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Education Committee
October 16, 2014

[LB1103]

The Committee on Education met at 1:30 p.m. on Thursday, October 16, 2014, at Broken Bow High School Auditorium, Broken Bow, Nebraska, for the purpose of conducting a public hearing on LB1103. Senators present: Kate Sullivan, Chairperson; Jim Scheer, Vice Chairperson; Les Seiler; Ken Haar; and Rick Kolowski. Senators absent: Bill Avery, Tanya Cook and Al Davis.

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Good afternoon, everyone. It's 1:30 so we will begin. This is the public hearing for the interim study on LB1103, which is to develop a vision for education in Nebraska. And I thank all you for being here and look forward to hearing from you. I'm Senator Kate Sullivan. I'm Chair of the Education Committee. I represent District 41 which is a nine-county area in central and northeast Nebraska. I live in Cedar Rapids, Nebraska, so I had a nice drive of about one hour and thirty-five minutes across the countryside and watching all the harvest going on. I'd like you also to meet the rest of the senators that are here. I'll start with the Vice Chair. [LB1103]

SENATOR SCHEER: I'm Jim Scheer, District 19, which is all of Madison County and a little bit of Stanton County on the eastern edge. [LB1103]

SENATOR SEILER: Les Seiler, District 33 which is all of Adams County and all of Hall County except Grand Island. [LB1103]

SENATOR HAAR: I'm State Senator Ken Haar, District 21, which is northwest Lincoln and part of rural Lancaster County and I can't see all the faces in the front row. I'm a little worried here. (Laughter) [LB1103]

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

SENATOR SULLIVAN: I'd also like you to meet the staff that are here with us today. To my immediate right is Tammy Barry, one of the legal counsels; over there on the other end is LaMont Rainey, also another legal counsel for the Education Committee; and on the far left is Mandy Mizerski, the committee clerk and she'll be making sure that we have appropriate record of the hearing today. We're thankful to Broken Bow Public Schools for hosting this and to that end I'd like to call Mark Sievering to give us the official welcome. So, Mark. [LB1103]

MARK SIEVERING: We would like to welcome you today to Broken Bow. We appreciate you being here. We'd especially like to welcome Senator Sullivan and the members of the committee. We definitely appreciate them being here and we're looking forward to a great committee hearing, and again, welcome to Broken Bow. [LB1103]

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SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you, Mark. Also wanted to mention that of the Education Committee members, three weren't able to be here today: Senator Tanya Cook of Omaha; Senator Bill Avery; and also certainly, Senator Davis who represents this area sends his regrets. He had a conflict and was unable to be here. Also in our midst is another sitting senator, Senator Mike Gloor of the Grand Island area. So thank you for being here. Before we start with testimony, I just wanted to make a few brief comments about this whole visioning process that we are in and maybe to start with to tell you a couple of things that this process is not. And one of which is, we didn't embark on this because we think that education in Nebraska is in bad shape. Quite the contrary, actually. We think we have a great educational system in this state and we want to try to make it better and we want to make sure that if we are all kind of focused on the same priorities, we can make it even stronger than it already is. And secondly, we purposely, not sidetracked, but not focused our attention on the money portion. I have found in my six years in the Legislature that when we talk about education because it commands such a huge part of our state budget, that pretty much the focus is about funding. I know that will have to come when we once identify priorities and we need to put resources behind them. But for right now, we're not talking about the dollars and cents. We are just simply talking about what we feel are educational priorities in our state. And as I know that many of you understand, this has been a process that the committee has been working on all summer. We have met several times and when we started the process, came up with what we considered to be a vision, mission, and four goals. At that point, we did an on-line survey and we're pleased that over 5,000 Nebraskans responded with comments about what we had come up with. From there we developed objectives to go with each of those goals. We met with some interested parties in educational circles and beyond in roundtable discussions with them and that helped us clarify a few things that we had put together. And now here we are with our public hearings. We had a great public hearing in Omaha, very well-attended. Yesterday we were in Norfolk and today we are here as well. There will be one additional public hearing that is not directly related to the visioning process but is in some ways related and it has to do with the use of lottery dollars being used for education. And that public hearing will be later on this fall. But we are, as I said, pleased to have all of you here and look forward to your testimony. And we are certainly here to listen. It's not that we're going to engage you in discussion. We are here to listen carefully to what you have to say and look forward to that. So, a few ground rules, if you will, on testimony. If you do intend...I misplaced my notes so I'm going to wing this and, Mandy, I'll have to make sure I clarify everything. If you don't already have a green sheet if you're planning to testify, please get the green sheet and fill out the sheet in its entirety. Please print and when you come up to testify, then simply give that green sheet to Mandy. When you arrive at the seat to testify, we are going to limit testimony today to five minutes and I'll try to give you the one minute signal, and then, like that, when we prefer that you end your testimony at five minutes. When you begin, please state your name and also spell it for purposes of the record. If you don't wish to testify but want your name written into the record as being here, I think there's a sign-in sheet right outside the door to do that. And also if you have written

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testimony, we can accept that as well. If you are testifying and have handouts, we hope that you have 12 copies of it so we have enough for the committee and the staff. With that, I think we have covered everything. And we have the first row down here at the bottom is sort of being designated for the testifiers, so if you are planning to testify, kind of fill those seats in and when you're done, then move back, so it just kind of streamlines the process a little bit. So...and I've taken the liberty of asking one person since it was just a little bit difficult for him to get up here, we've asked him to be the first testifier. So, we're ready for you. [LB1103]

BERT PETERSON: I could use my five minutes just getting here. (Laughter) [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: No, we won't start the clock just yet. Do you want to remain standing or would you like to sit down? [LB1103]

BERT PETERSON: Standing would be great, if you don't mind. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: That's fine, that's fine. Is that going to pick up okay, Mandy? [LB1103]

BERT PETERSON: Can you hear? [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Okay. Yeah, okay, very good. [LB1103]

BERT PETERSON: You need...you all, I hope, have your handout. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Yes. [LB1103]

BERT PETERSON: (Exhibit 1) You got to pretend there's a large screen in back of me with all of these colors. I appreciate the opportunity to be here. My name is Bert Peterson, B-e-r-t P-e-t-e-r-s-o-n. I sent in a long version, 13-page version, of commentary. And it basically boils down to two points. I'm encouraging emphasizing the role of the parent, their communication between parent and school, and secondly, discard the testing. It's nonsense. Pure waste of money. ESEA was signed in 1965 by Lyndon Johnson. The intent was to reduce the achievement gap between, at that time, white and African-American students. Since then it has been expanded to basically rich and poor. In effect it's been...now, there have been a lot of amendments to it and much of it is good law. Reducing that gap that has been a total absolute failure for 50 years, 49-plus. Absolute failure. We're wasting time. And the reason, you can trace it back to ESEA, it was primarily the responsibility has been laid solely on schools. Schools can't do it. Change slides again. A child from birth to age 18, graduation, spends 10 percent of his time in school; 90 percent of time is home and in his neighborhood. Schools cannot overcome that and haven't for 50 years. In schools...a researcher's break this breakdown into two phases. In-school factors which are building, facilities, curriculum,

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administration, and teachers. It represents about 20 percent of the affect on that achievement gap. Teachers are the biggest portion of that in-school factor. They represent something under 10 percent. Out-of-school factors, we're talking about food insecurity or hunger, housing insecurity, fear, poor health. That represents 80 percent of that achievement gap. You had in your vision item Goal #4 which brings the parent and the school together in collaboration. That's a tremendous opportunity to expand that role. What I'm suggesting is, use the school social worker for outside the school. The teachers, the administration they can set up the PTL, encourage activities with the PTL. That gets the parents to come to PTL meetings. The parents that don't come because of work, for whatever reason, now we use the school's social worker outside the school. They go to the home. Now, you all have seen a lot of my stuff. It goes on forever. (Laugh) I appreciate the opportunity. Please look at bringing the parents, making the parents part of this in closing of the achievement gap. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you, Mr. Peterson. Are there questions for Bert? Senator Haar. [LB1103]

SENATOR HAAR: Yes. Well, thank you. I've read the things you've sent to my office and just real briefly, obviously, you have an education background to do the kind of research and work that you presented to us. Could you tell me real briefly what that is? [LB1103]

BERT PETERSON: I graduated from the school. I...we're talking about...got lucky. I was a pretty fair wrestler. You would never know it with this, but got a scholarship to Nebraska UNL, went to Teacher's College, graduated and that was shortly after Sputnik. And the opportunities for a math major--and I was a math major--were tremendous. So I went into actuarial science and that was my career during my entire work period. [LB1103]

SENATOR HAAR: Okay. Well, keep sending...sending information. [LB1103]

BERT PETERSON: I'll do it. Thank you. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Any other questions? Thank you for your testimony and you be careful getting down those steps. [LB1103]

BERT PETERSON: I will. Thank you. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Okay. All right, we'll hear from our next testifier. Welcome. [LB1103]

CHERYL REED: (Exhibit 2) Thank you. My name is Cheryl Reed, C-h-e-r-y-l R-e-e-d. I'm here to support the testimony of Dr. Eileen Vautravers who represented the

