



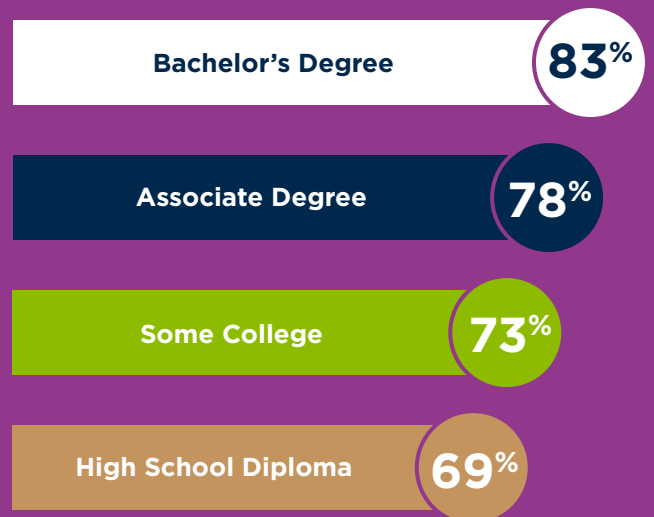
POSTSECONDARY GRADUATION provides important individual and societal benefits.

With each degree earned following high school completion—a two-year degree, four-year degree, or beyond—there is an incremental increase in the employment rate for an individual. This is important because more jobs require some postsecondary education. Individuals ages 25 and up who earned a bachelor’s degree have higher employment rates (83 percent) than those who earned only a high school diploma (69 percent), as do individuals who earned an associate degree (78 percent), or completed some college (73 percent).¹ Notably, researchers estimated 65 percent of jobs in the United States would require postsecondary education by 2020, and the projected rate was even higher for Nebraska at 71 percent.²

Postsecondary completion rates in Nebraska are similar to national averages, but they also reveal some important within-state differences. Nebraska’s graduation rates at four-year colleges are comparable to national averages (69.9 percent in Nebraska versus 69.0 percent for the U.S.), as are the rates for two-year colleges (43.9 percent in Nebraska versus 42.2 percent for the U.S.).³ In addition, Nebraska’s four-year public college graduation rates are substantially higher than the rates at the state’s two-year colleges (69.9 percent versus 43.9 percent).³ In 2018, among individuals ages 25 to 64 who were White, 38 percent had a bachelor’s degree or higher in Nebraska. Among students who were from underrepresented minority groups, 16 percent had a bachelor’s degree or higher.⁴



Individuals who earn a bachelor’s degree have higher employment rates than those who earn only a high school diploma.



Students who earn a college degree realize greater economic, civic, and health outcomes compared to students who do not earn a degree after high school.

- **Civic engagement is higher among individuals who have earned a college degree.** Compared to high school graduates, college graduates with a bachelor's degree are two times more likely to volunteer (42 percent versus 19 percent), vote at higher rates (73 percent versus 41 percent), donate more money to charities, and contribute more to the government via taxes).¹
- **Degree attainment is associated with greater economic status.** Individuals who graduate from college with a bachelor's degree earn nearly \$25k more each year compared to individuals with only a high school diploma.¹ In Nebraska, individuals with a bachelor's degree earned \$46.8k annually, compared to \$30.2k for those with only a high school diploma.⁵
- **Bachelor's degree attainment is associated with optimal health outcomes.** Bachelor's degree earners show lower risk of diabetes, heart problems, high weight, inflammation, and depressive symptoms and have higher self-rated health.⁶ In 2019, the percentage of Nebraska adults ages 18 and older who met recommendations for physical activity (e.g., at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity activity each week) increased with level of degree attainment: 27.6 percent for adults who did not have a high school diploma, 43.1 percent for high school graduates, 48.9 percent for those with some college education, and 55.8 percent for college graduates.⁷

Efforts to improve postsecondary completion rates can begin in high school by preparing students for postsecondary education, exposing them to college curriculum, and assisting with the transition to college.



EDUCATORS CAN IDENTIFY WAYS TO SUPPORT STUDENTS IN HIGH SCHOOL, ESPECIALLY THOSE WITH LOW GRADE POINT AVERAGES (GPAs). High school GPA is a strong predictor of bachelor's degree attainment.⁸ This is partly explained by aspects of self-regulation (e.g., self-control and persistence) that are captured by GPAs.⁹ Students with low GPAs would benefit from receiving attention and support from educators to improve their college readiness.



DURING HIGH SCHOOL, EDUCATORS CAN ENCOURAGE STUDENTS TO TAKE ADVANCED AND COLLEGE COURSES. Advanced course taking in high school increases the odds of graduating from college with a bachelor's degree. Research has estimated that taking advanced high school courses—such as honors, upper-level, advanced placement (AP), or international baccalaureate (IB) courses—increases the likelihood of earning a bachelor's degree within 4 years of high school graduation by 5.0 to 8.8 percentage points.¹⁰ Additionally, participation in dual enrollment or early college programs boosts postsecondary graduation rates by giving students the opportunity to earn college credits before they officially start college.^{11,12}



ENCOURAGING HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS TO PARTICIPATE IN CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION (CTE) can improve postsecondary graduation rates. Students in Nebraska and South Dakota who participated in CTE were 3 percentage points more likely to earn a college degree than those who did not participate in CTE.¹³ Students who concentrated in government/administration or marketing (55 percent and 46 percent, respectively) had the highest rates of attaining a bachelor's degree within 5 years of their expected high school graduation year.¹³



IMPLEMENTING SUMMER BRIDGE programs can be an effective way to improve postsecondary graduation rates. In a study including over 2k students, students who participated in a five-week summer bridge program had significantly higher graduation rates than those who did not participate (70 percent versus 67 percent).¹⁴ Among students at community colleges and colleges with low selectivity or open admissions, those who participated in summer bridge programs were 10 percentage points more likely to earn their degree within 6 years.¹⁵

Colleges can provide the following supports for students to improve postsecondary graduation rates.



FOSTERING A COLLABORATIVE ENVIRONMENT IN COLLEGE COURSES. Academic and social engagement in college are important predictors of college graduation. Specifically, active and collaborative learning are associated with college graduation.^{16,17,18} To foster active and collaborative learning, college faculty can implement group projects, encourage students to collaborate with peers outside of the classroom, create tutoring opportunities where students can teach one another, and allot time outside of the classroom to discuss course material with students.



ENSURING STUDENTS CAN TRANSFER THE MAXIMUM NUMBER OF CREDITS WITH A STRONG GPA AT TWO-YEAR COLLEGES TO FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTIONS. Credit loss is a risk factor for not earning a bachelor's degree. Students who can transfer more credits when they transition from a two-year to a four-year institution are more likely to graduate with a bachelor's degree than students who lose credits when they transition.¹⁹ Performance in community college courses is also important for postsecondary graduation. For each one-point increase in GPA, the likelihood of earning a bachelor's degree can increase by 93 percent.²⁰



PROVIDING GRANTS AND FINANCIAL AID. Students from low-income households benefit most in their bachelor's degree attainment from receiving grants and merit-based aid.^{16,21} Research shows that awarding grants of \$1k to students improves their attainment rates by 1.5 to 2 percentage points.²¹ Additionally, a study found that \$3.5k of grant aid improved the likelihood of graduation by 29 percent among undergraduate students at the University of Wisconsin.²²

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