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Education Committee
October 15, 2014

[LB1103]

The Committee on Education met at 1:30 p.m. on Wednesday, October 15, 2014, at Northeast Community College, Lifelong Learning Center in Norfolk, Nebraska, for the purpose of conducting a public hearing on LB1103. Senators present: Kate Sullivan, Chairperson; Jim Scheer, Vice Chairperson; Al Davis; Rick Kolowski; and Les Seiler. Senators absent: Bill Avery, Ken Haar, and Tanya Cook.

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Good afternoon and welcome. Hello, everyone. Thank you, everyone in attendance, to the public hearing on LB1103 to create and develop a vision for education here in Nebraska. I'm Senator Kate Sullivan of Cedar Rapids. I'm Chair of the Education Committee and I represent District 41 which is a nine-county area in central and northeast Nebraska. I'd like you to also meet the other members of the committee. I'll start to my left with the Vice Chair. [LB1103]

SENATOR SCHEER: Jim Scheer, District 19, which is all of Madison County and just the northwest corner of Stanton County. [LB1103]

SENATOR DAVIS: Al Davis, District 43, a 13-county area from Dawes County on the west to Keya Paha County on the east and down to Logan County by North Platte. [LB1103]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Senator Rick Kolowski from southwest Omaha, the Elkhorn and Millard area and District 31. Thank you. [LB1103]

SENATOR SEILER: Les Seiler from Hastings. My territory is Adams County and all of Hall County except the city of Grand Island. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: We also have three other members of the committee who were unable to be here today: Senator Bill Avery of Lincoln; Senator Ken Haar of Malcolm;

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and Senator Tanya Cook of Omaha. Also we have two additional sitting senators in the audience: Senator Dave Bloomfield from Hoskins, thank you; and Senator Paul Schumacher of Columbus. And just so you know, I was going to try to travel incognito today, (laughter) but then my staff said I had to have my name up here, so. I'd also like you to meet the staff that helps keep this public hearing on track. To my immediate right is Tammy Barry who is one of the legal counsels for the committee; to my far left is LaMont Rainey, another legal counsel for the committee; and also Mandy Mizerski, the committee clerk who makes sure that the hearing is appropriately recorded. Just a few of the logistics. If you intend to testify today, you should pick up a green sheet--they were on the table right inside the door--and fill it out in its entirety. If you do not wish to testify but would like your name entered into the official record as being present at the hearing, there is a form on the table for you to sign. And this will be part of the official record. Regarding the green sheet, if you would please fill it out in its entirety. Please print and make sure it is completely filled out. And when you come up to testify, give that to Mandy so that she can record that. If you do not choose to testify, you may submit comments in writing and they will also be read into the official record, but please let us know that that is your intent. If you have handouts along with your testimony, make sure you have 12 copies so that we can make sure that all the members of the committee have copies. When you come up to testify, please speak clearly into the microphone; tell us your name, and please spell both your first and last name to ensure that we get the adequate record. And in this day and age, I have to say this, please turn off all your cell phones, pagers, or anything else that makes a sound so that we don't distract from the testimony. We are going to limit the time of the testimony today to five minutes. And we don't have the light system with us today, but we do have a timer up here. So I will try to indicate to you when you have one minute left and then like that, (laughter) I would like you to end. And we're tickled to have the room filled today. I don't know exactly how many will be testifying, but we do have the first row up here. So when you're done testifying, if you would leave that slot, and then you can fill up the first row as the testifiers get organized to testify. That will make the process go a little smoother. I think those are all the logistics. Before we actually start the testimony, though, I

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thought maybe I should make a few comments about this whole process that we are currently embarking in and maybe it's actually even important to say what this process is not, because I purposely did not want to have the conversation revolve around funding and money. In my six years as a senator and all six having served on the Education Committee, so many of our conversations when we talk about education are about money. This is not. This is what we are considering to be the priorities for education in Nebraska. The Education Committee has been meeting intensely over the last several months. What we have done thus far, as you know, we have identified a vision, a mission, several goals. And when we got to that point then we did an on-line survey. We had well over 5,000 people respond and give us their opinions on what we had done thus far. After that, we developed some objectives to accompany each of those four goals. We had one session where we met, literally roundtable discussions with some of the people in different educational groups, and other groups that have a concern and a vested interest in education in this state. And here we are today at this point and that is to hear from all of you folks. We had the public hearing in Omaha last week, which was very well attended. We'll be off to Broken Bow tomorrow. So the second thing that I think this process is not and that is to just develop a report and put it on the shelf and realize that no one is ever going to look at it again. We don't know at this point what the outcome of this process will be in terms of legislation, but I do know that what I hope is that even at the end of this process in December, we identify a way that we can keep the conversation going and growing, because I'm quite sure that when we identify these educational priorities, it won't be an easy fix. It won't be a conversation that ends up being in one neat package--this is what we need to do. It will beg for further conversation. So I'm sure that this process will not end in December of this year, nor with the next legislative session. But it will be very important for the future of education in Nebraska. So that's sort of the basis and, with that, I look forward to hearing from all of you today and this is something that we are hearing. It's not a conversation. It's not a give-and-take between the senators and you. We welcome your testimony, but also be prepared that we may have some questions from you in the process as well. So with that, I'd like the first testifier to come forward. Welcome.

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[LB1103]

DARLENE MERZ: (Exhibit 1) Thank you. Thank you for giving me this opportunity. I'm here to support the testimony... [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Okay. Excuse me. Could you give us your name and spell it? [LB1103]

DARLENE MERZ: Yes. Darlene Merz. And I will introduce myself further. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Oh, I'm sorry. Okay. [LB1103]

DARLENE MERZ: I'm here to support the testimony of Dr. Eileen Vautravers who represented the Nebraska Dyslexia Association at the Omaha public hearing. I am a member of NDA. I am also here to encourage early recognition and appropriate instruction of students with dyslexia, and to give my personal journey testimonial with dyslexia as a special education teacher and a tutor of individuals with dyslexia. My introduction: My journey with dyslexia. I am Darlene Merz, farm wife and lifetime resident of rural Nebraska. I resided in the Falls City area for 62 years and currently reside in the Stromsburg, Nebraska, area with my husband, Dale Moore. My husband, Duane Merz, and I farmed and raised our six children in the Falls City area. At age 51, as a farm wife and mother and assistant to my husband on the farm, I went back to college and attended seven years part-time to obtain a Bachelor of Science degree in Elementary/Middle School Education/Special Education and graduated in 2001. I taught in the Auburn area for four years, but following my husband's death, I took a teaching position in the Stromsburg Public Schools, where I taught for seven years. In spite of the fact that 20 percent of our population suffers with dyslexia, and research shows all of the students with an IQ of 70 or above can all become good readers, public schools are not using researched programs that fix the reading difficulties. As a college graduate in 2001, I did not receive any training that addressed dyslexia. Nebraska colleges and

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universities do not require training in methods to address dyslexia in spite of the fact that FMRI's show the pathways being built in the dyslexic brain, as it is happening when we use programs tailored for dyslexia. I would like to refer to the orange sheet that you have. On the back of that, shows the dyslexia brain. It can be fixed. As a special education teacher, over 90 percent of my career was spent working with struggling readers, synonymously termed "dyslexia" by Dr. Sally Shaywitz, neuroscientist and codirector of the Yale Center for the Study of Learning and Attention and the author of Overcoming Dyslexia. During my teaching career in the public schools, programs such as Corrective Reading, Reading Recovery, and Accelerated Reader were used as interventions beyond the classroom and into the SPED room to address struggling readers' issues and have been scientifically proven not to work for the struggling reader, children with dyslexia. The progress I saw, if there was any, for my SPED students was slow. I monitored their progress weekly with an assessment being used all over the Nebraska schools called DIBELS. DIBELS testing measures accuracy, fluency--the speed of the reader, and comprehension. Following a semester of interventions, I would see an improvement of three to five points for the work that had been done on the DIBELS scores. In comparison, when I started using a direct, systematic, explicit, systematic multisensory program, the improvement was striking. I saw scores on the DIBELS assessments improve 30 to 50 points in one semester. I handed out awards for the striking improvements in my students' readings in one semester. Our ESU special ed director at 7...ESU 7 shared that our SPED reading scores were the highest she had seen. I shared that information with the Board of Education when I terminated my service at school. How did I happen to start with a program that was tailored for dyslexia? I attended the Nebraska State Reading Conference where I saw Susan Barton, the creator of a multisensory, explicit, systematic phonics program, Barton Reading and Spelling, give a presentation on dyslexia and how to teach students with an Orton-Gillingham influenced program. I was so impressed with what I saw that a year later I attended a weeklong class to learn, use and teach with the researched methods and rules for overcoming and conquering this monster. My school incorporated into the reading program for seven years and is still using it. I terminated my position as a

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special education teacher to work independently using this program and to seek change in Nebraska through legislation. My tutoring, in school and privately, with over 60 students, has given me the opportunity to experience the wonder of improvement for children and their parents through the struggles associated with dyslexia. It's a miracle in action. And there is a sheet called Miracle in Action. I'm including several handouts that I use in in-services and free presentations with and without movies. I share the good news that the everyday pain, nightmares, and struggles that parents and children are living through can be overcome. The movies and the presentations share stories like--and on your "Changing Lives" sheets that information is given--Charles Schwab, dyslexic, who revolutionized the financial services world; Carl Schramm, CEO of Kauffman Foundation, who shared that 35 percent of our entrepreneurs are dyslexic. The poem I am including is painting a picture of the joyful experience that "I'm living" and that's on the yellow sheet, the golden yellow sheet. The NDA hopes to collaborate with NDE and you to address all of the children in Nebraska, every Nebraskan, to be educated for success. Sincerely dedicated to helping struggling readers, Darlene Merz. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you, Darlene. Any questions for her? Thank you for your testimony. Welcome. [LB1103]

LIANE CONNELLY: (Exhibit 2) Thank you. Good afternoon. I am Dr. Liane Connelly, L-i-a-n-e C-o-n-n-e-l-l-y. I have been a registered nurse for 33 years, of which the past 23 years have been spent as a nursing faculty member and administrator in higher education. I currently serve as the assistant dean of the Northern Division of the University of Nebraska Medical Center College of Nursing in Norfolk, Nebraska. In my current role, I oversee the delivery of UNMC's and the College of Nursing's mission in this region, as well as working collaboratively with other UNMC colleagues across the state for the purposes of planning and implementing UNMC's mission. I am here today to support LB1103. As a Nebraska native, I had the good fortune to attend a high school in Holdrege, Nebraska that prepared me well to enter into UNMC's nursing program in

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the late '70s and '80s. In high school, I completed courses in physics, biology, chemistry, trigonometry, advanced algebra, and a number of other science and math courses that enabled me to transition easily into the expectations required in rigorous programs of study such as nursing. As I recall, I was not required to take the college entry math course because of my high school preparation, educational experience, and was able to move directly into the higher level math courses that were offered at UNL. Now, in my current role, I have benefited from the good planning and collaboration that has occurred in the early 2000s, which is the creation of the Northern Division, which was made possible through the work and collaboration from Northeast Community College, UNMC, then-Senator Mike Flood, and a host of engaged citizens. In particular, I enjoy an outstanding collaboration between Northeast, UNMC for the purpose of planning and implementing academic courses and programs of study for individuals who desire to be registered nurses. Our students in the Northern Division have access to the prerequisite courses needed for our program locally through their collaboration with Northeast and can complete all of these courses while staying home in the northeast Nebraska region. In addition, we have collaborative relationships with a number of other institutions in the state and have the RHOP program with Wayne State College, a program that provides qualified students the opportunity to complete prerequisite courses at Wayne State with guaranteed admission to our undergraduate nursing program. Many students choose to stay here in the area after graduation and have found jobs in Norfolk, as well as more rural areas of northeast Nebraska. We have a need and an opportunity in Nebraska to build on these outstanding partnerships among K-12, community colleges, and universities through the development of an educational strategic plan which can pave the way to addressing the work force needs in Nebraska. Students who enter the undergraduate program in nursing--a profession which is anticipated to be in demand for many years to come--must have a solid foundation in the math and sciences as well as the soft sciences and humanities in order to meet the expectations of rigorous study. This requires the careful planning at all levels of education in Nebraska. The ability to strategically plan the educational needs of our citizens enables us to determine strengths in our educational programs and our

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systems based on knowledge of work force needs. This includes strategic planning for K-12 through community colleges and universities in Nebraska. We know that strategic planning provides a road map for the future. As you know, when we plan, we determine what's important and what is not as critical. Once we have the opportunity to plan, we can communicate our strategies to others. And strategic planning does also enable businesses to plan on us when they consider whether or not to locate their businesses in Nebraska. For example, if we strategically focus on the math and sciences, healthcare, manufacturing, agriculture business we'll know our work force provides an asset location for our businesses. It also creates expectations as citizens and business owners and we, as educators, know what we must provide at all levels, creating opportunities for growth of our youth and enabling them to compete and collaborate globally. Finally, staying power: Students who find their area of study in the state are likely to stay in the state to find employment. This is especially important in rural communities. In my personal experience, that's what brought me back to Nebraska, after leaving and being gone for 18 years, was the educational opportunities and employment opportunities. One final note I'd like to say, related to our partnership here in northeast Nebraska with Northeast Community College and UNMC, is we've been able to reduce duplication of resources by bringing the nursing programs in the one building. And again, I think that that is an asset when we consider strategic planning for K-12, community colleges, and universities. Thank you. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you, Dr. Connelly. How pervasive is the potential nursing shortage? Is it...are there pockets in the state or is it across the state or what is the situation? [LB1103]

LIANE CONNELLY: Rural areas are especially struggling. And nursing as a profession is expected to be shortages well past our generation and on into the future. And that's, quite frankly, an international shortage as well as a state and national one. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Are the concerns and issues over privacy, has that been kind of

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a hindrance in terms of job shadowing for young people or is that...can you still do that in elementary levels with...? [LB1103]

LIANE CONNELLY: We work very closely with the AHECs in the state... [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Okay. [LB1103]

LIANE CONNELLY: ...to provide job shadowing and I know that they're very, very involved themselves in providing shadowing services for students who are seeking to learn more about nursing and other healthcare fields. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Okay. Thank you. Any other questions? Senator Davis. [LB1103]

SENATOR DAVIS: You talked about the use of facilities for your nursing program, the community college and university, but tell me why we would need to have two programs? Why do we not just have one program here? [LB1103]

LIANE CONNELLY: We're serving different populations at certain times. We seek to serve the educational needs of individuals where they are at their station in life. When we work collaboratively with Northeast Community College, we really look at the needs of the student learner and then we help them to matriculate in which program is best suited for their life needs. We also know from a professional standpoint that we want to advance our education in nursing so that we are optimally prepared to serve and care for individuals who have diverse and ever-changing healthcare needs. So we need to position our nurses so that they are educated at the highest level possible to deliver the highest quality of care. And that yet we can provide that pathway, that link from different levels of education as they continue to further their education and are in the work force in rural parts of Nebraska. [LB1103]

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SENATOR DAVIS: I guess I'm still kind of confused. So like an RN program versus an LPN program, is that what we're talking about? [LB1103]

LIANE CONNELLY: Uh-huh. The role of an RN and an LPN are different. They work very closely together, but they have different roles and responsibilities and we need them all at the table. And I hope that answers your question. [LB1103]

SENATOR DAVIS: Thank you. [LB1103]

LIANE CONNELLY: Thank you. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Senator Kolowski. [LB1103]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you, ma'am. Doctor, thank you for your testimony. Appreciate your being here today. And I appreciated Senator Davis' question also. That helps from that perspective. I think we should also be thankful for the administration of the university and the Board of Regents for their vision of expanding the opportunities of nursing across the state. I know that's been very productive and has great dividends for our state as they move on. So, thank you for your work in that capacity. [LB1103]

LIANE CONNELLY: Certainly. Thank you. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you for your testimony. Before we hear from the next testifier, I would like to recognize Dr. Michael Chipps who is president of Northeast Community College and thank him for hosting us at this facility. Thank you. [LB1103]

MICHAEL CHIPPS: Glad to do so. Thank you for being here. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: You bet. All right. Welcome. [LB1103]