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Nebraska Dyslexia Association at the Omaha public hearing. I'm a member of NDA and also a board member. I'm here to encourage early recognition and appropriate instruction of students with dyslexia, and to give my personal journey with dyslexia as a parent of a child with dyslexia. My son, as a prechooler, started showing difficulty tying his shoes, and naming months, seasons, and letters of the alphabet in sequence. By second grade he had increasing difficulties with reading and writing cursive. He was put on an IEP for reading around that time. As a parent, I was pleased that the schools would be giving my son the help he needed and I trusted the schools. Then in 3rd grade, math became more difficult and in 4th and 5th grade, writing and spelling were really difficult for him. All along, I would meet with the teachers and ask them what can I do as a parent to help my son become a successful reader. And I had difficulty understanding his struggles in school since I was a college graduate with advanced degrees. I've since learned that one-third of poor readers live in college-educated families. His teachers would say, read more to him, which I had been doing since he was an infant and I still was doing. They said, give him fish oil; use a colored transparency over the letters to help him read. All these interventions were not successful, so I took it upon myself to get my son some summer tutoring. I spent \$4,500 on Sylvan Learning and \$1,600 on visual therapy. All these interventions were not successful as well and I've learned since that none of these measures help a child with dyslexia learn to read. Then in the 5th grade he was given a new teacher who had been teaching him in the Middle School. This teacher shared with me that he was not trained to teach my son math or spelling. My son fell further behind. He developed anxiety. In 6th grade, the country school that my son had been attending closed and he was transferred to a Middle School in a town nearby. There he felt stupid and was bullied. I could not get him out of my car in the morning. I had to take him to a psychologist who diagnosed him with anxiety related to his school experience. My son began taking medication. I know now that children who have emotional or behavioral problems, 30 to 50 percent of those children also have learning disabilities. The 6th and 7th graders...or the 6th and 7th grade years were difficult for my son. He continued with an IEP through the 7th grade and was told that he was going to be put on a 504 plan going into the 8th grade. With much concern, because my son was not progressing on an IEP and wondering if he would get a lesser educational plan on the 504, I started gathering his educational records and learned that he did not know his multiplication tables and he was reading at a 3.5 grade level going into the 8th grade. One of his IEP goals that had been written in 2005 had never been met and it was 2010. So I had my son independently tested by a pediatric clinical neuropsychologist who diagnosed him with dyslexia. He qualified for an IEP in reading, written language, and math. I immediately got in touch with the Nebraska Dyslexia Association and learned about dyslexia. I obtained a math program that was explicit and multisensory and taught my son his multiplication tables in three hours. For the first time a light bulb went on for my son. He felt hopeful. He felt that he was not a failure. He felt that the schools were failing him. So with an IEP and explicit recommendations, my son began the 8th grade. He started a Sunday Reading program. But today, where's my son today? He's a 12th grader, soon

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to graduate. He is reading at a 7th to 9th grade level. He has difficulty writing papers. His spelling is poor and his math is basic. His two older siblings, who don't have dyslexia, are going to a four-year college. But the real question is, where could my son have been today had he received early screening for dyslexia and received early appropriate intervention by a properly trained teacher? [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you, Mrs. Reed. Any questions for Cheryl? Thank you for your testimony. Welcome. [LB1103]

ROBIN STEVENS: (Exhibit 3) Hi, Kate. I'll wait until those get out because that follows my presentation. My name is Robin, R-o-b-i-n, Stevens, S-t-e-v-e-n-s, an educator for 40 years, now retired, and running for the Nebraska State School Board, 7th District. Thank you to Chairperson, Senator Kate Sullivan, and all senators of the Education Committee and their staff. Thank you for having this and other hearings to allow the public response to the education strategic plan for the state of Nebraska. Please allow me a brief philosophical comment: Education needs to change its current fixation on standards and testing. Nebraska must continue to resist the Common Core. Education's top priority must focus on researched-based, dollarwise, early childhood education. This will allow all children the opportunity to enter school prepared to learn and fulfill their life's potential. During my oral comments, I'll not go through all of the specific suggestions that are found on the second page or the back page. But I trust you will find the time to read my response. If you have questions, comments, please note my phone number and e-mail address above. Thank you for the time and effort you and many others have spent to create this strategic plan. I appreciate the fact that you have started your objectives 1.A and 1.B focusing on early childhood education. I would encourage you to keep this at the top of your list. Specifically, I'll ask that your time line for 1.A and 1.B be in 2015, investigate, research and develop; 2016 to pilot; 2017 to implement a statewide program for all public schools. I would also ask that ages 0 to 3 be added to 1.B. I would encourage you to use lottery funds to investigate, research and develop 1.A and 1.B. Sustainable funding will need additional research and method of implementation. Again, I'll not take the time to go through my other suggestions, but I will ask that you find a way to reduce your goals and objectives. I know this will be difficult, but I also know funds, or the lack of, will be an issue as they always are. As you know, strategic planning is a continuous process. Annual updating and evaluating is crucial. Possibly you can eliminate some of the goals and the objectives now and revisit them as you review your strategic plan. I encourage you to challenge the conventional wisdom that focuses on standards and testing, and in its place focusing on the growing body of research and practice that is early childhood education. Thank you. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you, Mr. Stevens. If, as you say, we were to move away from more standards and testing of those standards, how do you propose we assess the progress that children are making? [LB1103]

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ROBIN STEVENS: I think what you have currently done with standards and testing, I mean we've been through STARS, we've been through NeSA. We hear talk about Common Core, and I do appreciate the fact that we've stayed away from that. I'm not saying that it is to be eliminated. That is not my point. My point is the exuberance, the fixation, the excitement, the frustration that testing has taken on its life here within our educational system. So if we must, and I realize we must, to prove some form of accountability, if we must, of course, we're going to continue to have standards. We're going to continue to have assessments, but the amount of money, the amount of time, the amount of effort that we have asked of our educators, and our legislators in the area of testing, and all of the things that have gone into that from hiring people to trying to come up with an efficient way of judging what these scores really mean, I just say stop, no more, from the standpoint that, don't increase that. It's really not the route that we should be going. Let's take that money and put it in the area that we all now know is where it would best be spent and that is in the area of early childhood education. So again, to reiterate, do we do away with it? No, but let's not expand it. Let's use the funds that we would use to expand it, put that into early childhood education. You'll be...you'll be years ahead. [LB1103]

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

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you, ma'am. Mr. Stevens, thank you for your testimony and two very quick questions. Would you elaborate a little more on your opposition to the Common Core so we understand it? [LB1103]

ROBIN STEVENS: There are numerous ways that people have. And by the way, I've spent a lot of time in my campaigning visiting with representatives from many of the school districts here and listening to many of the citizens. And so, first of all, you should know at least in the 7th District there appears to be a very strong opposition to it. From my perspective, do I...and they will say that they're really disappointed, it's the federal government again trying to play the heavy hand on state governments to again give them more control and that sort of thing. I'm not as concerned about that. As a matter of fact as I read through the background of the Common Core, I find that, I think it was fairly well done in that they really did try to get a broad group of people to give them input, much like you guys are trying to do to get a broad input from the people that it's going to affect. So my issue becomes...and those things are fine. I understand those complaints, but my biggest issue is again, as I have already mentioned, we started with STARS assessment. We spent time, treasures, and talents of educators to assist in the STARS accountability system. Now we're into NeSA. Again, really don't know what the figure is but it has to be in the millions of dollars that we had spent either locally or at the state level to make sure that they are appropriate, and then that they can be tested and tested with validity and all of that sort of thing. So now what we're saying, or one of the things is, again as I mentioned to Senator Sullivan, enough is enough. STARS, NeSA, now if we move into the Common Core, I see it as just another layer in which many

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funds will be, in my opinion, wasted. And so, therefore, it shows...it proves to me that there is no real value in moving to the Common Core. NeSA is fine. If we must have Common...if we must have standards, we must have assessments, fine. NeSA is fine. Now I will say this, that I think seven schools...excuse me, seven states now are no longer following the Common Core and I'm glad that Nebraska is one of them. [LB1103]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you. My second question. Do you feel the same way about the ACT and SAT? [LB1103]

ROBIN STEVENS: That...first of all, I can only...well, I can relate to many experiences. You're going to have to realize that this is the nature of post-high school education. So for me to say I'm for or against it, I don't know if it serves any real positive purpose one way or another. I think the discussion needs to be between public education in particular at the high school level and our post-high schools programs as far as, okay, why do you believe the ACT and the SAT are a good measure for college entrance. [LB1103]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you. [LB1103]

ROBIN STEVENS: Sure. [LB1103]

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

ROBIN STEVENS: Thank you. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Welcome. [LB1103]

NANCY FULTON: (Exhibit 4) Thank you. Thank you, Senator Sullivan and the members of the Education Committee. I appreciate the opportunity to come today and discuss our state's educational priorities, and to provide a little input on the visioning process. For the record, I'm Nancy Fulton, N-a-n-c-y F-u-l-t-o-n. I was a 34-year classroom teacher and now serve as the president of the Nebraska State Education Association. I'm here today on behalf of our 28,000 members, including teachers, support professionals, faculty, and retirees. NSEA's vision for education in Nebraska is straightforward: Provide a great public education for every student. At NSEA, 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 ensuring that every student--regardless of their socioeconomic status, race, gender, or other factors--is taught by a motivated, well-trained, high-qualified teacher. This past spring, NSEA conducted six focus groups. We talked to 72 Nebraska teachers, all between the ages of 22 and 32, the millennial age group. Overwhelmingly, the top three concerns shared by these educators were the amount of standardized testing, the increasing class size, and the lack of access to mental health services for students. I'm going to use my time today to speak about the amount of standardized testing. We believe it is important to

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protect the time needed for the direct instruction of our students. Standardized testing continues to eat away at the instructional time and in many cases, it's neither productive nor helpful in providing the teacher with timely information that could be used for improving student learning. The excessive use of these tests promotes a drill-like, teaching-to-the-test approach and undermines our state's ability to produce innovators and critical thinkers. Standardized tests have been part of the American system since the mid-1800s. Their use skyrocketed after the 2002 No Child Left Behind Act, or NCLB, mandated annual testing in all 50 states. You took standardized tests, I took standardized tests. But research has shown that the use of the standardized testing has not improved student achievement and is not a true reliable measure of student performance. Since NCLB's introduction, American students have slipped from 18th, in the world in math, in 2000, to 31st place in 2009. A similar decline has taken place in science. Increasingly, instructional time is being consumed by standardized test preparation in Nebraska. The Nebraska state reading test, known as NeSA-R, is given statewide to 3rd through 8th graders and at a high school grade. Students in 3rd through 8th grade, as well as high school students, take the NeSA math. Students in 4th or 5th, 8th grade and 11th grade take the NeSA science test. Fourth, eighth and eleventh grade students take the NeSA writing test as well. Each test takes between two and three hours to complete. Typically, older students do not take the standardized test seriously because the test do not affect their grades and they know that. Millard Public Schools have recently begun to award special ribbons to be worn at graduation gowns for above average NeSA scores because previously students had no other incentives to do well on the test. Excessive testing may teach children to be good test takers, but it doesn't prepare them to be productive adults. Also, these tests have been shown to cause severe stress in younger students. I taught third grade. Third grade is when the NeSA math and reading tests begin for children and they are like eight and nine years old. Finally, standardized testing does not lead to internationally recognized excellence. Finland taught the international education rankings from 2001 to 2008, yet it has no external standardized tests used to rank students or to rank schools. Giving teachers time to teach core material is important. I have attached to my testimony a handout entitled The Ever Increasing Burden on America's Public Schools, by Jamie Robert Vollmer, which shows how government mandates have encroached on instructional teaching time over the past 100 years. I think you will find it very eye-opening. We would like...ask the committee to take note of these concerns when completing its visioning recommendations. Standardized testing may provide some measure of student performance and improvement in the classroom, but we believe it is the overuse of these standardized tests that has diminishing marginal utility; basically that the benefit from over-testing does not exceed the cost of the greater loss of instructional time in the classroom. We hope the visioning process will be instrumental in improving the institution of education in our state, and that as a result of your committee's work, new initiatives will be implemented to encourage support and gains for student achievement within the classrooms. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. [LB1103]

