

Access College Early (ACE) Scholarship Program

EVALUATION

2025



A Nebraska Statewide Workforce & Education
Reporting System (NSWERS) evaluation
prepared for the Nebraska Coordinating
Commission for Postsecondary Education (CCPE)

insights.nswers.org/evaluations/ace-2025

Acknowledgement

NSWERS wishes to acknowledge Dr. Jim Bovaird, Professor of Educational Psychology at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, for his technical and methodological review of this study. His thoughtful feedback and recommendations improved the clarity and rigor of the analysis, and several of his suggestions were incorporated into the final report.

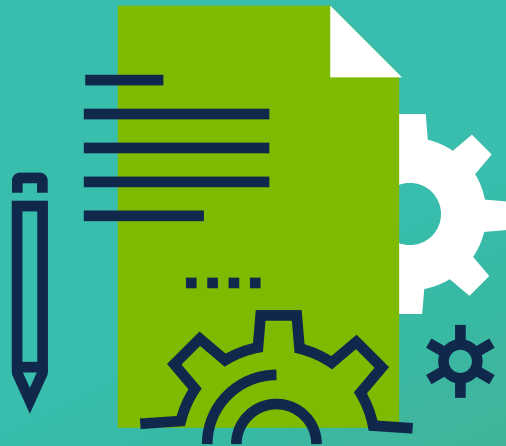


The Nebraska Statewide Workforce & Educational Reporting System, or NSWERS, is a one-of-a-kind research partnership among Nebraska's education and workforce systems designed to create a data-informed decision culture that supports pathways of learning and earning for the people of Nebraska. The NSWERS data system is the most comprehensive education-to-workforce longitudinal information source ever created in Nebraska.

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ACE IN NEBRASKA

Letter from the Executive Director



This report presents a comprehensive evaluation of the Access College Early (ACE) Scholarship Program, examining participation trends, student characteristics, and postsecondary outcomes using Nebraska's statewide longitudinal data system. The analysis reflects NSWERS' ongoing work to provide clear and reliable information that supports decision making across Nebraska's education and workforce sectors.

Using rigorous analytic methods, the report assesses both participation patterns and student outcomes. The findings show that ACE participants are more likely to enroll in college, more likely to persist once enrolled, and, among students attending Nebraska's community colleges, more likely to complete a credential and to do so in a shorter period of time. The evaluation also identifies areas where outcomes are similar between ACE participants and non-participants, offering a more complete picture of the program's relationship to postsecondary progress.

The report highlights contextual factors such as shifts in dual enrollment offerings and variation in participation across districts and service areas that may influence how students access early college opportunities. These patterns, together with the outcome findings, provide relevant information for agencies and institutions as they consider future planning and program design.

This evaluation was made possible through collaboration among NSWERS and its partner organizations, including the University of Nebraska System, the Nebraska State College System, the Nebraska Department of Education, Nebraska's six community colleges, and the Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education. We appreciate Dr. Mike Baumgartner and the Commission for their foresight and initiative in requesting this evaluation in support of Nebraska student success. I am also grateful to the NSWERS team for their careful work in producing this analysis.

NSWERS remains committed to delivering high-quality, evidence-based evaluations that support Nebraska's ongoing efforts to understand and improve student transitions from high school into postsecondary education and the workforce. We hope this report supports future conversations and decisions related to early college opportunities for Nebraska students.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Matt Hastings". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Matt" and last name "Hastings" clearly legible.

Matthew J. Hastings, Ph.D.

Executive Director

Nebraska Statewide Workforce and Educational Reporting System (NSWERS)

Introduction

This report provides a comprehensive evaluation of the Access College Early (ACE) Scholarship Program, focusing on participation trends, student demographics, and postsecondary outcomes. It aims to support strategic decision-making by the Nebraska Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education (CCPE) and its partners by offering actionable insights—highlighting program successes, identifying areas for improvement, and informing future investments.

About ACE

The Access College Early (ACE) Scholarship Program offers financial support to eligible low-income high school students in Nebraska, covering tuition and mandatory fees for college courses taken through dual enrollment or early enrollment agreements with participating institutions.

The program's primary objective is to expand college access by encouraging academically prepared students from low-income backgrounds to begin postsecondary education early. By earning college credit while still in high school, students can reduce both the time and cost required to complete a degree. Without financial assistance, many students face significant barriers to accessing these opportunities. The ACE Scholarship helps remove these barriers by reducing the financial burden, thereby increasing participation in college-level coursework among economically disadvantaged students.

Funded by the State of Nebraska and administered by the CCPE, the ACE program included 19 postsecondary institutions and 192 high schools during the 2023–24 academic year (Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education, 2025).

About CCPE

The Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education (CCPE) was established to provide a statewide perspective on planning and decision-making for Nebraska's higher education system (*Neb. Rev. Stat. §§ 85-1411, 85-1412, and 85-2108.*, n.d.). Its responsibilities include:

- Developing a comprehensive statewide plan to guide higher education and reduce duplication;
- Partnering with legislators to shape innovative education policy;
- Awarding need-based financial aid to support low-income students;
- Reviewing and approving postsecondary construction projects funded by tax dollars;
- Evaluating public college and university budget requests for alignment with the statewide plan;
- Approving or disapproving academic programs;
- Authorizing new or out-of-state institutions to operate in Nebraska;
- Collecting and analyzing statewide data to support education goals;
- Administering state appropriations to Nebraska's six community colleges; and
- Managing a national distance learning agreement on behalf of the state.

About NSWERS

The Nebraska Statewide Workforce & Educational Reporting System (NSWERS) is a collaborative data initiative that connects Nebraska's education and workforce systems to promote data-informed decision making. Its mission is to support lifelong pathways of learning and earning by providing integrated, longitudinal insights across the education-to-workforce continuum.

NSWERS maintains Nebraska's most comprehensive longitudinal data system, linking student-level information from early childhood through postsecondary education and into the workforce. This system enables stakeholders to evaluate outcomes over time, assess program effectiveness, and identify opportunities for improvement.

In addition to data integration, NSWERS conducts evaluations of state and federally funded education and workforce initiatives. These evaluations generate actionable insights that inform decisions at the program, agency, institution, system, and state levels. All NSWERS activities are governed by robust data governance policies, legal agreements, and ethical standards that ensure privacy, security, and responsible data use.

Key Findings

This section summarizes the major findings from the evaluation, organized into four thematic categories.

Participation Trends and Access

- During the 2017-18 to 2022-23 academic years, the total number of ACE scholarships awarded has increased over time.
- Most ACE scholarship recipients are high school juniors and seniors.
- The majority of ACE scholars enroll in dual enrollment courses through community colleges.
- Since 2018-19, Central Community College had the highest percentage of ACE enrollments.
- Omaha Public Schools has historically had the highest share of ACE scholarship recipients, although its proportion has declined over time.
- More than half of ACE scholarship recipients come from school districts located within the Metropolitan Community College and Central Community College service areas.
- About two-thirds of recipients are from urban county school districts.
- More than 40% of recipients are from schools serving low-income neighborhoods.
- English is the most frequently enrolled subject, followed by mathematics and history.

Participant Demographics

- About two-thirds of ACE participants are female.
- Roughly 50% of ACE participants are White, with the remainder representing a diverse mix of racial and ethnic backgrounds.

Participant High School Academic Performance

- On average, ACE participants earned more high school credit hours than non-participants.
- ACE participants had similar high school GPAs to Non-ACE dual enrollment participants.
- ACE participants had lower ACT scores across subjects compared to Non-ACE dual enrollment participants.
- Less than 10% of ACE participants were chronically absent.
- 98% of ACE participants graduated from high school.

Impact of ACE on Postsecondary Outcomes

- ACE participants who graduated from high school were 11 percentage points more likely to enroll in college.
- ACE participants who enrolled in college were more likely to persist at Nebraska public four-year institutions (by 2 percentage points) and at two-year institutions (by 4 percentage points).
- ACE participants who enrolled in Nebraska public two-year institutions were 5 percentage points more likely to graduate.
- On average, ACE participants who graduated from two-year institutions did so about one month earlier.
- No statistically significant impact was found on postsecondary graduation rates, time to degree, cumulative credit hours, or GPA for ACE participants at four-year institutions. Similarly, no significant effects were observed for cumulative credit hours or GPA for those at two-year institutions.



EVALUATION OVERVIEW



Evaluation Objectives

This evaluation has two primary objectives:

Broaden the Scope of Postsecondary Outcomes

Previous evaluations of the ACE program have primarily focused on college enrollment as the key outcome (Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education, 2024). This study expands the scope to include a broader set of postsecondary success indicators:

- Postsecondary Persistence
- Postsecondary Graduation
- Time to Award Attainment
- Cumulative College Credit Hours
- Cumulative College GPA

Research indicates that high school students who take college courses while still in high school are more likely to graduate, enroll in college, and persist through postsecondary education (Nguyen, 2025). Because ACE provides financial support for these opportunities, it is essential to assess whether these benefits extend to ACE participants and translate into measurable academic success.

Assess the Program's Impact Using Causal Inference Techniques

To contextualize ACE outcomes, this evaluation includes a comparison group of non-participant students from Nebraska public high schools. To determine whether observed outcomes are attributable to ACE participation—rather than to pre-existing differences—this evaluation applies statistical methods to strengthen causal inference and improve the validity of comparisons. This approach provides a more rigorous understanding of the ACE program's effectiveness in improving postsecondary outcomes for low-income students.

Evaluation Scope

This evaluation focuses on the educational outcomes of ACE scholarship recipients, with attention to data availability and relevance.

Public High School Data

Analyses primarily focus on the scholarship recipients who attended Nebraska public high schools. While recipients from private high schools are included in the participation data analysis, they are excluded from high school data analysis and postsecondary outcome analysis due to data limitations. NSWERS does not capture data from non-public or out-of-state institutions. Notably, public high school students represent the majority of both Nebraska high school students and ACE scholarship recipients (Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education, 2024; Nebraska Department of Education, 2025).

Public Postsecondary Institution Data

Postsecondary outcomes are primarily analyzed for the scholarship recipients who enrolled in Nebraska public colleges and universities. NSWERS provides comprehensive demographic and transcript-level data for these institutions. While limited data from other U.S. institutions is available via the National Student Clearinghouse, detailed analyses (e.g., GPA, credit accumulation) are restricted to Nebraska public institutions. This focus is both practical and representative, as most ACE scholarship recipients pursue postsecondary education within the state's public system.

Evaluation Design

This evaluation is an impact study that assesses the effects of the ACE Scholarship Program on student outcomes. Unlike an implementation study, which focuses on how a program is delivered—including aspects such as fidelity, processes, barriers, and facilitators—this study aims to determine the extent to which participation in the ACE program influences educational outcomes.

In this analysis, program participation is defined as the treatment condition, regardless of the number of scholarships a student receives. That is, students who received the ACE scholarship at least once are considered part of the treatment group, whether they received it one time or multiple times.

Because the ACE Scholarship Program is not a randomized intervention, students self-select into the program and receive scholarships based on eligibility criteria rather than through random assignment. This introduces the possibility of selection bias, as ACE participants may differ systematically from non-participants in ways that also affect educational outcomes—such as socioeconomic status, academic history, or other demographic factors.

To address these potential biases and better estimate the causal impact of the program, this study employs a quasi-experimental design using propensity score matching (PSM). PSM pairs ACE participants with non-participants who have similar observable characteristics, thereby simulating a randomized control group. This approach strengthens the validity of causal inferences by reducing confounding due to pre-existing differences between groups. Full methodological details are provided in the technical documentation.

Analytic Approach

This evaluation consists of four analytical components:

- Participation Data Analysis – Examines program participation trends over time and access to the program among students across Nebraska.
- Participant Demographic Analysis – Assesses the demographic distribution of ACE participants.
- High School Data Analysis – Analyzes the academic performance of ACE participants.
- Postsecondary Outcome Analysis – Evaluates the impact of ACE participation on student outcomes including college enrollment, persistence, and completion.

The first two sections are largely descriptive, focusing on the program and its participants.

The third section ***High School Performance Analysis*** contextualizes the academic performance of ACE participants by comparing their performance to non-participants. This analysis includes two comparison groups:

- Non-ACE/DE participants: Students who participated in dual enrollment but did not participate in ACE.
- Non-ACE/Non-DE participants: Students who are neither ACE participants nor dual enrollment participants.

These groups help assess whether ACE participants differ meaningfully from their peers in terms of high school academic outcomes. More details can be found in the comparison group description. The data analysis in this section is descriptive in nature.

Finally, the ***Postsecondary Outcome Analysis*** section has employed two main approaches:

- **Observed Differences in Outcomes:** These are simple comparisons of outcome rates between ACE participants and non-participants. These estimates do not adjust for pre-existing differences and should not be interpreted as causal effects.
- **Matched and Regression-Adjusted Treatment Effects:** These represent the estimated causal effects of the ACE program on the outcomes. They are calculated by first matching ACE participants with a sample of non-participants who have similar baseline characteristics. Then, regression models are applied to adjust for any remaining imbalances. This two-step approach yields more robust estimates of the program's impact.

This section also includes observed outcomes over time for ACE participants and non-participants, overall group comparisons (ACE vs. Non-ACE/DE vs. Non-ACE/Non-DE), and specific analyses for each outcome.

Guiding Evaluation Questions

This evaluation is guided by the following key questions:

- What are the trends in ACE program participation and course-taking over time?
- How do these trends vary by geographical and economic factors?
- What are the participants' demographics?
- How do ACE participants perform academically in high school compared to their peers?
- Does ACE participation improve students' educational outcomes? Specifically, are ACE participants more (or less) likely to:
 - Transition to college?
 - Persist in college?
 - Graduate from college?
 - Attain an award more quickly?
 - Earn fewer college credit hours?
 - Achieve a higher college GPA?

Study Subject Description

The target population for the ACE Scholarship Program consists of Nebraska high school students who meet specific eligibility criteria based on financial need, academic readiness, and other qualifying circumstances.

Eligibility Criteria

Nebraska high school students are eligible to apply for the ACE Scholarship if they meet at least one of the following conditions:

- Their family is approved to participate in a federal need-based assistance program, including:
 - Free or Reduced-Price Lunch Program
 - Supplemental Security Income
 - Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF)
 - Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
 - Special Supplemental Assistance Program (WIC)
 - Their family has experienced extreme hardship affecting household income.
 - They are enrolled in a designated Career Education program as defined by the Nebraska Department of Education.

In addition to meeting one of the above criteria, students must also be academically qualified for dual enrollment. Academic qualification requirements vary by high school and postsecondary institution, as Nebraska does not have a statewide standard for dual enrollment eligibility.

Scholarship Amount and Length

The amount of the scholarship award varies by student because it is granted per course, and tuition and fee charges for each course differ by institution. Students may submit multiple applications per year since the scholarship is awarded on a per-course basis.

The number of courses funded per student has changed over time:

- In the 2017–18 academic year, funding was limited to two courses per student.
- From 2018–19 through 2021–22, the limit increased to three courses per student.
- Since the 2022–23 academic year, there has been no limit on the number of courses a student may receive funding for.

The length of the scholarship award also varies by student as eligible students may apply for the ACE Scholarship at any high school grade level and may reapply in multiple years, provided they remain eligible and have not yet graduated from high school.

Study Sample

For this evaluation, the study includes:

- All students who ever applied for the ACE Scholarship during the 2017–18 to 2022–23 academic years and those who received the scholarship, included in the program participation data analysis (*ACE Scholarship Applicants* and *ACE Scholarship Recipients*).
- A subset of the scholarship recipients who attended Nebraska public high schools and participated in the program during their junior or senior year, included in the participant demographic, high school performance, and postsecondary outcome analyses (*ACE Participants*).

For the demographic, high school performance, and postsecondary outcome analyses, this specific subset was selected because students may participate in the program across multiple years and due to NSWERS data limitations. To ensure consistency, students are grouped based on their senior year of high school rather than the year(s) they received the scholarship. This cohort-based approach enables more accurate comparisons across time. The resulting six cohorts correspond to the following graduating classes:

- 2018 Cohort: Seniors in the 2017–18 academic year (N = 1,054)
- 2019 Cohort: Seniors in the 2018–19 academic year (N = 1,338)
- 2020 Cohort: Seniors in the 2019–20 academic year (N = 1,310)
- 2021 Cohort: Seniors in the 2020–21 academic year (N = 1,262)
- 2022 Cohort: Seniors in the 2021–22 academic year (N = 1,370)
- 2023 Cohort: Seniors in the 2022–23 academic year (N = 1,222)

It's important to note that these cohort sizes do not apply uniformly across all outcome measures. Sample sizes vary by outcome type, as certain outcomes are only relevant to specific groups of students. For example, when calculating graduation rates for students attending two-year postsecondary institutions, the analysis is limited to those who actually enrolled in such institutions. Similarly, when examining cumulative college credit hours earned by four-year college graduates, the analysis includes only students who completed a four-year degree, since credit accumulation can vary significantly depending on graduation status. Additionally, some outcomes are measured only for earlier cohorts to allow sufficient time for follow-up. Full details on outcome-specific sample sizes are provided in the technical documentation.

Comparison Group Description

To evaluate the impact of the ACE Scholarship Program, multiple comparison groups were constructed using a sample of Nebraska high school seniors who attended public high schools but did not participate in the program. Because ACE participation is voluntary and based on eligibility and self-selection, differences in instruction, services, and student experiences between ACE participants and non-participants may influence outcomes independently of the program. This evaluation uses both observational and quasi-experimental comparison groups to address these challenges.

Observational Comparison Groups

These groups allow for descriptive comparisons of outcomes but are subject to bias due to baseline differences between ACE participants and non-participants. For example, students may differ in academic performance, college aspirations, or socioeconomic status—factors that can influence outcomes regardless of ACE participation.

- **Non-ACE dual enrollment participants:** These students took dual enrollment courses but did not receive ACE funding. They may have similar academic profiles (e.g., GPA) to ACE participants but could differ in either of two key ways: 1) They may be more affluent, which is associated with stronger postsecondary outcomes and fewer financial barriers to course-taking. 2) They may be low-income but lack awareness of or access to the ACE application process. Either of these differences may result in different average “dosages” of dual enrollment—more affluent students may take more courses, while low-income students without ACE support may take fewer.
- **Non-dual enrollment participants:** These students did not participate in dual enrollment. On average, this group tends to have lower academic performance, likely due to GPA requirements for dual enrollment eligibility. As a result, they may be expected to have poorer postsecondary outcomes, independent of ACE participation.

Quasi-experimental Comparison Groups

To estimate treatment effects, the propensity score matching (PSM) method was used. PSM reduces bias by creating a matched sample of non-participants who closely resemble ACE participants based on observable baseline characteristics such as:

- Academic performance (e.g., GPA, credit hours)
- Demographics (e.g., race/ethnicity, sex)
- Neighborhood-level poverty indicators

This method simulates a randomized comparison and supports causal inference. Its strengths include transparency and ease of interpretation. However, PSM can only adjust for observed variables; unmeasured factors—such as motivation or parental support—may still confound results if not captured in the NSWERS data system.

Outcome Metrics

This evaluation focuses on students' transition to postsecondary education and their success once enrolled. The following metrics are used to assess the progress and performance of ACE participants and non-participants:

- College Going: Indicates whether a student enrolled in a two- or four-year postsecondary institution within 16 months of high school graduation.
- Postsecondary Persistence: Measures whether a student re-enrolled at any postsecondary institution one year after initial college enrollment.
- Postsecondary Graduation: Captures whether a student earned a degree or certificate from any postsecondary institution within a defined follow-up period.
- Time to Award Attainment: Represents the duration between a student's initial degree-seeking enrollment and the date of award conferral at a postsecondary institution.
- Cumulative College Credits: Reflects the total number of college credits earned, averaged across all coursework, excluding dual enrollment credits. This metric is limited to Nebraska public college graduates.
- Cumulative College GPA: Indicates the average grade point across all college coursework, excluding dual enrollment, for Nebraska public college graduates.

Full definitions about the outcomes analyzed and variables employed in the evaluation can be found in the data definitions section.



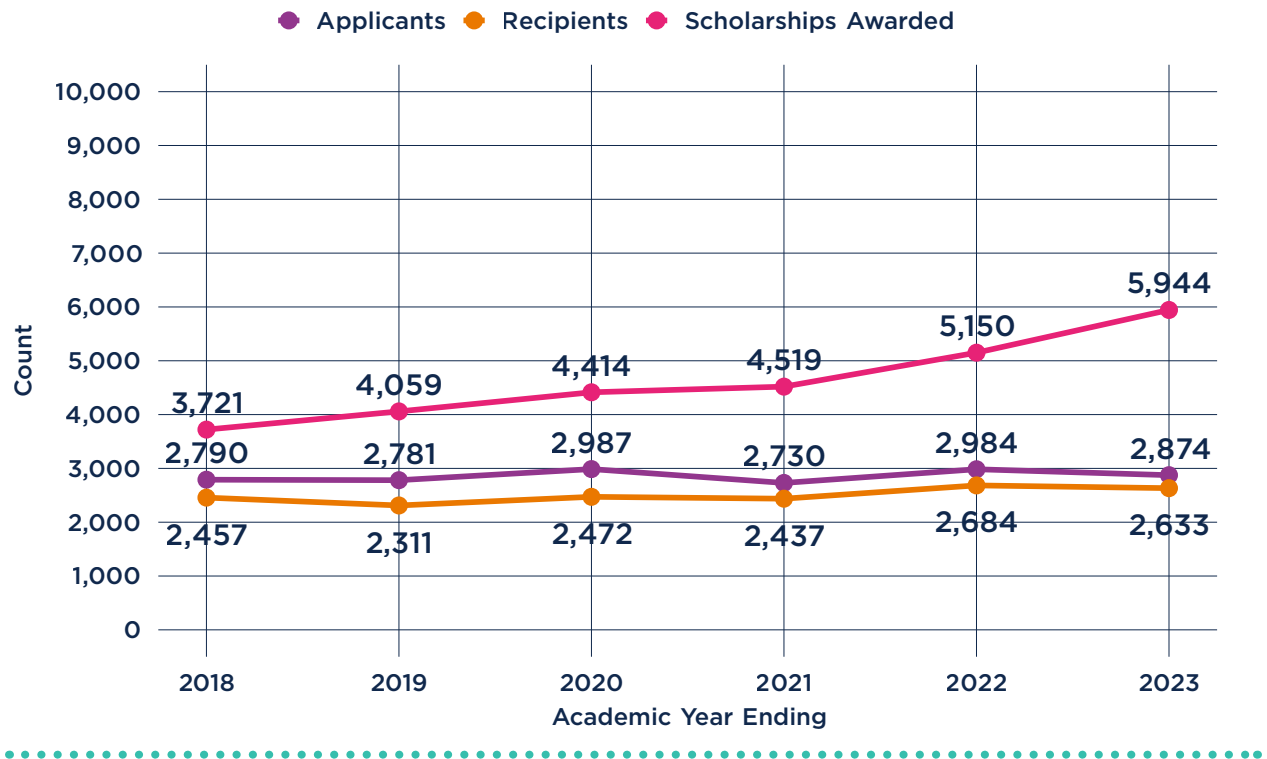
PARTICIPATION DATA ANALYSIS

ACE Scholarship Applicants, Recipients, Scholarships Awarded

While the number of ACE scholarship applicants and recipients has fluctuated slightly across cohorts, overall trends show relative stability. In contrast, the total number of scholarships awarded has steadily increased, indicating that students are receiving more scholarships on average.

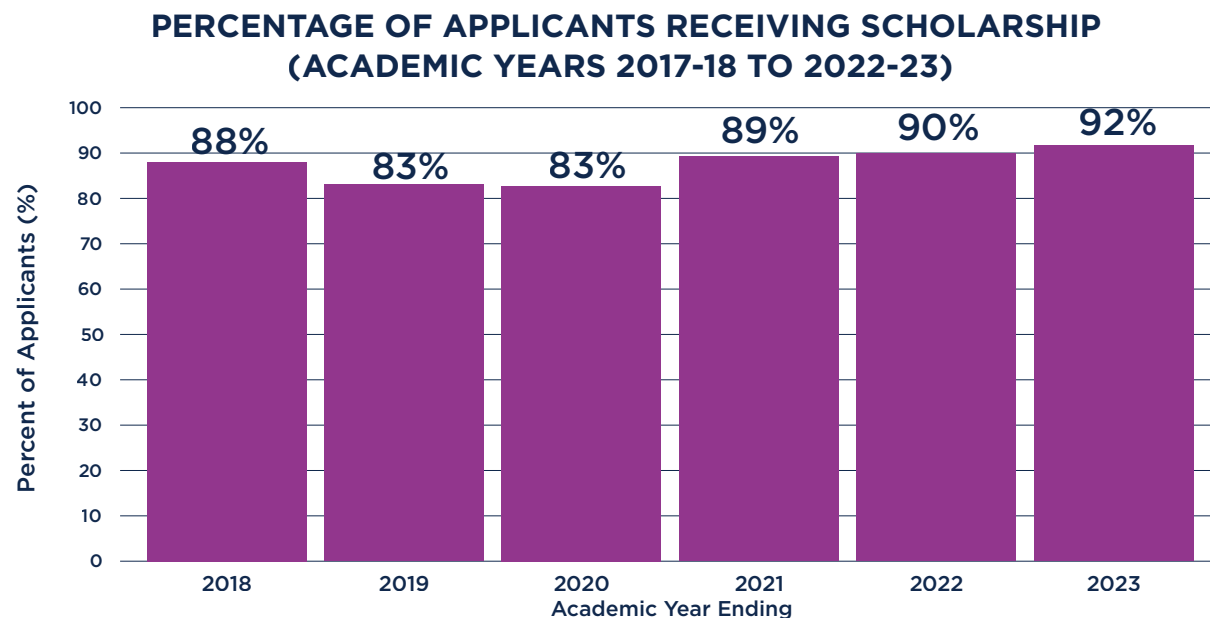
According to the Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education (CCPE), prior to 2022-23, the number of scholarships a student could receive annually was capped based on available funding and projected demand. In the 2022-23 academic year, increased funding and reduced community college tuition costs (due to state and federal American Rescue Plan Act funds appropriated for community college dual credit tuition reduction) led to the removal of this cap. As a result, students were able to receive funding for an unlimited number of courses (Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education, 2024).

