

Education Committee October 4, 2019

GROENE: --once we're looking for background information on-- on the services. This isn't about the mechanism, how we provide the services, the issue. It's more about the services provided, and that's the information we are seeking. And we're looking for not to cut services, but how we could be more efficient if possible. If we can find ways, that's what the committee is looking for. We're not looking for cheerleaders for a government entity. We want the best services provided, and that's what we are looking for here. So we're just-- we're just talking about LR63. Please turn off your cell phones, of course. And we have invited testimony so we can be precise on what information we can take in. I think we made a good effort to have every side of it presented to us through those who we believe to be the most knowledgeable of it or should be most knowledgeable of the situation. If you really-- if you want to give written-- written testimony, you can. Give it to the clerk before you leave, and we'll make sure every member of the committee gets it. We received a lot of it by e-mail already. When you begin to testify, state and spell your name like we always did because it is being recorded and will be tran-- there will be a transcribed version of it three or four months from now when the transcribers get to it. We're going-- we're going to try to get out of here by 10:30 as some senators have other places to be. So the testimony, we're trying to limit it to seven minutes. You

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Education Committee October 4, 2019

Rough Draft

will have a yellow-- a green and then a yellow warning light when you get to six minutes, and it's seven minutes. And then we're going to try to at least give every testifier eight to ten minutes when we can-- we can ask questions and get down to specific issues. There won't be any pages today, so like I said if you have any, give it to the clerk. And I will introduce the clerk. Kristina is our clerk. She'd been here before and she came back. So she's-- you might know her. She's loved by many, friendly face when you come in the door before you get to me. [LAUGHTER] And then we have a new committee clerk, Chris Jay. Chris handles the colleges, the coordinating commission, issues of that sort, higher education. And then we have Nicole who will be presenting the information she found as part of the testimony. And she's also the research assistant and she handles K-12 issues which include ESUs so. And then if senators, the ones that are here, could introduce themselves.

LINEHAN: Hi. I'm Senator Linehan from District 39, western Douglas County.

GROENE: Of course I'm Senator Mike Groene, Chairman of the committee.

BREWER: Tom Brewer, represent District 43 which is 13 counties of western Nebraska and freshly, as of a few hours ago, returned from lovely Bulgaria.

GROENE: Want to introduce yourself right away?

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office

Education Committee October 4, 2019

Rough Draft

WALZ: I'm Lynne Walz, District 15 which is all of Dodge County.

GROENE: What we're going to start with, testifiers, is, so you know where you are, Senator Lou Ann Linehan will introduce why she brought this legislative resolution. Then Research Assistant Barrett will go into what she-- a recap of the history and some information that she gathered from the-- in her research. And then we'll go with Dr. Kraig, the ESU Coordinating Council. And then Jack Moles with Nebraska Rural Community Schools Association is going to be fourth. And sadly Dr. John Skretta-- or not-- Dr. John Skretta is here, all right? He will be five, former Norris superintendent, ESU-- [LAUGHTER] I was going to talk about your passing, but since you're sitting there. [LAUGHTER] Wrong obituary, I'm sorry. Don Mayhew will be six, ESU 18 president because we wanted a view of the two issues that are strictly to one school district, and I believe Dr. Skretta will give us a view. Recently he was an administrator and now he is a administrator of a ESU, so he can give us both sides. And then of course Dr. Kraig Lofquist is going to give us an overview of all the ESUs across the state. But when I meant sadly, I thought-- I said it too soon, we had also had two superintendents who have looked at alternative ways of offering some services, Jane Davis of Hershey and Brian Hof of Red Cloud. And both them had family emergencies, and they both apologize for not being here. But they have written testimony which we-- I might read a little bit to you at the end of the session so you can get some

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office

Education Committee October 4, 2019

Rough Draft

feedback and we can get some of it into the written transcripts. So we'll start with Senator Linehan.

LINEHAN: Can I just do it from here?

GROENE: Yeah, if you want to.

LINEHAN: Good morning, everybody. Good morning, Senator. What-- what-- is she sitting here?

BREWER: She's right beside me.

LINEHAN: Do you want to intro--

GROENE: Go ahead and introduce yourself.

PANSING BROOKS: OK. Good morning. Sorry. I'm Senator Patty Pansing Brooks representing District 28 right here in the heart of Lincoln.

LINEHAN: Good morning. The reason I thought we should look at this, I remember so very long ago when I was in school, the ESU, from my memory and this could be incorrect, is they were a bus that came around that did testing. And when I was in grade school, I think we had something like 2,000 schools in Nebraska. I know at one point, when we-- when most of the-- or all of the rural schools K through 8 went away, that there was some shuffling of the ESUs. But it seems to me if we had 19 when we had over 2,000 schools and now we have 17 and 244 schools, it's probably something we should look at. I-- I, too,

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Education Committee October 4, 2019

Rough Draft

don't have any preconceived ideas of what we should or should not do.

One of the things I think the committee is looking at and I've been looking at is how do we coordinate all the education in Nebraska better? And by that I mean preschool, K through 12, ESUs, community colleges, university, state colleges. There's lots of different institutions, and I'm all-- and are all of them working together as well as they could for the benefit of the students? And is it as fiscally responsible as it could be? So without any preconceived ideas, I thought we should look at this since I think it's been a very long time since anybody at the Legislature level has really looked at what ESUs are doing. So thank you for being here. Appreciate it.

NICOLE BARRETT: Good morning, Senator Groene and members of the Education Committee. My name is Nicole Barrett, N-i-c-o-l-e B-a-r-r-e-t-t. I'm the research analyst for this committee. And I'm here today to provide some introductory research that I've compiled on LR63 and then turn the microphone over to our invited guests to share their expertise. This interim study's purpose is to study educational service units including but not limited to structure duties, current projects, and financing of educational service units. LB301, the legislation to create ESUs, was signed into law in 1965. At that time there were 2,701 public school districts in the state of Nebraska. A key argument for the passage of the legislation was provided by the structure of federal education assistance. Federal funds were

Rough Draft

available through the Elementary Secondary school Act, but because of the small number of students in so many of Nebraska's rural school districts, rural districts were generally unable to receive these funds due to eligibility criterion in the law. While the landscape of federal eligibility may have changed over the past 50-plus years and we now only have 244 public school districts, one of the current co-op efforts of school-- of school districts within ESUs continues to be the receipt of federal grants. You will hear more about that from our expert testifiers here today. As introduced, LB301 called for 20 service units. This number was amended down to 19 units by shifting around some counties at the preference of the senators representing those areas. The final selection of boundaries was influenced by population, land valuation, enrollment, service needs, and senator input. There have been two ESU mergers to date. In 1998 former ESUs 12 and 13 merged to become a new ESU 13. And then in 2005 ESU 13 merged again, this time with ESU 14. It retained the name ESU 13. So there are currently 17 educational service units in the state today, and I provided for you a map of the ESU district boundaries as well as a list of all the ESUs and the schools and districts they serve. Two ESUs serve only one district: ESU 18 serves Lincoln Public Schools; and, ESU 19 serves Omaha Public Schools. In 1984 legislation was enacted to place ESUs under the administrative supervision of the Nebraska Department of Education and made ESUs responsible for providing a number of programs and services to school districts on

Rough Draft

behalf of the state. In 1986 legislation was enacted to provide for school districts with the option to opt out of their ESU with a majority vote by their local school board. With this change, some larger districts chose to leave their ESU. However, at this point in time all school districts have reaffiliated with their ESU, and are receiving some level of services. That level of service provided will vary in capacity depending on the needs of the school and/or the district. In 1987 after a planning study by the Legislative Council's legislative research team, the Education Committee introduced legislation that implemented many of the study's recommendations. The enacted legislation, among other things, established a requirement that the Nebraska Department of Education provide regulations by which ESUs were accredited and governed and how ESU boundaries' changes would be handled. These regulations, promulgated in Rule 84 and 85, currently define the governance and operation standards for all 17 ESUs. Current statute delineates the role and missions of ESUs as-- and I was going to highlight it, but I believe Senator Groene had placed on your-- in your packets the actual statute that delineates the specific roles of them. So I can read them to you, or in the interest of time just direct you to that.

GROENE: Go ahead and read it.

NICOLE BARRETT: You want me to go ahead and read this? OK. So the key roles and missions of ESUs are to act primarily as service agencies in

Rough Draft

providing core services and services identified and defined in statute as: staff development; technology, including distance education services; and, instructional materials services; to provide for economy, efficiency, and cost-effectiveness in the cooperation-- cooperative delivery of educational services; provide educational services through leadership, research, and development in elementary and secondary education; act in a cooperative and supportive role with NDE and school districts in the development and implementation of long-range plans, strategies, and goals for the enhancement of educational opportunities in elementary and secondary education;--

PANSING BROOKS: Excuse me, Nicole. Could you tell me which document you're looking at from our sheet. Sorry, I'm trying to follow along.

GROENE: It says ESU on top.

NICOLE BARRETT: So it's in the packet that was left on-- I think it's in that manila folder.

PANSING BROOKS: Yeah. I'm looking through it. There's so many things. I'm trying to find it. Sorry. I just want to--

GROENE: It's in this.

NICOLE BARRETT: Sorry. There was my handouts and then there were the handouts that came in.

PANSING BROOKS: Well, thank you very much. Very sorry.

NICOLE BARRETT: No, that's OK. And I sort of summarized them. But you do have the statute in there. It should be behind the list of testifiers, kind of a last minute addition.

PANSING BROOKS: OK. Thank you.

NICOLE BARRETT: --and then serve, when appropriate and as funds become available, as a repository, clearinghouse, administrator of federal, state, and private funds on behalf of school districts which choose to participate in special programs, projects, or grants in order to enhance the quality of education in Nebraska schools. Annually, ESUs must submit an annual accreditation compliance report to NDE, and I included in my set of handouts behind the map, a copy of the form for 2020-2021 just so that you would sort of see what that annual compliance report looks like. And then additionally, one of the continuing requirements of Rule 84 is that each ESU is to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of its programs and services at least once in every five-year period using models approved by NDE and as scheduled by the individual ESU. You also have an infographic that in purple shows the various ESUs with the number of elected board members for each. You will also notice that the ESU coordinating council. It's highlighted in-- or identified in green. The ESUCC was created to coordinate the activities of Nebraska's 17 educational service units

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office

Education Committee October 4, 2019

Rough Draft

in 2007, and officially came into existence on July 1, 2008. Dr. Kraig Lofquist, executive director of the ESUCC, is here today, and will be able to provide additional information on its role. So finally, I have for you in my handouts a summary of funding sources statewide for ESUs from the 2017-18 Annual Financial Report or the AFR. So you will see, I'll just highlight a couple things from there. Line one shows their local property taxes that make up 23.34 percent of their overall funding. However, additional tax revenues are included in some of the lines with carline taxes, homestead exemption, property tax credit, and the nameplate capacity tax lines. State aid is reflected on that report. Towards the bottom there's a line for core services and technology infrastructure and then the other state receipts line item which is additional appropriations made by the state. That's a \$13.7 million total state aid making up 9.17 percent of overall ESU funding. The largest source of ESU funding that you'll see on there is contracted services, totalling \$54.6 million and 36.39 percent overall. Our expert testifiers here today will be able to provide additional details about financials. As always if there's additional detail I can provide to any of you on the committee, please don't hesitate to ask. Are there any questions?

GROENE: Any questions? Senator Linehan.

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Education Committee October 4, 2019

Rough Draft

LINEHAN: Maybe you said this. And so with the two schools that just have one ESU each, was that originally the way it was or did that develop over time? Do you recall?

NICOLE BARRETT: You know, that I'm not sure about, but we do have a representative from ESU 18 that maybe will be able to give a little bit more background on that.

LINEHAN: All right. Thank you.

NICOLE BARRETT: I didn't find-- I couldn't find the original-- an original map to see how that was, so I apologize.

LINEHAN: No, that's fine. Thank you. This is all very helpful. Thank you.

GROENE: Any other questions? Nicole, I told you I was going to ask you this question, but have you been able to find out what other local receipts are, the \$19.5 million, 13 percent of their revenues?

NICOLE BARRETT: So I have been able to research it. I have not been able to get additional information. So I spoke with Bryce Wilson, the director of finance and organizational services at NDE. And in the AFR, the description for other local receipts is any other receipts received at the local level that are not identified in a different item or line item of the AFR. So that is the definition of that category, and NDE would have to do some specified data analysis to

drill down. It's not something publicly available. They would have to-- we'd have to put in a data request, and and look at that to see what ESUs are reporting into that.

GROENE: That's fine. Maybe--

NICOLE BARRETT: So that was something you had requested yesterday. Perhaps some of our testifiers today could identify, and we can always do a data request next week to NDE. But they're tied up with the EDGE. That's going to take a little while.

GROENE: Did you research any of the core services, how much of the ESU's mission now is core services and how much of it is selective or by choice of the school districts outside of any statutory requirement?

NICOLE BARRETT: In terms of their search-- in the time of their services spent or?

GROENE: No, the type of services.