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SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you, Nancy. In your focus groups in discussion, they said that there was the burgeoning test requirement, but did they offer any alternatives, particularly in terms of getting the results or information back to the teachers so that changes could be made if necessary? [LB1103]

NANCY FULTON: That was the concern they expressed over and over because I attended...I wasn't able to attend all six focus groups, but they did, the importance of immediate feedback to the teacher of the class so that they could adapt, change the instruction. And often the results of these tests are not returned until after a teacher no longer even has these students. [LB1103]

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

NANCY FULTON: Thank you. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Welcome. [LB1103]

CRAIG HICKS: (Exhibit 5) Thank you. Good afternoon, senators. I appreciate the time to share with you today. My name is Craig Hicks, C-r-a-i-g H-i-c-k-s, technology trainer at Educational Service Unit 13 in Scottsbluff, Nebraska, and we provide support services to 21 school districts in the Panhandle. I'm here representing the BlendEd Initiative and I know in the other two testimony...or hearings, that you had an opportunity to hear some of that information. When you look at technology-related projects of which BlendEd is one of those, most people generally talk about the "What", the elements of the project and the equipment that's going to be purchased and needed to roll this out and how, the professional development, the teachers are going to need to be able to implement this. I actually want to start with "Why". And when we talk about BlendEd in my mind, "Why" is personalized and equitable learning opportunities for all students in the state. Being in the Panhandle of Nebraska, we serve a number of very small school districts. And looking at equitable opportunities, I did a little bit of just digging on class sizes. Enrollment in Lincoln Public Schools for 2013-14 school year, seniors, 2,732 students. Sioux County High School, one of the districts that we serve, seven. We need to provide the same learning opportunities to those seven students in Sioux County that we do for the 2,732 in Lincoln. And we have the tools to do it. We have been doing some things with distance learning for a number of years. We have the tools now to be able to put great teachers in front of all students, but the 12 teachers that we have in Sioux County High School can't match the same number, I mean, when we look at 350 teachers in Lincoln Public Schools. We've got to be able to use the resources...human resources that we have available across the state. Another opportunity for BlendEd learning, homebound students. For a number of reasons, might be medical issues, might be behavioral issues, might be psychological issues, whatever it is that doesn't

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allow them to be best served within a school building. We can still deliver those opportunities to those students. Career ready. I know there are going to be some opportunities for people to speak today on career clusters. One of the things, and I was doing some things, looking at some information that came out of Illinois. And they're putting together some certificate models, and I know there are things on-line right now. They're talking about the electronic badges. People in those career clusters can acquire those badges and have a set of credentials when they graduate that businesses are looking for in developing that career readiness. This is a quick definition of blended learning. A combination of traditional face-to-face instruction, and on-line. And I think the key thing that we start to looking at with blended learning is that there is some student control over time, place, path, and pace. Okay. The learning does not have to happen or should be available, 24/7, 365. Make those opportunities available to students. Not all learning has to happen within the walls of a school. When you start talking about pace, how do we develop opportunities for students to learn once they've mastered a certain skill where they're allowed to continue. And path. There's specific paths that we have to set forth, but there are also ways that we can differentiate those paths to meet the needs of individual students. I do want to spend just a little bit of time talking about the "What" the actual products that will be part of this. Identity management is probably the critical element to get this started. A single sign-on capability to be able to log in once as a staff member or a student and have access to the learning tools that they need to get to. I want to sign in once, I want to have access to the tools that I need as a student and a teacher to best serve my learning opportunities. Learning management systems. There are a number of them across the state and we've got pockets of this working really well, but to deploy it systemically, we need your help. Learning object repository, a place where we can deliver digital content. And ESUs have taken a lead in this and we've actually deployed this across the entire state of Nebraska. Those are in place. The ultimate goal of this is to, again, equitable personalized learning opportunities for all students in the state. And I want that to be something that when we look at this we've got the data dashboard, we have teacher/principal evaluation, and we have blended learning. Those three elements all have to work together. And they talked about accountability. Okay. The accountability system that we need to create, and I actually had this conversation with the commissioner last week, the accountability needs to be the student. Okay. The accountability systems we have now are to the state and to the federal government. The accountability system that we need is to the student. Thank you. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you, Mr. Hicks. Is it fair to say that we have total connectivity among all the school districts in the state? [LB1103]

CRAIG HICKS: Connectivity, we do. But the elements of this project are still not systemic. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: And so then when you made the comment to achieve that, you

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need our help. But is it more just simply getting the educators to buy into this? [LB1103]

CRAIG HICKS: I think both. To deploy something on this scale, I do think there will have to be financial support. We are working with Nebraska Department of Education. There are three main projects that are being put in place. Again, BlendEd being one of those. And I do think there are things in place to have dollars allocated for these projects. On the other side of that, I do think from a professional development standpoint, when we start having the conversations about lottery dollars, I think that's an important place where teachers are going to need to be trained. It's a big transition from ownership of learning being solely in the hands of the teacher to now being placed in the hands of the student. [LB1103]

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

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Yes, ma'am, thank you very much. Craig, thank you for your presentation and I certainly do agree with your premise, where you're heading, and the philosophy behind it. And it's the third presentation we've heard on BlendEd. You've coordinated that very well with the hearings and I'm getting it and I understand it, but I've also lived in the past as a secondary director in Millard and as an assistant principal and as a principal of a high school. We spent a lot of money, did a lot of wiring, put in a lot of equipment that was shortly taken out because districts weren't cooperating with one another. Are we going to see history repeating itself, or are we in a different mode now with all that's going on and how this is coming about? And second question: Where are you in discussions, elaborate on this if you would, with NDE, all the issues, educational TV, UNL extension division, and keep adding any other layers you want to add? Are we big picturing this so it has the greatest chance of success and for success? And I want it to be successful because I want the rigor, the choice of rigor for every school district and every student in those buildings to have the opportunity that 2,200 kids had in my school, or the seven that you're talking about in Sioux County. I want every child to have that. [LB1103]

CRAIG HICKS: Right. I do think the focus of this is not on the technology. So when you talk about technology projects that were not successful in the past possibly, this is focusing on the student. Why are we doing this? And it is putting learning opportunities in front of every student that best suit their needs. So I think the... [LB1103]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: In and out of the school day. [LB1103]

CRAIG HICKS: Yes. [LB1103]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: That's also different. [LB1103]

CRAIG HICKS: Yes. So I think that focus on the student is where we need to be and not

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on the technology. Now to deliver those opportunities, yes, the technology has to be in place. In terms of cooperative agreements, conversations with NDE, very strong. I was actually at a meeting last week where we had those conversations, leadership at the educational service unit level as well as NDE. We spent the entire day together. BlendEd was one of the topics. The data dashboard and teacher/principal evaluation. So all of those are taking place. We continue to have conversations with NET. The learning object repository. That delivery of digital content resources to students, we need to work with NET to have their resources available in this one location. I want teachers to be able to, again, that one log-in and have one place that they're going to find educational resources for their students, not doing a Google search and just finding what they find. We need to put those things together for them so that they have that one location where they go to search to find the educational resources that are best suited for the students that are in their classroom. [LB1103]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: But Senator Sullivan's question, is there anything you need in policy directions that may not be there, or you haven't made your list up yet of what might potentially be asked of us besides money? And money is important, but... [LB1103]

CRAIG HICKS: Right. [LB1103]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: ...you also need policy in place. [LB1103]

CRAIG HICKS: Right. And we've actually been having conversations with some of the state school board members. There are other states that are in the process, so we're just researching those items at this point. But there are things that will have to be put in place. I don't know how much modification there will be to Rule 10. I don't think a great deal, but there may need to be some policy revisions. [LB1103]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Well, high school students start understanding what MOOCs are doing to the college scene, and college credit and noncredit, both aspects of that, it's only a matter of time. And I'm cheering for you to be successful, but I hope we can help in any way we can. [LB1103]

CRAIG HICKS: I think it's important that we understand school is going to be...still be a very important place for our K-12 students to go. But we also need to look at making opportunities available to them whenever we can. [LB1103]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you. [LB1103]

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

CRAIG HICKS: Thank you. [LB1103]

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SENATOR SULLIVAN: Welcome. [LB1103]

GORDON ROETHEMEYER: (Exhibit 6) Welcome. Thank you. Thank you, senators. I am Gordon Roethemeyer, executive director of distance education for the ESU Coordinating Council. Again, my name is Gordon Roethemeyer, G-o-r-d-o-n, Roethemeyer, R-o-e-t-h-e-m-e-y-e-r. As you heard Craig say, blended learning is approach to education that uses a combination of digital and face-to-face instruction to create personalized learning environment for students at school. And because of the successes made possible by the Legislature's support of distance learning in Nebraska, Nebraska is in a good place to help schools implement blended learning statewide. When implemented correctly with the funding and tool and support that is needed, blended learning will improve student academic performance. Blended learning is appropriate for schools in Nebraska at this time because they have good technology resources and a robust statewide network, and they want to improve student achievement by more effectively integrating new technologies with traditional learning. Blended learning itself is a new practice, but it dovetails perfectly with what has been accomplished over the last eight years as a result of LB1208 passed back in 2006 and because of one-to-one and Bring Your Own Device programs in many schools right now. Blended learning is based on sound research and the longstanding principles of data-driven decision making about student readiness and placement; differentiated instruction; small group instruction; and varied learning modalities. It is important to note that blended learning is not distance learning or on-line school, but it can effectively leverage those kinds of resources. Computers and other digital resources are used in a classroom under the supervision of a teacher. It helps teachers provide more focused instruction to small groups of students instead of having to give lectures. Digital educational resources are essential for students today because they allow students to learn at their own pace; keep students engaged while the teacher is providing specialized attention to individual groups and students; to automatically measure and report on student progress and give that immediate feedback; present the same lesson materials in different ways. Any child from any background can benefit from this type of curriculum because of more choices and greater equity. There are a wide range of options when it comes to blended learning, and Nebraska schools and the ESUs have already invested in a diverse array of services. As blended learning is implemented, ESUs can help schools track their results through a continuous improvement process and measure success and demonstration of real gains in career and college readiness. Where do schools in rural areas find bassoon, oboe, or Spanish vocal lessons for talented students when they are far away from Lincoln and Omaha? They can, and they have. These kinds of innovative programs that provide personalized and differentiated instruction must be encouraged and supported so that blended instruction can thrive. How could a student from tiny Arcadia ever hope to fulfill the dream of getting in...her dream of getting into MIT and study aerospace engineering if her local district did not offer the advanced classes she needed? Molly O'Brien did by finding classes she

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needed in NVIS, Nebraska's distance education course clearinghouse. Molly was able to pursue a customized learning pathway because in 2006 legislators funded the purchase of distance-learning technology for all schools that were willing to send or receive distance-learning classes. Providing students with the opportunity to choose their own customized learning pathway is part of what blended learning is all about. Thank you. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you, Mr. Roethemeyer. Any questions for Gordon? Thank you for your testimony. [LB1103]

GORDON ROETHEMEYER: Okay. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Welcome. [LB1103]

MICHELLE AREHART: Thank you. My name is Michelle Arehart, and it's M-i-c-h-e-l-l-e, Arehart is A-r-e-h-a-r-t, and I am the director of the after-school program, the Kearney Community Learning Center for Kearney Public Schools. We serve approximately 500 K through 8th students and 7 elementary and 2 middle schools in Kearney. I would like to thank you for your work on this important topic establishing a future vision of education for all Nebraska youth. I'm here to discuss with you the important role that after-school on summer programs, what we call expanded learning opportunities, play in helping thousands of Nebraska youth get the additional hands-on learning opportunities that they need to succeed in school. These programs are extremely important because we all know that young people come from varied backgrounds and have different out of time school experiences. Sorry. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: That's fine. [LB1103]

MICHELLE AREHART: First time I've ever done this, very nervous. (Laughter) In Kearney... [LB1103]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Could you speak a little more...could you speak a little louder, please? [LB1103]

MICHELLE AREHART: Okay. A little louder, okay. In Kearney, we share partnerships with many organizations to help foster engaged youth that become our future community leaders. A few of our partners in Kearney are Boy Scouts which we have our own Cub Scout troop for the after-school program. A lot of our students, the parents don't have the time or the means to take their kids to something as simple as a Cub Scout meeting. So we provide that and we also have art classes with MONA. We have outside science classes with the Rowe Sanctuary located outside of Gibbon. And we have history classes, hands-on history classes with the Trails and Rails Museum. And we also work with Kearney public libraries and Kearney Park and Recs that get the kids

out into the community, explore the library, explore the parks in Kearney. And we work with UNK. We have a great partnership with UNK. And with their team, 100 students, they come out and they volunteer for our programs and do a lot of one-on-one with the students and they also work with us to provide theater clubs and art clubs. They also work with MONA to provide those art clubs for us at no cost. And we also work with the planetarium in Kearney. We have an astronomy group that actually helps prepare the shows for the planetarium. And we work with many other organizations in Kearney: the Humane Society, Buffalo County Extension Office. We have a healthy eating program that we work with the students and we also have a sewing club, robotics, and many other programs like that. And I just want to talk to you more about after-school programming. It's not an extension of the school day. We...or more work for the existing school day staff. We work side by side with the school day staff to help meet those needs of those students. We work with the teachers, find out who is getting behind in homework, who needs a little bit extra help, not just academically, but sometimes emotionally. We are that connection a lot of the times between the parents and the school day staff. We're there, we see the parents every day. My staff, a lot of the times, goes to the IEP meetings, the MIT meetings and just helps facilitate that learning. We also offer a lot of enrichment activities, like I spoke of, with the communities and for the students. A few of them are dance theater, robotics, astronomy, cooking, and a lot of other opportunities that our students...our at-risk students wouldn't normally be able to experience. In our community we have created a much needed mechanism, KCLC, for community organizations. We work well with the nonprofits in Kearney to make it a community school to get the kids out into the community so they know what those organizations are in our community. And again, we work with the school day staff to meet the needs of the students. We make sure no student is turned away. We work with the social workers in Kearney to meet those needs. We know those students that are not receiving everything that they need in school. We also follow the guidelines established by the Department of Education's 21st Century Community Learning Centers program to ensure program quality. And there's a growing body of research supporting that we are finding in our community regular participation in our ELL programs have a positive impact on student achievement and behavior in the school day programs and give youth in our community more positive interactions with caring adults. In closing, in order for this to be a true vision for education to supporting the education for all Nebraska youth, we stress the need to recognize the importance of the space which makes up around 80 percent of a young person's waking and potential learning hours, and create strategies that will enable ELOs to be an explicit critical part of a education vision for the state that ensures that all staff have equitable opportunities to succeed. We think that this could be enhanced by more specific language about the ELOs in the objectives following proposed Goal 4 developing collaborative education and relationships with the entire community, including individuals, families, businesses, and organizations. As after-school programs, we are already doing this on a daily basis and we just want to remind you that instead of creating something, we already have the system in place that is working to engage the families, engage the communities in our

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children's education. Again, I would like to thank the committee for the work on this important topic establishing a future vision of education both inside and beyond the traditional school walls that will help all Nebraska youth get the education they need to succeed and to promote Nebraska's continued growth. [LB1103]

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

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Yes, ma'am. Michelle, thank you for your presentation. Would you go over the grade levels you're working with again, please, repeat that? [LB1103]

MICHELLE AREHART: Yes, in Kearney we serve from kindergarten through 8th grade. [LB1103]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Okay. Excellent. Thank you for your work. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Senator Scheer. [LB1103]

SENATOR SCHEER: Do you have contact with other directors in other districts, and more specifically, to the smaller communities? I mean, Kearney is sort of mecca for a lot of the things you're talking about but as you get into smaller communities, those resources become less available, and I'm just curious how those folks might be utilizing that. [LB1103]

MICHELLE AREHART: We actually do meet on...we have a coalition that has certain directors throughout the state and then we also have director meetings for the programs that are funded by 21st Century Community Learning Centers. I mean, I've been with the program from the beginning. This is my 11th year and we actually have mentor. It's unofficial but we mentor a lot of the smaller programs and Broken Bow actually does have an after-school program and that director is Michele Taylor. And I have worked with Michele on reaching out to finding any of the community people because there's always...there's always a Kiwanis group or it could be just someone in the community that enjoys gardening that would come in and help your student. Or there could be the city has a recycling program to get your students involved in that. So we do mentor and meet and discuss those things across the state. [LB1103]

SENATOR SCHEER: Okay. Just out of curiosity, are you and your employees part of the school district, are you part of a foundation, or how are you...worked in Kearney? [LB1103]

MICHELLE AREHART: In Kearney we started out as the foundation and with the 21st Century grants, they run five years and after that first initial five years, then the grant was actually moved to the school district. And so we do...the grant is through the school

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district. We do have a few programs that are actually completely tuition ran. And so they are in the foundation so we've kind of...we use it as an umbrella, but we kind of go between the two. [LB1103]

SENATOR SCHEER: Okay. Thank you. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: You said you served over 500 children. [LB1103]

MICHELLE AREHART: Yes. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: So what's the selection process in terms of who participates because that probably doesn't cover all the students that would be able to participate? [LB1103]

MICHELLE AREHART: We have an open enrollment, but we do work with the teachers at each of the schools. And if at the point in time where we have our first parent-teacher conference, the student hasn't enrolled and we know that they need that help, then the teacher discusses that with the parents at the parent-teacher conferences about getting them into KCLC. We never turn a student away if there is a need. So we work magic to try to fit them in whenever we can, but again we don't want to have a room of 50 kids with one educator trying to help everyone with homework because that also kind of goes against, you know, it would be more like herding than actually tutoring, so. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: And your program, it's not connected with the foundation, it's the 21st Century grant, and so there's no tuition involved in it. [LB1103]

MICHELLE AREHART: Yes. In Kearney we've always...and that is an option with the 21st Century grants. We have always from the beginning had a tuition base. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Sliding scale, or...? [LB1103]

MICHELLE AREHART: A sliding scale, yes. And we also work with...I do work with the school and if we have students that fall under homeless funds or migratory worker funds, then I work with Carol Renner, our associate superintendent, to help put some of those funds on students that were meeting those needs. So we really work well with the school. [LB1103]

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

SENATOR HAAR: Yes, I'm a strong supporter of the CLCs and I've worked with the ones in Lincoln. We have one school, Park Middle School, where they offer breakfast, lunch, and supper with CLCs before and after school. How do you...there's got to be

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sort of a point where schools can't just keep taking on more and more responsibilities for bringing up children. I almost see in my mind a point where there's going to be dormitories and kids maybe go home for the weekend. How do you bring the community, because the community has got to step up and help to bring up children. The schools can't do it all. How do you convince communities of that and where do you think that's going? [LB1103]

MICHELLE AREHART: Well, in Kearney, I feel like our community is so willing...our nonprofits in Kearney are so willing to step up and a lot of the times it just takes a meeting and discuss with them our visions and then they're very willing to come in. At this point in time in Kearney, I'm at a point where I'm trying to reach out to the for-profit companies to try to get them in and get them invested into the program because I feel that it's so important with...just bringing it all in with the kids and the professional development for our teachers is to reach out to the communities and find out what kind of employees do they need. What will make strong employees for our future citizens and kind of...and go on helping us to create those citizens. One of the projects that we've done is with a...to describe the astronomy. And we actually wrote a NASA grant and received a of couple sets of telescopes for Kearney Public Schools. And the students, we originated wanting to teach the students about just the stars and they stumbled across light pollution and the kids were really excited about light pollution. And the more they learned about it they realized that the animals used...the birds used the North Star for migratory purposes and in Kearney, the cranes are so important to us. And so the students really got invested into this and they started learning more about it and they started sharing and they went to the Rowe sanctuary and shared with groups and they went to the planetarium and made shows on light pollution. And they've also gone to the city council and spoke about light pollution and what we can do in Kearney. And I feel just working with the community and those students not only did they learn about light pollution, they learned how to speak at a meeting so they won't be nervous when they're older. (Laugh) They also learned how to make those phone calls and to become those better citizens and I just feel that once the community sees that that they are helping us and helping us to create what the community needs. [LB1103]

SENATOR HAAR: Well, thanks for what you do. [LB1103]

MICHELLE AREHART: Thank you. [LB1103]

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

TRAVIS MILLER: Good afternoon. My name is Travis Miller, that's T-r-a-v-i-s M-i-l-l-e-r. I'm the superintendent of Bayard Public Schools in the shadow of lovely Chimney Rock in western Nebraska, 230 miles from here. I would like to begin by thanking you for conducting these hearings and for your commitment to a vision for education in our great state. As a former social studies educator, my belief is that one of the highest

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purposes of education is to develop and to maintain an enlightened citizenry. With a clear vision for education that is committed to students within communities across our state, we will improve the quality of life for all Nebraskans. So I'd like to thank you for your commitment to this process. I appreciate the committee distributing a draft vision and offering Nebraskans the opportunity to provide a feedback first through the survey and now through this hearing process. It is apparent that the committee had made adjustments to the vision based on those surveys and I want to express my appreciation for your responsiveness to the feedback that you received as a committee. Your responsive leadership is equally appreciated. In looking at some of the specifics included in the proposed strategic plan, I would like to commend you for the emphasis on early childhood education. We know that early childhood education is one of the best investments we can make as a state and in our communities. I also appreciate your interest in providing additional early childhood education opportunities for children whose backgrounds put them at greater risk for educational failure. I would like to remind the committee that many of the students that are at the greatest risk often come from rural areas, as much of Nebraska's poverty is in rural communities. As you make policy decisions in fulfillment of this vision, I would encourage you to keep children in every part of Nebraska in the forefront of your minds even though children in some neighborhoods in Omaha have the most publicly visible challenges. We know that children throughout our state come from homes with poverty, limited parental education, lack of access to healthcare, substance abuse, and lack of stable family structures. I strongly encourage you to include geographic diversity in your vision for meeting the needs of all children through early learning opportunities. I encourage the committee to include increased access to opportunities through distance learning in the vision. I would encourage you to consider the importance of distance learning courses within this vision because those courses provide more equitable access to students throughout the state. Another school district has recently proposed additional funding for career academies and college preparatory courses. I would respectfully ask that in the spirit of equity, at least a certain percentage, I would propose 50 percent of any courses funded through such a proposal be made available to other districts in the state through the Nebraska distance learning course clearinghouse. Such a requirement would help ensure that state funds serve to benefit students throughout the state rather than address a specific segment of the state student population. I appreciate the desire and the vision to create systems of support to assist parents. Providing support to parents helps educators, it helps students, and it helps the entire community. When we have parents who are able to effectively navigate educational systems and advocate for their children, it makes those school systems more effective. I would encourage you to think about providing equitable access for parents across the state when working to achieve this vision. It is very challenging for educational experts, policymakers, and state employees to reach the entire state particularly in schools like mine which are several hundred miles away from Lincoln and Omaha. I would encourage you to continue to focus on equitable access for parents and community members in rural areas along with urban areas when making policy decisions in fulfillment of this vision. Without intentional

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outreach, an additional funded position or an office in Lincoln does little to help parents in places like Bayard, Nebraska. One area of particular opportunity that currently exists is in the area of state reporting. Every district in the state of Nebraska is required to report significant amounts of information to the Department of Education. This information serves many important purposes and does inform policymakers and educators alike. The current system requires districts to send or upload data electronically to the state. A more efficient approach would be for the Department of Education to pull that data from schools into the Department. This has the potential to reduce the time school district staff members spend on reporting and would be more efficient. A data form process would allow for more timely reports and would allow us to devote our resources to analyzing the data rather than reporting it. I do have one concern I would like to share. I believe that the proposed vision does plant some seeds of regulation. Regulation is beneficial when it helps us to understand expectations and improve conditions such as safety and security, but it's unsound policy when regulatory burdens shift resources away from meeting the educational needs of our students and staff. The current wording in the strategic plan implies that schools are not currently safe and secure. There's no doubt we have room to grow and always will in these areas. I would, however, encourage you to incorporate language that would say that we'll have safer and more secure facilities and positive learning environments rather than implying that schools are currently unsafe. Our schools are as safe as they've ever been and districts are working every day to make them safer. So, I just would ask that you focus on safer rather than safe, because we already do have safe schools, but we want to make them safer. In conclusion, I'd like to reiterate my appreciation to the committee for conducting these hearings and for your responsiveness to the feedback you've received. Your dedication to this process is an indication of your dedication to all of our children, our schools, and our communities. On behalf of all Nebraskans, I would like to thank you for the time that you've committed to this vision and for your ongoing and future efforts to make Nebraska a great place to be a student. Thank you. [LB1103]

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

SENATOR SCHEER: Travis, just...you made the point as far as the funding go...disbursed, at least some of it. Yesterday, there was testimony of what they classified as a second tier funding and we asked specifically and it was on a per student basis regardless of where the students were at. So I don't think...my understanding is that it's trying to go towards any specific district or area. It's just on...their thought, at least the testifier's thought was it was on a student basis. So, just clarify that. [LB1103]

TRAVIS MILLER: Yeah, but my point would be that if you can somehow incentivize the sharing of those opportunities beyond districts that have career academies, for example, and college preparatory courses, that there could be a benefit to students throughout the state. Many of those career academy opportunities require coordination with the college, which is great if you're in Scottsbluff or Grand Island or Norfolk or

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Omaha. It's challenging in a location like Bayard where the community college has limited staff. Their availability through distance learning is limited. And so if there is incentives for districts to make those opportunities available as a requirement for receiving that funding, that would have a benefit to the entire state. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Senator Haar. [LB1103]

SENATOR HAAR: Yes, thank you. This sort of has to do with vision a little farther in the future. Nancy Fulton handed out this thing, The Ever Increasing Burden on America's Public Schools with lists and lists and lists of things you're required to do. Do you see the umbrella just getting bigger and bigger for public schools, or how do you handle that? [LB1103]

TRAVIS MILLER: I think the best way I can answer that is to talk to you about what we've been doing. We've been working very hard with our staff to provide high-quality curriculum and high-quality instruction. We've adopted an instructional model that is research-based, and our principals and teachers are working very hard to improve instruction with high-quality curriculum. We're in a location with high levels of poverty with approximately 56 percent of our students on free and reduced lunch. We have a lot of single family homes. Over the past year, areas we've been working to try and improve our educational performance have centered around reducing or eliminating barriers for learning. So things that we have done, is we've added a summer school in our elementary to reduce the...you know, to prevent the summer slide that we're all familiar with. We've added a breakfast in the classroom program to help our students in poverty and it's actually helped all of our students. Our students K-12, actually P-12, come in the door, they receive a breakfast, they go to the classroom and they eat it. We're trying to eliminate the barrier of hunger as an impediment to learning. We've added a preschool this year. We were fortunate to receive an early childhood learning grant. We're at a point where there's limited incremental value to additional initiatives within the school day. If we're going to improve student achievement, we've got to be working with our parents to reduce barriers to learning and improve the conditions for learning, whether that be by providing those breakfasts in the morning, a preschool opportunities. We're also...our board of education just discussed the plan for a community...a 21st Century Community Learning Center grant for a lot of the reasons that the previous speaker just addressed. We have a lot of kids with significant needs at home and we want to work with our parents. We would prefer that the parents address those but we know our parents don't have the capability to address all of those issues, particularly with limited economic opportunity. So we're working in partnership with the community and our parents to try to address those needs. [LB1103]

SENATOR HAAR: Okay. Thank you. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Senator Kolowski. [LB1103]

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SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you, ma'am. Travis, I hope people have a chance to listen to what you just said. That aspect of dealing with the whole child, the whole community, the whole family as you're reaching out, is going right back to what Nancy Fulton was talking about, Michelle was talking about, and a number of other people that have spoken today. You're doing that, you're trying to get that done and that's a tremendous outreach on the part of your district. If we don't think bigger than the current parameters that we're living in, we're always going to be boxed into a corner and not be able to get things done. It begs the issue of the continuation of expansion of the calendar, the educational calendar which still is an agricultural calendar makes no sense in this day and world that we're in today. And all of the other opportunities that might come with that as far as full use of facilities and staff, extended contracts, many other things that could be very beneficial for districts. So, stay the course. Keep up the good work. Thank you. [LB1103]

TRAVIS MILLER: Thank you. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Senator Scheer. [LB1103]

SENATOR SCHEER: Just real quickly, you talked about, for example, the career academies. Are you making an assumption that other districts won't help you with that? I mean, have you contacted LPS or some other district to try to work an agreement so that your students can participate in those programs? Because I know other districts are sharing that, so I...it would surprise me if some districts are not receptive to that. [LB1103]

TRAVIS MILLER: You know we have strong distance learning programs. I think this past year we had something like eight courses. We're a small school, approximately 210 students in grade 7 through 12. In the high school side a total enrollment of 422 plus 34 preschoolers, and we have a good partnership with our community college. The area's that are of particular concern to me are areas of future shortage. For example, healthcare. We know that in rural areas of Nebraska, we have a pending shortage of healthcare providers. Whether that be dentists, nurses, doctors, pediatricians, you name it, we have a shortage. And there's some great opportunities on-site, on college campuses for students to develop those nursing career academies for example. Another area is criminal justice. But the outreach opportunities at the current time that I'm aware of at least are very limited because of the hands-on types of requirements for those courses. If you're studying to be a CNA, for example, there's a significant hands-on component to have a quality education. And so, anything that we can do to increase opportunities for us to address those shortfalls is something that we would be very interested in. [LB1103]

SENATOR SCHEER: Well, I just took a tour last week, I believe it was Papillion's

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program. They have a...in the hospital, obviously. But I'm just wondering if you contacted them, if they wouldn't let you...if you've got students that are interested in that, utilize that from a long distance basis, you know, with the technology. Granted, you wouldn't have the hands-on or the testing, but you're not that far from Scottsbluff that they couldn't get some work within the system there. It's a side...I mean, I just...what bothers me when I hear things like that is school districts should be wanting, and I do think for the most part, are wanting to help each other. And when we start talking about having to incentivize or pay districts to help one another, that just sort of rubs me wrong. We're all state high schools, all school districts, and we should be trying to help each other both from a best practices standpoint or our educational opportunities. It doesn't make sense that we should have to pay another district to help another district with the technology the way it is now. So this isn't necessarily chiding you, but I think most districts are trying very hard to participate with other districts in participating among each other. So I would urge you to continue to look in that vein and not necessarily have to expect, you know, incentives in order for that to work. [LB1103]

TRAVIS MILLER: I would agree that districts are willing to work with one another. We trained our new teachers in Sutherland Public Schools on an instructional model. We traveled a couple hundred miles to share that opportunity with them. Our students ride a Bridgeport bus to a special needs program. We have an interlocal agreement with Bridgeport Public Schools to provide transportation to activities such as golf and cross country. And we're sharing a Spanish teacher with Minatare Public Schools. We have found that schools across the state have been willing to partner with one another, and I appreciate the insight about maybe approaching Papillion as a possible partner. Thank you for that. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you Travis and thanks for driving the distance. (Laughter) [LB1103]

TRAVIS MILLER: Thank you. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Welcome. [LB1103]

TIP O'NEILL: (Exhibit 7) Thank you, Senator. Senator Sullivan, members of the Education Committee, my name is Tip O'Neill, that's spelled T-i-p O-'-N-e-i-l-l. I'm president of the Association of Independent Colleges and Universities in Nebraska. The members of ICUN are Bellevue University, Bryan College of Health Sciences, Clarkson College, the College of St. Mary, Concordia University, Creighton University, Doane College, Grace University, Hastings College, Midland University, Nebraska Methodist College, Nebraska Wesleyan University, Union College, and York College. Those colleges and universities collectively enroll almost 33,000 students. We award more than 40 percent of the bachelor's and advance degrees awarded in Nebraska including more than one-half of the degrees in business and the health sciences. We award more

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than one-third of the degrees in teacher education. We enroll a high percentage of minority students, actually the highest percentage in all the sectors of higher education, all the nonprofit sectors. And our students are more likely to graduate at a higher rate and in a quicker time than students in other sectors. The Nebraska constitution in Article VII, Section 1, provides for free instruction in the common schools for all persons between the ages of 5 and 21. It has no such mandatory requirement for a higher education, which we believe gives the Legislature greater flexibility in how to utilize the higher education resources in this state. Dr. Baumgartner of the Coordinating Commission recently provided the Coordinating Commission some interesting information at its last meeting just earlier this week. Nebraska actually ranks in the top ten of states in support of higher education on a per capita basis and on per \$10,000 in income basis. However, we rank at the bottom of all Big Ten and Big East states in support of student aid. And it is interesting in terms of how we fund then higher education. We support institutions to a much greater extent than we support student aid. There was a recent article in the Chronicle of Higher Education just last week and I think it indicated the demographic challenges that face students...that face institutions, the types of institutions that I represent. Of those institutions that responded to a survey more than, I think 800 in the United States that responded, only 38 percent of the private colleges and universities that responded indicated that they had met their enrollment and revenue goals for the fall semester this year. And one of my colleagues in higher education, Tom Mortenson, who is the editor of postsecondary opportunity magazines--he has been a higher ed researcher for more than 40 years out of Iowa City--responded to that article. He said, really, you're surprised by this? He said, look at the median family income numbers over the last several years. He said in constant 2013 dollars according to data from the October current population survey, 2001 the median dependent 18 to 24-year-old high school income, \$85,597 in 2001. It was \$77,436 in 2007; \$65,330 in 2013. That's median income in 2013 dollars. The national postsecondary student aid study, share of undergraduates with zero expected family contributions went from 11 percent in 1996--these are families who aren't going to contribute any money to their children's college education, families, or students--11 percent in 1996; 14 percent, 2008, to 23 percent in 2012. And K-12 subsidized lunches went from 31 percent in 1989 to 53 percent in 2012. What that should tell us is there are a whole lot of students who are going to be college age that are not going to have the money to go to college. And we, as a state, need to be looking at how we're going to fund college education for those students in the upcoming years. And we need to be looking at whether we need to be funding low tuition, which subsidizes students from all income levels, or whether we need to be taking a look at funding students with the greatest financial need. And obviously need-base student aid is very important to those students. Thank you. Appreciate the time you've taken and appreciate the great work that your committee is doing, Senator. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you, Tip. Any questions for Mr. O'Neill? All right, thanks for your testimony. [LB1103]

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TIP O'NEILL: Thank you. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Welcome. [LB1103]

SCOTT JONES: Thank you. Good afternoon, Senators. My name is Scott Jones, S-c-o-t-t J-o-n-e-s. I served as a classroom science teacher and principal for 15 years and I currently serve as a technology and distance learning director for ESU 15 and 16. I'd like to begin by taking just a moment to thank the Education Committee for setting up these legislative hearings and allowing input and thought from our classrooms across the state. I am truly appreciative that you have allowed this opportunity. Thank you. As the Education Committee shapes the vision of every Nebraskan educated for success, I would encourage them to include, model, and perpetuate the success of LB1208 in this endeavor. This bill is an example of what incentive-based legislation can accomplish. LB1208 was an educational improvement plan crafted by the legislative Education Committee that centered on these three general principles. First, the plan recognized the responsibility of school districts, ESUs, and public postsecondary education institutions to make decisions related to participation and distance education. Second, the plan encouraged and incentivized the exchange of distance education courses using a statewide network. And third, the plan provided for statewide coordination by creating an oversight committee, the results of which have been the creation of over 600 classes being offered between districts which are housed in a statewide clearinghouse called the Nebraska Virtual Instruction (Source) site. This clearinghouse allows equitable access to courses, Rule 10 compliance for schools, and the ability to complete college coursework as well as offering fiscal compensation for participating in these resource sharing exchanges. Districts have been able to leverage that compensation and as a result have received over \$12.8 million in grant money to further perpetuate classroom instruction. This legislation spurred the building of a statewide Internet backbone to interconnect the state. In 2005, Nebraska schools districts were divided up into a dozen different distance learning consortia ranging in size from 7 to 60 districts. And they were using a variety of different video technologies with unlike equipment with no way to interconnect. After the Legislature passed LB1208, and passed the chief information officer and the university with interconnecting all educational entities, a rapid transformation happened. The Nebraska Information Technology Commission helped us to set standards that enabled all of our videoconferencing equipment to work together. The Office of the CIO and the University of Nebraska engineered a statewide backbone, strategic aggregation points, and Internet protocol standards, so that all of our data and distance learning could be exchanged between all of our school districts and colleges. By the legislative benchmark of July 1, 2012, almost 90 percent of all school districts and 100 percent of public higher education were all participants in a statewide network called Network Nebraska. Besides interconnectivity, the combining of our network has leveraged procuring power that has helped school districts to lower their transport and Internet

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costs, to improve the quality, reliability, and speed of their telecommunication services. As an example, since 2007, Network Nebraska has been able to lower the unit cost of commodity Internet by 99 percent for its members through aggregated demand and competitive bidding. Nebraska K through 20 education now enjoys one of the lowest unit costs for commodity Internet in the entire country and also offers a pathway to Internet2 which enables access to a nationwide 100 gigabyte per second backbone and faster routing. LB1208 also brought about the creation of the Educational Service Unit Coordinating Council which has worked toward greater statewide coordination and has helped to provide cost-efficient and equitable delivery of services across the state. The committee administers statewide initiatives, the provisioning of statewide services, as well as coordinating distance education. In a nutshell, a viable product was created. A system of distributing that product was developed and a statewide steward empowered by the Legislature oversaw and offered guidance. I believe that this model can be utilized by the Legislature in their latest endeavor to bring about a statewide vision of education. A template could easily be adopted and paired that would continue the networking between the Legislature, the ESUCC, NDE, NITC, school districts, centers of higher education and communities. This template would include key pieces that would meet the goals set forth by the Education Committee. In closing, I'd like to ask that in shaping the vision of every Nebraskan educated for success that it includes three key components. First, support, similar to LB1208, to meet the goals of that vision; require interaction between higher education entities, ESUs, school districts, communities, NDE, the NITC, and other educational entities as seen fit by the Legislature; and an assignment to an oversight committee such as the ESUCC, or a like group, to ensure decisions are driven and supported statewide. I would like to thank the Education Committee for their valuable time and would encourage them to reflect on these three key components as they shape the vision of Nebraska. Thank you. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you, Mr. Jones. Any questions for him? Thank you for your testimony. [LB1103]

SCOTT JONES: Thank you. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Welcome. [LB1103]

JOHN STRITT: (Exhibit 8) Good afternoon. After Mr. Jones just finished speaking, I'm going to be repeating some of the same information. So, if you didn't catch it the first time, maybe you'll catch on to a few of the things that he shared about. I am John Stritt, J-o-h-n S-t-r-i-t-t, and I serve as a distance education coordinator for 40 districts and ESU 10 and ESU 11. Today, however, I would like to speak to you from my role as a cochair for the Network Nebraska Advisory Group. The Network Nebraska Advisory Group is composed of 16 members, eight each from K-12 and higher ed. Both of our previous speakers, Tip O'Neill, he represented the independent higher ed sector, and

