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The Platte Institute strongly believes in the importance of citizens participating in the public dialogue on issues important to Nebraska. Writing a letter to the editor is an outstanding way to partake in the discussion and have your voice

# PLATTE CHAT

## HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUT RATES, ECONOMY GO HAND-IN-HAND

One in every nine high school freshmen in Nebraska will drop out of school before graduating, but in Omaha more than one out of four will drop out. According to the Alliance for Excellent Education, the economic impact of having that many children failing to get a high school diploma has a staggering economic impact.

In a recent report, the Alliance for Excellent Education took a look at dropout rates and the economic impact it has on 45 metropolitan areas in the country. According to their research, if the Omaha metropolitan area could reduce its dropout rate by 50 percent, these “new graduates” would have the following impact on the regional economy:

heard by thousands of people. To make the process easier, the Platte Institute has assembled a list of links which allow you to submit a letter to the editor to nearly all Nebraska newspapers. Simply [CLICK HERE](#) for a listing of the newspapers and follow the appropriate link to submit your letter.



And these are just the figures for the Omaha metropolitan area. Unfortunately, data from Nebraska's Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education shows that in many major communities in Nebraska, more than just one out of every nine students is dropping out. All of the following communities would stand to make significant economic improvements if their dropout rates were lowered as well.

While the average four-year graduation rate in Nebraska sits at 89 percent, the following school districts in Nebraska with more than 50 graduates a year are below average – and in some cases significantly below average:

- Chadron Public Schools – 88.9%
- Falls City Public Schools – 88.0%
- Scottsbluff Public Schools – 87.9%
- Hastings Public Schools – 87.9%
- South Sioux City Public Schools – 87.8%
- Westside Public Schools – 87.5%
- Fremont Public Schools – 86.5%
- Nebraska City Public Schools – 86.4%
- Kearney Public Schools – 86.3%
- Crete Public Schools – 84.2%
- Lincoln Public Schools – 81.5%
- Lexington Public Schools – 81.4%
- Schuyler Community Schools – 81.4%

- Grand Island Public Schools – 78.3%
- Omaha Public Schools – 71.0%

As a whole, Nebraska is making progress in reducing its dropout rate. From the 2002-2003 school year to the 2007-2008 school year, the dropout rate decreased from 15 to 11 percent. A large portion of that improvement comes from a reduction of the number of white students dropping out of public schools. Over the course of those five years, the number of white students dropping out has decreased by 40 percent (2,214 to 1,328) and the number of Asian students dropping out has dropped 33 percent (55 to 37).

Despite this, Nebraska's educational system seems to have yet to figure out a way to keep black, Hispanic and Native American students in school until graduation. Unfortunately 32 percent of Native American freshman students will drop out while 31 percent of black students and 26 percent of Hispanic students drop out. The dropout rates for those students have improved slightly, but the rate of improvement doesn't match that of white and Asian students. Dropouts among black students in Nebraska dropped 18 percent (576 to 476) while Native American dropouts decreased 17 percent (131 to 109) and Hispanic dropouts decreased just nine percent (555 to 510).

State Senator Brad Ashford recently stated that it is critical to make sure all Nebraska students are being given the best opportunity for success so that they can graduate and help build the economic prosperity of the state grow:

“(There needs to be) a call to action for the juvenile justice system, the child welfare system, the schools and parents to do more to keep our children in school,” he said. “Truancy, detention and out-of-home placements are disruptive to a child's education. We must do more to address truancy at the earliest indication of a problem so that students can remain in school and not get involved in the juvenile justice system.

“If children do enter the system, we must find alternatives to detention so that they can remain in their homes and get services in their communities. Our children must have hope that when they complete their education, they will be able to find jobs and not be restricted by the record of a mistake they made as a juvenile.”

The impact high school dropouts have on a state’s economic, social and civic health are often underestimated. There is much at stake in the success of public high schools. Everyone from small business owners, to car dealers, realtors and CEOs would benefit in Nebraska by an improved high school graduation rate.

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