K12 ACADEMICS — STATE EDUCATION SERIES



Nebraska

Education Guide

A complete profile — schools, testing, graduation, accountability, school choice, teacher certification & financial aid, each in depth.

K12 ACADEMICS

Find Your Community

2026 EDITION

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Everything about school in Nebraska.

This guide profiles **Nebraska**'s education system in seven parts, each a two-page deep dive with the key facts, plain-English explanations, and a link to the full, regularly-updated guide online. From K12 Academics, the world's largest education resource, online since 2004.

WHAT'S INSIDE

Education Overview · State Testing · Graduation Requirements · Accountability & Report Cards · School Choice · Teacher Certification · Financial Aid

SEARCH 200+ DIRECTORIES

K-12 Schools · Colleges & Universities · Vendors · Summer Programs · International Programs · Performers

Education Overview

EDUCATION IN NEBRASKA

Nebraska educates roughly 330,000 public K–12 students across about 245 school districts , overseen by the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) and the State Board. Nebraska's public schools sit at the center of its education system. It has strong option enrollment (families can choose among public districts), but it is one of the few...

WHO MUST ATTEND SCHOOL

- **Start age** — 6 (by January 1)
- **End of compulsory age** — 18 (early release at 16 with consent)
- **Districts** — ~245 school districts
- **Satisfying it** — Public, accredited private, or exempt (home) school

PRE-K IN NEBRASKA

Nebraska does not offer a universal pre-K program. State-supported early education includes public-school prekindergarten (offered by many districts, prioritizing at-risk and income-eligible children), the Nebraska Early Childhood Education Grant Program , and Sixpence (an early-childhood endowment supporting at-risk infants and...

AT A GLANCE

Compulsory	**Ages 6–18**
Districts	**~245**
Testing	**NSCAS · ACT**
Diploma	**200 credit hrs**
Choice	**Option enrollment**

DISTRICTS & THE LEARNING COMMUNITY

Nebraska's largest districts include Omaha Public Schools (the state's largest), Lincoln Public Schools , Millard , Papillion-La Vista , and Elkhorn . A distinctive Nebraska feature: it has no charter schools — one of only a small number of states without a charter-school law. In the Omaha metro area, districts also operate within the...

PRIVATE & INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS IN NEBRASKA

- **Catholic & parochial schools** — A large network across the Archdiocese of Omaha and dioceses statewide (such as the Jesuit Creighton Prep, Marian, and Skutt Catholic)
- **Independent schools** — Nonprofit, board-governed schools such as Brownell Talbot School (Omaha)
- **Other religious schools** — A strong Lutheran network, plus Christian and other faith-based schools
- **Specialty schools** — Montessori and schools for specific learning needs

READ NEBRASKA'S FULL EDUCATION OVERVIEW GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com →

State Testing

WHAT YOUR STATE TESTS

Nebraska uses the NSCAS (Nebraska Student-Centered Assessment System) in grades 3–8 for ELA, math, and science, and the ACT in grade 11. Run by the Nebraska Department of Education. There's no exit-exam gate.

WHICH TESTS, WHICH GRADES

- **NSCAS (grades 3–8)** — English language arts, mathematics, and science
- **ACT (grade 11)** — The statewide high-school test — a real, college-usable score
- **NSCAS Alternate** — For eligible students

FORMAT & SUBJECTS

NSCAS is online ; the grade-11 ACT follows the national ACT format.

IS PASSING REQUIRED TO GRADUATE?

No exit-exam gate. Nebraska doesn't require passing a state test to graduate; districts set course and credit requirements. The grade-11 ACT provides a college-usable score.

HOW IT'S SCORED

NSCAS reports achievement levels; the grade-11 ACT is scored 1–36.

AT A GLANCE

Grades 3–8	**NSCAS**
Subjects	**ELA, Math, Science**
High school	**ACT (grade 11)**
Grad requirement?	**No exit-exam gate**
Format	**Online**
Standards	**Nebraska College & Career Ready**

TESTING WINDOWS

NSCAS and the ACT are given in a spring window set by each district.

HOW TO PREPARE

- **ACT prep for grade 11** — Our ACT guide and free official ACT practice apply to the grade-11 test
- **State practice tests** — The state provides free practice materials matching the real format

PARTICIPATION & OPTING OUT

Students in tested grades participate. Ask your district about make-up windows and any questions.

ACCOMMODATIONS & MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS

Accommodations follow a student's IEP or 504 plan ; eligible students take the state's alternate assessment. Multilingual learners take an English proficiency test (WIDA ACCESS or the state equivalent) and may receive designated supports.

READ NEBRASKA'S FULL STATE TESTING GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com →

Graduation Requirements

AT A GLANCE

Nebraska is a strong local-control state: it sets some minimum requirements , but districts determine most of the credits and courses . There is no exit exam .

