

PANSING BROOKS: Good afternoon, everybody. Welcome to the Education Committee hearing. My name is Patty Pansing Brooks. I represent District 28 right here in the heart of Lincoln. And I am-- I am the presiding Chair of the committee today. The committee will take up bills in the order of posted agenda. Our hearing today is your public part of the legislative process. This is your opportunity to express your-- your position on the proposed legislation before us today. To better facilitate today's proceeding, I ask that you abide by the following procedures. Please turn off your cell phones and other electronic devices. The order of testimony is the introducer, proponents, opponents, neutral and then closing remarks. If you will-- if you will be testifying, please complete the green testifier sheet and hand to-- hand it to the committee clerk when you come up to testify. If you have-- if you have written materials that you would like to have distributed to the committee, please hand them to the page to distribute. We need 10 copies of all-- for all committee members and staff. If you need additional copies, please ask a page to and-- to make copies for you now. When you begin to testify, state and spell your name for the records. Please speak directly into the microphone so our transcribers are able to hear your testimony clearly to translate. If you are not testifying in person and would like to submit written comments to be included in the official hearing record as an exhibit, you will be-- you will find the link-- the required link on the bill page of the Nebraska Legislature's website. Comments are allowed once a bill has been scheduled for a public hearing and must be submitted and verified prior to 12 p.m. on the last work day prior to the public hearing. The comments submitted online and-- the comments submitted online and verified prior to the deadline and identified as comments for the public hearing record, will be the only method for submission of an official hearing record comments other than testifying in person. Letters and comments submitted via email or hand-delivered will no longer be included as a part of the hearing record, although they are a viable option for communicating your views with an individual or multiple senators. Finally, please be concise. Testimony will be limited to five minutes. We will be using the light system, the green-- the green light up here means that your time has started and you can begin speaking. Yellow means one minute is remaining, and so you should wrap up your comments and red means to please stop. The committee members with us today will begin introducing themselves, beginning at my far left.

SANDERS: Rita Sanders representing District 45, which is the Bellevue/Offutt community.

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LINEHAN: Lou Ann Linehan representing District 39, which is Elkhorn and Waterloo and Douglas County.

MURMAN: Hello. Senator Dave Murman from District 38 and I represent seven counties and part of an eighth along the Kansas border in the middle part of the state.

McKINNEY: Good afternoon. Tyrone McKinney. I represent District 11, which is north Omaha.

PANSING BROOKS: Thank you. And to my immediate left is research analyst, Nicole Barrett, and to my right and at the end of the-- yeah, right, at the end of the table is committee clerk, Noah Boger, and our pages today who will be helping us are Bhagya Pushkaran and Savana Brakemen. So please remember senators may come and go during our hearing as they may have bills to introduce in other committees. I'd also like to remind our committee members to speak directly into the microphones and limit side conversations. And we are an electronics equipped committee and information is provided electronically as well as in paper form, so you may see committee members referencing information on our electronic devices. Be assured that your presence here today and your testimony are important to us and is crucial to the form of our state government. Thank you all. And with that, we will open the hearing of Senator Vargas, LB960. Welcome, Senator Vargas.

VARGAS: Vice Chairwoman Pansing Brooks, members of the Education Committee, my name is Tony Vargas, T-o-n-y V-a-r-g-a-s. Going to do just a quick handout, thank you. I represent District 7. Thank you very much. The communities of downtown and south Omaha in the Nebraska Legislature and today I'm happy to introduce LB960, which would remove the basic skill and content tests requirements for teachers and administrators, which is fulfilled through a series of Praxis exams. Now, a little background information about the Praxis exams. To receive or passing school an applicant must achieve four different metrics across three separate portions of the test. Going to remove this mask because I'm really fogging up here. One hundred and fifty six or above in reading, 150 or above in mathematics, 162 or above in writing and a composite score of 468 or above, with no single portion being more than one point below the specified minimum scores. The Praxis core exam can also be rather expensive for our soon to be educators, costing \$150 for the combined reading, writing and mathematics tests. It doesn't account for the years of work and preparation that these students have already put into their field. In

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addition to the Praxis core, prospective teachers must also take the Praxis Subject Assessments Exam, a teaching endorsement in their intended subject area. These subject assessments range in the cost of \$60 to \$199. Now, before I get into the details of LB960, I want to emphasize that teachers, and there are many behind us, go through a lengthy process of coursework, specialized certifications, student teaching and preparation before entering their own classroom or even getting hired. Having gone through this process myself, I can tell you that it is not easy. In January, Senator Walz graciously agreed to host a roundtable with the Education Committee and a wide variety of professionals from the education world to discuss the education workforce shortage and some of the issues surrounding certification and teacher retention. I know that's not news to all of you, but for the public and for those that have-- don't have a teacher, friend or family member, it is truly an issue and has been with this pandemic, especially this year. It is apparent that one way we can get teachers into the classrooms is by eliminating the requirement for basic skill and content tests requirements. Standardized testing is a barrier for many students. Whether they have trouble with the time portion, English is their second language or they're missing the requirement by just a few points. The Praxis test is an expensive hurdle that is not serving our prospective teachers, our students or our education system. A standardized test does not and should not determine what type of teachers they will be for our students. Many of you sitting here have worked in classrooms or with students in other settings or visited classrooms, or have loved ones that have been teachers. As you all reflect on your coursework, training and preparation for these different positions, I would like you to ask yourself if another step in the process of time standardized test would have made a difference in your abilities to serve the students in our state. And instead think about all the hours of practicum work of real world experience, of time and coursework being taught by professors or other entities, and how valuable that is to making sure that you are ready to be a teacher. There are testifiers behind me that can speak more about the barriers the Praxis test presents and the need to remove this requirement. With that, I'll close and be happy to answer any questions. Let me just-- one addition here. I know this is not new to all of us that there is a shortage of teachers. There are a lot of reasons of barriers behind it. There's not one silver bullet or panacea that it will address this shortage, at least in my opinion. But at least what we can do is identify best Praxis in what we've seen. And as many of you know, across this pandemic, many states have waived the Praxis exam or core subjects exams because they wanted to

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make sure teachers were getting into classrooms. And what we're finding is we need to be as nimble as humanly possible. I'm not the only one bringing a bill of this similar type, which means there's something we can and should be doing in this arena because in the meantime, we're overrelying on our teachers to fill in vacancies and their planning time and their time meant to then co-plan with people for special education needs, or even take their mental health breaks to do their own work for their classroom. And that burden is exponentially making it more difficult for our teacher workforce to be sustained. And so with that, I'm happy to answer any questions. We will have teachers that will express their different stories, experiences with the Praxis. Thank you.

PANSING BROOKS: Thank you, Senator Vargas. Anybody have a question for Senator Vargas? Yes, Senator Linehan.

LINEHAN: Thank you. Senator Pansing Brooks. Do you know any of the history of this, like, when did it start and why did it start, the Praxis?

VARGAS: I can get you more information. I find that there is always a-- there are a lot of testing administrative-- you know, administrative companies that create these tests and they evolve over time. So from my-- let me just pull this up because I have this as a reference here. Believe one of the testing companies had a-- it was called something different and then it evolved and became the Praxis. And-- and that is just what they utilize because it was-- it was the most valid or reliable test that they had. However, as one thing that is mentioned here, we did see percentages of certain different types of students that were not doing well in these tests, and it was one barrier for them. So, but I'll find out the exact history, and I can share that with you.

LINEHAN: OK, thank you very much. Thank you. Any other questions? Yes, Senator McKinney.

McKINNEY: Thank you. Senator Vargas, I was curious, has any other state done away with some of this as well? Or are they-- is there some work.

VARGAS: We can get you that information. I probably think the most relevant is many states, you know, New York, Louisiana and others have made and waived this amidst the pandemic. And I'm sure what we're going to see is many of these states going down the route of

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completely removing it, largely because it has enabled them to be nimble and keep teachers in the classroom and bring teachers in. As you know, when we don't have that flexibility, what we end up relying on are a lot of our retired teachers or subs, which is also a burden on the system as well. And so, yeah, we've seen strong examples in many states and I bring up New York and Louisiana because they are very fundamentally different areas, but they waived the same requirement and it has been working.

McKINNEY: Thank you.

PANSING BROOKS: Thank you. Senator McKinney. Yes, Senator Murman.

MURMAN: Thank you. Thank you. Senator Vargas, for bringing this. Once a teacher is-- has passed all the tests and got certified, how long are they certified, if it-- you know, for instance, if they don't teach for a year or two or three years?

VARGAS: I think--

MURMAN: how long will it be in effect?

VARGAS: Yeah. So my understanding is this is really dependent on states' teacher certification laws and rules and regs. Like in New York, there is a specific amount of time you need to continue renewing your teacher certification. But the crux of this is, in this bill we will remove the requirement of having to pass the Praxis or, you know, the core or the subject specific to be able to be-- be a teacher. And in doing that, it would make it easier for people to get into the profession.

MURMAN: Could I ask one more?

PANSING BROOKS: Sure.

MURMAN: Well, part of the reason I'm asking is, you know, I realize the severe teacher shortage that we have right now, there is potential for retired teachers or even teachers that have gone on to a different business, you know, to possibly come back at least part-time. And-- and I'm not sure that that brings up another question what-- what are the certifications for-- for teaching part time? But you know, maybe these questions will be answered later, but I'm hoping we can use that potential for, you know, increasing the teacher workforce.

VARGAS: Well, I appreciate this committee because they have worked on legislation making it easier for teacher reciprocity, having introduced the bill in the past that would have created an easier pathway to be able to teach temporarily for two years, which I think would have really helped in this pandemic. But there is more that we can do in this arena to then get people to the classroom, so we're not overreliance on our retired teachers.

MURMAN: Thank you.

PANSING BROOKS: Any additional questions? Thank you. Are you going to stay too close?

VARGAS: Yeah, I will stay.

PANSING BROOKS: OK, thank you. So now we'll take proponents. The first proponent, if you please. Welcome.

JENNI BENSON: Hello, senators, my name is Jenni Benson. I am the president of the Nebraska State Education Association and I am here to represent our 28,000 NSEA members who support LB960. Thank you, Senator Vargas, for introducing this bill. We need to eliminate the Praxis court examination as an entry requirement to teacher education. Today, you will hear some specific testimony regarding the reasons why this is necessary to address some significant issues regarding this test. I'm going to spend my time telling you some real life experiences that I've had with the Praxis and Senator Linehan, we have a staff member do extensive research about the-- the lineage of where it came from. And I'll get you that information, for sure. Thank you. I was great at taking standardized tests when I was a kid. They were easy for me. I never gave it a lot of thought and I always did pretty well. But I didn't know what it meant until seventh grade when they said I didn't have to take reading because my score was so high. So I got to be a teacher's aide instead of taking reading. Shortly after I graduated from UNL with my degrees in special education and elementary education, my husband and family moved to Austin, Texas. I graduated in December and applied to teach special ed. Back then, there wasn't much of a shortage. There-- there was definitely extra folks. They had two openings in the entire Austin Independent School district in special ed, and I took one of them. They told me I'd need several tests in order to be certified to teach in Texas. And I paid a large amount of money. That was 40 years ago. I remember it was a significant amount of money for our young family, and I took my certification tests. Then I received a letter that said,

congratulations, you are now lifetime certified in the state of Texas. I was like, do they know what kind of teacher I am? Nope, but I could pass a test and I did. Pre-COVID, I was having coffee with Senator Vargas in Omaha. Our conversation was being overheard and we were talking about a test called the Praxis. A young woman came up to us and she said that she had just graduated from college, from a Nebraska college that had suddenly closed. She got her degree, but they had never had her take the Praxis, ever, during her entire four years. She found out that she had a degree that didn't mean anything because she had to take the Praxis. They told her she could go back to school and then take this test again. She was desperately trying to study at that coffee shop because she had two young boys at home. I gave her my card and we went out for lunch. She was working as a para at OPS. As a young woman of color she was ready to be a teacher. She was so excited to work with kids who could see themselves in her. I provided her with some resources and we have kept in touch. Last week, she reached out and said, have you made any progress on this Praxis? She still can't pass the math section. She didn't stop working at OPS and now is working in a preschool. My final story is very personal. I have four grown children. Three of them have graduate degrees. School testing came easy for them. My daughter, Joy, has an associate's degree in early childhood education from Southeast Community College. She taught Headstart for seven years and a nonprofit in Crete. She was making about \$14 an hour after seven years and she was laid off every summer. She has four children, two that will graduate from school this year that are 18-year-old kids that graduated-- or were in foster care. And then when COVID happened, with the encouragement of her mother, me. I said, get back to school, get your bachelor's degree in early childhood. She went to Peru State. She transferred to UNK. She started working as a para at LPS, and she took her classes online. She has taken the math test seven times. She finally passed. Whoo. She has taken the reading tests five times. She finally passed. She's taken the writing exam five times. She has yet to pass. She's the hardest person I know-- working person I know. She has a GPA at UNK, currently a 3.97. She is thoughtful and she's a dedicated student, and she was a wonderful head start teacher for seven years, but she has trouble with time tests and she's about to give up. So I went to the Praxis website and it said the Praxis test measures the knowledge and skills you need to prepare for the classroom, whether you're entering to be a teacher, preparation program, seeking your certification, these tests will help you on your journey to becoming a qualified educator. I won't say what I think about that, but I think it's silly. No test has ever made your journey to be an educator better. No test makes you do better. They

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just cost a lot of money. When NACA started looking at various to recruiting students to the profession, one of the top barriers was the Praxis. Thousands of dollars later, it is still a barrier.

