POSTSECONDARY PERSISTENCE is crucial for Nebraskans' future economic security and employment.

Students who persist in attaining a postsecondary degree

earn 74% greater incomes

than those with a high school diploma or less.

Individuals who attend at least some college, regardless of graduating, earn up to $8k more a year on average than those with just a high school diploma.[1] Overall, those who persist in attaining a postsecondary degree earn substantially higher incomes (74 percent greater) than those with a high school diploma or less.[2] Furthermore, employment rates are greater for those with a bachelor's degree than those with a high school diploma. In 2021, the employment rate for those with a bachelor's degree was 86 percent compared to 68 percent for those with a high school diploma.[3]

There are several disparities in rates of postsecondary persistence across student characteristics:

- **Black, Latinx, and Native American full-time students** have lower persistence rates (75.3 percent, 79.3 percent, and 62.6 percent, respectively) at four-year colleges compared to White and Asian students (86.4 percent and 93.1 percent, respectively).[4]
- **First-generation students** have lower persistence rates compared to students whose parents attended college.[5] First-generation students are often unaware of the various unspoken components of college that are key to academic persistence and success, and they lack guidance through this process.
- **Students from low socioeconomic backgrounds** (often including first-generation students and students from minoritized racial/ethnic backgrounds) persist in postsecondary pursuits at lower rates than those from high socioeconomic backgrounds.[6,7] Those who struggle financially are also more likely to work during college and attend school part time.
- **Students who attend college part time** have lower persistence rates than full-time students.[4] At two- and four-year public colleges in Nebraska, retention rates in 2020 among part-time students (38.9 percent and 51 percent, respectively) were much lower than among full-time students (63.5 percent and 80.8 percent, respectively).[8]

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The following factors represent evidence-based strategies for improving postsecondary persistence rates, with some strategies starting as early as high school:

ENCOURAGING STUDENTS TO TAKE RIGOROUS COURSES IN HIGH SCHOOL is one approach to improve postsecondary persistence. Advanced course taking in high school (i.e., honors, upper-level, advanced placement [AP], and international baccalaureate [IB] courses) is a good predictor of a student's postsecondary persistence. Math courses appear to have a particularly influential effect on students' transition from two- to four-year colleges, although advanced courses across multiple subjects show improvements in persistence rates.[9] In addition, successfully passing AP or IB exams (i.e., scoring 3 or higher on AP exams and 4 or higher on IB exams) or taking dual enrollment courses on a college campus[10] is related to persistence rates during the first two years of college.[11] Unsurprisingly, students who take rigorous courses have higher grades than those who do not. Students with low grade point averages (GPAs) would benefit from additional support, since high school GPA and first-semester GPA in college consistently predict persistence in college.[7, 12]

IMPLEMENTING ANTI-DISCRIMINATION EFFORTS IN HIGH SCHOOL can boost postsecondary persistence among students. The adolescent years consist of significant social and emotional development that contributes to young people's identity formation, and discrimination experiences can pose a major threat to one's identity. When youth experience discrimination from peers and adults in high school, they are less likely to persist in college.[7]

ENCOURAGING AND ASSISTING STUDENTS TO ENVISION FUTURE POSTSECONDARY SUCCESS AND SET GOALS throughout high school and college can help students persist in college. Youth who set educational goals, have degree aspirations, and expect that they will earn a degree are more likely to pursue a college degree and persist in their pursuit.[6, 13, 14]

ADVISING COLLEGE STUDENTS IS IMPORTANT FOR ENSURING THEIR PERSISTENCE. First-year experience courses/seminars are commonly required for college freshmen and aim to support students academically and socially.[15, 16] In these courses, students receive information about their college's resources (e.g., career planning and advising, cultural diversity), learn skills that are critical to academic success (e.g., time management, study skills), and build relationships with peers and faculty.

Psychosocial factors can affect persistence rates, and **FOSTERING STUDENTS' SENSE OF BELONGING AND SELF-EFFICACY**, particularly during the first year of college, is related to postsecondary persistence. Persistence rates are greater among students who report a higher sense of belonging at their college[17, 18] or higher academic self-efficacy[18] compared to those who report a lower sense of belonging or academic self-efficacy. A higher sense of belonging correlates to a three percent increased likelihood in persisting to the second year of college.[18] Students from minoritized racial/ethnic backgrounds and those who are first-generation students report a lower sense of belonging, and it is recommended that college advisers support students in building their relationships with faculty and peers on campus.

ASSISTING STUDENTS WITH TRANSFERRING FROM TWO- TO FOUR-YEAR COLLEGES, AND MAXIMIZING TRANSFER CREDITS, CAN BOOST POSTSECONDARY PERSISTENCE. Students who are more likely to transfer and persist in their postsecondary education attend college full time and have more transferable credits,

higher college GPAs, more frequent interactions with school personnel and peers (e.g., participating in study groups, sports, clubs), and degree aspirations.[6] Among students who transfer from two- to four-year colleges, only 58 percent can transfer all of their earned credits.[19] Thus, efforts should be made to assist students, especially those at risk for not persisting, in transitioning from two- to four-year colleges, including ensuring they can transfer the maximum number of credits when transferring.

ENCOURAGING TRADITIONAL STUDENTS TO ENROLL IN COLLEGE FULL TIME AND OFFERING COURSES ONLINE can improve postsecondary persistence rates. Students who enroll in college full time, especially traditional students (i.e., aged 18–20 at onset of college), are significantly more likely to persist than their peers who enroll part time.[4, 10] Fully-online courses and hybrid formats that include online and face-to-face components are a potentially effective avenue for supporting full-time enrollment and improving persistence rates among students.[20]

PROVIDING FINANCIAL SUPPORT AND ASSISTING STUDENTS WITH APPLYING FOR FUNDING boosts postsecondary persistence rates. Specifically, educating students and families on the importance of completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), prompting individuals with reminders, and assisting with completing the FAFSA help boost student persistence rates.[11, 21] Another component of financial support that improves persistence is grant aid. It is estimated that $1k in financial support via grants boosts students' persistence rates by 1.5 to 2 percentage points.[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 Persistence** in Nebraska.