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MOLLY ASCHOFF: (Exhibit 3) Thank you. Good afternoon. I'm Molly Aschoff, M-o-l-l-y A-s-c-h-o-f-f. I am the distance learning coordinator for Educational Service Unit 8 in Neligh. I am representing K-12 education in Nebraska and I'm here to ask for support to expand a statewide systemic learning environment that provides equitable and evolving educational opportunities for all Nebraska students and teachers. This learning model is referred to as BlendEd. Your Education Committee Strategic Plan Goal 1 states that we need to provide quality educational opportunities that engage and prepare Nebraskans for success in learning. I know that a blended learning environment provides this engagement piece by offering a new, different, and/or additional way to learn and absorb content. It is not a replacement for the teacher, but it does offer students opportunity to use technology which in most cases is their preferred format for gaining knowledge. BlendED learning personalizes the learning experiences for students by allowing them to take some control of their learning, increase their collaboration and creativity skills, and allows them to show mastery of content. This model better prepares all students to be college, career, and job ready. Does this work? According to a report from the U.S. Department of Education, in recent experimental and quasi-experimental studies contrasting blends of on-line and face-to-face instruction with the conventional just face-to-face classes, blended instruction has been more effective, thus, providing a rationale for the effort required to design and implement blended approaches. On the one-page sheet I handed out, I made a reference to an article where a veteran teacher shadowed two different students on two different days, and what she found was very sobering for her. Throughout a day, a high school student sits passively and listens through 90 percent of their class time. This is not engagement. What does it look like? In Bloomfield, Nebraska, a young man is taking a CAD class from Lincoln Public School. He meets face to face with the instructor through videoconferencing and his learning materials are on-line. In Stuart, students are videoconferencing using Skype or phone conference calls to connect with an expert, or someone outside of their school, to discuss themes in novels that they chose to read. In Neligh, students from other schools meet with the Neligh teacher once a week over videoconferencing and the rest of the week they work on-line through a learning management system to complete their work

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in a personal finance and a statistics class. Students in Fullerton and High Plains-Clarks read the same novel and blogged between the classes, gaining the interest of the author who joined in their conversations on the blog, forming a collaborative relationship. Second grade students at Clearwater are joining in with author John Erickson, the author of Hank the Cowdog books, a very popular children's adventure series, for a virtual field trip just coming up here on October 31. These are just a few examples which most are using videoconferencing or distance learning equipment that have been made possible mostly through your support of LB1208 and the lottery incentives. With continued support for this equipment and other technology, we can increase and grow the BlendEd learning opportunities for all students pre-K through 12th grade. I want to conclude with the fact that BlendEd learning is the answer to student engagement and this can be the answer to improving student achievement. Together we can offer all children in pre-K through 12th grade equitable access to high-quality educational experiences. Thank you. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you, Molly. You mentioned that BlendEd and the use of technology does not replace the teacher. But what beyond learning how to operate the hardware, what sort of professional development and retraining, so to speak, is needed for a teacher in this new environment? [LB1103]

MOLLY ASCHOFF: There is a change in pedagogy and I know that one of my co-presenters are going to talk about that. But teachers have to step back and be more of a facilitator than the giver of the knowledge. They need to let the students take that opportunity to seek out and find their ways to learn on their own or...and they direct them. It's not so much a lecture type. It's more of an active hands-on, problem-based learning. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Okay, thank you. Any other questions? Senator Davis. [LB1103]

SENATOR DAVIS: So, just to play devil's advocate a little bit... [LB1103]

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MOLLY ASCHOFF: Uh-huh. [LB1103]

SENATOR DAVIS: ...what is it that you're trying to do? Do you think we need more funding for this? [LB1103]

MOLLY ASCHOFF: I think we need an awareness also for it because BlendEd learning is differentiating, it's giving equitable access for all students to be able to have that quality of an education. And I think that will help so we don't lose students because they sit 90 percent of the day. [LB1103]

SENATOR DAVIS: How do you...how do you propose to encourage districts to take this on in light of a couple of things, in light of reluctance, maybe, on the part of staff to take on these new duties or for the school to embrace the technology? [LB1103]

MOLLY ASCHOFF: Right. It's a Nebraska initiative and so I think that finding those master teachers and showing how it works, showing teachers that it's doable. It's not a complete change. A lot of teachers are already doing a lot of these components. They just maybe need some help and some guidance and definitely some professional development to move them that way, whether it's move them with the technology, you know, and teaching them how to use that, or showing them it's okay to let up a little control of the classroom and let those students go. And, you know, we all learn at different paces. And so letting some students go farther, our high-ability learners, stretch them, at the same time, you know, helping those from the bottom, you know, coming up to be successful also. [LB1103]

SENATOR DAVIS: And what are the primary hindrances with trying to broaden this and make it more available? [LB1103]

MOLLY ASCHOFF: I think just the change in pedagogy. Maybe it's the change in our

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postsecondary education for teachers. Also that would play a part in it. And I think helping...it's good teaching and I think promoting good teaching and not being stagnant. And we want our test scores to improve, you know, and it's not all about that but I think engagement helps with that, keeping these kids engaged, keeping them in school, finishing school. Am I answering your question? [LB1103]

SENATOR DAVIS: Yes. Thank you. [LB1103]

MOLLY ASCHOFF: Okay. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Senator Kolowski. [LB1103]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you, ma'am. Molly, you talked about engagement in great detail, which I support tremendously, but would you talk about rigor, additional levels of courses that might be offered rather than just how they relate to one another? [LB1103]

MOLLY ASCHOFF: Right. I think that's very important. I think that we need to maybe build some master courses so that teachers know what is high levels of education. And I think that we have...we have good education. But there's a lot of students that could use a more rigorous education and showing teachers how to find that, whether that student is taking a college level course within that high school or they're maybe...maybe they know the content of what's needed for, let's say, I'm saying high school level, but they're seeking out maybe some job shadowing or working with a professional to see where their interest could go in that type of thing. But I think that we do have to look at our curriculum and make it very rigorous, so that if a student is choosing his own path, it's going to be quality yet. [LB1103]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Right. I'm always intrigued by what you're talking about as far as engagement and some of the data you had on research of lack of engagement on

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the part of students. The teacher training institution certainly have a great deal that needs to be done as far as helping teachers to see a different way of teaching in the classroom. Would you talk about that because I...I believe the more students are interacting with one another with the good teacher in a classroom managing that sets of discussion...these sets of discussion that might go on, will hopefully hold the lesson to a higher level of intensity and thinking skills. And if we don't do that, I can replace you with a computer. [LB1103]

MOLLY ASCHOFF: Right. I agree and I think collaboration is a huge part of this, whether you're collaborating with your peers, your colleagues, or professional. And I think that blended learning goes beyond K-12. I think that, you know, we know that a lot of college students take on-line courses or hybrid courses, but I think that we could do a lot in our teacher preparation, helping our teachers prepare for this model of educating our students. [LB1103]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you for your testimony. [LB1103]

MOLLY ASCHOFF: Thank you. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: As the next testifier is coming up, I also would like to recognize...it's always a pleasure to see students getting involved and observing the process and we have a group of students from Gary Timm's Northeast Community College political science course sitting in the back. So thank you all, students, for being here. You want to raise your hand so we know where you are? (Laughter) Thank you very much. I guess we could tell, you're the youngest ones in the group. (Laughter) Welcome. [LB1103]

MICHAELE CARLSON: Good afternoon. My name is Michaele Carlson, M-i-c-h-a-e-l-e

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C-a-r-l-s-o-n. I am the director of curriculum and assessment for West Point Public Schools in West Point, Nebraska. I also serve as a committee member of the Nebraska BlendEd Initiative. I'm here today in support and to address this common vision for education specifically related to Goal 2, establish high expectations for all educators, parents, students and educational institutions. I would like to take this opportunity to share with you the direction that West Point Public Schools has taken and how it has already had an impact on teacher professional development and student learning. We have changed the teacher professional development technique to model a blended learning approach. Our teachers receive all knowledge and content before the face-to-face meeting dates. Our teachers are then...our teachers then fulfill their responsibilities of the actions tied to the knowledge and content by using technology resources to working groups, collaborate, and research. When our face-to-face professional development day arrives, we can answer any lingering questions, facilitate higher order thinking, and foster a deeper understanding. At West Point, we refer to this model as Flipped Professional Development or Flipped PD. In the end, our teachers gain a stronger understanding than in a traditional sit-and-get environment. In the same way, we are handling professional development. We currently have several staff members that have engaged the BlendEd learning mind-set and have placed their classrooms in a flipped learning environment. This gives students more control over their learning while the teacher facilitates content over an on-line component. At West Point, we use the programs Moodle, Schoology, and/or Google Classroom to accomplish this goal. The programs listed above provide both teacher and the students with a virtual classroom that can be accessed anywhere, includes a central on-line location for course outlines, instructional documents, and research links, as well as an on-line test administration mechanism which serves as a continuous practice for improvement, state assessments like NeSA. Classes using this model are reporting the following successes. Number one: By having the concept covered outside of the regular 48-minute class period, teachers can spend more time practicing and implementing that concept which gives students a better chance at mastery. Number two: Teachers are able to spend more time preparing for state and national assessments because there is

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more time in the class period to practice, discuss, and implement strategies that may need more attention for success. They're also able to take assessments on-line which prepare them for NeSA as well as other local state and national assessments. Number three: Students are beginning to understand and implement higher order thinking skills and are prepared for postsecondary education. Number four: Parents have the ability to learn the content along with their children because this is covered outside of the normal class period. This enables parents to assist their children in the learning and education process. And number five: Student engagement is at a higher level and differentiation instruction is not only the responsibility of the teacher but the students have more ownership in their learning, which in turn makes them a part of the process. In our experience, achievement gaps are lower and students are becoming more responsible for their own education. In conclusion, continued support and implementation of this common vision for education will allow school systems to enhance learning in the twenty-first century and prepare our students for the future. Thank you for your time and attention. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you, Ms. Carlson. You indicated that in this whole process a student can actually then keep learning outside of the traditional classroom. And does that mean that you provide and make sure that they have Internet access outside the school system? [LB1103]

MICHAELE CARLSON: When we did a survey with our students last year, we had 95 percent of our students that had Internet access outside of the school. Those that do not, we provide an opportunity for them to come in and get that content learned on our premises with our teachers, with our media center. We provide any opportunity. With the use of an application like Schoology, a lot of that stuff can be done on smartphones, and we did find that our students all had access to some sort of a smartphone or data plan that they do use. So, so far that has not been an issue. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Okay. Thank you. Any other questions? Senator Kolowski.

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[LB1103]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you, ma'am. As far as extended learning opportunities outside of the regular classroom day, do you have groups or any organizations in your city that you're directly going to with students after school, vacation times, whatever it might be. Any connections there? [LB1103]

MICHAELE CARLSON: At this point what we utilize is our before and after school times. Our elementary school does have an after-school program. The elementary principal and I are actually revamping that so that it does happen more. We have tutors available before and after school on the high school side along with during study hall period so that they do have an opportunity to continue to learn that concept. [LB1103]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Those tutors are teachers in the school? Are you extending some time with them or you bring tutors in at the end of the day? [LB1103]

MICHAELE CARLSON: We actually have some tutors that come in and then we also have students that are tutoring other students. [LB1103]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Okay. I'm just trying to get the match of the curriculum during the day with the extended learning opportunity time after school or whenever, and if that's strong, you're very tight. Thank you very much. [LB1103]

MICHAELE CARLSON: Right. Yeah, and it is something that, you know, is constantly being revamped. They're not teaching new content in those tutoring sessions but just helping to enhance if that student is struggling. [LB1103]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you for your testimony. Welcome. [LB1103]

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MARY BETH KABES: (Exhibit 4) Thank you. Good afternoon. I'm Mary Beth Kabes, M-a-r-y B-e-t-h K-a-b-e-s. I'm representing K-12 education in Nebraska through educational service unit agencies across the state. I'm the media and distance learning coordinator for ESU 7 in Columbus. Nebraska ESU Coordinating Council and Nebraska Department of Education work collaboratively to provide services to school districts in our state. The two organizations have identified three initiatives to concentrate on. These are, as I'm sure you're well aware, Teacher/Principal Evaluation, Statewide Longitudinal Data System and BlendEd. I serve as one of the cochairs of BlendEd. All three projects, though separate, are quite integrated in concept and implementation. You will hear from Dr. Blomstedt on the role of Nebraska Department of Education on the three initiatives. As shared with you at the previous hearing, the Commissioner was the idea person behind the BlendEd Initiative. And as cochairs, we are tasked with taking this initiative forward. To restate, BlendEd in Nebraska means a classroom environment that includes face-to-face or videoconferencing and on-line components while giving students an element of control over time, place, path, and pace. These four elements provide key opportunities for students to have ownership in their learning and to personalize their learning. You heard from cochair Linda Dickeson last week from Lincoln Public Schools speak of the single sign-on project within BlendEd. Again, that is the ability to log into a system that will give the user access to needed resources and tools for their on-line educational experience. This is a key component for ease of use and transparency in accessing these on-line tools and resources. Tomorrow, our third cochair, Craig Hicks from ESU 13 in Scottsbluff, will share testimony on additional elements relating to equal and equitable access. Today, I will be speaking to professional development within the BlendEd Initiative. In order to effectively implement an initiative such as BlendEd, it will be necessary to provide the professional development, specifically: opportunities for teachers, instructors, and professors to learn about classroom environment; learn about pedagogy change to facilitate learning versus being the keeper of the knowledge; and thirdly, to learn about the integration of on-line resources and tools into the curriculum. When considering the classroom

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environment, your team identified Goal 3, create positive, safe, and successful learning environments. Within that goal, objective 3 states: "support developmentally appropriate continuing education for teachers, instructors, and professors designed to enhance student learning." This objective, in my understanding, relates to the professional development I am referring to. Imagine, if you will, a classroom that you attended as a child. Were there individual desks? Were those desks in rows all facing the same direction? In your image, where do you see the teacher? Is that teacher in front of the rows of the desks facing a wall that perhaps holds a board, whether it be a chalkboard or a white board? And is that any different than many of our classrooms that you see today? I venture to guess that that is not an engaging approach to learning for today's students. Is that allowing for that enhanced learning? Personally, I think not. Now imagine a classroom of groups of students working together by collaborating on a math project. Other students could be working personally with their teacher, demonstrating mastery of that math content. This model can allow for students to move more quickly through content or allow for other students to take more time needed for their full understanding. Developing a classroom environment that is centered on student learning is a piece of that professional development need and one that schools and districts must consider. INACOL, which is the International Association for K-12 Online Learning, recently published a document called Blended Learning Teacher Competency Framework. A look of that framework is what I distributed to you. This document describes 12 teacher competencies and four domains of a blended teacher. From that document I quote, "Blending is a strategy for helping teachers achieve what they strive to do every day--deeply understand and enable each student they work with to reach the very highest levels of educational mastery." Through a process of using this data with longitudinal data systems and improving the improvement...the opportunities of the Teacher/Principal Evaluation, I think that we could also change pedagogy. Finally, that differentiation within the classroom of on-line tools, that technology integration is the third tool that I think should be addressed in professional development. I believe that with the vision identified for your Education Committee and the vision of the three statewide initiatives, professional development will need to be a strong component of

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successfully meeting your four goals as well as achieving the three initiatives. Thank you. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you, Mary Beth. How prevalent is the blended concept being taught to new teachers that are still in training in postsecondary education? [LB1103]

MARY BETH KABES: I believe at this time it is not prevalent. I do have a relationship with Dr. Rebecca Pasco at UNO and she is a...the dean or the leader of the school library master's program. And they just recently went through a review and that question was asked of their school librarians or their teacher candidates in their university. And Dr. Pasco shared that, no, they do not have any classes, per se, that are teaching or that are giving those experience for preservice teachers to think about BlendEd. So we are working on a course to do just that and will begin to implement that in the summer. Granted, that is just University of Nebraska at Omaha. I do not know of our other two universities or our college institutions, but I think that we are working with our higher ed institutions to also think about and consider these blended techniques, strategies to be sharing with our classroom teachers that are coming out of the universities and state colleges. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you. Any other questions? Thank you for your testimony. [LB1103]

MARY BETH KABES: Thank you for your time. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Welcome. [LB1103]

