

WALZ: Since Patty's here on time. [LAUGHTER] No, it's funny because she is-- she was here about ten minutes ago and I was just waiting for her to get to everybody to say hello.

PANSING BROOKS: Oh, my gosh, don't worry, I don't get mad, just even.

WALZ: I know. All right.

PANSING BROOKS: We aren't taping yet, are we? Oh, good.

WALZ: OK. Welcome to the Education Committee public hearing. My name is Lynne Walz from Legislative District 15. I serve as the Chair of this committee. The committee will take up the items in the order posted on the agenda. Today's hearing is for invited testimony only. To better facilitate today's proceeding, I ask that you abide by the following procedures. Please turn off or silence cell phones or other electronic devices. We request that you wear a face covering while in the hearing room if you're unvaccinated. Testifiers may remove their face covering during testimony to assist committee members and transcribers in clearly hearing and understanding the testimony. Move to the chairs at the front of the room when you are ready to testify. If you have written materials that you would like distributed to the committee, please hand them to the page to distribute. We need ten copies for all committee members and staff. If you need additional copies, please ask a page to make copies for you now. When you begin to testify, state and spell your name for the record. Please speak directly into the microphone so our transcribers are able to hear your testimony clearly. Finally, be concise. Testimony will be limited to seven minutes. We will be using the light system. Green, you have seven minutes remaining. Yellow, one minute remaining. And then you'll wrap up your comments when you see the red light. And I do just want to make a note that Senator Pansing Brooks does have another meeting at 4:00. I don't want to rush this important discussion, but just wanted to be respectful of her because it is her LR and I want her to have the opportunity to hear everybody as-- as much as possible. The committee members today will introduce themselves beginning at my far right.

McKINNEY: Thank you. Good afternoon, my name's Terrell McKinney. I represent District 11, which is north Omaha.

MURMAN: Hello, I'm Senator Dave Murman from District 38 and I represent seven counties to the east, south, and west of Kearney and Hastings.

DAY: Good afternoon, I'm Senator Jen Day and I represent Legislative District 49, which is northwestern Sarpy County.

WALZ: And I'd like to introduce the committee staff. To my immediate left-- to my right is research analyst Nicole Barrett. And to the right end of the table is committee clerk Noah Boger. And our page today is Jason. Thank you, Jason. Please remember that senators may come and go during, during our hearing as they may have obligations in other committees. I'd also like our committee members to speak directly into the microphones and limit side conversations and making noise on personal devices. We are an electronics-equipped committee and information is provided, provided electronically as well as in paper form. Therefore, you may see committee members referencing information on their, on their electronic devices. Please be assured that your presence here today and your testimony are important to us and crucial to our state government. And with that, we'd like to open with LR-- what's the number, LR157. Senator Pansing Brooks, welcome.

PANSING BROOKS: Thank you, Chair Walz and fellow members of the Education Committee. I wish everybody could be here today. I know that two of the-- two of our members are working on redistricting issues and in those hearings and today they were up in Omaha. So I'm sorry everybody's not here because this is one of my favorite hearings, probably in my seven years so far. The people who are here behind me, I am honored to have here. They are amazing people, as you will all see when they introduce themselves. And it is a true honor and privilege to have these experts coming and testifying today on such an important matter. So anyway, for the record, I'm Patty Pansing Brooks, P-a-t-t-y P-a-n-s-i-n-g B-r-o-o-k-s, representing District 28 right here in the heart of Lincoln. I appear to you today to introduce LR157, an interim study to explore how Nebraska schools can improve our recruitment and retention of teachers and administrators of color. I know we have a number of testifiers here today who will contribute to this dialog beyond any measure. So I'm keeping my opening very brief to allow them more time for their important testimony. Numerous studies show that the beneficial aspects of having a diverse workforce of teacher and administrators in school, especially as it relates to closing achievement gaps for students of color. Research also indicates the benefits of diversity to all students across the entire spectrum. While this is the case, the numbers also show that Nebraska teachers and administrators are not as diverse as the children who are attending our schools. We need to rectify that imbalance. My hope is that today's hearing will help bring light to this issue. It will showcase the barriers at various levels that contribute to the lack of diversity and highlight and promote efforts taking place to address this problem. I want to thank all the testifiers behind me who have come today. I especially want to thank Lisa Fricke, who came and-- and really called us on this from the State Board of Education, as well as those who asked me to bring the study, including a coalition of the NAACP and Nebraskans for Peace. It is clear to me, based on those who reached out to my office after I introduced the study that there is tremendous interest in addressing this issue. I'm gratified by all the educators and all those who have come forward to help us move as a state together. I look forward to a productive hearing today. Thank you very much.

WALZ: Thank you, Senator Pansing Brooks.

PANSING BROOKS: Is that OK if I sit over there?

WALZ: Yes.

PANSING BROOKS: Thank you.

WALZ: Our first testifier or testifier is Lisa Fricke from INSPIRED-- the INSPIRED Task Force. Welcome, Lisa.

LISA FRICKE: Well, thank you all very much. Can you hear me OK?

WALZ: You might have to--

LISA FRICKE: Oh, let's do this for you.

WALZ: OK.

LISA FRICKE: Take a deep breath. All right. Good afternoon, Chair Walz and other members of the Education Committee. My name is Lisa Fricke, L-i-s-a F as in Frank r-i-c-k-e. Before I begin, I'd like to share the mission of the INSPIRED Task Force. The INSPIRED Task Force supports strategic approaches for attracting, recruiting, and retaining educators of color. Oh, I appreciate this opportunity to share information about the INSPIRED Task Force. And the acronym stands for Inclusion Needed to Support Positive Impacts Reflecting Educator Diversity. The Task Force was created in July of 2020. Over the years, there's been quite a bit of talk about increasing diversity in education workforce, but not enough coordinated statewide action to address that issue. So I recruited a team of 12 experts-- education experts and education advocates to develop a plan for creating diversity. I believe LR157 could be the catalyst that coordinates and enhances existing efforts and could increase the potential to recruit more teachers of color throughout the state, in fact. With the Legislature's involvement, Nebraska could start recruiting future teachers in middle school, get their interest that early, develop more educator programs and training, and offer more scholarships, tuition credits, incentives, and possibly residencies to support teachers. The Task Force began the first two meetings creating a list of existing barriers that decreased the opportunity for teacher diversity. Then we sought state and national experts to share presentations supporting our mission. We were privileged to hear presentations from Education Commission of States, and that's out of Colorado; Brad Dirksen from NDE; Stancia Jenkins, who's the chief diversity and inclusion officer at the University of Nebraska; NSEA President Jenni Benson, who took time to share information about Educators Rising, Aspiring Educators, and I guess there's a change, used to be called NGEN, N-G-E-N, and now it's just NewGEN for new generation of teachers; and the director of the OPS Equity and Diversity Program. Next, we divided into three groups: grow-your-own program, incentives and supports, and preparation programs and

licensure. Each group researched their assigned topic and reported back to the entire group. I need to take a breath. I'm sorry, I'm nervous. Some of the information included what other states were doing to increase teacher diversity, what was happening in our very own state of Nebraska, and then we started discussing next steps. After listening to all the research that was shared, we decided to prioritize what needed to be done to support our mission. Right now, our plan is to find someone to create a strategic plan using the priorities that we set. So if you know of anybody who would create a strategic plan for us pro bono, please let me know. We hope to find someone to write the strategic plan this fall. That was our plan last spring. That was our target. Then we want, then we want to share our plan with Superintendent Logan about selecting Omaha North and South High as pilots to implement the goals in our strategic plan. OPS had an outstanding participation in their summer educator academies, so we want to learn more about that and potentially coordinate with those efforts. I have provided each of you with a packet of information that includes a list of the Task Force members who have worked very hard on their jobs and then took time to do this as well, a list of barriers and priorities, examples of successful Nebraska programs, a potential partnership with a national program, future discussion topics, and more information about what some states have adopted. And I had to get permission from ETS to put those in here. So we've worked with two national organizations on this so far. Thank you again for the opportunity to share the INSPIRED Task Force origin and its efforts, and that concludes my presentation.

WALZ: Thank you, Lisa. Good work. Questions from the committee? Senator Day.

DAY: Thank you, Chairwoman Walz. And I don't have a question as much as I just wanted to say thank you for doing this work and we're very fortunate to have you here in the state and we're fortunate to have you on the State Board of Education as well. And I have known you for years before I was even a candidate, before I was a senator, as somebody who leads in the world of-- of education in Nebraska, because you are-- your bottom line is always caring about making sure that the students are successful. And so thank you for your testimony today. And-- and I'm-- I'm grateful to have you here.

LISA FRICKE: Oh, my gosh, I got chills. Thank you so much.

DAY: You're welcome.

LISA FRICKE: It was a team effort. I mean, we have some wonderful people. It started by recruiting one person. I thought, who can I call that everybody knows in the state of Nebraska? So I called him and asked for a suggestion. I called that person, it ended up being 12 great people who have different expertise from, you know, the specifics of education diversity to marketing to what we're going to plan. So thank you for-- thank you.

DAY: Thank you.

WALZ: Great. Any other questions from the committee? Senator Murman.

LISA FRICKE: Hi.

MURMAN: Hello. Thanks for your testimony, Lisa. I do totally agree with the part about recruiting students early for teaching. Any specific ideas about how that could be done?

LISA FRICKE: Oh, yes, they asked me to limit it to five or six minutes. There's-- the schools have career fairs. And do you ever see a booth for teacher recruitment, an exciting booth with somebody like Johnny Rodgers or someone from, you know, I'd like to get Gabrielle Union, you know, people that are famous to help us recruit and get them excited. I taught middle school for eight years, mostly high school, those middle school, you know, students are off the charts sometimes. You just have to know how to rein them in and find interests that meet what they want. And I think if we market it, there's that marketing. We have a marketing expert on our team. If you start including time for middle schoolers to go to like a job fair, something like that, and target and give away something not very expensive, but meaningful. If they're interested in teaching a verse on a keychain or something, you know, probably a \$5 to something to where they want to eat, but whatever it would be to get them-- give them a spark to think about teaching. Because when students see teachers who look like them, they work harder. And not only that, in the research that I have done from NASBE, and that's the National State Board of, you know, Association for the nation, they have statistics that's it's only good for students of color, it's good for every single student across the nation. God bless you.

MURMAN: Just, just a little funny tidbit.

LISA FRICKE: I enjoy those.

MURMAN: Johnny Rodgers is great for my generation. He's a great guy and everything.

