

## By The People: Dialogues In Democracy **Immigration and Nebraska**

November 2007

Funding provided through a grant from the  
Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, W.K. Kellogg  
Foundation, and Rockefeller Brothers Fund

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## **Acknowledgments**

### **Making the Omaha, Nebraska, *By The People: Dialogues in Democracy* Deliberation Possible**

The Omaha *By the People: Dialogues in Democracy* deliberation would not have been possible without the support of numerous individuals and organizations.

NET Television (<http://www.netnebraska.org/television/>) serves as the primary link with the national *By The People* effort (<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/btp/>), and it is thanks to NET Television that the University of Nebraska Public Policy Center has been involved in Nebraska's *By The People* deliberations. The Omaha deliberation was held at the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO) (<http://www.unomaha.edu/>), and UNO administrators, faculty, staff, and students were indispensable to its success.

In particular, we appreciate the leadership of Senior Producer Bill Kelly (NET Television), Paul Sather (UNO Service Learning Academy), Associate Vice-Chancellor for Academic Affairs Deborah Smith-Howell (UNO), and Nora Bacon (UNO Department of English). We also thank the many other individuals from both NET Television and UNO who assisted in a variety of roles with orchestrating this event, including the small group moderators from the UNO Difficult Dialogues initiative, and numerous student volunteers. We would also like to thank Darcy Tromanhauser from the Nebraska Appleseed Center (<http://www.neappleseed.org/>) and Jamie Marincic from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Survey, Statistics and Psychometrics Core Facility (<http://ssp.unl.edu/>) for their consulting assistance as well.

We are grateful to the *By the People* national coordinating staff with MacNeil/Lehrer Productions, the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, and Rockefeller Brothers Fund, who provided national support and funding for the deliberation.

Finally, we would like to thank the 100 residents of Omaha who took the time to complete our surveys, read the project's educational materials, and attend the deliberation itself.

**The Three Key Findings of the *By The People: Dialogues in Democracy* Deliberation (Omaha, NE, October 14, 2007)**

- Participants were generally supportive of policies designed to integrate immigrants into the community.
- Participants were more supportive of pro-immigrant integration policies than counterparts from rural Nebraska communities.
- After participating in the deliberative process, knowledge about immigration-related issues increased.

## **Background**

### ***By The People: Dialogues in Democracy 2007***

On Sunday, October 14<sup>th</sup>, 2007, 100 residents of the City of Omaha gathered at the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO) campus to engage in a *By The People: Dialogues in Democracy* deliberation. The *By The People* project is a national-local partnership intended to foster civic dialogue about important public policy issues facing the nation. MacNeil/Lehrer Productions has led the initiative on the national level since 2002. In Nebraska, a collaborative partnership between NET Television and the University of Nebraska Public Policy Center has convened *By The People* deliberations since 2004.

Besides Omaha, ten other communities across the nation participated in the 2007 *By The People: Dialogues in Democracy* initiative – Albuquerque, NM; Baton Rouge, LA; Bowling Green, OH; Cleveland, OH; Denver, CO; Houston, TX; Kansas City, MO; New Haven, CT; Rochester, NY; and Seattle, WA. Participating communities chose different topics of discussion for their deliberation, ranging from health care to transportation to the environment. The Omaha project partners chose immigration as the topic of discussion.

### **Immigration in Nebraska**

As in many states, immigration policy has become an important topic of discussion in Nebraska. Immigration scholars have recently termed Nebraska a “new gateway” state – a recent destination for immigrants driven by a need for labor in agriculture, manufacturing, and other important sectors.<sup>1</sup> Although the exact number of recent immigrants in Nebraska is unknown, according to the U.S. Census Bureau there were approximately 96,000 foreign-born residents in the state in 2005, about 5% of Nebraska’s population of 1.7 million.<sup>2</sup> The Pew Hispanic Center estimated that there were anywhere from 35,000 to 55,000 undocumented immigrants in the state in 2005.<sup>3</sup>

Recent immigrants to Nebraska - particularly from Mexico and other Latin American countries - have settled in many of the state’s rural meatpacking communities and the two urban areas of Omaha and Lincoln in the past two decades. The state also has a fast growing Asian population, and Omaha is believed to have one of the nation’s largest Sudanese communities. This new influx of immigrants to the state has considerable public policy implications for Nebraska and its communities, ranging from changes in K-12 education to economic development in rural areas.