NICOLE BARRETT: The type of services, so that varies greatly based on ESU, but also on the specific school. So for some schools, they may be only receiving corps services. Some may be opting in to others, so that's a pretty broad-- I did review some information on that, but it wasn't specific enough to really pull in here. So some of that's available on-- they have a public Web site called SIMPL, S-i-m-p-l,

Rough Draft

that starts to break it up for some of the participating ESUs that report that that way, but that's not a very easy answer.

GROENE: Thank you. Any other questions? Senator Linehan.

LINEHAN: And it's-- maybe it's just to forewarn others who are coming behind you. Do you have a breakdown-- do we have a breakdown of how many students are in each ESU? I mean this is wonderful, the list of schools, but-- and I suppose the Department of Ed could get it to us, but how many-- are the students-- is each ESU got a similar number of students? Or is that-- I assume that's different too, fairly different. They're probably coordinating overall.

NICOLE BARRETT: Well, and school population sizes vary in step two, so the-- the districts, they looked at some of that when they set them up. But now how, over 50 years, some of those populations have changed, I don't know that they're necessarily similar. I can pull the data in that format for current formula students or current fall membership by ESU, and I'd be happy to provide that off--that to your office today.

LINEHAN: I think that would be helpful just so we know the number of students in each ESU.

NICOLE BARRETT: OK. OK. I will send that. Would you-- do you prefer fall membership, formula students? Does it matter?

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office

Education Committee October 4, 2019

Rough Draft

LINEHAN: Whatever. It doesn't matter.

NICOLE BARRETT: OK. I will send that to the committee this afternoon.

LINEHAN: OK. Thank you.

GROENE: Thank you. Any other questions? Thank you, Nicole. Dr. Kraig Lofquist.

KRAIG LOFQUIST: Good morning, members of the Education Committee. Thanks for your time today and allowing us to tell our story. My name is Kraig Lofquist, the executive director of the Educational Service Unit Coordinating Council. We call it ESUCC. For the past eight years, I was the administrator at ESU 9 which is located in Hastings, Nebraska. So you know, ESU 9 serves about-- just under 10,000 kids, 14 public school districts, and a handful of private school districts. I want to sincerely thank you for taking my testimony today. The Nebraska Legislature was pressured when they created educational service units in 1965. Today ESUs continue to be a critical component of Nebraska's educational system. Historically policymakers have understood that Nebraska schools have significant needs that they cannot-- that cannot be provided on their own. They understood that ESUs provide efficient, cost-effective services in an equitable manner to Nebraska schools. It is nearly impossible to sum up the efficiencies and cost effectiveness that the ESUs provide, but the following is one quick example. For decades now, ESUs have run a

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office

Education Committee October 4, 2019

Rough Draft

cooperative purchase program that saves time, energy, and money. As you know, public agencies must obtain bids for products and services. The 2018-19 data shows that the ESU's co-op purchase program save Nebraska public schools, private schools, community colleges, and other municipalities over \$4.8 million. Over the past four years, the cost savings is nearly \$20 million. ESUs are governed by Nebraska's Rule 84. This rule delineates the services that must be provided to schools. And Nicole alluded to this, so I'm repeating it. Specifically, core services are provided to schools in the following order: professional development, technology and technology infrastructure, and instructional materials. Additionally, ESUs provide services that are requested by school districts. These services are voted on by the ESUs' respective school superintendents, local school boards, and the locally elected ESU boards. In short, the decisions made at the local level are done with a great deal of thought and deliberation. ESUs are primarily funded in two ways. First, ESU boards have taxing authority that is limited-- limited to 1.5 cents. Also there's a formula that distributes core service dollars. These dollars have been systematically reduced over the course of the years. In fact, the amount available for the 2010-11 year was about \$14.5 million, and almost ten years later, it's \$12.8 million. Additionally, it is imperative that I share with you that Nebraska ESUs work closely with the Nebraska Department of Education in a cooperative and supportive role. Specifically, ESUs help

Rough Draft

implement long-range plans, strategies, and goals for the enhancement of our educational system. Ironically, we met with the NDE this past Wednesday to determine how ESUs can support our schools due to a new round of federal mandates related to ESSA or the Every Student Succeeds Act. To be clear, the Nebraska Department of Ed does not have the resources or the expertise to meet these recurring mandates. The NDE relies on the resources and expertise of Nebraska's ESUs to help develop, implement, and execute the plans for improvement. ESUs also work with other entities to impact economic growth. For example, ESU 2 started a career and technical education pathway program known as P2T. It stands for pathways to tomorrow, but the two stands for ESU 2 because they were an intricate part of the program and continue to be. So this program works in conjunction with the Northeast technical Community College and Wayne State College. It started about 3 years ago and had 17 students and now has just under 150. And the local school districts benefit from that. ESU 9 in Hastings recently obtained a reVISION grant for 8 of its 14 school districts that involve working with the Department of Labor, the Nebraska Department of Education, and local business leaders to determine work force needs. Those organizations have moved to a second round of that grant and are working to develop a win-win program similar to the aforementioned P2T program. It was brought to my attention that the focus for today is not to hear about the greatness of ESUs, but to talk about cost savings. In the final analysis, Nebraska's ESUs have

Rough Draft

been analyzed, studied, restudied, and reviewed, and the logical conclusion is that Nebraska ESUs do not take up a great deal of resources but remain as-- remain a tremendous cost savings resource to Nebraska school students and our educational system. And I'd be happy to take questions and try to answer them if you have some.

PANSING BROOKS: I have one.

GROENE: Senator Pansing Brooks

PANSING BROOKS: Thank you, Chair. Thank you for coming today, Mr. Lofquist. I just wanted to say one thing. I do want to hear the good that the ESUs are doing, I don't know if-- if-- who's been saying that, but that and hand-in-hand with what the cost savings are. There are a number of people that have said to me, we aren't sure what ESUs do. So if you don't "tout" your horn, then how are we going to know whether the cost savings are-- are necessary? So I will just announce that to the whole crowd that I guess we don't want people going on and on, but I do need to know more information. And maybe a couple people on the committee seem to know exactly what ESUs do, but for my own-- my constituents and others who are, you know, the second house, we do need to know more about the good that ESUs do. Thank you.

KRAIG LOFQUIST: I have a comprehensive list here.

PANSING BROOKS: Great.

KRAIG LOFQUIST: And when I put it-- when I created it, I thought, well, there's got to be something I'm forgetting. And there were a couple of things that I was forgetting. ESU 4, for example-- one of the issues that came before this committee I think was on substitute teachers a couple of years ago. They worked with Peru State College to provide new educators an opportunity to substitute in our schools. ESU 1 works with Wayne State College. Those are some of the things that-- that aren't well known. But ESUs provide special education and special services, and I'll talk a little bit about those and just list a few because we'd be here probably till 10:00 if I went through all of these: professional development, technology and technology infrastructure, instruction materials, grant management. And then we work with common goals with the department. So I'll just take a couple of each of those, special education administration. For small schools, one of the people that's here today is Mary Phillips that works for ESU 6. They do the final financial reports for school districts, special education law, at one time and I still think it's true, is the number one litigated area in public schools, where they have the expertise to work with small school districts and provide them help and guidance. Nebraska's Rule 51, Rule 52, and Rule 55 governs special education and what you can do, and they're experts in that area. Smaller schools especially-- even larger schools don't need a physical therapist all the time or a speech language pathologist, so they leverage those resources through the ESU. For example, a speech

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Education Committee October 4, 2019

Rough Draft

therapist might go to Kenesaw Public Schools two days a week and three days a week go to South Central Unified. So there's-- there's cost savings that way and efficiencies. From the professional development, schools work with the Nebraska Department of Education on Rule 10 accreditation. They work with schools on their accreditation. Every school has to be accredited every five years. The experts at ESUs, they're experts in data, data analysis, looking at-- drilling down in that data, disaggregating it and where they can help public schools improve. Down to student groups, this is one of the things we talked about Wednesday, was targeted supports for improvement and additional targeted supports for improvement on subcategories of students that are struggling. Instructional materials, we talked about how things have changed. ESUs evolved over the course of the years and the decades. We never used to have an Internet, and ESUs met that need back in the mid-'90s, continue to work extensively with technology, the Universal Service Fund, making sure that schools have Internet access and the backbone so-- so they can be on the cutting edge. We have professional developers. I think when you start talking about professional development and-- and school improvement, there's-- it's very deep. One example is having somebody that is an expert with technology and infusing technology into the curriculum. So we have experts that know the latest applications for mathematics, reading programs, things of that nature that work with public schools. Instructional materials, years ago we used run vans around or a

Rough Draft

station wagon and they had the whole reel of reel tape. If you're older like me, you probably remember that. Now schools can download the info-- download it. For example, films-- they're-- and they're directly related to Nebraska's standards. So fourth grade, if they're learning about Nebraska, they can click on there, and they can get the video right there. And ESUs leverage their resources, and it's more cost-effective to do the structural materials. There are on-line libraries, so schools don't have to buy 20 copies of The Scarlet Letter or whatever book they're studying. They can get it on-line and do it. So those are just a few examples, and I'd be happy to take other questions if you have them.

GROENE: Senator Brewer

BREWER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. All right. Actually, I got a list of them here, and we're just going to kind of run through these real quick. The discussion earlier about the size and shape, the number of schools for each of the ESUs, I'm assuming part of that has to do with just the shared geographics of Nebraska and the areas because if we look at 17, which happens to be one of mine, there's not a lot of schools in it, but it takes a long time to cover that. And I mean if you look at 10, 16, and 13, which are all ones that I have schools in, that's-- it's probably going to be out of proportion as far as number

Rough Draft

of students to each of the ESUs just because Nebraska's population is centered to the east. Is that kind of?

KRAIG LOFQUIST: Absolutely, there's a dichotomy. The majority of Nebraska students are on the eastern part of the state. And it gets sparse and very sparse, but students still need access to those critical services. One of the things that I will tell you, and Nicole gave some background information on ESU 12 and 14, they went in with ESU 13. The administrator there said, you know, it's-- you can be too big. Absolutely, you can be too big. It is really hard to cover the bases, and they also have alternative sites there. They have one in Chadron and one in Sidney. So they have satellite offices and satellite locations. So when they do have events, they can go to those.

BREWER: And then ESU 13's headquartered out of Scottsbluff, right?

KRAIG LOFQUIST: Correct.

BREWER: OK. I think the schools in my district get desperate, so they invite me to go out and present classes on a number of subjects to include history because, like you, I'm also old. The other part is they'll have specific things like 9/11 or Native American history stuff, and they'll have me do presentations. And when I speak to them at school, I kind of run some questions by them just to kind of see where they're at with different issues. The ones that seem to come up

Rough Draft

the most when it has to do with the value-added the ESU provides, speech therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy, and mental health were the ones that they rattled off right away as being critical because in the remote parts of western Nebraska, they just have nothing if they don't have that. How are the ESUs structured in those specific areas? Do they have specialists that they contract or are they someone that's available and can be mobile to go to schools as needed? Because that's covering a pretty big spectrum of stuff, those four titles there.

KRAIG LOFQUIST: I'm a speech language pathologist. I graduated in 1996, so 23 years ago. And there was a shortage of them. So we had trouble finding them in Hastings. They have trouble finding them here I think in-- in the-- in the metro area. So it's extremely difficult to find them and to rely on the ESUs to-- to fill those gaps. I'm not saying that it's always perfect. You may have to contract differently as opposed to bringing somebody onto your staff. But they really rely on the ESUs for that. And I'll give you one more example because I know that this has been bantered around amongst this committee and others, the issue of mental health. When we meet with superintendents, we meet with them at least annually just to dis-- just to talk about the services that you provide for the upcoming year. And every single year they said, mental health, mental health. And one superintendent one of the larger schools in ES-- in the ESU 9 area said, I went to my

Rough Draft

hospital to see if they could provide the service, and it was just not fiscally feasible to do it. So can you do it? We hired one, and there were several schools that bought time or FTE, one day a week. Some started with half a day a week, and every one of them doubled their time. And we hired another one for this particular school year, and my gut feeling is that's going to continue to grow. So those are the services that are hard to come by. Those are the ones that you can provide efficiencies for the school districts. And over the course of the years, that's an example of the evolution.

BREWER: Well, I think another duty we have is to try to figure out how to help law enforcement because as you have a child that falls in that category of protective services, unfortunately many of the departments are so small that to stand down an officer, or in some case two, to travel all the way across Nebraska-- and the reality is Scottsbluff is overwhelmed and can't handle it. In many cases, the first stop is either Kearney or Lincoln. So we've got to figure out a way to help them so we're not reducing their ability to provide safety to the community, but we can also make sure that those that need to have protective care have it for the sake of the schools. So that's a-- that's a dilemma we'll have to resolve here internally. But on that issue, do you know how many times during a given year that a child is put in protective custody and turned over to law enforcement? Do you know of any system that tracks that?