LEANN WIDHALM: (Exhibit 5) Thank you, Senator Sullivan and members of the Education Committee, for this opportunity today to discuss our state's educational priorities and to provide NSEA's input on the visioning process. For the record, I am

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Leann Widhalm, L-e-a-n-n W-i-d-h-a-l-m, and I am representing the 28,000 members of the Nebraska State Education Association. I am also the president of the Norfolk City Education Association and a middle level special education teacher. Please note that my testimony today only reflects the positions of the NSEA and not my local school district. NSEA's vision of education in Nebraska is straightforward: Provide a great public education for every student. In order to achieve this goal, we are focused on improving the quality of teaching, increasing student achievement, and making schools better, safer places to learn. An important part of this work is to ensure that every student, regardless of socioeconomic status, race, gender, or other factors, is taught by a motivated, well-trained, highly qualified teacher. This past spring, NSEA conducted six focus groups where we talked to 72 Nebraska teachers. All were between the ages of 22 and 32. Overwhelmingly, the top concerns shared by these educators were burgeoning class sizes, the amount of standardized testing required, and a lack of access to mental health services for our students. I will use the allotted time at this hearing to speak about the mental health services for our students. One young teacher we spoke with this past spring had lost two 8th grade students to suicide in the past 12 months. This is absolutely heartbreaking for the family, teachers, students, the entire school. Teachers see the need for their students every day, up close and personal, and all too often they are unable to access the services needed to assist their students in need. Teachers report that they see a growing number of students who need mental health services, yet our public schools are not equipped to provide services for all of these students with mental health issues. We do not have enough guidance counselors, school psychologists, social workers, and teachers who are trained to work with students on issues such as suicide; sexual harassment and abuse; bullying; harassment of gender, race, religion, or national origin; drug abuse; and many other mental health issues facing our students today. Tackling the issue of mental health services for our students will require us to work with Health and Human Services, medical professionals, psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, juvenile justice, and educator preparation institutions. The support system created positive, safe, and successful learning environments, as espoused in the Education Committee's Goal 3,

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will take a partnership. As society asks more and more of our public schools, Nebraska's Legislature needs to provide mental health support systems to all students to have a positive, safe, and successful learning environment to learn and achieve at high levels. We hope this visioning process will be instrumental in improving the institution of education in our state, and that as a result of this committee's work, new initiatives will be implemented to encourage support and gains for student achievement within our classrooms. I appreciate your time and your work in this endeavor. Thank you. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you, Leann. Appreciate your testimony. You indicated that it's...even though mental health was the focus of your focus group, that it's a multidimensional thing. So it can't be addressed by just one professional. Did your discussions include who is the go-to person, so to speak, in a school that can then, maybe, access the services needed in a particular situation? [LB1103]

LEANN WIDHALM: I think the old African proverb, you know, it takes a village. It can't be just one person. You know, we've got to have lots of different entities in our schools to go to help in issues, our counselors, our psychiatrists, our psychologists. And even my school in Norfolk here, you know we have a justice officer to help us with different issues with students that have mental health issues. Our behavioral disorder teacher helps out too. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you. Any other...? Senator Scheer. [LB1103]

SENATOR SCHEER: Thanks for coming this afternoon. Can...it did not use to be as prevalent a problem as far as mental health. I mean, did not hear that earlier two or three years ago as it has been really quite predominant in a lot of the hearings that we've been to. What do you attribute that to? [LB1103]

LEANN WIDHALM: A lot of times even with our special education diagnosis is that, you

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know, with autism, you know, it was probably there in the past but now with new testing that we have and assistance that it's more prevalent out there that its got a label. And I think, too, that--I'm aging myself--but the Leave It To Beaver world that we all lived in where, you know, Mom in her apron, you know, brought the kids to school, had breakfast and everything and served their kids and was home when the kids came home. Now we have parents that are out there with two or three, four jobs trying to make a living. The two-parent household is not there. There's a lot of things that students have to deal with. Thinking when, you know, when we were young and teenagers, the issues that we thought were big aren't even close to the things that the students nowadays have to deal with. You know, we have students that are dealing with pregnancies in school that, you know, we never had that kind of stuff when I was in school that I remembered. You know, there's just so many different pressures and things that students have to go through that they didn't in the past. [LB1103]

SENATOR SCHEER: Thank you. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you for your testimony. Welcome. [LB1103]

CONNIE KNOCHE: (Exhibit 6) Thank you. Senator Sullivan, members of the Education Committee, thank you for taking your time to provide us with the opportunity to give input to the committee. My name is Connie Knoche and I'm the finance director for Lincoln Public Schools. I'm here today as one of several business officials from across the state that have gathered in Kearney for the last three years to review the state aid formula. We often hear from the Legislature that the education community doesn't get along and that it's not able to work together to solve issues that may exist because of our diverse needs. And I wanted to explain to you the process that we have when we meet in Kearney so that you could have a have a better understanding of how we are working together. When we meet in Kearney, we have representatives from GNSA, NRCSA, and STANCE, from our largest school districts all the way to our smallest school districts that don't receive any equalization aid. The first two years we had a

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facilitator work with the group to discuss factors in the formula, including what is working and what may need improvement. This year we had a facilitator work with us and we talked about the Education Committee's vision, mission, and goals. After my testimony, Sandy Rosenboom is going to talk about what we came up with when we had that meeting as well. We meet for a day and a half, and at the end of the second day we come up with recommendations to which we all agree. Representatives from this group present those recommendations to the Chair of the Education Committee. So what I handed out to you was some recommendations that we had submitted. We represent different sizes of school districts with different needs, but we do agree on what is important to financing school districts in Nebraska. Some districts are not equalized and struggle with spending limitations, other districts are growing with increasing needs. Some districts face levy limitations that prevent them from addressing the needs of their students, while others have issues with aging facilities. When we meet in Kearney, we're placed in separate...on different tables with six to eight people on those tables and we're all from different size school districts, different situations, so that we can talk about the issues that are going on in the different school districts. We collectively advocate for and promote equitable funding for Nebraska public school students. For this reason, we support the Education Committee's efforts to define the vision, goals, and objectives needed to move public education forward in Nebraska. The committee's goal to provide quality education opportunities that engage and prepare Nebraskans for success in learning is a priority. The focus on access to quality early childhood programs along with college and career preparation opportunities are what we all want for the students that we serve. Additionally, recognizing that students have different needs that may require different educational opportunities is something that we strive to provide. While we're optimistic about the committee's visioning process and we look forward to working with the committee as you implement policy to move education in Nebraska forward, we understand that moving from a vision to action is not always easy. We ask the committee to keep in mind the tremendous diversity of students and districts. Just as each student has different needs, each of the districts in the state has different needs as well. As we look at a vision for the future, it is important to remember that the current

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funding formula is based on needs minus local resources is equalization aid. This philosophy should continue to be the focus of the Legislature's commitment to strengthening our state by ensuring a quality educational experience for our children. And thank you for this opportunity and I'd be happy to answer any questions. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you, Connie. Any questions? Thank you for your testimony. Oh, excuse me. [LB1103]

SENATOR SCHEER: Connie, is this yours or is that going to be... [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: That second sheet. [LB1103]

SENATOR SCHEER: ...the recommendations? Is that from you or...? [LB1103]

CONNIE KNOCHE: That's from the group that met in Kearney. [LB1103]

SENATOR SCHEER: Okay, if I have a question, would I ask you or...? [LB1103]

CONNIE KNOCHE: You could ask, I mean, anybody in the...that was in that group, but you could ask me if you have a question. [LB1103]

SENATOR SCHEER: Well, I guess it surprised me a little bit. Your sixth recommendation is to incent collaboratory agreements between school districts that improve programs and reduce costs. And when you say incent, I'm assuming that there should be funding attached to that and I'm failing to see if something reduced costs and provides better education, why would it take additional money for you to do that? [LB1103]

CONNIE KNOCHE: Well, to incent the schools to work together so that there can be economies of scale by them collaborating, then it would reduce the cost of some

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programs if you could, you know, all... [LB1103]

SENATOR SCHEER: But if that's the end result, if the three people, the four school districts know going in that that's going to reduce costs, wouldn't they want to do that? [LB1103]

CONNIE KNOCHE: You know, it depends on the district and the situation they're in because we do have different sizes of different districts with different needs. [LB1103]

SENATOR SCHEER: Okay. Thank you. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Senator Kolowski. [LB1103]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you, ma'am. Connie, thank you for your listing of items. And I think sometimes Senator Scheer's question might smell like consolidation. That's why some people might back off but that's just my personal opinion. Your comments here on early childhood, would you tell us why you suggest .6 to .8 rather than a full point, 1.0? [LB1103]

CONNIE KNOCHE: We were being conservative just to move that up. Some programs only go for four hours a day or, you know, depending on the length of the day for the students, so that's why we put that weighting in there. One would be a good weighting as well. [LB1103]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Early childhood materials and space is equally as important as a welding class for high school kids, so why would we want less for those kids, would be my question. So, thank you. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Senator Davis. [LB1103]

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SENATOR DAVIS: Thank you, Senator Sullivan. A few questions, Connie, and along the same line that Rick's question, but mine is going to be a little bit different. Our constitution tells us our responsibility is 5 through 21, basically. Early childhood is an aspect that I understand and agree with, but the question kind of comes down to this, and you know how the formula works. In many respects, the body determines how much revenue is available and then the formula is tweaked. So by doing this, aren't we going to end up having some more schools fall out of the formula because there's really only this much money and we're going to have to adjust this around? It looks to me like what we're going to do by moving that up is increase the needs significantly in our larger districts, therefore, they're going to need more assistance. And we already have a hundred and...you know, probably 130 that are unequalized now. [LB1103]

CONNIE KNOCHE: Well, it could also increase the needs for the districts that are not equalized as well. And it's already part of the state aid formula. You're just increasing the weighting from .6 to .8 or 1 for the... [LB1103]

SENATOR DAVIS: Have you done any kind of a preliminary analysis of that? [LB1103]

CONNIE KNOCHE: What it would cost to move the weighting? [LB1103]

SENATOR DAVIS: Uh-huh. [LB1103]

CONNIE KNOCHE: No, I haven't, but that would be a good thing to look at. [LB1103]

SENATOR DAVIS: So that's the first question. So let's talk about the special building fund. Can districts...are they locked in now or can they go to a vote of the people and increase that levy? [LB1103]

CONNIE KNOCHE: Districts can go to a vote of the people for a bond issue to help with the facilities. [LB1103]

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SENATOR DAVIS: So, why should we change what's not...what's working today?
[LB1103]

CONNIE KNOCHE: Some districts use all of their levy capacity in the general fund, the \$1.05, so they don't have the ability to spend money out of the building fund, so they're limited that way unless they do go to a bond issue. And some have tried bond issues and have not been successful because of the public's perception that they don't need the new facility. [LB1103]

SENATOR DAVIS: So, if that's the case, how is the school board not responding to what the public in that community wants? [LB1103]

CONNIE KNOCHE: I'm not sure what...by not levying in the building fund, is that what you mean, or...? [LB1103]

SENATOR DAVIS: You said communities can go to the bond issue...for a bond and it maybe get voted down. I said, that would seem to me to be what the will of those people in that district is, so I'm not quite clear why we need to set this outside and let that levy be appraised without a vote of the people. [LB1103]

CONNIE KNOCHE: Well, there was a...and I'm not probably one to speak on this, but Chadron talked about how the roof blew off of their building and they've gone to the voters before to ask for a bond issue and it hasn't been passed. But they struggle with, you know, insulation in the building and different issues. And you know, sometimes there's just, you know, taxpayers don't want to pay more for those type of things.
[LB1103]

SENATOR DAVIS: Okay. Thank you. [LB1103]

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SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you for your testimony. Welcome. [LB1103]

SANDRA ROSENBOOM: (Exhibit 7) Welcome. Thank you. I'm continuing where Connie left off with the other part of our report on our review session this fall...or this...yeah, this fall. My name is Sandra Rosenboom, S-a-n-d-r-a R-o-s-e-n-b-o-o-m. I'm the business manager for the Crete Public Schools. Connie has explained the process that we went through over the last three years with a broad group of schools. I'd like to add to her testimony by guiding you through the summary of our discussions from this spring. That is the stapled set of sheets, I think about six pages. We were working at that point with a visioning process draft that was available at the time, so the comments don't match exactly with your current version, but I'm sure you'll see the connections. We talked about vision, mission, the goals, and then strategies under each. As we discussed the vision you can see on that sheet the comments and the questions that were generated and distilled from the groups' discussion. I will let you read those on your own, because I think they're self-explanatory. The mission on the previous draft was different and the comments we submitted however lead very nicely into the mission that you have now stated. On the second page, the third and the last bullet points in the middle of the page, are very close to what you have identified as the current mission and I'm sure that mission will generate very strong support. Now under the goals, under Goal 1, you will find that we supported strongly early childhood education and additional services for students at greater risk of failure. These causes may be poverty, first language other than English, migrancy, having parents without a high school education, to name a few. Examples of the additional services or the strategies that may address this goal may be after-school or summer school programs, possibly adult education for the parents, as well as the things happening in school. Students also need equitable access to programs for transitioning to careers or college. Dual credit, advanced placement courses, and world languages were all mentioned as some of these high school strategies. Goal 2 that we studied encompassed both your Goals 2 and 3, and the goal at that time talked mostly about high expectations for educators. I applaud the addition of parents, students, and educational institutions to the group with educators as

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everyone needs to work together to set these high expectations. Our work spoke mainly about staff and identifies the need for highly trained staff in adequate numbers. Local control was emphasized by districts as the needs and revenue are different for individual school districts. Possible strategies include addressing teach staffing shortage areas, collaboration among districts to share best practices, and the need for certain specific programs to be funded outside of levy and expenditure lids. There is support for the work that the ESUs do in providing professional development in a collaborative way. This has been very positive in bringing together groups of teachers to get professional development. Many of your objectives in Goal 2 also refer to reducing the achievement gap. Expanded learning opportunities will be needed to make this happen. Again, this may be before and after school, summer school, early childhood education, internships, and career education, just to name some of the major expanded learning opportunities. Your Goal 3 was not in our earlier draft so we addressed those issues though in a couple of places, emphasizing the need for a safe and secure environment. This environment means both the infrastructure modifications to make safe and secure buildings and the programs to prevent bullying and create a positive, healthy learning opportunities. In discussions of the last goal, which was number 3 in our document and number 4 on the latest draft, the important point was made that the state, both through legislation and the work of NDE, needs to create opportunities and not mandates. Many partnerships need to be expanded and enhanced. Barriers need to be removed and incentives provided to make partnerships more possible. On our last two pages, you will see strategies that may encourage collaborations and examples of programs that are already being tried. Thank you for your opportunity to share details of the work of many representatives from districts across the state. This is a very brief summary and I invite your questions and invite you to read the document in its entirety. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you, Sandy. You mentioned in your second to the last paragraph that we need to create opportunities and not mandates and that barriers need to be removed. Can you cite any particular...? [LB1103]

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SANDRA ROSENBOOM: They are probably going to be different in each district, but a couple of examples I came up with were sometime in different programs there are income restrictions. And so when you try to blend the funding, say from Head Start and Early Childhood, you may have run into trouble because only kids of a certain income level can be served in one area. If you're trying to throw migrant education in there, there will be protest that they should be migrant only. So those kind of barriers would be one thing to remove. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: And, of course, some of those are federal and we don't have a lot of control. [LB1103]

SANDRA ROSENBOOM: Right, exactly. It's not, you know, some of those are things we just have to live with. We've managed to figure out ways to do that. Maybe it's teacher certification to find qualified people to teach in trade areas. You know, we would love to offer electrical...extensive electrical course and it's something our local industries have requested. But we can't find a certified teacher who is also a certified electrician who can teach in this. So then it's either hiring two teachers, one certified and one who is an electrician, which doubles our cost, those kinds of things. A little smoother transition to teaching program: We couldn't find a Spanish teacher this year and ended up with someone applied who was a university professor but he did not have a teaching certificate, so now he's got an expensive two-year process in order to get a teaching certificate. You know, some of those kinds of things, I think if all of us sat down and thought of it, we could probably give you a pretty lengthy list. Other than, you know, removing barriers is sometimes incentives. Sometimes schools may want to say, this is something we could identify to close the achievement gap, but not every district in the state may try the same thing. So maybe we have incentives to try things and then bring the results back, or to let people identify which of after school, before school, summer school, what kind of things would work to effect the closing of the achievement gap in their case. [LB1103]