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Mr. Jones, he is a representative of the K-12 level as well. And the CAP is also a part of the Network Nebraska Advisory Group with liaisons. The CAP is comprised of the staff from the State Office of the CIO, University of Nebraska Computing Services Network, and the Nebraska Educational Telecommunications Commission and CAP is responsible for operating and managing Network Nebraska. The role of Network Nebraska Advisory Group is, along with CAP, is to listen to its member institutions and to assist in crafting a vision and strategic direction for Network Nebraska. Network Nebraska came from LB1208, as Mr. Jones had mentioned, and it was sponsored by Senators Raikes, Peterson, Baker, and Stuhr, and became law in 2006. And by 2007, Network Nebraska had brought together the 12 separate consortia networks designed specifically for regional videoconferencing into one network that today not only continues to support videoconferencing but serves as a conduit for a statewide electronic backbone. Network Nebraska currently has a singular purpose for its existence which is maintaining the backbone. Network Nebraska reaches across the entire state, is completely self-funded, and has close to 100 percent voluntary participation by public K-12 and higher education entities. With a Network Nebraska membership of 274 educational systems supporting an estimated 250,000 K-12 and 120,000 higher education students, plus faculty of 20,000 or more from K-12, and 8,000 or more from higher ed, the network plays a major role in daily connections for these Nebraska students and teachers. With many districts in the state continuing to share classes through videoconferencing, implementation of one-to-one initiatives, and more cloud-based options, the annual growth and demand for purchased bandwidth has increased by over 75 percent each of the last two years. While demand for bandwidth has increased, the cost has gone down from \$87 a meg in 2006-07 to down to \$1.28 per meg. And even though there is this increasing demand for bandwidth, efficiency in funding is possible through statewide purchasing for our large membership. So eight years after LB1208 was put into law, we now have a network interconnecting almost every public education entity, and it's now time to consider the applications and services that run atop the network to enable the state to achieve its educational goals and increase learning outcomes for every student. Education technology and the Internet are now mission critical services within every aspect of education--from teaching and learning to administration and student information systems. Even the statewide assessment program runs over Network Nebraska. By providing or incentivizing enterprising applications such as team management system...learning management systems for every Nebraska teacher and learner, every course section, every term, it would enrich the K-12 learning environment. Should Nebraska students be deserving of anything less? For Nebraska's school districts there is need for leadership from the Education Committee to make happen in the application sector what LB1208 did for the state backbone and Internet, that is to incentivize all districts and ESUs to work together for the greater good rather than by operating separately. Providing digital sources, statewide digital textbooks, teacher cadres working together in virtual on-line communities, are just some of the ways that should be or could be considered that Network Nebraska can help support and accomplish through the major goals as stated

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within LB1103. Thank you. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you, Mr. Stritt. Any comments...questions? Senator Kolowski. [LB1103]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Just one. Thank you, ma'am. Mr. Stritt, your comments and Mr. Jones comments are very exciting. A lot of things have happened. It's an excellent background. Do you have a Web site that we go to get more information, if we so desire? [LB1103]

JOHN STRITT: Yeah. Network Nebraska.net is the network, Nebraska Advisory Group as well as Network Nebraska. One question I know was being postrepresentative of Millard Schools or representative from Millard Schools, there are 13 schools and public entities that are not currently members of Network Nebraska and they're part of the ESU 3 area or Millard Schools, Papillion. And again, based...probably based upon location, they've been able to get very reduced low prices for bandwidth. And so up to this point they have not been members but it's hoped that they will be able to come on as well and we're projecting that, hopefully, within the next year. [LB1103]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you. And will the cost-effectiveness still be there as this spreads across the state...will Internet or any other providers be able to play with the schedule and do things that we didn't anticipate? [LB1103]

JOHN STRITT: As far as the cost goes, what we're looking for is free Internet. Probably not going to happen, but it's getting pretty close when we get down to \$1.28 a meg. The thing that really becomes a concern for Network Nebraska is not the Internet because of the demand for it, because this continues to grow so we have that particular need. Our bigger concern is how do we continue to operate that network from an infrastructure because it takes more hardware to keep the network running, not to pay for the bandwidth. So that becomes a factor in terms of consideration of that. But yes, the purpose of my sharing here is mostly to say that the Internet is vital. And we've got a backbone in place. Fortunately, it was initiated through LB1208 so that really gave us a great step. So we've got the footprint of the interstate highway of backbone. Now the next step is, because there's that need, what types of solutions or applications or services will help, and the ultimate goal is to help all students. [LB1103]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you. [LB1103]

JOHN STRITT: You're welcome. [LB1103]

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

JOHN STRITT: Okay. Thank you for your time. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Uh-huh. Welcome. [LB1103]

BRIAN MAHER: (Exhibit 9) Thank you. You all look remarkably awake and engaged given the endurance test that you've had already today and I notice this is the third of three. My name is Brian Maher, B-r-i-a-n M-a-h-e-r. Senator Sullivan, members of the Education Committee, thank you for taking your time to provide us with the opportunity to give the committee even more input than you have already received. As I already mentioned, I'm Brian Maher. I'm the superintendent of the Kearney Public Schools and I'm here today to represent the Greater Nebraska Schools Association. GNSA and its 30 member districts are responsible for the education of more than 200,000 students in this state, or more than two-thirds of all of the pre-K-12 public students in Nebraska. As a group, the purpose of the GNSA is to collectively advocate for all Nebraska Public School students with the mission to ensure educational excellence through equitable funding for all Nebraska Public School students. For this reason, we applaud the Education Committee's efforts to define the vision and goals and objectives needed to move public education forward in Nebraska. The committee's first goal to provide quality educational opportunities that engage and prepare Nebraskans for success in learning is directly aligned with GNSA's purpose and we wholeheartedly support that goal. The focus on access to quality early childhood programs, along with college and career preparation opportunities, are mirrored in the efforts of all of GNSA's member schools. Additionally recognizing that students have different needs that may require different educational opportunities is something that we work on every day. Although we're focused on grades pre-K through 12, we know that our students will need to continue their education after graduation, so we appreciate the objective aim that 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, not just in GNSA. Many of these objectives can be good measures of the quality of the programs being offered by 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 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 responding to our ever-changing needs. While we are 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 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 districts. GNSA is committed to advocating for excellent educational 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

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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 the needs for 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 all children. Thank you for your time and I would take any questions that you may have. [LB1103]

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

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you, ma'am. Brian, thank you for your continued leadership and contributions to the education of Nebraska. You have a particular experience coming up of building a new high school and as much of a fan as I am for Dr. Dostal, I hope he does well with all that. What you've been hearing about today on technology, how does your thinking fit into the physical plant and the plans of what you're thinking about, and what are you dealing with in your district to take that to a next generation, because it's a very rare thing for Class A high school to be built like this? [LB1103]

BRIAN MAHER: That's a great question. I was the principal at Waverly High School when we built...what to me is still the new Wavery High School. It's 15 years old now. I suppose it's not so new anymore, but really what has changed from a technological standpoint, even in the late '90s when we built Waverly High School, we were really focused on a distance learning room. And I would say now, we're not focused on that as much as we are focused on technology throughout the building. So it's not a room anymore. It's not isolated, but rather it permeates what we do. So when we look at technology for the facility that we're--we just poured the footings, by the way--that we're just getting going on, we're looking at how technology will permeate that facility. And not only are we looking at being consumers of the technology anymore, but rather we're looking at being a district that not only can consume but also maybe can be somewhat philanthropic in helping other districts as well. To Senator Scheer's point earlier, maybe we can be somebody in that regard. But beyond even the technology, we're looking at moving beyond the walls of that brick and mortar and into our community through career academies and so forth. So the technology is of critical importance. I don't want to downplay its significance. It's just not a room for us anymore, but rather it permeates the building. [LB1103]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: And your kids carry it home in their power books every night. [LB1103]

BRIAN MAHER: Literally, carry it home every night, yes. [LB1103]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Yeah, uh-huh. Thank you so much. [LB1103]

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

BRIAN MAHER: Thank you. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Welcome. [LB1103]

RICH KATT: (Exhibit 10) Good afternoon. Senator Sullivan, members of the Education Committee, I'm Rich, R-i-c-h, Katt, K-a-t-t. I serve as the state director for career education with the Nebraska Department of Education. I know that you've heard from a number of different individuals in the Department over the course of these hearings. Dr. Blomstedt asked me this morning to bring you this info graphic that truly came off the printer this morning. It is a draft, but it is...we've always heard that a picture is worth a thousand words, so what this is intended to start to illustrate is kind of a new commitment from the Department of Education's perspective. You've heard this afternoon of a lot of programs and a lot of components of what makes up Nebraska's educational system. Our work and our initiative under Dr. Blomstedt's leadership has really focused on how we systematize all of those programs into an educational pipeline. How do we work more collaboratively than in isolated programs? So this is a start. This is a picture of how it might look. This is not the final version, but Dr. Blomstedt did ask that I share this with you from the Department's commitment to working with the Education Committee, and the vision to create an educational pipeline for the state of Nebraska. As you can see, it starts with the early childhood which you've heard a great deal about today. It continues on through middle school, secondary, postsecondary, and ultimately to a successful career. I would just make a couple of comments. I'd be remiss as the state director of career education if I didn't mention a couple of things about career education. We are in the middle of our round three of the revision process. And that's a process where we go out and work with schools and really help them take a look at the curriculum that they're offering in the programs and is it aligned to the labor market needs in the state of Nebraska, the economic priorities. Is it focused on jobs of the future rather than teaching the history of a programmatic area. So we've had some tremendous success from revision. I could tell you a lot of stories in schools that have gone through that, but have made significant changes, not only in career ed, but also in the alignment with academic education, the core alignment with postsecondary entrance requirements. So we're excited about where that program is going and how we're going to continue to move forward. A couple of issue areas that we continue to struggle with and you've heard about today. I appreciated the testimony from the gentleman from Bayard. How do we continue to think about offering a diverse and a rich curriculum in career education to all students in the state of Nebraska? And I think as you heard some testimony about technology, that is certainly part of the answer that we need to continue to think about. The most critical issue facing us right now today in career education is the lack of teachers. We have classrooms sitting empty in skilled and technical sciences, industrial technology in the state because we do not have teachers. And last count, I think there were 13 shortage areas where the classrooms

were simply empty. We are struggling to keep programs alive at colleges. We're down to, in industrial technology or the skilled and technical sciences area, we have one less and we're trying to rebuild the university's program, but we're also seeing critical shortages in the areas of family consumer science and in agriculture food and natural resources. So that to us is paramount. It's number one issue for us is how do we provide quality instructors in classrooms across the state of Nebraska so that students do have the opportunity for an incredible career development process along with the development of their whole person to be successful employees or entrepreneurs in the state. So I would urge you to kind of...to keep that in mind as you're working on the vision of the state of Nebraska, is how do we provide an adequate supply of well-qualified, well-prepared educators to serve all schools in the state of Nebraska. Thank you for the opportunity to be here and thank you for your leadership in this visioning process. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you, Rich. With respect to just your most recent comments, does that beg the issue of looking at what kind of certification we need of teachers for some of these high-need areas? [LB1103]