LISA FRICKE: Oh, yeah. [LAUGHTER]

MURMAN: But like 20 years ago, my son was playing midget football and Johnny Rodgers, the coach, knew Johnny Rodgers and talked him into coming to the game and everything. And Johnny come walking out there and said-- the-- the coach says this is the most famous running back Husker of all time, back-- or backfield Husker of all time. And the kids all said, hey, Ahman Green.

LISA FRICKE: Well, we'll take him too. But Johnny Rodgers does a lot in the Omaha community with young people, and he has an award, the Johnny Jet Award something foundation. I mean, he-- it's amazing. I just talked to a lady yesterday who asked him to come to a birthday

party for her, her grandson, and they had a party and Johnny had to take breaks to take interviews on the phone. And so he-- he gives of his time very generously and-- and he's just an amazing person. So he's in-- in-- in the Omaha area where we want to pilot it. He is someone that's known even among the young people, so.

MURMAN: Yes, he's done a lot for the state. Thank you very much.

LISA FRICKE: Yeah, he really has. You're welcome.

WALZ: Terrell-- I mean, Senator McKinney.

McKINNEY: Thank you.

LISA FRICKE: Hi there.

McKINNEY: And thank you for your testimony. Just kind of question or thought. I see on-- on this sheet you have barriers. And one of the things is incentive packages for teachers of color and things like that. And one thing I was thinking about sitting here and I know from speaking with people in the community and me and Senator Walz had a listening session with teachers about a month ago or something that one of the barriers is especially for, for people coming from communities of color, is the pay. It's hard to convince somebody--

LISA FRICKE: Yeah.

McKINNEY: --that grew up in an impoverished environment that has to probably take loans out for school to convince them to go into the-- the teaching field because the pay isn't the greatest. Have you guys communicated with OPS and others about how to raise the pay for our teachers and create a better incentive package to convince some of these individuals to--

LISA FRICKE: I believe that's in our future discussion topics. But you've hit the nail on the head with the hammer really well. Teachers, especially during COVID, some having to teach online and in person. And you can't effectively teach, you know, if you use the same strategy for in the classroom for online. There's a whole different way to approach the kids online to keep their attention and keep them engaged. And so they're doing double duty for the same pay. Why? Because they care about kids. That's one of the things that's embarrassing in Nebraska for me, is how hard teachers work. Many of the teachers that I work with, they're going to summer school, they're taking training in certain things like mental health on their own to be able to address their kids. So I think maybe the Legislature could add some money to the pockets of schools earmarked for increase in pay. But that's something, if we want teachers, we can't pay them a pittance. They're worth so much more. So thank you for that comment. That's--

McKINNEY: Yeah, thank you.

LISA FRICKE: --if you can get that emailed to me, I'm going to make sure if it's not on our future discussions, that's one of the things. Because you're right, why do I want to do that for all that work and not get this much pay? So thank you.

WALZ: Thank you.

LISA FRICKE: Oh.

WALZ: OK, I have a quick question.

LISA FRICKE: OK.

WALZ: You said that you might have some data for me regarding the numbers, the diversity numbers in the state.

LISA FRICKE: Yeah.

WALZ: Is there a chance that you could quickly go over that?

LISA FRICKE: Quickly, I would be happy to. I feel more relaxed now that I'm answering personal questions. So anyway, I didn't think I'd have time to put this in-- in the body of my speech. But this is Millard, I believe it's my biggest district in my district to school board. So I got statistics from them and also statewide. So the first number I'll read is Millard and the second number I read will be statewide. So indigenous people: Millard none, statewide 1 percent; Asian 1 percent, statewide 3 percent; Hispanic 9 percent, 19 percent statewide; black or African-American in Millard 3 percent, state 7 percent; white in Millard 78 percent, 66 percent statewide; two or more races, 4 percent in Millard and 4 percent statewide. So thank you for that. I'm going to wrap it up now so other people can speak. But thank you all.

WALZ: Lisa, is there a chance that you could email me those numbers as well?

LISA FRICKE: Of course.

WALZ: OK, and you can share them with--

PANSING BROOKS: For the whole committee.

WALZ: --for the whole committee. Yeah, we'll get it out.

LISA FRICKE: OK. Very good.

WALZ: Thank you so much for being here today.

LISA FRICKE: I'm going to write that down so I don't forget.

WALZ: OK. All right, thank you.

LISA FRICKE: Watch out for this chair, it's not rolling.

WALZ: Our next testifier is Thomas Christie with NAACP. Good afternoon.

THOMAS CHRISTIE: Good afternoon. My mouth is a little dry already. Excuse me. OK, technology, don't fail me. I'm old school. A minute, please. Sorry.

WALZ: That's OK.

THOMAS CHRISTIE: My name is Thomas Christie, that's T-h-o-m-a-s C-h-r-i-s-t-i-e. Good afternoon to everyone. I'm the educational chair of the local NAACP here in Lincoln, and I'm a retired educator with Lincoln Public Schools for 43 years. I was a sociology and history teacher for 19 years, 4 years as a building administrator at Lincoln Northeast High School, and the last 20-plus years as the multicultural school administrator in the superintendent's office, the district office. I spent my career working on recruiting and retention of diverse educators. I will share my career perspective on the issues of the diversity gap of educators. Also, I am here representing the NAACP concerns and our support for LB157 [SIC LR157]. I will highlight the Lincoln, Lincoln NAACP letter, which you should have received. And I passed out a copy from our president, Dr. Mays, in case you didn't receive that. My career experiences of trying to improve the diverse teaching gap was consistently limited in success. I was part of an effort to recruit from Detroit, Michigan to Louisiana, South Carolina to California to Pennsylvania, south-- the southwest, the midwest, basically the country. But consistently-- I consistently heard the following reasons as to why it was hard for many diverse students to consider education. One of the reasons were because many of the students had not had teachers who looked like them. They didn't even consider the profession. They had a lack of interest because their school-- because of their school experiences, unfortunately, wasn't always positive. Also, the bias hoops to get into the profession and often hearing and seeing negative attitudes, unfortunately, from teachers about the profession. There's research that support that many teachers does not encourage students to go into the profession. They also expressed feeling alone and not encouraged in school to go into the profession. They often said Nebraska was too far and are there any people of color out there and lacking diversity for support. I can relate to this. Working in a social science department with around 18 colleagues in one of the most diverse high schools in the state, Lincoln High, I was often-- I was the only nonwhite department person. Most of my students of color told me I was their first African-American male teacher. This was and most likely still the same across the state of non-- for nonwhite teachers. I can tell you it's a stressful position to be in. You feel that you're carrying the weight of your entire ethnic group, their expectations of you that are different. The pressure is always there. As an old saying, you feel like a fly in milk. It was stressful, but also challenging and hopeful to have students who could relate to you

and often I saw this even with some of my few colleagues of color, teachers would say, well, why do those students want to stay in your class? Why do they always come to you? And the reason being because they had someone that looked like them and could relate to their experiences. Far as retention, the few nonwhite diverse teachers often felt isolated and lacking support. They feel they are expected to carry that weight of their group and often lacking mentoring and professional growth for promotions. The small success we had was establishing a grow-your-own program for 9 through 12th grade diverse students and working with diverse students in local colleges who already had experiences in Nebraska and knew that there were opportunities, challenges, but also hope, and those who had already worked or student taught in Lincoln Public Schools. Time and resources often were-- and were issues for supporting these types of programs, as well as countering attitudes of being perceived as an affirmative action effort. I often got information, anonymous notes that why are we doing this for kids of color and not for white kids? Why are we making these efforts? Isn't affirmative action illegal in Lin-- in Nebraska and so forth? I give you that because I think you need to have that in mind as we pursue this effort. As I stated, you should have received the letter from the NAACP, and I would like to highlight some of our points and concerns in that letter. Well, first, I'd like to thank the sponsors of this: Senator Brooks, McKinney, and Morfeld. The numbers are stark far as population of students of color in Lincoln Public Schools, as an example, has steadily increased. More than 30 percent, yet to teachers and administrators of color have risen only 6 percent. The achievement gap of students of color in Lincoln Public Schools, for example, is 10 to 20 percent less than their-- their colleagues' white students. Statistics from throughout the state show similar results. We think it should be addressed by formulating a statewide collaboration with appropriate resources and community input. Some of the suggestions we think that would help in this effort: provide scholarships and incentives that will attract more teachers and administrators of color; work with private and local entities to make education a more attractive career, as was done in the medical field; eliminate barriers for recruiting teachers with English as a second language; as stated, increase teacher pay; provide the necessary resources to meet pandemic needs; increase and promote current programs that increase the pool of teachers of color, such as I mentioned, grow-your-own; formulate, corporate efforts to recruit outside the state in communities of color; eliminate barriers of testing.

WALZ: Mr. Christie.

THOMAS CHRISTIE: Yes.

WALZ: I'm sorry, but the red light is on, so I just wanted to give an opportunity for questions.

THOMAS CHRISTIE: Sorry.

WALZ: No, that's OK.

THOMAS CHRISTIE: Thank you for the time. And if there are any questions, I appreciate the opportunity, the NAACP appreciates the opportunity to express our support and also to share my experiences with you in my 40-year-- 43-year career. So thank you.

WALZ: Thank you. Thank you for all you've done. Questions from the committee? Senator McKinney.

McKINNEY: Thank you. Thank you for your comments. I don't know if it's a question, it's kind of just a thought. I was sitting here and I was thinking how many black teachers that I had growing up and I was thinking of elementary, I don't think I have one. In middle school, I don't think I have one. I went to North High School, although we had a black principal.

THOMAS CHRISTIE: Mr. Haynes.

McKINNEY: Yeah, the-- the only black teachers that I had were coaches actually, like,--

THOMAS CHRISTIE: That extended.

McKINNEY: --outside of, like, sports or-- I don't think I had an English-- a black English teacher ever or a math teacher or things like that outside of, like, them teaching us physical education. And that's where I see, like, where the need is, is there-- there are some black teachers, but a lot of them, especially on the high school level, only teach some type of gym activity, of course. So but thank you.

WALZ: Thank you. Other questions from the committee? I see none. Thank you so much for your testimony. We appreciate you being here today.

THOMAS CHRISTIE: Thank you.

WALZ: Next testifier is Kevin Abourezk. OK, we're going to go on. I don't think Marian is here yet. Is Marian here? All right, then we're going to go to Maddie, Maddie Fennell, NSEA.