PANSING BROOKS: Ms. Benson.

JENNI BENSON: Thank you.

PANSING BROOKS: Sorry.

JENNI BENSON: Yeah, that's OK.

PANSING BROOKS: We have a lot of people and--

JENNI BENSON: Yeah.

PANSING BROOKS: Thank you for coming. Let's see if there's some questions for you. Those were great stories, and it's really important to hear stories of actual people taking them on what's happening, so thank you for that. Anybody have a question? No. Was it at the end, you were basically talking about that, you feel that the test helps helps the Praxis people make money, that's what--

JENNI BENSON: It sure does, yeah.

PANSING BROOKS: And so that's sort of where you're ending on that right?

JENNI BENSON: Yeah.

PANSING BROOKS: OK.

JENNI BENSON: Thank you.

PANSING BROOKS: Well, I see no questions, thank you for being here today.

JENNI BENSON: Yeah, thank you.

PANSING BROOKS: Next proponent. Welcome.

ADRIANNE KRUGER: Good afternoon, members of the Education Committee. My name is Adrienne Kruger and I'm a junior at Wayne State College studying education. I have served--

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PANSING BROOKS: Could you spell your name, please, for the record.
Thank you.

ADRIANNE KRUGER: A-d-r-i-a-n-n-e K-r-u-g-e-r.

PANSING BROOKS: Thank you, Ms. Kruger.

ADRIANNE KRUGER: I have served the NSEA aspiring educators as president, northeast region rep, and I'm currently the secretary. I'm speaking to you today with my experiences and to fellow test-takers experiences with Praxis. I'm so sorry if I start crying.

PANSING BROOKS: Don't worry.

ADRIANNE KRUGER: For the past three years, I have taken Praxis and have not passed. I was an education major at Wayne State College. It is required that I pass the Praxis before I can even move into my upper level education courses. Within these three years, I have contemplated changing my major, dropping out of college and finding new avenues to move on with my education. Oh, sorry.

PANSING BROOKS: You're doing fine. So we're-- we're grateful for you to be here and give your testimony and thank you, that's wonderful.

ADRIANNE KRUGER: This test is a problem for many reasons. This test is a financial burden on students that can't even pass on the first try. I personally have spent almost \$850 trying to pass one test. That \$850 could have gone towards my tuition, books or even personal bills. As a student with a disability, I feel it is incredibly hard to get accommodations for taking the Praxis, especially because so few options for accommodations actually exist. I feel this also creates a barrier with-- barriers for students with a disability to move forward in education. I understand that it takes time for the accommodations to be put in place, but this is time I do not have. I also have tried many studying tactics and even have hired private tutors to help me pass. Recently, I have had to submit an application to be an interdisciplinary studies major in education and family studies just so I can graduate on time. A bilingual friend of mine said the writing portion of the test was hardest for her. Even though she passed the reading and math portions, she felt many times when she failed the Praxis she wanted to give up on education. She feels this test doesn't determine if you're going to be a great educator or not. This test only proves that some know the basic skills better than others. When she started her freshman year at Wayne State College, she and a group

of nine other students began studies to become educators. By the time graduation came, only three completed their education degrees. This was all a result of not passing the Praxis. Another friend of mine, a mother of three who works three jobs, has passed the math and reading parts of the test. But she has been trying to pass the writing portion for more than 4 years. She has now taken the writing portion 10 times, which has cost her \$900. She recalled that the Board of Education has stated that if you are one point away from passing the one test, you-- or passing one test you have passed the other-- you have passed the other two. They will waive it and allow you to pass. The Praxis is scored on a two-point scale, so she is technically within that one point. She would like the Praxis to tell people where they went wrong so they can figure out how they can improve. She also feels this test is a poor indicator of whether one will be a good teacher. I quote her saying, teaching comes from the heart and truly caring about students. As future educators of Nebraska, we understand why we have to take the Praxis two. That's in our content areas. We get that. But why the Praxis one? That's just basic skills. People wonder why we are struggling to find teachers. Ask a former education major why they switched, and they'll firmly tell you it was because they couldn't pass the Praxis one. Please consider LB690. Get rid of the barrier that is keeping aspiring educators from becoming great teachers. Thank you.

PANSING BROOKS: Thank you, Ms. Kruger. It's important that you came to speak to us today and we appreciate your courage.

ADRIANNE KRUGER: Um-hum.

PANSING BROOKS: Any questions for Ms. Kruger? Yes, Senator Murman.

MURMAN: Thank you, and thank you for testifying and-- and I feel for you spending so much trying to get all these tests-- this test completed. Would-- there is two different kinds of tests, apparently from the way you described it, there's a basic skills that tells you if you're qualified, I guess, to just be an all around teacher--

ADRIANNE KRUGER: Yes.

MURMAN: --supposedly, and then--

ADRIANNE KRUGER: Yep.

MURMAN: --then the one that whatever you're going to specialize in for teaching.

ADRIANNE KRUGER: Correct.

MURMAN: Do you feel that the-- if you just eliminate the basic skills one, that would be a good avenue to go because, you know, it is important, especially that you're fluent in-- not fluent, but good at whatever you're going to teach.

ADRIANNE KRUGER: Yes.

MURMAN: So you'd be OK with eliminating just the first one and not--

ADRIANNE KRUGER: Yes.

MURMAN: --specials.

ADRIANNE KRUGER: Typically the Praxis two is taken during your student teaching semester, wherever you're going to college and they ask you to have that taken because they want to make sure you understand what you're going to teach. But I don't believe the Praxis one is a great avenue anymore because it's basic skills. And for me, who is someone that doesn't do well with standardized testing, this is just another standardized test that I don't think it's worth it anymore. And I'm going to be honest, I am burnt out on taking it. Like I said, I've spent so much money on this test. I'm pretty much ready to be done.

MURMAN: I have one more question. You mentioned a disability and I can understand if you have a disability, and maybe that would affect one certain part of taking a test, that that would be a hindrance.

ADRIANNE KRUGER: Yes.

MURMAN: Would you mind telling us what the disability is?

ADRIANNE KRUGER: So I have a specific learning disability in math and reading, and that's two of the major portions of the Praxis one. So those two areas are big struggles for me, but even the writing is a struggle for me. Yes, I had a great education growing up, but I graduated high school in 2014. It is now 2022 and I'm still trying to pass basic skills that have changed in the last 7-- 8 years.

MURMAN: Thank you.

PANSING BROOKS: Any other questions? Well, thank you very much for coming today, Ms. Kruger. Next proponent. Proponent? Welcome.

BRIAN HALSTEAD: Good afternoon, members of the Education Committee. For the record, my name is Brian Halstead, B-r-i-a-n H-a-l-s-t-e-a-d. I'm with the Nebraska Department of Education, and we want to acknowledge and support the Legislature's efforts in trying to address the educator workforce shortage, the barriers created by a single basic skills test and having the opportunity to have basic skills demonstrated in other ways. You're going to hear this from me on the next bill and the last bill you're going to hear today. We're looking for the flexibility in-- in that regard. So I'll stop right there and see if you have any questions.

PANSING BROOKS: OK, thank you. Thank you, Mr. Halstead. Any questions? Senator Linehan.

LINEHAN: Thank you, Senator Pansing Brooks. How long have we been using this test? How long does Department of Education-- I think you have been here a while. I think maybe you know.

BRIAN HALSTEAD: So the Praxis, I think that we're talking about now, that's been the test since about 2014 or '15 because the previous version of the test was no longer provided by the vendor. So we had to pick a new test in that regard. The basic skills competency exam has been a legislative requirement since the mid-1980s.

LINEHAN: But the basic one, is that the one we're having issues with or is it the other one?

BRIAN HALSTEAD: The one to demonstrate the basic skills in reading, writing and mathematics, that's--

LINEHAN: But we didn't have an issue with it before we changed vendors?

BRIAN HALSTEAD: No, I think there has always been historically issues with some individuals not being able to pass portions of that or just, as you've heard, some individuals on a time test, it just doesn't work.

LINEHAN: So it's always time. There's no waiving of the time on it.

BRIAN HALSTEAD: I can't speak to all of the past versions and everything else, but I think from the department's perspective, we're not confident that a single test is going to determine basic skills competency for every human being.

LINEHAN: OK. Thank you.

BRIAN HALSTEAD: Sure.

PANSING BROOKS: Any other questions? Yes, Senator Murman.

MURMAN: Thank you, Senator Pansing Brooks, and thanks for testifying. Would-- would you be open, you know, with the shortage in teachers that we have right now to putting a sunset on one or both of the tests? You know, so once we, you know, two or three or four years, whatever it takes to get through the shortage that it could be removed?

BRIAN HALSTEAD: Well, so we are trying to provide at the moment all the flexibility we can at the department to give individuals a certificate or permit just for the immediacy of the pandemic. We're-- we're still subject to the statutes that drive this. And we're also still subject to the regulations that have been promulgated, so we're doing what we can. The department, the board has tried in the last five or six years to make changes to the regulation that deals with basic skills. We've not been successful in getting that all the way through the rulemaking process. We're still looking at and trying to work on it, but we do acknowledge that the Legislature has a role in this and we're here to work with you on any methodology to remove the basic skills one test as a requirement for people to get into the profession.

MURMAN: Thank you.

PANSING BROOKS: Any other questions? I guess I have one. Do you have any knowledge, Mr. Halstead, or maybe somebody else does, of the percentage of people who are educated and then have difficulty and are waiting and take the test multiple times?

BRIAN HALSTEAD: I don't have that with me. I can go back and see if we can derive that information. We get about several thousand applications a year to the-- give you the exact numbers. I don't have that with me.

PANSING BROOKS: OK. Maybe somebody can get that for us. Thank you very much. OK. Senator McKinney has a question.

McKINNEY: Thank you. I was curious. Do you have any numbers on the number of job openings in school districts across the state versus the

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amount of individuals who have education degrees? We can't pass the tact-- Praxis currently?

BRIAN HALSTEAD: We do collect from school districts information about job postings they've been unable to fill. So we do-- we do produce for a U.S. Department of Ed report that ties in to loan forgiveness there so I can get you those numbers of the most recent that we have. I forgot the other data source you were asking-- comparing to individuals who don't pass the test?

McKINNEY: Yeah, yeah.

BRIAN HALSTEAD: If we have the numbers of individuals who don't pass, I'm sure we can get you that too. I don't think we do an analysis of comparing the two.

McKINNEY: OK. Thank you.

PANSING BROOKS: I don't see any other questions. Thank you for coming, Mr. Halstead. Next proponent.

JOHN SKRETTA: Good afternoon, Chair Walz, senators, members of the Education Committee. My name is John Skretta. That's J-o-h-n S-k-r-e-t-t-a. I'm the administrator of Educational Service Unit Six. We're headquartered in Milford. We serve 16 public school districts that are within our geographic area, and I am also the secretary for STANCE, which is Schools Taking Action for Nebraska Children's Education. And I'm here today to start off by expressing my gratitude to Senator Vargas for continuing to advocate for and take initiative to help address the issues that are in front of the Education Committee here today, and tomorrow, where you're working very diligently. And I want to express my gratitude collectively to the committee on behalf of STANCE and the SUCC for your work to address educator workforce shortage issues. So starting with that, just a little bit more about I'm here in the capacity as an ESU administrator, also representing ESUCC, which is the Coordinating Council. That's the umbrella organization representing Nebraska's ESUs. And a little bit about STANCE. STANCE is the coalition of 19 mid-sized Nebraska public school districts that really covers the state from Chadron to Blair and have-- having levies that range from a \$1.05 to 60 cents with enrollment populations that range from 800-plus to almost 4,000. So a pretty diverse group that really has robust conversations about what we consider and support in terms of legislative policy. You're going to see me in front of you as a

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proponent for all three of the bills today and starting with LB960, we're very supportive of it because we believe that it is an aggressive yet appropriate step to clearing a path to promote educator pipeline development. We don't think that Praxis basic skills was ever intended to become the high stakes hurdle or obstacle or impediment to moving into and getting through a teacher ed program that it's become and that you've heard eloquently described for you by some folks who themselves have directly experienced the hardship that can be, unfortunately, put upon someone in repeated attempts to pass that when they're otherwise performing, not just adequately, but very well academically. I also want to make sure that I mention that, and you'll hear from some of the folks representing NAACP here later today, convened an educator shortage summit in October. There's a group of higher ed and school administrators that represent both district and building level personnel who have identified as a task force outcome of that initiative to eliminate the obstacle of Praxis. And so there's, I think, a great deal of choral refrain in the education community around this now, and that newly formed committee is working diligently to want to eliminate these requirements, so I'm happy to be here today to speak in support of LB960. And with that, I'll-- I'll open it up for questions if there are any.

WALZ: Questions from the committee? Senator Murman.

MURMAN: Thank you, Senator Walz, and thank you, Mr. Skretta, for testifying. So you are advocating for eliminating only the Praxis one, not the Praxis two.

JOHN SKRETTA: Actually we're-- we're in favor of eliminating the whole darn thing. And we're in favor of greater flexibility to just get the-- get the thing moving and-- and we believe that it is appropriate to trust the professional judgment of the educator prep institutions that work with our pre-service teachers.