KRAIG LOFQUIST: Yeah. Prior to being an ESU administrator, I was the director of student services at Millard Public Schools from 2004 to 2011. And you have mandatory reporting. You know, we called Child Protective Services. The-- the most we called them-- my office contacted them was 101, I don't remember the exact year off the top of my head, and the least amount was 66. So that is a-- that is a larger school district, third-- third largest in the state of Nebraska. I can give anecdotal evidence when I worked at Wayne Community Schools in northeast Nebraska. It was a few times a semester. But you're absolutely right, talking about needs, and the resources, and how spread thin they are. And in the-- as you get into a more sparse population in western Nebraska or even central Nebraska, one of the things that ESUs also do, and I'll use ESU 3 as an example, they have the Brook Valley school where they bus in over 100 kids every day that have alternative learning needs. And those superintendent-- the superintendents, they scrutinize their bills, and they want to know where they can save money. And they save money by-- that's an example of how they do it, the ESU 3 area. I know that ESU 5 also runs an alternative education program. So ideally, you want kids to be in a regular school setting, cognitively engaged, but you have to meet some of those needs, whether they're mental health or physical or emotional needs, first. And it's a way to work with them. And then the ultimate goal is to get them back in and get them moving forward.

BREWER: Very good. Thank you.

GROENE: Go ahead, Senator Linehan.

LINEHAN: Thank you, Chairman Groene. On the core funding services-- this is the state aid. But the budgets for the ESU over the last ten years haven't gone down, right, the total budgets? Because your property taxes, just because of valuations, would have gone up.

KRAIG LOFQUIST: I'm glad that you said that. It's not a perfect formula. I call it the teetertotter. I'll speak from the ESU 9 perspective. Yes, property taxes went up, and it is a formula. There is a local effort rate. There is a number of student rate. There is a U-- Universal Service Fund telecommunication rate's built into that.

LINEHAN: OK.

KRAIG LOFQUIST: But it's not a perfect formula. So when the teetertotter goes up on one end, it goes down on the other. There were two-- my first two years, we actually went backward when the core service-- when property tax went up, the core service went--

LINEHAN: Because it depends on your valuation and your ESU.

KRAIG LOFQUIST: Yeah.

LINEHAN: Right.

KRAIG LOFQUIST: And so you could actually go backward. Property taxes did go up. Now here's-- here's the rub. And here's what my colleagues sitting behind me will tell you is that the-- systematically the core service money comes through the Department of Education, and they've been systematically cut. So now that the property taxes are coming down for the third year in a row in-- in Adams County and Hastings, Nebraska, the teetertotter is not there to come back up. And so there are 5 of the ESUs that don't receive any of that, and it was 6 last year of the 17. Oh, and then-- and then as far as--

LINEHAN: Can you-- say that again. I'm sorry, could you say that again? Five.

KRAIG LOFQUIST: Six-- for-- for the last several years, six ESUs did not get any. Now in fairness--

LINEHAN: Any core services?

KRAIG LOFQUIST: Right.

LINEHAN: Right.

KRAIG LOFQUIST: In fairness, there was a 2 percent increase this year. So it went up just a little bit, but I believe there was four cuts in the eight years I was at ESU 9. Don't quote me on that. I have to go back and look. And then you're talking about budget. Do the budgets go up? Well, it depends. It depends on the request for the local

Rough Draft

districts. I know ESU 13 nearly doubled their staff because they took on Head Start and a Head Start grant to provide those services to-- to their community. One of the things that ESU 9-- ESU 9's budget went down because when I started there, there were five preschools that ESU 9 ran, Webster County and Adams County. And there was some grant money, and the state started kicking in about .6 FTE for-- for preschoolers. So that grant went down. And-- and schools took over their program, hiring the people that the ESUs had on their staff.

LINEHAN: A couple more questions. On the-- the ESUs have-- for ESU 1, 9 private schools, ESU 3, 36. The services, that's mostly special ed, right? Isn't it--

KRAIG LOFQUIST: No, not necessarily. I'm glad you asked that question. First of all, we do grant management for schools. It saves a lot of time, energy, and money for the school district. And I'll just talk about the easy ones that come through the federal government, Title I, Title II-A, Title III, Title IV. And the school districts will consort their money. And by federal law, you work with the private schools for improvement on II-A, for example, highly educated teachers. And so it's called proportionate share or equitable share. And so they're-- they're also invited to professional development events. I know at ESU 9, they took advantage of a lot of the programs that we had for kids. One was the quiz bowl. It was very popular, and the private schools attended. The technology, technology infrastructure, they're-- some of

Rough Draft

the private schools, they use the e-Rate, consulting, and work with our technology department. So at some level every ESU works with their private schools and has a relationship. Some are stronger than others.

LINEHAN: Because they have to be accredited too. So I think you mentioned you help schools with accreditation or something--

KRAIG LOFQUIST: Um-hum.

LINEHAN: --you did every five years, so would you help those schools too with accreditation?

KRAIG LOFQUIST: Not--

LINEHAN: It probably depends on ESU.

KRAIG LOFQUIST: For private schools, no. We do not do that, that I'm aware of.

LINEHAN: OK.

KRAIG LOFQUIST: I've never been affiliated with that. I don't think so. But Rule 10 governs schools and their-- public schools and their accreditation. I think you're talking about Rule 14. With private schools, I can tell you when I was in Millard, it was-- it was-- there was no professional development, but there was oversight by the local district. And I think this is changed now, too, where you would go out

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Education Committee October 4, 2019

Rough Draft

and you would audit to make sure their teachers had a certificate and sign off.

LINEHAN: I thought I had one more question, but it's escaped me, so thank you very much.

KRAIG LOFQUIST: Thank you.

GROENE: Thank you, sir. And to clarify to the member who wasn't here when we-- when I introduced, I didn't want personal testimony of Johnny and Susie and how you'd saved them. You've done a very good job of concentrating on what I asked for, on the services I asked for. Question, you were-- the education coordinating council was created in 2007?

KRAIG LOFQUIST: Um-hum.

GROENE: And by reading the background on it, I think the Legislature in the past also looked at getting more efficient, just like the reason the ESUs were created was to give services to-- to 2,000-plus schools. You were created to make it even more--

KRAIG LOFQUIST: Coordinate the services.

GROENE: Coordinating services, to make it more efficient. Instead of 16, 17 ESUs out there doing their separate thing, you were created, your-- what you have now, to coordinate that. For example, we brought the-- the substitute teacher came to my committee, and you said two

Rough Draft

ESUs are working on it. That should be a statewide program that every college, every community college has the same program that Peru State does and Wayne State does, not just two colleges working with a single ESU. Is that the type of thing you're working on, to create a statewide cooperation that everybody who's exmilitary, somebody came out of the military and wants to go into teaching, can go into the Mid Plains Community College, can go into Wayne State and know that it's the same requirements and courseload to become a substitute teacher, to get your certification? Is that what you're working on?

KRAIG LOFQUIST: That one, not specifically, Senator Groene, but I think that there's some things that we can learn from the others. All of-- all of the issues-- all of the services that we provide come from the-- from the local school districts. You know, they say, here's what we're really hurting with. Here's what we really need to do. The truth is, I tried to start that at ESU 9 in Hastings where Hastings College is located, and I just didn't get that far.

GROENE: On this issue of substitute teacher?

KRAIG LOFQUIST: On the issue of substitute teachers. But it's a-- it's a-- it's a good example of something that we could take a look at.

GROENE: You coordinate-- pretty simple law "Administration of statewide initiatives and provision of statewide services," so you coordinate: Preparation of strategic plans to assure the cost-

efficiency and equitable delivery of services across the state.

Another question, coordinating distance education.

KRAIG LOFQUIST: Um-hum.

GROENE: I'm totally confused why we have all of these people out there with different classloads when you have the UNL high school. Why haven't we worked directly with UNL high school that that is the service given for distant education in our-- in our small schools? Taxpayers already provide it. I know there's a tuition, but why do we have 16 different groups going out there and offering different distance education when we have that great asset here in the state?

KRAIG LOFQUIST: Well, actually it's a-- it's a coordination, so we have one person, her name's Beth Kabes, that coordinates that. If-- let's just take German. German is offered at Omaha Public Schools or maybe Wynot Public Schools. When I got on this site, it's a-- it's a clearinghouse. There's 264 courses listed there. I think there's actually some more. That need-- it needs to be updated, But there's a drop down on what is dual credit. There's a drop down on ag courses, math courses. It's not the 16-- or 17 ESUs that are-- that are putting that together. It's the ESUCC, and-- and finding out where those courses are available.

GROENE: And sharing them. All right. And-- but like I said, I believe you were created to make sure we get even more efficient, more

Rough Draft

cost-efficient. We did it when creating ESUs on some of these services. And now, the way I read the statute, we're trying to get it more-- even more cost-efficient.

KRAIG LOFQUIST: That's correct.

GROENE: And work with the Department of Education. Here's one I hear a lot about. South Dakota has one data service collecting a programmed data service that goes to the state. They don't need an ESU doing that data service on court because it's all one program reporting to the Department of Education. There is just-- everybody does it the same. Have you looked at those type of issues to try to get more efficient and cost effective or is your duty to be the initiator or to sit back and wait for ESUs to bring you something?

KRAIG LOFQUIST: No, that's a great example. And in a perfect world, that would-- that-- that would work. Schools, such as Lincoln Public, they use something called Edupoint or Synergy. It's a software that-- that works for them. I think-- and the state of Nebraska has had these conversations with districts. You have to at one point-- and technology changes so quickly, Senator, and it can get deep fast for me, just so you know. That every-- every-- every student information system had to be Ed-Fi compatible or compatible to send information and receive information from the Department of Ed. So programmers will work behind the scenes to make sure that that works. I think that

Rough Draft

there were 11, and yeah, that-- in a perfect world, that would-- that would fly. I can tell you that there are two predominant ones in the state of Nebraska. That's PowerSchool and Infinite Campus. I think that that takes up 80 percent of the schools in Nebraska. Don't quote me on those figures because it's changing. I hear that others, you know, are moving from one system to another, but those those conversations do take place. And-- and it-- it's hard to get in front of the ball and and it's difficult to run behind it, to try to make something that fits for everybody.

GROENE: Another question, I've heard from some smaller schools and bigger schools that ESUs, on their professional training, they do it during the school year. Are ESUs considered more like the Department of Education where they work 12 months a year, or are they under contract with their employees for 185 days like a school?

KRAIG LOFQUIST: No. Well, yes and no. So you may have a speech language pathologist that has this-- a standard teacher contract or one that's quite comparable. But those staff developers, they work all the way through the summer, so they can have a varying contract, 205 days or 210.

GROENE: That isn't what we hear from a lot of districts, that the training schedule during the school year and then it adds to their substitute teacher problem, adds to the cost to their budget for

substitute teachers. Why isn't it coordinated more to be in the off-- when teachers aren't in the classroom?

KRAIG LOFQUIST: Well, you're going to pay for those teachers if they have 185-day contract, for example, to go during the summertime. Let me give you one example. One-- one of your bills, LB147-- I'm a Mandt trainer. I am certified to train in Mandt, and for the last few years during the summer we go to Aurora Public Schools. Schools come to Aurora, including Aurora, Aurora, Sutton, Giltner, and some others, I can't think of all of them off the top of my head, to receive that training. But if they're not on a teacher contract, the school districts have to pay a daily stipend for them to attend that. And we do try to think win-win. I'll give you another example where school districts usually fire up somewhere between August 10 and August 15. We try to have that training at the very beginning, so we can get as many people trained as possible. So it's a contractual issue, and I understand you are talking about efficiencies and-- and when they can do the training.

GROENE: Also the classroom, a student does better when the-- when there's one teacher there and not a substitute.

KRAIG LOFQUIST: Correct.

GROENE: So there's an educational value too, not to take the teacher out of the classroom, I would assume. But that was-- you said you

tried-- that was when you were at the ESU 9, but you're no longer there. You've got to look at the big picture.

KRAIG LOFQUIST: Correct.

GROENE: And a-- and you haven't. Is that-- how what-- how big a staff do you have to help you with research and putting things together?

KRAIG LOFQUIST: There's about 50 at ESU 9. There are 11--

GROENE: No, you're no longer there. You're the coordinator.

KRAIG LOFQUIST: OK. Sorry, I didn't follow you on that one. There's 11 people that work for the ESUCC.

GROENE: And what's their duties?

KRAIG LOFQUIST: Well, I'm newer so let's throw that into the--

GROENE: That I understand.

KRAIG LOFQUIST: --the situation here. We have three computer programmers. One of them works quite a bit with the Nebraska Department of Education. One of them works with the student records system. The student records system is a statewide on-line IEP system, but it's much more than that. It has progress reports in it. It has MDT information which stands for multidisciplinary team. And it is a comprehensive system that works with kids that have been identified as needing special education services. I'll give you an example. I don't

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Education Committee October 4, 2019

Rough Draft

want to get too tangential with that. But a student is in Wayne, and they moved to Lexington. You can get on-line. You can identify the person at Lexington by the county and the school, and you can send there the record like that.

GROENE: And that's something you-- you're--

KRAIG LOFQUIST: That's what-- the ESUCC coordinates that.

GROENE: Not the Department of Education has done.

KRAIG LOFQUIST: We have one person that works-- actually, more than one person that worked extensively with the cooperative purchase program. They talked about it saves districts quite a bit of money because we buy in bulk.

GROENE: Thank you. Any other questions?

BREWER: I've got one.

GROENE: Senator Brewer.