ACE APPLICANTS, RECIPIENTS, AND SCHOLARSHIPS AWARDED (2018-2023 COHORTS)



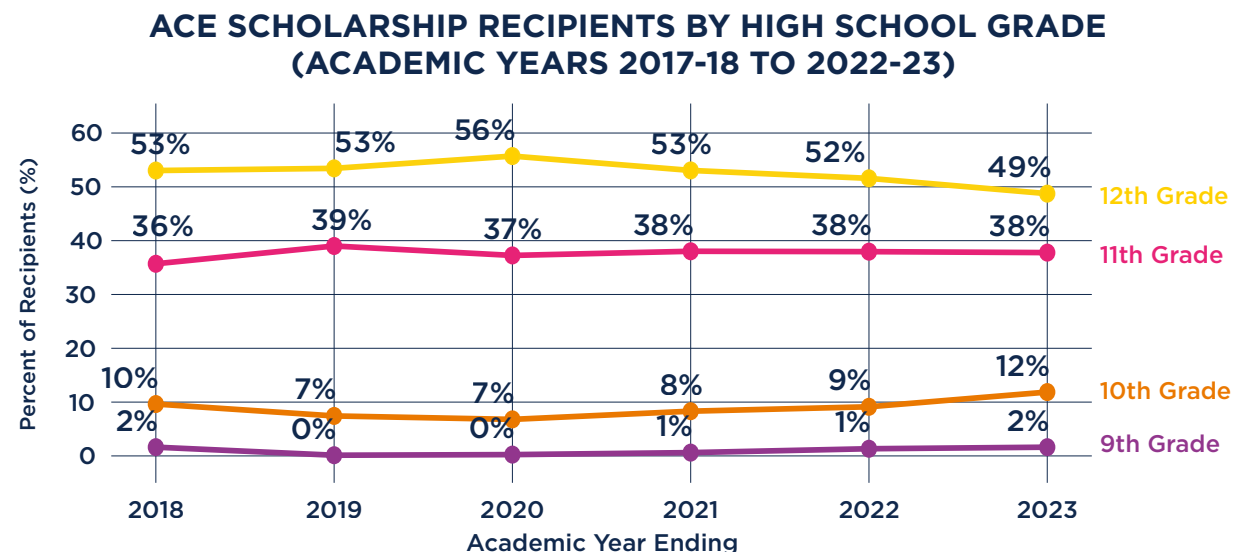
Percentage of Scholarship Applicants Who Received Scholarship

The percentage of applicants who received ACE scholarships generally trended upward across cohorts, with slight declines observed during the 2018-19 and 2019-20 academic years. This upward trend may reflect increased funding availability or improved application support for eligible students.



High School Grade Level of ACE Scholarship Recipients

Most ACE scholarship recipients were high school juniors and seniors. From 2019-20, the proportion of sophomore recipients has gradually increased, while the share of seniors has declined. This shift may reflect growing awareness of the program among younger students and expanded opportunities for early college credit.

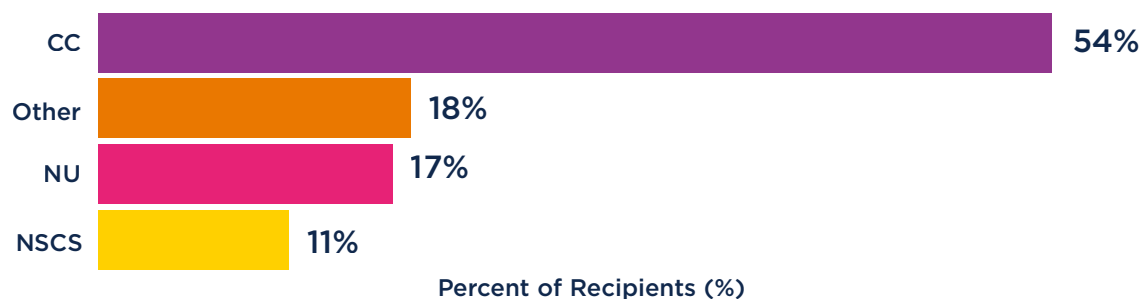


Percentage of Scholarship Recipients by Participating Postsecondary System

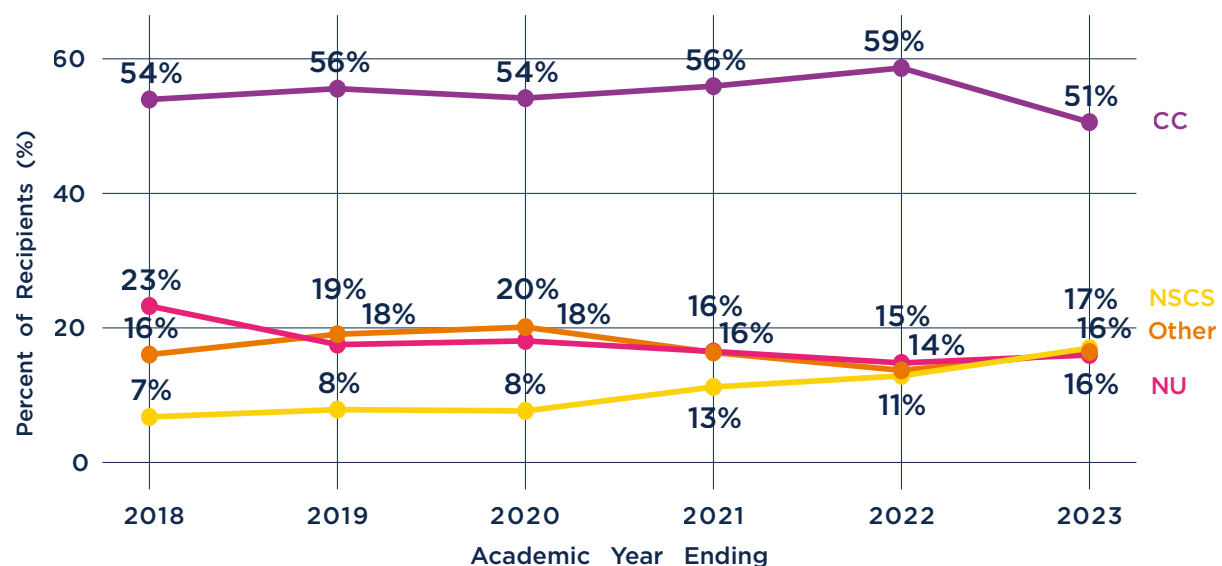
Approximately half of ACE scholarship recipients enrolled in dual enrollment courses through Nebraska's community colleges. Other recipients enrolled through non-public institutions (Other), the University of Nebraska system (NU), and the Nebraska State College System (NSCS).

In the 2022-23 academic year, the percentage of students attending community colleges declined, partly because Metropolitan Community College (MCC) did not participate in ACE. Beginning in 2022-23, MCC began to offer tuition-free dual enrollment courses for Nebraska high school students, which made enrollment without the ACE scholarship possible (Metropolitan Community College, n.d.; Schmailzl, 2025). As a result, the share of other institutions has increased. For example, Nebraska state colleges had the lowest percentage among the postsecondary systems but showed modest increases in enrollment over time from 2019-20.

**ACE SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS BY POSTSECONDARY SYSTEM
(ACADEMIC YEARS 2017-18 TO 2022-23)**

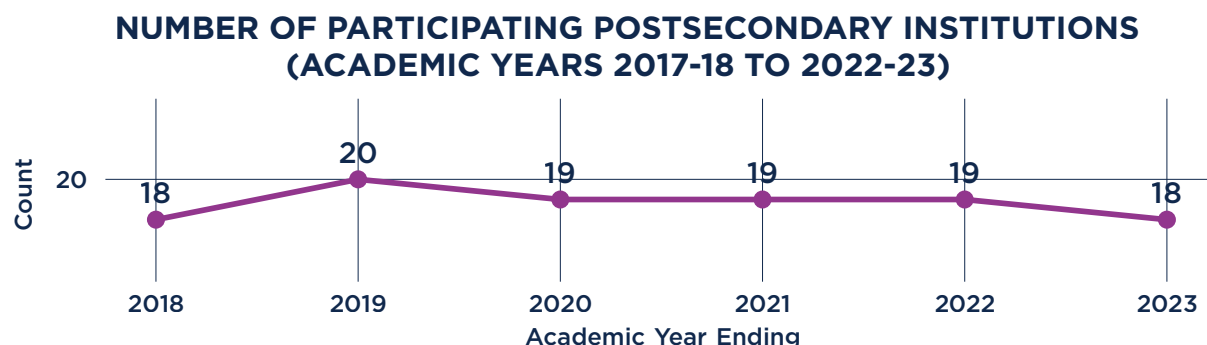


**ACE SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS BY POSTSECONDARY SYSTEM
(ACADEMIC YEARS 2017-18 TO 2022-23)**



Number of Participating Postsecondary Institutions

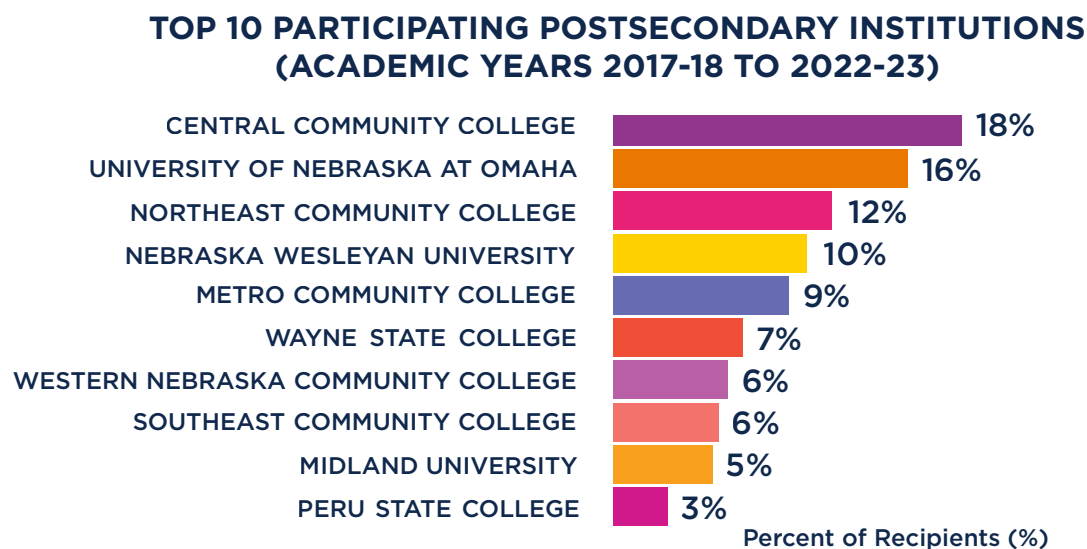
The number of postsecondary institutions participating in the ACE program—including both public and private institutions—ranged from 18 to 20 over the study period. This consistent level of institutional engagement reflects broad support for dual enrollment across Nebraska’s higher education landscape.



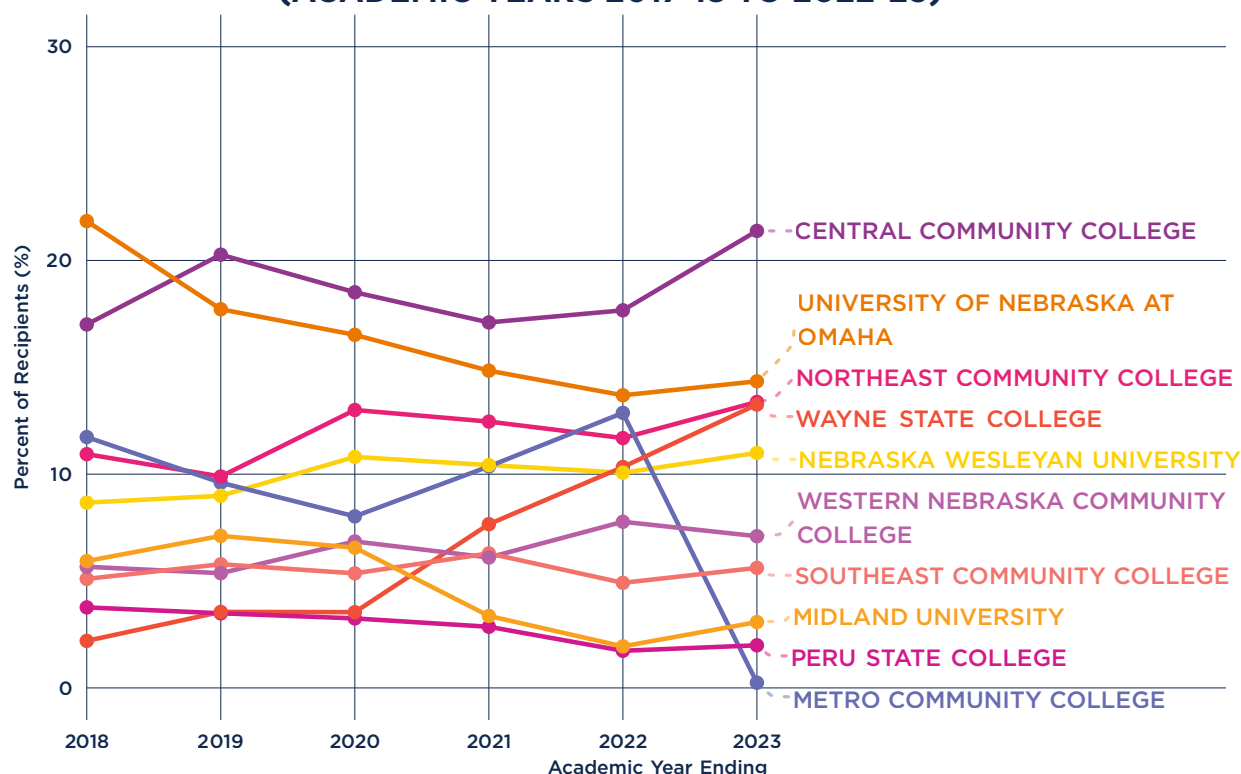
Top 10 Participating Postsecondary Institutions

Central Community College (CCC) had a higher percentage of recipients, followed by the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO) and Northeast Community College (NCC).

CCC consistently had the highest percentage of ACE scholarship recipients enrolled except in the 2017-18 academic year. In that year, UNO had the highest enrollment, though its share declined over time. Northeast Community College (NCC) and Nebraska Wesleyan University (NWU) maintained consistent enrollment of ACE scholarship recipients over time. MCC’s share dropped below 1 percent in the 2022-23 academic year, likely due to its tuition-free dual enrollment offerings. Notably, Wayne State College showed the most significant growth in ACE participation since the 2019-20 academic year.



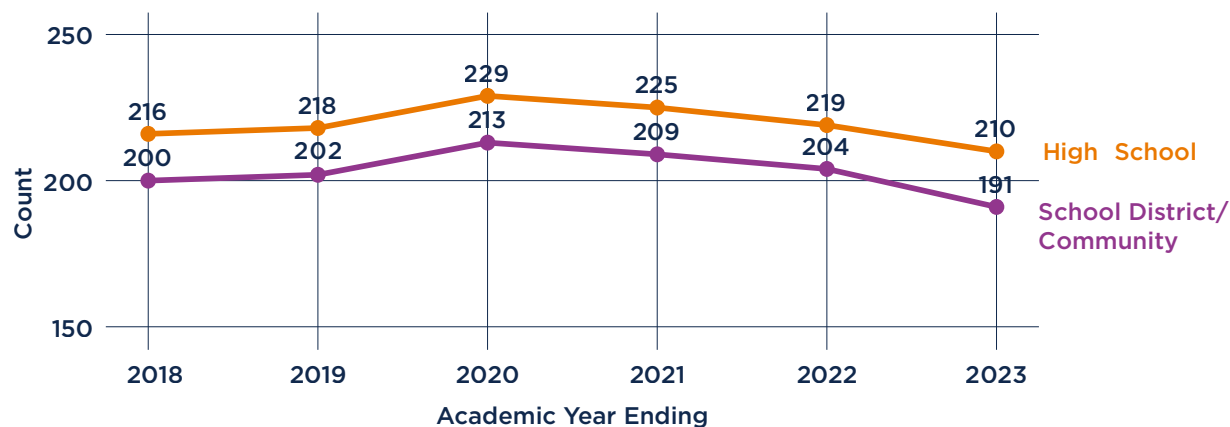
TOP 10 PARTICIPATING POSTSECONDARY INSTITUTIONS (ACADEMIC YEARS 2017-18 TO 2022-23)



Number of Participating School Districts/Communities and High Schools

The number of participating school districts and communities—including both public and private institutions—declined after the 2019-20 academic year. Despite stable numbers of applicants and recipients, this trend suggests that some districts may have shifted to alternative funding sources for dual enrollment, while others increased their reliance on ACE scholarships.

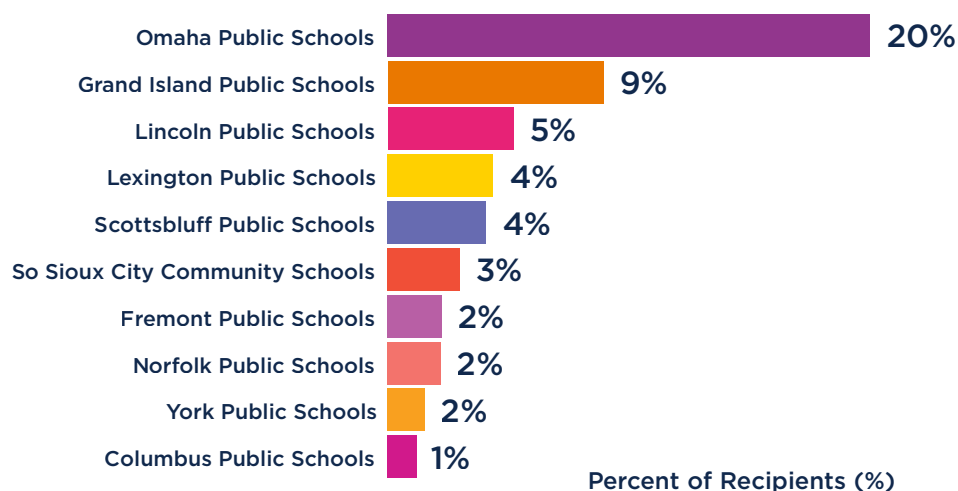
NUMBER OF PARTICIPATING SCHOOL DISTRICTS, COMMUNITIES, AND HIGH SCHOOLS (ACADEMIC YEARS 2017-18 TO 2022-23)



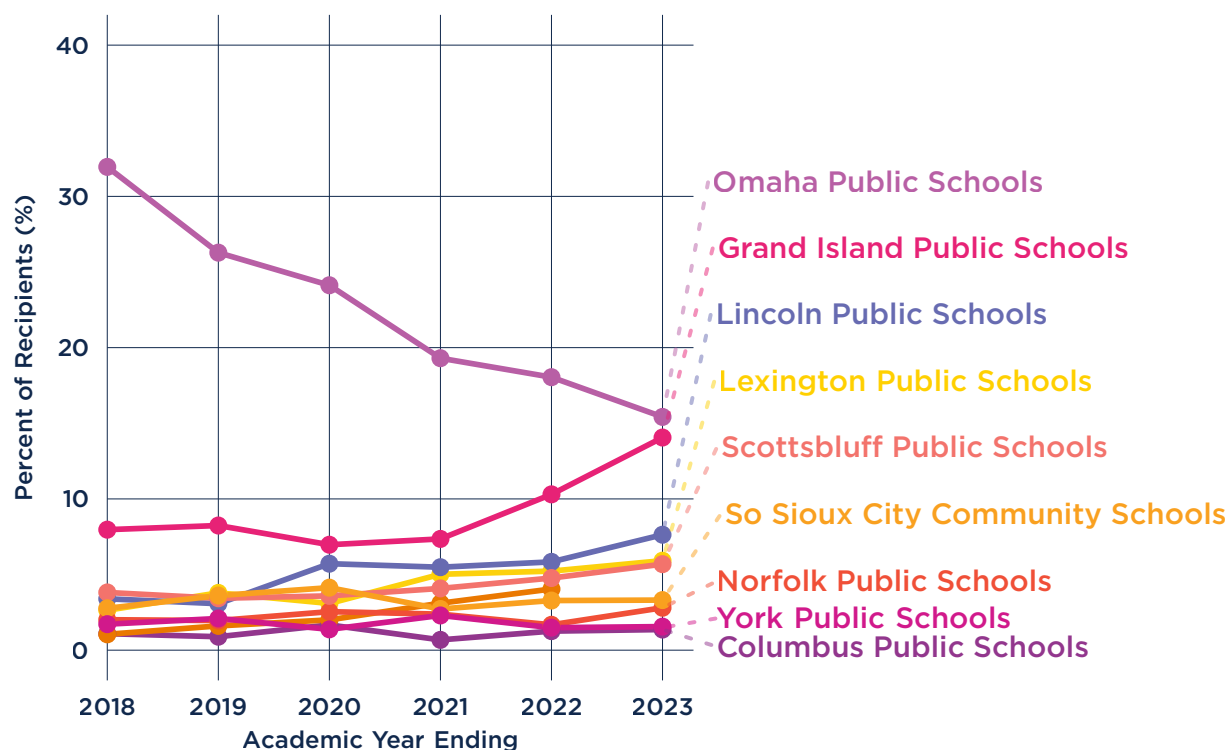
Top 10 Participating School Districts

Omaha Public Schools (OPS) had the highest number of ACE scholarship recipients throughout the study period due at least in part to implementation of free tuition at MCC, followed by Grand Island Public Schools (GIPS). However, OPS experienced a consistent decline in participation, while GIPS saw a notable increase beginning in the 2020-21 academic year.

TOP 10 PARTICIPATING SCHOOL DISTRICTS (ACADEMIC YEARS 2017-18 TO 2022-23)



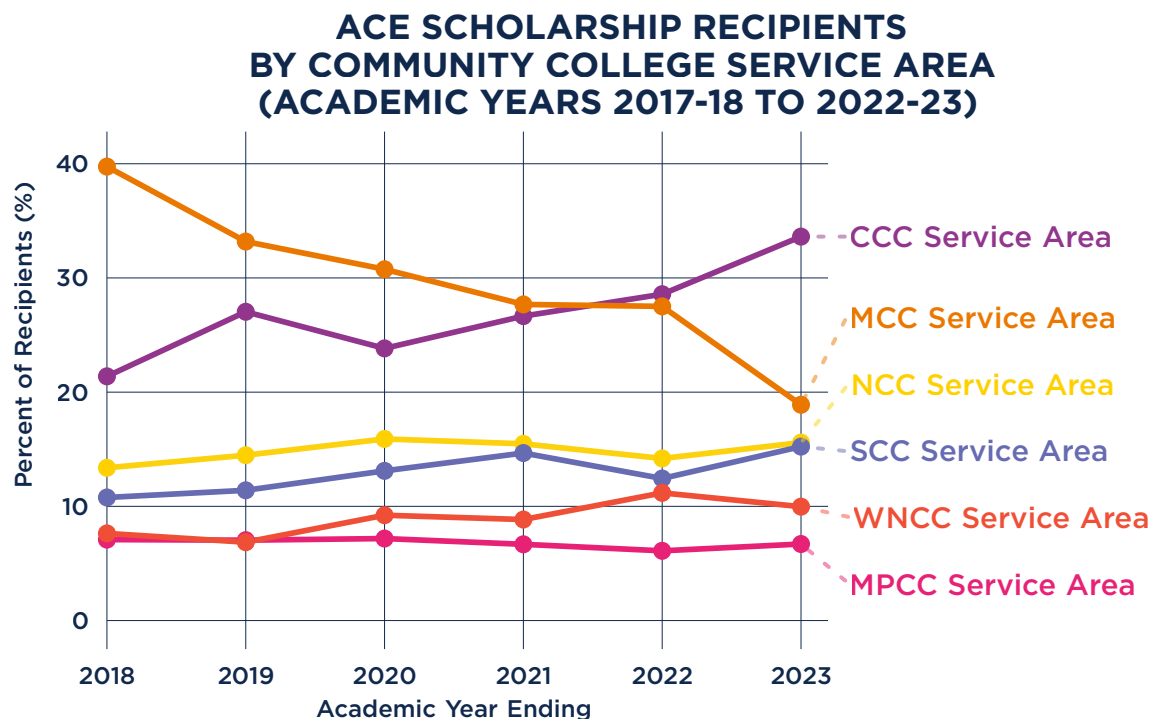
TOP 10 PARTICIPATING SCHOOL DISTRICTS (ACADEMIC YEARS 2017-18 TO 2022-23)



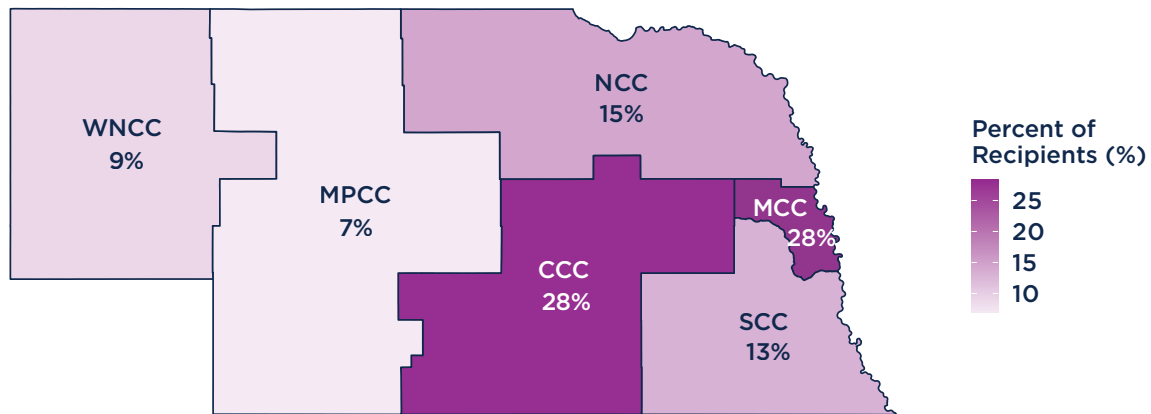
Participation by Community College Service Area

More than half of ACE scholarship recipients came from school districts located within the MCC and CCC service areas. The MCC service area had a higher percentage of recipients, followed by the CCC service area.

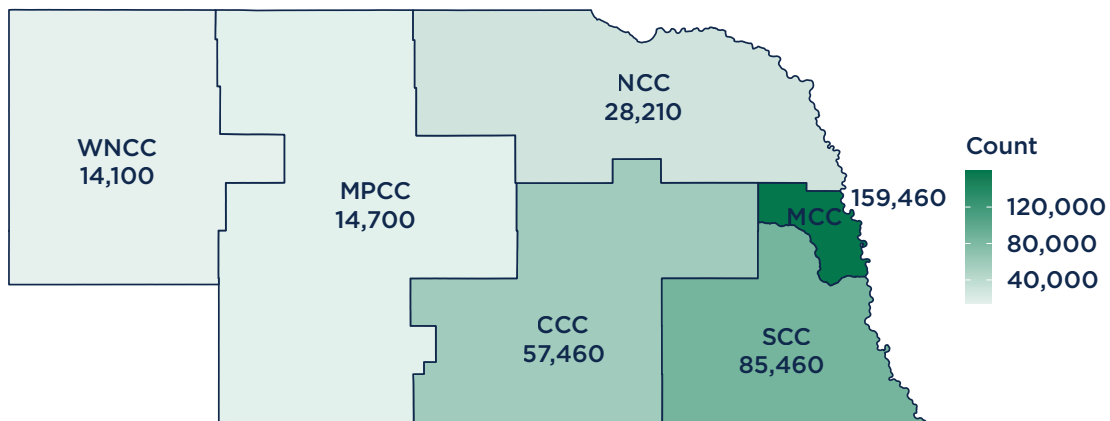
However, MCC service area's share declined over time, likely reflecting reduced demand for ACE scholarships in the MCC region due to MCC's tuition-free dual enrollment offerings. Since the 2019-20 academic year, the CCC service area had a consistent increase in recipient percentage, reflecting an increased demand for ACE in this area. Additionally, the Southeast Community College (SCC) service area may be underrepresented. Despite having the second-highest youth population in the state and a poverty rate similar to MCC and CCC, SCC's share of ACE scholarship recipients remains comparatively low.