MADDIE FENNEL: Thank you very much and I have distributed packets because if you ask a teacher to come with ideas, they're going to come with a whole bunch of them. My name is Maddie Fennell, M-a-d-d-i-e F as in Frank -e-n-n-e-l-l, and I'm the executive director of the Nebraska State Education Association. Thank you for inviting us to speak with you today regarding the recruitment and retention of teachers and administrators who accurately reflect the proportion of students of color attending Nebraska schools. I'm going to echo a lot of what you may hear from others today, because so many of us are in agreement that this is an issue that has to be

addressed. But I do want to take just a moment and say to Mr. Christie, I have known you my entire career and he is an exemplary educator. And I want you to know that Jason Hayes just texted me, our chief government person, and said to tell you that you were his favorite high school teacher at Lincoln High. So what more of an endorsement can you ask for than that? First, why do we need more educators of color? I've included a report from the Learning Policy Institute that found there's a growing body of research demonstrating teachers of color provide benefits to all students, especially students of color. For example, studies have found that teachers of color boost the academic performance of students of color. Teachers' influences include improved reading and mathematics test scores, improved graduation rates, and increased aspirations to attend college. One such study found that the benefit to black students of having a black teacher for just one year in elementary school can persist over several years, especially for black students from low-income families. Students of color also experience social, social-emotional and nonacademic benefits to having teachers of color, such as fewer unexcused absences and lower likelihoods of chronic absenteeism and suspension. Students of color and white students also report having positive perceptions of their teachers of color, including feeling cared for and academically challenged. Teachers of color are a resource for students in hard to staff schools. Many teachers of color report feeling called to teach in low-income communities of color, positions that are often difficult to fill. Indeed, three in four teachers of color work in the quarter of schools serving the most students of color nationally. Teachers of color play an important role in filling gaps in these schools, and whether they decide to remain in teaching has significant impacts on students of color. The reasons for the difficulty in recruiting and retaining educators and educators of color are multifaceted. There is no simple solution. The answers are complex and will need an ongoing systemic support and coordination and dollars over an extended number of years to see results. First, we need to support education as a career. The NSEA and the National Education Association have invested over \$450,000 and thousands of staff hours in the recruitment and retention of teachers, focusing our work on teachers of color. Nancy Burkhart, who you'll hear from today, will describe the Educators Rising program across Nebraska. Our association members, through their own dues dollars, have paid for everything from shoes for students in competition to leadership training, travel costs, and sponsor stipends, growing the program from 2 high schools in Nebraska to over 35. Without this crucial support, we wouldn't have the success stories Nancy will tell you about and more. The Educators Rising program needs to be deeper and wider. We must begin talking about education as a career in elementary schools and offer structured programs of support starting in junior high and continuing through high school. This work needs to be publicly funded at the local and state level. School districts need to bargain stipends for Educators Rising sponsors, just as they do for DECA, FBLA, and other career tech student organizations. We need more grow-your-own programs that provide support for paraprofessionals to receive their

teaching certification. Many education support professionals would make excellent teachers, but they can't afford both the tuition and the lack of income during student teaching. We need to dismantle the barriers that divert too many potentially wonderful educators from our classrooms. We need to eliminate the Praxis Core as an entry requirement to teacher education. I'm going to say that again because you're going to hear it from us this year over and over and over. We need to eliminate the Praxis Core as an entry requirement to teacher education. Students who have already shown ability through the ACT and successful completion of college courses should not be facing an expensive test that has no bearing on their future career. In his recently completed study of teacher education in Nebraska, Dr. David Steiner, executive director of the Johns Hopkins Institute for Education Policy, stated: Admissions tests are controversial: (1) they're expensive to take, particularly for multiple-time test takers; (2) basic pedagogical tests, including the Praxis Core, have not been shown to correlate with teaching effectiveness; and (3) they reproduce the inequity-- the inequality of prior access to strong education, thereby disadvantaging minority applicants at disproportionate levels. The Institute recommends that the Praxis Core not be used as an entrance exam. We also need to provide more scholarships for students and better information on loan forgiveness. NSEA has been providing information to our members, but our students really need this information in high school and in early college to be making the right financial choices. We also need to align Nebraska policy with federal policy so that our educators aren't denied this important loan forgiveness benefit. We recently heard from a seventh grade math teacher who couldn't get loan forgiveness, even though she taught in a junior high because Nebraska classified her K-8 elementary-- as a K-8 elementary teacher and the loan forgiveness was for secondary. Student teaching should be a paid experience. Chadron State College has worked with local school districts in an innovative program that allows student teachers to learn from master teachers while also providing intermittent assistance as substitute teachers. We need more of this creative thinking. Student teaching is a time-consuming endeavor that doesn't allow for much of any additional employment. We need paid internships at residencies as other professions utilize. We have a certification problem in Nebraska. Not only is the NDE certification office woefully backlogged, but we love them, especially Brad Dirksen. I want that on the record. He's wonderful. He's doing all he can. But we make it too hard for a teacher who has not received their degree in Nebraska to teach in Nebraska. I knew a Teacher of the Year from Kansas with more than 15 years of experience who could not get certified to teach in Nebraska. We need pathways to certification that continue to focus on the quality of the educator, not their path to preparation. Once we have teachers in the classroom, they need to have strong programs of support. This is especially true for our new educators who have had their field experiences truncated by COVID. They need mentors and instructional coaches who can help them translate theory into practice-- practice. Again, with the help of the NEA-- the NSEA, our members, have invested over \$300,000 to provide mentors and training

for teachers across the state. We are paying teachers to be mentors to their colleagues. This year we've partnered with Falls City and Raymond Central to pilot a seven-state instructional coaching and mentoring program led by national experts in teacher development. These types of programs need public funding to be scaled across the state, which they have done in Illinois. While there are many more strings in this complex web, let me finish with this, studies have shown that having more administrators of color will increase the number of teachers of color. In the interest of time, I won't go into this in-depth, but I refer you to the articles I gave you on this. In your packet, you're going to find all kinds of information. But let me just say that NSEA will continue our commitment to this crucial endeavor. And we look forward to partnering with you and anyone else who wants to help us improve the education profession. Thank you.

WALZ: Thank you, Maddie. Questions from the committee? Senator McKinney.

McKINNEY: Thank you. And thank you again, Maddie, for your testimony.

MADDIE FENNELL: You bet.

McKINNEY: What has been the argument for keeping the Praxis test?

MADDIE FENNELL: There are people who believe that the Praxis is truly just a basic test. However, it's not. You have to have a high level of skill even to pass the Praxis Core. And if I were a high school math teacher or if I was having my child in a high school math teacher's room, I'd want him to know that level of math. But you don't need to have that level of math if you're going to teach pre-K or first grade. And yet we're expecting that out of those teachers. There was-- there have been endeavors to change that. But quite honestly, been blocked by the Governor's Office, that he did not feel that-- he felt that it was important for it to be there or not move to a composite score. But the data does not support that. There is no data that shows that the Praxis Core makes you a better teacher or after you've passed the ACT and college courses, that the Praxis Core is needed to actually help you matriculate through the program. It's been found to be a barrier and most states have gotten rid of it because of that.

McKINNEY: All right, thank you.

MADDIE FENNELL: Um-hum.

WALZ: Senator Murman.

MURMAN: Thank you. And thank you for your testimony, Maddie. I-- I should know more about the Praxis Core also. Is that just kind of a general test on all subjects that teachers have to take to qualify?

MADDIE FENNEL: So the Praxis Core has three primary components: math, English, and a writing piece. And so, for instance, we've been working with a teacher who-- who has been teaching on a probationary certificate for a couple of years. He can't pass the Praxis Core because he's a Spanish teacher and English is his second language. He's great at what he does, but he can't pass the writing portion of the Praxis Core. But he's been proven to be an exemplary educator. We actually have one of our-- we provide tutors for those who cannot pass the Praxis Core. We-- our association goes out and offers tutoring and says we give a group tutoring program and then we give individual tutoring to everybody who asks for it. One of our tutors has a doctorate in math, Dr. De Tonack. And she has looked at this and she said these questions are so poorly written and have no relevance. I, as a math teacher, wouldn't have used a lot of this in my math teaching. So it's not basic, the way we consider basic, it goes far beyond that. Not only that, but quite often people are in college a few years before they take the Praxis Core. And I was in college for three years before I took another math test. So if you haven't taken any math test your freshman and sophomore year of college and suddenly the Praxis Core is put in front of you, I don't know how many people here can figure a circumference of a circle if you haven't looked at it since high school. And so that's part of the problem, too. It's things that are just outside of the things that they're using. There's a great book out there called "Miseducated," which when we bring a bill forward on the Praxis, which we intend to do, I'm going to make sure you all have copies of the testimony because it's someone who is at Harvard who could not pass the Praxis Core in English. And he was an English major. Kind of ridiculous. Yeah.

MURMAN: So, so the Praxis has three different, like, three different kinds of tests?

MADDIE FENNEL: The Praxis Core has three components to it. And each of those components costs \$80 to take. So if you don't pass, you have to repeatedly pay over and over and over to take the test. And that's also a burden for college students.

MURMAN: Thank you.

MADDIE FENNEL: Um-hum.

WALZ: Thank you. Other questions? Senator Pansing Brooks.

PANSING BROOKS: I've just found out that I can ask some questions because this is a LR so now I will jump in here and there and thank Thomas Christie for his great work in our community and his testimony today. Thank you for being here, Miss Fennell, too. I guess, a couple of things. The-- the statistics you gave are-- are teacher FTE by race and ethnicity. Are there numbers on administrators and paras as well?

MADDIE FENNEL: Yes, they would have-- they-- the NDE would have those numbers.

PANSING BROOKS: OK, so--

MADDIE FENNEL: NDE would have those numbers.

PANSING BROOKS: --could we maybe get those from the--

MADDIE FENNEL: I'm sure you can get those from NDE.

PANSING BROOKS: Oh, NDE, OK. OK, we'll get that and get it to the committee. And the Praxis-- can you explain the Praxis versus other testing that people take to get into different colleges? I mean, this is-- is this to get into the college?

MADDIE FENNEL: This is actually to get into the College of Education. So you've already taken the ACT, which has gotten you into college.

PANSING BROOKS: Right.

MADDIE FENNEL: Often you've already taken two years of courses and successfully completed those courses, which include, you know, writing and--

PANSING BROOKS: Math and-- yeah.

MADDIE FENNEL: --reading and maybe even some math. But then to get into the College of Education, you also have to take the Praxis Core. Now state-- I don't know if it's-- Brad can tell you if it's state statute or state law or whatever, but it's state-- something says we have to have a basic test. And it was set that the practice was the basic test. However, as we got farther down the road, we realize that the Praxis was actually far beyond basic. And I should say there are two Praxis that someone has to take. One is the Praxis Core that you have to take to go into the College of Education. Then you have to take another subject-specific Praxis test when you leave before you are certificated in that subject area. So if I'm an elementary ed teacher, I have to pass math, English, and writing to get into the College of Ed. And then to leave and get my certificate, I also have to pass the-- the elementary ed Praxis.

