INTRODUCTION

Nebraska enjoys a strong and stable economy and benefits from many advantages that make the state an attractive place to do business and live.¹ The state offers a business-friendly regulatory environment, a robust and well-educated workforce, low operating costs, and an excellent quality of life.

None of those attributes should lull Nebraska’s government, community, and business leaders into complacency. Challenges and trends facing the education systems, housing and healthcare sectors, population and workforce could alter the state’s position in the national and global economy. As technology improvements, transportation efficiencies, and other market forces promote ever-closer national and international economic connectivity, Nebraska must establish a globally competitive environment for creating, attracting and retaining thriving businesses or risk falling behind better positioned states and nations. The state must focus especially on identifying strategies — including new, quality-focused educational models — for efficiently meeting existing industries’ workforce skills gaps while also cultivating, retaining and attracting the creative, skilled and entrepreneurial workers who can establish and lead the knowledge industry businesses that increasingly drive the economy.

Achieving this ambitious goal will require a comprehensive, long-term state strategy that would incorporate new ideas for ensuring that all Nebraskans have access to a world-class education closely aligned with the state’s current and future workforce needs. Nebraska’s schools are successful by many measures, but there are indications that its education systems — from early learning and care programs through higher education — would benefit from improvements aimed at fueling the state’s economy and ensuring its communities’ long-term vibrancy and economic competitiveness. Despite boasting excellent high school graduation rates, low dropout rates, and high college attendance rates, Nebraska wrestles with persistent achievement gaps, high postsecondary remediation rates, and difficulty finding more flexible and faster ways to equip students with the knowledge and skills thriving industries demand. Meaningful state and local work has begun to address these and other key educational and business challenges. But concerned Nebraskans must do more to develop and realize a shared vision about the state’s inextricably linked long-term educational and workforce objectives and the changes required to achieve them in ways that benefit students, industry and communities.

With this challenge in mind, Accelerate Nebraska developed this State of Education in Nebraska report to help state, civic, and business leaders better understand the state’s existing education systems from the perspective of many stakeholders’ needs. Those parties cannot design and activate rational, system-wide educational improvements if they are not equipped with the knowledge they need to make planning decisions aligned to statewide workforce goals. Accelerate Nebraska hopes that a shared understanding of Nebraska’s education landscape will enable stakeholders to participate in richer, more collaborative discussions about how to create new and better educational opportunities for all Nebraskans and achieve the workforce readiness goals described above.

THANK YOU for reading this report. We hope it’s helpful in guiding actions to enhance the identification and development of the talent needed to grow Nebraska’s economy.

Jeff Schmid
Chairman of the Board, Accelerate Nebraska

Kris Valentin
Executive Director, Accelerate Nebraska
Accelerate Nebraska’s past reports show that ensuring the state’s long-term economic success will require a comprehensive economic strategy. That will include plans for expanding and strengthening the state’s well-educated workforce, promoting greater access to capital, improving core infrastructure, and diversifying the state’s economy. To accomplish these goals, the state must effectively update and improve education systems that serve preschoolers to adults — with a focus on developing a generation of creative entrepreneurs. These early learning through higher education system improvements must not only create a workforce that energizes the industries of today and tomorrow, but must also extend new workforce education opportunities to more Nebraska communities and to students marginalized in the current economy.

Developing this stronger and more inclusive workforce education approach will require a new vision that builds on the career readiness goals already present in Nebraska’s education system, and expands on other related state education and workforce policies based on the state’s specific industry, community and student needs.
**NEBRASKA WORKFORCE AND EDUCATION**

**QUICK FACTS**

**LABOR FORCE**
- **General**
  - 999,000 workers
  - 527,000 men
  - 471,000 women
- **Productivity** Nebraska’s population produced 128% of its predicted economic activity.