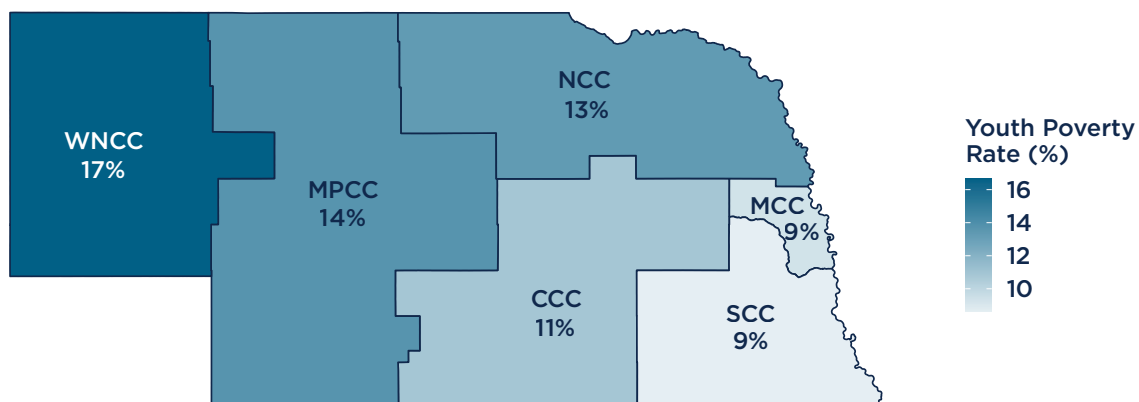
ACE SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS BY COMMUNITY COLLEGE SERVICE AREA (ACADEMIC YEARS 2017-18 TO 2022-23)



YOUTH POPULATION COUNT BY COMMUNITY COLLEGE SERVICE AREA (CALENDAR YEAR 2023)



YOUTH POVERTY RATE BY COMMUNITY COLLEGE SERVICE AREA (CALENDAR YEAR 2023)

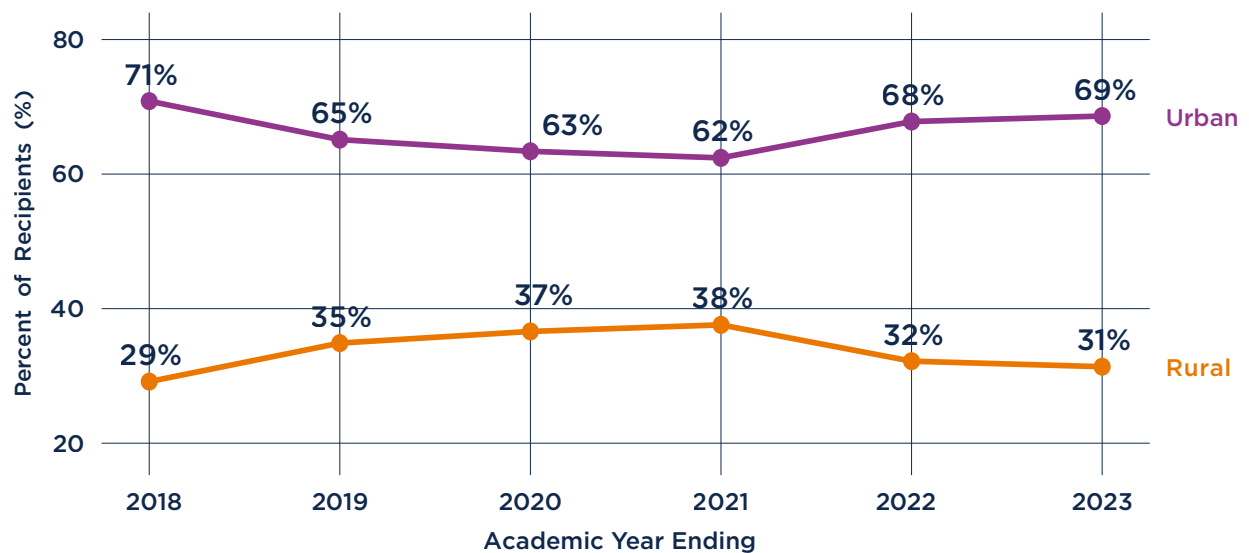


Participation by Urban/Rural County

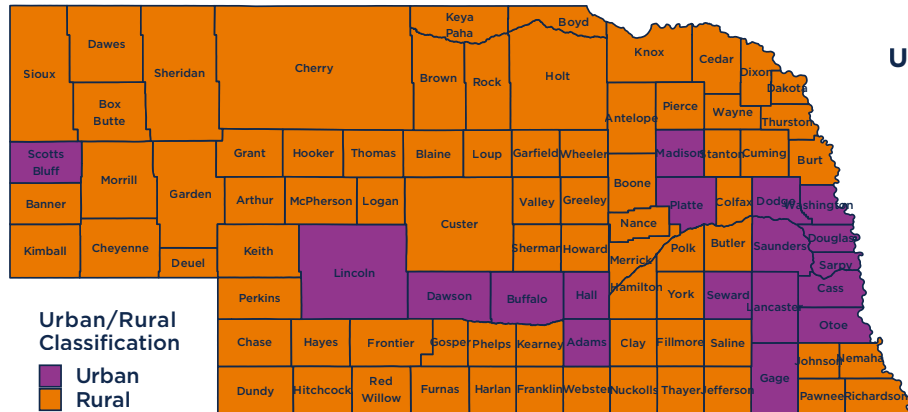
Approximately two-thirds of ACE scholarship recipients came from urban county school districts. Urban counties consistently had higher participation rates, and the gap between urban and rural counties remained stable across cohorts.

The distribution of ACE scholarship recipients is somewhat proportional to Nebraska's youth population, but not entirely. Urban counties account for 66 percent of total recipients, despite representing approximately 81 percent of the state's youth population. Conversely, rural counties received 34 percent of ACE awards while comprising only 19 percent of the youth population. One possible explanation for this disparity is the difference in youth poverty rates: rural counties had an average youth poverty rate of 13 percent, compared to 10 percent in urban counties. However, this gap in poverty rates is relatively modest and does not fully explain the disproportionate distribution.

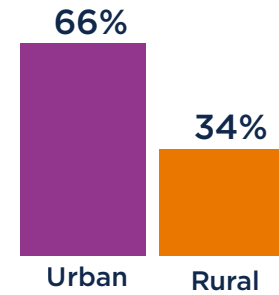
**ACE SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS BY URBAN/RURAL COUNTY
(ACADEMIC YEARS 2017-18 TO 2022-23)**



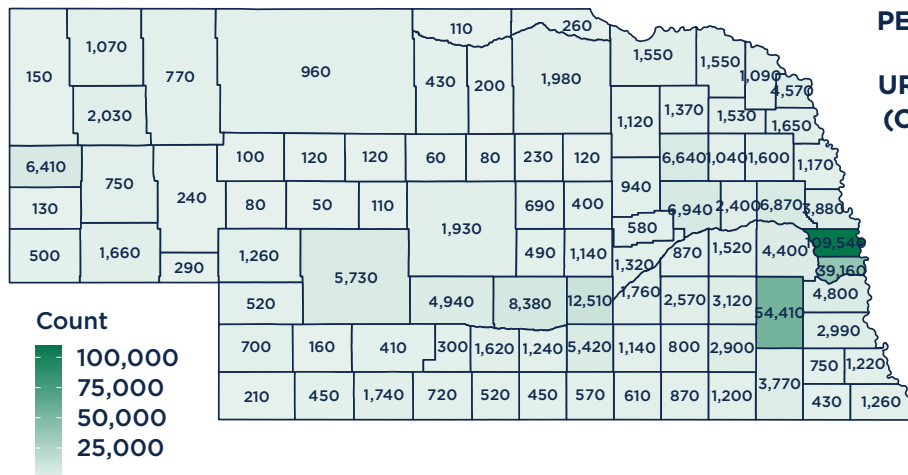
URBAN/RURAL CLASSIFICATION OF NEBRASKA COUNTIES



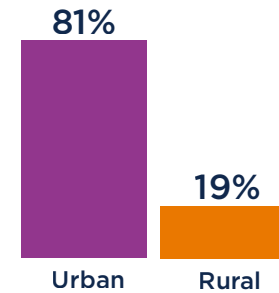
ACE SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS BY URBAN/RURAL COUNTY (ACADEMIC YEARS 2017-18 TO 2022-23)



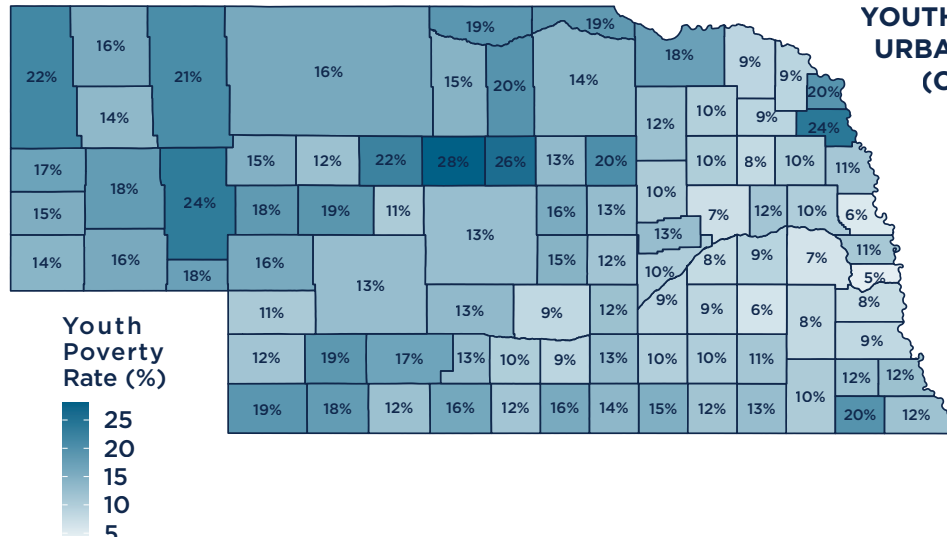
YOUTH POPULATION COUNT BY COUNTY (CALENDAR YEAR 2023)



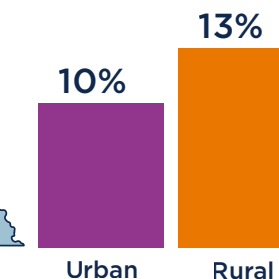
PERCENTAGE OF YOUTH POPULATION BY URBAN/RURAL COUNTY (CALENDAR YEAR 2023)



YOUTH POVERTY RATE BY COUNTY (CALENDAR YEAR 2023)



YOUTH POVERTY RATE BY URBAN/RURAL COUNTY (CALENDAR YEAR 2023)



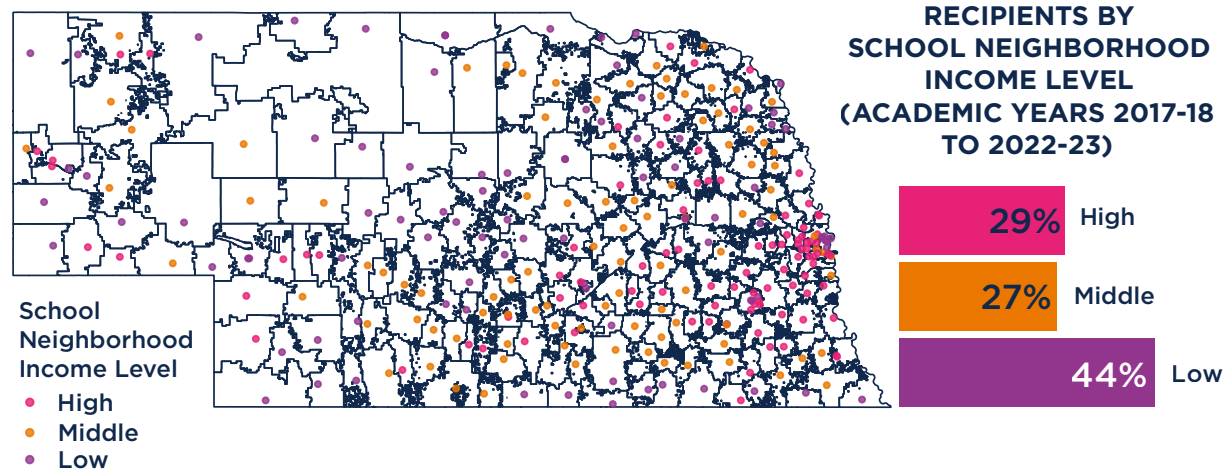
Participation by School Neighborhood Income Level

The percentage of scholarship recipients varied significantly by the average income level of school neighborhoods, which may serve as a proxy for schools' economic conditions.

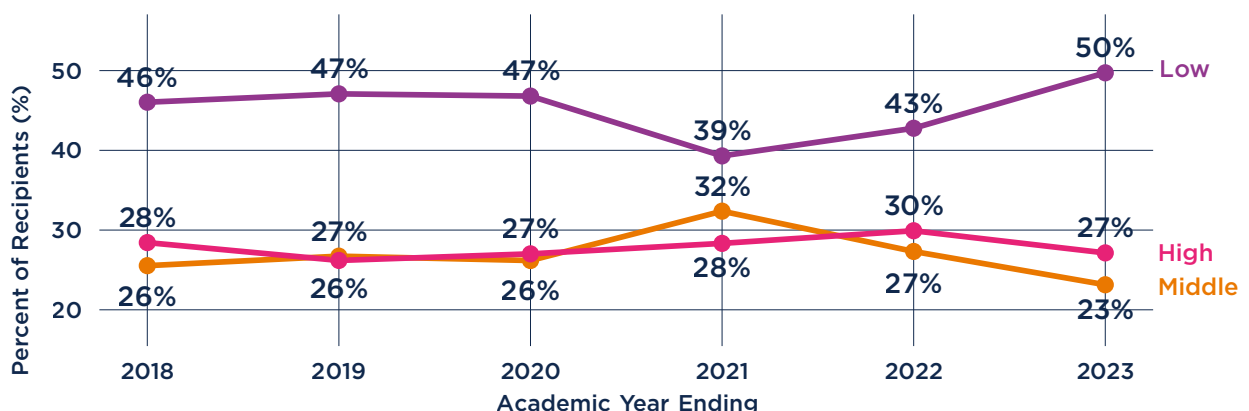
More than 40 percent of ACE scholarship recipients attended schools serving low-income neighborhoods. Schools in middle-income areas had a slightly lower percentage than those in high-income areas, with both under 30 percent.

Although there were year-to-year fluctuations, schools in low-income neighborhoods consistently had the highest percentage of ACE scholarship recipients. During the 2020-21 academic year, the percentage of recipients from low-income areas dropped below 40 percent, while the percentage in high-income areas remained stable. This may indicate that schools in low-income areas had less access to the program or fewer resources to address challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic compared to schools in high-income areas.

SCHOOL NEIGHBORHOOD INCOME LEVEL (ACADEMIC YEARS 2017-18 TO 2021-22)



ACE SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS BY SCHOOL NEIGHBORHOOD POVERTY (ACADEMIC YEARS 2017-18 TO 2022-23)

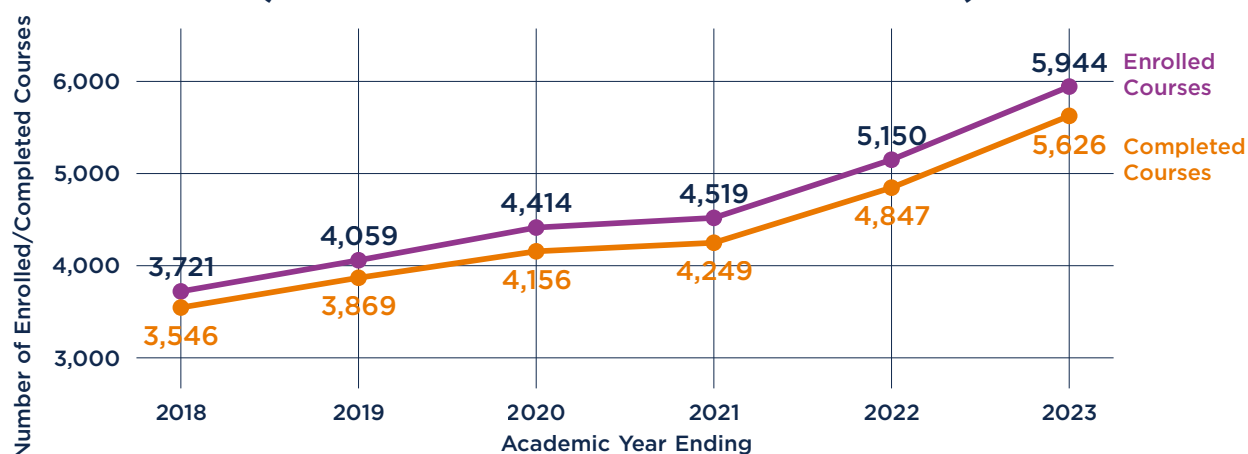


Course Enrollment and Completion

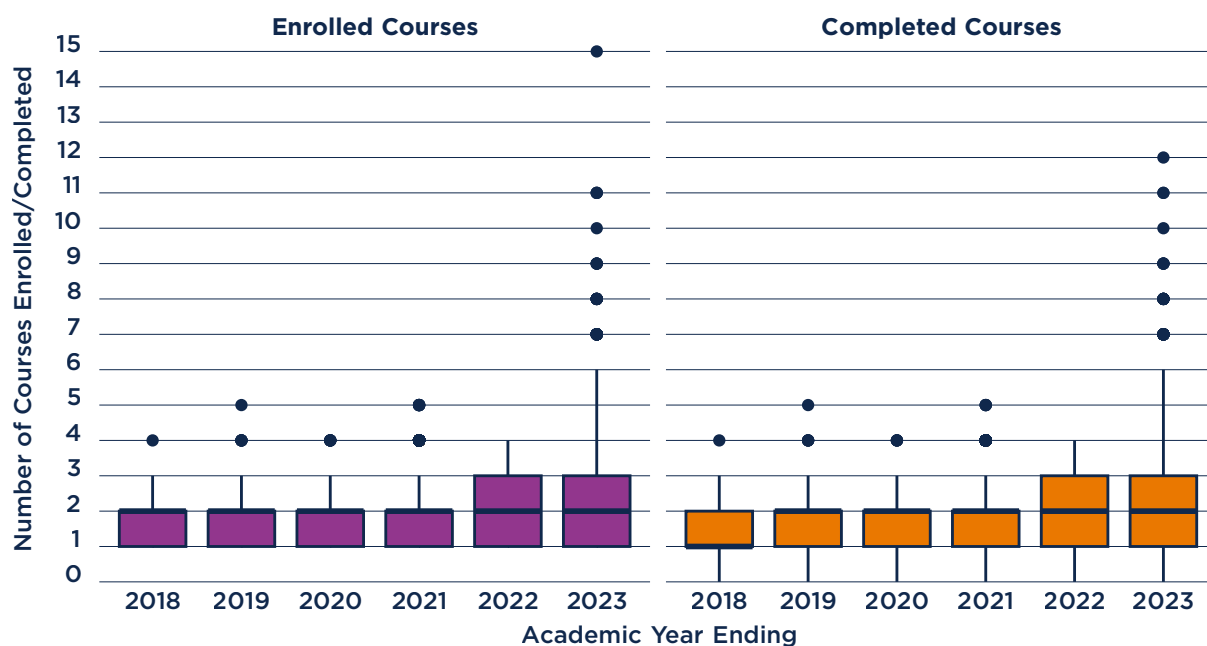
The total number of courses enrolled in and completed by ACE scholarship recipients increased over time, likely due to the gradual removal of funding limits. In the 2022-23 academic year, some students received funding for up to 15 courses, although most completed between one and three.

This increase may reflect expanded access and flexibility in course-taking under the ACE program.

**NUMBER OF DUAL ENROLLMENT COURSES
ENROLLED AND COMPLETED BY RECIPIENTS
(ACADEMIC YEARS 2017-18 TO 2022-23)**



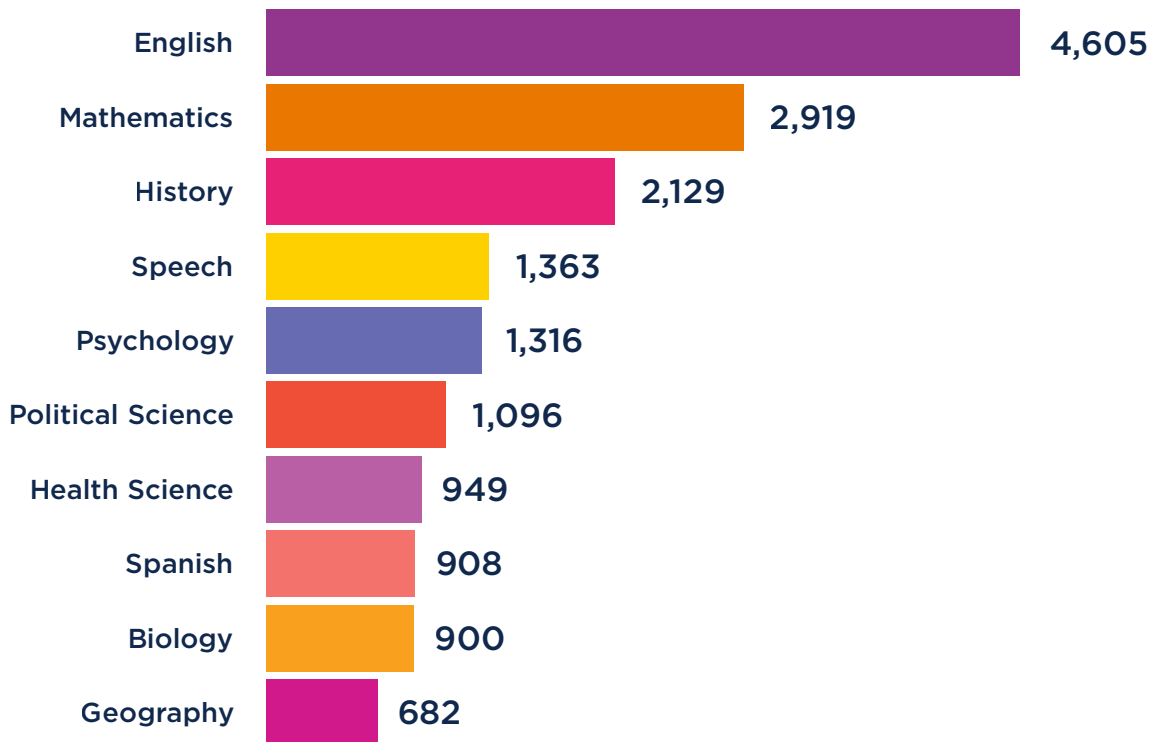
**NUMBER OF DUAL ENROLLMENT COURSES
ENROLLED AND COMPLETED PER RECIPIENT
(ACADEMIC YEARS 2017-18 TO 2022-23)**



Top 10 Course Subjects Enrolled by Scholarship Recipients

English was the most frequently enrolled subject among ACE scholarship recipients, followed by mathematics and history. These core academic subjects align with general education requirements and college readiness priorities.

TOP 10 COURSE SUBJECTS ENROLLED BY RECIPIENTS (ACADEMIC YEARS 2017-18 TO 2022-23)



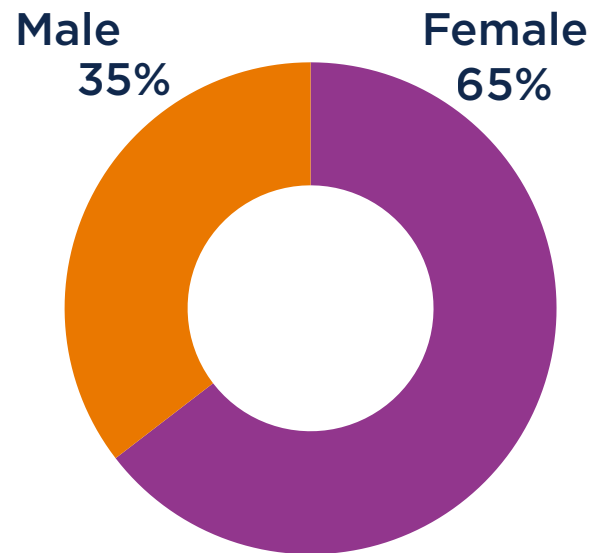


PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

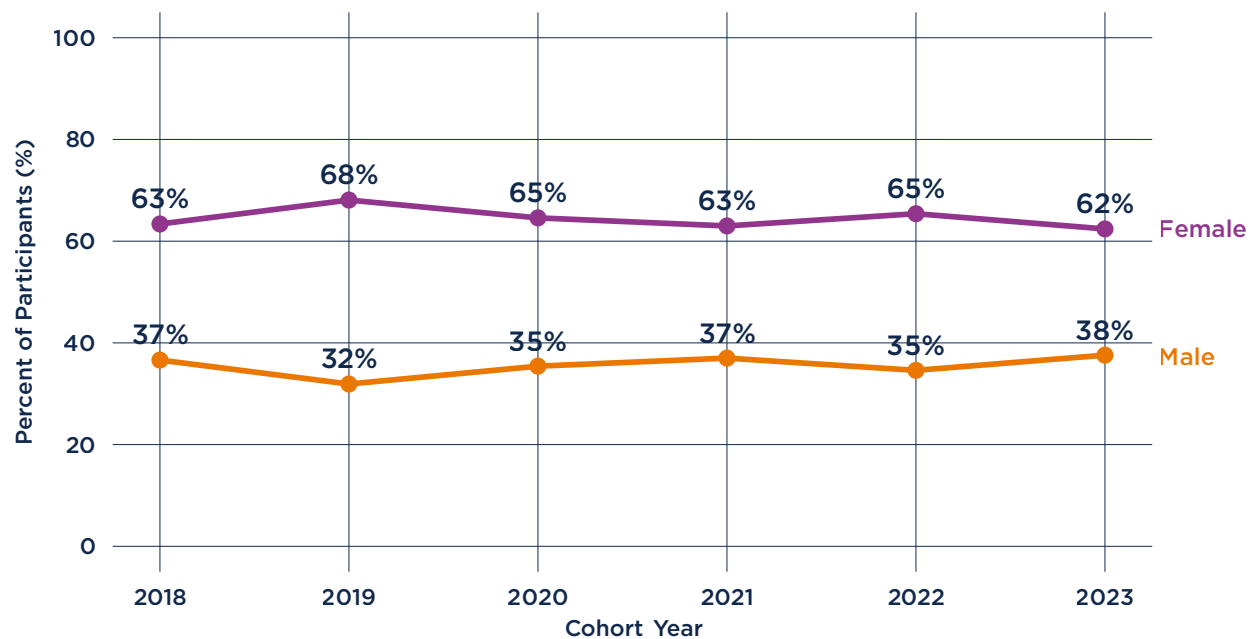
Sex Distribution of ACE Participants

Female students consistently made up the majority of ACE participants, accounting for approximately 65 percent of the total. This proportion remained stable over time, ranging between 62 and 68 percent across cohorts.