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SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you. Any other questions? Senator Scheer. [LB1103]

SENATOR SCHEER: Your comment about certification for instruction, I know the State Department a couple years ago looked at changing somewhat the certification process to allow somewhat that. Is that what you're looking for is an easier access, or those in more trade applicant type of industry career path where the instructor may not have the direct certification, that they be able to teach in that area? [LB1103]

SANDRA ROSENBOOM: Right. [LB1103]

SENATOR SCHEER: Is that what you're talking about? [LB1103]

SANDRA ROSENBOOM: Yeah, at this point, as I understand it, and this is not my field of expertise, we would still have to...if the teacher did not have a certificate, we would still have to have a certified teacher be the one that actually, quote, assigned the grades. And... [LB1103]

SENATOR SCHEER: I understand, so that's on...is it your thought then to have some type of an alternative certification that would allow that other instructor that may not have had the certification via the state to fill in, in those specific areas? [LB1103]

SANDRA ROSENBOOM: Uh-huh. Right. And then also, of course, there's going to be the issue of cost because I'm sure some electricians make, unfortunately, more than some teachers do. [LB1103]

SENATOR SCHEER: Thank you. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Any other questions? Thank you, Sandy. [LB1103]

SANDRA ROSENBOOM: Thank you. [LB1103]

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SENATOR SULLIVAN: Welcome. [LB1103]

MARK ZIMMERER: Thank you. Good afternoon, Madam Chair and members of the Education Committee. My name is Mark Zimmerer, M-a-r-k Z-i-m-m-e-r-e-r. I'm the president and CEO of the Norfolk Area Chamber of Commerce and a member of the Nebraska Early Childhood Roundtable. I know you have recently heard from some of my colleagues on the business roundtable from Union Pacific, Gallup, and Bellevue Chamber of Commerce at your hearings in Omaha, so I'll keep this pretty brief. The Early Childhood Business Roundtable is a growing group of statewide business leaders that believe early childhood needs to be the top priority for our state. And while there are many reasons this should be the case, on our main interest include...some of our main interests include economic development, work force development, and a return on investment. We've been traveling the state for about three years now, meeting at local Chambers of Commerce with local business leaders and local media in places such as Omaha, Lincoln, Kearney, York, North Platte, Scottsbluff, and here in Norfolk at a meeting hosted by the Norfolk Chamber of Commerce to deliver this message. So we are pleased that you are undertaking a strategic planning process prescribed in LB1103 to develop a statewide vision for education in Nebraska. In doing so, we would encourage you to continue making early childhood a prominent aspect of your vision. The business community understands the concepts of accountability of public dollars and return on investment. So they understand the importance of investing early when presented with the research and facts. And with today's economic research indicating that we can achieve up to a 10 percent return on investment, when we reach kids most in need of a quality early childhood environments, we find it easy to achieve consensus on this issue. We've had the great fortune of having some national experts visit Nebraska including Nobel laureate economist, James Heckman, who was a featured speaker at the recent Nebraska Chamber of Commerce and Industry's annual meeting. Clearly the most efficient, accountable, and highest return on investment occurs within the first five years. If we do this, we will produce the future work force we need while

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reducing the demands on our tax dollars such as grade repetition, special education costs, work force training, welfare, and incarceration. In closing, LB1103 is about establishing a vision. Let me say we're excited about the efforts of the Legislature, state government, the business community, the new Buffet Early Childhood Institute at the University of Nebraska, Educare expansions throughout the state, and various other entities and providers who are doing a great work on this issue. Our vision would be that the state of Nebraska becomes a national model for the delivery of early childhood education to at-risk children, birth to five. We believe that if put together all the pieces to this puzzle and coordinate our efforts effectively, this vision can be accomplished. This is an exciting prospect and an exciting vision that the business community supports. Thank you. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you, Mr. Zimmerer. We did hear from your colleagues in Omaha last week as well. A couple of questions: In your discussions in your roundtable talks, have you talked about education already comprises almost half of our state budget? Have you talked about how are we going to fund that? [LB1103]

MARK ZIMMERER: Most definitely. And I think there is a private sector piece to this. I think, you know, the Buffett is just one example of where private dollars may be able to be used to significantly increase the availability to early childhood educational programming. I also think, in discussion, we talked about areas where we could maybe shift some costs. Incarceration: I know you guys will be addressing prison reform here coming up. Being a past law enforcement officer and a Health and Human Services worker for over 25 years, I was in those homes. I saw the end result of a poor connectivity to the student to the school and we all know the end result. And so I think that return on investment is where we need to focus. I know it's always, where are we going to pull from, but if we can get the tide turned finally, I think we can maybe realize some of the cost-effectiveness talked about in that 10 percent. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: You also mentioned in your comments, I think, directing the

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resources especially to at-risk children. Is that some of the discussions that you've had in your roundtables that maybe it needs to be more focused? [LB1103]

MARK ZIMMERER: Yes, most definitely. And I think my colleague, who just spoke, talked about some of those concern areas, you know, the ones that are, you know, not able to speak our language, who are transient, who are...poverty would be one. I believe that drug addiction plays a critical role in the ability of parents to get their students to be able to learn once they get to school. So I think there's that piece. And when we talk about Educare, I think we talk about bringing those students in earlier and having more one-on-one time. That way it makes the teacher's job a lot easier to engage those students once they're at the kindergarten level. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you. Any other questions? Senator Kolowski. [LB1103]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you, ma'am. Mark, thank you for your comments and I couldn't agree with you more on early childhood and the support that we need to have in that situation. But I also encourage us to remember we can't wait 13 to 15 years by just doing something with early childhood when the rest of the pipeline, as those kids come through to us, there's many, many things we can do at other locations all through K-12 to prepare ourselves for kids to have greater success in that college career awareness and preparation. So I commend the Chamber...the Omaha Chamber for backing the bond issue right now. For Omaha it's extremely important. But I hope we also think in terms of the whole picture, not just early childhood. We can't wait 13 to 15 years to say, well, when they come down the pipeline, they're going to be more ready than kids today. We've got to do other things at other levels and we know how to do that. We can do it, we should do it. Thank you. [LB1103]

MARK ZIMMERER: Thank you, Senator. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you for your testimony. Oh, sorry, Senator Davis.

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[LB1103]

SENATOR DAVIS: I'm good. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Are you sure? [LB1103]

SENATOR DAVIS: I was just going to make a comment. Thank you, Senator Sullivan.
[LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Go ahead, go ahead. [LB1103]

SENATOR DAVIS: You know, and I think we all recognized how--this was obviously a very important goal for us--the financing is the big hang-up. And I think the business community needs to really be engaged fully in that because tax dollars are thin, and I think they're going to be thinner as we move forward. [LB1103]

MARK KIMMERER: I believe it, and I think industry is starting to realize some of the gaps that we're seeing in not being able to fill positions. We have currently over 900 open positions in Norfolk area alone and with the 3, 3.3, 3.6 percent unemployment rate. What we're hearing from our industry is that they're lacking the soft skills necessary to be hired, so basically they're saying, unemployable. Well, we need to do better than just saying unemployable. We need to be working and we know that we have to step up to the plate as well. [LB1103]

SENATOR DAVIS: So can you tell us a little bit about the 900 jobs that are here? What kind of skill? I mean, I guess, part of them are...require skills, part of them probably minimum wage jobs. Would that be right? [LB1103]

MARK KIMMERER: Above minimum wage, most definitely. We're talking industrial jobs from anywhere from \$10 to \$15 an hour. And the gaps we're talking about is just the

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ability to show up for work; the ability to stay off their cellular phone long enough to run a...you know, fill a shift; you know, the ability not to test positive for drug screens. (Laugh) Those are all things that play into being able to hire an individual to do the job. [LB1103]

SENATOR DAVIS: And how do you think government can change that? [LB1103]

MARK KIMMERER: Well, I think the engagement, as I talked about earlier, if they're connected. We know if they're not connected when they get to school, then they lose interest. They're not performing well within the school. That adds more discouragement to the student which oftentimes leads them to, if not completing their educational requirements, is getting into drugs, alcohol, and other things. [LB1103]

SENATOR DAVIS: And I think you probably have a good point there. It does lead into Senator Kolowski's comment about 15-year period of the wait and the outlay of resources to get there. [LB1103]

MARK KIMMERER: Right. I'm excited about what we're doing in Norfolk. And you'll heard from Dr. Thompson coming up about the things that we're looking to, to enhance the pipeline overall, not just at early childhood, but it has to start there. [LB1103]

SENATOR DAVIS: Thank you. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you for your testimony. [LB1103]

MARK KIMMERER: Thank you. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Welcome. [LB1103]

JULIE MOORE: (Exhibit 8) Welcome. Good afternoon, Senator Sullivan and members

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of the Education Committee. My name is Julie Moore, J-u-l-i-e M-o-o-r-e, and I'm the executive director for the Nebraska Educational Technology Association speaking on behalf of NETA's 2,300 members from all over this great state. NETA applauds the work of this committee as it sets out to conduct a strategic planning process to create the statewide vision for education in Nebraska which shall include aspirational goals, visionary objectives, meaningful priorities, and practical strategies. NETA also agrees with the intent of the Legislature to focus educational resources from all sources in our state toward a common statewide vision for the future through collaborative efforts to achieve the best possible results for all Nebraskans, our communities, and our state. I am here before you this afternoon to share information about how educational technology may assist in achieving the goals, objectives, priorities, and strategies set out in LB1103. The purpose of the Nebraska Educational Technology Association is to provide leadership and promote the application of technology to the educational process. Its span of interest includes all aspects of education. Every April the NETA organization holds an educational technology conference in Omaha that attracts over 2,300 teachers, technology coordinators, and administrators. We have learned that Nebraska's conference is the largest in the country when measured by the percentage of a state's educators in attendance, and it continues to grow each year. NETA also offers year-round professional development and networking activities such as the Learning Web, Technology Coordinators LISTSERV, mobile technology seminars, and the state E-rate support group. We believe that Nebraska teachers attend the annual conference because they are eager to find new technology tools and systems to help them do their jobs better; that is, to educate their students more effectively and efficiently. They come to the NETA conference to learn about such tools and techniques as videoconferencing; software applications; management of BYOT and BYOD, Bring Your Own Technology, Bring Your Own Device; and assistive technologies for homebound and special needs students. They also come to learn from their colleagues and compare notes on management of major systems like on-line assessment, student information, learning management, content management, and identity management. The NETA conference offers over a hundred different session options for attendees,

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which can be quite overwhelming. I believe that one of the reasons that there are so many different types of technologies to choose from is because Nebraska is a local control state, and there is little guidance or support for schools to make universal or centralized technology decisions and adoptions. While NETA enjoys being a professional development event showcasing hundreds of different technologies, we don't believe that school districts independently adopting hundreds of different technologies is an efficient way to spend public funds. The strategic planning of LB1103 could help with the selection and support of major systems that could be implemented statewide and achieve economies of scale leading to cost savings and greater efficiency. Implementing a handful of key technologies statewide could refocus educators' energies away from deciding which technologies to purchase and toward better implementation of specific technologies that every school can use. NETA recognizes that technology is now involved in almost every aspect of education from researching information from the Internet to using data analytics to determine the best interventions and activities to help students learn. Technology, when methodically researched and properly implemented, has the power to raise graduation rates, increase student achievement, and improve K-12 assessment and college entrance scores. The NETA leadership has carefully examined the components of the BlendEd Initiative, sponsored by the Educational Service Unit Coordinating Council. We believe that this initiative contains the essential elements to transform education for every teacher and learner, if properly funded and reinforced statewide. As an organization offering professional development to Nebraska teachers, we encourage you to carefully consider these technology options to benefit all learners, from early childhood through adulthood. Your leadership, policies, and incentives are greatly needed and deeply appreciated. As members of the Education Committee, I know how challenging it can be to keep pace with everything that's happening in technology. As a gesture from our organization, I would like to invite you all as guests to our technology conference held at the CenturyLink Center in Omaha, April 23-24, 2015. I am sharing, or I have shared with the committee, a copy of our program so you're able to look at the sessions that have been offered last year and what our educators are learning at the conference. I would

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be happy to attempt to answer any questions at this time. Thank you for allowing me to speak. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you for your testimony, Julie. You mentioned that your association has reviewed the BlendEd Initiative. Are you involved in conversations with them at this point? [LB1103]

JULIE MOORE: No, we are just an infinite nonprofit and have reviewed their goals, and they're set forth exactly as they claimed earlier today, but we have not had any conversations directly with them. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Do you...in some of the programs...program content that you have at your conferences, do you think it incorporates some of the philosophy of BlendEd? [LB1103]

JULIE MOORE: Yes. We have sessions actually that are specifically dedicated to BlendEd. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Okay. Thank you. Any other questions? Thank you. Oh, yes, Senator Kolowski. [LB1103]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: I couldn't pass this up, Julie. Good to see you again. As a 2000 graduate of Millard West, it's awfully good to see you in this position (laughter) having been your high school principal, so I appreciate that very much. And I will peruse this entire document. Thank you very much for sharing it with us. [LB1103]

SENATOR SEILER: In spite of yourself. [LB1103]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: I know it. (Laughter) [LB1103]

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SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you for your testimony. Welcome. [LB1103]

SARAH ANN KOTCHIAN: (Exhibit 9) Thank you. Good afternoon, Madam Chair and members of the Education Committee. My name is Sarah Ann Kotchian, S-a-r-a-h A-n-n K-o-t-c-h-i-a-n, and I appear today on behalf of the Holland Children's Movement, a nonpartisan, not-for-profit organization committed to improving public policies essential to providing opportunities for success for children and families living in poverty. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak before you today. I'd like to bring information to this statewide conversation about the importance of early childhood data collection and sharing, the value of understanding the developmental profile of kindergarten students, and meaningful ways to strengthen connections and target limited resources to the youngest and the most at risk. As you know, efforts have been made in past years and in this past session to address the state's interest and identified need to develop and improve early childhood data collection and sharing. This work is critical to understanding and linking early childhood programs and services between NDE and DHHS. Because of new and increased investments in several early childhood programs, we have even greater opportunities to gather and collect information across multiple programs and agencies. LB992 introduced by Senator Howard this last year was an attempt to follow through on recommendations from the Early Childhood Interagency Coordinating Council to create an early childhood data governing entity. Although the legislation did not advance, Senator Howard has introduced LR588, referred to this committee, to continue to study the issues related to improving early childhood data and we would like to support the work of this interim study however we can. Related to data collection comes the value of understanding the developmental profile of kindergarten students. Last year, we were fortunate enough to have worked with NDE and the Munroe-Meyer Institute to convene a group of interested stakeholders including school district staff, policymakers, advocates, and university faculty to determine interest in exploring the possibilities of a common statewide kindergarten assessment. Based on the information gathered, we recommended two strategies. The first recommendation is a pilot of a voluntary expansion of kindergarten assessment

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content in a select number of kindergarten classrooms to determine efficacy for program planning. The second is to identify a cadre of school districts willing to partner to review their existing data to determine the profile of children entering kindergarten with different early childhood experiences. I've shared copies of the work products from last year that go into more detail, including a white paper on kindergarten assessment systems and a review of current kindergarten assessments. We would like to thank this committee for its forward thinking and legislative intent to expand high-quality preschool to all children. In doing so, we hope you will continue to bear in mind that children of low-income families who could benefit most from high-quality preschool need a steady and quality place to learn for the full day. Working parents, of which Nebraska has one of the highest percentages nationwide, do not always have the ability nor means to leave work to transport their children from a half-day preschool setting to a different location for the remainder of the workday. In Nebraska, of all families living below the poverty line with children under the age of five, 54 percent are single mothers. Preschool can be incredibly stabilizing for families living in poverty with young children, but it must be full day to be a meaningful and viable option. Finally, we hope this committee will also closely consider the impact of expanding preschool on licensed childcare professionals who will find themselves shifting their business models to specialize in much more costly infant and toddler care. We will need to remain mindful of the supports these providers will need to provide high-quality care for infants and toddlers, a well-known crucial period of brain development, while knowing these same programs will most likely be providing before and after school care as well as summer programming to school-age children. We want to raise awareness of this now so we can work to stay ahead of the changes and remain nimble enough to respond with the same intent to provide high-quality care and education for infants and toddlers that we aim for with older students. If it is the intent of the state Legislature to eliminate or reduce income-based social, cognitive, and achievement gaps among young children at risk, we will need the data to inform both the policy and funding mechanisms to best serve students right from the start. Just like we should not wait until 3rd grade to have a sense of where students are in their educational achievement, we should not wait to tie

