



On-time HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION increases students' options for career success.

Students who complete high school are more likely to enroll in postsecondary education, become economically self-sufficient, and contribute to their local communities than students who do not complete high school.^{1, 2} Students who graduate from high school also increase their earning potential. When comparing median earnings, students who complete high school earn more than students who do not complete high school.³ In addition to enhanced opportunities for economic success, high school completion is associated with better long-term health outcomes, regardless of income.⁴

On-time graduation rates (that is, graduating from high school in four years or less) differ across student subgroups. Black, Hispanic, and Native American students have significantly lower on-time graduation rates than the national average.⁵ Multilingual learners and students in economically disadvantaged circumstances also graduate from high school on time at lower rates compared to the average of all students.⁶ In Nebraska, the overall graduation rate in 2021 was 88 percent; however, the rate was lower for Black students (75 percent), Hispanic students (78 percent), Native American students (73 percent), and students from economically disadvantaged circumstances (80 percent).⁷ Understanding which students are less likely to graduate on time can inform decisions about interventions to improve the long-term educational, financial, civic, and health outcomes for these students.

“Students who complete high school earn more than students who do not.”



Efforts to improve on-time graduation have focused on identifying indicators that predict which students may be at risk of dropping out. Student attendance, behavior, and course performance (the ABC's) have proved to be reliable indicators for identifying which students could be at risk of not completing high school on time. Individual psychological factors, including student engagement, motivation, and locus of control, are also predictors of students' continued high school enrollment and graduation. These psychological factors are correlated with one another, meaning that interventions targeting one factor will likely also improve the other factors.⁸

Research-based recommendations for improving high school graduation rates and reducing dropout rates focus on the following three areas:⁹



EARLY WARNING SYSTEMS. An early warning system uses data to identify students who exhibit behavior or academic performance that puts them at risk of dropping out of school. Early warning systems help districts and schools pinpoint student achievement patterns and school climate issues that may contribute to students dropping out of school.¹⁰ These systems use student data that align with the ABC's, such as attendance records, behavioral incidents that resulted in expulsion or suspension, and course performance (particularly in English and mathematics). Data from early warning systems can inform the need for higher level intervention support.



PROVIDING STUDENT SUPPORT. When students feel more connected to the people in their schools, whether other students or adults, they are more likely to attend school, engage in learning, and persevere to graduation.

- For large schools with many at-risk students, creating small, personalized communities facilitates closer monitoring and support and fosters a greater sense of belonging.
- For students who face multiple or acute personal obstacles and are consequently off track on the ABC indicators, providing intensive, individualized supports connects students to advocates they can trust. These students have generally failed to respond to monitoring from early warning systems and support through higher tiered interventions.



ENGAGING STUDENTS THROUGH CURRICULA THAT CONNECTS SCHOOLWORK WITH COLLEGE AND CAREER SUCCESS. Curricula and programs that connect schoolwork with college and career success and improve students' capacity to manage challenges in and out of school have been shown to improve student engagement. Students should have access to college preparation coursework, dual enrollment courses, or career-focused programs. Regularly assessing student engagement and school climate (using resources such as the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning SEL framework) or incorporating social-emotional skills can promote individual strengths that predict graduation.⁹

¹ Belfield, C. R., & Levin, H. M. (2007). *The price we pay: Economic and Social consequences of inadequate education*. Brookings Institution Press.

² Flanagan, C., & Levine, P. (2010). Civic engagement and the transition to adulthood. *The Future of Children*, 20(1), 159-179. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27795064>

³ Institute of Education Sciences. (2018). *Trends in high school dropout and completion rates in the United States*. National Center for Education Statistics. <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/dropout/intro.asp>

⁴ Pleis, J. R., Ward, B. W., & Lucas, J. W. (2010). *Summary health statistics for U.S. adults: National Health Interview Survey, 2009* (Vital and Health Statistics Series 10, Issue 249). Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/series/sr_10/sr10_249.pdf

⁵ DiPaoli, J. L., Fox, J. H., Ingram, E. S., Maushard, M., Bridgeland, J. M., & Balfanz, R. (2015). *Building a grad nation: Progress and challenge in ending the high school dropout epidemic*. America's Promise Alliance. https://new.earlygraduates.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/2015_BGN_Full.pdf

⁶ Deussen T., Hanson, H., & Bisht, B. (2017). *Are two commonly used early warning indicators accurate predictors of dropout for English learner students? Evidence from six districts in Washington state* (REL 2017-261). U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National

Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Northwest. <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/rel/Products/Publication/3850>

⁷ Nebraska's Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education. (2002). *2022 progress report*. Nebraska Department of Education. https://ccpe.nebraska.gov/sites/ccpe.nebraska.gov/files/PR_Section_1.1.a.pdf

⁸ Zaff, J. F., Donlan, A., Gunning, A., Anderson, S. E., McDermott, E., & Sedaca, M. (2017). Factors that promote high school graduation: A review of the literature. *Educational Psychology Review*, 29, 447-476. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-016-9363-5>

⁹ Rumberger, R., Addis, H., Allensworth, E., Balfanz, R., Bruch, J., Dillon, E., Duardo, D., Dynarski, M., Furgeson J., Jayanthi, M., Newman-Gonchar, R., Place, K., & Tuttle, C. (2017). *Preventing dropout in secondary schools* (NCEE 2017-4028). U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance. https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/docs/practiceguide/wwc_dropout_092617.pdf

¹⁰ Osher, D., Sprague, J., Weissberg, R. P., Axelrod, J., Keenan, S., Kendziora, K., & Zins, J. E. (2007). A comprehensive approach to promoting social, emotional, and academic growth in contemporary schools. *Best Practices in School Psychology*, 5, 1263-1278.



This is an NSWERS **EXPLORE** product, an overview and background of the current state of knowledge surrounding the factors that contribute to **High School Graduation** in Nebraska.