



Nebraska Ready: PK-12 Policy Priorities

The mission of the Nebraska Department of Education is to lead and support the preparation of all Nebraskans for learning, earning, and living. This mission is directly aligned with the postsecondary attainment goal outlined in LR335 - for **70 percent of Nebraskans to have a postsecondary credential or degree by 2030**.

To achieve this attainment goal, the NDE is pursuing a bold policy vision for the next biennium called “Nebraska Ready.” These six broad priority areas will set the state on a path to reach the 70% attainment goal by 2030.

Priority 1: Increase Third Grade English Language Arts Proficiency to 75% by 2030

- **Rationale:** In 2021, 50% of Nebraska 3rd grade students were proficient in English Language Arts. Proficiency by 3rd grade is a key gateway to future success, including graduation rate and postsecondary enrollment and completion.
- **Legislative Priorities:**
 - **BIENNIAL BUDGET REQUEST:** Transform early literacy instruction in Nebraska through an annual \$10 million investment.
 - Support a statewide allocation for statewide family engagement centers (family literacy centers)
 - Achieve the full legislated special education funding/state contribution
 - **BIENNIAL BUDGET REQUEST:** Enhancements to Step Up to Quality.
 - Support efforts increasing the compensation for early childhood education providers
 - Create a legislative study group to unearth overlaps and opportunities in early childhood governance, funding, and accountability.
- **Regulatory & Agency Priorities**
 - Adapt Rule 20 to ensure the science of reading (eg. phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, comprehension, fluency, and background knowledge) is included as a requirement in educator preparation program accreditation

Priority 2: Half the Gap in 8th Grade Math Achievement for Each Student Group by 2030.

- **Rationale:** Algebra and 8th grade math are also considered “gateways” to success. Students need algebra skills to access higher level courses and succeed in high school. Unfortunately, significant achievement gaps in math exist by the 8th grade based on the state’s NSCAS Growth Assessment from 2021.
- **Legislative Priorities:**
 - **BIENNIAL BUDGET REQUEST:** Ensure the NDE has the requisite staff to support school improvement activities
 - Update core services statute, and secure additional state funding for ESUs
 - Address the “homework gap”
 - Support investments in tutoring and mentoring
- **Regulatory & Agency Priorities:**
 - Include high quality instructional materials (HQIM) in accreditation requirements for school districts.
 - Work collaboratively with ESUs to strengthen professional learning offerings to schools
 - Commit to a consistent assessment measure to ensure stability
 - Clarify “Alternative Administrative Structure” in the priority school statute

Priority 3: Increase the Number of High School CTE Concentrators to 50%.

- Rationale: A recent analysis of Nebraska students participating in career and technical education shows that students who concentrate (i.e. complete two courses at the intermediate or capstone level in a specific career cluster) are more likely to graduate from high school, 2) more likely to enroll in postsecondary, and 3) more likely to earn a postsecondary credential of any kind. While 80% of Nebraska high school students participate in CTE, only 29% of students are concentrators.
- Legislative Priorities:
 - BIENNIAL BUDGET REQUEST: Secure a state match for career and technical education (minimum \$8 million)
 - Create a statewide council for work based learning, internships, and apprenticeships that ensures all stakeholders are at the same table (DED, NDE, DOL)
- Regulatory & Agency Priorities:
 - Further develop the career specialist teaching program
 - Define postsecondary “credential/certificate of economic value” and engage higher education, workforce, and the Department of Labor

Priority 4: Reduce Chronic Absenteeism by Half by 2030.

- Rationale: A student is chronically absent when they miss 10% or more of their time in school attendance. Common sense and research both suggest that students who attend school at higher rates are more successful, not only in academic outcomes, but life outcomes. Chronic absence can be caused by many factors including physical and emotional health and safety, belonging and connection, academic challenge and engagement, homelessness, and adult and student well-being.
- Legislative Priorities:
 - BIENNIAL BUDGET REQUEST: Secure funding to bolster non-academic supports surrounding mental health, including mental health first aid, additional licensed mental health practitioner (LMHP) capacity, and school psych and counselors
 - Work collaboratively with DHHS to ensure every school has access to school nurses
 - Secure funding for full-service community schools and expand the current pilot
 - BIENNIAL BUDGET REQUEST: Secure general funds for continuation of the Safe2Help hotline
 - Support recommendations from the School Safety Taskforce
 - Revise and update attendance statutes and encourage partnerships with probation, county attorneys, and others to prevent chronic school absence.
 - Support recommendations from the ventilation and achievement research study
- Regulatory & Agency Priorities:
 - Work with DHHS Medicaid Administration to ensure school psychologists are reimbursable by Medicaid.

Priority 5: For Youth who are Systems-Involved, Raise the High School Graduation Rate and/or High School Equivalency Attainment to 70%.

- Rationale: In the 2020-21 school year, children in the foster care system had a graduation rate of 42.7%. Each year, around 10,000 children are served by the child welfare system including foster care, and almost 9,000 youth arrested. At any stage across systems involvement, placement changes, creating challenges of continuity of learning and completion of high school and graduation.
- Legislative Priorities:
 - Support a study on the challenges and opportunities around data sharing among entities responsible for education, treatment, and rehabilitation of youth.
 - Support direct funding for the education of systems-involved youth.
- Regulatory & Agency Priorities:
 - Continue to strengthen relationships with Rule 18 schools, YRTCs, and Department of Corrections schools.

Priority 6: Eliminate the Special Education Staffing Vacancy and Cut the Educator Shortage in Half by 2030.

- Rationale:
 - One of the most consistently unfilled education positions in Nebraska is special educators. In the most recent year, 86 special education positions went unfilled across the state. With 15 percent of Nebraska's students having a disability, eliminating this vacancy is an essential element in postsecondary attainment for this student group.
- Legislative Priorities:
 - Advocate for the elimination of the basic skills competency requirement or provide other pathways to demonstrate basic skills
- Regulatory & Agency Priorities:
 - Create a written plan for addressing the teacher shortage (Including plan for Rules 20-24)
 - Combine the multiple NDE websites pertaining to recruitment, preparation, certification, and retention of teachers into a single, one-stop-shop
 - Pursue educator apprenticeship program in partnership with Nebraska Department of Labor and Nebraska Association of Colleges of Teacher Education