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together the multiple programs and supports we are investing in for children and families before 3rd grade. We look forward to supporting these goals however we can. Thank you again for your tireless work on behalf of education in Nebraska. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you, Sarah. With regard to the data that you think needs to be collected, is it not only an assessment of a child's ability, but is it an assessment of the...what kinds of services are being provided at any time, at any place for the early childhood experience? I wasn't quite sure what... [LB1103]

SARAH ANN KOTCHIAN: So the data system that we talk about would be integrating the data across agencies. So it would be creating data-sharing agreements, for example, between NDE and DHHS. Even within DHHS, we need to improve data collection on what are we...what and how are we serving the early childhood years, integrating education data with child welfare, for example. In the child welfare system, the majority of children...this is...the majority of children are there for neglect. The majority of children are birth to five. And the majority of them return home. In some recent information I just got from Through the Eyes of the Child and the Supreme Court, which kind of struck me as we, you know, those...if we're talking about most at-risk students in this population, what are they getting before they have access to the public school system? We're not integrating and answering those questions so that we can utilize our limited resources to the best of our availability. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Okay. Thank you. Any other questions? Thank you for your testimony. [LB1103]

SARAH ANN KOTCHIAN: Thank you very much. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Welcome. [LB1103]

NOLAN BEYER: (Exhibit 10) Good afternoon. My name is Nolan Beyer, N-o-l-a-n

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B-e-y-e-r, and I'm with Millard Public Schools in Omaha. I appreciate the opportunity to visit with you today about a vision for education in Nebraska. We believe the following proposal is a way to enhance educational opportunities for all students throughout the state addressing rigor, accountability, relevance in all of our schools statewide. We are proposing a second tier, tier II, to the education model in the state of Nebraska focusing on building career and college-ready students. This plan would come outside of TEEOSA and would be available to all school districts receiving equalization aid or not. This proposal brings K-12 education, higher education, business communities, and philanthropic groups together to pursue best educational programming, whether it be career, college readiness, or both. The proposal would work as follows. In the area of career readiness, career readiness programs are oftentimes referred to as career academies. Working in conjunction with businesses and chambers of commerce, schools districts identify career readiness programs that help support the local or state economy by helping students earn a license, credential, or near licensure status while taking courses that meet high school graduation requirements. The district would be provided state support to help offset the cost of those students earning the credential. The financial incentive to change programs drives districts to implement career programs that ultimately help students penetrate the achievement ceiling. Too often, students who are not college bound check out of high school because the relevancy of schooling is not in line with preparing for a career. "Incentifying" a district to add programs that prepare students for specific careers while also recognizing that those programs must have a credentialing component raises the quality of education for students who are choosing a career path. School districts would only receive incentive for students who successfully complete the program, meaning they would earn a credential, a license, or a near licensure status. Career programs cost more than basic education programs because of teacher licensure requirements, internship transportation, equipment, and curricular materials. In the area of college readiness, students who choose to attend college upon graduation of their high school experience also have the opportunity to participate in an educational program that increases the rigor and helps them penetrate the achievement ceiling. A school district may select to

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grow dual enrollment or AP programs or those that would be equivalent. Public schools would articulate courses with a community college, college, or a university. These are commonly referred to as dual enrollment courses. Students participate in these courses and earn a transferable grade, a grade C or better, would be counted in the tier II model. Public schools who choose to offer AP courses or the equivalent would also have a chance to meet the incentive standards. Students would select an AP course and complete the AP exam at the conclusion of the course. Students who earn a grade of three or higher on the AP exam, a "transcriptable" credit, would be counted in the tier II model. Dual enrollment programs and AP programs cost more than basic educational programs. Teachers are required to hold advanced degrees with a minimum of 18 hours in the subject area. This advanced education equals a higher salary. College textbooks are more expensive and change over much more frequently. Professional development such as the AP Institutes and specialized equipment all add additional costs. Key to this vision is accountability in the form of an external control. Career programs require a licensing or credentialing agency such as the community college. College preparedness programs require articulated courses, transferable grades, and advanced teacher degrees. Programs such as AP require performance on the exam as measured by the College Board. I want to thank the committee for your time today. Happy to answer any questions. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you, Nolan. You mention in your remarks that this would be sort of a partnership with business and chamber of commerce. What role, if any, do you think that community has in helping support, particularly with respect to funding of these programs? [LB1103]

NOLAN BEYER: Yeah, absolutely. I see them certainly playing a role in identifying, for example, in the development of the career academies, what academies would need to be developed to enhance and support the local and statewide economy. We certainly do not feel as if the state should fund these programs entirely. We think it should be a partnership with the state, the local school districts, and the community, especially in

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start-up cost. In our area, some others talked about jobs that might be available, but we know that we have over 50 unfilled welding jobs in the city of Omaha. And our community or our chamber is asking school districts to, please, train welders. We could use them. The same in coding. And we're working with them to potentially help on start-up costs. So we think everybody has some responsibility in developing these programs. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you. Senator Davis. [LB1103]

SENATOR DAVIS: I think this is a very interesting idea, as you know. But do you have any idea to implement it what the actual dollar amount is going to be? I mean, have you done any kind of preliminary study across the state? [LB1103]

NOLAN BEYER: Yeah. That's the thousand dollar question. And it's more than a thousand dollars, I promise you. (Laughter) [LB1103]

SENATOR DAVIS: If it's a thousand dollars, we can fund it. [LB1103]

NOLAN BEYER: Then you can do it. Sign up right now. It's difficult because we do not have all the data throughout the state to go look, last year and the year before, how many licensures were given, how many credentials, how many AP courses, and those types of things. We initially looked at this and tried to back into it with the idea that \$25 million could be towards this program. And then it would...we would back into it with the idea of just what percent of aid that would be. Those that we've talked to, and we've talked to many statewide--large schools, small schools, rural, and urban areas--I think our biggest interest would be to get the incentive in place and prove that it is effective and is a true measure and then try to grow it initially in the funding as time would go on. [LB1103]

SENATOR DAVIS: Thank you. And then I want to ask you a clarification question.

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When you gave your testimony, you said 50 welding jobs in the city of Omaha. I'm thinking you must have meant 500 or... [LB1103]

NOLAN BEYER: They told us 50. [LB1103]

SENATOR DAVIS: Only 50? [LB1103]

NOLAN BEYER: Um-hum. [LB1103]

SENATOR DAVIS: In Kearney, when I was in Kearney a few weeks ago, they had I think 250 welding jobs. [LB1103]

NOLAN BEYER: Yeah. That's interesting because as we visit with the people in Kearney and Grand Island, we think they have a wonderful model about the community playing a part in the relationship in educating their children. And we visited lots of times with them. [LB1103]

SENATOR DAVIS: Thank you. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: In identifying a particular career track or courses that prepare for a different career, I struggle with the idea that certainly we want all children in our public schools to take courses that prepare them to be college and career ready. [LB1103]

NOLAN BEYER: Absolutely. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: So there shouldn't just be subset over here that puts them on a track for college and career ready. All the courses that they take should be preparing them for that, shouldn't it? [LB1103]

NOLAN BEYER: Absolutely, but I think at some point there's an area of specialties that

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they begin to take some of their elective courses in. And a large piece hidden in here is the relevancy. Many students that we see in our high schools at least, once they determine they're not a college-bound student, school becomes less relevant to them. If we were able to put the career piece to them that high school, four years, especially the senior year I think would look much different and would be...have much more rigor and relevance to it. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Okay, thank you. Senator Kolowski. [LB1103]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you, ma'am. Nolan, the important concept here with TEEOSA is that this is not talking about TEEOSA. We're talking about a separate category of money, separate way of funding and dealing with the question of rigor above and beyond a high school...above and beyond a school district doing the certification or the grading or anything else. And that becomes extremely crucial when we're identifying this because, am I correct, this is totally separate from TEEOSA? [LB1103]

NOLAN BEYER: Yeah. Yes, Senator. It would have to be outside of TEEOSA. TEEOSA obviously serves a very wonderful and needed purpose. It's a demographic model, how many students are sitting in the seats. Within it, we're not able to identify accountability or performance or rigor. This would be something that we believe would take the education in the state of Nebraska, because it's available to all schools, to that next level. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Senator Scheer. [LB1103]

SENATOR SCHEER: In relation to the separate funding, were your thoughts based on the reimbursement on a per-student basis? Or what were your...when you were talking about backing into it, how were you utilizing the numbers to back into whatever number you were backing into? [LB1103]

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NOLAN BEYER: Yeah, yeah. [LB1103]

SENATOR SCHEER: Because that's sort of sounds like TEEOSA to me when you back into a number. [LB1103]

NOLAN BEYER: Yeah, it does but for different purposes. The big piece here would be, for example, only those students in the career path that would earn a licensure, near licensure, or some type of credential would be eligible for the incentive. In the AP course, it wouldn't be all students that take the AP course. It would be those that take the course plus the exam and score on it three or higher. And then in the dual enrollment courses, it would be a C or higher and it would have to be able to transfer to a community college or college. So not all students sitting in the classroom would receive the credit. It would "incentify" districts to look strongly at their programs and what is effective. If we have 20 students taking an AP biology class and 16 of them don't meet the criteria of a three or higher, it forces us as a district to look at that course, to look at the instruction, to look at the curriculum path that led to it because obviously it would need some work. [LB1103]

SENATOR SCHEER: But more specifically, are you thinking then you have a pot, whatever it might be, \$1 or \$1 million... [LB1103]

NOLAN BEYER: Sure. [LB1103]

SENATOR SCHEER: ...and the number of students that reach that category, if it's 1,312 statewide, or 13,212, you're dividing it by that pool so each student's performance equals the same incentive to every district? Is that...? [LB1103]

NOLAN BEYER: Yes. [LB1103]

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SENATOR SCHEER: I'm not trying to put words in your mouth; I'm just wanting to make sure I understand what you're... [LB1103]

NOLAN BEYER: Yep, yeah. Those that reach the level of "incentifying" would be equal. One point, for example, a student in Millard would be the same as a student in Hyannis or elsewhere, absolutely. [LB1103]

SENATOR SCHEER: Okay. Thank you. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you for your testimony. [LB1103]

NOLAN BEYER: Thank you. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Welcome. [LB1103]

LINDA RICHARDS: (Exhibit 11) Good afternoon. Chairwoman Sullivan and members of the Education Committee, my name is Linda Richards, L-i-n-d-a R-i-c-h-a-r-d-s, and I am honored to serve as board of education president for Ralston Public Schools. I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today to speak on behalf of the students and staff in Ralston but also all education stakeholders in the great state of Nebraska. First and foremost, I want to thank you for your commitment and your leadership in supporting and improving education for all students across Nebraska. As a school district, we have spent considerable time reviewing and reflecting on the goals and objectives published in your press release on September 24, 2014. The goals and objectives you have identified are, without question, important initiatives that will support continued growth and opportunities for students. Programs such as early childhood education, college and career readiness, positive, safe, and successful learning environments, and improved student achievement are essential for all Nebraska schools. The unanswered question, though, is, what vehicle, program, or process will be used by schools to identify, implement, and evaluate these programs across our state?

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In my opinion, I believe that the answer to this question is both clear and already in place in many of our schools. Over the last several years, many Nebraska school districts have made the commitment to move to district accreditation through AdvancED. Currently, the Nebraska Department of Education employs several experts in district accreditation through AdvancED and the continuous school improvement process. We believe using a high-quality, continuous school improvement process, most notably the AdvancED process, will provide the perfect solution for the implementation and evaluation of the goals and objectives that you have identified. But throughout history, schools across the country have searched for that new program or silver bullet to address the achievement gap and make progress towards improved student learning. The good news is that research is clear about the essential elements that make up a quality school. In David Kirp's book, the Improbable Scholars, Dr. Kirp discusses a reality that all great educators already know: There are no quick fixes to the problems facing public education. Long-term success is only possible if we commit to some core principles. What core principles do effective school systems have in common? They put the needs of students, not the preferences of the staff, at the center of decision making. They start early by investing in quality preschool. They rely on rigorous, consistent, and integrated curriculum. They make extensive use of data to diagnose problems and pinpoint what's required to solve them. They build a culture that combines high expectations with respect and a we-can-do emphasis on the positive. They have stability and avoid political drama--most of the time. (Laughter) They are continuously improving, planning, and doing and reviewing, turning a system of schools into a school system. Now as you can see, the core principles outlined by Dr. Kirp do not identify the programs or initiatives to implement. Instead, they suggest the areas we as schools and districts need to spend our time and energy. Identifying the exact programs and interventions for each school in Nebraska relates back to the Nebraska vision and the foundation for quality education Nebraskans have always enjoyed--local control. So you may ask, how does this all tie together? The answer, we believe, is to use a high-quality school improvement process, specifically AdvancED accreditation model, as our guide. The AdvancED model has clear quality indicators designed to help

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schools not only identify strengths, but also opportunities for improvement. AdvancED focuses on continuous improvement while allowing Nebraska schools to identify the needs of our community within the Nebraska vision. The AdvancED model is research-based, it's rigorous, and most of all it provides a quality framework to address the unique needs of schools across Nebraska. Now, on page 9 of the packet that I've handed out to you, we have taken the liberty...it begins on page 9. We've taken the liberty to take the goals and the objectives that the committee has put together. And we have aligned them to the AdvancED indicators and performance areas to help the committee see that there is great alignment in the work that you've done with the mission and vision here in LB1103. And so as you peruse through the document, you'll see that we have provided you with that information to help you see how these correlate with one another. In closing, I want to thank all of you again for your leadership and for the commitment to the students of Nebraska. It is no surprise to me that a powerful solution designed to achieve your proposed vision, goals, and objective already exists amongst many of our Nebraska schools. As leaders, we sometimes find the solution to a problem is right before us. Professionals, quality school improvement is the answer to developing strategic, community-focused school systems. Please know that the Ralston Public Schools stands ready and willing to do our part in helping support you along the way in this visioning process and any other initiative that you have that has students as the focus. I want to thank you for your time and I'd be happy to answer any questions if you have any. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you, Linda. [LB1103]

LINDA RICHARDS: You're welcome. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: So Ralston Public Schools has gone through the AdvancED model. [LB1103]

LINDA RICHARDS: That's correct. [LB1103]

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SENATOR SULLIVAN: Do you have any idea how many other school districts have gone through this? [LB1103]

LINDA RICHARDS: Inside your packet we do have on page...let's see, I'll find it quickly. There are 29 percent of the districts in the state of Nebraska that are currently. It's on page 6, Senators, background information. There are 29 percent of all school districts in Nebraska that have earned district-level accreditation with AdvancED. There are 20 million students in 70 different countries across the world that AdvancED is used for accreditation. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: So this is simply, and I know it looks like the Commissioner is following you so he can maybe provide some more... [LB1103]

LINDA RICHARDS: He has all the rest of the answers. (Laughter) [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: But this is simply a choice that a district makes to go through this accreditation process. [LB1103]

LINDA RICHARDS: It is. We're all required to be accredited in some way, shape, or form. Years ago, we went through then a different accreditation process. We ascertained that we wanted something that was a little bit more rigorous, was a little bit more...had a higher level of expectation, quite honestly. We started at the building level, Senator, and went building by building with the accreditation. And then we moved just recently to a districtwide accreditation, which is a little bit more intensive and more involved. But we felt that it would help our buildings, we only have...we have six elementaries, one middle, and one high school. It would help us align together. Instead of having that set of goals by building, that there would be more of a district emphasis and focus that way. [LB1103]

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SENATOR SULLIVAN: Okay. Thank you very much. [LB1103]

