



CAPITOL EXPERIENCE DAY

YEAR-END REVIEW

2024
2025



CAPITOL EXPERIENCE DAY

As one of Civic Nebraska's flagship programs, Capitol Experience Day offers hands-on civic engagement to youth and adults across Nebraska. This year, the Capitol Experience Day program served 1,533 participants, more than ever before.

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Taking 13 of my students to the Capitol for a Cap Day was an amazing experience! As youth from immigrant and refugee backgrounds, having the hands-on experience to learn about civic engagement and what happens in the Capitol proved to be a valuable learning experience. The mock protest activity seemed to be their favorite, and by doing the mock protest, they learned how to use their voices, as young people, to advocate for themselves and others.

Sabrina Salrin
Youth Program Coordinator, Asian Community & Cultural Center

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Capitol Experience Day is designed to teach critical thinking, civil discourse, and the governing process through interactive programs and presentations. This daylong deep dive is convened entirely at the Nebraska State Capitol and is a beyond-the-headlines look into how state government works. Participants in the program may tour the Capitol building, meet with elected or appointed officials, practice the art of debate through mock hearings, learn about Nebraska's unique history, and identify how they can work together to build a stronger community through civic leadership. By the end of this day, participants in the Capitol Experience Day program are inspired and empowered to be more active, more engaged citizens.

STORY OF IMPACT

CRIMINAL JUSTICE


CAP DAY

EXPLORING SYSTEMS, EMPOWERING STUDENTS



Northeast High School's junior and senior Criminal Justice students experienced an unforgettable Capitol Experience day as they stepped out of the classroom and into the heart of Lincoln's legal and public safety systems. Designed to bring textbook concepts to life, the day offered a behind-the-scenes look at multiple agencies that shape the criminal justice process in Lancaster County.





“These experiences remind me why this program is so important. Students walk in expecting a field trip, but they walk out with a deeper, more personal connection to civic life. You can see it in their questions, their reflections, and the way they carry themselves after the day is done.”

Audrey Nance, Capitol Experience Days Program Manager

Students began their day by observing live District Court hearings, gaining firsthand insight into courtroom procedures, judicial roles, and how cases are presented and decided. From there, they met with County Attorney Pat Condon, who provided an overview of the prosecutor’s role in the justice system and offered a tour of his office, allowing students to ask questions and better understand how criminal cases are built and charged.

Next, the group visited the Public Defender’s Office, where Chief Deputy Public Defender Paul Cooney shared his perspective on legal defense, fairness in the system, and the importance of constitutional rights. The students then traveled to the Lincoln Emergency Communications Center, where Director Jessica Loos explained how 911 calls are handled and dispatched—highlighting the critical role dispatchers play in emergency response.

The day concluded at the Lincoln Police Department with Officer Jason Hellmuth, who led students through a tour of the LPD office and a look inside a police cruiser, giving a real-world feel for the daily tools and responsibilities of officers on patrol.

Throughout the day, students engaged directly with professionals across the justice system, asking thoughtful questions, exploring career paths, and developing a more complete and nuanced understanding of how the system works. The experience reinforced not only classroom learning but also the importance of public service, critical thinking, and the impact of justice on community life.

