

STATE PROFILE

Nebraska is a state with approximately 1.6 million people. Less than 15% of the population is non-white. It is also a state with a large geographic area (77,237 square miles) and its population is concentrated in two areas; the greater Omaha area and along Interstate 80 which crosses the state from east to west. Statewide, the population density is less than 20 persons per square mile.

The state has 93 counties and 596 school districts. Of those school districts, 283 serve secondary students. The student population in these districts ranges from 100 to 45,000 students. As a result, there is a great variance in the kind and amount of vocational and applied technology education available to secondary students.

There are no area vocational schools in Nebraska because of the geographic distances and population sparsity in most of the state. Therefore, all secondary vocational and applied technology education opportunities are provided through the local school district or through a cooperative arrangement with a community college if there is one within reasonable distance.

The state is divided into six Community College areas for the purpose of providing postsecondary vocational and applied technology education. The six areas have a total of 14 campuses which serve the entire state. Each area is governed by an elected Board of Governors and functions as a separate entity, although there is significant cooperation among the six areas.

The Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Education Act of 1998 presents a significant implementation challenge in a state such as Nebraska. Because of the number of school districts and the population sparsity in many areas of the state, a number of features of this law are challenging to administer.

For example, out of the 283 secondary school districts included in the allocation formula, only 27 qualify for funding on their own. The remaining 256 must enter into consortium arrangements with several other schools in order to utilize the funds. Most of the consortia are formed utilizing the sixteen existing educational service units, which may include as many as 32 school districts in eleven counties. Schools within a consortium will have a significant range in student population and varying levels of vocational and applied technology education opportunities available to their students. Consortium planning is difficult, at best.

The number of school districts and the geography of the state will also make it difficult to implement comprehensive articulation programs between secondary and postsecondary programs. Tech-Prep programs will be vastly different in each area because of the variance in needs. Services to special populations will also be difficult to achieve on a consistent basis.

Federal funds at the secondary level will be concentrated on improving the quality of vocational and applied technology education programs, improving the career guidance and counseling services, and strengthening the integration of academic and vocational programs.

Federal funds at the postsecondary level will concentrate on improving vocational-technical education programs, providing articulation between secondary and postsecondary programs, and strengthening the linkages with business and industry.

Support for vocational and applied technology education in Nebraska is focused almost entirely on the federal funds. The State of Nebraska appropriates only those funds necessary to meet the matching requirements for State administration and to meet the maintenance of effort requirements and does not appropriate State funds specifically for vocational education. This funding structure makes it very difficult to develop a long-range plan for vocational and applied technology education because the force for program direction is based on the federal legislation.

However, much work has been done in the state to assist in the implementation of the Act. Technical assistance meetings have been held throughout the state. A statewide assessment has been conducted. The consortiums are working quite well and local cooperation is evident.

The institutions of higher education which are involved in vocational teacher education have been strong participants in the planning process. They have a very important role to play in the delivery of curriculum and professional development services to the consortia, individual school districts, and community colleges.

All of this has been possible because the State of Nebraska is fortunate to have dedicated staff at all levels and citizens willing to participate in the planning process.