MURMAN: Thank you.

JOHN SKRETTA: Yeah.

WALZ: Any other questions from the committee? I see none, thank you.

JOHN SKRETTA: Thank you.

WALZ: Next proponent.

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BILL ARFMANN: I don't think I can speak through this thing. Senator Walz, Senator Pansing Brooks, members of the committee, my name is William Arfmann, Bill Arfmann. That's spelled A-r-f-m-a-n-n.. I'm retired and lived almost all my life-- adult life in Lancaster County. I'm here today on behalf of the Lincoln branch of the NAACP, Nebraskans for Peace and the Let's Talk Alliance, which is an ALEC, lifelong learning group, other retirees like myself. To testify in support of LB960, I felt a bit uncertain about coming into a live hearing as this pandemic continues. I guess it's in that context that I want to thank all of the senators and staff members who show up. And in particular, I want to thank you for the fine work you did, as LR157 was considered this past interim. We are in support of eliminating the Praxis testing requirement. Through my participation in the organizations that are referenced above, I've been privileged to work closely with individuals such as Dr. Paulson, who spent his lifetime at UNO working with education, Dr. Dewayne Mays, who is the president of the NAACP. He's with us today and Dr. Carol McClain. She's a lifelong educator. With those folks, I've studied the current teacher certification requirements in Nebraska, and I'm here also as a grandparent of four kids, four children currently in Nebraska's public schools. I support not LB960, frankly, I'm here to support the other two bills that you're considering today also. I believe that the research does not demonstrate that there's a correlation between passing the Praxis and competence as a teacher. In fact, the John Hopkins Institute for Educational Policy recommendation to Nebraskans notes and this is quote, admission tests for teachers are expensive to take, and they have not been shown to correlate strongly with teacher effectiveness. A second reason for this legislation is that Praxis testing is clearly a major obstacle in recruiting and retaining more teachers of color in Nebraska schools. Presently in our state, about one-third of our students are students of color. In communities like Lincoln, Grand Island, Lexington and others, the proportion of students of color in relationship to the total student population has grown a great deal during my adult lifetime. The number of teachers of color has not grown. We have as a state and our individual districts, not been effective in recruiting teachers of color. Seems to me that would help if students were to have more-- if students of color were to have more contact with teachers who look like they do. And frankly, it's beneficial also for white students, my grandkids to interact more often with teachers of color. White kids educational experience will be much more rich as they have the opportunity to interact with diverse adult role models. As you learn, LR157 hearing, Praxis testing, especially when it's the one and only means to enter into the

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teaching profession, is a major obstacle. If we hope to do better in recruitment, retention of teachers of color in our state, this quite simply has to be eliminated. An NEA report from 2019 estimated that each year the Praxis exam screen almost half--screened out almost half the people of color taking that exam, which is much higher than the exclusion of white students taking that exams test. It's for those reasons that we recommend that you support and report out LB960. And in the interest of time, if I may, let me add our whole committee reports out LB690 and LB1218. I might hope that you would consider cobbling together the best of these three bills. Thank you, and I'd be happy to answer your questions.

WALZ: Thank you very much. Questions from the committee? Senator Linehan.

LINEHAN: Thank you, Chairman-- Chairwoman Walz. So in your third paragraph-- thank you for being here. That last line in NEA report, that's the National Education Association?

BILL ARFMANN: Yes.

LINEHAN: OK, the screen out almost half of people of color, so that'd be 50 percent, right?

BILL ARFMANN: Yes.

LINEHAN: And then it says, which is much higher, .7, .5. So according to these numbers, questions were asked before, it's screening out half the people of color and a little over 20-- or 27.1 percent of white kids.

BILL ARFMANN: Yes, that's my-- that's my understanding, Senator.

LINEHAN: That's very helpful. Thank you.

WALZ: Other questions from the committee? Senator Pansing Brooks.

PANSING BROOKS: Thank you for coming here today. I appreciate it, Mr. Arfmann. I also just want to thank you for mentioning LB-- LR157. We did have a hearing on these exact issues, and Praxis was front and center about, you know, but we need to get rid of that exam. And it was pretty wholeheartedly supported all the way around but that was the need-- the need for changes now. So thank you for bringing that up too. That was my-- my resolution for the study. Thank you very much.

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BILL ARFMANN: Thank you, Senator Pansing Brooks.

WALZ: Any other questions from the committee? Are you planning on testifying on all three of the--

BILL ARFMANN: I was hoping to--

WALZ: OK. All right. Thank you so much--

BILL ARFMANN: Thank you.

WALZ: --for coming today. Next proponent. Good afternoon.

DEWAYNE MAYS: Good afternoon. I'm Major Dewayne Mays. I am president of the Lincoln branch NAACP, so Mr. Arfmann has just given much of our discussion. So what I'll try to do for you is to share a little bit of my experiences. In addition to the meetings with the different organizations and our collaboration, I just want to share just a little bit additional information experience. I have three sisters that are retired teachers in another state, so I've tried to talk to them and find out as much as I can about education because I'm not an educator. My wife is an educator of 27 years. She's retired. We tried very hard to talk our children into perhaps being in education. At least my wife did. But guess what? She couldn't. Of my siblings and cousins about 10 teachers in my family. They are only two young teachers that are in my family that chose to go into teaching. And I'm not sure why. Yes, I know why. Because the pay and the requirement. Praxis is a barrier to teachers or to potential teachers of power. Yesterday, I was talking to a friend and I happened to mention Praxis and another person was passing by, and that caught her attention and she said, that Praxis. Her daughter, who has a bachelor's and master's degree, but she wasn't in teaching so she decided to go back, so she had to do all of that. The prep has had problems passing Praxis, even though she has that education background and done a very good job so far. So I would suggest, if I could, that we eliminate Praxis, both Praxis one and two, because it is a barrier rather than a helping. Realizing the shortage of teachers and certainly the teachers of color within the state of Nebraska, if we don't do something-- something soon, we're going to be in real trouble, so.

WALZ: Thank you so much. Questions for the committee? Senator McKinney.

McKINNEY: Thank you. And thank you for coming and your testimony. I was wondering, do you have any historical knowledge on when our state

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and maybe other states began to require standardized tests for individuals that wanted to go into the teaching profession? And if so, what was the reason?

DEWAYNE MAYS: I don't know exactly when, because I worked in Texas before I came to Nebraska a number of years ago, and I still had contact with friends who lived in Texas and who had-- some of the friends were telling us they had to take Praxis. And how-- what a hard time they had taking Praxis because some of them had been in the educational field for quite a while, but still they have to take Praxis. And so I don't know how many were eliminated, but I'm sure that there were some. But I know that it caused a lot of stress that could have been-- could have been focused on educating our students.

McKINNEY: All right, thank you.

WALZ: Thank you. Any other questions from the committee? I have a quick question. First of all, did you spell your name?

DEWAYNE MAYS: D-e-w-- well, Major, M-a-j-o-r D-e-w-a-y-n-e M-a-y-s.

WALZ: OK, thank you. And then my other question is, are you testifying on behalf of all three bills today, LB960, LB690?

DEWAYNE MAYS: Yes.

WALZ: Right now?

DEWAYNE MAYS: Yes.

WALZ: OK. All right. Thank you so much. We appreciate you coming in today.

DEWAYNE MAYS: Thank you.

WALZ: Next proponent. Are you testifying on all three or--

NICOLE FOX: Two of the three.

WALZ: OK.

NICOLE FOX: Chairman-- Chairperson Walz, and members of Education Committee, Nicole Fox, N-i-c-o-l-e F-o-x, director of government relations for the Platte Institute and I'm here in support of LB960. During prior legislative sessions, the Platte supported occupational licensing efforts brought forth by both Senator Vargas and also by

Senator Sanders. Last year we supported LB558 and LB389. Both were brought forward to address teacher shortages and to reduce barriers to those who are seeking licensure. LB960 would remove the requirement for the Praxis exams to enter into a teaching-- teacher education program or prove competence. And we thank Senator Vargas for bringing this bill. It would allow teachers educated in Nebraska to prove their competence through their school's academic offerings and training, and it would enable those educated outside of Nebraska who may come from a state that doesn't use a Praxis exam for certification, to become-- to potentially come and be a part of our education workforce without jumping through those hoops. We believe it's important to remember with this, as with all state licensing and certification issues, that no state certification or licensure guarantees competence. It just assures that a hoops may jump through. Those licensed or certified will still need to prove that they are capable of teaching, whether through their student teaching programs or through their experience and recommendations. And also they'll have to go, of course, through a job interview. An occupational license of any sort doesn't guarantee a job or that a person will be good if they get that job. Just as a driver's license doesn't ensure that a person is a safe driver or will never get in an accident. We encourage the advancement of the principles found in LB960, whether standalone or perhaps as a part of an amendment to LB1218, which you should have received a letter of support from the Platte Institute. So, Senator Walz, to answer your question, we do support LB1218. We submitted that as a letter of support for that.

WALZ: All right.

NICOLE FOX: And with that, that concludes my testimony.

WALZ: Questions from the committee? Thank you. Next proponent. Any opponents? Anybody that would like to testify in neutral? Senator Vargas, would you like to close?

VARGAS: OK. Hi, everyone. I'm going to try to clarify some things that will be a little helpful because there are differences between my bill and the other bills. My bill will eliminate both of the Praxis, the one and two, the core subjects and the general. And the reason why this is important is because of the place that we're currently in. I studied biology courses and science courses in undergraduate. I was able to become a middle school science teacher because of that. I took a equivalent of the Praxis core subject exam for science and the actual equivalent of a Praxis one. Neither one of those tested my

ability to be a teacher, and I can fundamentally say that to you. I had to take coursework to understand the content knowledge of what it took to teach. Just like many of our teachers, let's say, for example, at UNO or state college system or UNL are taking courses that are both subject specific and competencies for teachers to be able to teach. I encourage you to Google. There's many different articles or even opinion pieces on the state of teacher exams on whether or not they're actually assessing their ability to teach, or whether or not they're assessing a point in time on whether or not you can memorize facts, write a good essay which are typically what these exams do. So for a little bit of Senator Linehan's question, PETS also writes the SAT and the GR rating. Many of these tests have also been waived or removed in different states from higher education and for other different opportunities for post-secondary because they stopped seeing the correlation between getting that person into the profession, whether or not it was actually accurately assessing whether or not they would be good at that profession. I still think the same is true in this example. Teachers are going through a rigorous set of standards in their post-secondary education, coursework through their teachers, through the curriculum. And at some point in that journey, we asked them to take both the Praxis one and, of course, subject if it is deemed appropriate. And the question is, is that necessary if you have a rural community and you are struggling to find a science teacher? And you have people that could but have failed the Praxis and want to teach, but I've passed every requirement they need at, let's say, Peru State. But the one thing they didn't pass about the core subject and this subject specific, should we empower both the university and/or the principal in the school district that is making the decisions on whether or not that person is best fit to teach when right now we have a teacher shortage. That is the reason and I really do appreciate the language, at least from STANCE saying that this is an aggressive way and I don't mean aggressive in a negative way, is aggressive in saying, what are we really assessing here? Some data. California, I don't always use an example on things, but California, this instance saw that about 67 percent of first-time test-takers on the equivalent of the Praxis one, they went on and then we had about 30 something percent that failed, right?. The same percentage was carried on to the subject specific. Pretty equivalent in terms of the number of people that failed on their first try. Even more interesting, there's a lot more new data that came amidst this pandemic that many aspiring teachers did not pass the state's licensing exam on the first attempt. And in fact, nearly a quarter of candidates across the country that took this licensing exam that failed, don't try again. There are

people taking this test that either the core or the subject specific that won't try it again and then move on to a different profession that does not require them to assess their ability to do the job through a standardized exam. That is the reason why it is included, both the Praxis one and the subject specific in this, because I ultimately think if you were trying to be in special education or if you're trying to be a science teacher, geography, I'm naming things that require a course subject, you know, Praxis exam. You actually have to take coursework and pass that coursework to assess your knowledge of it, and an essay in multiple choice questions are not going to assess whether or not you're the best equipped to learn that information. So with that, I'm happy to answer any questions. The last thing I'll say here is there's-- there's a very reason why I included both of these is both from my experience and what I have heard. And we do have a teacher shortage, both urban and rural. We need to be aggressive in giving the flexibility. We also need to acknowledge that our schools of education are really good schools of education. And also know that there's always a principal deciding on when they're going to hire a person, and that principal is going to decide whether or not we have the best content and subject specific person to be in that classroom, or they don't even have the choice and instead have to take another teacher from another class to cover and have more coverages that make it harder on the entire culture and on the existing teacher workforce. Happy to answer any questions.

PANSING BROOKS: Thank you, Senator Vargas. Any questions? Senator Day.

DAY: Thank you, Senator Pansing Brooks, and thank you, Senator Vargas. What is the timeline on this bill? So if we were to pass it to the floor and debate it and pass it this session, what's-- what group of students is this going to affect ?

VARGAS: My understanding, doesn't have any clause on it, but this would go into effect where all the other bills go in, so this would be in approximately July.

DAY: OK.

VARGAS: And then all the students from that point on, we could put an eclause on, make it immediate. I'm sure I'll look to my Department of Education and my higher education folks that it's something we can work on, but it's clearly urgent.

DAY: OK, thank you.

PANSING BROOKS: Any other questions? Senator Linehan.