**ACE PARTICIPANTS BY SEX
(2018-2023 COHORTS)**



**ACE PARTICIPANTS BY SEX
(2018-2023 COHORTS)**

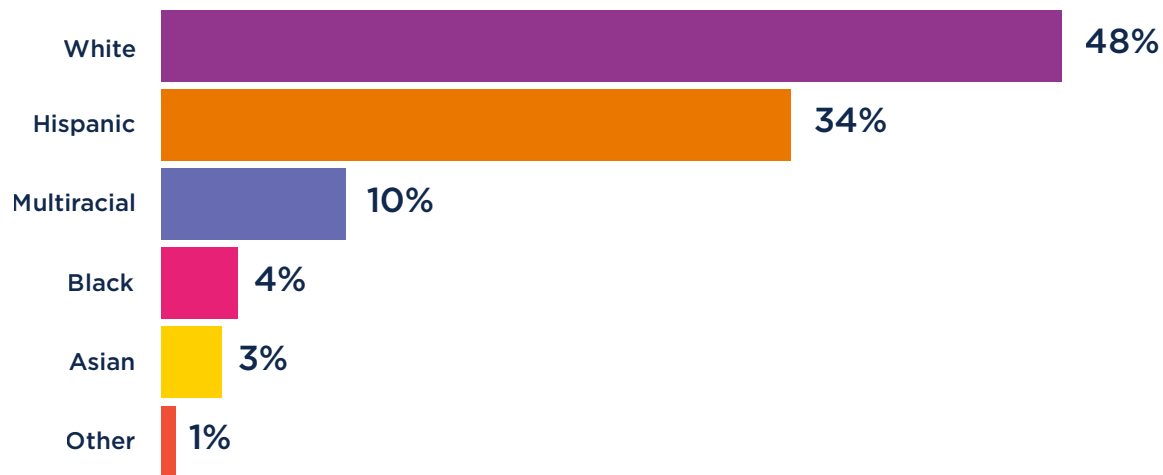


Racial/Ethnic Distribution of ACE Participants

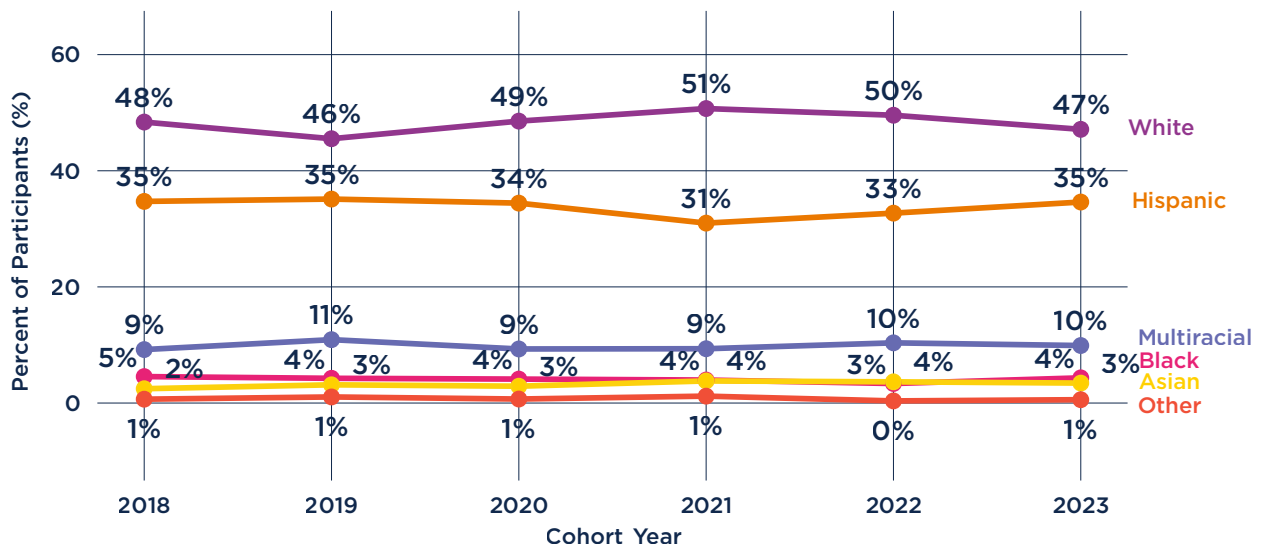
White students represented approximately half of all ACE participants, with their share ranging from 46 to 51 percent over time. Hispanic students were the second-largest group, followed by multiracial students.

This distribution reflects both the demographic composition of Nebraska's student population and the program's outreach to diverse communities.

**ACE PARTICIPANTS BY RACE/ETHNICITY
(2018-2023 COHORTS)**



**ACE PARTICIPANTS BY RACE/ETHNICITY
(2018-2023 COHORTS)**



HIGH SCHOOL DATA ANALYSIS



High School Credit Hours Earned

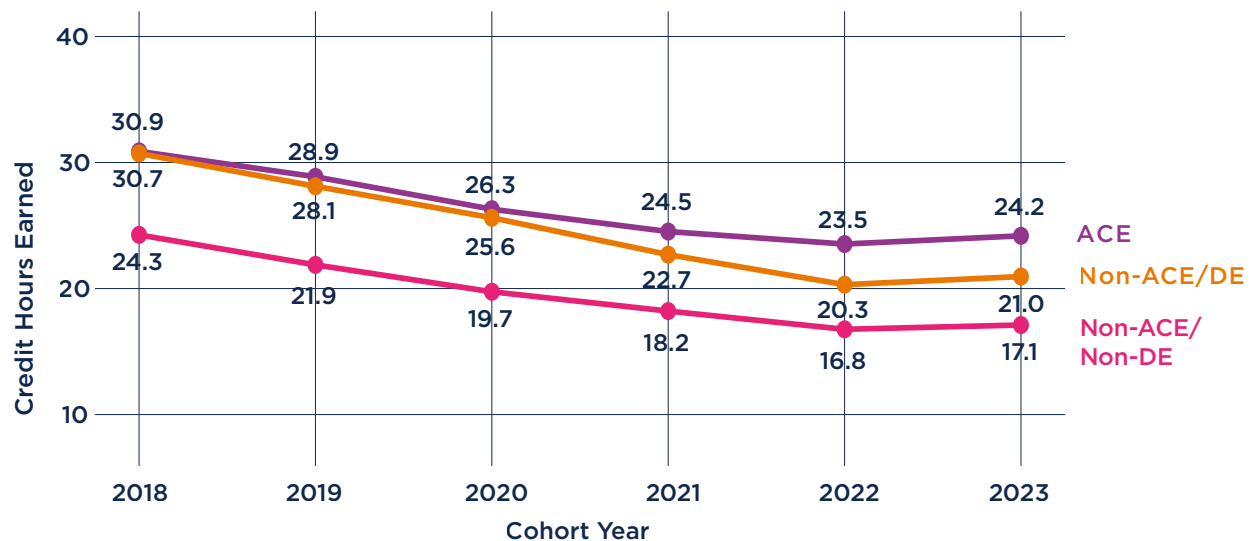
ACE participants consistently earned more high school credit hours on average than non-participants. Non-ACE/DE participants earned more credits than Non-ACE/Non-DE participants, reflecting the additional coursework associated with dual enrollment.

These trends remained stable across all cohorts, suggesting that ACE participation is associated with increased academic engagement and course completion during high school.

**HIGH SCHOOL CREDIT HOURS EARNED
BY ACE PARTICIPANTS AND COMPARISON GROUPS
(2018-2023 COHORTS)**



**HIGH SCHOOL CREDIT HOURS EARNED
BY ACE PARTICIPANTS AND COMPARISON GROUPS
(2018-2023 COHORTS)**



High School GPA

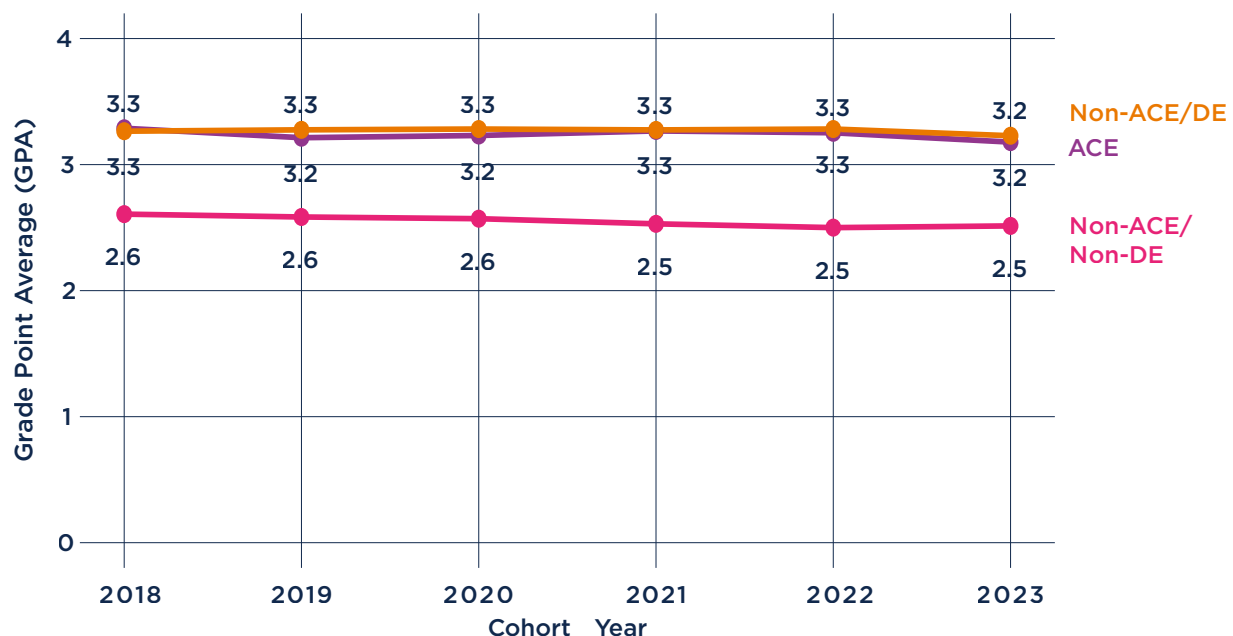
ACE participants performed similarly to Non-ACE/DE participants in terms of grade point average (GPA), with both groups maintaining higher GPAs than Non-ACE/Non-DE students.

This pattern was consistent over time and indicates that ACE participants are academically comparable to other dual enrollment students, while outperforming students who did not participate in dual enrollment.

HIGH SCHOOL GPA OF ACE PARTICIPANTS AND COMPARISON GROUPS (2018-2023 COHORTS)



HIGH SCHOOL GPA OF ACE PARTICIPANTS AND COMPARISON GROUPS (2018-2023 COHORTS)

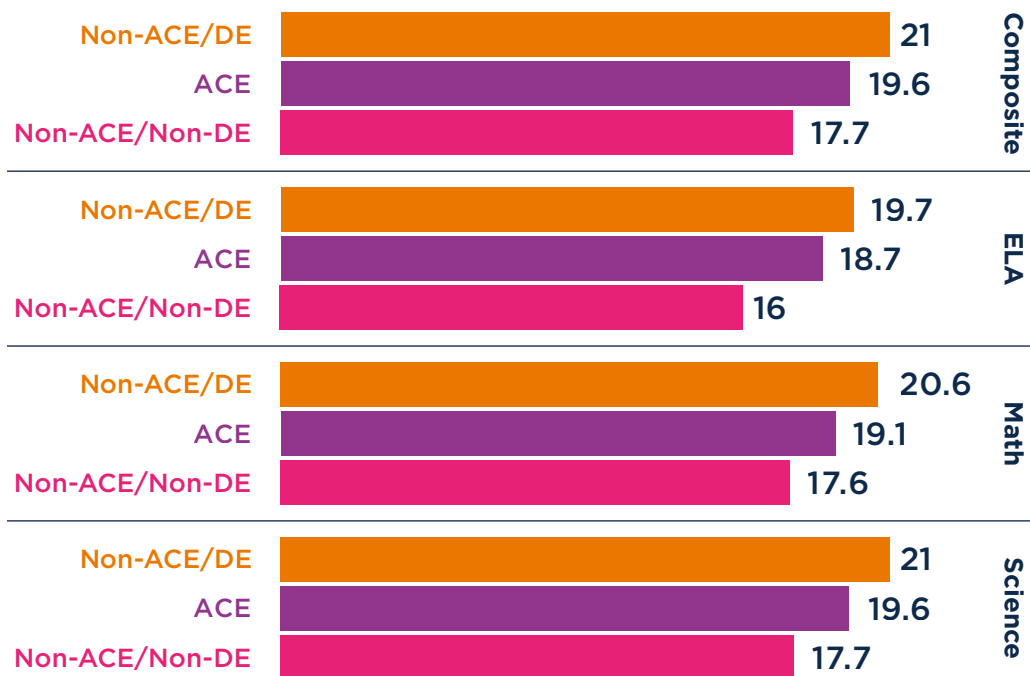


ACT Scores

Despite strong academic performance in high school, ACE participants had lower average ACT scores across subjects compared to Non-ACE/DE participants. However, they still outperformed the Non-ACE/Non-DE group, which had the lowest ACT scores.

These results suggest that while ACE participants are academically engaged, they may face challenges on standardized assessments—potentially reflecting broader disparities in test preparation resources or access.

ACT SCORES OF ACE PARTICIPANTS AND COMPARISON GROUPS (2018-2023 COHORTS)

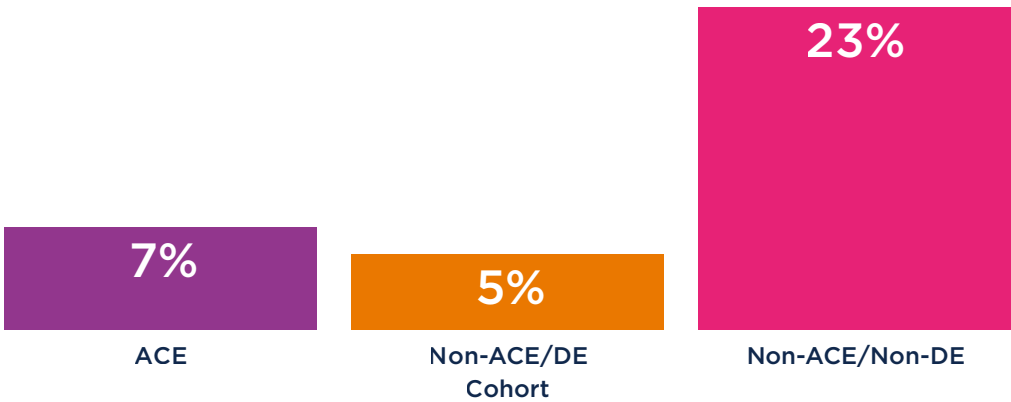


Chronic Absenteeism

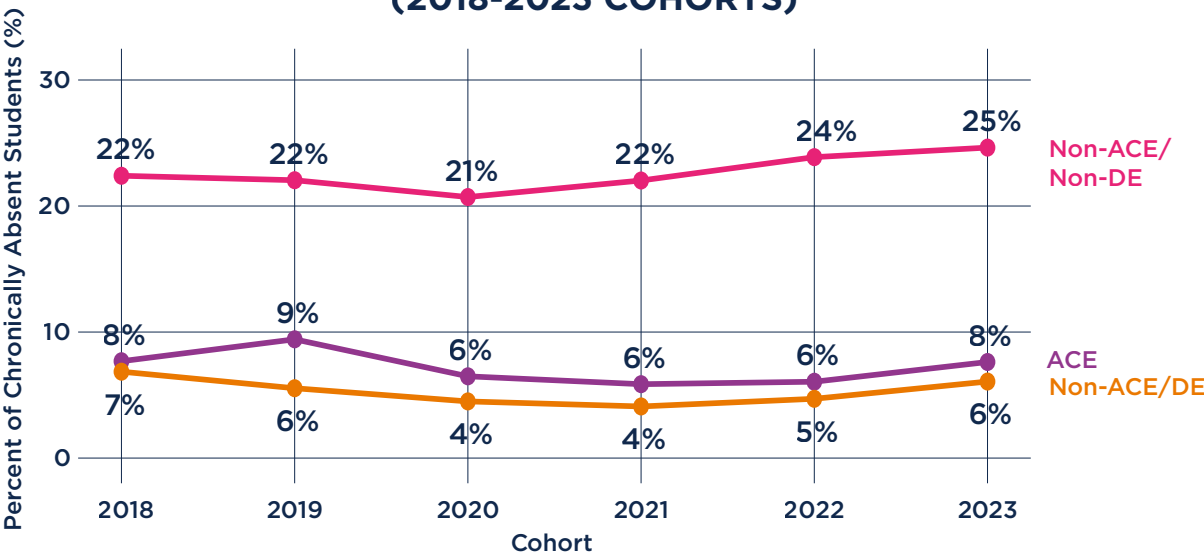
ACE participants had a slightly higher rate of chronic absenteeism than Non-ACE/DE participants, though both groups remained below 10 percent. In contrast, the Non-ACE/Non-DE group had a significantly higher absenteeism rate, averaging 23 percent.

These trends were consistent across cohorts and may reflect differences in academic motivation and engagement. They may also be influenced by external factors such as the need to work, caregiving responsibilities (e.g., caring for siblings), or transportation challenges—particularly in metro areas.

CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM OF
ACE PARTICIPANTS AND COMPARISON GROUPS
(2018-2023 COHORTS)



CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM OF
ACE PARTICIPANTS AND COMPARISON GROUPS
(2018-2023 COHORTS)

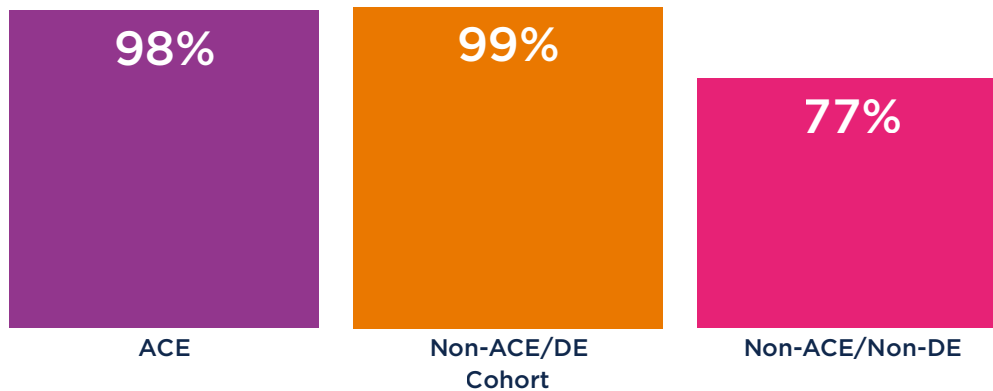


High School Graduation

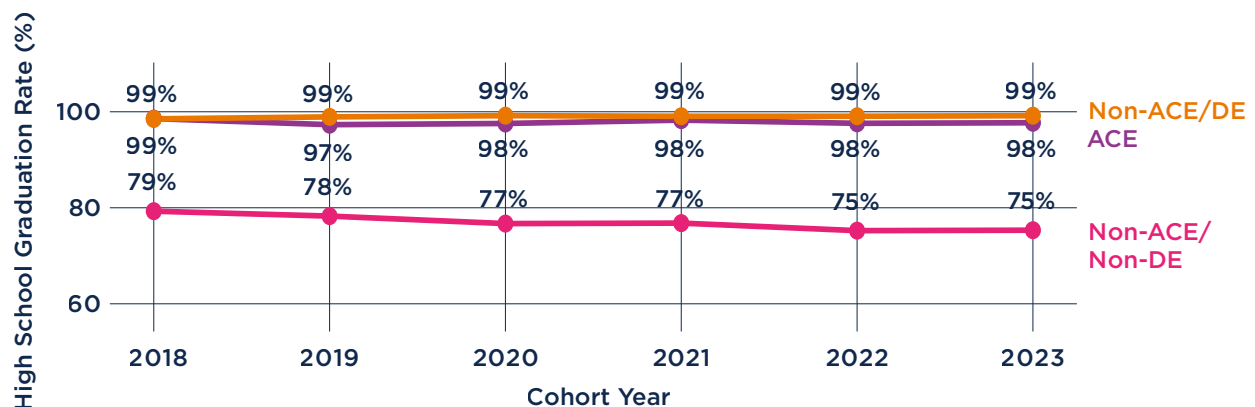
Graduation rates were high across all groups. ACE participants had slightly lower rates than Non-ACE/DE participants, with both groups exceeding 90 percent. The Non-ACE/Non-DE group had the lowest graduation rate, averaging 77 percent.

These findings suggest that dual enrollment—whether supported by ACE or not—is associated with a higher likelihood of high school completion, reinforcing the value of early college access programs. However, it is also possible that students who choose to participate in dual enrollment are more academically motivated or higher-achieving to begin with, and thus more likely to graduate regardless of program participation.

HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATE OF ACE PARTICIPANTS AND COMPARISON GROUPS (2018-2023 COHORTS)



HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATE OF ACE PARTICIPANTS AND COMPARISON GROUPS (2018-2023 COHORTS)



POSTSECONDARY OUTCOME ANALYSIS



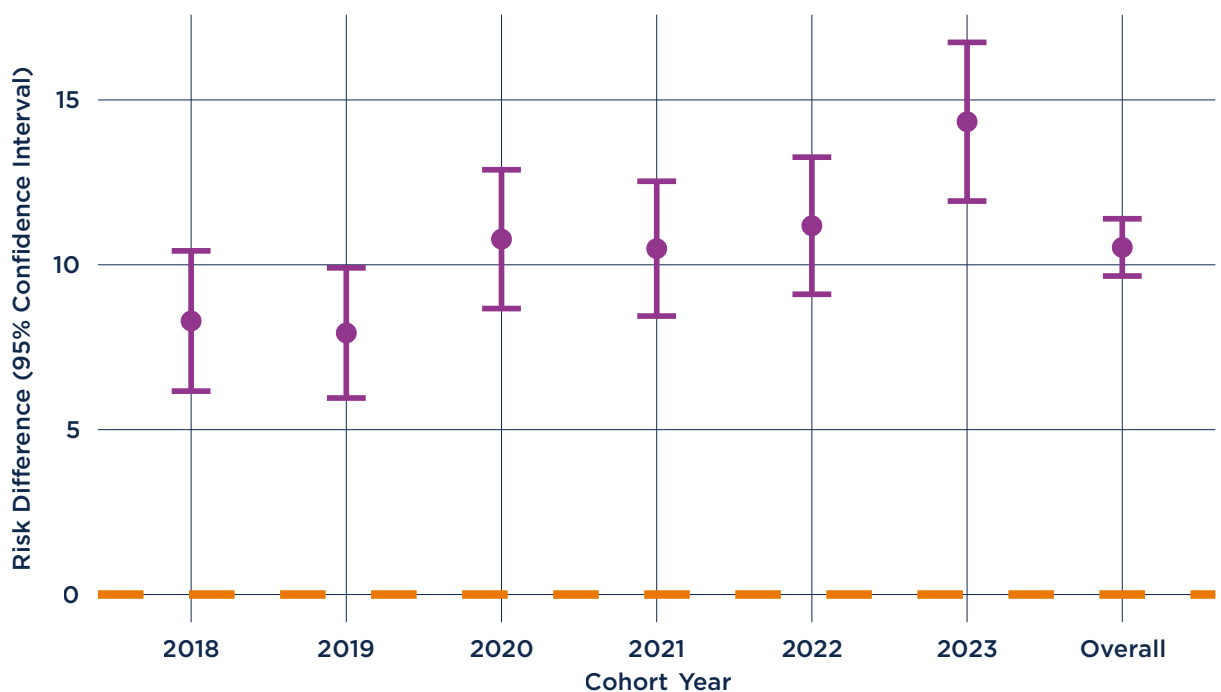
College Going

Nebraska Public High School Graduates

Overall, ACE participants are more likely to go to college after high school graduation by 11 percentage points. After adjusting for baseline characteristics, the estimated treatment effects ranged from 8 to 14 percentage points, underscoring the program's effectiveness in promoting postsecondary access.

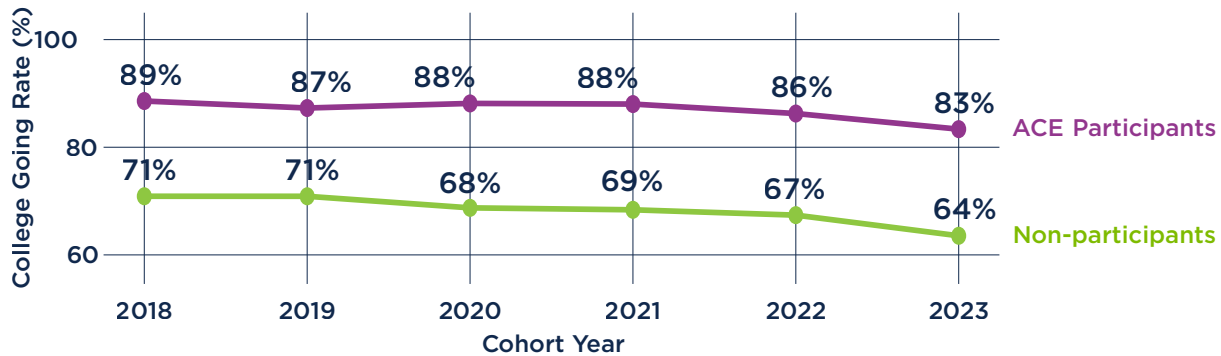
Before the adjustment, across all cohorts, ACE participants consistently demonstrated higher college-going rates than non-participants. ACE participants had slightly higher overall college-going rates than Non-ACE/DE participants, while Non-ACE/Non-DE participants had the lowest rate. Among ACE participants, more than half enrolled in Nebraska public four-year institutions for their initial college experience, and approximately 30 percent enrolled in Nebraska public two-year institutions. This reflects program participants' strong preference for in-state public colleges over other colleges.