CREDIT & COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Nebraska sets minimum instruction requirements (including English, math, science, and social studies), but the total credits and specific courses are set by districts . Confirm your district's requirements — most require roughly 200 credit-hours (about 24 year-long credits).

TESTING TO GRADUATE

No exit exam. Nebraska students take state assessments (NSCAS and the ACT), but a passing score is not required to graduate.

DIPLOMA TYPES & HONORS

Nebraska issues a standard diploma, with the Seal of Biliteracy available. Districts may add honors.

ALTERNATIVE PATHWAYS

Dual credit, AP, and CTE offer accelerated pathways; see the Nebraska Career Scholarship (in our financial-aid guide).

AT A GLANCE

Model	**State minimums + local control**
Exit exam?	**No**
Districts	**Set most requirements**
Confirm with	**Your district**

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- **How many credits does Nebraska require?** — The state sets a minimum, but your district may require more — confirm locally.
- **Does Nebraska require a test to graduate?** — No — Nebraska has no exit exam; a passing test score is not required to graduate.
- **Are there different diploma types?** — Yes — plus honors designations and seals; see the diplomas section.
- **What if my student is behind on credits?** — Talk to the counselor about credit recovery and alternative pathways.
- **Where do I confirm the exact requirements?** — Your school counselor, district, and the state department of education.

READ NEBRASKA'S FULL GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com →

Accountability & Report Cards

AT A GLANCE

Nebraska rates schools with AQuESTT (Accountability for a Quality Education System, Today and Tomorrow) — classifying schools into levels — and publishes the Nebraska Education Profile (NEP) .

HOW THIS STATE RATES SCHOOLS

AQuESTT places each school in one of four classifications : Excellent, Great, Good, or Needs Improvement . It's based on evidence-based analysis and data — status and growth on assessments, graduation, and other indicators of quality. Read the underlying data alongside the classification.

WHAT GETS MEASURED

- **Academic achievement** — How students score on state tests (proficiency in reading/ELA and math)
- **Academic growth / progress** — How much students improve year to year — not just where they land
- **Graduation rate** — For high schools (the 4-year cohort rate)
- **English-learner progress** — How English learners are progressing toward proficiency
- **School quality / student success** — An extra indicator — often attendance/chronic absenteeism, college/career readiness, or similar

FINDING & READING THE REPORT CARD

Look up any school on the Nebraska Education Profile (nep.education.ne.gov) . Review the data (especially growth and graduation) and the trend.

AT A GLANCE

Format	AQuESTT classifications (4 level...
Levels	Excellent, Great, Good, Needs Im...
Tool	Nebraska Education Profile (NEP)
Look up at	nep.education.ne.gov

HOW FAMILIES SHOULD USE RATINGS

- **Read it in context** — A school's score reflects its students' circumstances too, not only its quality
- **Look at growth, not just scores** — Growth shows how much a school moves students — often more telling than raw proficiency
- **Check the trend** — Is the school improving over time?
- **Look past the summary** — Dig into the underlying data (subgroups, attendance, readiness)
- **Then visit** — Data raises questions; a visit answers them (see our guide on evaluating a school)

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- **How does Nebraska rate schools?** — Nebraska uses AQuESTT classifications (Excellent, Great, Good, Needs Improvement).
- **What do the ratings measure?** — Test scores, growth, graduation rate, English-learner progress, and a school-quality indicator.
- **Where do I look up my school?** — On the state's official report-card portal (see below).
- **Should I choose a school by its rating alone?** — No — use it as a starting point, weigh growth and context, and visit.
- **What are CSI and TSI?** — Federal labels for schools flagged for Comprehensive or Targeted Support and Improvement.

READ NEBRASKA'S FULL ACCOUNTABILITY & REPORT CARDS GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com →

School Choice

AT A GLANCE

Nebraska does not currently have a private-school-choice program. The legislature had created a tax-credit scholarship program (Opportunity Scholarships), but voters repealed it by referendum in November 2024 . Nebraska offers public choice through option enrollment .

THIS STATE'S CHOICE PROGRAMS

There is no active ESA, voucher, or tax-credit scholarship for private school in Nebraska after the 2024 repeal. Families seeking a private school pay tuition (with financial aid often available).

PUBLIC SCHOOL CHOICE, TOO

- **Open enrollment / transfers** — Attend a public school outside your zone, where allowed (see our finding-your-school guide)
- **Charter schools** — Tuition-free public schools of choice (where available)
- **Magnet schools** — Tuition-free public schools with a specialized focus
- **Homeschooling** — Legal in all 50 states (rules vary)

LEGAL & LEGISLATIVE STATUS

Nebraska's tax-credit scholarship was repealed by voters in 2024 . New proposals may appear — confirm the current status before assuming a program exists.