PANSING BROOKS: OK, thank you. So that is another whole issue, too. Yeah.

MADDIE FENNEL: Yeah, it is. In fact, we just had somebody in our office last week, one of the school districts, that was very concerned because they had a teacher they recruited from another state who had as a special education teacher, which, you know, that's like a diamond right now, like a black diamond right now, they're so hard to find special education teachers. They recruited this person

from Washington State and they had something like 18 years of successful experience and they could not get them certificated in the state of Nebraska.

PANSING BROOKS: OK.

WALZ: All right.

PANSING BROOKS: Thank you. Thank you for your time.

MADDIE FENNEL: You bet.

WALZ: Other questions? I see none. Thank you--

MADDIE FENNEL: Thank you.

WALZ: --so much for coming today. Our next testifier is Dr. Vann Price, LPS representing NCSA. Welcome.

VANN PRICE: Thank you.

WALZ: You can go ahead and start.

VANN PRICE: OK. Good, good afternoon, everyone. My name is Vann Price and I am currently director of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion and also supervisor for secondary personnel in Lincoln Public Schools. Prior to that, I was high school principal here in Lincoln, Nebraska. And I am speaking to you today on behalf of the Nebraska Council of School Administrators. Thank you so much for allowing me to share my passion for educating and empowering others in order to level the playing field. I was really encouraged to hear that you were conducting an interim study in order to explore how Nebraska schools could recruit a teaching and administrative force that accurately reflects the proportion of students of color attending our schools. I'm pleased to see acknowledgment that one of the biggest talent challenges facing the education sector today is the demographic mix-match between the students attending PK-12 public schools and the teachers and the leaders who serve them. Today's students are the most diverse in the history of our nation. Yet, unfortunately, the educators and leaders who serve them do not accurately reflect this diversity. Diversity benefits students. Research suggests that students of color who have at least one educator of color fare much better academically and less likely-- are less likely to have disciplinary issues. We've all probably heard how beneficial this is to black and brown children. But research also suggests that white students show improved problem-solving, critical thinking, and creativity when they have diverse teachers and leaders. An article in Scientific American sums it up this way: Being around people who are different from us makes us more creative, more diligent and harder-working. So true are the words of Jon Gordon in that no one ever creates success alone. I've been blessed to have a positive team with supportive people rooting me on every step of the way. I am

choosing to share just a snippet of my story so that you better understand my mission of empowering others, particularly those whose lived experiences have been plagued with challenges. I also want you to recognize that our efforts to recruit and empower leaders of color must be deliberate and intentional. I have heard it said, and I agree, that we are born into our lives by chance. Our birthplace, nationality, and right to live in safety and dignity is due to luck. As life is an unjust human lottery, we have a responsibility to stand by those who do not receive winning tickets. I'm convinced that for me, an African-American female growing up in the late 1960s and '70s, I did receive a winning ticket, although some who measure winning based on resources might question that assessment. My mother and grandmother were the two most responsible for who I have become as these maternal strong pillars poured their whole selves into the igniting of my torch. And by the time I entered Omaha Central High School in 1978, I knew I wanted to be at the top of my class. My mother was convinced that there was no substitute for embracing your talents and seeing where they take you, realizing that an education helps to create knowledge, build confidence, and break down barriers to opportunity. There are promising initiatives happening around the country. In my opinion, the most promising programs are grow-your-own initiatives, where districts recruit and prepare diverse educators and leaders from within their own ranks. I am a blossom of such efforts and I welcome the opportunity to publicly applaud two women for their hand in positively affecting my course along my winding professional journey, Dr. Marilyn Johnson-Farr and Dr. Nancy Becker. Ever since I can remember Dr. Johnson-Farr has allowed me to sit at her feet to learn firsthand what it means to be an academic scholar and pioneer for justice. Additionally, my skills and talents would have gone untapped had I not been nudged and recruited by former principal, Dr. Nancy Becker. Dr. Becker inspired me to go forth and be courageous, she rallied and advocated for me with the powers that be. And as a result, I began my leadership journey that led me to eventually being named the first high school principal of color in Lincoln Public Schools' history. Sadly, it took until 2011 for a nonwhite leader to be given this opportunity. Sarah Leibel of the Harvard Teachers Fellows Program said: It's really important that students, and humans in general I might add, have people who reflect back to them their language, their culture, their ethnicity, their religion. It doesn't mean all the people in our lives have to do that mirroring, but they should have some. And we know that in education there really are not enough mirrors. I am thankful for mirrors like Dr. Johnson-Farr who reflected confidence, determination, and possibilities into my existence. Although staff of color deserve and benefit from mentoring from staff of color, there is a need for cross-racial mentoring. Additionally, particularly in Nebraska, white educators and leaders tend to be the conduit for access and opportunity in our educational institutions. Dr. Becker was a prime example of this during my acclimation into leadership. And had she not spoken on my behalf, I would not be sitting here today. I know personally that difference-makers come in all shades and believe that white leaders must be key contributors in efforts to provide staff of

color opportunities to lead. Thank you for allowing me the chance to speak to you today. My hope is that my words with, with all who share with you today create a sense of urgency to step outside of our comfort zone and find creative ways to attract and support leaders and educators of color within our Nebraska schools. We must do all in our power as the table of diversity is set and be mindful of the power in our voices and actions to be a difference-maker. I just want to leave you with a quote: Diversity is a fact. Equity is a choice. Inclusion is an action. Belonging is an outcome. By Arthur Chan. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak with you and I have finished with my testimony. I'd be happy to entertain questions.

WALZ: Thank you so much. Questions from the committee? Senator Pansing Brooks.

PANSING BROOKS: I just can't help saying this beautiful testimony, thank you very much for bringing it. Clearly, I was fortunate enough to travel for a little bit with Dr. Price and grew to count her among my friends. And I'm so honored that you're here today. And it's quite clear the leadership you exude. We're so blessed to have you in the Lincoln Public Schools mentoring and living as an example for so many of us.

VANN PRICE: Thank you.

PANSING BROOKS: Thank you.

VANN PRICE: Thank you so much, Senator.

WALZ: Thank you. Any other questions? Thank you so much for coming today.

VANN PRICE: Thank you.

WALZ: Next testifier is Colby Coash from Nebraska Association of School Boards. Welcome.

COLBY COASH: Thank you, Senator. Good afternoon, members of the Education Committee. My name is Colby Coash, C-o-l-b-y C-o-a-s-h, and I represent the Nebraska Association of School Boards. And I'm going to keep my comments brief. You've got a handout because I really want you to hear from Mr. Barcnas, who's going to follow me from Grand Island Public Schools. Nebraska schools are experiencing an educational workforce challenge. And this has been a real part of NASB's strategic plan to try to be a partner and work in that way. And I can tell you that as we've traveled the state over the last couple of months meeting with school board members and administrators across different parts of the state, they will tell you that-- that workforce is a challenge. More specifically, workforce as it relates to finding educators who look like the students they're educating is a challenge. And we have heard many of the same things that were brought up earlier, earlier with regard to the Praxis test and the

certification issues that were brought up. And so we're hearing that from our perspective as well. Districts across the state are competing for a real finite number of applicants and it's a shrinking pool. So to meet those demands, what school districts have been doing is-- is incorporating a grow-your-own concept. It's very easy for a high school graduate who graduates from Chase County High School to go to college and become a teacher and then go to Westside and be a very effective educator. But it's really difficult to get the graduating student from Westside who graduates, goes to college, becomes a good educator, and get that graduate to go-- go to Chase County. And that's really what's happened across the state, is-- is that students who want to go into education tend to stay where they're from. And-- and so districts are trying to-- to lean into that. So this grow-your-own has become a real concept. And-- and a lot of districts are incorporating Educators Rising as an example. And I'm happy that you're hearing from them a little bit later. We work with boards all the time in strategic plans. And this issue has bubbled up as a real priority for boards across the state in their strategic planning process. The plans-- the plans implemented by districts are starting to include strategies and goals to attract diverse staff and build district resources and capabilities through partnerships and resource allocation. But at the end of the day, the pool needs to be grown. And I'm very pleased to see that you're having some representatives from teachers colleges because as we-- again, as we've traveled the state, some of the most successful things have happened when districts are partnering with some of the higher-ed institutions who can filter and are training the next generation of teachers. And so I'm happy to hear from them, but there's more to be done. I would in closing comment that there are resource-- resources available as far as research from the Education Commission of States of which members of this committee are a part of. And I've handed out a few examples of the resources I found that outline what other states have been doing in order to recruit, attract, and retain educators of color. One of them, and as I was looking at some of this research, one of the things that stood out to me was only 11 states in-- in the union actually have implemented any type of financial incentives that were attractive for recruiting educators of color. And so in their packet, you'll see what 11 other states are doing or you have access to that information. I think that might be helpful to the committee. With that, I'll close my testimony.

WALZ: Thank you. Thanks for being here. Questions from the committee? Senator Murman.

MURMAN: Yes, thanks a lot for your testimony. The grow-your-own thing, I think is a great-- I mean, that's something that will really work. I know the school I came from has trouble recruiting and retaining teachers, but if the teacher is someone that is from the community or nearby community or somehow has roots in the community, maybe was educated at UNK or Hastings College or somewhere close and-- and then and maybe marry someone from the area. That works a

lot, that has a chance being a lot more success-- successful, I should say. Then, you know, earlier we talked about recruiting from a black college, you know, out of state and-- and I hope that works. But I think the chances of that working are a lot less. And if we can do the grow-your-own and-- and recruit nearby families and-- and community members.

COLBY COASH: Certainly, grow-your-own has been what districts have turned to. But it's a challenge. And as previous testifier, Maddie, indicated, you have to start early and you have to get these students thinking about it much earlier than we've thought about it. And there needs to be kind of a coordinated push to show that as a career path and not only show education as a career path, but show that the community they're from is a place where they can execute their career. And that's a real challenge, particularly with rural communities where you represent and it goes beyond just the Praxis and the certification. Really, what it comes down to in the more rural parts of the state is, is there a house for that educator to live in when-- if, if you can recruit them? Is there a nice place for them to live? If they come with a family, is there daycare in that community who can watch their young children while they're teaching? That goes a little bit beyond the-- the scope of what this is. But it's a, it's a more global issue or a statewide issue that we're committed to trying to address. And I'm glad that this hearing has brought up some of those, those issues.

MURMAN: Yep, thanks.