ESTIMATED TREATMENT EFFECT OF ACE PARTICIPATION ON COLLEGE GOING: NEBRASKA PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES



Overall indicates overall intervention effect

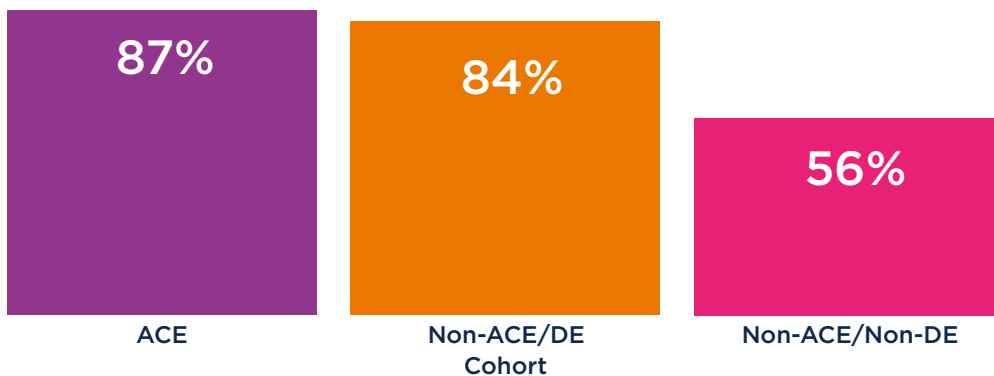
COLLEGE GOING BY ACE PARTICIPATION (2018-2023 NEBRASKA PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES)



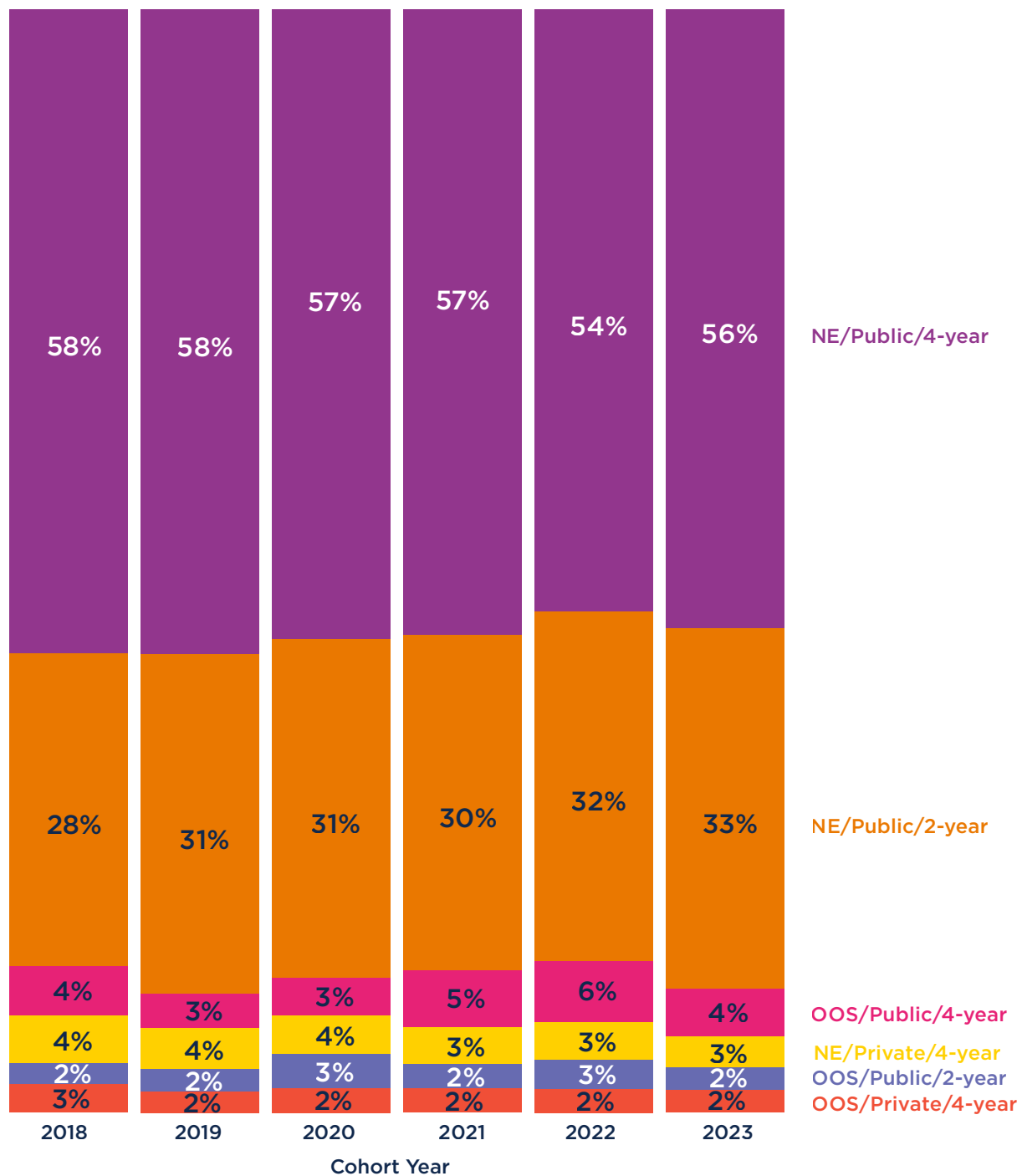
Observed Differences in College Going and Estimated Treatment Effects of ACE

Cohort Year	Observed Differences	Treatment Effects (95% CI)
2018	18%	8% (6%, 10%)
2019	16%	8% (6%, 10%)
2020	19%	11% (9%, 13%)
2021	20%	10% (8%, 13%)
2022	19%	11% (9%, 13%)
2023	20%	14% (12%, 17%)
Overall	19%	11% (10%, 11%)

COLLEGE GOING RATE OF ACE PARTICIPANTS AND COMPARISON GROUPS (2018-2023 NEBRASKA PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES)



COLLEGE-GOING ACE PARTICIPANTS BY COLLEGE SECTOR (2018-2023 NEBRASKA PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES)

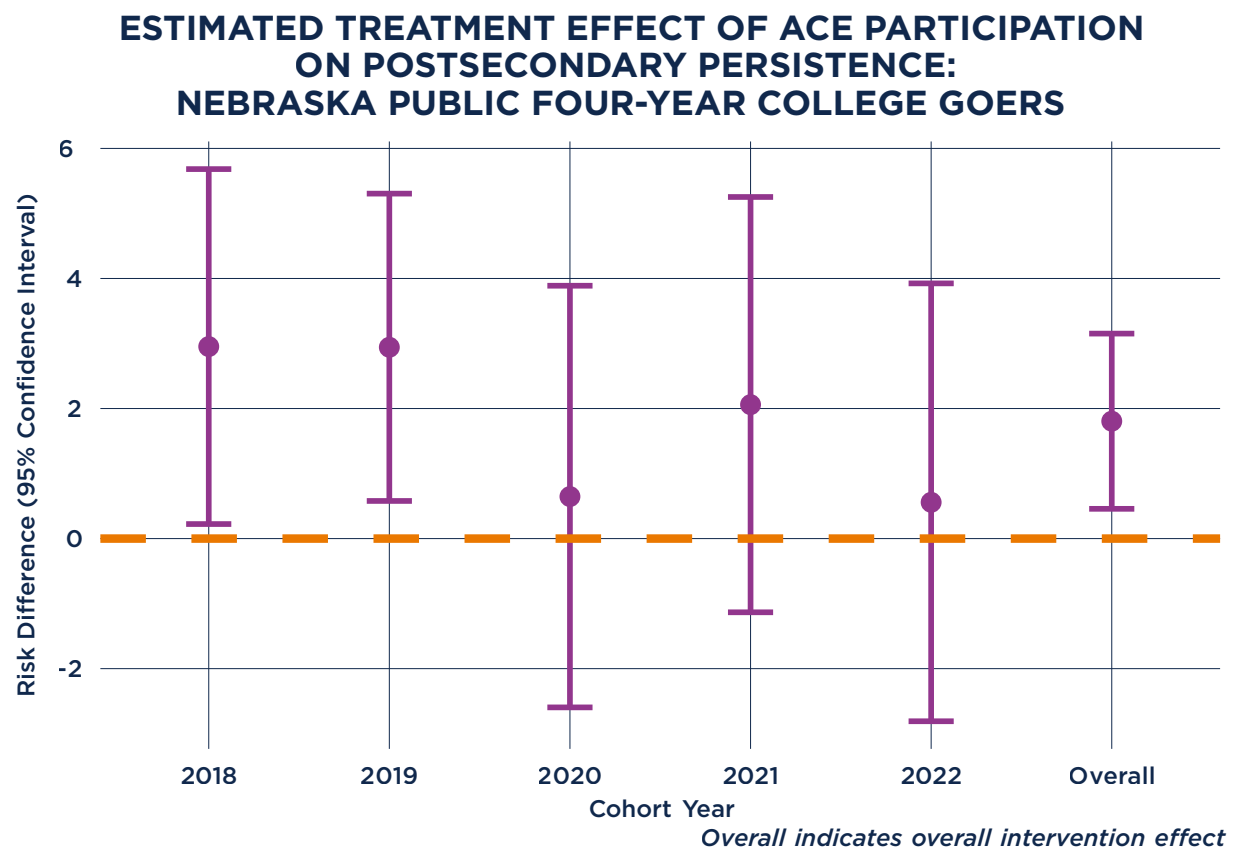


Postsecondary Persistence

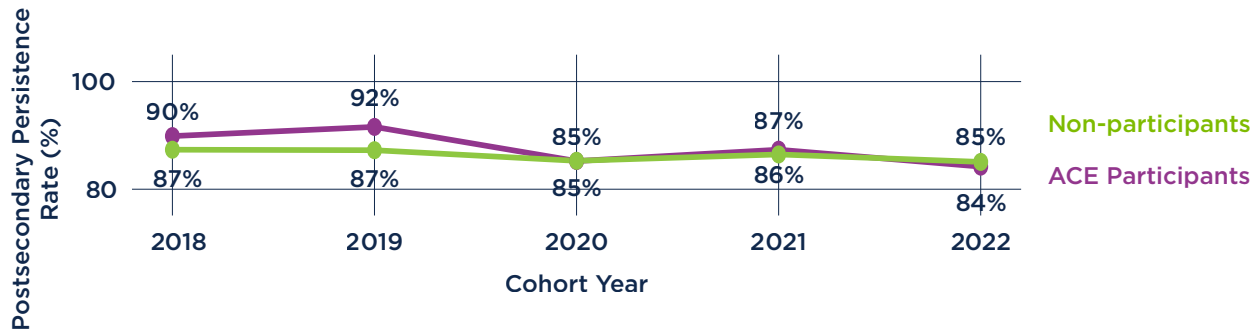
Nebraska Public Four-year College Goers

Overall, ACE participants who enrolled in Nebraska public four-year institutions were more likely to persist in college by 2 percentage points. After adjusting for baseline characteristics, the estimated treatment effects ranged from 1 to 3 percentage points.

Before the adjustment, ACE participants generally had slightly higher persistence rates than non-participants, yet these differences fluctuated year to year. ACE participants had slightly lower overall persistence rates than Non-ACE/DE participants, while Non-ACE/Non-DE participants had the lowest rate.



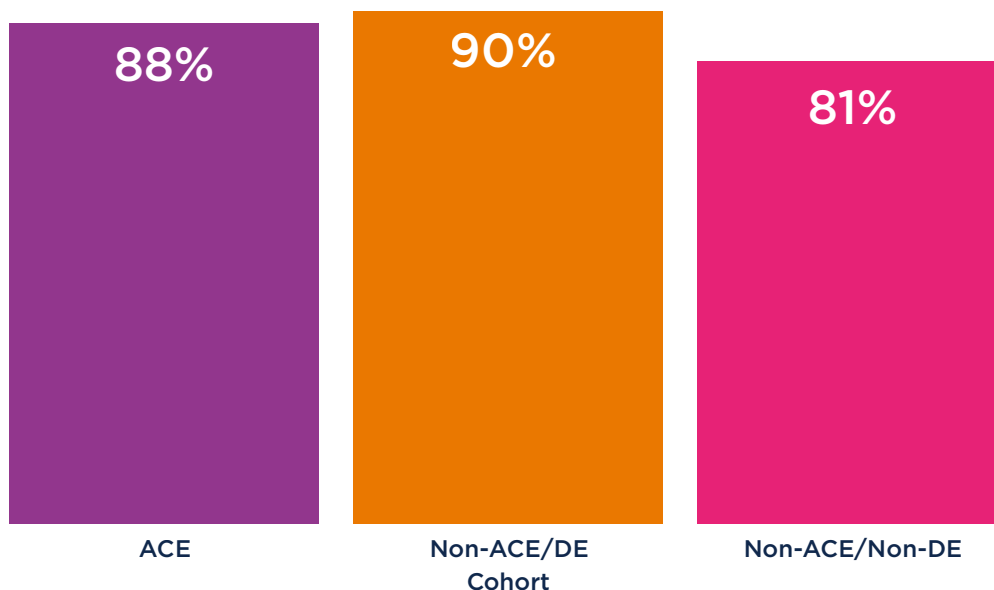
POSTSECONDARY PERSISTENCE BY ACE PARTICIPATION (2018-2022 NEBRASKA PUBLIC FOUR-YEAR COLLEGE GOERS)



Observed Differences in Postsecondary Persistence and Estimated Treatment Effects of ACE

Cohort Year	Observed Differences	Treatment Effects (95% CI)
2018	3%	3% (0%, 6%)
2019	4%	3% (1%, 5%)
2020	0%	1% (-3%, 4%)
2021	1%	2% (-1%, 5%)
2022	-1%	1% (-3%, 4%)
Overall	1%	2% (0%, 3%)

POSTSECONDARY PERSISTENCE RATE OF ACE PARTICIPANTS AND COMPARISON GROUPS (2018-2022 NEBRASKA PUBLIC FOUR-YEAR COLLEGE GOERS)

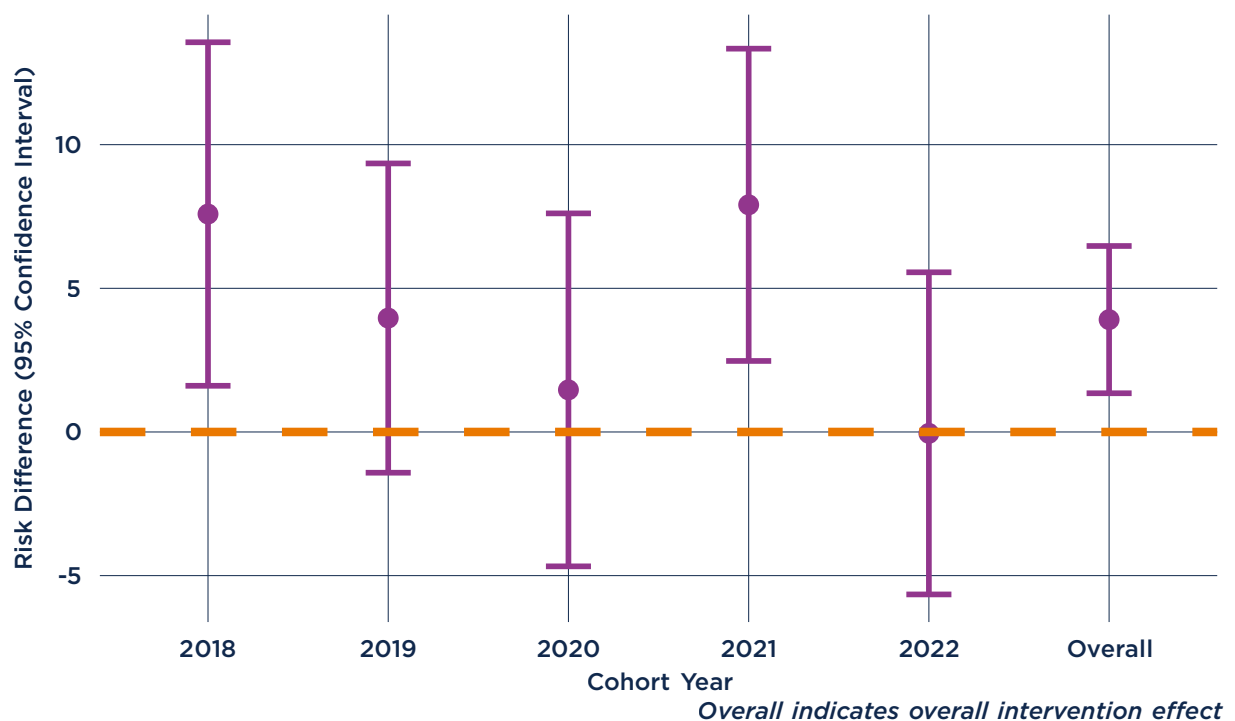


Nebraska Public Two-year College Goers

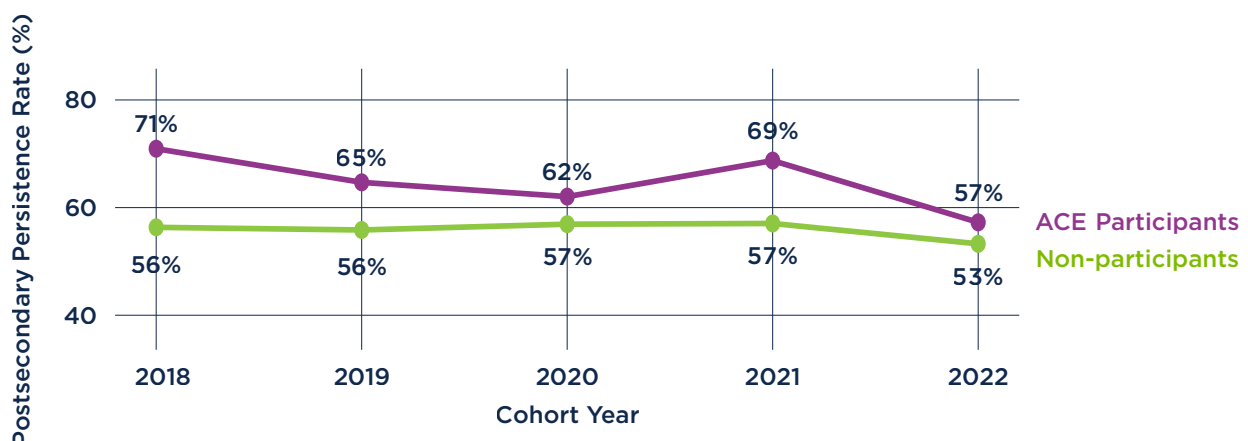
Overall, ACE participants who enrolled in Nebraska public two-year institutions were more likely to persist in college by 4 percentage points. After adjusting for baseline characteristics, the estimated treatment effects ranged from 0 to 8 percentage points.

Before the adjustment, ACE participants consistently outperformed non-participants in persistence rates. ACE participants had slightly higher overall persistence rates than Non-ACE/DE participants, and much higher rates than Non-ACE/Non-DE participants.

ESTIMATED TREATMENT EFFECT OF ACE PARTICIPATION ON POSTSECONDARY PERSISTENCE: NEBRASKA PUBLIC TWO-YEAR COLLEGE GOERS



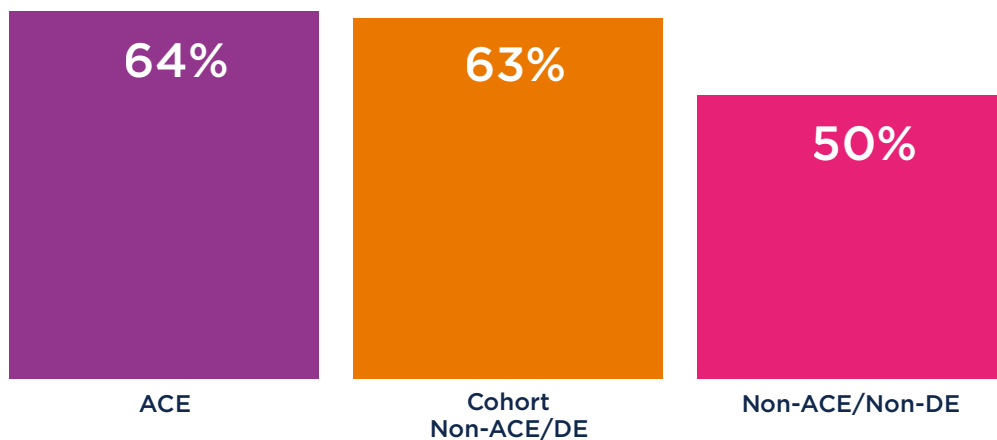
POSTSECONDARY PERSISTENCE BY ACE PARTICIPATION (2018-2022 NEBRASKA PUBLIC TWO-YEAR COLLEGE GOERS)



*Observed Differences in Postsecondary Persistence
and Estimated Treatment Effects of ACE*

Cohort Year	Observed Differences	Treatment Effects (95% CI)
2018	15%	8% (2%, 14%)
2019	9%	4% (-1%, 9%)
2020	5%	1% (-5%, 8%)
2021	12%	8% (2%, 13%)
2022	4%	0% (-6%, 6%)
Overall	8%	4% (1%, 6%)

**POSTSECONDARY PERSISTENCE RATE OF
ACE PARTICIPANTS AND COMPARISON GROUPS
(2018-2022 NEBRASKA PUBLIC TWO-YEAR COLLEGE GOERS)**



Postsecondary Graduation

Nebraska Public Four-year College Goers

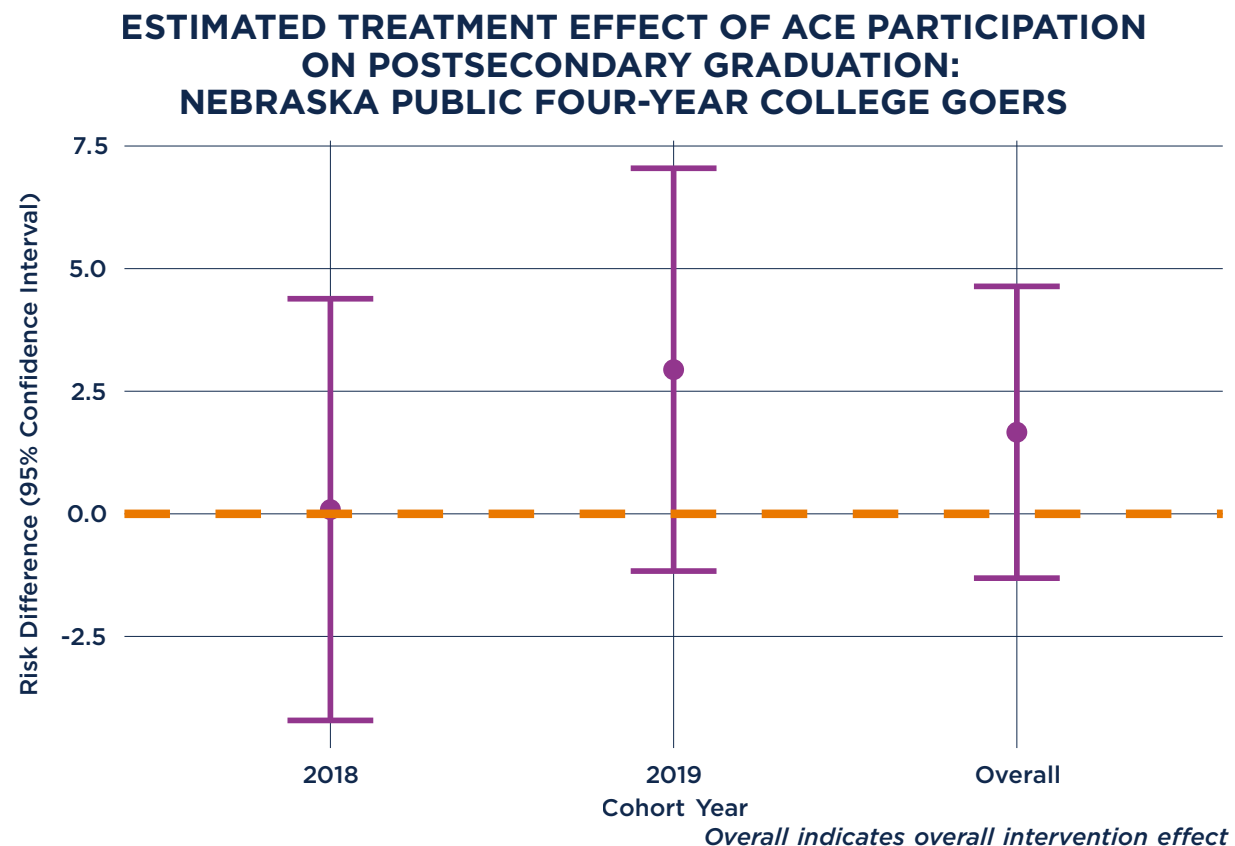
Overall, no statistically significant impact of the ACE program was found on postsecondary graduation for ACE participants at Nebraska public four-year institutions. After adjusting for baseline characteristics, the estimated treatment effects ranged from 0 to 3 percentage points.

Before the adjustment, graduation rates among ACE participants were similar to those of non-participants. ACE participants had a slightly lower overall graduation rate than Non-ACE/DE participants, while Non-ACE/Non-DE participants had the lowest rate.

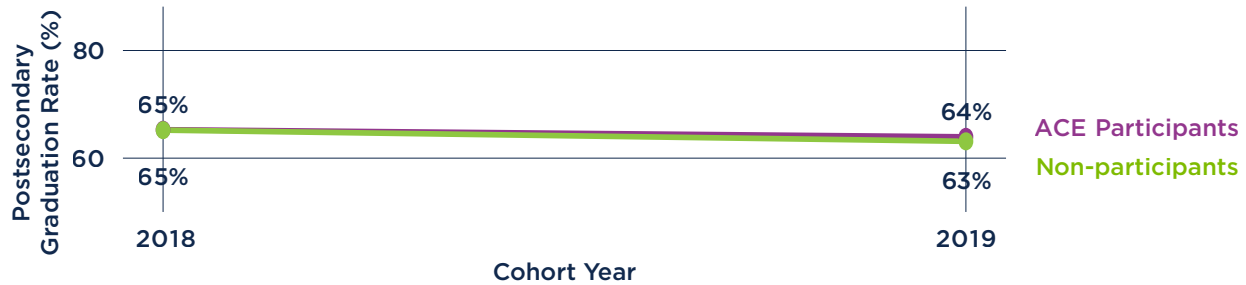
Among ACE participants who earned an award, over 90% earned a bachelor's degree or higher. Non-ACE/DE and Non-ACE/Non-DE participants showed similar patterns.

Degree major patterns were consistent across groups, with Business, Management, Marketing, and Related Support Services being the most common, followed by Education and Health Professions.

When examining how graduation rates changed over time, ACE participants demonstrated lower graduation rates compared to Non-ACE/DE participants, while Non-ACE/Non-DE participants consistently had the lowest rates. This suggests that more Non-ACE/DE participants earned their degrees within a shorter time frame.