As the U.S. Congress has been unable to enact comprehensive federal immigration reform, many states have begun introducing and enacting their own immigration-related bills. In recent years, Nebraska lawmakers have considered two bills specific to immigration policy. In 2006, Nebraska passed into law LB 239, which grants qualified undocumented immigrants in-state tuition at state colleges. In 2007, lawmakers considered LB 266, which would have

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<sup>1</sup> Immigration's New Frontiers: Experiences from the Nation's Emerging Gateway States (Greg Anrig Jr. & Tova Andrea Wang, eds.), 2007.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2005.

<sup>3</sup> Pew Hispanic Center, Fact Sheet: Estimates of the Unauthorized Migrant Population for States based on the March 2005 CPS, April 26, 2006.

allowed qualified undocumented immigrants to operate cars using an alternative to a driver's license. However, that bill failed to move out of committee and was thus not enacted.

## Deliberative Polling

The 2007 *By The People: Dialogues in Democracy* deliberations were based on the Deliberative Polling model. Deliberative Polling combines random sampling with deliberative discussions as a means to provide insight about public perceptions of policy issues. Deliberative Polls were first conducted in the United States in 1996, but have since been convened in Australia, Britain, Denmark, and various other nations.

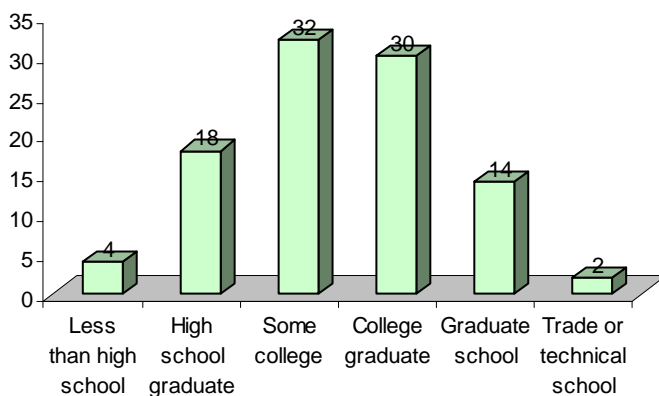


University of Nebraska at Omaha students assisted with registering participants at the event.

In the Deliberative Polling model, a survey is conducted of a random sample of individuals about the public policy issue(s) of interest. That sample is then provided with educational materials about the issues of interest, and then invited to participate in small group deliberations about the issue and engage a panel of experts in a question-and-answer period. A follow-up survey of the sample is then conducted which measures the extent to which the deliberative process altered opinions or knowledge of the topic(s) of interest. More information about Deliberative Polling can be found at the website of the Center for Deliberative Democracy at Stanford University (<http://cdd.stanford.edu/>).

## Recruitment of Participants - Who Attended the Omaha *By The People: Dialogues in Democracy* Deliberation?

Figure 1. Participants by Highest Level of Completed Schooling (N=100)



The University of Nebraska Public Policy Center (PPC) contracted with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Bureau of Sociological Research (BOSR) to recruit participants for the Omaha *By The People* Deliberation. Participants were sought from households located within the City of Omaha.