**Workforce Participation** 69.3%
- **Unemployment (2017)**
  - Unemployment rate 2.7%
  - Less than a H.S. diploma 6.7%
  - H.S. graduates with no college 2.8%
  - Some college or an associate’s 1.9%
  - Bachelor’s degree or higher 1.7%

**EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT**
- **College Going Rate and Graduates**
  - 70% of graduating H.S. seniors have gone on to attend certificate programs, community colleges, trade school, and other two- and four-year degree programs.
  - 64.1% of state residents have some college, an associate’s degree, or a bachelor’s degree or higher. That percentage is above the national average of 59.6%. (U.S. Census)
- **Higher Ed Completion Gaps**
  - 54.4% of 25- to 44-year-old whites have completed an associate’s degree or higher. In comparison, only 27.5% of 25- to 44-year-old minorities have completed an associate’s degree or higher. (Coordinating Commission on Post sec)
- **H.S. Graduates** 26.9% (U.S. Census)
- **Some College or Associate’s (25+)** 33.9% (U.S. Census)
- **Bachelor’s Degree or Higher (25+)** 30.2% (U.S. Census)
- **Graduate or Professional Degrees** 9.9%
- **STEM Credentials** 4,750 degrees conferred in 2015-16 (15.5% of all degrees) A 31.6% increase over 10 yrs.

**RELATED INDICATORS**
- **Under-Employment**
  - Almost 40% of Nebraska workers have an associate’s degree or better. Only 20% of Nebraska’s jobs require those levels of education.²
- **Student Loan Debt**
  - Seven in 10 seniors (69%) who graduated from public and nonprofit colleges in 2014 had student loan debt, with an average of $28,950 per borrower.³
- **K-12 Achievement Gaps**
  - Poor and minority Nebraskans’ proficiency in math, reading, science and writing falls well below that of other students. For example, in 2016, only 59% of students qualified for free or reduced-price lunch (FRL) were proficient in math, compared to 73% of all students.⁶
  - Only 56% of FRL students were proficient in science compared with 72% of all students.⁷
Nebraska industries benefit from a highly educated population, nation-leading worker productivity, labor force participation, and college attendance rates. Almost 40% of Nebraska workers have an associate’s degree or better. Nebraska’s population produced 128% of its predicted economic activity. The state’s labor force participation rate is 69.3%, which is among the five highest labor force participation rates in the nation. The number of workers with multiple jobs ties for 5th highest in the country and the state “consistently ranks among the states with the highest numbers of graduates continuing their education beyond high school.” Seventy percent of graduating high school seniors have gone on to attend certificate programs, community colleges, trade school, and other two- and four-year degree programs.

The state should strive to maintain these impressive educational and productivity levels. However, Nebraska must adopt education reforms that produce more skilled blue collar workers and cultivate and retain the highly skilled and entrepreneurial workers required to build and attract advanced industries.

**Addressing Blue-Collar Worker Shortages and Skills Gaps.** Recent Nebraska Department of Labor reports examining cities across the state demonstrate a greater demand for blue-collar than white-collar jobs. Not only do Nebraska businesses demand more blue-collar workers, they seek workers with more sophisticated skill sets, including the math and science skills modern manufacturers and other industries require.

**Cultivating and Retaining High-Skill Workers and Entrepreneurs.** The state does not have sufficient numbers of highly skilled and entrepreneurial workers to start, attract and support advanced industry sectors at scale, such as employers that strongly focus on research, development and science, technology and engineering and math. This problem might be exacerbated, although the data is limited, by the out-migration of college educated Nebraskans to more attractive positions in other places. Nebraska’s next generation education system needs to make deliberate connections between these highly educated residents and the business relationships that might entice them to stay, such as access to venture capital, engagement with senior leaders in advanced industry fields and entrepreneurship training.

**Preschool to Workforce Data Systems.** Nebraska does not connect its robust education data systems to its workforce data system. Making this connection would benefit the state by enabling it to more easily identify and predict labor shortages and compare them with education data to inform improvements to the educational system, including better alignment with Nebraska industry’s workforce needs.

"From an economic perspective... the ability to create exportable products and services is critical. Advanced manufacturing offers tremendous opportunities. High-growth industries like technology, robotics, and artificial intelligence are key areas as well because of their exportability.”

— Dan Shundoff, CEO & President, Intellicom
Nebraska’s communities report some shared workforce needs, such as the demand for more blue-collar workers. They also differ in other respects, including in the breadth and types of educational opportunities they can offer to learners of all ages. Most Nebraska communities share a need for more and better qualified educators, including school counselors who can inform students’ course selection and career planning. Many areas lack sufficient access to high-quality early childhood opportunities that can set the stage for later academic, life and workplace success and help parents succeed at work. Greater access to high-capacity broadband would help regions of Nebraska support the digital learning opportunities that can fill local gaps and offer students — including adults seeking to update their skills — a wider array of coursework. Many of these problems are hard to address in rural Nebraska communities, especially those that have experienced sustained out-migration.