LINDA RICHARDS: You're welcome. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Any other questions? Senator Davis. [LB1103]

SENATOR DAVIS: I always have questions, you know. But thank you, Linda. [LB1103]

LINDA RICHARDS: You're welcome, Senator. [LB1103]

SENATOR DAVIS: I'm not familiar really with this at all. So I'm glad you presented it. But I have a couple questions. You talk about the districts in Nebraska that are participating. Are these primarily Ralston-size districts or do you know? [LB1103]

LINDA RICHARDS: It runs the gamut. There are multiple sizes of districts that are AdvancED accredited. I think it has been and as we looked at it from the district size, we were interested in trying to help, again, a small number of buildings stay aligned. I think as you get larger, districts that are larger districts, it becomes even more important that you have something to tether yourself to so that your mission and the vision that you cast stays focused and you don't get mission creep. And so that's the concept, Senator, of bringing this to this committee, is that the hard work that you have done with these areas and objectives and goals, the inevitable dollars that will either be redistributed or allocated or...if new dollars are found, it's critical that we are tethered to something, that we're being able to analyze and determine, did we meet what we said the mission and the goal was? And we believe that AdvancED would really help the committee have something common languagewise amongst districts. It would also, in the five areas that you notice inside the packet, the five areas that AdvancED addresses, Senator, it helps a district be focused on the prioritization because you get the feedback from that external team and it helps you to know we're high in this area, we're low in this area. Where do we begin? How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time. And so you try to

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prioritize then. [LB1103]

SENATOR DAVIS: So your recommendation is that this committee mandate that all districts participate in this program? [LB1103]

LINDA RICHARDS: I don't like that word, I never have, Senator. So even... [LB1103]

SENATOR DAVIS: (Laugh) Neither do most of the school districts. [LB1103]

LINDA RICHARDS: That's right. Yes, it makes me cringe. What I would suggest is that we have a wealth of information, as we pointed out, inside our Department of Education, folks that are versed in this. I don't know that we have encouraged districts, if many districts...I talked to my colleagues even in the metro area, certainly out in western Nebraska, about what process they use. And I think as boards of education, we're looking for more of these systems and these processes. And if we can collaborate together and we can have common language and discussion together, when I can walk into a room and talk to a colleague about governance and issues that they're having, I think that's healthy, that's healthy. I think that helps us to...in our school board association to align our training and our program development. And so I would think it would be really about educating and encouraging. But I think as a committee, as the body, you could certainly use the AdvancED process as you look at your goals in that structure and really help...the AdvancED process could help you as you align with where your goals and objectives need to be and what your measurements will be on success. [LB1103]

SENATOR DAVIS: Thank you. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Senator Kolowski. [LB1103]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you, ma'am. Linda, thank you very much for your

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testimony. [LB1103]

LINDA RICHARDS: You're welcome, Senator. [LB1103]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: It's a...you exemplify, I think, what we're trying to look at is the idea of local control with accountability. And you're not shirking from that in any way, shape, or form. And taking a program that is highly respected and well researched and has proven its worth makes a difference when other districts might be floundering and not knowing exactly where they're going. You've stayed the course and done an excellent job of bringing your district along a path where everyone can grow. And we need more of that and I commend you on that and I hope we'll be able to come to you and seek more information. And this will be very beneficial for us. I thank you for that. [LB1103]

LINDA RICHARDS: You're welcome. We open ourselves up for that. If there's...the documents that we've received from AdvancED we'd love to share with you to let you see where our pains are, where our successes are. It's been an incredible process. We're very proud of the work that our staff and our team, our leadership have accomplished in this process. It's an ongoing process and that's probably the key to it. It's continuous. So when the team is not...the outside team is not looking at us, we have an inside team that's looking using the same process. And so if we're doing this in education collectively, I think we'll be able to meet the goals and objectives that you're outlining here. And I think it will help us be focused and that will help us direct dollars where they need to be most spent. And that's the bottom line. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Has this resulted in significant changes in how your district operates? [LB1103]

LINDA RICHARDS: It has and it will as we move forward. We're in an initiative right now where one of the key areas was our teaching and our learning area, area three, in which

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we learned several hard facts about some alignment of our curriculum, some of the alignment towards the ACT model that we're using, the...all students taking the ACT, Senator, and what we need to do with regard to professional development. And so we have...we are now undergoing an extensive review of our teacher and principal evaluation model using the Danielson Model to do that. Would we have looked at that before? We would have, but not with as much intensity and with as much focus. And so we as a board now in our summer work sessions shifted dollars within the budget that we have, dollars were shifted, refined in that direction knowing that that was an area that we needed to work on immediately to make sure that we were getting after the recommendations. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Very good. Any other questions? [LB1103]

SENATOR SCHEER: Yeah. [LB1103]

LINDA RICHARDS: Yes, Senator. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Senator Scheer. [LB1103]

SENATOR SCHEER: Thanks as well, Linda. [LB1103]

LINDA RICHARDS: You're welcome, Senator. [LB1103]

SENATOR SCHEER: Just curious because, you know, we hear about that. But you said you shifted funds because of priority. [LB1103]

LINDA RICHARDS: Yes, sir. [LB1103]

SENATOR SCHEER: Where were the funds shifted from? What took a back seat to this in your budget? [LB1103]

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LINDA RICHARDS: Absolutely. So you heard alluded to a little bit earlier about some of the dollars with regard to limitations and maybe building fund allocations and things like that. We've made decisions here in the last couple of years to make sure that we don't shirk those responsibilities towards our building fund...operating of our buildings. But in these areas where maybe we would spend dollars in curriculum to possibly add different programming, to test different programming, to do different initiatives, we now know this is the priority and that we need to have those dollars allocated more intensely towards this program. And so they are not...it's not new dollars. [LB1103]

SENATOR SCHEER: Uh-huh. Right. [LB1103]

LINDA RICHARDS: It is a decision that gets made of, in the hierarchy of the 20 things that we need to do, where does the line get drawn after the funding stops and the resources are there? And so it's incredibly important that you have something that you're taking the goals through so that you know when you have the ability to fund and when you don't and, therefore, what you need to prioritize. And so that's why we bring this to you is to maybe help you with how do you, you know, take the next steps with these goals and these initiatives and what can you assure yourself you're able to measure. [LB1103]

SENATOR SCHEER: Okay, thank you. [LB1103]

LINDA RICHARDS: You're welcome, Senator. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you for your testimony. [LB1103]

LINDA RICHARDS: Thank you very much. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Welcome, Commissioner. [LB1103]

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MATTHEW BLOMSTEDT: (Exhibit 12) Good afternoon. I'm Matt Blomstedt, B-l-o-m-s-t-e-d-t, and I am the Commissioner of Education in Nebraska. I'm very proud to be so. And actually, it's actually a great honor to be able to participate and listen to the other thoughts that are going on. And I somewhat share the burden, so to say, in a policymaking sense with you relative to where we need to go. And so I appreciate the opportunity to listen. Now, you can criticize me now for my lack of vision because just yesterday about 4:30, I was sitting down with Freida Lange, who's our director of accreditation and school improvement. And I sat down with her and I said, well, yeah, I don't think there's any need for you to go; I could probably handle it on my own. And so, therefore, I've failed on that ability to provide vision, at least for this particular subject. I will tell you, AdvancED and in prior iterations of that is North Central Accreditation. And so it's something that's been around for a long time in Nebraska and been a part of our school improvement processes, I think, for schools that desire to achieve beyond the expectations of the state of Nebraska relative to accreditation. And I will tell you that our expectations continue to increase. And part of what I will talk to you about today is about an accountability framework that actually is much more than LB438 but much more of a vision, I think, for where we need to go and where we need to focus. There are roughly 400 school buildings that are accredited through AdvancED and we also have our Nebraska framework for school accreditation. And I'll tell you, in my past experiences working with the ESU Coordinating Council, most of our ESUs have actually gone down the path of being AdvancED accredited as well, and for the reasons, for the very reasons, I think, that you heard from Linda in her testimony: the importance of speaking about and having the same language for school improvement. And actually building a system that supports schools in their improvement efforts is quite critical. And I'll tell you, it's quite critical as a state. And so what you have in front of you is a draft of what we are calling and have dubbed A QuESTT and I would...and I have to give Brian Halstead credit for coming up with this. We were trying to come up with a acronym, and let a lawyer, you know, lead the way. That doesn't sound right, quite frankly. (Laughter) He did. He thought...we were trying to find a way to include quality. I think it's extremely

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important that when we talk about accountability, we're actually talking about accountability for quality and for...so A QuESTT stands for Accountability for a Quality Education System Today and Tomorrow. I added the "Tomorrow" to the conversation. And I think it's important that we build...that we look at where we stand today and also that we continue to go down this path using the A QuESTT analogy, down this path, down this journey to continuously improve in our education system in Nebraska. And so we've identified, the State Board has identified six different tenets that we think matter. And many of these are based in things, research around what makes quality schools, effective schools, some of that certainly coming from AdvancED but lots of other research around what really matters and what we have to invest in, those things that matter in our educational system. The first tenet is college and career ready. And being that...I won't go through each one of these, so you can certainly read those, but each of these tenets has particular meaning. We think it is important that our focus is that students are college and career ready. And I like to focus on the "and" portion of this as well. "And" means something, and it means something in our education system that we don't say, college or career ready. I think it means that we are preparing students to be college and career ready, and that matters considerably, I think, in how we approach our students. The second tenet being assessment, and assessment is an important part of what we do for accountability. It's important that we measure and understand where we're going. But it also is important that assessment becomes diagnostic and actionable and so that we actually understand what makes a difference and what investments make a difference for school improvement and for our student's learning improvement. The third tenet being positive partnerships, relationships, and student success, knowing, quite frankly, that our schools have to reach out and have to work effectively with their parents, with their caregivers, with their communities, and ultimately, with their students. And that actually is an important investment that we make and we make in what teachers do on a daily basis. I sometimes, in approaching principals, I say, we have a lot of "have to do's" out there, just a lot of "have to do's." If we spend all of our time on those "have to do's," we miss the opportunities to do the "get to do's." And the "get to do's" are where we're going to make a difference. And I will tell you, it's those expanded

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opportunities to engage parents and engage the community in that effort. And so we want to recognize that as we walk forward with our accountability system. Educator effectiveness is absolutely critical and we know that from a lot of research. And we know that from past work of the State Board of Education putting together a framework for effective teacher and principal evaluation. And that framework actually helps us guide and I think it's actually a very good document put together, I think, in 2009. It was the fall of 2009 anyway, that it was adopted by the State Board. When you look at that document, you go, I think we hit a lot of the right points. There was engagement statewide with principals and teachers and educators across the state to actually establish that framework. And so that becomes an anchor point for this effective educator tenet. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: And just so you know, because you're Commissioner, I'm going to give you a little more latitude. But you're past five minutes. (Laughter) [LB1103]

MATTHEW BLOMSTEDT: Oh, I'm already past. She didn't...I didn't even see one finger raised. All right, thank you. [LB1103]

SENATOR SCHEER: I could give you one finger if you'd like, Matt. [LB1103]

MATTHEW BLOMSTEDT: I didn't know what that one meant. Okay. So tenet five is transitions and the importance of transitions in what we do in our education system and understanding how schools bring students in from early childhood experiences into kindergarten, into elementary, through middle school, ultimately into high school and ultimately into postsecondary opportunities. And how we handle that really does matter. And then tenet six is educational opportunities and access. And you've heard a lot about BlendEd and blended learning. And certainly we want to see schools actually tie together and bring these elements into expanded...expanding the educational opportunities for their students. We want to see that that's being done in our schools, that we're being creative in how we accomplish that. And we also have to provide these

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supports. Every single one of these, by the way, as I look at it, requires the Department of Education to be accountable as well. And we've had a lot of these conversations inside the department, that it is not simply that we're holding schools accountable but that we are being accountable to provide systems and support systems that make this possible in our schools. And I appreciate the opportunity to take more than five minutes, quite frankly, to explain some of this, but I'm looking forward to the continued partnership that we've enjoyed with the Education Committee. Thank you, Senator Sullivan and members of the committee. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: So is it fair to say that with each of these tenets, you're going to have ways to measure where they are and the progress being made or the improvements needed? [LB1103]

MATTHEW BLOMSTEDT: Right. Actually, we have to have a theory of action, I mean, and I realized this very early on because we're going to, as a department, are going to have to intervene in three schools that are identified as priority schools. And we had a lot of conversations: What's our theory of action? What are the pieces that if we imagined that we'd have to walk into a school building and say, here's what we're going to do, it, quite frankly, is a continuous improvement process, a school improvement process, that we help stabilize the environment for the school, and perhaps in some cases work with the community to stabilize the environment for the students. And so our theory of action is really embedded in here. But yes, we have to have measures. And we don't have measures for every single one of these right now, and that's why it is, quite frankly, a journey along this path. That we have measures for certain things. Our hope is to have a measure in each one of these tenets for the first iteration of the new accountability system that we'll outline next year actually. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: And the time line on that is? [LB1103]

MATTHEW BLOMSTEDT: We actually have to be able to go through that process by

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next summer and identify three priority schools in that time frame. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Okay, very good. Senator Scheer. [LB1103]

SENATOR SCHEER: Matt, I think there's a general thought pattern of more laypeople than maybe educational folks that the Department of Education is a state-supported/funded department. But as we know, most of the funding, over two-thirds of which, comes from the federal government. Is there concern on your department's part that if there is continual decline in federal resources, that it will impede the ability of the department to actually do the job that most Nebraskans would expect it to be doing but without the availability of those additional funds? [LB1103]

MATTHEW BLOMSTEDT: Yeah, absolutely. It's one of my concerns. And I can remember Dr. Breed when he first started kind of being exasperated about that relationship on how the federal funds actually dominated, quite frankly, dominated the Department of Education. And it makes it very difficult. I'll put a few numbers on this for you. First of all, vocational rehabilitation and disability determinations, those two entities represent about 330 employees of the department. We have 530, roughly, total. So we have 200 working on the K-12 side. And of that number, about two-thirds to three-fourths actually are federally funded with restrictions on those funds. So we're roughly down into the category of 50 employees that are actually state-funded employees. And here's the other thing: Critical systems are built on federal dollars. Our assessment system is, in large part, built on federal dollars. Our data systems are built, in large part, on federal dollars. And so as we're expected to provide those supports, we have to find ways that this is going to work. And I will tell you, that's across the whole education system. And I think there's ways that we can do that much more efficiently. I know that Dean Folkers presented some of data vision for you. But as we pursue that, we need that in place. And I hear from schools all the time, tell us what direction we need to go so we know where to invest. I envision that A QuESTT is actually a bit of a beacon so people know where to go, right? It gives us, it gives our schools an

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opportunity to be moving in a direction. But we will do that collaboratively. I've had great, very warm reception from school districts' officials from across the state. And I'm pleased to say that. But you're entirely right and I appreciate the...I know you know that perspective of the department, Senator Scheer. So I appreciate that insight. [LB1103]

SENATOR SCHEER: Well, the concern, and I guess because this is a future look, is that, as a department, your responsibility is to do the accountability portion of local districts. And when they don't measure up to where we would like them to be, unfortunately, there are three districts that will receive some help, some assistance in trying to fine-tune and bring them back to an area that the state would feel comfortable. But there's a whole lot of other school districts that are... [LB1103]

MATTHEW BLOMSTEDT: Yeah. There's a whole lot of other places. [LB1103]

SENATOR SCHEER: ...would like or are looking for some type of assistance to improve that educational outcome in there. And you don't have the manpower or the resources to do that. [LB1103]

MATTHEW BLOMSTEDT: Yeah, we will--how does the song go--we'll get by with a little a help from our friends? And quite frankly, our friends include the whole education system. So our work with our educational service units, and the reason that we lay out these tenets is not just to say this is how we're going to arrive at those three schools, but these are the support systems that we need to begin to build for all schools and all schools together. [LB1103]

SENATOR SCHEER: Well, I guess I'm just looking that, you know, you've got three. Well, how close was four or how close was five to three? [LB1103]

MATTHEW BLOMSTEDT: Yeah. [LB1103]