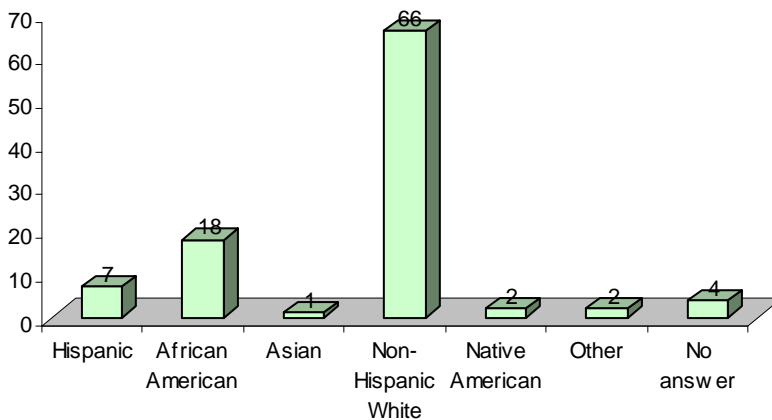
The PPC and the *By The People* national partners created a questionnaire composed of items about immigration and civic engagement

issues. This pre-event survey was administered at the point of recruitment of participants over the telephone. After completing the survey, respondents were invited to attend the actual deliberation on Sunday, October 14<sup>th</sup>, 2007. Compensation (\$75) was offered to individuals to answer survey questions before and after participating in the deliberation.

A total of 3,091 telephone numbers were procured by BOSR, including numbers generated through a random digit dialing process, and samples of phone numbers from Omaha neighborhoods associated with higher-than-average African American and Hispanic/Latino populations. This oversampling of minorities was done to increase their participation rate in the project.

Prior to calling, BOSR sent 2,120 letters to households included in the total sample to pre-notify residents that they would be receiving a phone call about the project. Telephone calling began on September 6, 2007. Of the 3,091 telephone numbers included in the total sample, BOSR made actual phone contact with 1,956 households. Of the contacted households, a total of 542 respondents completed the pre-event survey. Among these respondents, 179 individuals agreed to attend the deliberation, 89 indicated that they may attend the deliberation, and 274 declined to attend all-together.

Figure 2. Participants by Race/Ethnicity (N=100)



Following this recruitment process, from September 21<sup>st</sup> to October 13<sup>th</sup>, the PPC sent two sets of informational mailings and made a series of phone calls to the 179 individuals who agreed to attend the event and 89 who said they may attend. In this period, of the 89 individuals who said they may attend the deliberation, 10 indicated that they would attend the event.

Thus, at the end of the recruitment process, a total of 189 individuals had affirmatively indicated that they would attend the deliberation. On October 14<sup>th</sup> itself, a total of 100 individuals arrived to participate in the event. Figure 1 displays educational background of the 100 *By The People* participants. Figure 2 displays the participants' racial and ethnic backgrounds.

### What Happened at the Omaha *By The People: Dialogues in Democracy* Deliberation?



Participants deliberated about immigration issues in moderated small group discussion sessions.

Upon arrival at UNO, project staff randomly assigned the 100 participants into ten different discussion groups comprised of nine to eleven people each. The participants completed a second survey about immigration and civic engagement issues and also read and viewed some written and video educational materials about immigration issues in Nebraska. The ten discussion groups then convened in moderated break-out sessions to deliberate about immigration issues in Nebraska.

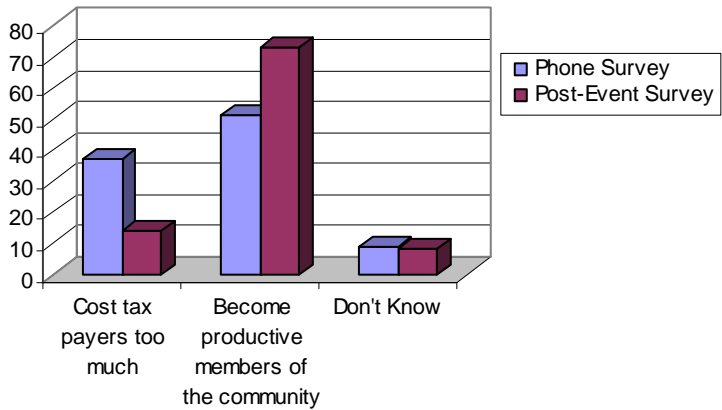
At the end of the small group deliberations, the 100 participants reconvened before a plenary panel question-and-answer session that featured a state lawmaker, an immigration attorney, and an academic expert. Following the plenary session, the participants were asked to take a final post-event survey about immigration and civic engagement issues.

## Results and Discussion

### What Was the Effect of Participating in the *By The People* Deliberation?

Four survey questions about immigration were asked on both the telephone pre-event survey and the post-event survey conducted at the end of the day on October 14<sup>th</sup>. Among the participating respondents, there was a significant change in how they responded to an attitude question asking whether they believed in the long-run that undocumented immigrants would either become productive, tax-paying citizens, or cost taxpayers too much in government services (*see* Figure 3).

Figure 3. Undocumented Immigrants: Cost Taxpayers Too Much vs. Become Productive Citizens



In the telephone phone survey ( $n=97$ ), the majority of respondents believed that undocumented immigrants would become productive citizens (53%) versus those who believed they would cost tax payers too much (38%). Following participation in the deliberation, post-event survey responses ( $n=95$ ) indicated that the percentage of participants who believed undocumented immigrants would become productive citizens increased to 77%, and those who believed undocumented immigration would cost tax payers too much decreased to 15%.



NET Television taped some of the small group discussions.

Three fact-based questions about Nebraska or Omaha immigration-related issues were also asked of respondents in both the pre-event and post-event surveys.

These included questions asking respondents about the number of foreign-born residents of Nebraska (pre-event survey  $n=98$ , post-event survey  $n=99$ ), the percentage of Omaha Public Schools' students in English Language Learning courses (pre and post-event surveys  $n=99$ ), and whether Nebraska law provided for in-state tuition to qualified undocumented immigrants (pre and post-event surveys  $n=99$ ). For all three factual questions, the rate at which respondents correctly answered the questions increased from the time of the pre-event survey to the post-event survey after the deliberation.

## How Did Perceptions of Immigration Among Participants in the *By The People* Deliberation Differ from that of Rural Nebraskans?

A series of survey questions asked of the Omaha *By The People* participants about immigration were either used previously or adapted from the 2006 Nebraska Rural Poll conducted by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Center for Applied Rural Innovation (CARI) (*see* <http://cari.unl.edu/ruralpoll/immigration.pdf%20>).

Comparing responses from the Rural Poll (based on responses from nearly 2,500 randomly selected individuals from Nebraska’s non-metropolitan counties) with the *By The People* event shows that participants from the Omaha deliberation were significantly more supportive of policies designed to encourage integration of immigrants (*see* Table 1) and immigrants from Latin America generally (*see* Table 2) than the Rural Poll respondents. For example, whereas the majority of *By The People* participants agreed or strongly agreed

**Table 1.** Opinions About Immigration Policies\*

	<i>Strongly disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neither agree nor disagree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly agree</i>
	Omaha/ Rural Poll	Omaha/ Rural Poll	Omaha/ Rural Poll	Omaha/ Rural Poll	Omaha/ Rural Poll
Citizenship should be available to undocumented immigrants under the age of 21 who have been living in the U.S. for 5 years and are in 7th grade or above.	7% <b>29%</b>	13% 27%	22% 16%	<b>41%</b> 24%	16% 4%
Businesses that employ undocumented workers should be penalized.	1% 3%	5% 8%	7% 12%	<b>47%</b> 36%	39% <b>41%</b>
Undocumented immigrants should be deported.	11% 4%	28% 8%	<b>36%</b> 17%	16% 35%	8% <b>37%</b>
An undocumented immigrant who has been working and paying taxes for five years or more should be allowed to apply for citizenship.	2% 14%	9% 15%	13% 16%	<b>61%</b> <b>46%</b>	15% 10%
The government should tighten the borders to prevent illegal immigration.	5% 3%	10% 3%	16% 8%	<b>37%</b> 33%	32% <b>54%</b>
Families of immigrant workers should be allowed to come to the U.S. regardless of other restrictions on immigration.	12% <b>39%</b>	<b>37%</b> 34%	29% 15%	20% 10%	1% 3%
A “guest-worker” program should be created to allow immigrants to work in the U.S. without becoming citizens.	6% <b>27%</b>	21% 23%	15% 17%	<b>40%</b> 26%	17% 8%

\* The 2006 Nebraska Rural Poll included this same set of questions. A comprehensive report on the 2006 Rural Poll can be found at <http://cari.unl.edu/ruralpoll/immigration.pdf%20>.

(57%) that a path to citizenship should exist for qualified undocumented immigrants, the majority of Rural Poll respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with that proposal (56%).

Unlike participants in the *By The People* event, the Rural Poll respondents did not have an opportunity to either deliberate about the topic of immigration, or read or view background materials about that topic. Additionally, the Rural Poll respondents represented rural Nebraska communities, whereas the *By The People* participants were exclusively from Omaha. Finally, the *By The People* event was over a year after the 2006 Rural Poll was administered. Any of these reasons may account for the differences in results between the 2006 Rural Poll and the *By The People* survey responses.

**Table 2.** Opinions About Latin American Immigrants\*

	<i>Strongly disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neither agree nor disagree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly agree</i>
	Omaha/ Rural Poll	Omaha/ Rural Poll	Omaha/ Rural Poll	Omaha/ Rural Poll	Omaha/ Rural Poll
Immigrants from Latin America strengthen Nebraska.	2% 17%	9% <b>33%</b>	33% <b>33%</b>	<b>43%</b> 15%	12% 1%
Wages increase for most people in Nebraska communities when undocumented immigrants (sometimes referred to as illegal immigrants or aliens) are hired.	12% 33%	<b>42%</b> <b>41%</b>	28% 21%	13% 4%	4% 1%
In general, immigration from Latin America has been good for Nebraska.	3% 25%	12% <b>31%</b>	31% 30%	<b>44%</b> 13%	10% 2%
In general, immigrants from Latin America are often discriminated against in Nebraska.	1% 7%	11% 21%	<b>42%</b> <b>34%</b>	35% 33%	11% 5%
Nebraska communities should communicate important information in Spanish as well as English.	9% <b>41%</b>	19% 28%	20% 12%	<b>39%</b> 16%	12% 4%
Immigrants from Latin America should learn to speak English within a reasonable amount of time.	0% 1%	0% 1%	5% 4%	<b>61%</b> 29%	34% <b>65%</b>
Nebraska communities do a lot to include immigrants from Latin America into the community.	0% 5%	13% 18%	39% <b>49%</b>	<b>42%</b> 24%	5% 4%

\* These questions were adapted from the 2006 Nebraska Rural Poll. The Rural Poll questions asked respondents about perceptions of immigration and immigrants specific to the Rural Nebraska context, whereas the questions asked in the Omaha *By The People* event were about Nebraska overall.

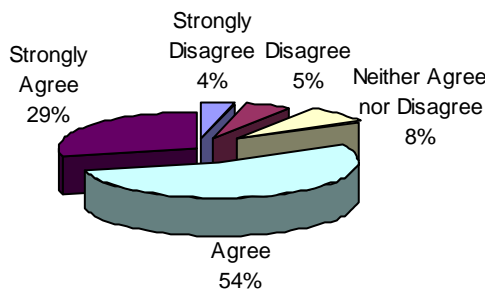
## What Did the *By The People* Deliberation Participants Think About Nebraska State Immigration Policy?

After participating in the *By The People* event, respondents indicated overall support for state policy that promotes immigrant integration.

Nebraska is one of ten states in the nation that currently allows for the provision of in-state college tuition for qualified undocumented immigrants (LB 239). Sixty-two percent of *By The People* participants agreed or strongly agreed with this policy (see Figure 4).

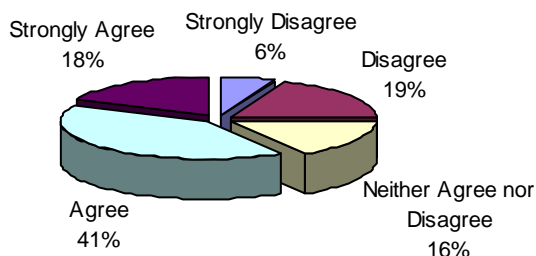
There was general support among the participants for the Unicameral to pass legislation facilitating integration of recent immigrants to Nebraska (see Figure 5).

**Figure 5. Unicameral Should Pass Legislation to Assist Illegal Immigrants Become Legal Residents? (n=99)**

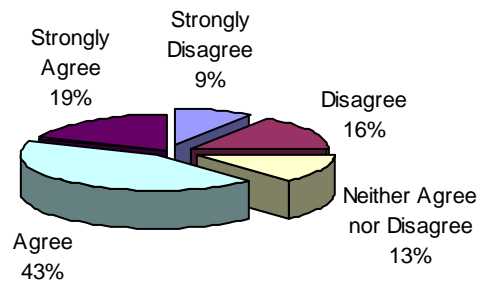


There was also general support for a similar program in the legal sector. Fifty-nine percent of *By The People* participants, at the end of the deliberation, agreed or strongly agreed that Nebraska should fund a program to train and credential interpreters for non-English speakers in the state court system (see Figure 7).

**Figure 7. State-funded Court Interpreters? (n=99)**

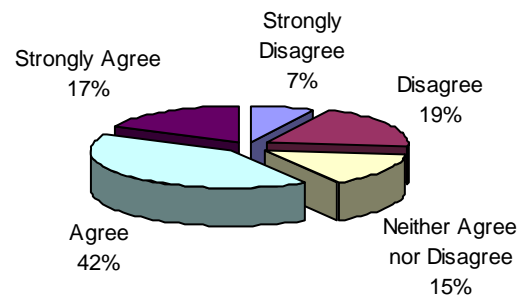


**Figure 4. In-state College Tuition for Qualified Undocumented Immigrants? (n=99)**



Additionally, the majority of *By The People* participants also showed support for state-funded interpretation programs in important social or governmental sectors. Fifty-nine percent of participants agreed or strongly agreed that Nebraska should fund a program to train and credential interpreters for non-English speakers who need healthcare (see Figure 6).

**Figure 6. State-funded Healthcare Interpreters? (n=99)**



The overall support for integration-oriented state policies may have been the result of participation in the deliberation, or a reflection of already-existing preferences favoring pro-integration policies among the participants.

## Issues for the Future

The 2007 *By The People: Dialogues in Democracy* deliberation provided an opportunity for participants to learn about immigration issues affecting Nebraska and discuss perspectives about this topic. Results from the deliberation indicate that the participants largely support pro-integration policies. Due to the small size of the sample, however, the survey results should not be considered reflective of what Omahans generally think about these issues.



Additionally, it is unknown what specific factors caused changes between pre and post-event survey responses. Differences could have been due to the influence of the written or video briefing materials, discussion among participants, interaction with the panelists, the combination of more than one of these factors, or other reasons. Further research would be necessary to provide specific insight into these issues.