POSTSECONDARY GRADUATION BY ACE PARTICIPATION (2018-2019 NEBRASKA PUBLIC FOUR-YEAR COLLEGE GOERS)



Observed Differences in Postsecondary Graduation and Estimated Treatment Effects of ACE

Cohort Year	Observed Differences	Treatment Effects (95% CI)
2018	0%	0% (-4%, 4%)
2019	1%	3% (-1%, 7%)
Overall	0%	2% (-1%, 5%)

POSTSECONDARY GRADUATION RATE OF ACE PARTICIPANTS AND COMPARISON GROUPS (2018-2019 NEBRASKA PUBLIC FOUR-YEAR COLLEGE GOERS)

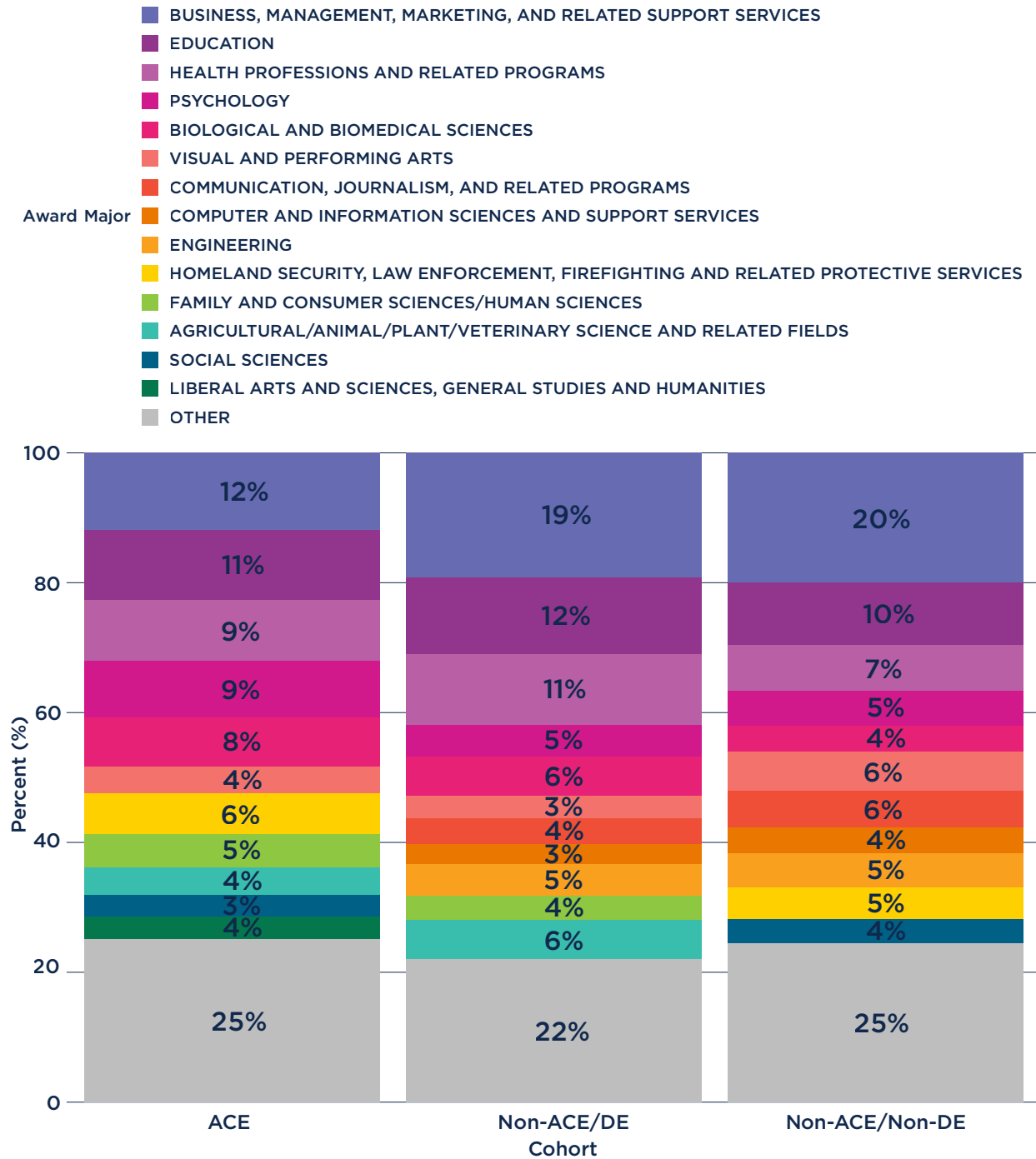


POSTSECONDARY AWARD TYPE OF ACE PARTICIPANTS AND COMPARISON GROUPS (2018-2019 NEBRASKA PUBLIC FOUR-YEAR COLLEGE GOERS)



*Masked due to low percentage (<1%)

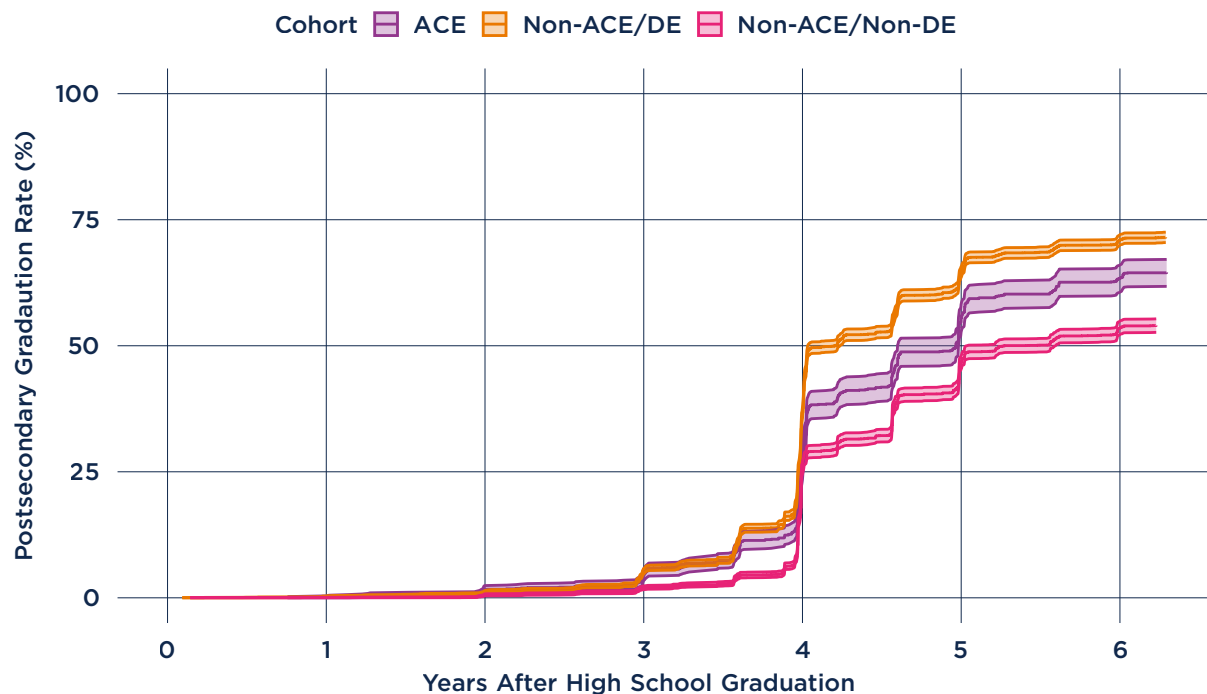
POSTSECONDARY AWARD MAJOR OF ACE PARTICIPANTS AND COMPARISON GROUPS (2018-2019 NEBRASKA PUBLIC FOUR-YEAR COLLEGE GOERS)



**Cumulative Graduation Rate of ACE Participants
and Comparison Groups over Time (Estimate with 95% CI)**

Years After High School Graduation	ACE	Non-ACE/DE	Non-ACE/Non-DE
1	0% (0%, 0%)	0% (0%, 0%)	0% (0%, 0%)
2	1% (1%, 2%)	1% (1%, 1%)	0% (0%, 1%)
3	4% (3%, 5%)	5% (4%, 5%)	2% (1%, 2%)
4	26% (24%, 29%)	35% (34%, 36%)	20% (19%, 21%)
5	55% (52%, 57%)	64% (63%, 65%)	45% (44%, 47%)
6	64% (61%, 66%)	71% (70%, 72%)	53% (52%, 54%)

**CUMULATIVE GRADUATION RATE OF
ACE PARTICIPANTS AND COMPARISON GROUPS
(2018-2019 NEBRASKA PUBLIC FOUR-YEAR COLLEGE GOERS)**



Nebraska Public Two-year College Goers

Overall, ACE participants who enrolled in Nebraska public two-year institutions were more likely to graduate college by 5 percentage points. After adjusting for baseline characteristics, the estimated treatment effects ranged from 3 to 7 percentage points.

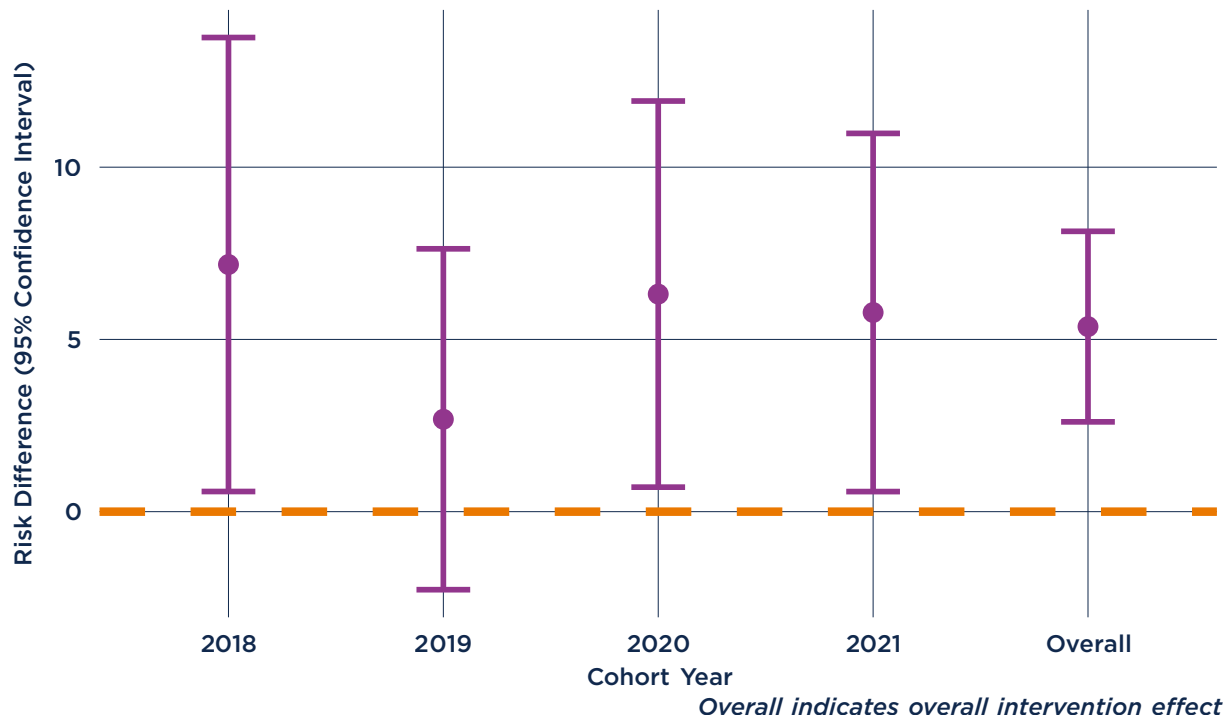
Before the adjustment, ACE participants consistently graduated at higher rates than non-participants. ACE participants had a higher overall graduation rate than Non-ACE/DE participants, while Non-ACE/Non-DE participants had the lowest rate.

Among the ACE participants who earned an award, over 80 percent earned an associate degree as their highest credential. Non-ACE/DE participants showed similar patterns, while Non-ACE/Non-DE participants had a higher proportion of certificate earners.

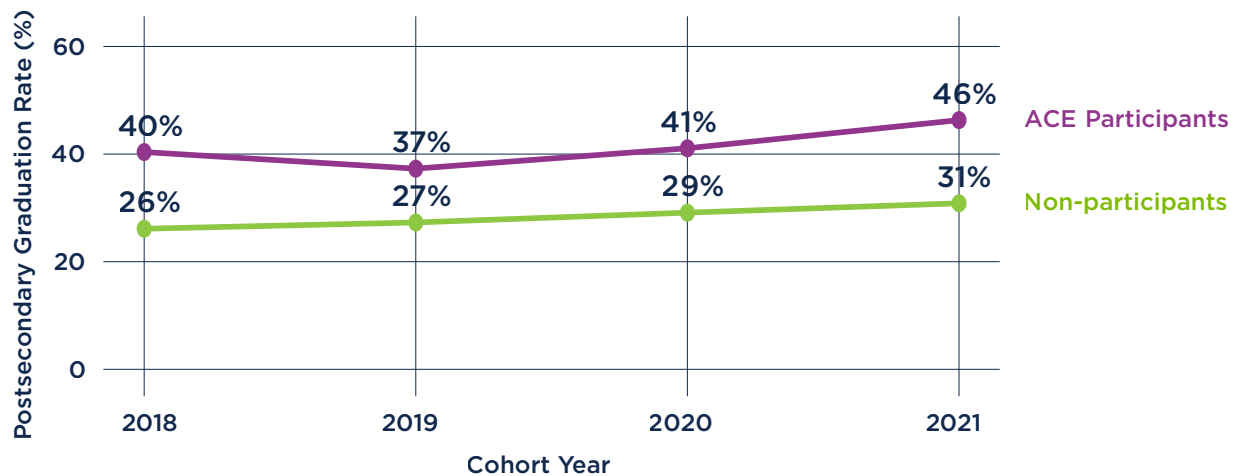
The most common degree major among ACE participants was Health Professions and Related Programs, followed by Liberal Arts and Sciences and Business, Management, Marketing, and Related Support Services. For Non-ACE/DE participants, Business, Management, Marketing, and Related Support Services was most common, followed by Mechanic and Repair Technologies and Health Professions and Related Programs. Among Non-ACE/Non-DE participants, Mechanic and Repair Technologies was the most frequent major, followed by Liberal Arts and Sciences and Precision Production.

When looking at how the graduation rates change over time, ACE participants consistently earned their credentials at higher rates than Non-ACE/DE participants and Non-ACE/Non-DE participants. This suggests that more ACE participants earned their degrees within a shorter time frame.

ESTIMATED TREATMENT EFFECT OF ACE PARTICIPATION ON POSTSECONDARY GRADUATION: NEBRASKA PUBLIC TWO-YEAR COLLEGE GOERS



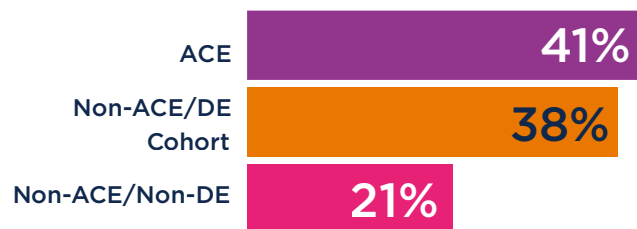
POSTSECONDARY GRADUATION BY ACE PARTICIPATION (2018-2021 NEBRASKA PUBLIC TWO-YEAR COLLEGE GOERS)



*Observed Differences in Postsecondary Graduation
and Estimated Treatment Effects of ACE*

Cohort Year	Observed Differences	Treatment Effects (95% CI)
2018	15%	7% (1%, 14%)
2019	9%	3% (-2%, 8%)
2020	12%	6% (1%, 12%)
2021	15%	6% (1%, 11%)
Overall	13%	5% (3%, 8%)

**POSTSECONDARY GRADUATION RATE OF
ACE PARTICIPANTS AND COMPARISON GROUPS
(2018-2021 NEBRASKA PUBLIC TWO-YEAR COLLEGE GOERS)**

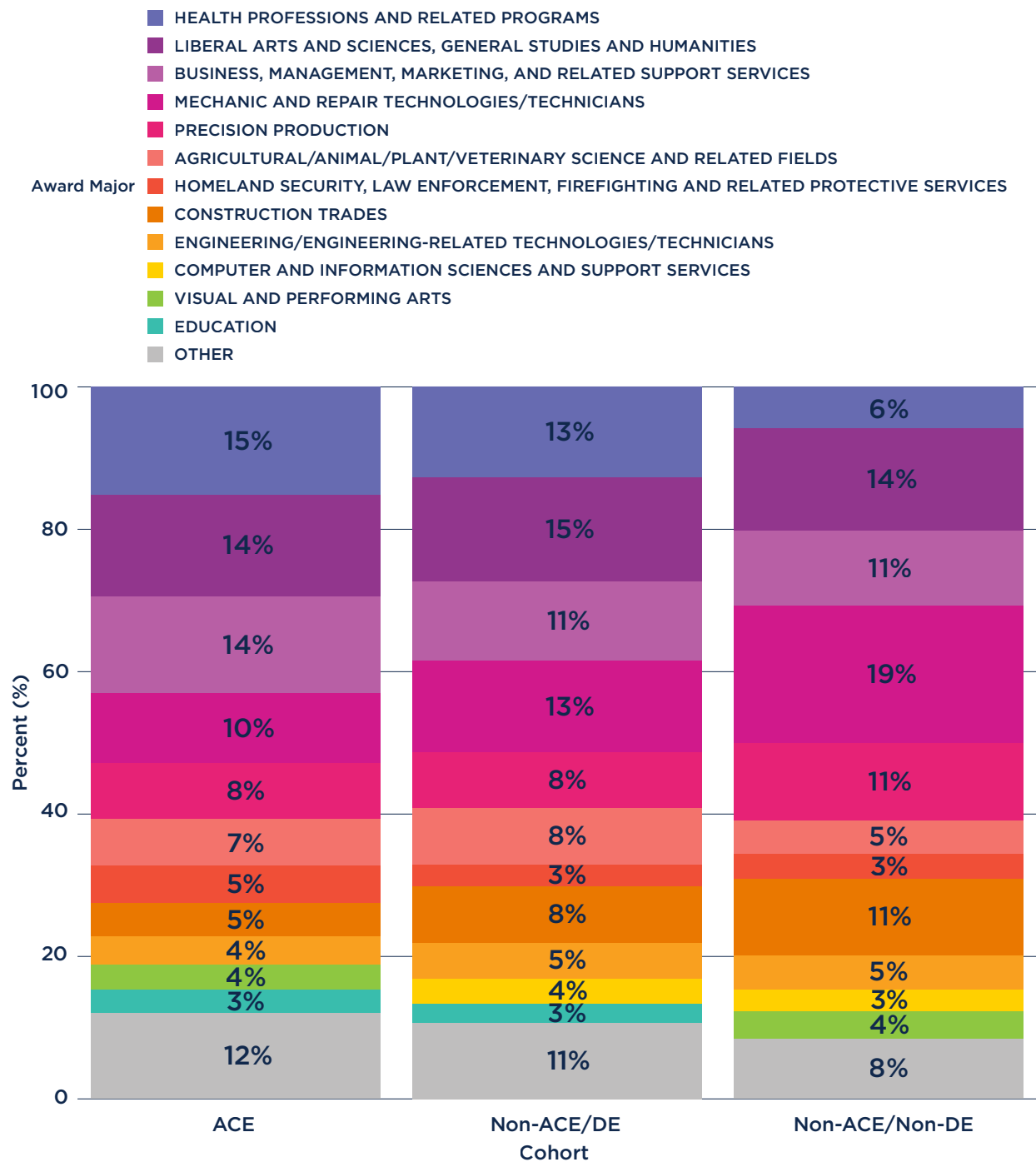


**POSTSECONDARY AWARD TYPE OF
ACE PARTICIPANTS AND COMPARISON GROUPS
(2018-2021 NEBRASKA PUBLIC TWO-YEAR COLLEGE GOERS)**



**Masked due to low percentage (<1%)*

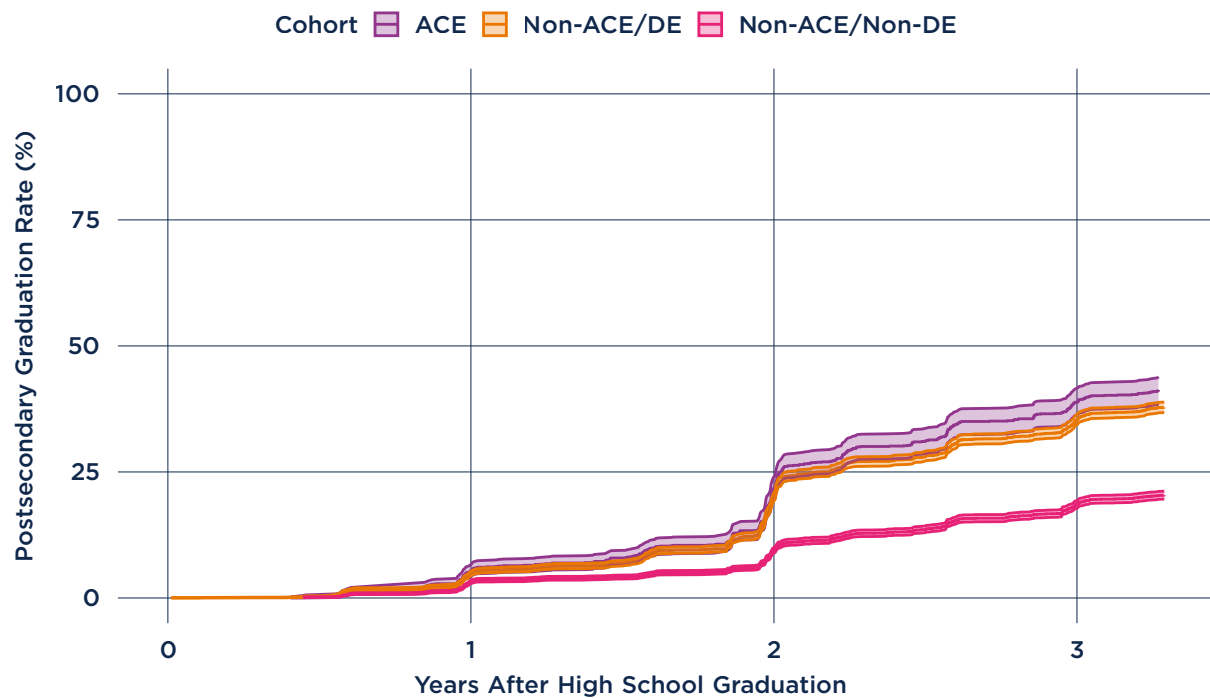
POSTSECONDARY AWARD MAJOR OF ACE PARTICIPANTS AND COMPARISON GROUPS (2018-2021 NEBRASKA PUBLIC TWO-YEAR COLLEGE GOERS)



**Cumulative Graduation Rate of ACE Participants
and Comparison Groups over Time (Estimate with 95% CI)**

Years After High School Graduation	ACE	Non-ACE/DE	Non-ACE/Non-DE
1	5% (4%, 6%)	4% (4%, 5%)	3% (2%, 3%)
2	21% (19%, 23%)	19% (19%, 20%)	9% (8%, 10%)
3	38% (36%, 41%)	35% (34%, 36%)	18% (18%, 19%)

**CUMULATIVE GRADUATION RATE OF
ACE PARTICIPANTS AND COMPARISON GROUPS
(2018-2021 NEBRASKA PUBLIC TWO-YEAR COLLEGE GOERS)**

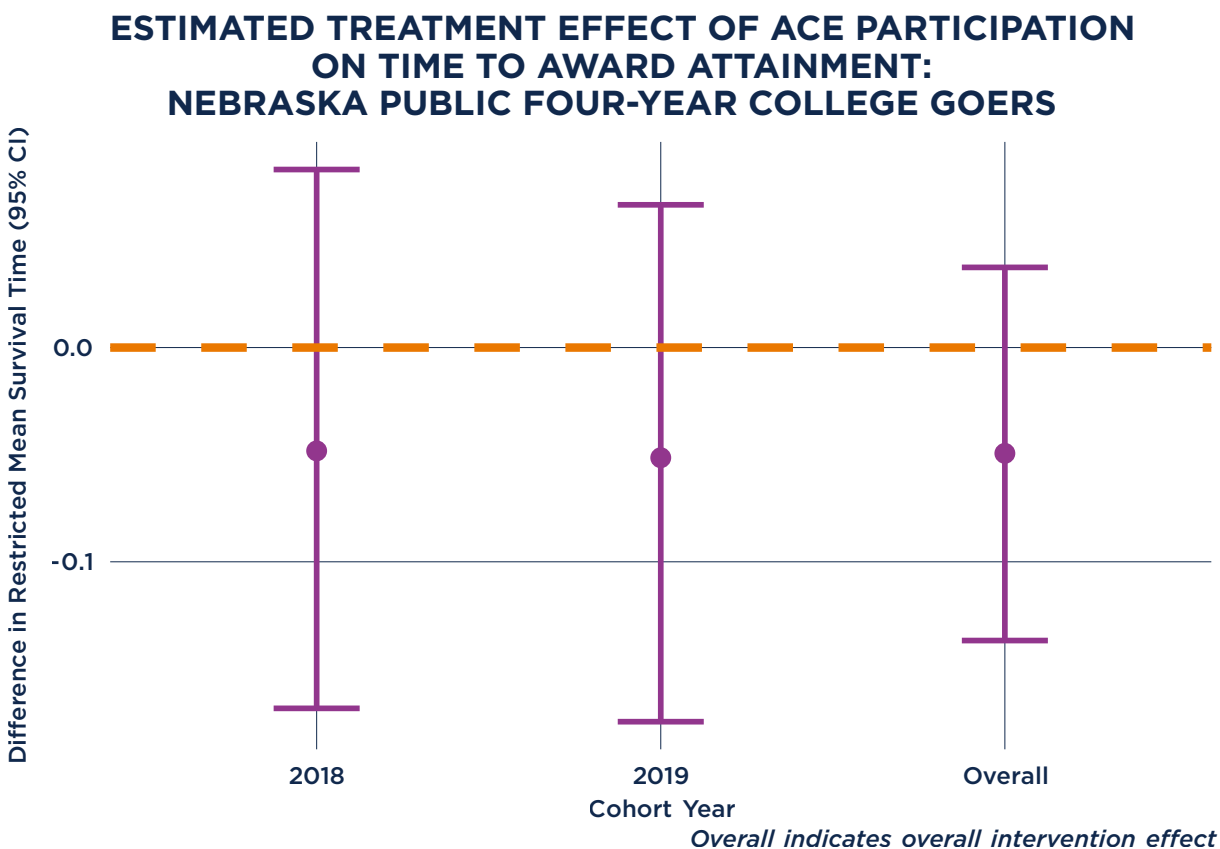


Time To Award Attainment

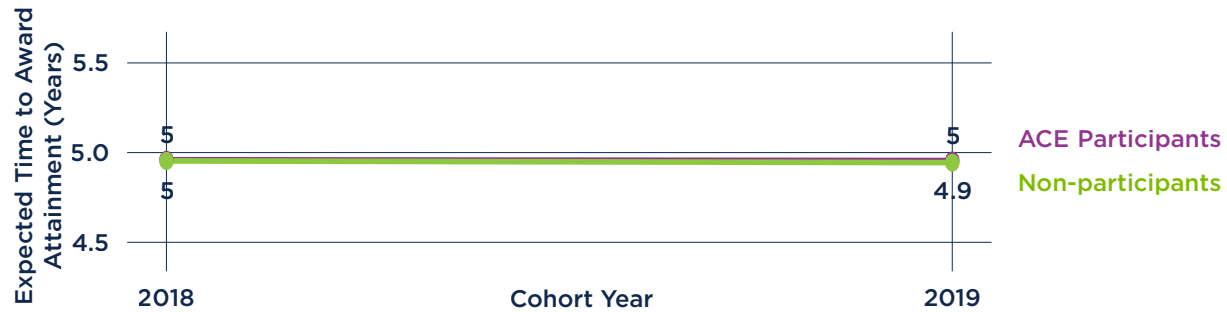
Nebraska Public Four-year College Goers

Overall, no statistically significant impact of the ACE program was found on time to award attainment for ACE participants at Nebraska public four-year institutions. After adjusting for baseline characteristics, the estimated treatment effects ranged from -0.1 to 0 years (approximately -0.6 months).