BREWER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. All right. I understand that I'm sort of surrounded by teachers. My son is a teacher, my sister, brother-in-law, nieces. So I get my ear bent pretty hard by teachers so sometimes I bend back. And the thing that I think comes out that is important is you're doing good things out there. And I think that the challenge is taking your story and getting it to people so they

Rough Draft

understand the story. Now I've got the ESU 1 report here. Anybody from ESU 1 here today? OK. Nicely done. This is not overwhelming. It's short. It's clear. It talks about who the board of directors are, the primary mission, and kind of how they do their day-to-day business. This is-- this is kind of the way to win hearts and minds I think is if you have some confidence that you know what exactly is happening at the ESUs. So and this kind of goes to Senator Pansing Brooks's point. I think if it's kept fairly basic, to the point, and covers the areas, this will be invaluable to everybody, especially the 49 in this building who-- who need to know what's going on. So they can intelligently address things and have that situation awareness, so what they do helps you, not hurts you.

KRAIG LOFQUIST: We have talked about better ways to tell our story, Senator Brewer. I am grateful that you said that. Those reports are actually mandated by the Department of Ed. They have to be in by November 1 for the prior year and the services that you provide. And that's an excellent point. Thank you.

BREWER: Do you consolidate the ESU reports into like a master report?

KRAIG LOFQUIST: I used to keep them in Google when I-- when I was at ESU 9 because we share them, put them on our Web sites. We share them with other ESUs and our schools. And so I would download everybody's-- or save it via e-mail and put it into a Google document.

BREWER: All right. Well hey, we're in this age of technology. Some of us are old school, and we like to read with real paper. But that's OK. If it's out there, it's out there.

KRAIG LOFQUIST: Well, I don't like-- I don't like saying that things are a work in progress. Nicole alluded to SIMPL which is a service-- service inventory of all the things that ESUs provide. Everybody's services are in there now. We're in there clicking the buttons to make sure that when the reports are ran, that they're-- that they're accurate in the number of services, the types of services. And you will have that at your fingertips in the future.

BREWER: And another idea, again, I'm just throwing this out here. If you think I'm crazy, it's-- join the crowd. The-- the issue may be that as the 49 come in, or at least the new faces come in, with each class, figure out a way to sit down with them, and one on one just walk them through, answer questions. Be sure that they have a binder that, you know, is able to be a quick go-to for information, and I think that'll go a long ways to help you.

KRAIG LOFQUIST: Thank you so much. You received a-- you received a bunch of letters, and they're written from the heart. The ESUs provide. I'd be eternally grateful if you could--

BREWER: This is the binder of letters. Yes, I have it.

KRAIG LOFQUIST: --if you could glance through those and pick some of those written by superintendents, principals, special education directors, parents, and students about the great things that we do.

GROENE: Thank you.

KRAIG LOFQUIST: Thank you.

GROENE: Next testifier. We have to keep moving on. Jack Moles from the Nebraska Rural Community School Association. We've got to keep moving.

JACK MOLES: OK. Good morning, Senator Groene and members of the committee. First of all, I want to appreciate-- extend my appreciation being invited to testify here. My name is Jack Moles, J-a-c-k M-o-l-e-s. I'm the executive director of NRCSA, Nebraska Rural Community Schools Association, and in talking to Senator Groene and Nicole Barrett, I understand the purpose of the interim study is to see if there is-- which school districts might share on services in order to help cut property taxes. I think that's a really good goal. And NRCSA's belief is that these discussions do need to include the ESUs as they are likely part of the po-- any positive steps in that direction. In preparing for my testimony, I surveyed our 186 member superintendents to see-- see which service-- services provided by the ESUs that the districts were most dependent. What I did is I just simply listed 40 ESU's services and asked them to identify which services their districts access. And I received a very positive return

Rough Draft

on my-- my survey. One hundred thirty-six of our superintendents responded, really good return. I was really pleased with that. I think that sends a little bit of a message of how important our rural superintendents see--

WALZ: Sorry.

JACK MOLES: But I, like I said, I do think it sends a message of how-- the importance that our-- our superintendents place on the service units. But what I did is I took the top ten services and just kind of focused on them. Ten of the services were accessed by at least 75 percent of the districts that responded, and I listed those for you there with the percentage of schools that are most-- or percentage of the services that the districts were most dependent upon. And staff development was number one there. Ninety-six percent of the-- of the school districts said they were dependent on the service unit for providing those services. Another 16 of those-- of the services that I identified in the 40 were identified as being important services for their districts by at least 50 percent of the respondents. But when I looked-- looked at the ten services that were-- received the most responses, I saw that seven of them are simply services that a school district could decide to do on their own. They were staff development, e-Rate filing, curriculum development, instructional strategies, purchasing, school improvement process, and state's SPED reports. And the reason why they could choose to do it on their own simply, and I

Rough Draft

said simply, is because those things don't require either certification by somebody or they don't require a lot of technology hardware. Two of the services, e-Rate filing and SPED state reports, are very, very closely scrutinized documentation that could cost the district thousands of dollars if they weren't done completely or done correctly. And I have seen examples of that where districts lost out on thousands of dollars because they weren't done right. Having one person do those or help you do those is really important for all districts, but especially our rural districts. And I'm going to give you a couple-- my experience with that as a previous superintendent. I was in Johnson County Central down in-- based out of Tecumseh. We were actually ESU 4 which is in Auburn, but we were dependent on ESU 5 in Beatrice to help us on our e-Rate file. They had a young lady there that became very, very versed-- well-versed in e-Rate filing, and she helped all of our districts because in ESUs 3, 4, 5, and 6 she would help those-- many of the districts there. And the districts had moved apart-- or the ESUs had moved apart and weren't working as closely together. And she agreed to take on all of our districts because she knew the importance, and we all knew how important she was to us. And so we did buy her time, but that's an example of how, you know, we did work together. The other was ESU 4 where my district was. We were dependent on them for the SPED filing, you know, the SPED reports, and like that. One of the things that comes into play here is a federal requirement on maintenance of effort. I think many of you have heard

Rough Draft

about that. It's a requirement on the federal level that we maintain our special education expenditures. Now, we couldn't lower them without a really good reason. And if we didn't do that, we would tend to lose federal money. And so we had to make sure our spending was-- was kept at the right level. And ESU 4 was able to help us do that, you know, make sure that we track all of our expenditures. Without them, we would have lost thousands of dollars there too. Moving on, four of the ten services that I talked about, staff development, curriculum development, instructional strategies, and school improvement process, all had the goal of helping districts become better. They could be handled in-house, but I don't think they'd be handled as well. The ESUs have staff development personnel who are-- who become trained and then help a number of districts which is a-- I guess a very good example of efficiency. If a rural district was to attempt to do that on their own or in conjunction with just another district, the costs would probably be quite a bit higher for them. And in a single district, you would have to hire a full-time position to do those things. You would have to create a position. And so you know, working with a number of schools through a service unit makes you more efficient, but also makes you more cost-efficient. The other item of the seven that the districts can choose to do on their own is purchasing. And through co-op purchasing that's coordinated through the ESUCC, we get much lower prices on items. And you know, the work through the ESUCC has been able to assure that districts have lower

Rough Draft

prices than if they're doing it on their own. You know that saying there is strength in numbers? There's buying power in numbers also. The other three items that were on the top ten that I hadn't discussed yet are Internet access, Internet filter, and psychologist. Internet access and Internet filter are examples of ways in which districts did join together to keep costs down. Back in my early days of being a superintendent, ESUs 4, 5, 6, and 3 had gone together to form the Southeast Nebraska Distance Learning Consortium. That group did much more than just distance learning. Two of the things they helped us with were Internet access and the filtering that was-- that was needed. Access was vital to our schools. And you know, one of the-- as I go around to our districts and talk to school districts in our-- each of our six NRCSA districts, one thing I hear that they struggle with the most is access in the rural areas, not necessarily access at the schools, but access in the-- in the rural areas. And I know that's something that some of you are working very hard on, but in the schools, we're able to provide that access through the consortiums that were developed through the working together. The other one was Internet filtering, and we're required to have that in the e-Rate structure. The other thing is the use of an educational psychologist, and this is a pretty good example of a number of services actually that are provided by cer-- by the ESUs in which we are able to have several districts work together with one person. The problem of finding-- but I'm going to kind of focus on the psychologists. Of

Rough Draft

course, they're required for-- for SPED requirements. But also it's kind of starting to evolve that they're becoming more involved in things such as mental health and behavioral health too. The problem of finding educational services units is very difficult, especially in the rural sector. There simply is a shortage of these individuals outside of the major population areas, and as Kraig said earlier, even in the rural-- or the urban areas, we sometimes have a hard time finding some of the services. In my role at Johnson County Central-- first Nemaha Valley, we merged, became Johnson County Central. But early on in my years there, we had a hard time finding the right person as a psychologist within the service unit. I was able to contract outside of this-- with an outside provider, and I was able to maintain that-- that relationship with the outside provider through my whole years of being the superintendent there. And-- and-- school districts do that. If they can find a better way to do it or a more efficient way that's maybe less cost-effective-- or less costly way, we'll do it. And schools do that all the time. The thing is I was able to do that, and-- and that's not the norm. We normally can't find those people. I just happened to stumble across one, and it worked out for us. But that's not the norm in rural Nebraska. We can't find those people normally. You know, I provided all of the list on the back of-- of the things that I identified and asked schools to respond to. As you look down that list, there are other examples that kind of follow what I've just described here. The rural-- smaller rural districts,

Rough Draft

either because of higher costs that they would incur or because of scarcity of individuals in their geographic region, are the reasons why ESUs are important to our rural districts. One of the things that struck me as I looked at that list of 40 though, over half of those weren't things that were even seen by being a need to rural, any school district, like 30 years ago. Over half those things have grown since, well, like I said, 30 years ago. And that's how long I've been a school administrator. That's why I used that-- that cutoff. NRCSA does believe that ESUs are vital for our rural schools. That being said, I think it's incumbent upon both the ESUs and their member schools to continue to explore ways in which sharing can contribute to cost reductions. And my experience is, they're doing that. We did that all the time in my work as a superintendent so. In closing, I just can't overstate the importance of ESUs to our rural districts. If they were to disappear or if their funding was cut, I think it'd be-- create extreme hardship on our rural districts.

GROENE: Thank you. Questions? Senator Brewer.

BREWER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. All right, so mine's relatively easy here. All right. In the military we like to use terms that no one else knows and then we confuse everyone.

JACK MOLES: We do too.

BREWER: SPED-- SPED, it stands for?

JACK MOLES: Special Education, I'm sorry.

BREWER: Ah, got you. Thank you.

JACK MOLES: I should have said that, Senator. Sorry about that.

GROENE: Senator Linehan.

LINEHAN: Thank you, Chairman Groene. On the maintenance of effort, is there any way-- because I can see where this would be a huge-- a challenge for the smaller schools because one kid can be-- one child could cost a great deal of money. But then, can the schools-- is there any way for the schools to put their numbers together?

JACK MOLES: No, I have talked to-- actually talked to the commissioner about that. My district got hit by a maintenance of effort issue. And what happened was we kind of had a magic year in which I lost a very high-needs student, the highest-cost student I ever had actually. We were able to-- we-- actually, we were able to hire our own speech therapist, and we also changed providers in PT and OT, physical therapy, occupational therapy. And we got hit with a maintenance of effort issue, and it was going to cost my district about \$100,000. And through working with the issue for Ellen Stokebrand, the special education director there, and she and I worked very closely on this. We were able to reduce that down. It still costed the district almost \$50,000 that had to be returned to the-- to the-- well, to the state government which then, you know, made up for that-- or the State

Rough Draft

Department of Ed. They did allow us when we lost the high-cost student. So if you're able to show a reduction because of something like that--

LINEHAN: Then they will-- they like you. OK.

JACK MOLES: Yeah. The other two things though, I was able to show how we became more efficient, saved some money, and actually, in one of the cases, expanded our services. Didn't matter. We still lost the-- the money.

LINEHAN: Have you talked to any of our federal representatives about the ESUs?

JACK MOLES: Yeah. Yeah, we did. And I know every year at the-- the ESU directors go out to-- to Washington, and they do visit with the representatives. They do talk to them about that. Yeah, that maintenance of effort becomes kind of a quandary.

LINEHAN: I'll try to be quick here. On the-- I know that there's a lot going on with dual credit courses with the community colleges. I'm a little confused at how-- it seems to me everybody's doing a little bit differently. Has there been any conversations at the Department of Ed or the ESU level to kind of make sure if you're going to school over here, it may cost you tuition, but they go over here, maybe the school

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Education Committee October 4, 2019

Rough Draft

pays the tuition? Is there any conversations about having some kind of continuation across the board?

JACK MOLES: I don't know. I don't know that.

LINEHAN: OK. And the other thing that concerns me a little bit about the rural schools, I know dual-- dual credit is wonderful, but it-- it's not the same as advanced placement.

JACK MOLES: Um-hum.

LINEHAN: So do the ES-- do you know anything that's going on to make certain that students in small schools have the opportunity for advanced placement classes?