AT A GLANCE	
Private choice?	No — repealed by referendum (202…
Was	Opportunity Scholarships tax-cre…
Public choice	Option enrollment; charter frame…
Homeschool	Legal (as exempt schools)
Confirm with	Your district

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- **Does Nebraska have a private-school-choice program?** — No — Nebraska voters repealed the state's tax-credit scholarship in 2024; only public choice remains.
- **What's the difference between an ESA and a voucher?** — A voucher pays a private school directly; an ESA is a flexible parent-managed account for many approved expenses.
- **What is a tax-credit scholarship?** — Donors get a tax credit for giving to organizations that fund private-school scholarships.
- **Is there public school choice too?** — Yes — open enrollment, charters, and magnets (plus homeschooling).
- **Where do I confirm the details?** — On the official state program site (see below).

READ NEBRASKA'S FULL SCHOOL CHOICE GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com →

Teacher Certification

HOW LICENSURE WORKS HERE

Nebraska certifies teachers through the Nebraska Department of Education . You complete an approved program, pass the required Praxis exams, and earn an Initial Certificate , later a Standard Certificate .

WHICH TESTS THIS STATE USES

- **Praxis Core** — Basic skills — or satisfied with qualifying scores
- **Praxis Subject Assessments** — Content test(s) for your endorsement area
- **Note** — Requirements vary by endorsement — confirm your specific tests

WHAT YOU NEED TO GET LICENSED

- **A bachelor's degree** — From an accredited college or university
- **A state-approved teacher-preparation program** — Completed at a college or through an approved alternative route
- **Student teaching / clinical practice** — Supervised classroom experience
- **Pass the required exams** — See the exams section above
- **A background check** — Fingerprint-based criminal background check
- **Apply to the state** — Submit your application and documents to the licensing agency

AT A GLANCE

Agency	**Nebraska Department of Education**
Basic skills	**Praxis Core (or qualifying score...**
Content	**Praxis Subject Assessments**
Certificate	**Initial — then Standard**

OTHER PATHS INTO TEACHING

Most states offer alternative routes for career-changers and those with a degree in another field. In Nebraska, these typically let you start teaching while completing licensure requirements — through district or university alternative-certification programs, residencies, or emergency/provisional permits. Requirements (and the exams) are...

RECIPROCITY & OUT-OF-STATE LICENSES

- **Interstate agreements** — Most states participate in the NASDTEC Interstate Agreement, which eases (but doesn't guarantee) recognition of an out-of-state license
- **You may still owe exams** — States often require you to meet their own testing (or coursework) requirements, sometimes within a grace period
- **Check both states** — Confirm the specific steps with Nebraskas agency and your current state

READ NEBRASKA'S FULL TEACHER CERTIFICATION GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com →

Financial Aid

THE STATE AID PICTURE

Nebraska's state aid is administered by the Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education (CCPE) , centered on a need-based grant distributed to colleges.

NEED-BASED STATE GRANTS

- **Nebraska Opportunity Grant** — Nebraska's main need-based grant, distributed to eligible in-state colleges (public, private, and community) which award it to Pell-eligible students.

MERIT & LOTTERY SCHOLARSHIPS

- **Nebraska Career Scholarship** — Merit-and-workforce scholarships for students in high-demand fields at Nebraska colleges.

COLLEGE SAVINGS (529 PLAN)

Nebraska's NEST 529 plan offers a state income tax deduction for contributions.

APPLYING & THE STATE AGENCY

- **File the FAFSA early** — It's the trigger for state grants and many scholarships
- **Register with Nebraska Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education** — Create the state agency's student account to track and claim awards
- **Confirm your details** — Verify residency, GPA, and enrollment as required
- **Meet any extra requirements** — Some programs need a separate form, GPA, or service commitment
- **Reapply every year** — State aid is awarded annually

AT A GLANCE

Need-based	**Nebraska Opportunity Grant**
High-demand fields	**Nebraska Career Scholarship**
529 plan	**NEST**
Agency	**CCPE**

DEADLINES & TIMING

State deadlines are typically much earlier than the federal FAFSA deadline , and some aid is first-come, first-served until funds run out. File the FAFSA as soon as it opens (in the fall) and confirm the state's specific priority date.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- **How do I get Nebraska state aid?** — File the FAFSA (and any state form) by the deadline; Nebraska Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education administers the programs.
- **Is it need-based or merit?** — Both — Nebraska offers need-based grants and merit scholarships.
- **Are the deadlines earlier than federal?** — Usually yes — file early, as some aid is first-come.
- **Can I use it out of state?** — Most Nebraska aid is for in-state schools; check each program.
- **Does this list private scholarships?** — No — this guide covers official state programs only.

READ NEBRASKA'S FULL FINANCIAL AID GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com →

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