**Early Childhood Education and Care.** Research shows that the first eight years of life are absolutely critical to a child’s future, but Nebraska’s families lack sufficient access to high-quality early learning and care. Nebraska has one of the highest workforce participation rates in the country (69.3%) and needs more high-quality childcare programs to serve the over 130,000 Nebraskans up to age 4. Among Nebraska counties with childcare facilities, 84% don’t have enough spaces to meet demand. Eleven counties in the state — all rural — have no licensed childcare at all. The state is home to over 120,000 married working mothers and 41,065 single mothers. Single and two-worker families need access to quality childcare and early learning opportunities not only to enable them to work and provide for their families. 4,204 Nebraska parents quit, did not take, or greatly changed their jobs because of childcare problems in 2016. Most people do not believe high-quality early care and education is available or affordable for all families in the state. Nebraska’s annual cost of childcare for young children (0-4) averages over $11,000 per child, and annual care for school age children can exceed $3,000. According to the Buffett Institute, “Just 11% of Nebraska residents strongly agree that high-quality early care and education is available to every family in the state.” And, “Only 15% of Nebraskans are very satisfied with the quality of early care and education programs in the city or area where they live.”

Expanding access to high-quality early learning opportunities is also an essential component to closing the state’s achievement gaps. A nonprofit leader interviewed for the report commented that the state needs to recognize the impact of early learning on economic vitality in urban and rural settings.

**Broadband Access and Enhanced Education/Business Engagement.** Since 2010, population declines in 63 rural Nebraska counties included talented local students who move to major population centers within or beyond the state. A result, Nebraska’s three largest counties now represent 55% of the state’s population. Digital learning offers one solution for rural communities working to expand access to coursework and career training, but in some cases broadband infrastructure gaps pose challenges for virtual learning. The Federal Communications Commission reports that nearly 40% of rural Americans, including 209,000 Nebraskans, lack access to broadband capable of 25 Mbps downloads and 3 Mbps uploads. Greater school system engagement with local businesses — rural and urban — is needed to equip students with the skills they need and helping them better understand the career opportunities that are available.

“We have trouble finding teachers in science, technology, and the career fields due to the different professional options available.”
— Commissioner of Education, Matt Blomstedt

“The fact that some students lack technology access at home is a major problem. Technology use at an early age diminishes the fear of technology and creates confidence in using the tools.”
— Shonna Dorsey, Founder of Interface Web School
STUDENT NEEDS

Strengthening the state’s workforce will require the education system — with strong support of other committed stakeholders — to close the academic achievement gaps and reduce remediation rates that are leaving too many Nebraskans behind. Students also need greater access to more flexible pathways through the education system, and earlier and better connections and exposure to businesses of all stripes. In addition, adult learners need much more universal access to targeted, low-cost, and flexible opportunities to update their skills and promote entrepreneurship, and the state must begin diversifying its economy to better accommodate the population’s high education levels.

Addressing Achievement Gaps and Remediation Rates. Nebraska’s elementary and secondary education system continues to produce uneven outcomes, especially for poor and minority students. Overall math proficiency for all grades tested is 73%, but it is significantly lower for American Indian (42%), Black/African American (46%), Hispanic (58%), and low-income (59%) Nebraskans. Similar achievement gaps exist for these students in reading, writing, and science proficiency. These gaps leave a significant number of individuals without the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in the workforce. In addition, many Nebraska students entering the state’s six community college systems require remedial classes that do not count toward their degrees because they cover material they should have learned in high school. The average percentage of Nebraska community college students who require some form of remediation, what state education officials call “developmental education” — is 38.6%. Remedial classes increase the time it takes for Nebraska students to earn degrees, and decrease the likelihood they will complete college. The Center for American Progress, using National Center for Educational Statistics data, estimates that Nebraska families pay $6,943,000 out-of-pocket every year for remedial education costs.