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SENATOR SCHEER: And you know, it's sort of, for some of those schools, it's...as much as we would look at it from a negative standpoint, it also can be a positive because they hit the lottery. They're actually the few small school districts that will get the assistance from the state and the rest don't. [LB1103]

MATTHEW BLOMSTEDT: Yeah. And I'll tell you, just to kind of put into perspective, SIG grants, for instance, are roughly \$1 million a year for each school that goes into school improvement, so school improvement grants. The total amount that we put into LB438 for this is \$750,000 for three schools. So as I look at it, our challenge and our charge, quite frankly, is to build a system that actually helps all schools including when we go into priority schools, are...what we've talked about from a staffing level at the department is not only do we go in to help that school, but we go in to make sure that we figure out what's going to help lots of different schools. And we're going to have to share that knowledge or that information with a lot of places and reshape what we do in professional development in partnership with our ESUs and our school districts to make sure that all schools are well supported in this model. And I think as we press forward, I mean, I don't know how all that will play out. You know, I wish I could say we're going to hit home run after home run, but I'm not the Kansas City Royals really. (Laugh) They've done well. Plug for the Royals, I guess. [LB1103]

SENATOR SCHEER: Thanks, Matt. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Any other questions? Thank you very much. [LB1103]

MATTHEW BLOMSTEDT: All right. Thank you. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Welcome. [LB1103]

JAMI JO THOMPSON: (Exhibit 13) Good afternoon, Senator Sullivan, Senator Scheer, and members of the Education Committee. My name is Jami Jo Thompson, J-a-m-i J-o

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T-h-o-m-p-s-o-n. For those of you who do not know me, I am the superintendent of Norfolk Public Schools and I am here today representing the 4,200 students that the community of Norfolk entrusts to my care. On their behalf, I would like to express my sincere gratitude for the time and the effort that you have put into developing a mission, vision, goals, and objectives, to direct not only your efforts but mine as well, as we seek to ensure that every Nebraskan is educated for success. I know that this was a very large but worthwhile undertaking on your part. As I reviewed your vision, mission, goals, and objectives, I found many similarities to Norfolk Public Schools' vision, mission, and strategic planning goals, which was very reassuring to me. There is no doubt in my mind that the students that I represent deserve to have programs and courses that inspire and prepare them for success in learning, work, and life, as you have indicated. As you have indicated within your objectives, this must include equitable access to high-quality and developmentally appropriate preschools. A multitude of research exists that strongly supports the benefits of early childhood education programs ranging from increased school readiness to higher graduation rates and higher rates of employment. Unfortunately, research also indicates that not all early childhood programs are created equal. In order for programs to make an impact, they need to be thoughtfully designed, implemented, and staffed by high-quality professionals. When they are, the impact on children is not only substantial but it is actually quantifiable as well. Researchers for the HighScope Perry Program, for example, determined that their program's initial per-pupil investment of \$15,166 returned \$244,812 per student in increased income and decreased special education, welfare, and incarceration costs. This means that this is one of the most beneficial investments that the state of Nebraska can make for our future. This also means that early childhood preschool programs must be provided universally for all students, not simply those who can afford it. It is time for the state of Nebraska to make a commitment to providing free public preschool for all four-year-olds. And it means providing public schools with the resources required to add these programs, which includes funding for teachers, classrooms, materials, training, and equipment. I commend you for including early childhood education within your vision and I strongly advocate for you to provide schools with the resources that are

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needed to make that vision a reality. Our students also deserve high-quality educational programs that prepare them to be college, career, or job ready when they graduate high school. This includes a need for strong career education and career guidance programs within our secondary schools. Career education programs have a positive impact on student engagement and student achievement. They also have a positive return on investment and they benefit local communities and economies. These are a few of the reasons that Norfolk Public Schools is participating in the reVISION process through the Nebraska Department of Education. We realize that there are many benefits to these programs and we fully anticipate that we will identify several areas that we can improve in our own career education programs. However, we also anticipate significant difficulties in funding these programs as they will be very costly. Therefore, I am asking you to please tie appropriate levels of funding to the goals and objectives that you have identified as essential to meeting our vision and mission for Nebraska children. I fully support the mission, vision, goals, and objectives that you have drafted. However, realistically, I know that schools will not be able to effectively implement these programs without additional funding. Norfolk Public Schools is an equalized district. We do not received adequate levels of funding through local revenue sources to provide the basic educational services that our students need without equalization funds. In fact, state aid comprises approximately one-fourth of our annual budget. So funding for additional programs such as preschool and career education must be provided in addition to our current equalization funding. In closing, I want to express my appreciation for the work that you have done throughout this visioning process. I know that it has been time-consuming and labor-intensive, and I want to express my sincere thanks to you for listening to my input. I do look forward to seeing this vision becoming a reality when all Nebraskans are educated for success and equipped to realize their maximum potential in all aspects of life. Thank you. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you, Ms. Thompson. With respect to the early childhood programs, I assume you have some in Norfolk Public Schools. How many sections do you have? [LB1103]

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JAMI JO THOMPSON: We have eight sections, which is not nearly enough. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Do you any idea, if we looked at just the four-year-old population in your district, at what capacity are you in terms of providing an experience for those four-year-olds. [LB1103]

JAMI JO THOMPSON: I would estimate that if we were to provide preschool education for all four-year-olds, we would need to triple that. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: I see, okay. And then with respect to...is reVISION, is that a program through the Department of Ed? [LB1103]

JAMI JO THOMPSON: Yes, it is. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: And is that looking at career pathways? [LB1103]

JAMI JO THOMPSON: It is strategic planning, basically, for career education and work force development. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Okay. [LB1103]

JAMI JO THOMPSON: It's usually done in congruence with Northeast Community College, NDE, work force development, local businesses, community members, etcetera. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: So what sorts of conversations are going on between the district and the business community here in Norfolk with respect to meeting some of those work force deficiencies? [LB1103]

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JAMI JO THOMPSON: We are in the very beginning stages of that, but it ranges the full gamut of things, from adding things to our secondary program such as more guidance counselors, more career education programs, better communication between ourselves and colleges, working with the businesses to bring experiences into our schools. It runs a large gamut of things. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Okay, thank you. Any other questions? Yes, Senator Davis. [LB1103]

SENATOR DAVIS: What kind of cooperation do you get from the community college in terms of career readiness? Are you doing anything like that here? [LB1103]

JAMI JO THOMPSON: Certainly, and we are working hand in hand as we go through the reVISION process. And also there's a work force task force that we are working on together. We have some dual credit courses, articulated courses. We're doing some career academies together. We just feel like we need to grow those opportunities, that they're at the basic level and they could be much stronger. [LB1103]

SENATOR DAVIS: So when you do your dual credit classes, do any of your students run into problems with those transferring on somewhere else? [LB1103]

JAMI JO THOMPSON: It depends on the college that they're going to. At times, yes. [LB1103]

SENATOR DAVIS: Do you think that's something that needs to be addressed? [LB1103]

JAMI JO THOMPSON: I think it would be nice if there were universal expectations between colleges, but of course, that's not something that I can mandate. (Laughter) [LB1103]

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SENATOR DAVIS: Thank you. [LB1103]

SENATOR SCHEER: But somebody could. [LB1103]

JAMI JO THOMPSON: Somebody could. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Any other questions? Thank you for your testimony. [LB1103]

JAMI JO THOMPSON: Thank you. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Welcome. [LB1103]

TROY LOEFFELHOLZ: (Exhibit 14) Thank you. Good afternoon. My name is Troy Loeffelholz; it's T-r-o-y L-o-e-f-f-e-l-h-o-l-z, and I am the superintendent for Columbus Public Schools. Senator Sullivan, members of the Education Committee, thank you for taking the time...your time to provide us with the opportunity to provide input to the committee. As I've already introduced myself as superintendent of Columbus Public Schools, I'm also here today representing the Greater Nebraska Schools Association, the GNSA. The GNSA and its 30 member districts are responsible for the education of over 203,000 of the 307,000 Nebraska students, or 66 percent of all pre-K through 12th grade public school students in the state of Nebraska. As a group, the purpose of the GNSA is to collectively advocate for all Nebraska Public School students with the mission to ensure education excellence through equitable funding for all Nebraska public school students. For this reason, we applaud the Education Committee's efforts to define the vision, goals, and objectives needed to move public education forward in the state of Nebraska. The committee's first goal, to provide quality educational opportunities that engage and prepare Nebraskans for success in learning, is directly aligned with the GNSA's purpose and we wholeheartedly support it. The focus on access to quality early childhood programs along with college and career preparation opportunities are mirrored in the efforts of all the GNSA's member schools. Additionally,

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recognizing that students have different needs that may require different educational opportunities is something that we work on every single day. Although we are focused on grades preschool through 12th grade, we know that our students will need to continue their education after graduation, so we appreciate the objective aimed at making sure that postsecondary opportunities will be available and affordable. We are also very supportive of the committee's second goal of increasing educational outcomes for students. The objectives proposed closely match many of the building and district school improvement plans across the state. Many of these objectives can be good measures of the quality of the programs being offered by our member schools. Goals 3 and 4 recognize that schools are teaching more than academics; that issues that face the larger community are also issues in our schools. Schools do have to be concerned about the physical and psychological safety of our students and our staff. Schools must also be good partners with the rest of the community with the understanding that the school is an extension of the community and must be responsive to the ever-changing needs. While we are optimistic about the committee's visioning process and we look forward to working with the committee as they implement policy to move education in Nebraska forward, we understand that moving from a vision to action is not always easy. We urge the committee to look for ways to improve educational outcomes for all Nebraska students while keeping in mind the tremendous diversity of students and the districts. GNSA is committed to advocating the excellent education opportunities by providing equitable funding for public schools. Just as each of the students that we serve have different needs, each of the districts in the state have different needs as well. As we look at a vision for the future, it is important to remember that the current funding formula is based on equalization for districts that lack the local resources to provide for the needs of their students. This philosophy should continue to be a tenet of the Legislature's commitment to strengthening our state by ensuring a quality educational experience for our children. Again, thank you for the opportunity and I'd be happy to address any questions. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you, Troy. Any questions? All right, thank you very much.

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[LB1103]

TROY LOEFFELHOLZ: Thank you. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Welcome. [LB1103]

VERNON FISHER: Good afternoon. I was just grateful you didn't take my time when the Commissioner went over. (Laughter) [LB1103]

SENATOR SCHEER: We are switching to three minutes now. (Laughter) [LB1103]

VERNON FISHER: (Exhibit 15) Okay. Good afternoon, Senator Sullivan and members of the Education Committee. My name is Vernon Fisher, V-e-r-n-o-n F-i-s-h-e-r. I'm the superintendent of South Sioux City Community Schools and I'm here representing 4,000 students of South Sioux City Community Schools and the member schools of STANCE. The member schools of STANCE are very supportive of the vision, mission, and goals that you have set forth as a committee and we feel that our four pillars are aligned to the goals you have created, those four pillars being: early childhood; college and career readiness; curriculum, instruction, and assessment; and formative assessment. We applaud the committee's efforts to seek input from the citizens of Nebraska and we value the committee's effort to maintain sight on the needs of all of Nebraska's children. In fact, maintaining sight on the needs of all of Nebraska's children may prove to be the most significant challenge for the committee. Whether you believe in research conducted by the Platte Institute or by OpenSky, whether you agree with the Chamber's position associated with a quality work force, or whether you believe the state is adequately funding education, given the variety of positions that exist on any one issue, the process of going from vision to reality is a fairly new journey for any individual state. Michael Fullan refers to the process outlined in LB1103 as trilevel reform. And I appreciated the comments made by Dr. Linda Richards in terms of AdvancED and a quality program in terms of accreditation. In fact, I'm trained in both AdvancED and the

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Nebraska frameworks. Michael Fullan talks about trilevel reform involving three levels, and this takes it beyond AdvancED: the school and community level, the district or regional level, and the state policy level. This kind of reform is an attempt to use the very best knowledge to identify strategies, bring about improvement, and build capacity. Capacity building is the development and use of policy, strategies, and actions that increase the collective power of the entire state to engage in continuous improvement for ongoing student learning. Capacity building synergizes three powerful collective phenomena: new skills and dispositions; more focused and enhanced resources; greater shared commitment, cohesion, and motivation. Michael Fullan goes on in great detail about the process of change and how change impacts local, district, and state levels. Considering the work conducted by members of the Education Committee, Fullan would say that impacting state policy is the most difficult to develop because of its political complexity and in propensity to favor quick and inevitable superficial solutions. There is a natural tendency to focus on accountability because it is easy to legislate change in this area. Capacity building, on the other hand, is more difficult and requires time and cultivation. Accountability without capacity building amounts to little or no gain. Fullan identifies four implications for this trilevel reform: the first is the need to address the problem of bias toward individualistic solutions, the radical need for system thinkers in action, the importance of learning from each other as we go, and the danger of waiting for others to act. The level of reform the state is looking for will require our state leaders recognize that system transformation won't happen unless the state takes responsibility for leading the way. This means that the very top elected and selected officials learn more about change and build their capacity within the framework of accountability, we act differently about the strategies and policies we formulate, and we redefine our relationship with local and district levels. The bottom line is this kind of efforts require governments, school districts, and schools work together on common approaches and strategies and involve building strong relationships and close connections with boards, schools, and other, organizations. And the information I took came from these two sources. On behalf of South Sioux City Community Schools and member schools of STANCE, we appreciate the courage that the Education Committee

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has taken to look at a vision for all of Nebraska's children to ensure that they all experience the kind of learning experiences that we want to prepare them for college and career. With that, I conclude my testimony. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you, Vern. Any questions? I'm intrigued by this article by Mr. Fullan. What comes first? Or does the capacity at state, district, and school happen simultaneously or...? He says the state has to lead the way. [LB1103]

VERNON FISHER: I feel that based on my interpretation of what he's written, and he's done extensive research in England, Australia, and Delaware has just started to do some of this work, that it really came from a process similar to what the Education Committee is taking on. What is it that they want to attack, but then aligning all efforts to ensure that those areas are addressed. In England, as an example, the area was literacy and numeracy. That is across the board and it begins with support from the top legislative...or the top governmental body. And it aligns itself as it works through the system. So from a Nebraska perspective, it would begin with the state Legislature working through the Department of Ed and local school districts, down to the individual school. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: How do you believe that goes along with what is a strong value in Nebraska with respect to local control? [LB1103]

VERNON FISHER: I think there's a way of looking at ensuring that we have a common focus or common strategies. And that's really what a vision is about, while also at the same time...and being very (inaudible), I'm going to steal from some professional learning community's language here. It's very appropriate to outline where is not negotiable, what is not negotiable for the state of Nebraska. But also within the individual school districts, the individual classrooms, allowing for the talent that exists within those entities to rise up to what those nonnegotiables are within a framework of accountability. [LB1103]

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SENATOR SULLIVAN: Okay, thank you. Any other questions? Senator Kolowski.
[LB1103]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you very much, ma'am. Vernon, thank you for your presentation and for the work that you're doing. My question is one of...and Fullan is one of my favorite authors--just fantastic. [LB1103]

VERNON FISHER: I was hoping you'd like him. [LB1103]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: But my concern is with 240-some superintendents in the state. And they jockey. There's positions. They leave the state. They move around different districts in the state. What you're doing with STANCE and what you're doing with other organizations in your capacity or my former capacity as a principal or whatever level we're talking about, how do we get the state, how do we get the common action on the part of those participants at various levels of positions to shift gears, compared to their "get me through this day," to a longer term thinking to put these practices into effect? Because I know what he's talking about. I know it works. We have seen and have examples of that. But it's not replicated very well. We don't share with each other. We don't talk to each other. We don't collaborate the way we need to. And how do we bring that about to get that done? [LB1103]

VERNON FISHER: I like the direction. That's a really broad question that would take a long time to answer. [LB1103]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: (Laugh) [LB1103]

VERNON FISHER: But I do like the direction the Commissioner is taking the state of Nebraska in terms of looking at what is it that we want for all of Nebraska's children. But he's also putting in a system that encourages collaboration among the superintendents

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and building capacity among those superintendents. And that shouldn't end there. It should also then...the superintendent taking that back to their leadership team, build that level of knowledge and understanding about what the quality indicators are. But it's also about changing behaviors over time. And sometimes we focus so much on the attitude; that's not what we're going to change. We're going to change those behaviors. So following his lead and identifying the systems approach to build capacity over time I believe is the answer. [LB1103]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Excellent. Thank you. [LB1103]

