

Online Learning: Addressing Challenges and Seizing Opportunities Nebraska

THE CHALLENGES

America's K–12 education system faces three significant challenges: (1) increased global demands for skilled workers, (2) significant financial shortfalls, and (3) a looming teacher shortage. Independently, these factors present significant challenges for U.S. schools. In combination, they create a national imperative for swift action to create a more innovative, effective, and efficient education system.

THE OPPORTUNITIES

Every day, creative educators are using technology better to meet the needs of students and teachers. Technology can no longer be considered an “add-on” tool in education, but rather one that is integral. Embracing online-learning opportunities for students and teachers will strengthen the supply and quality of teachers, improve efficiency, and increase students' college and career readiness.

CHALLENGE 1: GLOBAL SKILLS DEMANDS GROW FASTER THAN U.S. COLLEGE GRADUATION RATES

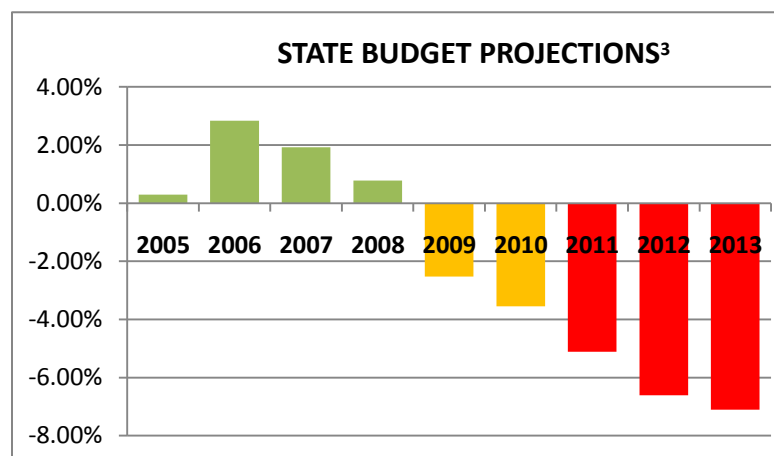
The global economy increasingly demands a skilled workforce. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), only 40 percent of Americans aged twenty-five to thirty-four have a two- or four-year college degree, ranking the United States tenth among industrialized nations. Boosting the supply of skilled workers and leading the world in postsecondary attainment will require greatly increasing current high school graduation rates and college completion rates (depicted below.)

High School Graduation Rate (Class of 2006) ¹		
	State-Reported	Independently Reported
Nebraska	88%	79%
United States	n/a	69%

College Completion Rates ²		
	Two-Year Institutions (Entered in 2005 and graduated within 3 years)	Four-Year Institutions (Entered in 2002 and graduated within 6 years)
Nebraska	37%	54%
United States	31%	56%

CHALLENGE 2: PROJECTED STATE DEFICITS INDICATE A PENDING FUNDING CLIFF

Local and state governments face continued declines in revenue. In many states, the 2008–09 recession has led to funding cuts or freezes for public education. Long-term forecasts predict that education funding will not return to former patterns forcing policymakers and educators to use scarce resources more effectively and efficiently to improve student outcomes.



CHALLENGE 3: THE LOOMING TEACHER SHORTAGE

Simply put, there are not enough highly skilled teachers to staff the nation's classrooms, let alone to accelerate improvements in achievement and attainment. Approximately one million teachers—almost one third of current teachers—are eligible to retire in the next five to seven years.⁴ Additionally, almost half of all new teachers leave the profession within five years of entering the classroom. The challenge is even more acute in difficult-to-staff subjects and in low-income and rural areas.

Percentage of Nebraska public school teachers aged 50 and up in School Year 2008–09 = **44%**⁵

This page summarizes information about (1) online-learning opportunities in Nebraska, (2) the presence of Nebraska state policies that support online learning, and (3) how federal policy supports online learning in Nebraska.

1. ONLINE-LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

DO NEBRASKA'S STUDENTS AND TEACHERS HAVE ACCESS TO COMPUTERS AND THE INTERNET?

	NE	U.S.
STUDENTS PER HIGH-SPEED, INTERNET-CONNECTED COMPUTER (2006) ⁶	2.8	3.7
PERCENTAGE OF EIGHTH-GRADE STUDENTS WITH ACCESS TO COMPUTERS IN THEIR CLASSROOMS (2007) ⁶	87%	50%
PERCENTAGE OF INDIVIDUALS WITH ACCESS TO INTERNET AT HOME (2009) ⁷	77%	83%

DO NEBRASKA'S STUDENTS AND TEACHERS HAVE ACCESS TO ONLINE-LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES?

- **State virtual school:** Nebraska does not operate a state virtual school.⁸
- **Other online programs:** Nebraska is in the process of creating a statewide online-learning management system in the attempt to improve staff development and distance education for K–12 students. Nebraska has numerous district-run online programs. One in particular, Omaha Public Schools' eLearning Program, had over 7,500 unique student enrollments, and offered eighty courses in School Year 2008–09. In addition, twenty-seven of Nebraska's high schools offer online courses through the Virtual High School Global Consortium.⁸

2. STATE POLICY INFRASTRUCTURE

DOES NEBRASKA HAVE POLICIES THAT NURTURE ONLINE LEARNING FOR STUDENTS AND TEACHERS?

	NE	States with Policy
STUDENT STANDARDS INCLUDE TECHNOLOGY LITERACY ⁶	Yes	50
STUDENTS ARE TESTED ON TECHNOLOGY LITERACY ⁶	No	13
COMPUTER-BASED ASSESSMENTS IS OFFERED ⁶	No	26
INITIAL TEACHER-LICENSE REQUIREMENTS INCLUDE TECHNOLOGY ⁶	No	21
INITIAL PRINCIPAL-LICENSE REQUIREMENTS INCLUDE TECHNOLOGY ⁶	No	10

3. FEDERAL POLICY

DOES FEDERAL POLICY SUPPORT ONLINE-LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES IN NEBRASKA?

- Since Fiscal Year 2002, **Nebraska has received \$17 million** from the federal Enhancing Education Through Technology grant program to improve student outcomes through the use of technology such as improving teachers ability to use technology or improving online-learning opportunities.⁹

SOURCES: