

THE MIDWEST: A STATE-BY-STATE ASSESSMENT AND A LOOK AT THE NUMBERS

THE PLAINS STATES



Kansas

Although the recession began on Wall Street, the neighborhood streets of Kansas have been far from immune. From 2008 to 2009, the Sunflower State suffered its greatest year-to-year employment decrease since 1946, as total nonfarm employment declined by 3.3 percent, and private sector employment dropped by almost 60,000. Despite those losses, however, the Kansas economy did not look as bleak as the national picture. By early 2010, in fact, Kansas had already shown signs of a turnaround. Although unemployment went from 4.4 percent in 2008 to 6.7 percent in 2009, it remained steady at 6.8 by March 2011—two points lower than the national average of 8.8. That recovery picked up where pre-recession trends had left off. From 2006 to 2009, Kansas’s year-to-year change in private employment compared favorably with that of other states in the Midwest and the rest of the nation.

Kansas lost jobs in the manufacturing; professional and business services; trade; transportation and utilities; and construction industries. The decline in manufacturing was more pronounced than in the other industries, though, as it shed more than 19,600 jobs in 2009. That was more than twice as large as the decline in the professional and business services industry, and three times larger than the dip in the trade, transportation and utilities, and construction industries (Kansas Economic Report, 2010).

TABLE 3: SNAPSHOT OF EDUCATIONAL DEMAND FOR TOTAL JOBS IN KANSAS (2008 AND 2018)

	2008	2018	% change
High school dropouts	142,000	155,000	9%
High school graduates	432,000	470,000	9%
Some college	367,000	402,000	10%
Associate’s	131,000	145,000	11%
Bachelor’s	311,000	345,000	11%
Graduate	131,000	147,000	12%

Kansas' major employers in 2010, provided by the Kansas Department of Labor, reflect both old-line industries and the emerging economy dominated by healthcare services and private education services. Aeronautical manufacturing companies such as the Hawker Beechcraft Corporation and the Cessna Aircraft Company continue the Midwestern tradition of manufacturing but require increased skills and education of their workers. Meanwhile, employers such as the University of Kansas, Stormvont-Vail Healthcare, and several public school districts reflect the growing dominance of these services industries. Finally, the federal government, in the form of the Postal Service, Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans' Affairs, continues to employ large numbers of Kansans.

However, the biggest companies are not the full story. Information on the fastest growing companies tells us about the direction of the state and sources of new opportunities. Inc.com ranks InfoSync Services (#325) and Vin Solutions (#447) among the 5,000 fastest growing companies in the nation. These companies are in information services and professional and business services, two fast-growing industries. These industries are growing at a similar pace across the country, accelerating changes in the demand for postsecondary workers to operate and manage these enterprises, and Kansas is no exception.

Computer and mathematical science occupations; community and social services occupations; and farming, fishing and forestry occupations are projected to grow the fastest through 2018, at rates of 22 percent, 21 percent, and 20 percent, respectively.

Between 2008 and 2018, new jobs in Kansas requiring postsecondary education and training will grow by 99,000, whereas jobs for high school graduates and dropouts will grow by 51,000. For the same time period, the state will have 482,000 openings from job creation and retirements. Of these, 301,000 will require postsecondary credentials, 136,000 will require high school diplomas, and 45,000 will require no diploma.

In the share of jobs that will require a Bachelor's degree by 2018, Kansas ranks 15th nationwide, versus 32nd in jobs for high school dropouts. By 2018, about 1 million jobs in Kansas, or 64 percent of the total, will require postsecondary education and training.

Nebraska

The overall unemployment rate in Nebraska was 4.2 percent in March 2011, which was still well below the national level of 8.8 percent (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011). Nebraska's private sector lost about 25,000 jobs in 2009, but the state's year-to-year rate of employment losses was lower than other Midwestern states and the United States as a whole.

Through 2018, the fastest-growing occupations are projected to be healthcare support, computer and mathematical sciences, and community and social services. They will grow at rates of 20 percent, 18 percent, and 18 percent, respectively.

Thousands of Nebraskans are employed by its diverse range of major employers, from Tyson Foods, Inc., a food manufacturer, to hospitals and healthcare organizations, and federal and