LINEHAN: Thank you, Senator Pansing Brooks. I think somebody asked this before, but I don't know, so we ask you. Would you have-- would you be willing to accept like a three or four year sunset on it to review? So we review, did it work, did it not work? Some kind of automatic review of the system?

VARGAS: Absolutely not. I was going to say absolutely not. I couldn't keep a straight face. So, so the answer-- (LAUGHTER)

LINEHAN: Right.

VARGAS: --no, no, no. So the answer-- the answer is-- the answer is yes. And I think this is where we get to be really nimble, right? We can put a sunset on this. We can-- we can assess this. And here's the reason why. Five years ago, we had about 25 states that had some requirement for an-- a test. We're now down to 15 states that require a Praxis or equivalent test. It's been changing. If you remember, we've also had the G-- the GR fee-- the high school equivalency is also another one where we've been reducing it. Over the last several years in legislation that's either been brought or in rules and regs through the Departments of Education, they've required more robust reporting of data so that they can see just how many people are failing this the first time. Who are these people? Can we look at it and see whether or not this is really helping? So that's where some of this-- this data about the first, nearly a quarter of the candidates who failed do not try again was coming from, more robust data reporting being asked and I think you could do a sunset and then see how effective it is. I would 100 percent be open to that.

LINEHAN: OK. Thank you.

PANSING BROOKS: Any other questions? Yes, Senator Murman.

MURMAN: Thank you, and, and thank you for closing here. Of course, the Praxis is just one measure of how we measure the competency of teachers. You mentioned some others, you know, like the, the interview, the review by the principal and those things. I do think, you know, of course, the Praxis test is not perfect and even the subject specific one isn't perfect, but it's still a measure that possibly can be useful in some situations, at least, I would think. Did you consider at all keeping the Praxis test and reporting the score, but not using it as a yes or no for certification?

VARGAS: So I'm-- I'm open to that. I mean, this is-- this is going to be, you know, a larger conversation. I really geared towards trying to put myself in the mindset of the teachers that I've talked to or in my own mindset, which is, what's the best measure of whether or not I'm-- I'm a-- I'm a good teacher and I understand my subject specific information. I spent years studying coursework and doing shadowing in the classroom, portfolios, assessments, backwards plan, unit plans. And that really was more of what it-- what it really assessed my ability as a teacher. So I do agree. It is one piece of information that's a factor that could be assessed. I would be open to not making it a requirement for licensure, right? That's-- that's the-- that's the breaking point, because I'm sure in every one of our communities and districts, we have a teacher shortage and in subject specific areas.

MURMAN: Sure, especially in rural areas that I heard a lot about.

VARGAS: Especially in rural areas.

MURMAN: Thank you.

VARGAS: And this would really address that.

PANSING BROOKS: Any other questions? Yes, Senator Sanders.

SANDERS: Thank you, Senator Pansing Brooks. Senator Vargas, thank you for bringing LB960. Have you heard of any pushback from any teachers who have taken the test, studied hard, gotten through, are teachers now, and what their thoughts on teachers not being able to take the test or not having to take the test?

VARGAS: One, I won't claim to speak for all teachers. And it's a good question because I've thought about that a lot. And the answer that comes to mind has more to do with what I hear more of right now. The frustration I hear of teachers that are doing what they have to do to make things work in the classroom. Coverage may seem like a nominal thing to some, but having it happened multiple times in a week, if they had a choice between alleviating that and getting a teacher in a classroom that has gone through a similar pathway that they have and maybe didn't take to pass test, most of the teachers that I've talked-- talked about, expressed more concern about lack of planning time and more coverage time than whether or not it affects the teaching profession, the professionalism that comes along with it.

SANDERS: Thank you, Senator Vargas.

VARGAS: Thank you.

PANSING BROOKS: Senator Day.

DAY: Thank you, Senator Pansing Brooks. I just wanted to add anecdotally, I was an education major in the early 2000s, and I very distinctly remember the stress of taking the Praxis. I very distinctly remember many of my classmates not passing and the cost of having to take the test multiple times, the stress of having to take it multiple times, how that took away from the studies in the other classes, the-- the actual curriculum classes that they were taking. And in terms of measurements, I think to Senator Murman's point, there are measurements in those other classes. You still are taking exams and having to write essays in the regular classes that you're taking. So it's not if we eliminate the Praxis, we're-- we still have a measure of competency when it comes to the ability to be an educator, right? And so I anecdotally appreciate you bringing this bill because I think this may be a new conversation to the Legislature, but this is a conversation that's been happening for a very long time within education, so thank you.

VARGAS: And I appreciate that. And there's a quote. I will read that response to this because it came from California. California just changed this requirement for both basic and subject, and this is from the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, Mary Vixie, the executive director. This is a game changer for those who have dreamt of becoming a teacher only to find their paths blocked when they couldn't pass the basic skills or subject matter entrance exams. These tests are meant to accurately measure readiness to be-- to begin teacher preparation, but not to be a barrier that keeps potentially great teachers from learning to teach and to be in the classroom. As alternatives to high stakes testing, these measures will right size the role of testing and allow for a broader and more diverse array of people to make a career out of teaching when we need it the most. Thank you.

PANSING BROOKS: Thank you, Senator Vargas. Any other questions? So before we close the hearing, I want to announce that there were six position comments from-- who were proponents, Chip Kay, Maggie Ballard, representing Nebraskans for Peace, Major Mays representing the Lincoln branch of the NAACP, Marrienne Williams, representing herself, Paul Turman representing the Nebraska state colleges, and Rose Godinez representing the ACLU of Nebraska. And there was one opponent comment and that was from Doug Kagan representing Nebraska

Taxpayers for Freedom. So with that, we will close the hearing on LB960. Thank you, Senator Vargas, and we will now open the hearing on LB690 with Senator Blood, and we just went from LB960 to LB690, so those of you with knowledge of dyslexia, that is a difficult transition, so. Welcome, Senator Blood.

BLOOD: Well, thank you, Vice Chair Pansing Brooks, and good afternoon to the Education Committee. My name is Senator Carol Blood, which is spelled C-a-r-o-l B-l-o-o-d, and I represent District 3, which is western Bellevue and southeastern Papillion, Nebraska. Thank you for the opportunity to bring forward LB690, to the esteemed Education Committee. As you know, Nebraska is experiencing a teacher shortage. We know that during the 2021 school year, Nebraska reported teacher shortages in areas that included art, music, special ed, world languages, English as a second language, math, science, gift education, early childhood education, and career technical education among the long list of areas needing educators in Nebraska schools. This teacher shortage is not something that has happened as a result of the pandemic, but certainly something that has become more serious and pressing since the start of the pandemic. As you may know, the first step toward Nebraska teacher certification is completing a 4-year bachelor's degree from an accredited school and an approved teacher preparation program. Teacher preparation must include student teaching, observations and internships, as you just heard from Senator Vargas. In addition, Nebraska law requires human relations training as part of teacher preparation. A course in special education is also required. Nebraska has a recency requirement which stipulates that candidates for teacher certification must have taken six semester hours of teacher preparation courses within the five years prior to applying for a certificate. Besides completing the educator preparation program, individuals seeking Nebraska teaching certification must also pass two assessments. The first is the Praxis Core Academic Skills Test, which assesses the basic skills of first-time teachers in Nebraska, the second testing requirement in Nebraska is the Praxis subject assessment. Each candidate must pass the content-specific subject assessment in his or her endorsement area before being considered for a Nebraska teaching license. All applicants pursuing Nebraska teacher certification must submit to a federal and state background check by providing fingerprints to the state as well. Nebraska takes who it hires to be our educators very seriously, and we want to make sure that they're qualified to do the jobs. However, we are finding that not every job really needs the skills tested in our Praxis tests. A Praxis test is one of the tools

currently used to assess the content knowledge necessary to be ready to teach a grade level or subject. A good example of the hurdles of Praxis testing, which, by the way, has been used in 42 different states, is one that's causing the current shortage of male gym teachers. A candidate may have exceptional grades and recommendations, but is unable to pass the Praxis test. In fact, a study done in 2019 shows that over half of the nation's elementary teachers initially fail the most common test. 54 percent of those who take the Praxis test on elementary level content fail on their first try. Twenty-five percent never managed to pass. And I want to put in contrast, so in nursing 85 percent of test-takers pass their licensing tests on the first try, which I think is a really good perspective to compare it to. The report from the National Council on Teacher Quality lays much of the blame at the door of teacher training programs, which we really haven't discussed today. The test assesses knowledge in four areas. Elementary teachers are expected to cover English, math, social studies and science, and the reason I'm talking about elementary teachers is show you a different dynamic than what you just heard. The teacher training programs don't ensure their graduates have a basic grounding in that content. The required knowledge is often far above the level an elementary teacher needs. The test asks them to do things like calculate the square root of a fraction without using a calculator, but on the job, they're expected to teach place value in fractions. And some say their training program didn't prepare them either for the test or what they did to teach. Their required courses focused on methods of teaching math rather than ensuring a thorough understanding elementary level concepts. Students often don't learn these basics in high school or even college. Twenty-two percent of American 12th graders score proficient or above on the National Assessment of Educational Progress Test in science. On the NAEP history, geography and civic test, proficiency rates are similar or worse. Licensing exams also have a disproportionate impact on teacher candidates in minority groups. Sixty-two percent of black-- black testers and 43 percent of Hispanic candidates fail the elementary Praxis tests even after multiple attempts. And so this bill does not ask you to eliminate the Praxis test, but ask that you allow for a choice where they can utilize examinations or coursework when it comes to identifying the teacher's qualifications for certification. Being a teacher is really hard work. On average, teachers spend \$750 out of pocket on supplies. They find that student environment in many schools lack respect for the teachers or rules. Many find themselves babysitting more than teaching. We need to find ways to retain the teachers we have and to help recruit newly qualified teachers to make

sure that our other teachers aren't burdened with extra responsibilities or more students than they are able to handle because of the teacher shortage. In the future, we also need to find ways to help them cultivate safer, more diverse and accepting environments where educators can grow, help create individualized growth paths and resources for these educators, and provide them with measurable data for better planning around professional development. Because we know, like many professions here in Nebraska, experiencing shortages, that if we can act now, we can hopefully prevent a bigger crisis in the future. So I know you have similar bills in front of you in the committee today, and I hope we can take the best of each and send a bill out to the floor for debate. But having a plan to help solve this crisis is sound policy and one that I hope we can all agree on. I appreciate your time today and would be happy to answer any of your questions, but as you can see, we've only changed basically a word or two in the bill and it's pretty clear cut. We feel that it was imperative to give an option on depending on what the certification area would be for, and I'd also like to add, just so we have this on record is that, it is my intent next year to bring forward another interstate compact for teachers, which will help alleviate some of these issues.

PANSING BROOKS: Thank you, Senator Blood. Any questions for Senator Blood? Any? OK, not right now. Are you going to stay too close?

BLOOD: I will stay to close.

PANSING BROOKS: OK. Thank you.

BLOOD: I'd like to hear the testimony.

PANSING BROOKS: Thank you.

BLOOD: Thank you.

PANSING BROOKS: We will take the first proponent, proponent. Welcome.

MICHELLE WARREN: My name is Dr. Michelle Warren, and that's spelled M-i-c-h-e-l-l-e W-a-r-r-e-n, and I'm having some troubles with the pair of earrings I selected for the day.

PANSING BROOKS: Don't worry, that happens to all--

MICHELLE WARREN: OK. All right. Well, I would have thought better about it. So, good afternoon. Good afternoon, members of the Education

Committee. I am a 30-year educator, currently in my ninth year at the University of Nebraska at Kearney and Associate Professor of Spanish. Here I'm presenting my own views. I'm not representing the views of the university. While I work at UNK, I'm joining you today to share my personal experiences as a teacher from the past three decades. In particular, over the last nine years, I've been preparing future educators to teach Spanish in the state of Nebraska. As an appropriate reflection of Nebraska's statewide Hispanic population of 11 percent, UNK boasts an 11 percent enrollment of Hispanic students, with our undergraduate enrollment closer to 13.5 percent. In my discipline, our upper level classes have more like 60 to 80 percent Hispanic students, and I just calculated from last semester I was at about 85 percent, most of whom are the first generation of their families to live in the U.S. and the first generation to attend college. Many, if not all, of these students grew up in Spanish-speaking households ensconced in their culture and language of heritage. While many undergraduate students in our general population experienced difficulties with the press-- Praxis basic skills test-- that's a mouthful --there is a disproportionate number of students from immigrant families who struggle with the exam. Make no mistake, in no way are these students from immigrant families less intelligent or less prepared. In fact, they excel in campus leadership, earn high GPAs and take advantage of tools available to them, such as tutoring through our library, extra study sessions and special group, and one-on-one tutoring through NFCA to try to pass the Praxis. I have watched dozens of students become frustrated as they fail the Praxis-- the Praxis basic skills time and time again. I've pleaded Rule 23 to Dr. Bromstedt multiple times to help get talented future teachers an exemption from the Praxis basic skills, knowing that we need these future leaders and role models in our classrooms. One example of that is-- is Carlos, who is now student teaching with my sister, already been offered four-- four positions across the state in Spanish in ESL. He failed the Praxis five times-- five times and had to put his education on hold for four years before he could be admitted to the College of Ed. Even before the pandemic, we would regularly receive calls from districts searching for Spanish teachers. The fully bilingual graduates usually get offers even before they begin student teaching, and rarely do we produce enough graduates to fill all vacancies. I heard it called The Hunger Games, right, to try to fill these-- these teaching positions these days. Now that many of our in-service teachers are feeling burned out by having to adapt to the demands that COVID-19 has created, it's even more important to encourage, not discourage our young professionals to get that-- and get them into the classroom. These students are the future of our

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state, and they stand as examples of people who have worked against odds. Immigrant families, sometimes undocumented, first generation educated to help our Nebraskan educational system reflect the population of young people growing up here. Let us please reevaluate how we measure basic skills for our future teachers and allow the doors to open and stop creating roadblocks such as the Praxis to those talented people reaching their classroom goals. Thank you.