JACK MOLES: You know, I don't know that. I know we looked into ways to do it, and--

LINEHAN: It's hard.

JACK MOLES: --it is hard.

LINEHAN: OK. All right. Thank you very much, Mr. Moles.

GROENE: Mr. Moles, thank you. You've done wonderful work. I don't think this committee has ever seen this list before, of those services.

JACK MOLES: OK. Well, OK. OK.

GROENE: Yeah. I mean--

JACK MOLES: I would just say you haven't seen the list because it's never-- I just-- OK.

GROENE: Well, that list of services that you gave us is something I've never seen before.

JACK MOLES: You know, and I would tell you, Senator, that that list is not as extensive as the service units themselves would be able to provide you.

GROENE: Let's keep our questions running, but we're getting good information. You made a good point that 30 years ago, a lot of this wasn't on--

JACK MOLES: Right.

GROENE: --the schools plate. The things we're looking at here, nobody brought to this committee. I would think the coordinating-- the ESU Coordinating Council, one of their duties would be to say, these are some things for efficiency and cost, Legislature, has come up that we think if you would look at it, that we could offer that service to the Department of Education instead of 16 service units trying to pick it up. We never see that. Because I have to believe with technology now and 244 districts, that some of these things could be done across-- statewide through the Department of Education. But as you said, last

Rough Draft

30 years these things have popped up, and it stopped apparently at the ESUs. It didn't go beyond that to the Legislature and to the-- to the Department of Education. So I appreciate that. But because some things like the psychologists, which everybody knows that concerns me, that's healthcare, that isn't education. We don't have diabetic doctors in our school diagnosing kids for that. And a real concern did you ever have or your members have is what is-- where is that line where you're talking about a medical issue with a child? That's-- that child had rights and the parents have rights. And you have a psychologist sitting in that school. What does that line blur between the parent noticing or somebody saying your child has a problem and then setting up an appointment and go-- and going to a psychologist like you would a doctor, and this individual sitting in the-- in the school?

JACK MOLES: You know one of the things we looked at trying to do is, you know, take the individual student. If they go to a outside psycholo-- you know, a psychologist, psychiatrist, a therapist, or anything like that, they're taking time away from school. If we could have it within the-- within the class-- not the classroom but within the walls of the building, that student misses a lot less class time. We thought that was something we wanted.

GROENE: When is the diagnosis done?

JACK MOLES: Um-hum.

GROENE: And who does the recommendation? In my world, the parent notices a problem, sets up an appointment. We do have personal responsibilities as parents yet.

JACK MOLES: Right.

GROENE: And have the child-- they go to their regular checkup. The doctor-- I believe medical doctors have the ability to do everything a psychologist does. But that's the problem. And on some of these things that you've said that's been formed by the schools through their ESUs, they're not regulated. It hasn't been directed by the Legislature and the people of Nebraska to provide that service. That is the concern I have with some of this.

JACK MOLES: Um-hum.

GROENE: And if it's-- if it-- if there's a service that needs to be done, it needs to be brought to the Legislature.

JACK MOLES: I'd say do-- most of the things that have evolved at the request of the schools, they've evolved because we're trying to do what's best for our kids--

GROENE: We're all understand that.

JACK MOLES: --and trying to be-- to find the best way we can to meet their needs. And their needs are so much different now than-- than when I first started in education. You know, just a few examples, you

Rough Draft

know, the-- the poverty level, simply that, that is so much higher now than what I saw when I first started. And kids, you know, with needs just coming out of poverty. You know, the ELL population that we've had in the state, we didn't see that level many years ago. But you know, the kids with autism, you know, that's been pretty well documented, the number of kids with autism that-- that, you know, we-- I think there were probably some kids back in my early days of teaching that probably were autistic, but they weren't high-need autistic. But now that's so much more prevalent. So there's so many more things we're dealing with now in this-- on the school level that we didn't see back in the day. And you know, Senator, you talked about, you know, as a parent, you know, you would have had your child into, you know, maybe a psychologist, whatever. The-- the parent disengagement sometimes is-- is something that we have to deal with for the good of the student too so. So there are a lot of reasons for it. I agree, in a perfect world, a parent would be taking their student, you know.

GROENE: But is that-- but is that the duty of education?

JACK MOLES: To try to properly educate the student, ideally it wouldn't have to be, but in reality I think it is.

GROENE: My concern is, you know, those parents are alumni of the public school system.

JACK MOLES: Right.

GROENE: And you do understand, we went through times in this country where immigration was very high.

JACK MOLES: Um-hum.

GROENE: My father spoke German in school. And so this is-- there might have been a pause in the '50s and '60s and the '40s when we did not have English as a second language. But the history of this country, this is not a new issue. And we've always-- we've always been able to do that melting pot, and those immigrants did quite well without somebody saying they had a problem with their language. So anyway, it's not a new-- new issue--

JACK MOLES: Right.

GROENE: --in the United States of America. It's who we are. And I hear that a lot, that there are very good parents. Most--

JACK MOLES: Yeah.

GROENE: What I do find is the immigrants don't have a parent problem.

JACK MOLES: Oh. We had a fairly decent size minority grouping in-- in my district that I had, for a rural-- for a rural school, we were kind of out of the norm, and had great parents. They wanted what was best for their kids and very, very good to work with. Wasn't always easy to

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Education Committee October 4, 2019

Rough Draft

work with. You know, the language barrier sometimes created an issue,
but-- but--

GROENE: I just had one comment. I'd love to have your organization bring to the committee ideals that you think that services that would work on a statewide basis.

JACK MOLES: OK.

GROENE: Because we want to offer the services.

JACK MOLES: Right.

GROENE: Nobody's attacking the services.

JACK MOLES: Um-hum.

GROENE: How can we do it more efficiently? Give in to Senator Brewer's point, the military does a great thing.

JACK MOLES: Um-hum.

GROENE: But if we don't need 200,000 thousand tanks, and we only need a 100,000 which they have, let's get down to 100,000 and offer the same protection and the same services. That's what, kind of, I'm personally looking at. Senator Walz.

WALZ: Thank you, Chairman Groene. Good morning. How are you?

JACK MOLES: Good. How are you?

WALZ: I'm good. Senator Groene raised a point that I just have a question about. There's probably one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten-- ten, eleven services provided by the ESU that I think, and correct me if I'm wrong, but wouldn't some of those services be mandated through the IEP?

JACK MOLES: Yes.

WALZ: --have to be--

JACK MOLES: Yes, some of the things on that list are mandated that we do have to do. Some are things that the districts just needed help with.

WALZ: Right. OK. I just wanted to clarify that. Thank you.

JACK MOLES: Yep.

GROENE: Senator Pansing Brooks.

PANSING BROOKS: Thank you, Chairman Groene. Well, I guess I just have to jump in. I'm not quite sure how we jumped from mental health and psychologists to immigration because I see those as totally different things.

JACK MOLES: Right.

PANSING BROOKS: Clearly when I was a child, there were counselors in the school. So I think that people have decided that-- it's not like it's a new-- a new thing. And by, excuse me, requiring psychologists in certain areas, you all have a duty to keep all children safe.

JACK MOLES: Right.

PANSING BROOKS: And you have the children most of their waking hours. So clearly if a parent doesn't get home till 5:30 or 6:00 and they put the kid to get in bed at 8:00, they may not even recognize things that you all recognize in school. So it seems to me that if we are expecting the schools to take on the role of, you know, parent-- "parental in loca," basically put us in charge, you do have a duty both to that student and the other students and to the teacher to make sure that everyone is safe, everyone is being cared for, and that the child has an opportunity to learn. If that child is taken to a psychologist off-site, there are then HIPAA violations if there's any kind of communication with the school about the trauma or the disabilities or things like that that are going on with the-- with that child. Would you agree to all that?

JACK MOLES: Yes, pretty much.

PANSING BROOKS: So-- so part of-- or of the work that you're doing with the psychologist deals with children's safety, staff safety, everything like that to make sure that you're teaching in the best

possible way, best possible manner, and dealing with kids from all sectors and walks of life. Isn't that basically it?

JACK MOLES: I'd say, years ago, no, because the psychologist--

PANSING BROOKS: That's why it switched to psychologist. Yes.

JACK MOLES: --that we worked with was just on, you know, special education issues and like that. But as things have evolved, you know, we kind of push different things to different people, and that's one of the things that-- we started looking for help with-- in our case, we started looking for more help with behavioral things. And then, you know, more recently we started to look at mental health side of things too. And that-- I mean five or six years ago, that's not something I really saw as being a need was the mental health part of it.

PANSING BROOKS: Right.

JACK MOLES: But the more I looked at it, the more I saw that that really was what our-- a lot of the issue was.

PANSING BROOKS: Do you think that was because you were ignoring it or because there has been a shift in-- in what-- in-- in the children that you're teaching?

JACK MOLES: I think there was a shift in the people that we're teaching, but I think a lot of it was just lack of knowledge on my part.

PANSING BROOKS: Knowledge.

JACK MOLES: As I started to look closer at it, started to read more, started to listen more, I started to see, yeah, what they were-- what some of the experts were talking about, exactly what was taking place in my district.

PANSING BROOKS: Can you talk about what-- what if you-- if all psychologists were shut down, all mental health in the schools, what would that look like if all of a sudden, every single psychologist were gone? I've seen what happens at a school when the counselors are gone because I-- there was an effort at-- at one of our students'-- my kids' schools in elementary to take away the counselor, and then they'd come back periodically. And I think that was a real loss. So do you have a vision of what that would look like if everybody were taken away and we only dealt with psychologists outside and the parents were to do it and you guys just don't deal with anything in that realm.

JACK MOLES: Well, first of all, in the psychologist part of it, we'd be out of-- out of compliance on special ed issues.

PANSING BROOKS: Yes.

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Education Committee October 4, 2019

Rough Draft

JACK MOLES: But the counseling side of it-- first of all, I kind of almost an expert on that. My wife was a counselor, school counselor so. She would tell you I don't know as much as I think I do. But you know, her-- her-- I remember, you know, I know watching her position expand over the years. You know, she was mainly a high school counselor, and for a lot of-- you know, a lot of it was career and college readiness and like that. And more and more, she became involved with the-- the emotional side of it, the mental side of it, the behavioral side of it. But that was because-- I think a lot of it was because our student population was changing too.

PANSING BROOKS: Thank you, Mr. Moles.

JACK MOLES: You're welcome.

GROENE: Thank you, Jack.

JACK MOLES: Thank you.

GROENE: Very good testimony. Who's up next? I think it's-- Dr. John Skretta, ESU 6, former Norris superintendent.

JOHN SKETTA: All right. Good morning, Chairman Groene and distinguished senators, members of the Education Committee. My name is John Skretta. That's J-o-h-n S-k-r-e-t-t-a. I am the Educational Service Unit 6 administrator headquartered in Milford, and it's my privilege to have the opportunity to talk with you here today,

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Education Committee October 4, 2019

Rough Draft

hopefully answer some questions you might have regarding how ESUs provide services and support, talk about some of the basic economics and efficiencies of ESUs. Little background, I've been a Nebraska school administrator for 20 years at high school and district levels, last 9 of which I was the Norris superintendent. This summer I moved over to ESU 6 in Milford. What drew me to the position was the opportunity to work directly with partnerships of 16 school districts covering 5 different counties, basically almost 14,000 students, 1,500 teachers, and the excitement around opportunities for partnership. I believe that at their best ESUs, like ESU 6, provide tremendous support, value, and service to Nebraska school staff and students. And I want to share some examples with you. Coming into the position, having just started in July, what I'm most impressed about, besides the quality of our personnel and our team at ESU 6, would be my growing understanding of the scope of services that truly begin from birth and go all the way to age 21 which are facilitated through our ESU. The special education programming that is offered is just a really good example of how ESUs are the puzzle solvers for challenging personnel scenarios that are faced by districts across Nebraska. These are positions which are vital in helping schools meet IEP requirements and mandatory special education services in a vast range of areas. And to supplement my comments, and rather than kind of going blow by blow through the range of specialized positions fulfilled through ESU 6 in the student services special education realm, you've got a handout

Rough Draft

that's just labeled understanding student services from ESU 6. And that just gives kind of a breakdown. It's-- it's not exhaustive, but I wanted to give you just a quick annotated synopsis of what that looks like at ESU 6. And I think it's, you know, really pretty close to staggering when you see the range of-- of what's done out of ESU 6. And if I omit anything or get anything wrong, Mary Phillips is back here behind me, and she's our special education student services director at ESU 6. And she can provide clarification and specifics or she can kick my shins in the hall if I get something wrong. So here's another area that I wanted to mention because it is worthy of recognition and I think is a triumph of the ESU model. Instrumental infrastructure support and crucial specialized knowledge comes from technology through educational service units. I'm trying to think of a way for you to picture how these people operate who are our network technicians, and what comes to mind would be graduates of the Hogwarts School of Wizardry, OK? These are people who possess knowledge that is far beyond what mere mortals typically understand about computers, about technology, about really key issues that relate to the basic functionality of schools, and the fact that we are ever increasingly reliant on technology for a vast range of things that are absolutely essential to, not just the business of schooling, but the actual realities of instructional delivery and student learning. And I want to try to-- you know, as time permits, I want to try to share maybe a couple examples just to give some color and context that reflect

Rough Draft

things I've learned about on some of the back-end techs' work that happens directly at ESU 6 as well as some of the on-site support offered via contracted services. I've provided you a brief Google slide deck printout that's just got some-- it-- basically it's a case study. And wanted to offer that because it just provides some example and some color in terms of helping you fill in the-- around the edges about what technology services look like through an ESU. And many, many ESUs across Nebraska do things similarly. I, of course, am talking from the microcosm of ESU 6, and Jamen Hall is our technology director. And Jamen coordinated efforts with a couple of our network technicians to put that slide deck together for you, talking about how through the supports of ESU 6, we essentially revitalized, repaired, restored technology services for a member school district and did it in a way that provides, I think, pretty strong evidence of valuable ROI or return on investment in a way that I think exceeds what could be done if it were privately contracted. Another area that must be mentioned is the area of professional development. You know, I think it's hard to quantify savings and pencil those out when you're talking about professional development services in a way that pencils out quite the same as special education and student services and the technology realms. But what-- what I would urge you to understand about professional development through our educational service units is that we're kind of the seamless handoff. We're the folks who relay the baton from the federal and state levels and take NDE mandates and

Rough Draft

help schools make sense of those and provide technical support. For example, we have specialized personnel at ESU 6 who assist with the state mandated MAPP testing, that's "Measures of Academic Progress," to ensure that districts can meet assessment requirements and put the student data to use in actually informing their instruction. So that's-- I know I'm red-lighted here, so I want to be respectful of the time allotted. I would-- I would love to-- I can talk a little bit about some of the budget basics that were a revelation to me moving from a school district to an ESU. And I can also share with you-- would love the opportunity to share with you a little bit more about the technology side of stuff. Thank you.

