NEWS RELEASE

For additional infomration, please contact David Jespersen by phone (402-471-4537) or email (david.jespersen@nebraska.gov)

OCTOBER 14, 2026

Nebraska Students Near the Top of Peer States on Act

Nebraska students continue to lead the way with one of the highest composite scores nationally compared with states that test all their students on the ACT exam that measures college readiness in English, reading, mathematics, and science.

All Nebraska public school juniors are required to take the ACT as part of the Nebraska Student-Centered Assessment System (NSCAS). Overall Nebraska had 100 percent of public and private school graduates participate in the ACT.

Nebraska's average 2026 ACT composite score is 18.8. Although that is down from 19.2 in 2025, it is higher than the average composite score of the states that also test 100% of students at 18.2. Only two states that test 100% of students scored higher than Nebraska.

The national average is also down this year from 19.4 to 19.2 and only 36 percent of students take the ACT nationally compared to the 100% of Nebraska graduates. The highest possible ACT score is 36.

Nebraska also continues to stand out compared to states with more than 90 percent of graduates taking the ACT. The average score of those 16 states dropped from 18.4 to 18.2 this year. This is a significant comparison as states that test a high percentage of graduates tend to have lower averages as the scores include more students who are not on a college course-taking track.

Nebraska students scored an average of 17.8 in English and 19.2 in reading. In math, Nebraska students scored an average of 18.8 and 19.2 in science.

Next year scores will reflect a change in the way the ACT is administered. Nationally, the science portion will be optional while Nebraska will still require science as part of our state assessment. The writing portion will remain the same, currently it is optional nationally and required for the Nebraska state assessment.

It is important to note that the ACT results released today are based on Nebraska's 2026 graduating seniors, many of whom took the exam during their junior year, approximately two years ago. A more current picture of student achievement will be available when the Nebraska Department of Education releases statewide Nebraska Student-Centered Assessment System (NSCAS) results later this fall. Those results will include ACT performance from students who were juniors during the 2025-26 school year, and preliminary data indicate there will be encouraging progress to report across Nebraska schools.

The national and state ACT press release and reports can be viewed and downloaded on the ACT website at act.org/gradclass2026.

####

David Jespersen