PANSING BROOKS: Thank you very much, Dr. Warren. Any questions for Dr. Warren? Yes, Senator Linehan.

LINEHAN: Thank you, Senator Pansing Brooks. Maybe I'm missing something here, but they have to take the Praxis, sorry, you say, to get into it-- to just enroll.

MICHELLE WARREN: You can-- you can enroll in courses in your major and in your general studies, but you're not admitted to classes in the College of Education until you've passed the basic skills exam.

LINEHAN: So, OK. OK. All right, thank you.

MICHELLE WARREN: So, for example, the student I mentioned earlier had taken all of his other classes he could possibly take, and he kept trying to take that Praxis over and over before he could get into his ed classes.

LINEHAN: Do you think it would make a difference if they took it after they had their degree?

MICHELLE WARREN: I can't speak to it because I never thought about it that way, I guess. Yeah.

LINEHAN: OK, thank you very much for being here. Appreciate it.

MICHELLE WARREN: Yes.

LINEHAN: Appreciate what you did.

MICHELLE WARREN: Yes.

PANSING BROOKS: Any other questions for Dr. Warren? Senator Murman.

MURMAN: Thank you, Senator Pansing Brooks, and thank you for testifying. So you are in favor of eliminating the basic skills Praxis test, I assume. Is there a Praxis test specific to teaching Spanish?

MICHELLE WARREN: Yes, there is.

MURMAN: Would you be in favor of eliminating that one also?

MICHELLE WARREN: I believe that the Department of Ed at this time is looking at alternate measures to-- to evaluate ability to perform in target languages. I personally haven't taken the target language Praxis, which would be the Praxis two in Spanish, but I have several colleagues that have been working on it and have been advocating against using the Praxis for that measure.

MURMAN: OK. It seems like to me, that would be a useful test, you know.

MICHELLE WARREN: Yet if you've taken 36 content hours in Spanish, wouldn't your grade average from that trajectory of courses also be a reflection of your ability?

MURMAN: Yes, that would be another measure.

MICHELLE WARREN: We also do assessment markers at the second year-- fourth year of where students stand as far as actual, which is our-- our national body that governs the fluency of language, both written, oral and auditory comprehension. So we take those benchmarks already as an institution and keep them for our own assessment that we can give to our assessment officer. So I think that there are other ways that we can also measure Praxis two for Spanish.

MURMAN: Thank you.

MICHELLE WARREN: Sure.

PANSING BROOKS: Thank you, Dr. Warren. Any other questions? I don't see any. Thank you for coming here today.

MICHELLE WARREN: Thank you.

PANSING BROOKS: Next proponent. Welcome.

JACQUELLE LANE: Thank you so very much. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak today. My name is Jacquelle Lane. That's J-a-c-q-u-e-l-l-e, last name Lane, L-a-n-e, and I am here to represent the Nebraska State Education Association in support of LB690. As an educator, currently serving as a Praxis and policy fellow, I would like to provide background on the Praxis core exam, as well as my own

personal experience with the exam. Prior to September 1st of 2014, an applicant seeking admission to a teacher education program or applying for an entry level teaching certificate demonstrated their basic skills competency by taking the Pre Professional Skills Test or the PPST published by the Educational Testing Services, or ETS, in Princeton, New Jersey. ETS is also known for developing and administering other standardized tests, such as the SAT and GRE. The PPST was discontinued by ETS in 2015 in favor of the core academic skills for educators test also called the Praxis Test. Set-- since September 1st of 2014, any new applicants have been required to take the Praxis exam unless they have already received a passing score on either the Praxis or the PPST. To receive a passing score, an applicant must achieve four different metrics across three separate portions of the test. A 156 or above in reading, a 150 or above in mathematics, 162 or above in writing, or a composite score of 468 or above, with no single portion being more than one point below the minimum scores specified above. Each section has a possible score range of 100 to 200. Each portion may be taken separately at a cost of \$90 each, with the time allotment ranging anywhere from 85 to 100 minutes, depending on the subject being tested. An applicant may instead choose to take all three portions consecutively for \$150 and a total time allotment of 270 minutes. The cost does not include preparatory materials, tutoring or anything else that the applicant may utilize to prepare for and/or improve their test score. It also does not include the fees for separate subject assessments that may be required for teaching endorsement, which range in cost from \$60 to \$199. An applicant may retake any portions if they fail any number of times by paying these fees. From 2014 to 2018, nearly 800 students who took the Praxis test received composite test scores higher than the required 468, but failed one or more of the subsections. 20 percent of those students are members of one or more minority groups, people who are in high demand and in short supply across our state. We need to eliminate the Praxis core exams and find an alternative pathway for potential teachers to demonstrate-- demonstrate basic skills. LB690 accomplishes this by permitting coursework during the college experience to be utilized to demonstrate basic skills. I would like to take this opportunity to share with you my personal experience regarding the Praxis and why I am so very passionate about eliminating it. In 2009, after graduating from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln with a degree in communication studies and marketing, I became involved in a mentorship program known as Teammates, and I discovered that my true passion resided in working with children to attain their utmost potential. I went back to college and was accepted into a

program known as Tradition-- Transition to Teach at the University of Nebraska-Kearney, where I could work on obtaining teaching certification in secondary English and a master's degree in education administration. I flew through the coursework and thoroughly enjoyed my professors and on-site experiences working at an alternative level three school. I found a knack for working with at-risk youth, and when it came time to take the Praxis core, successfully passed the reading and writing on my very first try. However, I failed multiple times in the math portion of the Praxis, almost giving up on my dream of becoming an educator. In my case, I eventually passed the math portion with hours of tutoring paid for out of my own pocket, not to mention the time and energy spent studying material that I was never going to teach because my content area was English education. At that time, I was a graduate of UNL with a 3.8 GPA, and I was flourishing in my coursework in secondary English at UNK. I currently hold three master's degrees in education administration, English as a second language and school counseling in the state of Nebraska. I have had a successful career in both secondary and middle level English at two of the largest school districts in our state. Still, I think about the individuals that don't have the resources that I had to pay for tutoring or pay for the exam, which, as stated, is cost prohibitive for most. We are losing potentially excellent teachers in the state of Nebraska due to this exam that neither demonstrates talent nor effectiveness in the classroom. Please consider what is best for the students of Nebraska and eliminate this exam, providing for a larger pool of educational professionals with talents and gifts to share. Thank you so much for your time, and I'm willing to take any questions that you may have.

PANSING BROOKS: Thank you, Ms. Lane, and thank you for your story and how it's related to. Appreciate it. Any questions for Ms. Lane? Senator Linehan.

LINEHAN: Thank you, Senator Pansing Brooks. So your first paragraph on the last page of your testimony starts from 2014 to 2018. Is that just Nebraska students, I assume?

JACQUELLE LANE: Yes.

LINEHAN: And where did-- and I'm not questioning at all, I'm just asking because we had some questioning forms because they did not bring back the data, so your data-- where did you get this data?

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JACQUELLE LANE: Absolutely, I'm happy to send it from you. It's from the Nebraska State Education Association.

LINEHAN: Okay, thank you.

PANSING BROOKS: Any other questions for Ms. Lane? Thank you for coming here today. I appreciate it.

JACQUELLE LANE: Thank you so much for your time.

PANSING BROOKS: Thank you.

MORFELD: We're on proponent testimony?

PANSING BROOKS: Yes.

MORFELD: Next proponent testimony for LB690. Welcome.

NICHOLAS SMITH: Hi, my name is Nicholas Smith, spelled N-i-c-h-o-l-a-s S-m-i-t-h. I'm speaking for myself in favor of LB690. I was born and raised in Nebraska. I graduated from Holdrege High School in 2008. At that time, I had no idea what career path I wanted to pursue. To experience something new, I chose to attend Abilene Christian University in Texas, where I graduated with a bachelor's degree in psychology. During my time there, I began coaching football as a student assistant. When I graduated, I was offered a full-time position to coach defensive backs. I remained coaching at Abilene Christian University, a division 1 double S school, for four years. In 2016, I met coach Mike Riley in San Antonio, Texas, and he hired me on to his staff in Nebraska. During that time, I was able to further my education by pursuing a master's degree in educational administration. In 2018, Coach Scott Frost retained me on his staff, which allowed me to complete my master's degree in educational administration. In 2019, my wife and I moved to Texas, where I started an alternative teaching certification program, allowing me to teach in the high school setting. This included a yearlong coursework, formal classroom education-- observations, formal classroom observations, passing content and professional responsibility exams, all while learning the ins and outs of special education. Upon completion of my certification process, I became confident in my abilities as a special education teacher. I believe learning never stops, so through professional development and peer mentorship, I've continued to learn how to improve as a special ed teacher. My duties as a special educator include writing four IEPs, collaborating with students to create their own student-led ARD meetings, case management of over 15 special needs

students each school year. Those include students with a wide range of abilities from dyslexia to severe intellectual learning and emotional disabilities. My inclusion teaching experience allowed me to also co-teach alongside various English and social studies and classroom teachers. After mastering the sped landscape with all of its jargon and legal processes, I have been able to use my career as a coach to build relationships and find the right motivational tools for each student as an individual, while helping students set and achieve goals which often surpass their beginning of the year expectations. The collision of my experiences, both on the field as a coach and in the classroom, have led to my newfound passion of me being a special education teacher. I don't teach for the paycheck. I teach because there's nothing more fulfilling to me than working alongside a student and watching them grow and achieve things they never thought they could. Which brings us to today. I moved my family back to Nebraska in December with the hopes of continuing in the classroom as a special education teacher. Under the current circumstances, I will not be able to have a career in teaching in the state of Nebraska unless I go back to school and get a third college degree in education. Given the teacher shortage, the passing of the proposed bills would allow more qualified teachers to enter the classroom. Thank you for your time and hearing my story.

MORFELD: OK, thank you. Any questions? Senator Murman.

MURMAN: Oh, thank you for representing District 38 in Holdredge well. So you don't have an education degree now, you've been teaching but don't have an education degree? Did I understand that correctly.

NICHOLAS SMITH: Yes, sir.

MURMAN: OK. So to get an education degree, you would not only have to go back to college and take some courses, but also-- well, first of all, pass-- well, pass Nebraska test, a general one and then also specific to special ed or whatever you're going to teach.

NICHOLAS SMITH: Yes, sir. My path would be a little bit longer than most people. I'd have to take the Praxis and all the exams that have been discussed here, and then also go back and get an education degree.

MURMAN: OK, so if we eliminated the Praxis-- both Praxis tests, I guess, you would still have to go back to college and take some courses or maybe take them online--

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NICHOLAS SMITH: Correct.

MURMAN: --or however you would you do it. Thank you.

MORFELD: OK. Any other questions for Mr. Smith? OK. Senator Day.

DAY: Thank you for your testimony. So you-- and maybe you mentioned this. You said you took an alternative certification, something in Texas. So what did that look like? That didn't look like going to college and getting a degree in education, correct?

NICHOLAS SMITH: Correct.

DAY: So what was-- what was that program?

NICHOLAS SMITH: The program is called Texas-- Texas Teachers. It's for people who've gone to college and didn't know that they wanted to teach when they were in college. And so it's a year long process. Like I mentioned, it's-- I had to do a yearlong course work program and then I had formal-- I had six formal observations from the program director. Before I even got in the program, I had to pass content, which would be like a Praxis type content and professional responsibility exams to get in that program.

DAY: OK, thank you.

NICHOLAS SMITH: Mm-Hmm.

MORFELD: Any other questions for Mr. Smith? OK. Thank you very much for coming.

NICHOLAS SMITH: Thank you.

MORFELD: Next proponent testimony for LB690. Welcome.

JOHN SKRETTA: Thank you. Good afternoon again, senators, distinguished members of the Education Committee. My name is John Skretta. That's J-o-h-n S-k-r-e-t-t-a, and I am here today on behalf of the Educational Service Unit Coordinating Council. I serve as the administrator at ESU 6, headquartered in Milford, and I am here today in the capacity of being the STANCE secretary and STANCE is a coalition of 19 mid-sized school districts, stands for Schools Taking Action for Nebraska Children's Education. Just as stated previously on LB960, both of these organizations, which I'm here speaking on behalf of today are proponent on all three of the bills before the Education

Committee today, and we felt it was very important to be on the record as such. We want to express our gratitude to Senator Blood for bringing this bill forward, which we believe is a fairly narrowly construed change, but one that we would find very beneficial in providing an alternate means of demonstrating proficiency for a alternate pathway for future educators to be able to advance their careers and for us to be able to meet the demand that currently exists for teachers within the state of Nebraska. We want to point out that we believe that there is very much upon us right now, a crisis of crisis level shortage of qualified, credentialed and eligible employees for current and impending teaching vacancies in our respective districts. And that is not a problem endemic to STANCE. It's not a problem limited to rural schools. It's not even a problem limited to Nebraska. It's a nationwide challenge that reflects a profound systemic issue and it's basically innovative, creative suggestions like Senator Blood has brought forward, that we think can help be a part of the solution. We're glad that you're considering these proposals before you. Just one anecdote about LB690 in particular. It's an adage among professional development consultants and PD people are at the very heart and soul of what educational service units do, and professional development consultants are those who are the teachers of teachers. And one of the things that they like to say is that if it works for the littles and if it's a good strategy for children in the classroom, it's probably a good strategy for adult learners. And one of the things that the suggestion from Senator Blood brings forward in LB690 is something that simply reflects best assessment Praxis, which is provide an alternate means of demonstrating your proficiency as a-- in this case as someone who aspires to be an educator. With that, I'll close my comments and take any questions you might have. Thanks.