WALZ: Thank you. Any other questions? I see none. Thank you. Our next testifier is Carlos Barcenas, Barcenas. Thank you. Welcome. We're glad you're here today.

CARLOS BARCENAS: Thank you. Thank you. And I'm sorry, I have a-- started with a tickle in my throat and I speak for a career and I'm nervous, I guess. My name is Carlos Barcenas, B-a-r-c-e-n-a-s, and I'm here representing NASB and the Grand Island Public School District. So I wish my notes were as organized as everybody else. And I want to ditto a lot of what was said in that light way, but at the same time using it as a very heavy way that you go back and hear all the stories. There's a lot of information that I was going to share that has to do with the same thing. A little bit of my story, I am a Mexican citizen by birth. I'm a USA citizen by choice. I-- but obviously, I'm not good at math because for the last about 10 years I've been telling people I've been here for about 25 years. Turns out I've been here for 27 years. I just didn't stop to do the math. So I've been-- again, I had to learn the language. I often when I speak, I like to share that one of my disclaimers is the more I speak, I become conscious of my accent so it becomes thicker. So my German heritage comes out. If that-- if you don't understand, understand something I said, just ask me. And what I mean by that is I had to learn the language. I had to learn the culture of the United States. I was fortunate to have my mom and my dad who were always pushing us

to do better, to get involved. And they always pushed us that you could do anything you wanted to do. I remember hearing my dad and my mom from an early age tell us, which I thought this was their saying, and I found out it was Mother Teresa, I believe, who said it. But he who does not live to serve along the lines of doesn't live well or does not deserve to live, but really an emphasis on we are here to serve. So from the time we came to the United States, excuse me, the next morning, we were already involved in community projects and serving the community. So that's been a big part of why I'm here. I have been a board member for eight years in the Grand Island Public School districts. I graduated from the Grand Island Public Schools and it was always with that reminder of my parents in the back of saying, get involved. You can do whatever you want to do. Right. And I've been doing diversity, inclusion, equity, belonging work for the last 20 years. And it wasn't about ten years ago that something went off in my head when I thought, you know, I naively believed when I came in 1994 that I didn't have to see somebody in front of me that looked like me in order for me to achieve that role or that status. Right. I-- I believe that. And I still believe that in a way, because my parents said, you know, we'll support you. You can do whatever you want. But I wonder often, if unconsciously, I didn't take many more chances of doing something else because I never saw somebody that looked like me in positions of power or in decision-making positions or roles that people told me, oh, you could be part of that. So it could be-- that's why I think this is important that we take a-- a look into the importance of the research. If our students see, excuse me, somebody that looks like them in the classroom, will that change and impact their future? And I believe, and I believe it does. This-- for the last, again, 27 years, something that I heard every 10 years at least was our demographics are changing. We need to do something. But the reality is that our demographics have changed and they've changed about ten years ago. So how do we continue to have this discussion of creating, growing our own, especially in education? I don't believe it's an either, either or, it's a both and. As Colby was sharing earlier, it is not just the Legislature, the school districts, but it's also about the community. It's also about creating our own programs, but having the tough conversation. Some of the things that we have that I feel proud to be part of the Grand Island Public School district is because we have not only challenged ourselves as board members and as a district to have the uncomfortable conversations, to have the-- the courageous conversations about race, prejudice, equity. They're not usually brought up or they're not comfortable to have and look at the barriers that we're facing. How can we continue to educate our children, engage your family? And something that I believe is really important, the relationship piece. How do we continue creating good relationships, breaking the barriers of language and all other barriers that exist? Socioeconomics. You know, I mentioned that I am a-- a first-generation immigrant to the country. About 20 years ago, 25 years ago, I heard someone say, you know, for first-generation immigrants, it does take about 25 years to become acculturated or know how the host culture works. And even though I've been serving

for a long time in my community, I got to tell you that in my 20-year mark as an immigrant and a 25-year mark as an immigrant, really have felt like, well, now I have a voice and that's why I feel comfortable being here. I just know we have somebody with UNK at the end of the agenda and when I graduated from 19-- from high school in 1998, there was Dr. Juan Guzman, who was only a couple-- he wasn't a doctor back then. He graduated a couple of years before me or after me. And-- and he was one of the-- the people that I remember fighting this battle of saying we need to have more teachers that look like us. So, you know, it's been a 27-year journey where I've heard this and I've seen this and I'm partnering with all of you to say we've been saying we need to do something because it matters. And I believe that's how we ended up having Dr. Grover as Superintendent, Josué Covarrubias as the principal, because we're continuing to reach out to different places that maybe we have not reached before, because we are creating partnerships with colleges, because we are creating our own. And one of the community conversations that we need to continue to have is this belonging piece. How can we have our students, our kids have positive, good opportunities and interactions in their own community, in their own school, that they can feel that they can come back and live in their communities? So creating that sense of belonging. I think I've had the conversations with different colleagues, classmates, community members and I've heard people say, well, I don't want to go back to my own community because it wasn't a welcoming community, because I had a bad experience. Right. But I think we need to continue to explore this and have those tough conversations. And again, we are looking into our paraeducators. I did have a chance to work as a paraeducator for the school district. And a lot of the paraeducators are bilingual. They're just juggling different things. So we're looking into how can we count time, classroom time? How can we put back into the-- invest back so that they can come back and spend time with us? So with that, I thank you. Thank you for your time and doing-- looking into this. And I would entertain any questions you have.

WALZ: Thank you so much. Thank you for your story. Questions from the committee? Senator Pansing Brooks.

PANSING BROOKS: Thank you so much for coming today. Are-- are there some other specific things that you think have been helpful in your career to-- to really, you know, make it easier with what you're doing? What do you see could be changed that-- that would be beneficial?

CARLOS BARCENAS: I think we need to con-- to realize that we have really tough conversations that we need to have. And when we are in leadership positions, you know, one of the things as we are bringing people of color back into our classrooms, back into our communities, how are-- we are not immune to what's happening in politics, what's happening in our environments. Right. So what messages are we putting out there? Do we feel like we can empower conversations that are going to be really uncomfortable but really make us feel like that we

belong? So, again, we have to acknowledge that sometimes there are barriers and I've shared this in my speeches, as I've shared in many communities, many times I can tell you places where I did not feel welcome and I knew it was because of the color of my skin or my language. But then there was a place where I felt welcome. And I feel that the time-- the places that I-- that feel home to me in Nebraska is the relationships or with the people that I build relationships with. So being willing to sit down and have very uncomfortable conversations, brave conversations about the topics that are affecting our students and our community members.

PANSING BROOKS: Well, you have a unique perspective as both a student and now a board member. And-- and so we're really grateful to have you here.

CARLOS BARCENAS: Thank you.

PANSING BROOKS: Thank you very much.

WALZ: You mentioned that you were a para.

CARLOS BARCENAS: I was at one point. I-- I spent time-- when after I graduated from high school, I-- I was in the process of working my immigration status from a resident. And I didn't have a work permit at the time, so I couldn't go to college right away. So I had to take a couple of years off. [INAUDIBLE] came and I was able to spend some time in the classroom as well as a paraeducator, and then I spent some time working as a minority at-risk educator as well.

WALZ: That's great. Thank you so much for being here today. We really, really appreciate it.

CARLOS BARCENAS: Thank you.

WALZ: I think what we're going to do is back up, Marian Holstein is here now. So if Marian wants to come up and testify, that would be great. Hi, Marian.

MARIAN HOLSTEIN: Good afternoon, Chairman Walz and committee members. My name is Marian Holstein, executive director of the Nebraska Indian Education Association. We are a fairly new organization consisting of Native American educators in Nebraska. We were formed because there was not a united voice to address our concerns about the education of our children. It is with some trepidation, I share my thoughts with you today about proposing changes to increase the diversity in the teacher and administrative court in Nebraska. Trepidation because some of the resolutions to this problem already have been identified, yet unacted upon. For example, the teacher wage penalty in the United States. In 1979, teachers earned 7.3 percent less than other comparable college graduates, what we call a wage penalty. This wage penalty was 21.4 percent in 2018, a record high. People of color are making up a long history of being undervalued, underpaid, and

misunderstood. While I believe we have more college graduates of color than any time in the past, heads of households are inclined to take the highest paying position for the upward mobility of their families that-- and that often means bypassing the teaching field. This is not yet-- this is yet another instance Native Americans find it hard to understand about non-Natives. Why is such a critical piece of society so undervalued? Why is such an honorable position shown such disrespect? In Native cultures, our elders and those who teach have the highest positions of honor in our communities. Nebraska Indian Education has shared comments with the State Board of Education regarding the restrictiveness of teacher credentialing in Nebraska. Facts are that Nebraska does not have the number of Native teachers we need. Even if we were to headhunt from other states with higher populations of Native Americans, the requirement of taking the practice again-- Praxis again or paying a \$1,500 fee does not say that we want you in Nebraska. We are aware this is under the domain of the State Board of Education. Another example of what we already know. Other cultures and peoples have contributed to making this country great, yet they are not recognized. Children in schools today aren't taught Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson based the U.S.'s inherent and inalienable rights on the Iroquois Nation's Great Law of Peace. Our students aren't taught that Native people studied the stars and astronomy long before Copernicus. At the age of 67, a new friend of mine who studies existing mounds and petroforms explained to me the genius of my ancestors and how they built these mounds and their use of petroforms. I was teary-eyed because no one ever before explained to me how brilliant my ancestors were. If our students are to succeed, they need to have pride in who they are and who they were and are today. These two instances alone, I believe, calls for a rewrite of the history books. Other areas where Nebraska Indian Ed has had an impact in Nebraska is in our work on the social studies standards revision, numerous indicators to study Native American history were included. It is no longer feasible to say Columbus discovered America, Lewis and Clark discovered a way west, or Henry Schoolcraft discovered the headwaters of the Mississippi. Today's students recognize the cover-up. Since the schools on Native lands have the greatest potential to produce Native teachers than others, it behooves everyone to support us in increasing our effectiveness. And by the way, I'm also the president of the Winnebago's Public School Board. Take in-- take into consideration our students proficiency rates, in 2018, the last year for which I have data, Native American students statewide scored an average of 30 percentage points below white students in reading, English language arts, math and science proficiencies. What is needed is a system-wide change in schools. Systems management is slow to come to public schools. School administrators who take an inclusionary response and approach improvement are those that are most responsive and in whose schools show the most improvement. These administrators determine this, among other ways, through data-driven planning, including staffing the planning and then communicating this plan to all staff, monitoring changes, reporting on the effect of the proposed change, revisiting outcomes, and going back to the drawing board over and over again.