More Flexible Pathways to Graduation and Well-Paying Work. Nebraska’s students need more need more flexible and personalized pathways through the education system to access higher education and entry into well-paying jobs on a timeline consistent with their ability to acquire the knowledge and skills required for graduation and their later success. Students would also benefit from more universal access to high school classes that convey higher education credit aligned to workforce needs. Older and adult students would benefit from more seamless credit transfers between the state’s institutions of higher education.

Competency-Based Learning. Nebraska students need opportunities to advance upon demonstrated mastery through a competency-based system. The current system’s age-based grade levels, seat time requirements, and factory-style bell schedules impede a transition to this approach. Achieving this more dynamic vision of learning would require major revisions to the state’s dated accreditation requirements (“Rule 10”).

“We have a transition problem between high school and higher education. Having to bolster students’ basic academic skills when they arrive for higher education takes resources from community colleges.” — Greg Adams, Executive Director, Nebraska Community College Association
Nebraska’s existing workforce is fertile ground for talent that could fill new jobs in our economy. When members of our existing workforce were in their training or education system, many of the jobs of our current economy did not exist. Our existing workforce, with a little extra training, can be as proficient as a recent graduate. Can your training and education providers help develop new talents in our existing workforce? All of our higher education entities are equipped to provide some piece of the lifelong learning bandwidth — not as an activity during retirement, but while an individual is still participating in the economy."

— Cathy Lang, State Director, Nebraska Business Development Center

Dual Enrollment and Early College High School. Not all Nebraska students have sufficient access to an array of high school classes that convey postsecondary credit, such as dual enrollment, concurrent enrollment, and early college high school models. Well-designed dual and concurrent enrollment initiatives can increase career readiness and success; create a more efficient grade 9-16 education system; and align postsecondary credentials with labor market needs. The state has undertaken promising efforts to promote dual credit-opportunities, but such options are not universally available. They lack a statewide organizational and quality structure, and credit transfer between high school programs and higher education institutions (in-state and out-of-state) is not sufficiently seamless. Furthermore, dual-credit opportunities are not always available to lower performing students, even though research shows students who earn dual credit are twice as likely to go on to college than their peers who did not earn dual credit.

In addition to helping students move more quickly and efficiently through the educational process into the workforce, a competency-based learning approach and dual-credit initiatives might also help students avoid at least some later debt. Seven in 10 Nebraska seniors (69%) who graduated from public and nonprofit colleges in 2014 had student loan debt, with an average of $28,950 per borrower.

Credit Transfer Policies. The state also has related class credit transfer problems between institutions of higher education in the state, which can hinder seamless student movement between institutions and programs that are beneficial to them. Nebraska’s transfer system lacks several important attributes. The Education Commission of the States (ECS) notes that the Nebraska Transfer Initiative (NTI) allows — but does not require — general core credit to transfer from two-year institutions to four-year institutions. ECS also notes that NTI permits “transfer of an associate(‘s) degree but it is voluntary and not in policy. The Nebraska State College System allows 30 credits from the associate’s degree to transfer.” Furthermore, Nebraska does not have a statewide course number system (a uniform numbering convention all public postsecondary institutions use for lower-division courses) or a statewide reverse transfer requirement that compels institutions to grant associate’s degrees to students who had not completed the requirements for those degrees before they transferred to four-year institutions.

Adult Learning. Nebraska needs more adult learning opportunities designed to equip workers with the skills industry demands. This includes developing strategic goals and standardizing expected outcomes for adult programs consistent with industry needs. The state needs work-based learning opportunities for students and high-need adult job seekers. The Nebraska Department of
Labor's July 2018 Workforce Trends report said “[a] rising share of workers are concerned that they do not have adequate training to find better employment...”33

**Internships and Other Experiential Learning.** Nebraska students lack systemic opportunities to apply what they are learning, earlier in their education. The state lacks comprehensive connections between state industries and the education system. This challenge appears to be driven by a lack of clarity about how such integration and long term partnerships might function.