GROENE: Well you'll-- go ahead and tell us a synopsis of your financial [INAUDIBLE]. Somebody else referred to that as testimony.

JOHN SKETTA: You bet. Just wanted to reference the pie chart, OK? And the pie chart basically just shows a breakdown of our revenue sources. And this is the part that-- so I came from the Norris School District which is the school district that has had perennial cuts in state aid and equalization aid 9 of the last 11 years, something like that. I think actually got a little bump for the '19-20 school year. But the-- just to give you a quick comparison when you think about overreliance on property taxes to fund schools in Nebraska, it had reached a point last year in the Norris School District where for every dollar spent, I think right at about 70 cents of that dollar was derived directly

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Education Committee October 4, 2019

Rough Draft

from local property taxes, OK? When you look at the revenue for Educational Service Unit 6, 58 percent is coming directly from local contracted receipts meaning those are services which the districts are reimbursing Educational Service Unit 6 for because they believe and have identified that there's value-added in those figures.

GROENE: Those were also property tax dollars.

JOHN SKETTA: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. The property tax portion of what ESU 6 receives is the sentinel half that ESUs are allotted, and that comes to 25 percent of the revenue incoming. Core service dollars, and this is a point that I wanted-- wanted to allude to, ESU 6 is one of a number of ESUs that has seen core service dollars diminish or virtually disappear with the increased valuations of ag land in the state of Nebraska over the last ten years, OK? The valuation for ESU 6 sits at just in excess of \$15 billion And the total levy, of course, is at the 1.5 cents, but it's slightly over. You had identified, in some earlier correspondence I had with Nicole, that the ESU 6 levy exceeds 1.5 cents. And that's a reflection of the building project and the bonded indebtedness related to that, which was accomplished through a JPA Public Construction Act at-- or in cooperation with the Malcolm School District. And that is kind of a quick synopsis on-- on the revenue piece that I wanted to share with you. Total tax request at ESU 6 was \$2.3 million. Total cash reserve sits at 29 percent. The legal threshold is 50 percent. I wanted to mention cash reserve

Rough Draft

because I know that's an important topic. Sometimes there is a perception that public entities are sitting on a mountain of cash. And why are you doing that? And what are you doing with it? And what-- what I wanted to describe is that much of what ESUs do is a reimbursable service, and reimbursements may lag months or a year or more in arrears. So it is necessary to carry substantial cash reserve to be able to fund those personnel and meet the payroll costs. The cash reserve that ESU 6 has, and I can only speak to our ESU, but it would only cover between two to three months of bills which, you know, you could argue that we should-- we should try to build it beyond where it sits there. So just wanted to mention that. And then if I could, technology?

GROENE: Well, you're going to what-- you're going to lose your question and answer time, what you have.

JOHN SKETTA: OK, sorry.

GROENE: Because we can ask you about technology. But I've got a question off the top which is a revelation. So we have the same problem with ESUs as we do with state equalization aid.

JOHN SKETTA: Yeah.

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Education Committee October 4, 2019

Rough Draft

GROENE: If you-- property taxes go up. So of the \$13.7 million we-- the Legislature has-- has appropriated for ESUs, your ESU only gets \$34,000 of it?

JOHN SKETTA: Correct.

GROENE: Somehow that may be another place the foundation aid needs to be placed, but--

JOHN SKETTA: Yeah, I thought that was really interesting when I learned that as well.

GROENE: So it's the same thing, we're all Nebraskans [INAUDIBLE].

JOHN SKETTA: Yeah, it's endemic. Yeah.

GROENE: All right. Thank you. Any other questions? Senator Brewer.

BREWER: The-- the map is interesting to say the least I'm-- how the ESUs are set up. I'm assuming that they are having these squiggly lines because we're going by school districts, or at least for part of it, in some cases, entire counties. If I was to take say ESU 17 which I assume the number of students that are probably supported there is-- is maybe, you know, a few hundred because it's-- it's very small schools with the exception of Valentine. We go down to yours on 6, how many students would you have services for in ESU 6, roughly?

JOHN SKETTA: 14,000.

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Education Committee October 4, 2019

Rough Draft

BREWER: OK. Is it proportional then, say you have 14,000 or it's 1,417, you know, what-- whatever the number is, but this is at least a ratio we can work with.

JOHN SKETTA: Um-hum.

BREWER: The number of pleas that you're authorized, is it according to students or is it in order to meet your requirements with technology and the different categories.

JOHN SKETTA: Yeah. So that's a-- that's a fascinating question and one that I think both school districts and ESUs will continue to wrestle with is how do you-- how do you really optimize your services and find the right balance of staffing in delivering of those services. So we've got-- ESU 6, our staffing breakdown, real quick like, would be-- the single largest personnel FTE area's in special education, and we have around 50 who are directly in SPED or in a related service. Professional development is half a dozen so just under six full-time. Technology, we have five. And then we've got four folks who work in business and human resources. And production is a whole nother thing that we haven't talked about, but we do a ton of production work which would include custom graphic design services, printing, production, die cuts. There's two full-time people in that department. I don't know, you know, the-- one of the fascinating things about ESUs is that we're tasked with being responsive to the, you know, the long and

Rough Draft

valued history of local control in Nebraska districts. So when-- when you have demands brought to you from a local level, you want to be responsive to that. And we try to develop a service plan that's reflective of what those requests are. And at the same time, and this is where ESUs as those intermediate or intermediary agencies, it's-- it's really interesting because we've also got to be the delivery and support mechanism for a lot of those mandates that happen. And so I think, you know, when you look at like special education, the bulk of of FTE at ESU 6 being in the SPED area, what that reflects I think is the fact that there's an efficiency derived by school districts because then instead of a school district struggling to get out there and hire an SLP, speech language pathologist that they're not going to be able to recruit or retain, we can get one that we can farm out and fraction-- at a fraction of the cost. And that's-- that's what we're doing in the-- in the technology realm. Too, some of these districts are too small to have their own full-time technology director, but they still need all the same services. You know, technology has become like a utility where it's expected to be up and on all the time.

BREWER: Well, you could use that-- in the military we use the term train the trainer. You can bring a person in, train them, they leave and they-- they can carry on with the requirement whether it be technology or whatever.

JOHN SKETTA: Yeah. You bet.

BREWER: All right. Thank you.

GROENE: Any questions? Senator Pansing Brooks.

PANSING BROOKS: Thank you, Chairman Groene. So I was-- so did you have anything else to add on the technology part because you were trying to speak about that.

JOHN SKETTA: Oh, yeah.

PANSING BROOKS: And then I have one other question.

JOHN SKETTA: The really-- so-- so like an example on the technology piece that I think is-- is really awesome that ESUs do is the cost savings derived through the benefit of a group buy. And those don't always happen through co-op. I'll give you an example. There's a network monitoring system called PRTG, and it monitors all school networking devices, now think about this, anything that's in your network: printers, routers, switches, firewall, servers, bandwidth, your power, OK? The retail cost of that licensing was over 57K, but because some ESUs got together-- and initially I think it was ESU 6 and 4, and then ESU 2 connected to it. And now it's proliferated where almost every school district in Nebraska is using this PRTG network monitoring. And what it allows us to do then is remote monitoring of the networks for these school districts to ensure, again, that they're

Rough Draft

up and on. And you know, the thing-- the thing about this to understand how essential this is is what happens if the network goes down in a school district anymore. And-- and anyone who has been in schools long enough has experienced this traumatic event of OMG, the Internet's down. Now what do we do? And what happens if your network goes down honestly is people-- students can't even buy lunch, right? They can't buy lunch because that's dialed into the system. Teachers can't take attendance because that's on an Internet operative system. State testing won't work. So you can't meet the mandate within the window if your network's down. You know, all over now, Nebraska schools have instituted secure locking mechanisms on their door systems. And that's-- that's a great system. But if your networks down, it doesn't work. So you know, it's just-- it's just remarkable to think about the scope and span of what's delivered through ESUs. And the technology stuff is something like you don't-- you don't see, and we don't notice it until it doesn't work. And then when it doesn't work, we're really angry.

PANSING BROOKS: Can I have one more?

GROENE: One more.

PANSING BROOKS: Thank you. So. I guess the elephant in the corner is we hear some mumblings here about why not just move all this to the Department of Ed. And so I would like just to have you speak to the

Rough Draft

issue of why not the Department of Ed. Why-- I mean I don't-- we don't have anybody on the list from the Department of Education here so I don't think we're going to hear from anybody about the costs and the resources necessary for them to take--

GROENE: They were invited, and there's a letter--

PANSING BROOKS: Oh, is there? OK. Sorry. OK, sorry.

GROENE: -- it's from Senator Blom-- Commissioner Blomstedt.

PANSING BROOKS: Yeah. OK. Well, they should be here, in my opinion. So anyway I am just interested in-- so that technology thing which you just talked about possibly could have erupted from the Department of Ed as Senator Groene said, and be on a statewide continuum.

JOHN SKETTA: Um-hum.

PANSING BROOKS: But there are other things that-- that aren't as efficient that way, so could you speak to that a little bit? And also, of course, when you look at the costs of the ESUs, that would be-- and there's some taxing authority, that would be a significant increase of needs and resources to the Department of Ed if we were to get rid of all the ESUs, put all these duties under the Department of Ed. I just would like you to talk about that elephant sitting in this corner of this room.

JOHN SKETTA: Um-hum. OK. The-- for starters--

PANSING BROOKS: That's a big elephant.

JOHN SKETTA: Yeah. Thank you. [LAUGHTER] Try to eat the elephant like one bite at a time here.

PANSING BROOKS: I like that picture.

JOHN SKETTA: For starters-- for starters, I-- I-- I think that there's a very real distinction that exists in statute and in purpose and intent between the Nebraska Department of Education and our ESUs. And this is-- this is in the statute. It's also in Rule 84. ESUs are not regulatory agencies and NDE fundamentally is a regulatory agency. It is ensuring that compliance dictates are met. And yes, there are some supports there through NDE and some wonderfully accessible technical consultancy through NDE, but the department absolutely lacks the capacity that ESUs possess to deliver it and to tailor those services at a local level. And the-- the specific analogy I would use, to borrow a phrase that Senator Brewer would be familiar with from his military history, is boots on the ground. It's-- that-- that's what ESUs are ultimately is they-- they are the folks-- they are-- they're your platoon of people who possess highly specialized knowledge that can tailor services to school districts that are critical. And because they're regional, they're able to do that in a way that I think is

more efficient than if we were trying to steer that ship at a state level.

GROENE: Thank you. Technology.

JOHN SKETTA: Yeah.

GROENE: You got 16 school districts.

JOHN SKETTA: Yep.

GROENE: When your technician goes out there, how-- how similar is the tech-- is the software in every one of those school districts?

JOHN SKETTA: There's a-- there's a range of services.

GROENE: Just out of curios-- I mean you talking grading?

JOHN SKETTA: It's highly systematized. It's highly systematized.

GROENE: But everybody has the same software.

JOHN SKETTA: There-- there are individual variations, but because of the core service commitment in technology through ESUs, there's literally dozens of things that we do systematically across all 16 districts that are just provided to them.

GROENE: But you defined your technologist as not just service people, technology, but also as software creators.

JOHN SKETTA: Yeah.

GROENE: Why would that be necessary?

JOHN SKETTA: Not-- not software creators.

GROENE: What was the terminology you gave them when you said you had--

JOHN SKETTA: Network technicians--

GROENE: All right.