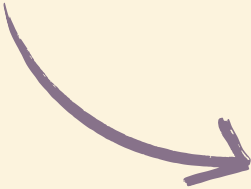
BY THE NUMBERS

37 Capitol Experience Days

1,533 Total Participants in 2024-2025

17 Offices Engaged

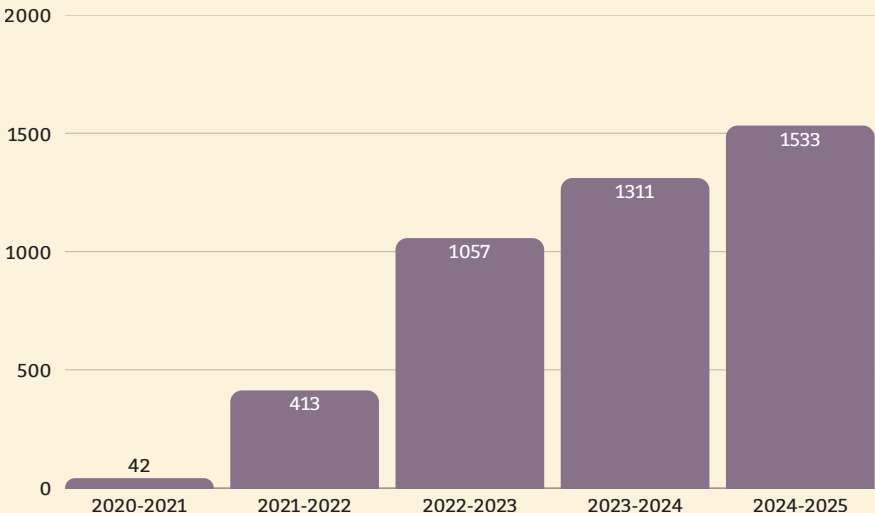
21 Unique Speakers



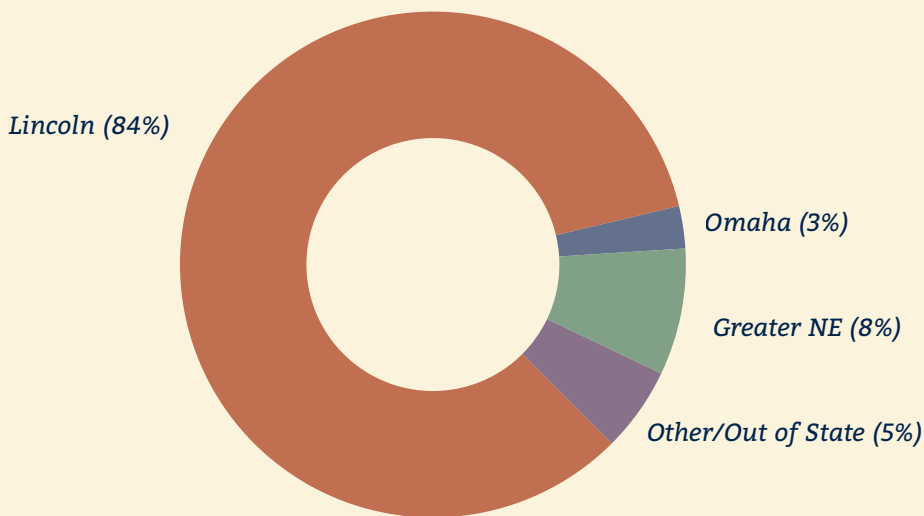
Most Frequent Speakers

1. Senator Dan Quick of Grand Island
2. Senator George Dungan of Lincoln
3. Senator Brian Hardin of Gering

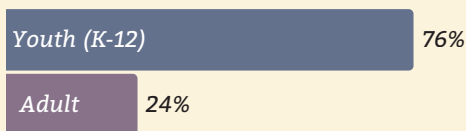
Number of Participants by Year



Participants by Geography



Participants by Group Type



38% of participants identified as English Language Learners (ELL)

New Partnerships Built

- Grand Island High School
- Fremont Chamber of Commerce
- LPS Deaf/Blind Teacher Team
- Empowering Families
- OPS Lothrop Middle School CLC
- LPS Family Literacy
- And more!

STORIES OF IMPACT



BUILDING CIVIC IDENTITY WITH NEW NEBRASKANS

This spring and summer, the Capitol Experience program welcomed several incredible groups of immigrants, refugees, and New Americans for immersive, hands-on experiences at the Nebraska State Capitol and other spaces. Each visit was uniquely tailored to help participants engage more deeply with state government, civic processes, and their roles as community leaders and changemakers.

ECHO Collective

Emerging entrepreneurs and civic leaders from ECHO Collective engaged with Senator George Dungan and Justice Stephanie Stacy, observed legislative debate, and learned about civic processes during a tour of the Capitol.

Asian Community and Cultural Center

Youth from the Asian Community and Cultural Center's Youth Program participated in a mock protest, explored the Capitol through a scavenger hunt, and visited the 14th Floor Memorial Chamber.

LPS Family Literacy Program

Participants in Lincoln Public School's Family Literacy Program—adults and their children in an English language learning program—visited the Capitol with interpreter support in five languages. Their afternoon included an interior tour, a stop in the law library, and a visit to the Memorial Chamber.



Citizenship Classes

Members of several different Citizenship Classes celebrated the completion of their class with a visit to the Capitol. Although originally planned activities were adjusted, participants explored the Capitol by physically following the legislative process step-by-step and even created their own "New Americans Guidebook," which the Asian Community and Cultural Center kept for future classes.



Each Capitol Experience day helped open the doors of government to individuals new to the U.S. system, making civic identity, public service, and democracy more accessible and empowering.

LINCOLN PUBLIC SCHOOLS PARTNERSHIP HIGHLIGHT

OF LPS CAP DAYS: 26

OF NEW TEACHERS: 11

GOVERNING GRIZZLIES

Standing Bear
students gain
legislative
experience at
mock hearing

Standing Bear High School students explored civic engagement this spring through a mock committee hearing at the Nebraska State Capitol. AP Human Geography and Civics students debated a fictional bill proposing voting rights for 16-year-olds. In small groups, they researched the issue, developed testimony, and took on roles as senators or testers in a simulated legislative process.

Students like Reese and Brooke shared arguments for and against the bill, gaining confidence and a deeper understanding of government. “You want to have a say,” Reese said. Hadley, who served as a senator, said the experience made the legislative process feel real and inspiring.

Social studies teacher Laurie Lofquist praised the trip’s impact: “One day like this is worth four to five weeks of classroom instruction.” The activity reinforced how experiential learning can empower students to think critically, speak up, and become active participants in democracy.



About Civic Nebraska

Civic Nebraska was founded in 2008 with the mission of creating a more modern and robust democracy for all Nebraskans. We believe every Nebraskan should feel a sense of ownership in their community and confidence in their voice. That's why we focus our work on *all* Nebraskans across every background, age, and region.

Our programs areas of Civic Health, Youth Civic Leadership, and Voting Rights equip people to participate, lead, and make a difference. Whether it's helping young people grow into active community members, protecting fair elections, or bringing neighbors together to solve problems, everything we do supports a more connected, engaged Nebraska.

As a nonprofit organization, Civic Nebraska works year-round to promote civic engagement, strengthen trust and confidence in institutions, and build community across the state.



None of this work would be possible without you. Your support helps us reach more communities, empower more voices, and strengthen democracy across Nebraska. Thank you for standing with us.



*Creating a more modern and robust
democracy for all Nebraskans.*



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