**Underemployment.** Nebraska’s economy benefits greatly from the state’s many educated workers, but educated individuals are not well-served by the misalignment between their educational attainment levels and the most common types of jobs available in the state. Accelerate Nebraska’s Nebraska Now report shows that while almost 40% of Nebraska workers have an associate’s degree or better, only 20% of Nebraska’s jobs require those levels of education.34 Highly skilled graduates may not achieve their earning potential if they stay in positions below their education level and may leave the state for better employment. Nebraska Department of Labor data for the First Quarter of 2016 about workers who left the state, shows that “workers with some college or an associate’s degree made up 28% of net losses and workers with a bachelor’s or advanced degree accounted for 29%.”35

One higher education leader interviewed for the report said the workforce is here; the work they are capable of doing is not. The education system is exceeding the needs of the current Nebraska labor market because most jobs don’t require postsecondary education or experience. Nebraska industry leaders must work to address this problem and the education system should seek strategies for equipping students with the entrepreneurial skills needed to start new businesses, so that the state’s economic diversification strategy is not solely dependent on attracting new business types to the state.

The education community and businesses need to do a better job of understanding the different needs of adult learners. Statewide we need to improve and standardize adult education expectations.”

— Randy Schmailzl, President, Metropolitan Community College
Like many states, the education system in Nebraska is best understood as three separate, significantly overlapping, components: (1) early learning and childcare; (2) elementary and secondary education; and (3) higher and adult education. Each, with varying degrees, features a diverse combination of subsystems, delivery models, and governance structures. Each also has strengths and weaknesses in terms of program quality. This diffuse model has promoted some important outcomes — such as producing positive overall high school graduation and postsecondary access rates. At the same time, each has contributed to uneven educational experiences for poor and minority Nebraskans, high postsecondary remediation rates, and some misalignment between the population’s educational attainment and industry’s workforce needs.

Progress toward a more effective and coherent statewide educational system — one that would align the three systems around shared goals and along a logical continuum of learning designed to equip students with the knowledge and skills they need — must begin by developing a stronger shared understanding of the present educational landscape and the state’s evolving student populations and their families. With that goal in mind, the report focuses on the three systems and the students they serve.

“In a competency-based system, students need multiple, high-quality pathways to high school graduation, higher education and the workforce.”
— Susan Patrick, President & CEO of the International Association for K-12 Online Learning (iNACOL)
One of the strengths of Nebraska’s early learning and care system has been the number of communities focused on building stronger support systems for families with young children. Many community programs, centers, and homecare providers with different purposes, designs, and oversight offer these services. This approach—as in other states—results in uneven service quality and availability. Ensuring that all Nebraska families have access to high-quality early learning and care programs is essential to achieving the state’s workforce readiness goals.

Nebraska’s Department of Education (NDE) and Department of Health and Human Services (NHHS) work in partnership to administer state and federal programs and policies that impact the state’s early learning and care programs, including through formal state entities designed to promote interagency, state and local collaboration. Pages 24-31 of the report provide a high-level description of state agencies’ early learning and care responsibilities. It also highlights examples of key local programs and initiatives that focus on the delivery of the high-quality early childhood services Nebraska needs to promote kindergarten readiness and later academic and workforce success.

### NEBRASKA EARLY LEARNING AND CARE

#### QUICK FACTS

- **118,092** Nebraska children from birth to age four are in some form of child care.
- **$9,157**: Annual cost of center-based child care.
- **$7,194**: Annual cost of home-based child care.
  (Compared to public college tuition of $8,265)
- **716** Center-Based Child Care Programs serve 61,000 children (52% of all children in child care).
- **292 CB programs** participate in the state’s quality rating improvement systems.
- **2,098** Family Child Care (FCC) Homes serve 22,000 children (19% of all children in child care).
  - **88 FCC programs** participate in the state’s quality rating improvement system.
- **3,304** School-Aged Care Programs serve 30,000 children (29% of all children in child care).
  - Number of programs in state quality rating improvement system is unavailable.
- **84%** of counties in Nebraska with child care facilities do not have enough available slots to meet the current demand.

#### SCHOOL DISTRICT PRESCHOOL PROGRAMS

- **18,558** children are being served in school district operated pre-kindergarten programs.
  - (14% of children birth to age 5 based on 2016 U.S. Census data)
- **86%** of Nebraska school districts provide prekindergarten programs for children birth to age five. This includes 4 Educational Service Units that provide services for 7 districts.

  Pre-kindergarten programs in school districts include center-based, home-based, and/or special education services for children on Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) or Individualized Family Service Plans (IFSPs) from birth to five.