JOHN SKETTA: --and then-- and on-site support is an element of what is provided to some school districts that purchase either a portion of FTE, of a full-time employee, or they purchase a block of hours.

GROENE: So most of the record technology for recordkeeping between where you were at Norris and Milford or Seward is-- is the same?

JOHN SKETTA: Most of the recordkeeping for technology?

GROENE: The-- the software.

JOHN SKETTA: A lot of the systems are-- are the same. Yeah.

GROENE: And they're getting closer to being that way statewide would you think or you wouldn't know?

JOHN SKETTA: Well, I think when you have-- like there's-- there's an affiliate through ESUCC, that's NOC, that focuses on technology and

Rough Draft

systematizing services. And I know that again, to Senator Pansing Brooks's point, there's not someone here from NDE today, but NDE has been working on a data dashboard called ADVISER that's-- that's intended to systematize reporting across the state level, which in theory should be more efficient.

GROENE: Thank you. Any other questions? Senator Walz

WALZ: Thank you, Chairman Groene. Real quick, I-- I really appreciate this piece right here. So ESU 6 this is covering 16 school districts.

JOHN SKETTA: Yes.

WALZ: OK. Three school psychologists serving nine districts, to me that says that there's six school districts that don't have to hire their own school psychologist, correct?

JOHN SKETTA: That's-- that's correct. Yeah.

GROENE: But I do.

JOHN SKETTA: [INAUDIBLE]

WALZ: Two districts, Early Childhood Special Education two districts don't have to hire or privately contract. Three preschool teachers-- oh, no, no, 2 teachers in hearing impaired for all 16 districts, meaning 14 school districts don't have to hire or contract services, correct? Because two are serving all 16.

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Education Committee October 4, 2019
Rough Draft

JOHN SKETTA: Yeah. Two are serving all 16. Yeah.

WALZ: OK. So I-- I-- to finish this up, I counted-- there's a total of about 53 positions or contracted services within ESU 6--

JOHN SKETTA: Um-hum. Um-hum.

WALZ: --that are being shared among the--

JOHN SKETTA: Sixteen school districts.

WALZ: Right.

JOHN SKETTA: Yeah. Correct.

WALZ: --that school districts don't have to hire out.

JOHN SKETTA: Yeah.

WALZ: Do you have any idea what the cost savings for those districts are, just 53 positions that would not have to be hired-- or that would have to be hired had the ESU not been providing those services?

JOHN SKETTA: Well, it would be in the millions of dollars. And here's the-- here's the rub though. Part of what would happen is that some districts that have the means would overextend, and they would be able to meet the need. But they would be hiring a full-time position without the need for staffing of a full-time position. And other

districts, the need could go unmet because they're unable to do that, and then they're out of compliance.

WALZ: Right.

JOHN SKETTA: And they have all sorts of other problems.

WALZ: Yeah.

JOHN SKETTA: Um-hum.

WALZ: And the majority-- majority of these services are special ed services.

JOHN SKETTA: Yeah. Correct.

WALZ: And also, you know, just a consistency. Do you see a consistency? I know this is not about costs, but do you see because-- see a consistency in the programming because of the shared services?

JOHN SKETTA: Absolutely, and that's one of the things that we think there's value-added in. There's-- there's value-added in going through your ESU that can sometimes transcend the bottom-line, ledger point, meaning OK, if you go out and hire your own speech language pathologist because you can, you have the means as a school district or you believe that there's the demand in terms of a caseload to do that, well, that person is likely to be a single SLP within an entire district. And what's their network of professional affiliation and

Rough Draft

what sort of support are they gaining? And when-- when you're housed under that umbrella of the ESU, it brings you into the fold in terms of that professional learning network and the support, the oversight, the evaluation, the supervision services, all that, which I think is really good.

WALZ: Right. Well, again, I just want to thank you for that, 53 at ESU 6. I mean, that's just one ESU. So it would be interesting to see the other information, the data, from other ESUs on the savings of total positions or contracted services that we would have to have in-- in the school district.

JOHN SKETTA: Yeah, I think a good example, that's listed on-- on the student services description sheet from ESU 6, is if you think about transition programs,--

WALZ: Yeah.

JOHN SKETTA: --those are for 18 to 21 special needs students who qualify for those services. And-- and, you know, for-- for any district, even districts of substantial size that would be at the outer end of the largest school district within ESU 6, you might have a need for those very specific specialized transition 18 to 21 programming for a few students. So to try to-- to try to offer, administer, hire out your own program in that area, it doesn't make any economic sense. So-- so the schools all turn to ESU 6 to be able

Rough Draft

to deliver those, and I think it's an example of a really successful partnership.

WALZ: Thank you.

GROENE: Thank you, sir.

PANSING BROOKS: I have a couple questions.

GROENE: Well we have to-- I have to leave at 10:40. So anyway, let's try to keep our quest-- our answers precise and short. Thank you.

MURMAN: I point-- I got--

GROENE: Yeah, go ahead, Senator. You have it now.

MURMAN: Thank you, Senator Groene. I-- I got a question about buildings. I didn't realize-- well, I guess I don't know as much about ESUs as I should, but how many people actually work out of the building? And I'm not familiar at all with ESU 6.

JOHN SKETTA: Um-hum. Um-hum. Well, most of the people within-- as-- as described before, it's mostly contracted personnel, so they're out in other school districts. But the ESU itself, there's probably-- oh, I don't know how many have home base as Milford. It's probably three dozen or so.

MURMAN: OK.

JOHN SKETTA: Yeah.

MURMAN: Well, that's more than I would have guessed.

JOHN SKETTA: Um-hum.

MURMAN: But just from being out in-- in the general population, cit-- hearing from citizens and so forth, and I don't want to offend anybody, but in recent years, some ESUs that I'm familiar with or know about have built really fancy, nice buildings.

JOHN SKETTA: Um-hum.

MURMAN: And I keep hearing from citizens, you know, that are really struggling to pay their property taxes, well, we don't need those really nice, fancy buildings. So you know, if it's-- if it's-- you know, I'm a farmer, so some buildings that look like buildings that are really being worked-- worked out of aren't always as nice looking as buildings--

JOHN SKETTA: Um-hum. Um-hum. Um-hum.

MURMAN: --as-- as some others so.

JOHN SKETTA: Yeah.

MURMAN: Just a question about, you know, recent spending by ESUs on buildings and so forth.

JOHN SKETTA: Yeah. I think you need a-- you need a functional workspace--

MURMAN: Sure.

JOHN SKETTA: --you know, and-- and the ESUs are hubs that host a lot of different events that are-- a lot of the professional development, about half of the PD. When I look back at some of the data we had from last year, it was right about half of the professional development that we delivered were what Toby, our PD director, calls home games, meaning we hosted it right there in Milford at ESU 6. But the other half were directly out in schools on-site. So that-- that's a big chunk of our facility, if you go in there, it's just meeting space. But the other thing, like with the recent building projects at ESU 6, that I would point to as necessary and reflective of local needs was that we have been able to do more in early childhood programming because we've got the space for it. And we've got technology workspace now which we didn't have before, and I think that that's just proliferated. So like you go back five years, we-- we only had like 30 physical servers at ESU 6. And now, here we are five years later, and this is how it's just a moving target all the time with technology and with teaching and learning, now-- now we're hosting 200 servers at ESU 6.

GROENE: Thank you.

MURMAN: Yes, thank you.

GROENE: Senator Pansing Brooks.

PANSING BROOKS: Thank you. Just quickly. So again, to-- I thought that elephant question might be a little bit longer, and I know you can only speak on-- from ESU 6. What-- do you see efficiencies that should be hap-- that could be passed on to the Department of Ed so that they could do it and-- and not the ESUs? And I mean that's part of what this is all about. What-- what could the ES-- what could the Department of Ed do to take it away from you, and-- and it would be more efficient and more costly, that's-- or less costly? Sorry.

JOHN SKETTA: More costly, I'm sure they could do. [LAUGHTER] No, I really-- I-- I don't know-- I don't-- I don't know-- I-- I do feel like, you know, there's a-- there's a bunch of us who've paraded in front of Appropriations over the last several years at the request of the commissioner to talk about how important allocations are to the department. I do think that the department has been-- has been faced with a high volume of turnover and some critical staffing shortages. And I-- and I think that that makes things hard. So I'm not sure I could pick off a lot of stuff that I would say, yeah, we-- we're-- we are comfortable. We want to hand that off to the state level and-- and-- and have the reassurance that it would be administered in a way

that would save money and provide better outcomes for students. I

think the ES--

PANSING BROOKS: Is it because of the differentials in-- in the various ESUs of the students sort of and the needs in that area?

JOHN SKETTA: Yeah.

PANSING BROOKS: Geography and topograph-- I mean just--

JOHN SKETTA: Yeah. It-- I mean it reminds me of the-- like the question about-- a related question is kind of around, well, can't you-- do we need all the ESUs we have? Can we combine some, you know? And-- and I just think that there's a lot that we can accomplish at a local level through the scope and span of the 16 school districts. That-- if you bring everyone together at scale, harder to deliver it in a way that really dovetails with what the needs of the local districts are.

PANSING BROOKS: Thank you.

GROENE: Thank you. Go ahead.

LINEHAN: Thank you, Chairman. You would agree though, Dr. Sketta, that there is some size school, like they basically have one ESU. So you've got Omaha and Lincoln.

JOHN SKETTA: LPS and OPS. Yeah.

LINEHAN: Right. So I think Lincoln's about 43,000 students. So is there-- is there-- is there-- and you don't have to answer this. Would you please think about it? Is there a size of a school where they really don't use the ESU? And is it everybody up to 43,000 or are there some in there like 24,000? Don't-- I'm not asking for an answer but just a thought process.

JOHN SKETTA: Yeah. I'll take your advice, and I'll just think about it.

LINEHAN: Well, you can answer off the record, [LAUGHTER] not here in public.

GROENE: But I know of school districts that are-- I'm glad Senator Linehan asked that, that don't have their own ESU and aren't small, basically provide all their services, really don't need an ESU to a point where they use their services very little. And that does exist. But you made a good point, boots on the ground. There's a lot of departments in state government that have boots on the ground--

JOHN SKETTA: Um-hum.

GROENE: --but they don't have 16 headquarters or 16 administrators. And I got more faith in a-- I don't see any difference between a school psychologist and a private practitioner belonging to trade groups and stuff and keeping in the circle of what-- what is known as childhood psychology, that that person needs as a professional,

Rough Draft

administration above them. That could come out of the-- out of the consortium of schools just hiring one which has happened. Two of the testifiers, that aren't making it here, did that themselves. That-- they're professionals. And staff development, that should be the same across the state. I would think that every teacher is given the same-- same instruction, the same-- the same input that every other teacher is when-- when somebody's in that room giving them staff development. Is that the case or does every ESU create their own curriculum or whatever they do on whatever it is, suicide prevention?

JOHN SKETTA: Not suicide prevention. No, that's strictly what's approved by the state.

GROENE: But there's training.

JOHN SKETTA: Yeah. That's the training I'm talking about. Um-hum.

GROENE: Yeah. So that they do that because the state set up a universal.

JOHN SKETTA: Um-hum. Um-hum. Yeah. So there's some things like that. That's a good example of one that's systematized statewide. And you answered Senator Pansing Brooks's question. That would be one. That's one example. Yeah.

GROENE: And staff development, I would think. But anyway, thank you. You did-- gave great testimony.

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Education Committee October 4, 2019

Rough Draft

JOHN SKETTA: Thank you.

GROENE: I would-- I'm going to try to stick around and hear the next testifier, but then I have to leave. The last testifier is Don Mayhew and Sarah Salem. And they're going to give the perspective of one school district that has their own ESU which is LPS. The other one is OPS. And no offense to OPS, these folks were right here, so we invited them to give the perspective of a ESU that's in one school district.

DON MAYHEW: Good morning, Senator Groene and members of the Education Committee. My name is Don Mayhew, D-o-n M-a-y-h-e-w. I'm joined by Sarah Salem. She's going to introduce herself in a minute. We both have prepared statements and then we'll do our best to respond to any questions. I'm here today as president of the board for ESU 18 serving Lincoln Public Schools. I would like to offer the following testimony to provide information about the services provided by ESU 18 and the impact this has on over 40,000 students. I would like to first share that although Lincoln Public Schools and ESU 18 operate in close partnership, these are two separate organizations. ESU 18 conducts its own board meetings separate from that of Lincoln Public Schools, each with different board officers. ESU 18 is audited and accredited separately and also has its own policies and leadership structure. It's my job to help provide oversight and accountability in this way. One such way that ESU 18 helps not only LPS, but many other districts and ESUs is through our participation in purchasing negotiations and

Rough Draft

contracts that drive down the cost of many educational products and services across the state. Because ESU 18 represents over 40,000 students, it's important that we collaborate and participate in collective purchasing to benefit districts and ESUs across the state. The work of ESU 18 is large in scope, providing resources and support to LPS in the areas of technology, professional development, instructional materials, and assessment and evaluation services. Lincoln Public Schools calls on the ESU to provide data and program evaluations that allow LPS to evaluate its systems and services for effectiveness and efficiency. In addition, ESU staff consistently work with LPS to offer suggestions about possible action steps for improvement and increased effectiveness. In addition, within Lincoln Public Schools, the departments of continuous improvement and professional learning, computing services, assessment and evaluation, and library and media services are all led by members of the ESU 18 leadership team. The services ESU 18 provides to the district are wide in scope and extensive in their impact. A change or reduction in Nebraska's investment in ESUs would have a tangible negative effect on the services that districts, including Lincoln, would be able to provide. We ask that the committee continue to support the essential work of the ESUs in Nebraska. I would also make a note that we heard Senator Linehan's earlier question about the history of ESU 18. I don't have all the particulars of that at hand, but I can tell you that ESU 18 was not part of the original ESU legislation and came

Rough Draft

several years later. By 1974, ESEA 18 was created in recognition of the fact that Lincoln, and Omaha as well, were big enough to warrant-- to need their own ESUs. Thank you.