MORFELD: Thank you, Mr. Skretta. Any questions? OK. Senator McKinney.

McKINNEY: Thank you. And thank you for your testimony again. I was curious, was there ever a time in the past where there was some reason or something that said that teachers weren't teaching our kids properly, and we needed these standardized tests to ensure that teachers have the knowledge, or was it just something that was put in place to be similar to like law school or something?

JOHN SKRETTA: Yeah, great question. I'm not sure what the historical precursors were to instituting Praxis, and your question hints at a bigger implication, which is the whole discussion of the role of standardized education and standardized testing in education and so I

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appreciate it. I don't know the specifics on that, but I think there are some people in the room who might be able to speak to that, yeah.

McKINNEY: All right, thank you.

MORFELD: Any other questions for Mr. Skretta? OK, seeing none, thank you.

JOHN SKRETTA: Thank you.

MORFELD: Next proponent testimony on LB690. Welcome.

BRIAN HALSTEAD: Good afternoon, members of the Education Committee. For the record, my name is Brian Halstead, B-r-i-a-n H-a-l-s-t-e-a-d. As I indicated on Senator Vargas' bill, we'd be back to be a proponent on Senator Blood's bill, so I am following through on that. We do acknowledge and support the legislative efforts in addressing the educator workforce shortage, the barriers created by a single test, high stakes tests to determine competency, and an opportunity to show basic skills in many different manners. So, I'll stop right there and see if you have any questions.

MORFELD: Any questions? Senator Linehan.

LINEHAN: Thank you, Vice Chair Morfeld. Thank you, Mr Halstead for being here. And I understand, as you said, this is a crisis, but could you work with the department, kind of get us in with whoever else knows what the history of all this? When do we start?

BRIAN HALSTEAD: I believe Senator, but we'll go back and dig through it. The Legislature in its response to a nation at risk report in 1983 brought forward LB994, which was the Legislature's response. I think Basic Skills Competencies exam was a piece of that legislation. If it wasn't that, it was a year or two shortly after that that the Legislature brought forward basic skills competency.

LINEHAN: And then what I'm picking up here is it seemed to work until we changed the vendor.

BRIAN HALSTEAD: You know, Senator, it's a good-- assessments, are great sources of information, but when you make them be the determinant of competency is where the issue comes up.

LINEHAN: I'm just trying to figure it, no forget that.

BRIAN HALSTEAD: Right, right. So obviously, I think what's happened is the companies and the experts in making assessments have gotten better and better and better and better. And makes it even more of a high stakes test if you got to pass or meet a more rigorous examination as the only means of knowing whether you're, in this case, competent to do anything, so.

LINEHAN: Thank you very much for being here.

MORFELD: Any other questions for Mr. Halstead? OK, thank you. Any other proponent testimony on LB690? Anyone testifying in opposition to LB690? Anyone in the neutral capacity? OK, Senator Blood, you're welcome to close.

BLOOD: So this has been a long afternoon for two bills. In closing, I just want to remind those of you that we're discussing perhaps a sunset on the first bill that perhaps having it be an alternative as a-- as a different choice might be the way to go. We did not want to eliminate the ability for people to utilize it should they need to utilize Praxis. I would hate to totally eliminate something and then five years down the road, they figure out that maybe they did need it for English or for math. If we do it as either/or as LB690 proposes, it gives the people who are in charge of certification the ability to have a choice. And I think that that sometime much better than just total elimination, especially since we don't have really good data as to where what areas the Praxis test may still be needed. Should they never choose to use it again, so be it. But if they would like to utilize it as a tool, LB690 gives them the choice to do so. And I think it's not necessarily our choice to decide which is best as much as it is for the Board of Education's choice. I think that we need to leave it up to the specialists. And I know that your committee bill is similar to mine as well, that we do it either/or. And my choice to do the bill in the way that I did it was based on the conversations that I've had over the last year with teachers who talked about their struggles. But I had very few people ask me personally to eliminate the test, but they did want to be able to have a choice over the Praxis test. So with that-- Senator Linehan, I would like to say that we couldn't track anything back further than like '84 or '83 either on the Praxis test. It's almost like it's like a hidden secret, which I thought was really interesting. Even Wikipedia didn't have it, so. (LAUGHTER) So it must not exist, right? With that, I'd be happy to answer any questions, but I think it's pretty well-- had all of your questions answered with the last two bills.

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MORFELD: OK, any questions for Senator Blood? Senator Murman.

MURMAN: Thank you. I'll ask you I think the same question I asked Senator Vargas and probably the Department of Education also. Would you be opposed to using the Praxis test, especially the content specific Praxis tests, as-- as a measure of competency, not a-- the measure of competence-- competency? In other words an elimination because the-- just use it as a measure.

BLOOD: I-- I feel that that would be up to the people who are responsible for certification. I don't think that that's a job for me to answer as a senator. I have two family members that are teachers, and we were very fortunate both passed through Praxis on the first try. But I can say that by having a bill that's either/or, then you have the ability to do exactly what you're saying. So if we indeed they find the need that they do want to measure something in particular, they have that option through Praxis that they choose not to utilize that for their certification, then they can choose not to do that and use their coursework. So I've always-- always tried to find middle ground on a lot of my bills, and I'm not always an all or nothing person. I tried that my freshman year and I found out it doesn't work, so LB690 is my compromise.

MURMAN: Thank you.

MORFELD: Senator Linehan.

LINEHAN: Thank you, Vice Chairman Morfeld. Did you talk to anybody at GNSA or the school administrators? You know, usually we only have an education bill, there's like five or six different groups to come and--

BLOOD: You know-- oh, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to cover you.

LINEHAN: Association, school boards, Association of School Administrators in GNSA.

BLOOD: I don't know if I've spoken with anybody from GNSA, but I've most definitely spoken to people from the other groups over the last year. So it's not only been teachers, but it's also been administrators as well.

LINEHAN: So are they in support?

BLOOD: They've not told me otherwise.

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LINEHAN: Maybe there's letters for the record.

MORFELD: There is letters of support from Nebraska Association of School Boards. I'm trying to think of the organizations that you--

LINEHAN: GNSA.

MORFELD: Yeah, GNSA.

LINEHAN: Administration.

MORFELD: Yeah. So I'll read through them at the end, but--

LINEHAN: OK. All right. Thank you.

MORFELD: Nebraska Catholic Conference.

BLOOD: So yes, we definitely did talk to people throughout the last year just trying to get a grasp on is this just only an issue with teachers or do their administrators also want to see a change and-- and everybody that I spoke with said something needs to change.

LINEHAN: Thank you very much.

BLOOD: Um-hum.

MORFELD: OK. I just want to correct the record. The Nebraska Catholic Conference was in support of LB1218, not to say they're opposed.

BLOOD: We didn't ask-- to be really frank, we didn't ask them for their support.

MORFELD: OK, any other questions for Senator Blood? OK, thank you, Senator Blood.

BLOOD: All right, thank you.

MORFELD: That ends our hearing on LB690 and begins our hearing on LB1218, Chairwoman Walz. Also for LB690, we have five proponents, zero opponents and one neutral letter. OK, Senator Walz.

WALZ: All right. Good afternoon, Vice Chair Morfeld and members of the Education Committee. My name is Lynne Walz, L-y-n-n-e W-a-l-z. And I proudly represent District 15, which encompasses all of Dodge County and Valley, Nebraska. I'm here today to open on LB1218, which was introduced by the Education Committee and has been designated as an

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Education Committee priority for 2022. LB1218 was written to provide several solutions to the educator workforce shortage and is a result of both the 2021 Occupational Licensing Report issued by the Education Committee, as well as work during the interim on the topic. Every member of this committee has been part of these efforts in some fashion. I know many of you have been doing research and providing insight to the committee staff, introducing legislation, and helping constituents that are struggling to become licensed to teach in Nebraska. My office hears on an average one or two individuals a month that have-- that are facing these challenges. I know you are hearing of these cases too, and today we will hear some more. Thank you for your individual efforts on this front. Collaboratively, we have been engaged as well. Last fall, this committee had two interim study hearings that while technically on different angles of education brought about testimony that helped us better understand the education workforce issues. Those hearings were related to LR157 introduced by Senator Pansing Brooks and LR158 introduced by Senator Day. Last fall, Senator McKinney and I hosted a roundtable and a town hall to address issues impacting north Omaha. Senator Wayne also joined us for the day. In very early January, Senators Linehan, Murman, and Day joined me for a roundtable discussion at the Career Academy to discuss workforce issues. We started our event by hearing from high school students enrolled in the dual-credit pathway for K-12 education. This was an example of, of grow-your-own efforts happening all, all around the state. It was a great way to start the conversation, a conversation that included 25 people, including representatives from three higher education institutions, five school districts, NRCSA, several people from, from NSEA and NDE, a staff member from Senator Vargas' office, as well as John Skretta, whose work on this issue and advice to me has been invaluable. That same week, I also sat down with a small group of education stakeholders to talk about what was needed in this legislation to make substantial and-- to make a substantial and immediate impact on the education workforce issues. That meeting gave me the opportunity to, number one, share some of the recent stories that we've been hearing about with out-of-state teachers having trouble getting certified in Nebraska and, two, provide some advance notice of research findings by our committee staff that would be published in the Occupational Licensing Report. And one such finding was the Legislature's unanimous effort to remove the basic skills competency exam as a requirement for entrance into the teacher education program back in 2003 and their intent that alternate forms of demonstrating basic skills competency would be utilized for teacher certification. Despite those efforts 19 years ago in LB685 introduced

by Education Committee Chairman Raikes due to the education workforce issues at that time, we are still handicapped by the same basic skills competency exam issues today and, unfortunately, an even worse education workforce problem. It is tragic that we are still trying to fix this issue after 19 years, especially if we think about all the potential, all the potential teachers that never entered the pipeline. But that is the reality of our situation. In regards to the challenges of out-of-state teachers getting licensed in Nebraska, that meeting with stakeholders included a robust discussion about the authority that the commissioner has to help fix the situation and that he was provided great advice from other experts in the field on ways to expand his utilization of authority. It was determined that statutory changes related to this issue are not needed in LB1218. Based on all of these efforts, and especially the stakeholder meeting, LB1218 begins with legislative findings in intent language aimed at ensuring that educators from other states have a path to joining the profession in Nebraska. This language also builds upon the intent of, of the Legislature in 2003, the proficiency and basic skills competency should be a teacher certification requirement as opposed to a requirement for entrance into a teacher education program. And that it should be able to be demonstrated in multiple ways, not just one examination. Therefore, LB1218 modifies the definition of basic skills competency to allow the certification requirement to be achievable from the successful completion of a college admission examination, college coursework, or successful employment experiences. It is my belief that after studying this issue in depth over the last year, over the last year that these changes can substantially increase the teacher population in Nebraska while still ensuring that all teachers in our state continue to be high quality and provide robust education experience for our teach-- for our kids in the classroom, which really is ultimately what matters. LB1218 changes the fee structure for the teacher certificates from being explicitly set in statute to being set by the commissioner with a not to exceed amount. These amounts were increased by an, an inflationary factor based on the last time they were increase. The statutory change allows the commissioner to increase, decrease, or waive fees, fees as deemed appropriate. Finally, it offers an additional \$1,000 of student loan forgiveness to partici-- to participants in the Attracting Excellence to Teaching Program after successful completion of their student teaching. This trifecta of efforts, coupled with the language providing our intent for action by the commissioner and the state board, I believe provide immediate help to the workforce issue. There are other ideas as well. We heard two other approaches today related to basic skills

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competency, and tomorrow we will hear three more bills related to teacher loan debt. It is my hope that following tomorrow's hearing, the committee takes swift action to advance LB1218 as an education workforce bill that encompasses all the great work that has been done on the topic. I'm confident that we can come to consensus on what this should look like. In 2003, all 49 senators and the Governor were united on a statute change that unfortunately did not come to full fruition. As you will hear today, there is-- oh, thanks Nicole-- there is a united consensus among education community on the need to implement the changes that were enacted back then. LB1218 is the bill we introduced to help make change-- to help make-- to help make these changes that we need now. Thank you for your time and I'd be happy to answer any questions.

MORFELD: Thank you, Chairwoman Walz.

WALZ: Whoo.

MORFELD: Any questions? OK, seeing none, we'll move on to proponent testimony for LB1218. Welcome.