#### EARLY LEARNING AND CARE WORKFORCE

- **$18,706 to $41,000** is the median salary for child care professionals in Nebraska, less than half that of K-12 teachers, and in fact well below the federal poverty line for a family of four.
- **$23,268** is the median salary for Early Head Start teachers with an Infant/Toddler Child Development associate’s degree.
- **33.2%** is the collective teacher turnover rate for Head Start and Early Head Start programs in 2016-17.
Nebraska’s elementary and secondary education system produces admirable overall outcomes boasting high graduation (89.1%), low dropout (1.26%), and high postsecondary attendance (71%) rates. The system must do more, however, to close achievement gaps for poor and minority students, reduce the need for postsecondary remediation, and provide students with the skills they need to succeed after graduation, including in the workforce. Pages 32-55 of the report provide a high-level description of the state’s elementary and secondary education system, including highlighting promising community-level initiatives focused on improving students’ workforce readiness.

**NEBRASKA ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION**

**QUICK FACTS**

The Elected State Board of Education’s powers and duties are prescribed by the legislature. The state board is the policy-forming, planning, and evaluative body for the state school program. The state board appoints the Commissioner of Education.

The Commissioner of Education is responsible for promoting the efficiency, welfare, and improvement in the school system; recommending to the state board such policies; and for promoting educational improvement.

The unicameral provides for the free instruction in the common schools of this state of all persons between the ages of five and 21 years. The legislature may provide for the education of other persons in educational institutions owned and controlled by the state or a political subdivision thereof. The legislature also prescribes the powers and duties of the state board.

The Governor holds supreme executive power and shall take care that the laws be faithfully executed and the affairs of the state efficiently and economically administered.

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**ACCOUNTABILITY AND ACHIEVEMENT GAPS**

2015 Nebraska Accountability System Designations (number of schools)

- **Excellent:** 147
- **Great:** 473
- **Good:** 423
- **Needs Improvement:** 87

2014-15 Reading Proficiency

- On average, 79% of students in Nebraska were proficient, yet:
  - Only 50% of students with disabilities were proficient.
  - Only 68% of economically disadvantaged students were proficient.

2014-15 Math Proficiency

- On average, 72% of the state’s students were proficient, yet:
  - Only 43% of African American students were proficient.
  - Only 57% of Latino students in Nebraska met the same benchmark.

Graduation rates also reveal significant gaps among groups of students. While on average Nebraska students graduate in four years at a rate of 89%, almost half of English Learners and only three in four Native American students graduate on time.

72% of Nebraska students in grades 7-12 participate in career and technical education.

49% of Nebraska’s seniors are CTE Concentrators. (A Concentrator at the secondary level is a student in grades 9-12 who has earned credit in 3 or more semester-long courses within a single career cluster.)

99% of CTE Concentrators graduated. The Nebraska cohort graduation rate for the 2015 cohort was 89%.

The ethnicities of Career Education students nearly reflect the state’s overall ethnic makeup and the gender gap has narrowed.

91.81% of CTE Concentrators passed technical skill assessments aligned with industry-recognized standards.
Nebraska’s higher education system is an important asset for the state that compares well with peer institutions nationally as measured by freshman retention rates, graduation rates, affordability, and other performance measures. Nebraska would benefit, however, if the state’s higher education institutions collaborated more to increase student completion rates, minimize student debt, and find innovative new ways to equip more learners — with a special focus on adult learners — with the knowledge, skills, and competencies required by industry. Pages 56-73 of the report describe, at a high level, the major elements of Nebraska’s higher education system, while also examining key subparts of the system — such as transfer and articulation practices, education, and workforce data sharing, and degree or credential earning connections with the high schools — that should be part of the state’s long-term workforce development strategy.

Improving these student-centric systems, including promoting greater data transparency for student and employer decision-making and system accountability, would help the state address its workforce needs.