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## **Appendix**

## Demographic Characteristics of *By The People* Deliberation Participants

Demographic Characteristics N=100		
	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Valid Percentage</i>
<b>What is the highest grade of school you have completed?</b>		
Less than high school	4	4
Some high school		
High school graduate	18	18
Some college	32	32
College graduate	30	30
Graduate school	14	14
Trade or technical school	2	2
<b>Political affiliation</b>		
Democrat	50	50.5
Republican	21	21.21
Independent	23	23.23
Other	5	5.05
No answer	1	
<b>Race/ethnic background</b>		
Hispanic	7	7.29
African American	18	18.75
Asian	1	1.04
Non-Hispanic white	66	68.75
Native American	2	2.08
Other	2	2.08
No answer	4	
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	52	52
Female	48	48

## Pre and Post-Event Attitude and Knowledge Questions about Immigration

Which comes closer to your view, thinking about the long-run; illegal immigrants become productive citizens and pay their fair share of taxes, OR - - illegal immigrants cost the taxpayers too much by using government services like health care and food stamps?

	Pre-event <i>n</i> =97	Post-event <i>n</i> =95	Pre-event <i>n</i> =97	Post-event <i>n</i> =95
	<i>Frequency</i>		<i>Valid Percentage</i>	
Become productive citizens	37	14	38.14	14.73
Cost taxpayers too much	51	73	52.57	76.84
Don't know	9	8	9.27	8.42

The estimated number of foreign-born residents in Nebraska is:

- Less than 50,000
- Between 50,000 and 100,000 (correct)
- Over 100,000
- Don't know

	Pre-event <i>n</i> =98	Post-event <i>n</i> =99	Pre-event <i>n</i> =98	Post-event <i>n</i> =99
	<i>Frequency</i>		<i>Valid Percentage</i>	
Incorrect	51	34	52.04	34.34
Correct	43	51	43.87	51.51
Don't know	4	14	4.08	14.14

The percentage of students currently enrolled in English-language learning programs in Omaha is:

- Less than 5%
- Between 5% and 10%
- Between 11% and 15% (correct)
- More than 15%
- Don't know

	Pre-event <i>n</i> =99	Post-event <i>n</i> =99	Pre-event <i>n</i> =99	Post-event <i>n</i> =99
	<i>Frequency</i>		<i>Valid Percentage</i>	
Incorrect	69	48	69.69	48.48
Correct	24	35	24.24	35.35
Don't know	6	16	6.06	16.16

Nebraska is one of the few states in the nation that provides in-state college tuition to some undocumented residents.

- True (correct)
- False
- Don't know

	Pre-event <i>n</i> =99	Post-event <i>n</i> =99	Pre-event <i>n</i> =99	Post-event <i>n</i> =99
	<i>Frequency</i>		<i>Valid Percentage</i>	
Incorrect	51	12	51.51	12.12
Correct	34	58	34.34	58.58
Don't know	14	29	14.14	29.29

## Post-Event Questions about Nebraska Immigration Policy

In-state college tuition should be available to children of undocumented immigrants who have lived in Nebraska for at least 5 years with a parent or guardian, graduated from a Nebraska high school, and agree to sign an affidavit stating that they will apply for naturalization as soon as they are eligible.

Post-event <i>n</i> =99		
	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Valid Percentage</i>
Strongly agree	19	19.2
Agree	42	42.4
Neither agree nor disagree	13	13.1
Disagree	16	16.2
Strongly disagree	9	9.1

Nebraska lawmakers should pass legislation that helps illegal immigrants become legal, productive residents of the state.

Post-event <i>n</i> =99		
	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Valid Percentage</i>
Strongly agree	29	29.3
Agree	53	53.5
Neither agree nor disagree	8	8.1
Disagree	5	5.1
Strongly disagree	4	4.0

The state government should fund a program to train and credential interpreters for non-English speakers who need healthcare.

Post-event <i>n</i> =99		
	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Valid Percentage</i>
Strongly agree	17	17.2
Agree	41	41.4
Neither agree nor disagree	15	15.2
Disagree	19	19.2
Strongly disagree	7	7.1

The state government should fund a program to train and credential interpreters for non-English speakers in the courts system.

Post-event <i>n</i> =99		
	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Valid Percentage</i>
Strongly agree	18	18.2
Agree	40	40.4
Neither agree nor disagree	16	16.2
Disagree	19	19.2
Strongly disagree	6	6.1



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