Before the adjustment, the time to award attainment for ACE participants was no different from that of non-participants. ACE participants had a lower overall time to award attainment than Non-ACE/DE participants, while Non-ACE/Non-DE participants took the longest to complete their degrees.



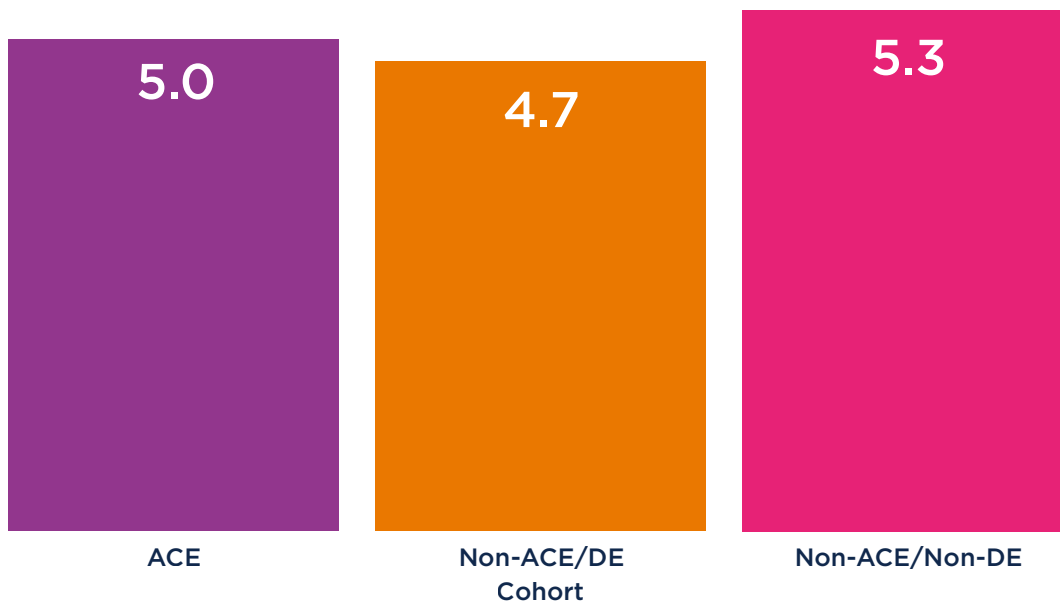
TIME TO AWARD ATTAINMENT BY ACE PARTICIPATION (2018-2019 NEBRASKA PUBLIC FOUR-YEAR COLLEGE GOERS)



Observed Differences in Time to Award Attainment and Estimated Treatment Effects of ACE

Cohort Year	Observed Differences	Treatment Effects (95% CI)
2018	0	0 (-0.2, 0.1)
2019	0	-0.1 (-0.2, 0.1)
Overall	0	0 (-0.1, 0)

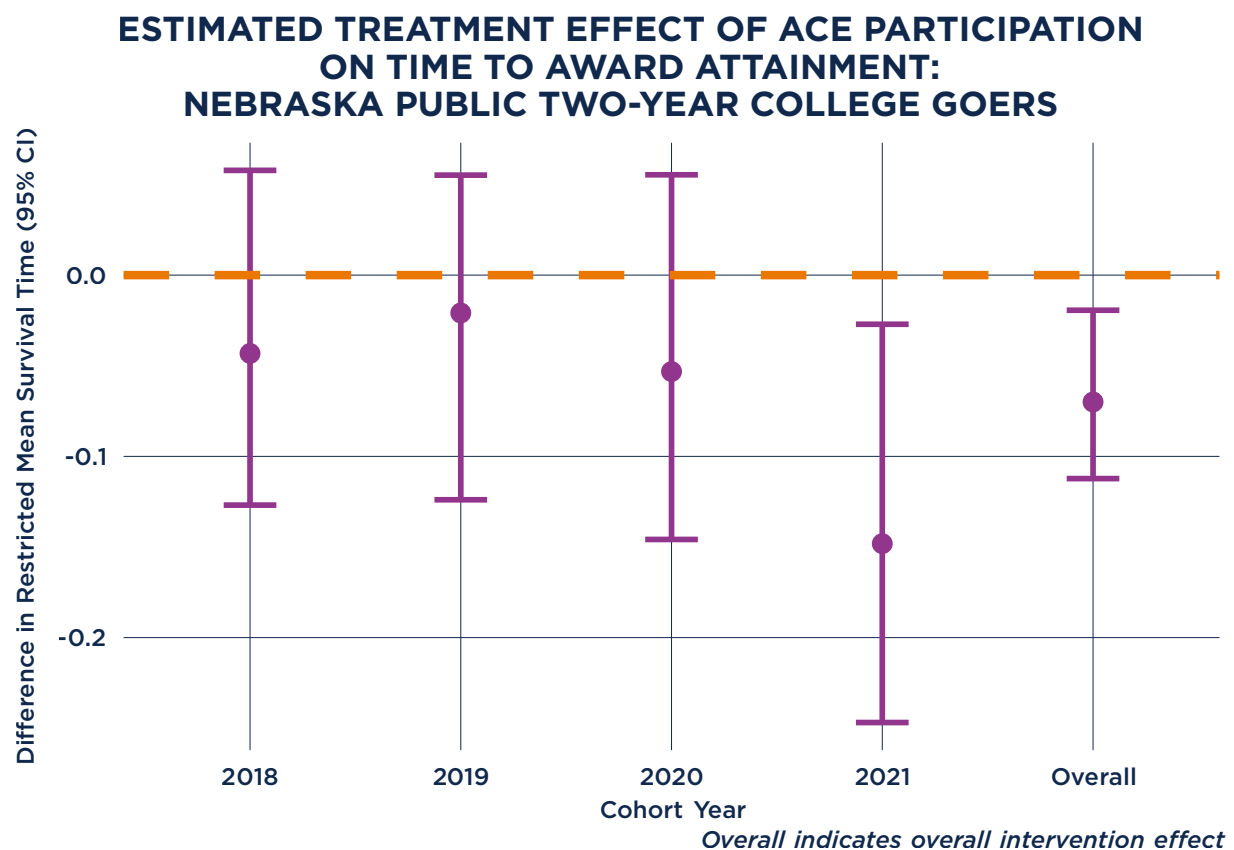
TIME TO AWARD ATTAINMENT OF ACE PARTICIPANTS AND COMPARISON GROUPS (2018-2019 NEBRASKA PUBLIC FOUR-YEAR COLLEGE GOERS)



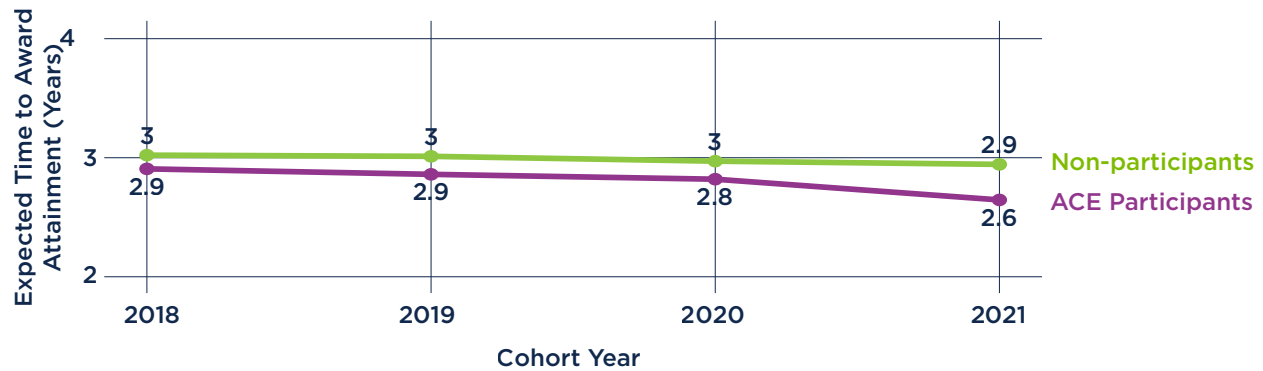
Nebraska Public Two-year College Goers

Overall, ACE participants who enrolled in Nebraska public two-year institutions were more likely to earn a postsecondary award earlier by -0.1 years (approximately -0.8 months). After adjusting for baseline characteristics, the estimated treatment effects ranged from -0.1 to 0 years (approximately from -1.8 to -0.3 months).

Before the adjustment, ACE participants had consistently shorter time to award attainment than non-participants over time. ACE participants and Non-ACE/DE participants had similar completion time, while Non-ACE/Non-DE participants took the longest to earn their awards. These findings suggest that ACE support may accelerate degree completion for students in two-year programs.



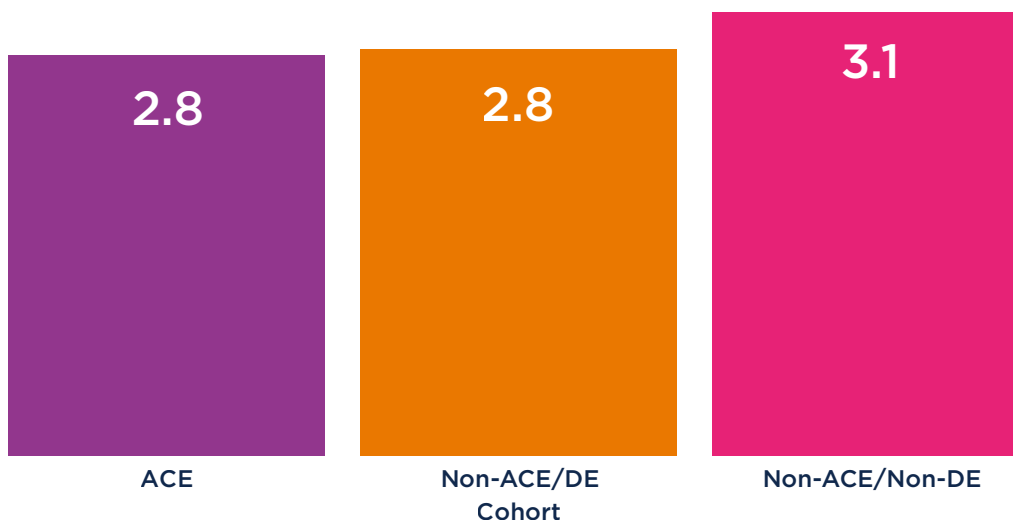
TIME TO AWARD ATTAINMENT BY ACE PARTICIPATION (2018-2021 NEBRASKA PUBLIC TWO-YEAR COLLEGE GOERS)



Observed Differences in Time to Award Attainment and Estimated Treatment Effects of ACE

Cohort Year	Observed Differences	Treatment Effects (95% CI)
2018	-0.1	0 (-0.1, 0.1)
2019	-0.2	0 (-0.1, 0.1)
2020	-0.2	-0.1 (-0.1, 0.1)
2021	-0.3	-0.1 (-0.2, 0)
Overall	-0.2	-0.1 (-0.1, 0)

TIME TO AWARD ATTAINMENT OF ACE PARTICIPANTS AND COMPARISON GROUPS (2018-2021 NEBRASKA PUBLIC TWO-YEAR COLLEGE GOERS)

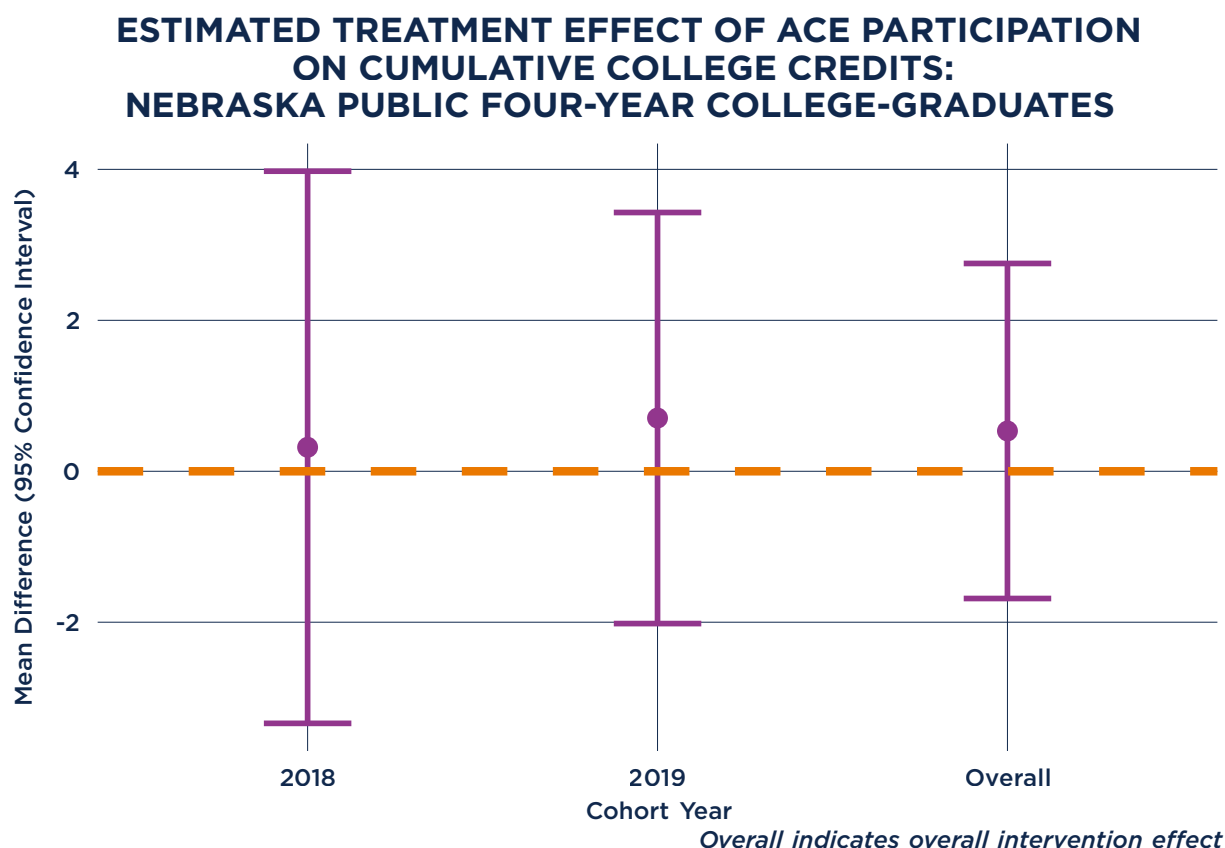


Cumulative College Credits

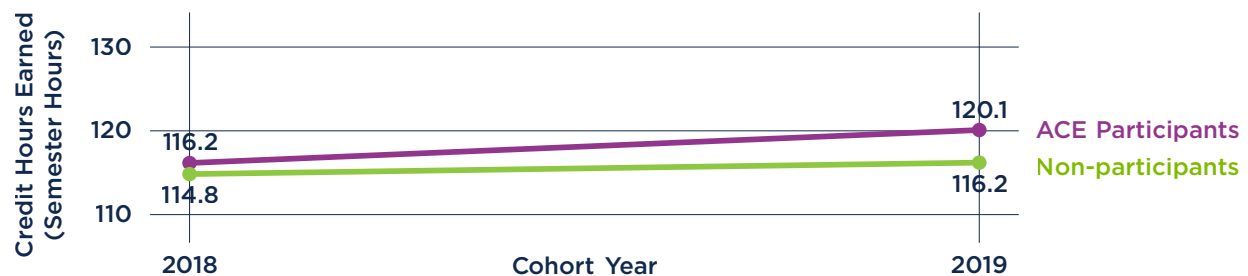
Nebraska Public Four-year College Graduates

Overall, no statistically significant impact of the ACE program was found on cumulative college credit hours for ACE participants who graduated from Nebraska public four-year institutions. After adjusting for baseline characteristics, the estimated treatment effects ranged from 0.3 to 0.7 credit hours.

Before the adjustment, ACE participants earned slightly more credits than non-participants over time, but the differences were modest. ACE participants had slightly higher overall cumulative credits than Non-ACE/DE participants, while Non-ACE/Non-DE participants earned the most college credits, possibly due to extended time in college or additional coursework.



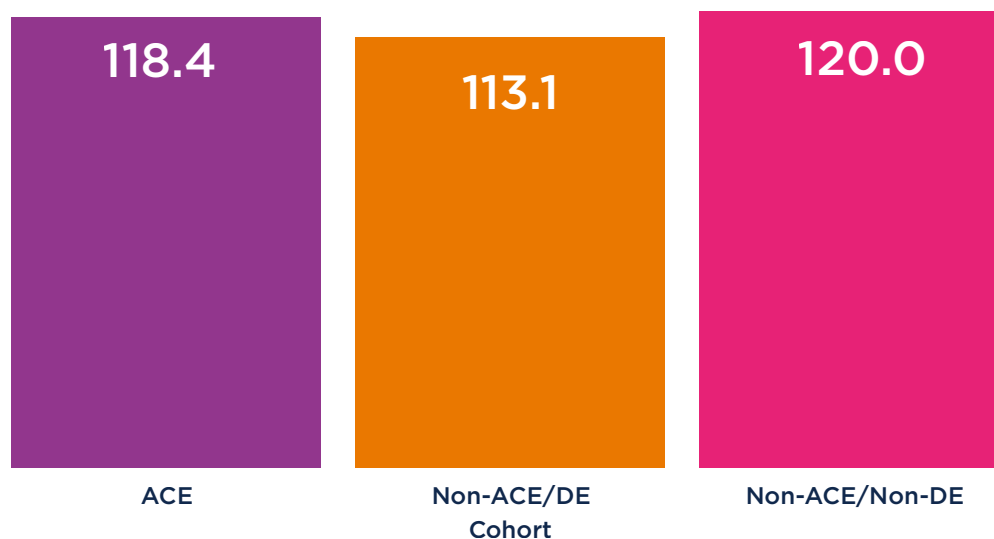
CUMULATIVE COLLEGE CREDITS BY ACE PARTICIPATION (2018-2019 NEBRASKA PUBLIC FOUR-YEAR COLLEGE GRADUATES)



Observed Differences in Cumulative College Credits and Estimated Treatment Effects of ACE

Cohort Year	Observed Differences	Treatment Effects (95% CI)
2018	1.3	0.3 (-3.3, 4)
2019	3.9	0.7 (-2, 3.4)
Overall	2.9	0.5 (-1.7, 2.8)

CUMULATIVE COLLEGE CREDITS OF ACE PARTICIPANTS AND COMPARISON GROUPS (2018-2019 NEBRASKA PUBLIC FOUR-YEAR COLLEGE GRADUATES)

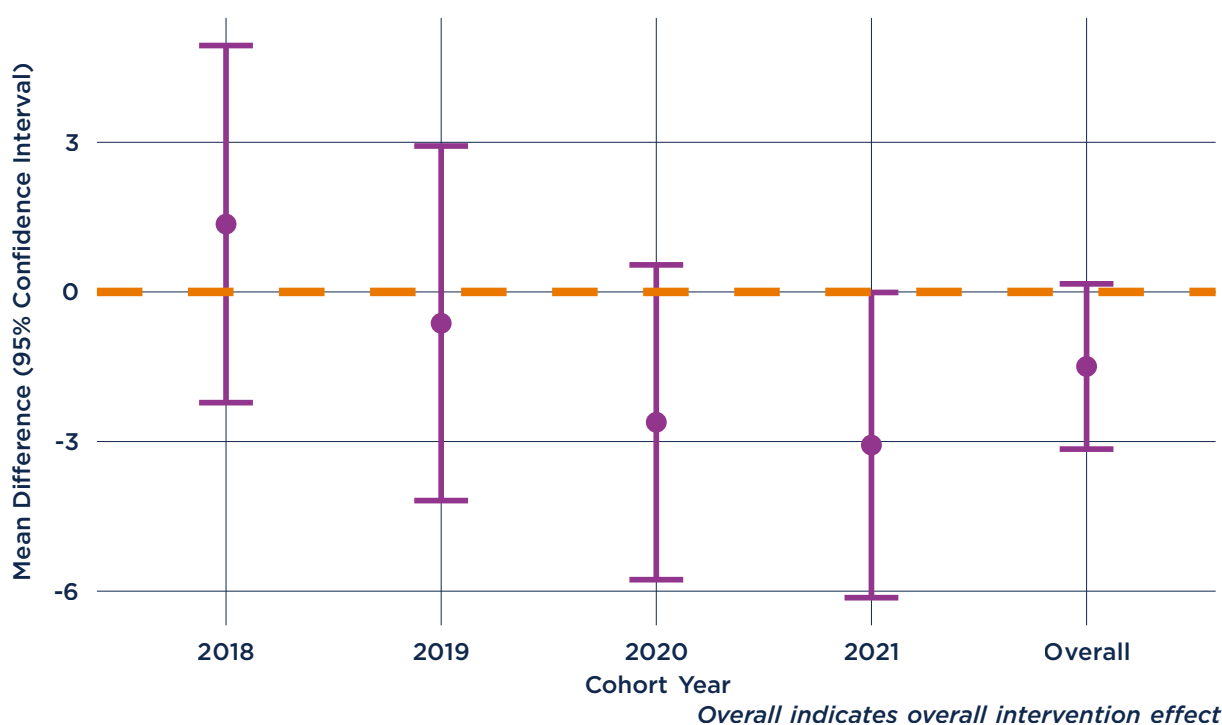


Nebraska Public Two-year College Graduates

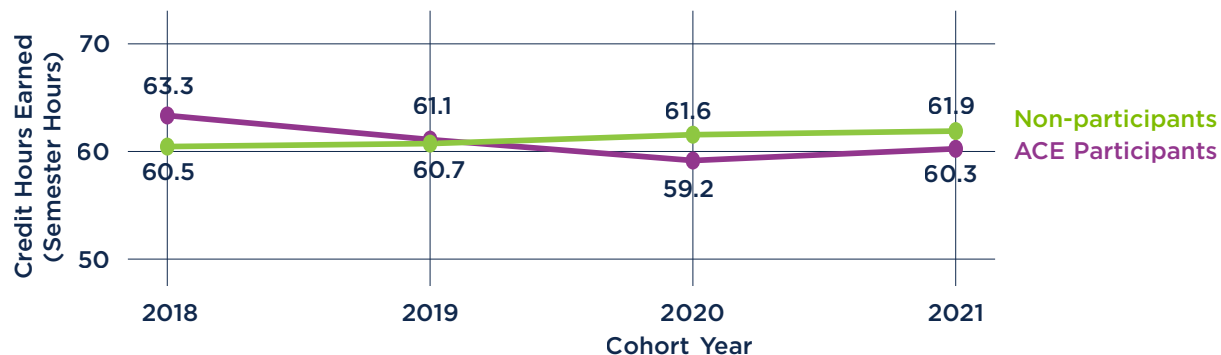
Overall, no statistically significant impact of the ACE program was found on cumulative college credits for ACE participants who graduated from Nebraska public two-year institutions. After adjusting for baseline characteristics, the estimated treatment effects ranged from -3.1 to 1.4 credit hours.

Before the adjustment, ACE participants earned fewer college credits than non-participants since the 2018-19 academic year. ACE participants earned fewer credits than Non-ACE/DE participants, while Non-ACE/Non-DE participants accumulated the most credits, potentially due to less structured academic trajectories. This may suggest that dual enrollment participation leads to more efficient course-taking or streamlined pathways to credential completion. Alternatively, it is possible that students who pursue dual enrollment are more academically driven from the outset, and the ACE program enables them to follow more intentional academic plans.