What I have witnessed in the schools on Native lands is they lack systemic, systemic implementation of goals and objectives. I'm reminded of the Charlie Chaplin movie, *Modern Times*, as he goes through the gears in the factory and comes out shaken, visibly shaken. So do our children and staff after being tossed to and fro with little rhyme or reason. In this day I-- to this day, I face an upward battle of stressing the need for data-informed decision-making. I make these comments from experience. I have a 33-year history with the Head Start Program. For over two decades, the systemic approach to serving children, families, and communities has been embraced and strengthened. We do not need to reinvent the wheel if only others embrace these concepts. And I didn't add this, but I'd like to say that in ESSA we do see that now that we have parent engagement and community engagement written into the act. That is something borrowed from Head Start. As a Head Start compliance auditor, we would visit schools who were Head Start grantees, the lack of systems management was uncomprehensible [SIC] to me at the time. It was basically administrators telling teachers what to do with little to no input or ownership. This is a reason for staff attrition. Until we increase the profess-- proficient-- sorry, until we increase the proficiency levels of our students of color at the elementary, middle, and secondary grades, we will not have a pool of potential quality students to enter teacher preparatory programs. Until we start teaching about the inherent abilities of all cultures, how we have borrowed from them in the past and to this day, we will not be instilling the pride and incentive for our students to succeed in their schools. Until we start approaching the problem as a team, we will see little progress and we will keep losing teachers because the stress isn't worth it. School, school administration listen nicely, then go about what they were going to do anyway. Many of our administrators' background is in education, not in business management. And without systems management and education, it can all just be busywork. Since our administrators know little about the plight of Native Americans or the trauma that affects classroom learning for people of color and those in poverty, how can they know how to reach out to students? Thank you for your attention today and for looking at the problem. I think it's a very good first start and I'm so glad that you are approaching that. And Nebraska Indian Ed has more comments and ideas on this complex problem. And we, and we are more than willing to share our ideas with anyone. Thank you very much.

WALZ: Marian, thank you so much for coming today. Any questions from the committee? Senator Pansing Brooks.

PANSING BROOKS: Thank you. Could you-- thank you so much for being here today. I appreciate it,--

MARIAN HOLSTEIN: You're welcome.

PANSING BROOKS: --Miss Holstein. Could you tell how the Nebraska Indian Education Association got started? You said it's only a few years old. And so did you, did you help found that organization or--

MARIAN HOLSTEIN: Yes, I did. Initially, we had-- we were founded in 1987.

PANSING BROOKS: OK.

MARIAN HOLSTEIN: And for certain reasons, it-- it sort of died out. And I had my own consulting business for many years. And when I retired, I filled a position on the Winnebago Public School Board. My mother was a school board member. And as I mentioned, I was-- or may not have mentioned, I was the Head Start director. So of-- and it was really at an opportune time because ESSA had just been passed. And so in reading that, I said, oh, great, this is, you know, I know all of this stuff. You know, I know the importance of parent and-- and student engagement as well as the community. And so dug in my-- dug in my heels, rolled up my sleeves and started working. And that's when, you know, I learned that for Native peoples, that tribal sovereignty is-- is, of course, critical and key. But it also tends to lead to another problem, you know, because our tribal nations have that, that direct partnership with the federal government, we sometimes aren't as well versed in state government--

PANSING BROOKS: Yes.

MARIAN HOLSTEIN: --and state laws, etcetera. So it took me quite, you know, quite a while to go ahead and-- and catch up. And, you know, looking at that systems management approach, understanding that that governance is-- piece is key as to where and if you're going to make changes, forgo the State Board of Education. And we have-- I have been working and communicating with members within the State Board and within the Nebraska Department of Education for quite some time. And it's a long road and we'll keep-- and I'm looking for more volunteers. So we will continue and-- and we know it's, we know it's, like I said, it's a long road, but the longest journey begins with a single step.

PANSING BROOKS: That's true. And it's, it's so fortunate you're out here as a resource. And thank you very much for your time and energy on all this. I hadn't-- I've heard some of the information about how-- how women are paid, but I'm glad to see this information on Native American teachers versus comparable college graduates. So thank you very much for bringing that information to us.

MARIAN HOLSTEIN: You're welcome. Thank you for listening. You're very good listeners. Thank you.

WALZ: Our next testifier is Nancy Burkhart from Educators Rising. Good afternoon.

NANCY BURKHART: Good afternoon. Shall I go ahead and get started? OK. Good afternoon, my name is Nancy Burkhardt and I'm a retired Omaha Public Schools teacher and currently the NSEA liaison for Educators Rising Nebraska. My role is to offer support to the state advisor and Educators Rising chapters throughout the state. Educators Rising was formerly the Future Teachers Association. Before that, it was Future Teachers of America, which was cofounded by Nebraska native Joy E. Morgan in 1937. Phi Delta Kappa International is the parent organization for Educators Rising. Educators Rising is a Nebraska State Career Tech Student Organization supported by the Nebraska Department of Education. CTSOs are an integral part of career education and workforce development. I've been involved with Educators Rising for 20 years. I was first introduced to the organization when I was teaching the human service course at Burke High School. I developed the course and included a portion of the course for students to explore the teaching profession. It soon became apparent to me there was a need for a separate class. I received training at the South Carolina Teacher Cadet Program and used it as a model to write and teach the introduction to education class. Currently, the class is dual enrolled and the three-hour credit is accepted or transferable to colleges of education across Nebraska, as well as out-of-state colleges of education programs. Educators Rising is an organization associated with the Introduction to Education course. School districts that would like to start chapters are encouraged to begin an education pathway, which includes courses such as Introduction to Education, Best Practices, and an internship experience. Educators Rising helps make sure teachers have the experience and skills they need to be ready for the classroom. Starting with high school students, we provide passionate young people with hands-on teaching experience, sustain their interest in the profession, and help them cultivate the skills they need to be successful educators. The result is accomplished teachers who are positioned to make a lasting difference not only in the lives of their students, but also in the field of teaching more broadly. The vision: Every teacher in America has the skills and experience to help all students achieve their potential. The mission: Educators Raising cultivates highly skilled educators by guiding young people on a path to become accomplished teachers beginning in high school and extending through college and into the profession. We work to accomplish this mission by providing students with learning experiences such as the Chapter Leader Camp, Fall Expos that provide professional development, and exposure to college campuses, a State Leadership Conference, which includes competitions and professional development sessions about pertinent educational issues, and the National Conference to compete against students from across the United States and hear from national speakers such as the National Teacher of the Year. There are also opportunities for students to apply for scholarships and teacher scholar programs at Nebraska colleges. The networking and connections made between students enhance their common goal of becoming teachers. Now it's time to let me, let me tell you about some of my students and what I've experienced in working with Educators Rising. I have had a state

officer who decided to go to University of Indiana. And as a freshman, she was sitting in the library and another student approached her and said, because they'd met at a national conference, you look familiar. And-- and sparked a conversation. I had another student who was elected a national officer. It was a great experience for her to network with other officers and maintain professional connections. I've had-- I've had at least 26 students that have gone through the program and are teachers in OPS or other districts in other states. I've had two past state officers who have secured teaching jobs this year and are-- are students in the CADRE, which is a Career Advancement and Development for Recruits and Experienced program at UNO. During which they'll earn their master's degree in curriculum and instruction while completing the first year of teaching. I have a state officer and former valedictorian at South High who will graduate in December with a double major in Spanish and English education with an endorsement in English as a second language. She has the possibility of being hired at her student teaching assignment upon graduation. So proud of her. I've had past-- a past student who-- who is now an ACP teacher at Burke High School, which is where she discovered she wanted to be an ACP teacher and she volunteered her junior and senior year. I know every Educators Rising advisor has similar stories about their students who have gone on to pursue their teaching degrees. I believe in this program because it also gives students the opportunity to test out teaching to know if it's for them. It's always a winning situation when students decide to go into teaching, but it's also a win if they decide it's not for them, as they have not wasted time and money working towards a degree they don't love. We need teachers who have a passion for what they do. I have always said, do what you love and love what you do. Teaching is important, not for the weak. It's hard work, but the most important and rewarding work you will ever do. This is what happens when communities grow their own: High school students are engaged in relevant teaching experiences, gaining transferable skills and opportunity for impact. Advisors are able to pay forward talent and expertise and lead without leaving the classroom. Districts are allowed to cultivate and retain a skilled workforce and get students ready for college and careers. Colleges have more informed and skilled teaching candidates and ready-made partnerships with PK-12 classrooms. And everyone will have a sustainable pool of skilled and experienced rising educators. Thank you for your time. Questions?

WALZ: Thank you so much for being here. Questions from the committee? I see none. Thank you so much for your time. Next testifier is Dr. Paul Turman from the Nebraska State Colleges.

PAUL TURMAN: Chair Walz, members of the committee, my name is Paul Turman, spelled P-a-u-l T-u-r-m-a-n. I'm the chancellor of the Nebraska State College System. Certainly, a pleasure to come and present to you this, this afternoon to talk about kind of I'll provide a comprehensive kind of overview of where teacher education candidates are for the entire state. And I think that will set the stage for the various challenges that-- and try not to replicate some

of the information that was shared here earlier as well. Three different-- or actually five different attachments that are being distributed. And I'll try to walk through and highlight a couple of important elements associated with each one of those. Attachment number one provides an overview of the 2019- 2021 teacher vacancy and-- and teacher shortage survey that's done by the Department of Education each year. The most recent data, I think the most comprehensive recent data is the 2019-2020 survey. Roughly, about 89 of the districts in the state replied to that. The number was much, much lower this last year as a result of the COVID, only about 37 percent. So I think to be able to look at the most recent data from '19 and '20, overall, there were about 15 percent of the available positions in the state went unfilled with highly qualified individuals, and about 2.9 percent of those essentially were left vacant at a number of the districts around the state. So overall, I think you see that in the central region of Nebraska is where probably the largest number or overall percentage of those end up coming from. But I think this is a-- a data set that will feed the ongoing kind of shortage that we're going to continue to experience in the state of Nebraska when you begin to look at the number of candidates that are prepared in the various teacher colleges across the state. So attachment two is actually an attachment that I shared last year when visiting with the Appropriations Committee about the ongoing workforce shortages in the state of Nebraska. I focused primarily on teacher education, kind of that driving focus for the creation of the three state colleges. And that right now, actually, without the trend that occurred this last year with seeing an increase, we were at a point of about 50 percent of the total number of candidates that we have in the state colleges, the university system, and all the privates. It dropped by almost 50 percent. And so that has increased this last year to about just under 30. But I would anticipate that as we start to see the experience of COVID continuing to kind of impact the workforce, that that will drop back down again. We also see the total number of completers continuing to decline, not as quickly, but I think ultimately these numbers will begin to kind of catch up. A thing to remember, total-- a candidate is an individual who has been fully admitted into a teacher education program. So you have sometimes sophomores, juniors, and seniors all in that mix. The completers are the total number of graduates that then are identified to meet the licensure requirements that have-- that the Department of Education has for educators here in the state. When we look at attachment three, provides information on the total number of endorsements. And so certainly some things to be able to kind of dive into. And you can see that by the different discipline areas, that that decline has continued dramatically over the last decade as well. It provides the last ten or, I think, nine years of information from the department in showing that we've seen about a 45 percent decrease in the total number of endorsements that people are pursuing. And when you look just at the state colleges, that number has dropped by 51 percent. So you can see that broken down by each one of the various institutions. And it's available at that level as well. When we look specifically at the information, and I maybe turn