### NEBRASKA HIGHER EDUCATION AND ADULT EDUCATION

#### QUICK FACTS

**2016-17 HIGHER EDUCATION ENROLLMENT**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University System Enrollment</th>
<th>State Colleges Total Enrollment</th>
<th>Community Colleges Total Enrollment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UNL: 28,550</td>
<td>Chadron: 3,667</td>
<td>Central: 9,238</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNO: 18,629</td>
<td>UNO: 18,629</td>
<td>Peru: 3,499</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNK: 8,264</td>
<td>Wayne: 4,173</td>
<td>Wayne: 4,173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical Ag: 388</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mid-Plains: 3,850</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNMC: 4,132</td>
<td></td>
<td>Metropolitan: 25,030</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Southeast: 14,755</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Northeast: 6,605</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Western: 2,635</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Degrees/Awards by Race and Ethnicity**

- White Non-Hispanic: 74%
- Hispanic: 8%
- Black Non-Hispanic: 4%
- Unknown: 4%
- Asian/Pacific Islander: 3%
- Two or More Races: 3%
- Native American: 0%

**Degrees/Awards by Gender**

- Female: 57%
- Male: 43%

**College Going Rate and Graduates**

- University System: 81.1%
- State Colleges: 65.1%
- Community Colleges: 62.3%
- Nation for Four-Year Institutions: 81.1%
- Nation for Two-Year Institutions: 62%

**College Attainment**

- 54.4% of 25- to 44-year-old, white non-Hispanics have an associate’s degree or more.
- 27.5% of 25- to 44-year-old minorities have an associate’s degree or more.

**Graduation Rates**

- 150% of Normal Time
  - University System: 59.5%
  - State Colleges: 44.2%
  - Community Colleges: 31.5%
  - Nation for Four-Year Institutions: 54.9%
  - Nation for Two-Year Institutions: 30.4%

**2016-17 TOP NEBRASKA DEGREES/AWARDS**

**Undergraduate**

1. Business, Management, and Marketing
2. Health Professions
3. Education
4. Liberal Arts and Sciences/General Studies
5. Computer and Information Sciences
6. Ag and Ag Operations
7. Mechanic and Repair Technologies
8. Homeland Security/Law Enf./Firefighting
9. Psychology
10. Biological and Biomedical Sciences

**Graduate**

1. Education
2. Health Professions
3. Business, Management, and Marketing
4. Computer and Information Sciences
5. Social Sciences
6. Legal Professions and Studies
7. Biological and Biomedical Studies
8. Public Administration and Social Service
9. Engineering
10. Psychology
CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Building on Nebraska’s current preschool through higher education systems, including developing a more inclusive, data-driven approach to workforce education, will require the state to expand on the successful programs already in place, while also innovating to address the systems’ shortcomings for industry, communities, and families. With that goal in mind, the report outlines a series of policy recommendations for state and local leaders to evaluate in light of the state’s near-term and longer-term workforce needs. The purposes associated with these recommendations, along with state examples, models, and resources, can be found on pages 75-90.
Governance and Infrastructure Recommendations

**Accreditation Reform (Elementary & Secondary, Early Childhood, ESUs)**
- Modernize the state’s accreditation regulations to prioritize education quality, identify school and school district needs, and identify and target improvements.
- Eliminate accreditation system barriers to competency-based learning models.
- Align accreditation to the state’s accountability system (AQeSTT).

**Data System & Workforce Linkages**
- Expand the state’s longitudinal data system to include workforce data.
- Complement the system with a leading education and workforce data analytics initiative.
- Strengthen the state’s Early Childhood Integrated Data System.

**Education System and Industry Coordination**
- Renew the state’s P16 Council and charge it with establishing and achieving the state’s workforce-focused education goals, through greater collaboration with workforce and industry leaders.
- Connect with effort to scale existing reVision and Nebraska Workplace Experiences Continuum initiatives.

**Open Educational Resources**
- Adopt and implement a statewide open educational resources strategy.
- Provide funding to develop or acquire openly licensed textbooks and a repository covering subject areas that constitute the most popular community college courses aligned to state workforce needs.
- Develop or acquire openly licensed resources for dual and concurrent enrollment, CTE, STEM classes aligned to state workforce needs.
- Require higher education institutions to provide searchable information that will allow students to seek out courses that use only open educational materials.
Early Learning and Care Recommendations

**Early Childhood Educator Workforce**
- Support the work of the Nebraska Early Childhood Workforce Commission, including its collaboration with the state’s higher education institutions.
- Complement with required program-to-program student and credit transfers for early childhood educator candidates (see credit and transfer description above).
- Focus on building the capacity of Nebraska Principals to Support the Transition to Kindergarten.