ESTIMATED TREATMENT EFFECT OF ACE PARTICIPATION ON CUMULATIVE COLLEGE CREDITS: NEBRASKA PUBLIC TWO-YEAR COLLEGE-GRADUATES



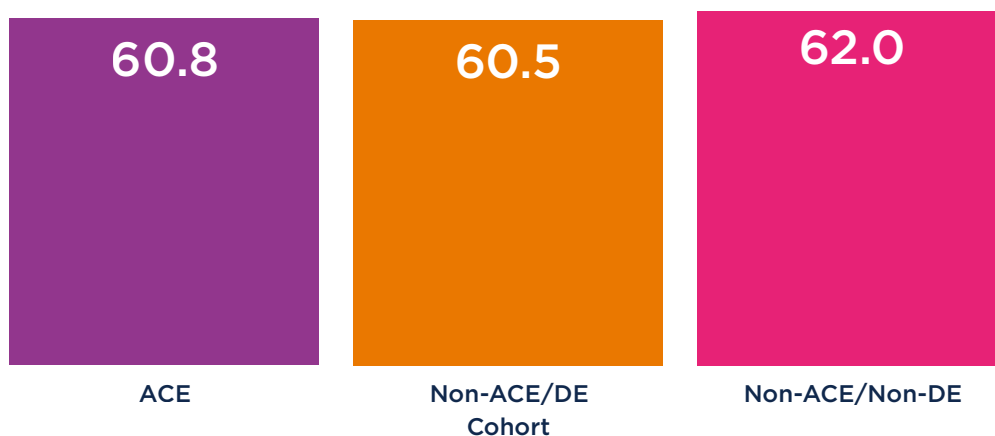
CUMULATIVE COLLEGE CREDITS BY ACE PARTICIPATION (2018-2019 NEBRASKA PUBLIC TWO-YEAR COLLEGE GRADUATES)



Observed Differences in Cumulative College Credits and Estimated Treatment Effects of ACE

Cohort Year	Observed Differences	Treatment Effects (95% CI)
2018	2.9	1.4 (-2.2, 4.9)
2019	0.4	-0.6 (-4.2, 2.9)
2020	-2.4	-2.6 (-5.8, 0.5)
2021	-1.6	-3.1 (-6.1, 0)
Overall	-0.4	-1.5 (-3.2, 0.2)

CUMULATIVE COLLEGE CREDITS OF ACE PARTICIPANTS AND COMPARISON GROUPS (2018-2019 NEBRASKA PUBLIC TWO-YEAR COLLEGE GRADUATES)

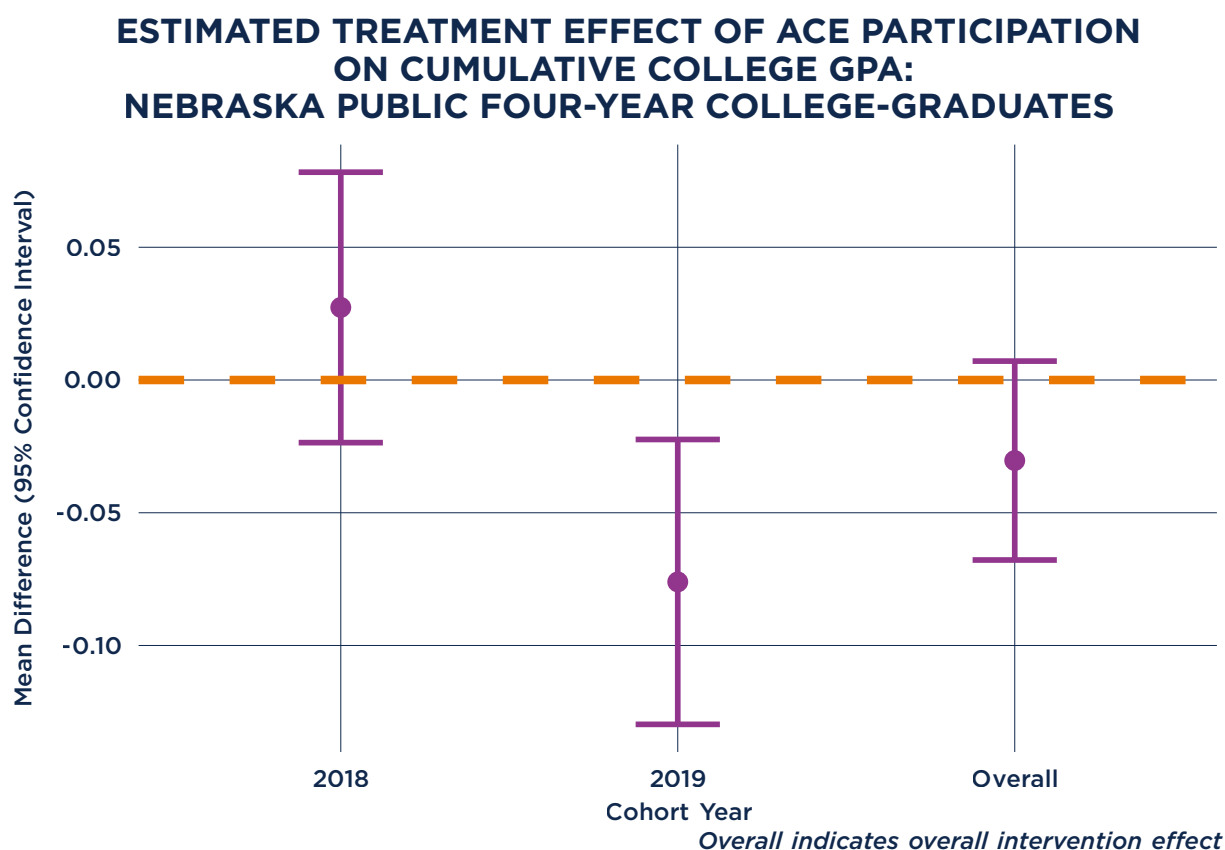


Cumulative College GPA

Nebraska Public Four-year College Graduates

Overall, no statistically significant impact of the ACE program was found on cumulative college GPA among ACE participants who graduated from Nebraska public four-year institutions. After adjusting for baseline characteristics, the estimated treatment effects ranged from -0.1 to 0 grade points.

Before the adjustment, ACE participants maintained similar average GPAs compared to their non-participant peers. ACE and comparison groups had similar overall GPAs.



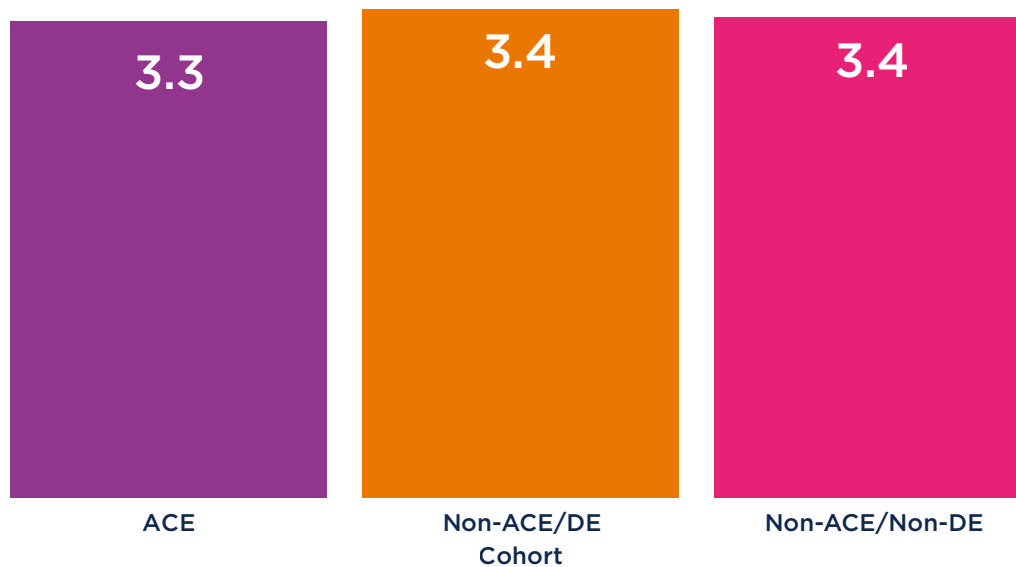
CUMULATIVE COLLEGE GPA BY ACE PARTICIPATION (2018-2019 NEBRASKA PUBLIC FOUR-YEAR COLLEGE GRADUATES)



Observed Differences in Cumulative College GPA and Estimated Treatment Effects of ACE

Cohort Year	Observed Differences	Treatment Effects (95% CI)
2018	0.0	0 (0, 0.1)
2019	-0.1	-0.1 (-0.1, 0)
Overall	-0.1	0 (-0.1, 0)

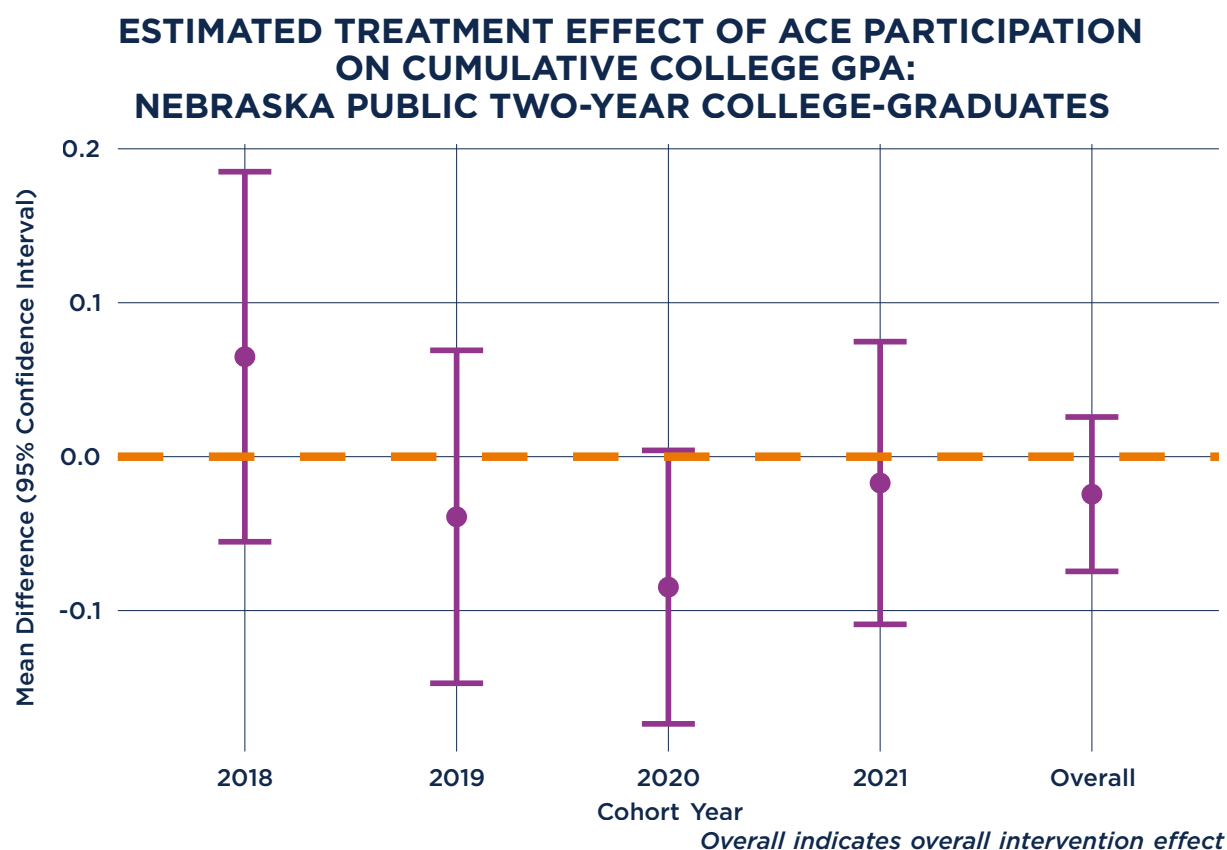
CUMULATIVE COLLEGE GPA OF ACE PARTICIPANTS AND COMPARISON GROUPS (2018-2019 NEBRASKA PUBLIC FOUR-YEAR GRADUATES)



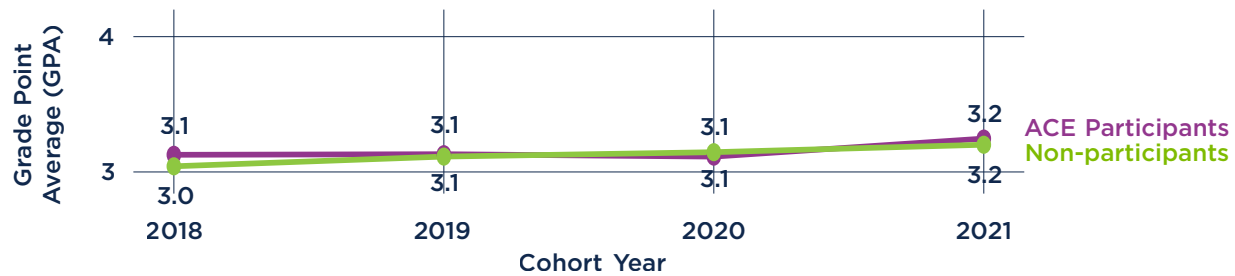
Nebraska Public Two-year College Graduates

Overall, no statistically significant impact of the ACE program was found on cumulative college GPA for ACE participants who graduated from Nebraska public two-year institutions. After adjusting for baseline characteristics, the estimated treatment effects ranged from -0.1 to 0.1 grade points.

Before the adjustment, ACE participants had comparable average GPAs to non-participants across cohorts. ACE and Non-ACE/DE participants had similar overall GPAs, while Non-ACE/Non-DE participants had the lowest average GPA, consistent with broader trends in high school academic performance.



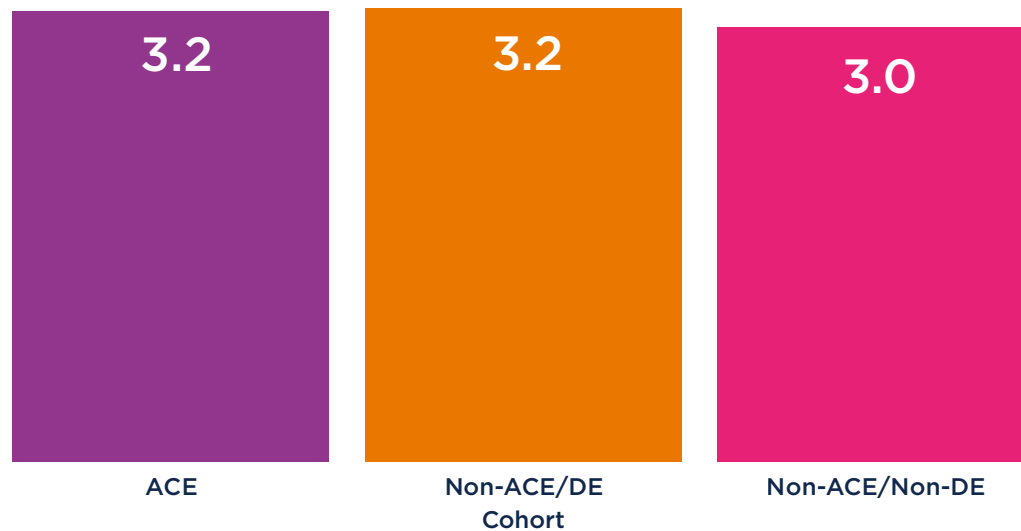
CUMULATIVE COLLEGE GPA BY ACE PARTICIPATION (2018-2021 NEBRASKA PUBLIC TWO-YEAR COLLEGE GRADUATES)



Observed Differences in Cumulative College GPA and Estimated Treatment Effects of ACE

Cohort Year	Observed Differences	Treatment Effects (95% CI)
2018	0.1	0.1 (-0.1, 0.2)
2019	0.0	0 (-0.1, 0.1)
2020	0.0	-0.1 (-0.2, 0)
2021	0.0	0 (-0.1, 0.1)
Overall	0.0	0 (-0.1, 0)

CUMULATIVE COLLEGE GPA OF ACE PARTICIPANTS AND COMPARISON GROUPS (2018-2021 NEBRASKA PUBLIC TWO-YEAR GRADUATES)





DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Summary of Findings

This evaluation demonstrates that ACE participation is associated with several positive outcomes:

- Broad and equitable access, with strong participation from schools serving low-income neighborhoods and districts in rural counties.
- Increased college enrollment among participants who graduated from Nebraska public high schools.
- Improved postsecondary persistence among participants attending any Nebraska public postsecondary institutions.
- Improved postsecondary graduation, particularly among participants attending Nebraska public two-year institutions.
- Accelerated time to credential attainment for participants attending Nebraska public two-year institutions, suggesting more efficient academic pathways.

Yet, no evidence was found for the benefit of ACE participation on postsecondary graduation, expected time to graduate, cumulative credit hours, or cumulative GPA among participants who attended four-year institutions. Additionally, no evidence was found for cumulative credit hours or cumulative GPA benefits among participants who attended two-year institutions.

The evaluation also identifies areas for continued attention:

- Enhancing outreach to underrepresented school districts with low or declining participation.
- Monitoring the evolving dual enrollment landscape, including tuition-free offerings, and assessing implications for ACE funding utilization.

Study Limitations

A number of limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings:

- **Unmeasured Variables:** Although key demographic variables are included, important unmeasured factors—such as family socioeconomic status (SES)—are not captured in the NSWERS data system. SES is a known predictor of postsecondary outcomes and a key eligibility criterion for ACE. Its absence may introduce bias into causal estimates. However, research suggests that SES effects may be mediated through academic preparation (Chowdry et al., 2013; Reber & Smith, 2023), which is accounted for in the propensity score model.
- **Lack of information on Alternative Interventions:** There may be other unknown scholarship programs from various sources in Nebraska that could help improve students' economic conditions. However, the NSWERS data system does not include information about these alternative interventions. Nevertheless, the use of propensity score matching and other available covariates likely mitigated this issue to some extent.
- **Lack of Qualitative Data:** NSWERS does not include qualitative variables such as academic motivation or college-going intentions. These factors may influence program participation and outcomes but could not be incorporated into the comparison group selection. The use of propensity score matching and available covariates likely mitigates this limitation to some extent.
- **Incomplete Data Coverage:** NSWERS includes detailed transcript data from Nebraska public high schools only. ACE participants from private high schools are excluded from high school and outcome analyses. Postsecondary data are limited to Nebraska public institutions that partner with NSWERS. Private institutions do not provide their student data for relevant cohort years, which may bias estimates of postsecondary outcomes—particularly cumulative credits and GPA—for participants who may have taken classes from these institutions.
- **Missing Data and Complete Case Analysis:** This study used complete case analysis (CCA), including only observations with no missing data across all variables of interest. While CCA is straightforward, it assumes data are missing completely at random (MCAR). If this assumption does not hold, the sample may not be representative, potentially leading to biased estimates and reduced statistical power. Although missing data rates were low (less than 5 percent for most fields), future analyses may benefit from more robust methods such as multiple imputation.

Conclusion

This evaluation demonstrates that the Access College Early (ACE) Scholarship Program is associated with several positive outcomes - especially for students enrolling in Nebraska public two-year postsecondary institutions - that support its role as a critical lever for expanding educational opportunity in Nebraska.

While the program's impact on postsecondary graduation among four-year college students was not statistically significant, the outcomes still trended positively. Given that ACE participants are more likely to be financially disadvantaged than non-participants, even neutral outcomes may reflect meaningful progress.

In addition, considering that the current student outcome analysis only includes students who did not take advantage of the removal of the limit on the number of scholarships awarded per year (a policy change implemented in the 2022-23 academic year), there may be potential for further improvement in outcomes—such as a reduction in cumulative credit hours—in a follow-up study.

With continued investment and strategic refinement, the ACE Scholarship Program is well-positioned to remain a powerful driver of postsecondary access, persistence, and success for Nebraska's most vulnerable students.



DATA DEFINITIONS



Cohort Year

In this report, the cohort year is defined as the expected high school graduation year. The expected graduation year is calculated as four years after a student's initial ninth-grade enrollment, following the guidelines provided by the Nebraska Department of Education (Nebraska Department of Education, 2017). In cases where a student has more than one recorded expected graduation date, the latest (maximum) value was used to ensure consistency.

Sex

Student sex was determined using the most recent available record of a student's self-reported gender identity. Due to the low frequency for individuals with unreported gender, only records in "Male" and "Female" categories were included in the analysis.

Race/Ethnicity

Student race/ethnicity was determined using the most recent available record of a student's self-reported racial/ethnic identity which is in line with IPEDS reporting categories (Integrated Postsecondary Educational Data System, n.d.). Some of the categories are then rolled up into "Other" category due to low frequencies for some racial/ethnic groups (less than 10 students in the category). These categories are:

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander

High School Course Credits

High school course credits were calculated across all the years a student attended a Nebraska public high school. Because the NSWERS data system does not contain a direct record of credit hours, the course credits are derived from the semester codes in Nebraska public K-12 course records and recoded into Carnegie units, a standard measure of course credit hours based on instructional time (Carnegie Foundation, n.d.). For example, one semester (half of a full academic year) of instruction corresponds to 0.5 Carnegie units. Attempted Course Credits include credit hours from pass/fail courses and withdrawn courses.

High School GPA

High school GPA was derived from Nebraska public K-12 course records and calculated across all the years that a student attended Nebraska public high school. Due to the varying grading codes used at different schools, all course grades were converted to a 4.0 scale then averaged for each student. Specifically, all course grades were standardized to a 4.0 scale (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011) and adjusted based on the number of Carnegie units earned in each course. Courses without a grade, like pass/fail or audited courses, were excluded from the GPA calculation. Additionally, no extra points were given for Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, or other honors classes.

Chronic Absenteeism

Chronic absenteeism was derived from the Nebraska public K-12 student attendance records and was determined based on the proportion of days a student was absent during high school. In this study, a student was categorized as chronically absent if he/she missed 10 percent or more of school days during high school (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

High School Graduation

An indicator of whether a student graduated from high school on-time. A student graduated high school on-time if they graduated within four years of starting ninth grade. Only students who earned regular diplomas, not alternative diplomas or GEDs, are defined as graduates in this report.

College Going

An indicator of whether students ever attended a two-year or four-year postsecondary institution within 16 months after high school graduation. This includes summer semester enrollment and enrollment at any postsecondary institution. This is determined based on linking students' high school graduation records and postsecondary enrollment records. The college going rate is computed as follows: (number of students who showed at least one college enrollment record)/(total number of selected students). Students who enrolled in both a two-year institution and a four-year institution are counted in the four-year category. Students who enrolled in both a public institution and a private institution are counted in the public category. 'NE' indicates Nebraska institutions, and 'OOS' indicates out-of-state institutions. Students who enrolled in both a Nebraska institution and an out-of-state institution are counted in the out-of-state category.

Postsecondary Persistence

An indicator of whether students are enrolled in any college during the fall term of the next calendar year after their initial postsecondary enrollment or if they earned a postsecondary award from any college within this time frame. A postsecondary enrollment is considered a Fall term if it begins between August 1st to October 31st. The period of time between a student's start date and the Fall term that is assessed for enrollment may vary since students may initially enroll in any term. This is done for two reasons:

- Requiring only Fall start dates reduces the sample size of students that can be considered in this analysis;
- It is difficult to determine Fall-Fall, Winter-Winter, Spring-Spring, or Summer-Summer across the various postsecondary institutions in which students enrolled.

This is determined using enrollment records from NSWERS's Nebraska public postsecondary partners in addition to NSC data. Postsecondary persistence rate is computed as follows: (number of students who showed a college enrollment record in second year fall)/(total number of selected students).

Postsecondary Graduation

This outcome measures whether a student earns a degree or certificate from any postsecondary institution within a defined period after high school graduation. The measure is based on linking high school graduation records with postsecondary award records. The follow-up period varies by cohort:

- Two-year college-going students: 40 months (3 years + 4 months)
- Four-year college-going students: 76 months (6 years + 4 months)

These time frames align with the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) standards, which define graduation windows as 3 years from initial enrollment for two-year institutions and 6 years for four-year institutions. In this report, an additional 4 months is included because tracking begins at high school graduation rather than college enrollment (assuming immediate enrollment after high school graduation). Postsecondary graduation rate is calculated as follows: (Number of students who earned an award) / (Total number of selected students). For award type, students are reported by their highest award earned. For example, if a student earns both an associate degree and a bachelor's degree, they are counted in the bachelor's degree category.

Time to Award Attainment

This outcome is defined as the difference in time between high school graduation and the date of the earliest earned award. If a student did not earn an award within the observation window, the time to award was treated as right-censored at the end of the window: 76 months for four-year college-going students and 40 months for two-year college-going students. Expected time to award attainment was represented by the restricted mean survival time (RMST), a measure of average survival time over a specific period. RMST was calculated as the area under the survival curve up to a chosen truncation point, which corresponds to the same 76-month mark for four-year college-going students and 40-month mark for two-year college-going students.

Postsecondary Course Credits

Postsecondary course credits were derived from Nebraska public postsecondary transcript records and calculated across all Nebraska public postsecondary institutions that a student attended within a defined period after graduating from high school. The follow-up period varies by cohort: for two-year college graduates, it is 40 months (3 years + 4 months); for four-year college graduates, it is 76 months (6 years + 4 months). Earned course credits include credit hours from courses with a passing grade, including pass/fail courses. Dual enrollment course credits were not included in the credit calculation. Standard credit hours are based on the semester system; quarter system credit hours were converted to semester hours.

Postsecondary GPA

Postsecondary GPA was derived from Nebraska public postsecondary transcript records and calculated across all Nebraska public postsecondary institutions that a student attended within a defined period after graduating from high school. The follow-up period varies by cohort: for two-year college graduates, it is 40 months (3 years + 4 months); for four-year college graduates, it is 76 months (6 years + 4 months). Courses without a grade, like pass/fail or audited courses, were excluded from the GPA calculation. The dual enrollment course grades were not included in the GPA calculation.

Dual Enrollment

Per the definition of dual enrollment in Nebraska in LB 814 (***Neb. Leg. Bill 814, 108th Leg., 1st Sess.***, 2023), a student is considered dually enrolled if they have a postsecondary transcript showing they took at least one for-credit course in a term that started before they graduated high school. In this report, the term “dual enrollment” refers to any course which meets the previous condition. That means that dual enrollment may include “dual credit” type coursework in which a student earns both high school and college credit as well as “concurrent enrollment” coursework in which a high school student is directly enrolled in college and earns college credit. Dual enrollment data for ACE participants in the participation trend analysis are provided by CCPE.

Community College Service Area

In Nebraska, community colleges serve specific geographic regions. There are six community college service areas: Central, Metropolitan, Mid-Plains, Northeast, Southeast, and Western.

Rural County

The classification of Nebraska counties as rural or urban is defined by state statute (***Neb. Rev. Stat § 71-5653***, n.d.). A county is considered rural if it has a population of fewer than 15,000 residents and is not part of a Metropolitan Statistical Area, as designated by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB) (U.S. Office of Management and Budget, 2021).

School Neighborhood Income Level

School Neighborhood Income Level is measured using the School Neighborhood Poverty Index (SNPI), a metric developed by the NCES (Geverdt, 2018). The SNPI is derived from the Income-to-Poverty Ratio (IPR), which compares a household's income to the federal poverty threshold, adjusted for family size and composition. The IPR ranges from 0 to 999, where:

- Lower values indicate higher levels of poverty.
- An IPR of 100 signifies that a household's income is exactly at the poverty threshold.
- Values above 100 reflect income levels exceeding the poverty line.

SNPI for Nebraska public high schools are then categorized into three groups based on score percentile:

- Above 66th percentile: High-income neighborhood (lowest poverty neighborhood)
- 33rd percentile - 66th percentile: Middle-income neighborhood
- Below 33rd percentile: Low-income neighborhood (highest poverty neighborhood)

Youth Population Count

This data is derived from the U.S. Census Bureau's Population Estimates Program (PEP) (US Census Bureau, n.d.-a). Each year, the U.S. Census Bureau produces and publishes estimates of the population for the nation, states, metropolitan and micropolitan statistical areas, counties, state/county equivalents, and Puerto Rico. The resident population includes all people currently residing in the United States. County population data provide a general overview of the state population distribution and population density. In this report, estimated count of children of age 5-17 for Nebraska counties were used. The data was rounded to the nearest 10.

Youth Poverty Rate

This data is derived from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2023 state and county estimates for Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates (SAIPE) Program (US Census Bureau, n.d.-b). SAIPE provides annual estimates of income and poverty statistics for all school districts, counties, and states. The U.S. Census classifies individuals as under the poverty line if they fall below income thresholds that vary by family size and composition. In this report, estimated percentage of children of age 5-17 in families in poverty for Nebraska counties were used. The data was also aggregated at for community college service areas.

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901 N 17th, NH W 208
Lincoln, NE 68588-0524
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