VERNON FISHER: You're welcome. Thank you. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you for your testimony. [LB1103]

VERNON FISHER: You're welcome. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Welcome. [LB1103]

MARY LAURITZEN: Thank you. I'm Mary Lauritzen, M-a-r-y L-a-u-r-i-t-z-e-n. I'm from West Point and I serve on the Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education. However, after two days of that meeting, I'm not here in that capacity because once you get through this list we'll talk again, I'm sure. So right now I'm here to represent the Nebraska Foundation for Children's Vision. And I'm glad to be at this point in this testimony because, after hearing everyone coming along, I discovered that the fundamentals are what make the big things work. So I'm going to use vision in a whole different way than it's been used all afternoon. In Nebraska for the past 20 years, it's one of the handful of states that uses a program called See To Learn. See To Learn is a preschool vision program that's aimed at three-year-olds and it was created to make sure that vision problems don't affect a child's ability to learn. And it's created for three-year-olds to flag those issues prior to entering school. Every three-year-old in

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Nebraska is eligible to participate because every optometrist in Nebraska can provide this free vision assessment, regardless of the family's income or ability to pay. So when you consider that 80 percent of learning depends upon visual processing, that 30 percent of children in special education have vision problems, that 70 percent of juvenile offenders have undetected or untreated vision problems, and that one out of five children entering kindergarten has a vision problem that can affect his or her ability to learn, then you can understand our emphasis upon the importance of the relationship between vision and learning. I look at you and there's eight of you and six of you have, obviously, corrected vision. And if you took your glasses off right now and tried to do the work, it wouldn't work. So imagine a little child sitting in a classroom trying to learn that way. In addition to See To Learn, we also have launched...this is the third year of a preschool screening program. We have partnered with Head Start, Community Action Partnerships, and Educare--the Buffett Early Childhood Institute--and we have put together a travel team of vision screeners and a vision screening designed for ages zero to five. And we moved...we take it to where the children are. And this year alone, we've been to Norfolk, two places in Omaha, one in Plattsmouth, South Sioux, and Dakota City. Fifteen other communities are looking for us to do this. This is volunteer. This is private funded. And in addition to that, since 2006, a kindergarten vision evaluation has been required for all children entering school in Nebraska. As a nearby case in point, the Wisner Lions Club has paid for vision screenings for every child entering Wisner-Pilger Schools since the inception of the vision evaluation requirement. Now, don't faint when I say this because our next step is parents. Parents need to know these pieces are available. Parents need to know this is in place. You need to know that we are focusing truly on what children need to be able to learn. If they can't read, they can't see, they can't learn. And so if I leave you with one slogan and one only, let it be this: Don't send your child to school without good vision. Thank you. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you, Mary. So tell me again, you are working with See To Learn, or you're working...? [LB1103]

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MARY LAURITZEN: See To Learn is a program that we sponsor, the Nebraska Foundation for Children's Vision. On my... [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Oh, so you're a member of the Nebraska Foundation for Children's... [LB1103]

MARY LAURITZEN: Yes, I'm the president of the Foundation for Children's Vision. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Oh, I see. Okay, all right. [LB1103]

MARY LAURITZEN: See To Learn is a program we adopted. It was set up in Kansas about 20 years ago. And Kansas looks at Nebraska for implementing. We look at Kansas for the model. So it's very, very interesting. And with See To Learn in place and with the early detection of issues at kindergarten age, there has been a...Kansas keeps very good track, and we're trying to do that here as well, of the numbers of remedial summer reading programs have diminished because being caught early enough, it has helped those kids prior to 3rd grade when the work changes and the print gets smaller and all that intensity begins. We've seen some positive results of early detection of any vision problems. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: So what's the percentage of students that have this as three-year-olds? Do you have any idea, get the screening? [LB1103]

MARY LAURITZEN: It usually runs about 20 percent, that one out of five number kind of follows. And that's what...we're trying to gather that information because there's a lot of information about infants and their health issues and developmental issues. There's a lot of information that can go toward a seven-...or a five-, six-, seven-year-old. That age gap between two and five and...is lacking that knowledge. And so that's what we're trying to do is gather that as well but, more importantly, catch it before they get into

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school. Let Mom and Dad know this is an issue. A child won't ever tell you that. A child doesn't know they can't see well. They assume everybody sees or doesn't see what they don't see either. So more importantly...and we can do these screenings. Even language issues in South Sioux and Dakota City with the meat packing plant, for example, there are immigrant children there from parts of Africa and all over the world. They don't speak English and there are no translators. So we can use symbols and do a point-and-shoot method and we can find out what they can see doing it that way. And it's very efficient and it works and we can catch it if it's not working. I'm very pleased with the success we've had with this age group. And they listen to you and they take instruction and they're anxious to do well, so. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: So all this... [LB1103]

MARY LAURITZEN: And it doesn't matter what, again, the economy, the economic backgrounds, any of those things. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: How many volunteers do you have doing this? [LB1103]

MARY LAURITZEN: Probably a handful right now, 20, 25. But we want to do a statewide regional kind of setup where we can take people from the areas that can go around and do like the preschool screenings in the Head Start centers, go where the children are. It's very hard for place-bound people to get where you are. And there are parents who...doctor's offices, time schedules, and very often parents' schedules don't work. We've also helped with the school screening. School health screenings have become extremely important, have been completely revamped since...it's been 40 years since most of them had been looked at. And I was fortunate to serve on that committee and worked to help redevelop the vision screening portion. So that's in place right now. And so school is the health home for a lot of kids. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Uh-huh. And then optometrists can...do offer this screening free

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of charge. [LB1103]

MARY LAURITZEN: Free of charge to any three-year-old in Nebraska. And it's available throughout Nebraska. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Okay, very good. [LB1103]

MARY LAURITZEN: And...oh, yes, sir. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Senator Davis. [LB1103]

SENATOR DAVIS: These are vanity glasses. I just want you to know. (Laughter)
[LB1103]

MARY LAURITZEN: Oh, yeah. I thought so, yeah. You wanted to look intelligent, is that it? [LB1103]

SENATOR DAVIS: Right. [LB1103]

MARY LAURITZEN: Yeah. [LB1103]

SENATOR SCHEER: Distinguished. [LB1103]

MARY LAURITZEN: Bless your heart. [LB1103]

SENATOR DAVIS: Your funding source for this? [LB1103]

MARY LAURITZEN: Donors, volunteers. [LB1103]

SENATOR DAVIS: And of course the Lions Club. [LB1103]

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MARY LAURITZEN: And Lions Club in Wisner. I have to, again, say that again. Wisner Lions Club pays for every child entering kindergarten in the Wisner-Pilger Schools and has done so since 2006. And that's commendable. [LB1103]

SENATOR DAVIS: So is there any thought of working with Lions Clubs across the state to promote this? [LB1103]

MARY LAURITZEN: Yes, we have. And others do in smaller proportion than they do. Some of the Lions Clubs don't have the funding or the manpower that they used to have. And Lions, God bless them, they were on a bus for years going from one end to the other doing screenings. [LB1103]

SENATOR DAVIS: Right. I know that. They've done incredibly valuable things. [LB1103]

MARY LAURITZEN: Yes. And so we've worked in partnership with them as well. [LB1103]

SENATOR DAVIS: You talked about remedial reading declining. [LB1103]

MARY LAURITZEN: Yes, right. [LB1103]

SENATOR DAVIS: Is that quantified? [LB1103]

MARY LAURITZEN: In Kansas. Nebraska doesn't have the numbers and we are trying desperately. And that's where, when in seeing the impact of the kindergarten vision evaluation requirement, there has been teachers and school nurses have mentioned as well, that there are less and less. The struggling issues are kind of overcome a little bit. It doesn't kill everything or fix everything, but it really does...it really does address the problem. I feel like we're the cavalry off in the distance coming to rescue, hopefully.

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[LB1103]

SENATOR DAVIS: If you're able to get the data in Kansas, I think it might be useful for the committee to see it. [LB1103]

MARY LAURITZEN: I will. My intention was...since I came here not prepared to speak but couldn't help it, hard for me not to. (Laughter) I do intend to provide you plenty of information on this because it's part of your work and this...and our connection, of course, is your Goal 1 objective: "for at least the school year prior to kindergarten, every child will have equitable access to high-quality and developmentally appropriate preschool programs that help prepare them for school." We'll take charge of that one. [LB1103]

SENATOR DAVIS: Thank you. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Senator Kolowski. [LB1103]

MARY LAURITZEN: Yes, sir. [LB1103]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you, ma'am. Mary, have you met Darlene on the dyslexic thing? (Laughter) [LB1103]

MARY LAURITZEN: I'm going to. I'm going to before I leave, yes. [LB1103]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: I think this would be a really good combination. [LB1103]

MARY LAURITZEN: The moment you were finished, I almost ran up here. Oh, yeah. And because we are with our--excuse me for interrupting, Senator, but--the Early Childhood Institute has hired Dr. Sam Meisels who is the guru of all time in regard to early childhood. And our organization has been in discussion with him to put together a

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summit that will connect your issues, our issues, any of those things that can do anything about being a barrier to learning, and get that in the spotlight and out of the way. [LB1103]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: And that echoes whole child, whole family, whole community. [LB1103]

MARY LAURITZEN: Absolutely, totally. [LB1103]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: If we don't think that way, we're never going to get it done. [LB1103]

MARY LAURITZEN: No. And our goal has always been...our organization was founded in 1927 with the idea that you send the whole child to school. If they're not well rested, if they don't have enough to eat, if they're not clean, if they can't see, if they've got a stomach...they can't learn. So let's fix it. I know it's an old-fashioned notion and, by God, we need the parents to do this, but, you know, that's...we'll take care of that too. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: All right. Thank you, Mary, very much. [LB1103]

MARY LAURITZEN: My pleasure. Thank you very much for that. [LB1103]

SENATOR SCHEER: No pressure, but you are the last one. (Laughter) [LB1103]

KARA WEANDER-GASTER: I know. Does that mean I get just three minutes then? [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Welcome. [LB1103]

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KARA WEANDER-GASTER: (Exhibit 16) It's Kara Weander-Gaster, spelled K-a-r-a W-e-a-n-d-e-r-G-a-s-t-e-r, also I think the most letters. I get extra points for that. Good afternoon, Chairman Sullivan and members of the Education Committee. My name is Kara Weander-Gaster. I am the executive director of the Norfolk Arts Center, a nonprofit organization that presents visual arts, performing arts, and arts education throughout northeast Nebraska. We successfully accomplish our mission of bringing people and the arts together by working with individuals, businesses, organizations, and schools from throughout northeast and north-central Nebraska. I am here today because I'm also a member of the education committee for Nebraskans for the Arts, a statewide organization of artists, teachers, businesses, individuals, and organizations committed to advancing opportunities in the arts and to improve the lives and learning of all Nebraskans. Years of research have proven the arts are essential to a quality learning experience, that goes for all ages and all educational settings. Numerous studies have concluded that students who participate in the arts outperform their peers on virtually every measure. Additionally, students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds see the greatest benefit as learning in and through the arts can help level the playing field for children from disadvantaged circumstances. New and recent studies are also showing that arts education actually affects students' brain structure, leading to improved motor control, focused attention, and fluid IQ scores. These scientific findings related to the arts' impact on the brain illustrate why arts education should be an integral part of every student's educational experience. A quality arts education program is more than simply entertainment. Research has shown that SAT and ACT scores improve the longer students are involved in arts education programs. Students in arts classes learn a remarkable array of habits and skills that can benefit them for a lifetime. These skills can include problem solving, goal setting, persistence, personal expression and communication, observation and attention to details, innovation and exploration--several of the skills that we're looking for, for our work force in Nebraska. We believe strong collaborations between schools, community organizations, and parents or caregivers will help ensure Nebraska's students have every advantage when it comes to arts education. As you develop Nebraska's strategic plan for education, we encourage you

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to think broadly about our students' art education, particularly the informal and experiential opportunities that disciplines like the fine arts can have in building upon and reinforcing the lessons taught in the classroom. A great example, just last Friday here in Norfolk, the Norfolk Arts Center presented The Tempest at 1:00 in the afternoon at our Johnny Carson Theater. This performance was part of annual performing arts program that we offer so regional high school students have the opportunity to witness Shakespeare live on stage, as it was meant to be experienced. All of Nebraska's students may be required to read Shakespeare, but understanding his plays entirely is a different matter. Upon actually seeing actors embody the characters on stage and reading the text or performing the text, the language barrier is significantly lessened. Thus, by spending 75 minutes in a theater seat, each student has the potential to change how they experience and understand Shakespeare and, thus, how they experience life themselves. The Norfolk Arts Center regularly partners with area schools on arts-related projects that enhance learning and help our students develop into good Nebraska citizens. During the '12-13 school year, we worked with the Norfolk Junior High students, teachers, and administration to spearhead a project that helped renovate one of Norfolk's oldest parks that happens to also sit right across from our junior high school. These students were engaged from the very beginning planning process through to the ribbon cutting on the project. They learned how they could make a difference in their community through the work that they made. And through that work, they also made a difference in their own lives. Their opinions were heard and realized and valued. And the vehicle of the arts were used to teach these students good citizenship as well as the basics of arts education: color, shape, and design. These are just a few examples from one arts organization. There are many others spread across the state that are able and willing to make sure every Nebraska student is educated for success. The statewide arts community should be one of the essential collaborative partners set forth by your committee under Goal 4 of your current vision, mission, and goals where you ask for collaborations in the community. Attached to my testimony are abstracts on articles and research studies demonstrating the positive impacts arts education has in improving students' performance, test scores, and their critical-thinking

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skills. Fine arts in our schools and in our communities are a vital part of providing students with a well-rounded education in Nebraska. From improving vocabulary to test scores to increasing learning experiences in communication, leadership, arts education plays a vital role in preparing students for success in their careers and their personal lives. Thank you for your work on this important subject. And if there's any questions, I'd be happy to answer them. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you, Kara. Any questions for her? Yes, Senator Kolowski. [LB1103]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Just a comment. Kara, thank you so very much. And with all of the recent history we've had on...emphasis on STEM, with science, technology, engineering, and math, an article I read just recently was talking about the A back into that. So put some STEAM in your STEM...(laughter) by putting art back into the science and all the rest that we're putting emphasis on. And it's really...it's true. And I thank you for your work and the difference you're making. Thank you. [LB1103]

KARA WEANDER-GASTER: Thank you. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Senator Scheer. [LB1103]

SENATOR SCHEER: Can you think of any other community like Norfolk that does as much in that field for our youth? I mean, I can't. [LB1103]

KARA WEANDER-GASTER: There are many...you know, I think that the arts community across the state understands that this is an area that is not being addressed frequently by the education system, by the formal education system. And so we have ramped up to make sure that the arts are happening in communities if they're not happening in schools. So I know many schools, Columbus brings in theater performances like we do. You know, I know there's work that's also done out in western

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Nebraska, in Ainsworth. It's surprising how many arts organizations really engage those schools. I think Norfolk, pridefully I will say, I think we do a great job. But, yeah, I think it is a statewide...there are arts organizations across the state. If asked to engage, I think they would step up. [LB1103]

SENATOR SCHEER: I would note though, too, in relationship to the arts, I think it was the State Arts Council provided funding last year or the year before for the Department of Education to revamp and bring their arts standards up to current levels. And without those funds I don't know that the department would have been able to do that. So at least there is some activity towards improving the level that we're trying to see from local school districts. [LB1103]

KARA WEANDER-GASTER: Yeah, and I would encourage you as senators to think about that as art funding, you know, not always that it comes through your Education Committee, but that arts funding through the Arts Council is essential for what we do and keeping this part alive. If the Education Committee can't always meet those funding needs, the Arts Council certainly is doing that. So thank you for that funding that you guys do supply. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Any other questions? Thank you so much for your testimony. [LB1103]

KARA WEANDER-GASTER: Thank you. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Is there anyone else wishing to testify? If not, this closes the hearing for LB1103 and I thank you so much for all of you...your attendance. (See also Exhibits 17, 18, 19, and 20.) [LB1103]