**Improving Overall Program Quality**
- Encourage and support the revision of Step Up to Quality, including by examining current indicators and possible additions.
- Complement with dedicated state resources to help more early childhood programs participate in Step Up to Quality.
- Strengthen community-level capacity to coordinate among providers and support their success.

**School Readiness Tax Credit**
- Strengthen the state’s existing School Readiness Tax Credits for early learning and care professionals and early learning and care programs.

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**Educator Effectiveness**

**Educator Preparation Program**
- Strengthen the standards and requirements for educator preparation programs.
- Use data to measure educator preparation program success and continuous improvement.
- Strengthen standards for teachers with state licensure improvements.
- Equip teachers to effectively use data to improve teaching and learning.
- Raise the cap on the Attracting Excellence to Teaching Program to recruit more high-performing students to the profession.

**Educator Evaluation and Professional Development**
- Require every school district to use performance standards and a research-based evaluation system for all certificated staff. Include objective measures of student achievement.
- Require and provide support to ensure all schools are staffed by CTE and other teachers with appropriate endorsements for the course they are teaching.
- Ensure federal and state professional development funding is used to address CTE, STEM and related dual and concurrent enrollment professional gaps identified by the evaluation system.
Career Readiness Standards and Alignment

- Review and revise, as necessary, the Nebraska Career Readiness Standards.
- Map specific CTE industry demand and employer needs and develop joint industry-education strategy for filling needs.
- Establish career pathways aligned to labor market needs using regional economic blueprints that summarize labor market trends, population characteristics, leading industries, and student outcomes.
- Host Summit on Career Readiness modeled after the successful efforts, in 2009, of the Nebraska Department of Education to promote collaboration with industry.

Career and Technical Education Teachers

- Recruit and equip effective general education teachers to become CTE teachers, including using summer externships with local industry and financial incentives to compete with higher paying industry positions in field.
- Equip industry experts to become CTE teachers through high-quality alternative licensure.
- Provide financial aid and other incentives to encourage high-performing students to become CTE teachers, including by raising the cap on the Attracting Excellence to Teaching Program.
- Support CTE teachers by establishing evaluation systems that are aligned with induction, mentoring, and professional learning.

Career and Technical Education Collaboration with Industry

- Expand state investments and access to the Nebraska reVision Initiative.
- Expand state investments and access to the Nebraska Workplace Experiences Continuum.

In-School STEM Programs

- Make high-quality STEM education a focus of the dual and concurrent enrollment and work-based experiences efforts recommended elsewhere in this section.
- Consider increased student access to high-quality STEM education among the state’s education equity strategies.

Beyond School STEM Programs

- Design, support, and take to scale high-quality programs that deliver valuable beyond school (out-of-school) STEM experiences that are linked to learning in the classroom.
Flexible Pathways to College and Career Readiness

**Dual and Concurrent Enrollment**
- Adopt a uniform process to align dual credit opportunities for students across the state.
- Adopt a single credit transfer policy and common course numbering system for all post-secondary institutions. Target specific industry needs first.
- Expand the ACE scholarship to provide additional incentives for taking courses targeting workforce needs.
- Set a standard price for dual enrollment courses.
- Promote greater CTE coordination between K-12, postsecondary, and industry.

**Transfer and Articulation**
- Require, by statute, statewide, program-to-program student and credit transfers for high-need workforce knowledge and skill areas and programs.
- Promote industry and education leader collaboration to identify specific programs for this credit and transfer approach, based on near- and the state’s longer-term workforce needs.

**Competency-Based Learning**
- Modernize the state’s K-12 and ESU accreditation regulations to enable high-quality competency-based learning.
- Acquire rich assessment tools that provide real-time feedback on a student’s progress toward mastery of knowledge and skills.
- Train teachers, school leaders, and other professionals to deliver competency-based models, including training them to use student data to inform instruction, specifically in competency-based systems.

**Work-Based Learning**
- Develop a strategy for expanding quality work-based learning programs for youth and young adults in high-need fields, including the Nebraska Workplace Experiences Continuum.
- Set a statewide youth apprenticeship participation goal and launch pilot and statewide strategies to grow an apprenticeship program. Improve public awareness of high-quality youth apprenticeship and advancing understanding of how well such programs serve students, employers, and communities.
- Complement with state and private collaboration and investments to expand work-based learning programs for educators and workers in all parts of the state.
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