RICH KATT: We have over the past few years, we worked very intensely to create a career education certificate which has allowed individuals with an industry background to come into a classroom to teach certain aspects of the curriculum. So welding is a good example. We have welders that have come in that are teaching. You know, they're AWS certified. They have a career in welding. They've come into the classroom. Probably the greatest area where we're utilizing that is in health science. We have no teacher preparation program in the state of Nebraska for health science. Not one college offers that, but yet we know the incredible career opportunities, we know that student interest, it's usually number one in every school that we go to that they're interested in health careers. So we have used that career-ed certificate to bring nurses, to bring retired doctors, healthcare workers into the classroom with some help. We have some concerns about that because a typical individual who has no pedagogy and no education training stepping into a classroom of diverse learners might have some challenges. So it puts some extra burden on a principal or on that school to provide the support services, but it has helped us out. The issue we have, though, with that is again in rural and remote areas it's not always easy to find an automotive's person or somebody to come in and teach that particular skill to those high school students. So it's a part of an answer, but it still begs the question of, and we were continuing to have conversations about what should our certification programs look like. Who should we allow in classrooms and what kind of credentials, what kind of professional development should be provided for them after they're in those classrooms so that we have success with all students. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: You said that this was hot off the press... [LB1103]

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RICH KATT: Definitely. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: ...and when the commissioner spoke to us yesterday, he sort of hurried through this. Do you want to make any comments that kind of give us...I mean, because right now I'm looking at it and I'm not sure I can make a lot of sense out of it. (Laughter) [LB1103]

RICH KATT: Certainly. The idea is as we take a look at, we think about a systemic approach to Nebraska's education. And one of the things that Dr. Blomstedt has been adamant about--he's visited with us at the Department level--is the interplay and the collaboration of programming, that we cannot be isolated segments of an educational system. We need to think broad term from early childhood all the way through the career. And if you've heard Dr. Blomstedt speak a lot lately, he speaks a lot about the importance of the "and" and he references that from a college and career perspective to say, you know, ultimately the objective of an educational system is to help an individual become successful in life in their chosen career, be that as an entrepreneur, an employee, whatever that might be. So, focusing from that perspective and that's...you can see there, underneath that, you do see the 6 Tenets of the Aquest System. So as we continue to take a look and to develop that new system of accountability, trying to make certain that it really covers the spectrum of what we're expecting out of our educational system. And then you can see some of the other...and the NSSRS, the NSWERS, and the statewide data, a lot of data-based kinds of...because if this is going to work and if we're really going to be on track with the direction that we're moving, we have got to further develop and continue to utilize the data that we have in...both from within the department's perspective as well as the statewide longitudinal data system that we're working with...or the...actually, it's the NSWERS with the work force development and our partnership with the Department of Labor. And the data interplay between education and work force. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Well, that was one of the questions that I had was the statewide longitudinal data system seems to stop at postsecondary. You want it...don't you want to try to find out what's going on with those students as it... [LB1103]

RICH KATT: And so I think the connection point is going to be between NSWERS and the state and the SLDS where those two systems connect. [LB1103]

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

RICH KATT: And that's...we have a new grant that we received from the federal government. We're working with the Department of Labor to make those two systems integrate as much as we can. So, it's great. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Okay. All right. Very good. Any other questions for Rich? All

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right, thank you for your testimony. [LB1103]

RICH KATT: Thank you for the opportunity. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Welcome. [LB1103]

VIRGIL HARDEN: (Exhibit 11) Thank you. Good afternoon, Senator Sullivan, members of the Education Committee. My name is Virgil Harden, V-i-r-g-i-l H-a-r-d-e-n and I am the executive director of business for Grand Island Public Schools. Thank you for this opportunity to provide input. As you work to create a statewide vision for education, we at Grand Island Public Schools would ask that you would continue to give thought to the following areas. Every Student, Every Day, A Success. Well, what does this really mean? It means regardless of a student's background, situation, abilities, location, stage of life, that we--in this case, collectively the state of Nebraska--will do everything within our power to make sure that the student is successful as a student, as a person, and as a citizen. The barriers for individual students achieving this ideal is as varied as students themselves. However, some districts have such high concentrations of students living in poverty and struggling with issues like limited English proficiency, that additional resources beyond what's available locally, is necessary. We know there are several strategies to address these barriers including things like strong communication with the parents, between the school and the household; the before and after programs which you heard about from other testifiers today; providing transportation and expanding tutoring opportunities for students that are struggling with these issues. Grand Island and many other districts across the state do these things for their students. So as we look forward and envision what we want education to look like, it seems to us that one thing is clear. That is that the mission of Every Student, Every Day, A Success will remain. But the changing nature of the economic, political, environmental, and general operating landscape will continue to play a major role in the strategies that we deploy in terms of helping our students achieve this goal. The use of technology both in the terms of infrastructure and the end user devices, investment in clean and safe and secure facilities, career academies both for the college and the technical work fields are currently on the minds of many, if not all, Nebraska educators. Additionally, provisions for the development of physical space and teaching staff to carry out a robust early childhood education program and curriculum for every Nebraska child will require a huge near and long-term investment. We would encourage a specific vision that funds the necessary...provides the necessary funds to carry out the vision for an early childhood education program. We will continue, as we have in the past, to advocate for a statewide stabilization fund for the current equalized state aid formula or TEEOSA. The goal of this fund is simple. We would set aside designated state resources that would smooth out both the highs and the lows of state aid to schools. Grand Island and similarly situated school districts struggle because we rely so heavily on state aid. So when there are decreases in state aid, that has such a negative effect on us in a disproportionate amount to other schools that have more resources locally.

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And finally, Grand Island takes our responsibility very seriously and to that end the community of Grand Island recently passed a \$69.9 million bond issue. And we're addressing things like eliminating open classroom...open concept classrooms. We're improving student safety. We're replacing hundred-year-old buildings and yet the state has no dollars in the game as it comes to facilities in the state. So as we think about the vision of what we want Nebraska schools to look like, we would encourage the thought and the concept of Nebraska having some money in facilities. We think about this facility. It's an older facility and at some point it's going to need to be renovated. Will the local community have the resources to do that on their own, or would there be room for the state to step up and have some investment in that. So, with that, again thank you for the opportunity to provide input. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you, Virgil. You're absolutely right, the state has stepped away from any involvement in funding the facilities. Do you have any thoughts, though, in terms of the challenges that presents in terms of equity? [LB1103]

VIRGIL HARDEN: It does provide the challenge because, you know, we know that different communities have more wealth per student, if we want to look at it in that context. So, you know, it may have to be some kind of proportion to just the amount of debt that we're looking at. Like in our example, \$69.9 million, if there would be some way to set aside a fund so that when the community would go to a bond issue, there would be some portion of that that would be contributed by the state, say 10 percent or something. And so as the local community...we spent over 18 months identifying the needs. Now when we started with the school board and the administration, I think we were at \$125 million worth of needs that we identified. And we took that...you know, it's obvious we couldn't invest that much at one time. That was just too much. So we worked for 18 months to, you know, engaged the community and set the priorities for the right reasons. And so I think as the communities do that, you know, there would be time for them to come to the state and say, you know, help us with this at this proportionate level. So if Lincoln is doing double that, their 10 percent would be in proportion to the debt that they're taking on kind of thing. So that's my thinking. The hardest part is the funding source. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Right. Okay. Senator Haar. [LB1103]

SENATOR HAAR: Yes, thank you. I know enough about Grand Island's school system to know you really do a good job and you say in here, everything within our power. But just for a second, what's outside your power as you look at today's...the kids you're getting today? [LB1103]

VIRGIL HARDEN: Well, I always like to preface my responses to from my seat on the bus because I'm a bean counter. You know, so I sit at my desk and work with spread sheets all day. So I kind of look out and try to observe things from a broad perspective.

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And to me the things that we can't control are the students themselves and the situation that they find themselves in as far as their home life. And that is in no way an excuse, it's simply we take every child as they are as they come to us. We cannot control if that child is in poverty or if they have, you know, both parents are professionals earning a great wage. And so it's one end of the continuum to the other. Believe it or not, there's struggles on both ends. Poverty for Grand Island is so...so many layers to that onion, so to speak. When you get into the number of people in poverty and the severity of the poverty, it's very hard to address everything. One of our most, I guess, effective is the social worker again working with the family, working with community to provide those additional resources because we need to get them up to school so we can educate them. That's our primary goal. So there's just a lot of things with the family that we can't control. If we can provide them with transportation to school, before-school activities, school, a meal or two, and after-school activities, maybe we can get that ideal goal of Every Student, Every Day, A Success and have them ready to be a student and develop into a quality person and a productive citizen. So it's...a lot of things out of our control, but I guess we don't think that we make any excuses, we just attack everything we can think of. [LB1103]

SENATOR HAAR: Thank you. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Did you have something? [LB1103]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Yes, please. Thank you. Virgil, thank you for your comments and testimony today. I've heard from a number of districts about the issue of facilities that you've talked about and your idea of X percent or whatever else, I've been asking around other states. Iowa has had some creative solutions in the recent history. Whether they continue that or not we need to look at that and I'm looking at other states and what they are doing and what we might be able to do to help that. So I thank you for your mentioning of that. It's come up in a variety of ways lately. Thank you. [LB1103]

VIRGIL HARDEN: You're welcome. [LB1103]

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

VIRGIL HARDEN: Thank you. [LB1103]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Is there anyone else wishing to testify? If not, this closes the public hearing on LB1103. I thank you all who testified and all who have been in attendance. Good afternoon. (See also Exhibits 12-15) [LB1103]