JENNI BENSON: Hello. My name is Jenni Benson, J-e-n-n-i B-e-n-s-o-n, and I'm still the president of the Nebraska State Education Association. But I am also here in support of LB1218, and I'm speaking for the Nebraska Council of School Administrators, the Nebraska Child Health and Education Alliance, and the Nebraska Rural Community Schools Association in support of LB1218. As has been said numerous times today, we need to eliminate the Praxis Core. We had-- NDE hired a consultant named Dr. David Steiner. He is executive director of the Johns Hopkins Institute for Education Policy. And he stated admission tests are controversial. They are expensive to take, particularly for multiple-time test takers. Basic pedagogical tests, including the Praxis Core, have not been shown to correlate with teaching effectiveness, and they reproduce 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 interest-- entrance exam. LB1218 also proposes loan forgiveness be provided to student teachers. Student teaching is a-- should be a paid experience. Chadron State College has worked with local school districts on 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 kind of creative thinking. Student teaching is a time-consuming endeavor that doesn't allow for much, if any, additional employment.

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We need paid internships and residencies as other professions utilize. Although LB1218 would not provide actual payment for this service, it does provide much needed loan forgiveness for college students who work a full semester as a student teacher. A preservice teacher intern, as described in the bill, would be eligible to have \$1,000 in their outstanding, outstanding Attracting Excellence to Teaching Program loan debt forgiven. That would be a small token of encouragement for those educators-to-be who have, in most cases, worked as unpaid full-time teachers for four months. We ask the committee to consider increasing this loan forgiveness amount to \$2,000 to better reflect the time and effort expended during the teaching-- student teaching experience. Thank you for your consideration and I can answer any questions you might have.

MORFELD: Thank you, Ms. Benson. Any questions? OK, Senator Linehan.

LINEHAN: Thank you, Vice Chairman Morfeld. So thank you again for being here. Appreciate it, long afternoon. So the third, the third bullet from Dr. David Steiner.

JENNI BENSON: Um-hum.

LINEHAN: They reproduce the inequality of prior access to a strong education. What does that mean to you?

JENNI BENSON: I would say that just like with barriers for what we're talking about in the tests, there are barriers to our underserved communities getting maybe the same access. That was his opinion from Johns Hopkins.

LINEHAN: Thank you.

JENNI BENSON: You're welcome.

LINEHAN: Appreciate it.

MORFELD: Any other questions? OK, seeing none, thank you.

JENNI BENSON: Thank you.

MORFELD: Next proponent testimony for LB1218. Welcome.

BRIAN HALSTEAD: Good afternoon, members of the Education Committee. For the record, my name is Brian Halstead, B-r-i-a-n H-a-l-s-t-e-a-d. The department here is in support of LB1218. We acknowledge and

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support the Legislature's efforts in addressing the educator workforce shortage about reducing barriers made by a single high stakes test and also, in this bill, loan forgiveness or other financial strategies to assist individuals to get into and remain in the education profession. Obviously, LB1218 includes a component of loan forgiveness under the Attracting Excellence, the Teaching Act, which has been in place for over 15 to 17 years now and tomorrow we'll be back supporting LB945 and LB1128 on loan forgiveness or other means of using financial help to get the educator workforce to be able to meet the needs of Nebraskans. I will stop there and see if you have any questions.

MORFELD: Thank you for your testimony, Mr. Halstead. Senator McKinney.

McKINNEY: Thank you, Senator Morfeld. Thank you for your testimony. So I was on Google and I was just looking at the nation at risk report. And it seems like it is the genesis to this issue. And I'm just curious, have, have there been other studies that shows the impact of this study and what it did? Did it improve our educational system or did it-- or, or not? And I was wondering if there's anything out there about that?

BRIAN HALSTEAD: Senator, I, I am not a research expert, so I can't comment on further studies about a nation at risk and whether it worked or not. There may be others in the audience. I'd have to go back and check with colleagues at the department if they have any analysis or other information that might be assistive.

McKINNEY: OK, thank you.

MORFELD: Any other questions? Senator Linehan.

LINEHAN: Thank you, Vice Chairman Morfeld. One of the reasons I appreciate it so much when you come to testify is because you've been around for a while.

BRIAN HALSTEAD: I appreciate the fact I've been around for a while, too, Senator. It's nice.

LINEHAN: So evidently, through this interim study, we found that Chairman Raikes tried to replace the Praxis test. You would have been here then, right?

BRIAN HALSTEAD: You're going to have to help me, Senator. Senator Raikes and replace the test.

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LINEHAN: There was-- there's already-- if I'm not-- if I understood the report right, there's already language--

BRIAN HALSTEAD: Oh, you mean the bill of 2003 that the Legislature enacted where Senator Raikes was asked on the floor, does this mean there wouldn't-- it dealt with the basic skills competency being required for admission to a teacher college. Correct.

LINEHAN: Yes, and his response was?

BRIAN HALSTEAD: His response was no. This bill would no longer require that, I believe. I'd have to look. Yes, I'm familiar with the report. Absolutely.

LINEHAN: So what happened?

BRIAN HALSTEAD: You know, Senator, I can't give you the answer to that. Obviously, that was one alternative back in 2003, but we're in a different time today and I--

LINEHAN: Was the Department of Ed in favor of his position at that time?

BRIAN HALSTEAD: Actually, the department drafted the original bill that was submitted to the Education Committee in order to provide greater flexibility for certification. I believe the bill that Senator Raikes then carried was the Education Committee's concept or amendments to what was initially introduced by the department seeking flexibility. Yes, we were a proponent of that whole concept.

LINEHAN: But it just didn't happen?

BRIAN HALSTEAD: I-- Senator, I think our focus is we're here today. What are we doing today and tomorrow for the workforce? We can look back as to whether the nation at risk and the Legislature mandating a basic skills test was--

LINEHAN: But this was way after the nation at risk.

BRIAN HALSTEAD: I, I got that. Let's think about today and where we're going tomorrow--

LINEHAN: OK.

BRIAN HALSTEAD: --to expand the workforce.

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LINEHAN: Thank you.

BRIAN HALSTEAD: You bet.

MORFELD: Any other questions? OK, thank you, Mr. Halstead. We're all glad that you're still around for the record. Next proponent testimony on LB1218. Welcome.

APRIL BUSCHELMAN: Welcome. Thank you. Distinguished members of the Education Committee, my name is April Buschelman, spelled A-p-r-i-l B-u-s-c-h-e-l-m-a-n. I am the current president of the Nebraska Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, better known and for the reference as NACTE. And I'm here today to offer proponent testimony for LB1218 on behalf of NACTE. The Nebraska Association of Colleges for Teacher Education serves as a state association for the national group the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education. NACTE is an organization of all Nebraska teacher education institutions that have been approved by the Nebraska State Board of Education. Our members include Bellevue University, Chadron State College, College of Saint Mary, Concordia University, Creighton University, Doane University, Hastings College, Midland University, Nebraska Wesleyan University, Peru State College, Union College, the University of Nebraska at Lincoln, Kearney, and Omaha, Wayne State College, and York College. NACTE provides a common means of support to assist all teacher education programs to be more effective at producing high quality educators. We have a positive working relationship with the Nebraska Department of Education and collaborate often for the greater good of the state's P-20 education system. According to Nebraska's Title II Higher Education Act report, our combined group of educator preparation institutions produces approximately 1,400 teachers annually, and we have about 3,000 students enrolled in our teacher prep programs. While this may seem like a high number, in the past 9 years the program enrollment has decreased by over 1,500. This results in a 45 percent decrease in teacher preparation enrollment, while the national average is sitting at 35 percent. The challenge of addressing teacher shortage is one of the most vexing workforce development problems our state and nation faces. In October, NACTE hosted the first Nebraska Educator Shortage Summit. The summit brought together P-20 educators supporting education organizations and associations and the Department of Education. Topics were identified as priorities for the group and the state with active task forces being established for four areas: recruitment and retention of educators, elevating and marketing the profession, certification, and the Praxis exams. The proposed

legislation LB1218 includes components that touch on these same areas and would take substantial steps towards removing barriers that artificially inhibit otherwise qualified individuals from pursuing the vocation of education. While there are many facets of LB1218 we support, as essential stakeholders in the educator development pipeline, NACTE has identified the following provisions as especially important: LB1218 removes unnecessary barriers to the profession by acknowledging that multiple measures can proficiently demonstrate competency when defining academic competency to teach effectively. We teach our students to look beyond test scores, identify strengths through multiple intelligences, and build relationships with students in the classroom. We should demonstrate this as a state as well. LB1218 expands basic skills competency to provide for a greater range of valid measurements while maintaining professional standards. Currently, basic skills competency is most commonly measured by the Praxis Core standardized test and a passing score in reading, writing, and mathematics is required for enrollment in a teacher preparation program. Alternatives to the Praxis Core exam are essential as the test has not been linked to teaching effectiveness, and research shows that pass rates are significantly lower for students of color. With each attempt at the exam costing between \$90 and \$150, this would also decrease the financial burden on students looking to declare a major and see if education is where they're being called. In addition, this provision opens the door to applicants from out of state who wish to be certified in the state of Nebraska by not requiring passage of another test. One other particular feature of LB1218 that NACTE supports is the addition of student teaching as work experience to demonstrate basic skills competency. We prepare our students to be in the classroom and student teaching as their internship, showing they are capable. Again, this would also support educators coming from out of state with the hopes of getting certified in the state of Nebraska by allowing student teaching to represent work experience rather than already being established as a certified educator. Finally, LB1218 enhances the already established loan forgiveness program Attracting Excellence to Teachers Program meant to incentivize entry into the profession. This enhancement would reduce the financial burdens associated with completing a college program of study and assist students completing preservice field experience internships in education. Many students are unable to work during student teaching and financial assistance is of high importance. In conclusion, NACTE offers its full support of LB1218 as we believe the bill contains multiple methods that will positively contribute to improving the educator shortage while also making strides in diversifying the

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Nebraska education workforce. The formation of LB1218 maintains the integrity of the teaching profession and holds educators to the high expectations required of such respected positions. I thank you for your consideration and we urge you to advance LB1218. I will now take any questions.

MORFELD: Thank you. Any questions?

APRIL BUSCHELMAN: I had a lot to get to in five minutes.

MORFELD: You got it right, right in time.

APRIL BUSCHELMAN: OK.

MORFELD: Any questions for Ms. Buschelman? OK. Oh,--

PANSING BROOKS: Yes.

MORFELD: --Senator, Senator Pansing Brooks.

PANSING BROOKS: Well, just sort of touching on what was last said. I, I feel like it's time to, to sort of quit worrying about the past that, that Senator-- or that Mr. Halstead knows so much about and, and just start helping the kids, don't you agree, and, and helping our education system with this, so.

APRIL BUSCHELMAN: Definitely.

PANSING BROOKS: I appreciated that. I just wanted to add that little-- to the whole thing as well, so.

MORFELD: Senator Linehan, a response.

LINEHAN: Is there a, is there a reason or is it just historically been that we don't pay student teachers? I mean, I don't know of any other industry where you work five days a week, eight hours a day and you don't get paid.

APRIL BUSCHELMAN: It is not written anywhere that we can see or that we have found in research that you cannot pay them. So it is an option. Actually, this past semester, OPS decided to pay their student teachers this semester for student teaching.

LINEHAN: Thank you very much.

APRIL BUSCHELMAN: Um-hum.

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LINEHAN: Appreciate it.

MORFELD: Any other questions? OK, thank you very much for your testimony.

APRIL BUSCHELMAN: Thank you.

MORFELD: Next proponent testimony on LB1218. Welcome.

DESIREE FERIA SMITH: Hello. Hello, my name is Desiree Feria Smith. Desiree is D-e-s-i-r-e-e, Feria is the first of my two last names, spelled F-e-r-i-a space Smith, S-m-i-t-h. I am speaking for myself, an out-of-state teacher, seeking revisions to the certification requirements for out-of-state reciprocity. Throughout my life, I have lived in south Texas, Monterrey, Mexico, and Lincoln, Nebraska. I graduated in the top ten of my class from Stevens High School in San Antonio, Texas, at the age of 16. I received my bachelor's degree in child and family studies with honors from Abilene Christian University at the age of 19. I met my Nebraskan husband in college and upon graduating moved to Lincoln, Nebraska, and began working as a youth specialist at CEDARS. We attended Lincoln Berean Church and there was a need for an elementary Sunday school, Wednesday night program, and large events director in the Children's Ministry Program. I filled this position for a year. My time teaching in the church setting led to my desire to be in the classroom teaching children more than just twice a week. I took a position with LPS as an early childhood special education para educator at Campbell Elementary in the center-based preschool program. After a year in the classroom, I knew I wanted to be an early childhood teacher. After many calls and correspondence with the Nebraska Department of Education, I was told I needed to return to school and either obtain a second bachelor's degree in education or obtain a master's degree in education in order to become a preschool teacher. I was accepted in UNL's Master of Education in Early Childhood Special Education Program. I completed two semesters of coursework towards this master's, and then our family had to make a move to Texas for my husband's work. Because I would have had to pay out-of-state tuition to complete my master's, I pursued a nationally accredited alternative certification program so that I could become an early childhood teacher in Texas. After completing the teacher preparation coursework and passing four competency exams in early childhood through sixth grade core subjects, pedagogy and professional responsibilities, bilingual education, and a bilingual target proficiency test in Spanish, I was finally granted to-- granted access to teach a classroom full of English, English Language Learner

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preschoolers. A long awaited dream of mine became a reality. After a year of teaching under a provisional certification to fulfill my internship or student teaching, I earned my standard teaching certification in the state of Texas. After three years of teaching bilingual education at Title I public schools in the state of Texas, my family has made the move back to Lincoln, and I wish to continue teaching English Language Learners here in Lincoln. Considering the dire need for qualified teachers to aid in the teacher shortage and subsequent burnout we are currently seeing throughout the state, I urge the committee to pass the proposed bill so that we can get teachers, like myself, who are willing and able to teach in the classroom and in front of students as soon as possible. Thank you.