your attention to attachment number four, a little bit brief or shorter attachment, I'm trying to look at the ethnicity data within the state college system. I'll note that there's a representative from University of Nebraska Kearney that can speak specifically to the university system. But what this is showing is that in our teacher education programs, about 14 percent of our current candidates right now in our undergraduate programs are students of color. It's a little bit lower and those that are going on to those administrative positions and earning a master's degree at only 9 percent. So the combined, you know, 12 percent for the various candidates and/or administrators that we're trying to train is a little bit under the overall population of students of color that we have in our system. The most recent IPEDS data show that that's about 18 percent. And so we're at a gap of roughly 6 percent in the total number of candidates of color that want to go into teacher education. I think it's also important, I'll highlight the-- the lower right hand corner of that pie chart, which is actually a step program, is very similar to what was being discussed by the previous presenter, dual credit programming. And actually the one that we have in place is students to teach through education pathways, which is delivered by Wayne, and it's delivered to a-- a series of school districts, Norfolk, South Sioux City, Columbus, Homer, Grand Island, and then they have West Point as well. And I think the essence of why we're seeing a much larger percentage of students of color in that program is because of the-- the types of districts that we're partnering with. And visiting with Dr. Grover in Grand Island just actually two days ago, you know, have a student population of almost 70 percent of them are students of color. And so the opportunity to grow these programs comes from having an-- an opportunity to also work in those districts that have much, much higher levels of-- of participation. We have some very good special education apprenticeship programs that is run through Chadron, which allows people who are paraprofessionals to work with their district to help fund their education, to go into special education, and that-- that has had some good success in-- in working with those local districts to do that grow-- grow-your-own that you've heard quite a bit about today as well. We're also seeing expansion in year-long student teaching experience. So rather than simply doing just one semester, having students actually do that the entire year, which has a-- a very good impact on ensuring that attrition numbers go down. Students who have far more experience of knowing exactly what the first day of class will look like and how to manage a classroom through the course of the year is an advantage and I think that we're seeing a lot of states who have actually put that as a major requirement for all teacher education preparation needs to work through that process. We also have a Northeast Nebraska Teacher Academy which is run through Wayne, where qualified teachers to help kind of build the-- the substitute pools that are in those districts that are in their service area. So pieces of different elements that are out there, I think, had some opportunity to talk with Senator Walz about scholarship opportunities with our Nebraska tuition guarantee, the career scholarships, which are we have the capacity to provide to students in teacher education. One of the disadvantages,

that we cannot utilize ethnicity or students of color as a criteria when making those awards. I think we all know what is holding that up. And I think we're starting to see something that was done a number of years ago, long before I came to Nebraska, has a number of kind of unintended consequences on how we want to try to address specific problems that exist. I know that the speaker from the University of Nebraska Kearney might talk about their alternate certification program. So I won't go into depth about that. But certainly a lot of room to-- to grow in this state. Senator Vargas two years ago came to this committee and talked about expanding alternate certification. I know that I provided information about the-- the way in which that's structured in South Dakota and how it creates a lot of very good opportunities that we have a little bit more of a restricted structure here in the state. We'd certainly be excited to have conversations or be a part of those conversations. The last attachment, and I know that one of the speakers talked about Education Commission for the States have a lot of really good resources, and what we tried to provide in that one is the breakdown of out-of-state certification and licensure requirements in Nebraska in comparison to all the other states in the country. And you can see in some ways we tend to be a little bit more restrictive than a number of other states. And that continues to be a barrier. If we have an individual who comes here, has to wait a year before they can get licensed and then picks another career pathway, that is not something that we want. Certainly, if those are individuals of color, then we have a significant disadvantage for the state. But I'd be happy to answer any questions that the committee might have related to any of these attachments or my testimony this afternoon.

WALZ: Thank you so much for coming today. Questions? Senator McKinney.

McKINNEY: Thank you. Thank you for your testimony. If you were able to recruit students based on race, how, I guess, how great of an opportunity would that be for the state college system?

PAUL TURMAN: I-- I think it would be a pretty significant opportunity, especially there are certainly districts that we do not draw a lot of students from, oftentimes more urban locations, and the capacity to be able to provide dedicated scholarships based on the students' kind of ethnicity would be advantageous. And I think right now-- so Wayne has a very good program. Wayne is also restricted from working with districts in Omaha based on the service region structure that the CCPE has. And so I think just having the opportunity to be able to work more closely with districts and put these types of programs in place would help, I think, everyone resolve some of the problems that they're experiencing.

McKINNEY: Thank you.

PAUL TURMAN: Thank you.

WALZ: Any other questions from the committee?

PANSING BROOKS: I-- I have a quick one.

WALZ: Senator Pansing Brooks.

PANSING BROOKS: Thank you. So thank you so much for being here, Dr. Turman. I was wondering on the-- on the reciprocity, can you talk about that a little bit? And how important is it that, I mean, we are, you know, there are a lot of people that do not give full reciprocity. Why not? What's the problem? Do we not trust the-- the teaching institutions elsewhere? What's the whole deal on this? Can you give us your perspective?

PAUL TURMAN: Yeah, my perspective, a lot of times states have particular requirements that are unique to their states and whether or not those requirements are things that should hold up someone from being able to come in and-- and teach right away without being able to take some time, maybe the course of a year or two years to be able to finish that up at. And I think this is a hard one to move and a-- a number of states have been beginning to think through, I mean, how do we have consortiums where, it's not just even education, how do we have consortiums where we come to agreements that we want to make it far easier for people to migrate between various states? And I know the-- the Governor tried to do that with the-- the licensure requirements when it came to healthcare providers as we're dealing with COVID. And if we can do it in those types of situations, I think we could look at some of these other areas that we have extremely significant shortages. And those problems that you see attachment two that the what we see in the next by the time we hit 2028, we don't have enough people, candidates, let alone completers, to meet the need for a good number of the districts in the state of Nebraska. And we have to have a comprehensive teacher education strategy to be able to address that. And licensure is going to be a piece of it, alternate certification. It's not just one particular thing that will be successful.

PANSING BROOKS: This is clearly a case where perfection is the enemy of good.

PAUL TURMAN: I would concur.

PANSING BROOKS: Thank you very much for being here today.

PAUL TURMAN: Thank you.

WALZ: Any other questions? Thank you.

PAUL TURMAN: Thank you all.

WALZ: Thank you. Our next testifier is Dr. Mark Reid from UNK.

MARK REID: Hello, thank you for the time today. It's a pleasure to be with a group that has an interest in my passion of education and specifically producing high-quality teachers. Good afternoon, Chairwoman Walz and members of the Education Committee. My name is Mark Reid, spelled M-a-r-k R-e-i-d, and I serve as the dean of the College of Education at the University of Nebraska Kearney, where I've worked for just over a year. I want to thank you for this opportunity to testify on LR157. UNK has a long tradition in teacher education, dating back to our founding in 1905 as a state normal school. For 116 years, we have emphasized the importance of graduating future teachers who will return to communities across the state to support the education development of our people. Today, UNK is the second largest producer of teachers in Nebraska and we've been ranked as the 27th best online master's in education program in the country. In fact, one in seven teachers in Nebraska has a degree from UNK. As a university, we focus on the needs of Nebraskans and Nebraska communities. This starts with access to higher education, which advances social mobility. It is essential that social and financial barriers do not keep students from enrolling in college. And we have a matrix of programs that recruit and support students who are first generation in their family to go to college and who are from low-income families or grew up in a household where English was not the primary language and other factors that might reduce access to college. For example, we have the Kearney Bound Program that works with Lexington, North Platte, and Kearney schools with first-generation Pell-eligible students starting as a high school freshman to support success through their advising, mentoring, and tutoring. Since 2006, these students who have met the Kearney Bound academic requirements earned scholarships that cover tuition, books, fees, and room and board. Other scholarship and financial aid programs like the Diversity Service Scholarship, Bilingual Educators Scholarship, and the Office of Student Diversity and Inclusion Leadership Scholarship are making UNK more attractive and affordable. We have marketing and recruiting materials in Spanish. We have bilingual admissions counselors and staff, and we offer Spanish language campus tours and recruitment events. Communities such as the Thompson Scholars Learning Community and student organizations in the Office of Student Diversity and Inclusion, First Gen Lopers, Multicultural Greek Council, and others have an enormous impact on student recruitment and success because they provide mentoring and peer relationships that help students navigate any challenges encountered. We also have a robust learning commons that provides tutoring and an academic success office that supports students with specific challenges. I just have to note that we got a slight bubble in communication. We heard that this focus on the hearing today was on Hispanic future teachers. So that's what my focus is. But it's applicable across the board for teachers of color. There are more initiatives to recruiting and support. But I will give you a couple of facts that demonstrate our success in engaging Hispanic students. Enrollment of Hispanic students at UNK has doubled in the last 15 years. Our first-time freshmen Hispanic students this fall number 139, that's 129 percent increase-- or, excuse me, a 29 percent

increase over fall 2020. This means that 12 percent of our freshmen this fall are Hispanic. Retention, which is a powerful indicator of student success, is typically about 80 percent at UNK. In comparison, retention with Hispanic students is over 83 percent. UNK is committed to attracting Hispanic students into ensuring their success. In fact, we are an affiliate Hispanic serving institute because our enrollment is over 10 percent Hispanic and we're on the path to becoming an Hispanic serving institute as our enrollment continues to grow. We were the first University of Nebraska member of HACU, the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities. K-12 teachers fall in the much discussed H3 category because of their high impact on communities. The UNK College of Education understands its importance and works in partnership with school systems like Lexington, Gibbon, and Grand Island to prepare the teachers they need. Cooperating schools can nominate students for specific scholarships. We have a specific bilingual educator scholarship that pays for four years of room and board for Spanish speaking students committing to becoming teachers. Two UNK College of Education faculty are currently conducting a collaborative study on supporting students of color who become teachers. This project involves faculty at UNK, UNO, and UNL. The goal is to understand how supporting these teachers of color in their coursework in the schools where they-- they-- in-- in the schools where they take their first teaching position. UNK has just launched a Leadership Academy to help school districts further-- develop future leaders, which can be used to support career development for young teachers. And we've just received approval for a certificate in Spanish for the helping professions. While enrollment in teacher education programs has been on the decline nationally, UNK is committed to supporting the school systems in our region. This particularly includes those school systems with changing demographics. They are, in fact, our communities. Let me close with a story about Carlos Ortega, a Hispanic student who came to UNK. Carlos Ortega emigrated to the United States in 2001. He completed high school in Nebraska and attended Central Community College before enrolling at UNK, where he is studying Spanish and English as a second language. He works as a paraprofessional in the Kearney Public School System. After he graduates, he wants to teach in a high school ESL program. He says he wants to pay it forward, and he emphasizes the need for people to communicate if we want to bridge cultural gaps. We value people like Carlos who come to UNK with a vision in mind as how they can enrich and help our state. This is the Loper way. Thank you and I'd be happy to answer any questions you have.