WALZ: Yeah.

SARAH SALEM: Would you like me to go ahead or did you have questions?

WALZ: Yeah. Go ahead.

SARAH SALEM: OK. Well, I started with Senator Groene, but I'll just say members of the Education Committee, my name's Sarah Salem, S-a-r-a-h S-a-l-e-m. I'm here today as the administrator for ESU 18 serving Lincoln Public Schools. I'd like to offer the following testimony to provide information about the services we provide to Lincoln Public Schools. ESUs exist in order to provide access to core services deemed vital to a child's education by the state of Nebraska. Collectively we serve as the implementation structure that allows statewide educational initiatives to move into action. ESUs are aptly named service units because our main objective is to serve the needs of districts, educators, and students we work with. ESU 18 serves over 42,000 students as our service unit works with Lincoln Public Schools. ESUs 18 and 19 are both unique in our ability to focus on the needs of a singular district, yet we partner continuously with ESUs and districts across the state. Among other things, ESU 18 is responsible for district professional development, access to technology for

Rough Draft

students and staff, large scale state and district assessments, data analysis, school Improvement planning, program evaluation, and student access to high quality library and media resources intended to enhance the work of LPS. One thing that makes ESUs powerful is our network. They don't work in isolation. All ESUs, along with the ESU Coordinating Council, built a tight network of collaboration that not only benefit educators, but make a direct impact on the quality of education each child receives in Nebraska. For example, in addition to the core services that ESU provides to Lincoln Public Schools, ESU 18 contracts with other ESUs and almost 40 districts to provide services for students who are deaf and/or hard of hearing. ESU 18 also partners with other ESUs and districts to provide coordinated access to distance learning opportunities. Because that was a question asked previously, this is not just access to a-- one on-line course. This is actually an opportunity for students to be in the classroom with a physical teacher via distance learning. It also-- the services allow our students to attend virtual field trips. And we also do this for other ESUs as well where throughout the state, they can do virtual field trips to Morrill Hall or with NASA or other things that would cut down-- cut down the costs of field trips in that way. Currently hosted by the ESUCC, these students have access to almost 300 distance learning courses such as architectural design, Chinese, pre-engineering. These may not be available in a student's home district, and these are some examples of how single district ESUs

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office

Education Committee October 4, 2019

Rough Draft

partner with the greatest ESU-- greater ESU network. These collaborative efforts directly impact the ability of all students to access rigorous curriculum and content while saving time and money for other districts and ESU-- ESUs. We ask that the committee continue to support the essential work of the ESUs in Nebraska so that we can continue to make a difference for all Nebraska students. In any important and complex endeavor, as education certainly is, coordinating services is infinitely better than a haphazard system. We cannot allow the education of students to chance, but must continue to use and develop a system that ensures and guarantees a level of service that is equitable for all.

WALZ: Thank you for your testimonies. Do we have questions? Senator Linehan.

LINEHAN: Thank you very much for being here. Do you know what your total budget is for the year, approximately?

SARAH SALEM: We do. We also have Dr. Liz Standish in the back who serves as the Treasurer for ESU 18. As far as property taxes, a little over \$4 million but we have a larger operating budget due to being the grant holders for a number of grants as well as interlocal agreements with Lincoln Public Schools and Lancaster County.

LINEHAN: What is your core state funding?

SARAH SALEM: I don't have that specific number with me, but I can get that back to you.

LINEHAN: OK.

SARAH SALEM: And Liz might have that too.

LIZ STANDISH: [INAUDIBLE]

LINEHAN: You can get it for the record.

LIZ STANDISH: OK.

LINEHAN: Core statement and then what is your relationship-- I'd be interested in-- you're the administrator of the ESU.

SARAH SALEM: Yes.

LINEHAN: So what is your relationship with the superintendent?

SARAH SALEM: So in Lincoln Public Schools, we've been really intentional to try to reduce the cognitive dissonance of our staff so that they don't have to say, should this be an ESU 18 professional development? Is this a Lincoln Public Schools professional development? So while I work for ESU 18, I meet regularly with the superintendent, with the executive team, and then also with the Lincoln Public Schools directors. Separately, ESU 18 also has a

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Education Committee October 4, 2019

Rough Draft

leadership team, and that includes our director of library media services, computing services, and assessment evaluation.

LINEHAN: Your board-- the school board and the ESU board are the same board, though, right?

SARAH SALEM: Same people, different leadership structure, so we have different board presidents and vice presidents.

LINEHAN: OK. But it's all the same people.

SARAH SALEM: Same members. Yeah. Correct.

LINEHAN: OK. All right. Thank you very much.

WALZ: Other questions? Senator Patty Pansing Brooks.

PANSING BROOKS: Thank you. Thank you both for coming and being here. Glad to see you both. I guess I'm interested in a little bit-- I presume you've heard some of my questioning. I'm just interested in why it would-- why you all think it's good to keep LPS, the ESUs and I would say the Department of Ed separate. Why are all three entities necessary and how-- how-- how is the differential enhanced by having everything different rather than putting everything under the Department of Ed?

SARAH SALEM: Sure.

PANSING BROOKS: As you've heard some of the--

SARAH SALEM: So one of the-- one of the things I want to be really clear about is that ESU 18 and Lincoln Public Schools do not duplicate services. So you've heard a lot about special education so far today. ESU 18 does not provide special education services because we know that that is the ability of Lincoln Public Schools to provide that. You heard Dr. Skretta talk about production services. ESU 18 does not do that because Lincoln Public Schools has the ability to provide those things. On the other hand, Lincoln Public Schools does not have a separate assessment and evaluation department. That is out of the ESU 18. So while we understand from a-- what that looks like from the outside, that it's one entity, they are two very separate things that are not duplicating efforts. We also think it's really important to keep Lincoln Public Schools as a part of the ESU connected network. I'll give you an example. Last summer we hosted a positive behavior conference of which I'm also part of leading. And that had over 600 educators from across-- across the state. And those things happen because we have the ability to network and communicate with other ESUs who can tell us, as a district and as an ESU, here's what we're working on and here's what's important. So our speakers, our breakout sessions came from other ESUs across the state. But it's not just hosted for the benefit of Lincoln Public Schools. It's hosted for the benefit of our entire state. So there are things that we do that

Rough Draft

aren't just specific to Lincoln but really do benefit all of the students across other ESUs.

DON MAYHEW: I would add to that just briefly that whether you're-- and I would echo some of the earlier comments, whether you're a smaller district or a larger district, I believe that the ESU structure is basically in service to-- to two concepts. And the first is what is the most efficient, most cost-effective way to deliver services to our children? And then the second is the idea of local control. The individual districts should know their community and should know the needs of their children and should decide how best to provide those services. In Lincoln our answer to that question is ESU 18. That was kind of the general. Getting to something-- to more of a specific example, a hypothetical, if you had an ESU that was currently serving 40,000 students across a number of districts-- and I would note, Lincoln Public Schools is second largest district in the state. Our growth has slowed the last couple of years, but over the last ten years, we've been setting all kinds of growth records. Several years we would grow by more students than 80 percent of the districts in the state serve in total. So what I would say as if you had an ESU with 40,000 students in it across a number of districts, and then you suddenly flooded that with 40,000 more students, it would probably overwhelm that ESU. And then I would also expect that future decisions would tend to skew towards the largest constituent district. So again,

Rough Draft

in service of what's the best way for us to provide services for our kids, our answer to that question is ESU 18.

SARAH SALEM: And in answer to your NDE question as well, with lots of major initiatives like A QuESTT, which is relevant right now as schools are working through the A QuESTT model, what happens is the Nebraska Department of Education pushes out a training via webinar or some in-person trainings. It really is up to the ESUs then to understand what their districts can take away from that model and how they improve. Without an ESU-- excuse me, without an ESU coming to the district and helping them make sense out of that, it really does fall to individual districts to provide training for their principals, make sense of this for principals, and for teachers, what this actually looks like at their district level.

PANSING BROOKS: So-- so do you believe that the Department of Ed has the capacity right now to do all that you are doing?

SARAH SALEM: No.

PANSING BROOKS: And so-- because they would have to then send people for training out to do exactly what you're doing in each of these districts and provide boots on the ground out in each district just from, I guess, Lincoln, where they're stationed.

SARAH SALEM: So if the NDE was tasked with doing all of that, they might actually think to themselves, hmm, this would be more efficient

Rough Draft

if we did this more regionally, kind of like the ESUs do. So like I can see where that would hypothetically be a great way to handle it. But what they would have to do in reality is do the same thing we're doing now which is coordinating what this looks like across the state.

PANSING BROOKS: Right.

DON MAYHEW: I think too, if I could add to that, I think Dr. Skretta outlined the distinction really well in the roles of those two groups. Department of Education is a policy setting body, and then the ESUs are largely technical people who deliver those services. So it's different roles.

PANSING BROOKS: So also you talked about boots on the-- or talked about local control and local needs. So I'm just trying to-- like special ed is been handled by LPS itself. And-- but in other ESUs it's being handled by the ESU. So I presume that's an efficiency in a way. And I guess I'm trying to think about that whole local control idea and why-- why the ESUs aren't really handling-- the-- ESU 18 is not handling special ed. I don't know. It just seems like some consistency might be good. Could you speak to that a little bit?

SARAH SALEM: Yeah, I know. I'll use the metaphor for why we even have a district office, for example, in Lincoln Public Schools. So we serve over 60 school buildings and for 1 school to say, well, we just want to use this new curriculum because we went to a training and thought

Rough Draft

it sounded good. That's not effective. That's not efficient. And it's not equitable for our students. And so we have a district office that organizes and coordinates curriculum and staff development. And ESUs do the same thing across the state on a large scale. So the efficiency comes in where we actually sit down, our ESU leadership team, and think about what can LPS already provide for themselves? What is it that the ESUs can do that can fill gaps and be a critical friend to Lincoln Public Schools and push them to think about maybe some areas where they have gaps or areas that they have not considered?

PANSING BROOKS: OK. Thank you very much.

WALZ: Thank you. Other questions? Senator Brewer.

BREWER: Thank you, Madam Chairman. All right. I'm going to ask if it would be OK if I go via direct to you on-- on issues. And the reason I'm asking this is someone pointed out that being on Government, Military and Veterans Affairs, you kind of got that one figured out. But you're on Education, and you spent your whole lifetime running around the world not doing anything that really is going to prepare you for this committee. So they made me an offer, and said, why don't you come and be a part of the Lincoln Public Schools Citizen's Academy. And I pushed back at first because it's not my district. But really when it comes to education, it's education, and the problems are problems. And it's 1,000 miles to go to my district and come back.

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Education Committee October 4, 2019

Rough Draft

So I've agreed to do that, been to one of the sessions, and-- and it is pretty revealing. You know, they-- they talk about all their problems kind of out in the open. And at some point, they may figure out I'm a senator, and not be quite as open. But I think having a direct conduit to share information might be a little bit revealing on where some of the issues are. So if you're OK with that, I don't have your number, but get it to me afterwards. And maybe I can share some of that, and we can at least figure out some of the problems.

SARAH SALEM: Yeah. My number's-- my number's on the top of the testimony if you have that.

BREWER: OK. New glasses, is that what I'm going to blame it on? Thank you.

SARAH SALEM: I can send you my information too.

BREWER: Thank you.

WALZ: Other questions? I see none. Thank you so much for coming today.

DON MAYHEW: Thank you.

WALZ: Before we end, I'm going to yield some time to Nicole. She has an announcement from Senator Groene.

NICOLE BARRETT: Senator Groene and Senator Linehan both had to go for an engagement-- or speaking engagement they have, but Senator Groene

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office

Education Committee October 4, 2019

Rough Draft

wanted me to point out there was testimony from three invited people today that weren't able to come, the two superintendents and-- that had family emergencies, and NDE who is at the state board meeting today. Their written testimony has been provided to the committee members but is available for any of you that would like to see it. You're welcome to stop by our Education Committee office in room 1306 and pick up a copy of that if you would like.

PANSING BROOKS: Which two superintendents?

NICOLE BARRETT: So it was from Red Cloud, Brian Hof and from Hershey, Jane Davis.

PANSING BROOKS: OK, thank you.

WALZ: Thank you, and that ends our hearing on LR63.