WALZ: Thank you. Questions from the committee?

PANSING BROOKS: I'll just--

WALZ: Yes.

PANSING BROOKS: I-- I don't think you misunderstood, we wanted your perspective on Hispanic students as well.

MARK REID: OK, good.

PANSING BROOKS: We want the perspective on all kids of color and what's happening to encourage and-- and look for barriers to each group and each set of kids that-- so we can have them active in our teaching system. So thank you for coming today.

MARK REID: Oh, my pleasure. I just wanted to say one thing, last presenter, Dr. Turman, alluded to it, one of the things that we're seeing to kind of frame the issue we're up against here is the-- the number of candidates coming to teacher education across the nation has been going down and it's been going down for quite a few years. So we've got to have a deflection point on-- on that. And then, of course, addressing the teachers of color is it is an embedded issue. But one of the things that will happen as we focus on increasing the number of candidates in teacher education hopefully we will get more teacher education candidates of color also.

PANSING BROOKS: Thank you.

MARK REID: You bet.

WALZ: Any other questions? Thank you so much for your time and coming down.

MARK REID: My pleasure. Thank you.

WALZ: We really appreciate it. Next testifier is Brad Dirksen from the Nebraska Department of Education.

PANSING BROOKS: And as he's coming up, I did just want to say thank you to Nancy Burkhart for her inspiring testimony, too,--

WALZ: Yes.

PANSING BROOKS: --about all the kids. We didn't do very well asking you a question, but you answered a lot of what we were interested in hearing. So thank you very much. Welcome.

BRAD DIRKSEN: Thank you. And first off, I'd say, wow, what a great room of educators and human beings that have been in this room today. Just the passion that they all have is-- is just great to be here with you all. Good afternoon, my name is Brad Dirksen, B-r-a-d, Dirksen, D-i-r-k-s-e-n. I'm the administrator for the Office of Accountability, Accreditation, and Program Approval at the Nebraska Department of Education. The Educator Preparation Program Approval Section and the Educator Certification Section is both in my office so I received a couple of key components of some of the regulations that are being discussed. Thank you for the opportunity to speak on such an important topic today. First, I think it's important to recognize where we are as a state right now regarding the racial and ethnic diversity of teachers and students in Nebraska. In the

2019-2020 academic year, over a third of our student population identified as a race or ethnicity other than white. During the same academic year, our state's teacher population, identified as a race or ethnicity other than white, was less than 5 percent. With recent census data, you can see a clear trend in Nebraska becoming a more racially diverse state. And that's something we need to embrace and not be fearful of, which is a reason to applaud the efforts of LR157. To address the lack of diversity in our teacher and administrator ranks, it would be misguided to only focus on the recruitment, hiring, and retention of teachers. This is truly a systems issue that starts early in our children's lives and is evident in the achievement gap data. Third grade NSCAS math assessments data from the '18-19 academic year showed students who identified as white as having a 60 percent proficiency level where their counterparts that identified as black or African-American had 24 percent proficiency level. These gaps persist through the graduation, as senior graduation rates, where in 2019 we saw a 92 percent graduation rate for students identifying as white. While those identified as American Indian or Alaska Native had a 71 percent graduation rate. The Nebraska Department of Education's mission is to lead and support the preparation of all Nebraskans for learning, earning a living. When--when achievement gaps persist, we know we have more work to do. The State Board of Education adopted their 2021-2022 legislative and regulatory priorities at the August board meeting, State Board of Education meeting. I would encourage you to review the legislative priorities that are focused around the educational equity in the areas of behavioral and mental health, early childhood education, equitable and value added and alignment of services and supports, school finance, school safety, and workforce development. Without closing achievement gaps, we'll continue to see disparities in graduation rates, college entrance rates, and educator preparation program enrollment. While closing achievement gaps before students get to college is vitally important, it's also key to focus on removing barriers that currently exist in our system that include singular high stakes tests such as basic skills competency and content test. I think has been referred to as Praxis I and Praxis II during some other testimonies as well. Providing alternative, yet rigorous pathways, provide an opportunity for individuals to demonstrate their true potential. We often see financial barriers regarding the costs of mandated tests, tuition costs, and teacher pay. There are also barriers around a lack of interstate reciprocity for teacher and administrator certification. Establishing reciprocity agreements can help encourage out-of-state educators to come to Nebraska and done right it can help safeguard the quality of educators as well. Solutions need to be focused around creating pathways and career ladders, pathways for students to be successful throughout their educational journey, and that start before they step foot in a kindergarten classroom but continues with them through their chosen career fields. We need students to experience success, find a passion and love for education, and find a meaning in their career field of education. We need to support grow-your-own programs like Educators Rising, para to teacher programs, and early childhood

education teacher career ladders. These pathways can't stop once we start realizing gains in the-- in the teacher workforce. But we also need to create ladder pathways through innovation-- innovative programs like the Tri-City ASCEND Academy, which is an innovative partnership between Grand Island, Hastings, and Kearney school systems to focus on improving the preparation, hiring support, and management of school leaders. As we realize gains, we also need to ensure we create a supportive environment and have a welcoming and inclusive culture in our communities. It's vital for teachers and administrators to be culturally competent, but also the community and state as a whole, because we know Nebraska is becoming more racially and ethnically diverse every year. We know that we must do this together and it's going to take people at every level of the system to pitch in, do the work, and have difficult conversations and grow as a state together to ensure the good life is for everyone. Thank you for your time.

WALZ: Thank you. Any questions from the committee? Senator Pansing Brooks.

PANSING BROOKS: Thank you. Thank you so much for being here. We really appreciate it. So you've heard a lot of discussion about Praxis, and I'd, I'd like to hear your opinion about that test. Whether you, I mean, it's obviously something that's-- is now seen as a complete barrier. So do you have some ideas on what might replace it? Could you talk about the politics of replacing it? And or if that-- if there is-- are there politics replacing it? I presume there are. And how can we get over those? And-- and I'm not talking politically on the floor of the Legislature. I'm just talking within education itself, so.

BRAD DIRKSEN: I think there's a-- a real support amongst all groups, as-- as you seen today, in regards to Praxis I. It's the basic skills competency requirement. She said is a maximum in state statute, not as a minimum. The State Board of Education has multiple times tried to move and create revisions to Rule 23, which is where we further define the examinations and test scores to be utilized. And we haven't been successful in-- in moving that past the-- the State Board of Education, and-- and we haven't ever had it signed off on through the Governor's Office for, for whatever reason. I-- as other testimony, other people have given testimony and it's been referenced like Dr. Steiner from Johns Hopkins University, it does not correlate with success in the classroom. It does appear to be a barrier. I think there are some potential solutions, how we define basic skills, competency and-- and what types of things we can utilize to demonstrate that I think needs to be maybe a little bit broader than just a test or work experiences. Maybe it's college classwork or college coursework or, or some other types of-- of components to it. So looking at the definition within state statute, that might be an approach to look at it. And then I know there's the-- with, with any of those, whether it's Praxis I, the basic skills competency, or we have the Praxis II with content tests, I think the real key is making

alternatives so a person's career isn't all on the line with one high-stakes test. Because we as educators know that one high-stakes test is not the right way to assess people. We need to give alternative pathways and different ways to show and demonstrate they're competent educators and are going to be successful in the field.

PANSING BROOKS: That's wonderful. That's a big help.

WALZ: Any other questions?

PANSING BROOKS: And could you-- can you help us work on that? What might be possible? Because I presume it needs to be changed in legislation. Is that correct? Are there any heads nodding in the background? Yes. So that does need to be changed via legislation. So I'm hoping that-- that the brilliant people in this room might get together and maybe we could call another meeting or something to contemplate what could be changed in state statute to make-- I mean, our number one issue for the state chamber is workforce development. So clearly we're, we're talking about all people. But certainly if you look at the numbers, workers of color and leaders of color are far more underrepresented. And so if we have actual barriers that we know about, it seems like the brilliant people in this room could get together and-- and see how to change that statute to be more flexible and embracing. And we can still get great teachers here. And of course, they're overseen by the administration as well. So I don't think we should be quite as worried as we have been. That's my thought right now. So maybe we'll try to organize-- our office will try to organize a meeting to get everybody together again for a roundtable of thoughts on this. Is that fine?

BRAD DIRKSEN: I do whatever the Commissioner will tell me to.
[LAUGHTER]

PANSING BROOKS: Oh, the Commissioner's back there doing the thumbs up. Good.

BRAD DIRKSEN: Nice, nice.

PANSING BROOKS: OK, we just got a thumbs up from the Commissioner of Education.

WALZ: I think you have a champion here, too, that leans that way.

PANSING BROOKS: Thank you. Good.

WALZ: Any other questions from the committee?

PANSING BROOKS: Thank you.

BRAD DIRKSEN: Thank you very much.

WALZ: Thank you so much. Well, I just want to say that before we end, this has been an LR that we have been very excited to-- to host today. Really, really appreciate everybody that came and testified, very appreciative of that. Not only do we have the need to increase teacher recruitment and retention, you know, just in general, but we certainly have a-- a need to increase diversity in teaching across our state. And I think that, you know, when we do that, the more we learn about each other, the better we become as a state. So, Senator Pansing Brooks, thank you so much for introducing this LR.

PANSING BROOKS: Thank you. Thank you to everybody.

WALZ: And that ends our hearing on LR157. Thank you.