MORFELD: Thank you for your testimony, Ms. Smith. Any questions? So just to clarify, are you able to teach in Nebraska right now?

DESIREE FERIA SMITH: No, sir.

MORFELD: OK. That's-- OK. Case in point. And I'm assuming you've spent a lot of money in your education as well.

DESIREE FERIA SMITH: Correct.

MORFELD: OK, we can talk about that later. You don't have to say that on the record. OK, thank you. Any, and questions? Senator Pansing Brooks.

PANSING BROOKS: Thank you. Why are you not certified in Nebraska? Can you explain what you think is the reason?

DESIREE FERIA SMITH: Yes. So right now, you have to have gone to college with a degree that says the word "education" in it. Now if you look at my transcripts, I just want to be a preschool teacher. I did study child and family studies. There are classes I took about child development and things of that matter, but it's not enough. You have to have attended a teacher preparation program that the state recognizes, even though in Texas to be a teacher, they recognize the National Accreditation Council of Teacher Education [SIC], NCATE, I think. Anyway, that's nationally accredited, right? And I did the program in Texas and it works for them. I took all four of the exams that are equivalent to Praxis so I can prove my competency in these tests that as a woman of color I'm not supposed to be able to pass but I passed them, and I still cannot attend or, you know, have access to

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a classroom of three- and four-year-olds who need to learn English as a second language.

PANSING BROOKS: Thank you for that explanation and for coming here today. That's pretty strong testimony. Thank you.

DESIREE FERIA SMITH: Thank you.

MORFELD: Any other questions? OK, well, thank you for your persistence and all of your dedication to educating our youth. We'll hopefully get you across the finish line here.

DESIREE FERIA SMITH: Thank you.

MORFELD: Thank you. OK, next proponent testimony, LB1218. Welcome.

TIM FREY: Thank you. Greetings, Senator Walz and distinguished members of the Education Committee. My name is Dr. Tim Frey, which is spelled T-i-m F-r-e-y. I'm the dean for the College of Education at Doane University, and I'm a proud graduate of a Nebraska teacher education program, and I taught middle school special education before becoming a teacher educator. I am here to offer testimony in favor of LB1218 on behalf of Doane University's Educator Preparation Program faculty, staff, and students. As part of the Nebraska Association of Colleges for Teacher Education or NACTE as you heard from my colleague, Doane University echoes NACTE's appreciation of the efforts LB1218 makes to address the teacher and education workforce shortage. In particular, the removal of the single option for demonstrating academic competency and basic skills which causes a barrier for candidates. The impact of the change to remove the barrier would be greater than you might anticipate. With their permission, I'd like to share two students' Doane teacher education stories. Both came to Doane from small towns in central and western Nebraska to be teachers. Josh chose special education as his area of emphasis, did well in his first two practicum placements, and earned a 3.0 college grade point average. What proved to be a challenge for Josh was passing the Core Praxis exam, the required exam to be formally admitted into Doane's and all other Nebraska teacher education programs. Josh was successful in passing all but one section of the Praxis Core. On his fifth attempt, Josh did pass the final section. The additional attempts cost Josh an extra \$360 and delayed his coursework, student teaching, and graduation and ability to enter the education workforce by eight months. Ashley's story is similar. She also did not pass all those sections on her first Core attempt. During the nine months following her first attempt

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at the exam, Ashley took various sections of the exam six additional times, hired extra tutors, purchased study guides, and spent more than \$800. Ashley has a 3.9 GPA at Doane and will graduate with a double major in elementary and special education, but considered giving up her education dream multiple times. Josh and Ashley are not alone in the challenges they've faced. Data from three of most recent years of students entering Doane University Undergraduate Teacher Education Program reveal that just over 50 percent, 68 out of 138 prospective teaching candidates did not pass at least one of the three areas of Praxis Core on their first attempt. On average, it took 3.9 attempts for those students to pass the Praxis Core if they did not pass on their first attempt, and it cost those students an average additional \$360. However, not all students persist through multiple attempts at the exam. In the past three years of cohorts at Doane, 18 prospective teachers left their education career path at Doane when they were unsuccessful at passing the Praxis Core. Those students account for 13 percent of the students that came to Doane with the hope of becoming educators who are now no longer pursuing teaching as their career. The Education Preparation Program faculty, staff, and students also strongly support the expansion of the Attracting Excellence to Teaching Program to expand loan forgiveness for teacher candidates completing their full semester clinical experiences. Student teaching interns provide valuable service to Nebraska's PK-12 schools during their clinical experience. And the opportunity for loan forgiveness while completing an internship will certainly provide needed relief for early career teachers. Doane University supports the steps taken by LB1218 to begin to address the educator shortage while maintaining the integrity and high expectations of the teaching profession, profession in Nebraska. I thank you for your time and consideration. And on behalf of Doane University, advocate for the advancement of LB1218. I would be glad to entertain any questions you might have.

MORFELD: Thank you, Dr. Frey. Any questions for Dr. Frey? I almost called you Dr. Linehan. Senator Linehan.

LINEHAN: Thank you. Thank you, Vice Chair Morfeld. Is it the math test? Is that frequently the one? Because when you don't do math for two or three years, you forget how to do math.

TIM FREY: In, in my-- I have the, the numbers here. In Doane, it's usually writing and math, about equal, writing or math. Just depends on the student's strength.

LINEHAN: OK. And then for the part about, the young woman who preceded you here, is there a way that all the teachers' colleges could get together and figure out what teachers from other states need to be certified instead of-- it's kind of a one-off system now, right?

TIM FREY: The teacher education institutions themselves don't have the ability to do that. We're bound by the rules of the Nebraska Department of Education for what leads to certification. So we can certainly work with NDE, and we do. As April said, work with NDE as best as we can with our certification offers to get students.

LINEHAN: So the way I understood it at the roundtable is they get a request from somebody that's moved here, and then the department sends it to a teachers' college to review it.

TIM FREY: Often that's the case, and I'm going to defer to my colleagues. I think Sara Skretta will also testify next. They're both certification officers for their universities, and they might be able to speak to that too.

LINEHAN: OK, perfect. Thank you.

MORFELD: Any other questions for Dr. Frey? OK, seeing none, thank you for your testimony.

TIM FREY: Thank you.

MORFELD: Next proponent testimony for LB1218. Welcome.

SARA SKRETTA: Thank you. Oh, I've been waiting all afternoon to do that for just a few minutes. Good afternoon, distinguished members of the Education Committee. My name is Dr. Sara Skretta, S-a-r-a S-k-r-e-t-t-a. I'm an assistant professor and the educator certification officer at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and I'm appearing today on behalf of the University of Nebraska System in support of LB1218. We want to thank Chairman Walz and the members of the Education Committee for their leadership and work on the issue of teacher certification and how we strengthen the teacher preparation pipeline that's addressed in LB1218. The educator shortage crisis is one of the most critical and challenging workforce development hurdles that we face as a state and LB1218 introduces significant solutions to this critical problem. From my experience at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and our educator development pipeline, there are numerous facets of the bill that we support, but we believe the addition of multiple measures to assess basic skills competency will

have the greatest impact in removing the barrier of a single exam and additional costs for candidates. As educators who prepare the next generation of P-12 educators, my University College of Education colleagues and I support this essential addition in LB1218, as it would significantly change things for many students. The multiple measures language will save money and time, as is the case of one of our students. We'll just call her Holly. Holly was approaching the last semester of her undergraduate career but had not yet passed the Praxis Core exam. Holly had successfully passed two sections but had taken the writing 14 times with results just short of the required score. At \$90 per exam, Holly spent over \$1,200 attempting to meet this requirement to retain eligibility to continue through the program. Ultimately, Holly persevered and successfully completed her student teaching, graduated with a bachelor's degree and a cumulative 3.6 GPA, and passed the licensure exam on her first attempt. The preceding example is unfortunately not a unique story that undergraduate students in Nebraska face. At my campus, UNL, between 2015 and 2017, over 1,400 students took the Praxis Core and about 14 percent were not successful in at least one section. Of those who did not fully pass the exam, 90 percent of them failed to finish their educator preparation program. With the changes in LB1218, postsecondary institutions would be able to use their expertise and engagement with students to determine whether these students demonstrated proficiency in basic reading, writing, and math through coursework competencies, experiential learning, and other assessments. Some students still will not meet the standard, but LB1218 would validate the expertise of the university's educator preparation programs. The university also wants to express our support for LB1218's provision for loan forgiveness for the Attracting Excellence to Teaching Program. Including preservice teacher interns during students' semester clinical experience will provide needed financial assistance to our soon-to-be new teachers. Students in clinical experiences are valuable resources and educators in their assigned Nebraska school. LB1218 will maintain the standards and integrity of the education profession while using multiple methods to help address the educator workforce shortage in our state. Once again, I'd like to thank Chairman Walz and all of you for your leadership on this critical issue and for introducing LB1218 and would be happy to answer any questions that you might have.

MORFELD: Thank you, Dr. Skretta. Any questions? OK, Senator Murman.

MURMAN: Thank you. And thank you for testifying. I'm not questioning at all the intelligence of anybody that's testified here today, but I

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think everybody was like a 3.6 to a 4.0. I'm just curious, do you know what the average grade point average is, maybe for each class or overall at the university?

SARA SKRETTA: I do not have that information, but I'm happy to see what we can do for you. I do know that our students who go through our educator preparation programs must have at least a 2.75 to even qualify to student teach. And I would say we do a really good job across the state with that. So I'm, I'm proud of what our institutions and, specifically, the University of Nebraska System does.

MURMAN: OK, thank you. I may not have phrased that quite right. Everybody that has testified seems really intelligent.

SARA SKRETTA: Well, thank you. We, we-- I-- we appreciate that.

MURMAN: I'm not surprised they're 3.6 or 4.0.

MORFELD: Senator Murman's amendment or clarification is noted for the record. Senator Linehan, did you have a question?

LINEHAN: Yes.

MORFELD: OK.

LINEHAN: Thank you, Vice Chairman Morfeld. So can you help explain how the certification for teachers outside of state, a teacher, the young woman who was up here testifying?

SARA SKRETTA: Sure. Candidates coming in from out of state, and again, first of all, I want to make sure to clarify I'm at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, part of the university system. I don't work for the Nebraska Department of Education, which is the organization that certifies teachers. Typically, an out-of-state candidate will start at the Nebraska Department of Education. And if they need to take extra coursework or NDE needs some assistance with some input on coursework, they might consult one of our institutions to see what we might think after we review a program. Our institutions-- well, I guess I'll just use me. I'm able to look at someone's program and have to measure it against what the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's state-approved teacher ed program requires. So we require this many hours here and this many hours here in this specific course. I am only able to look at someone within that confine, as are my colleagues in other, in other education programs. NDE would be able to look at it at a broader sense. As an individual certification officer, I can only look at

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someone within the confines of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's specific program.

LINEHAN: So in all the teachers' colleges that we have in Nebraska,--

SARA SKRETTA: Um-hum.

LINEHAN: --are you all aligned?

SARA SKRETTA: Every educator preparation program has to be approved by the Nebraska Department of Education, and there are standards that have to be met. And on an annual basis, we submit our programs and show how they meet those standards for approval. In terms of an out-of-state candidate coming in, we at UNL and my colleagues, we don't have a standard checklist for here's what would count or here would not be from NDE. That would be something that-- a decision that would be made in the educator certification office at NDE.

LINEHAN: OK, that helps. Thank you very much--

SARA SKRETTA: Um-hum.

LINEHAN: --for being here.

MORFELD: Any other questions? Thank you, Dr. Skretta.

SARA SKRETTA: Thank you.

MORFELD: Any other proponent testimony for LB1218? Welcome.

COLBY COASH: Good afternoon, Vice Chairman Morfeld, members of the Education Committee. My name is Colby Coash. I represent-- C-o-l-b-y C-o-a-s-h, and I represent the Nebraska Association of School Boards. And you have my testimony, so I'm not going to read that. I'm just going to highlight some things that you've already heard. First of all, there's some, there's some consensus on this that it needs fixed. And, and certainly from our perspective on a school board lever-- level, addressing this issue is something that we heard about from our association, from our members across the state. We spent time last fall going across different regions of the state talking about things education-related and the workforce issue bubbled up as a high priority. And we shared that, of course, with Senator Walz. And we're very happy to come in and see all the bills that you, you have reviewed today, but particularly with, with LB1218. The workforce summit that was discussed earlier that Dr. Skretta put together is

something we participated in. We have a member of our organization who is participating in those discussions. We're very pleased about that. The other thing I wanted to share with you is-- haven't really been talked about within this bill, but there's some fee changes within the Department of Education as part of, part of this bill. The speed of certification for new and relocating educators has been a real challenge for the Department of Education getting those cranked out in a time that is helpful for districts across the state. And so the feedback from our members is, as indicated, a strong desire to support the department and doing whatever they need to do to up-- to ramp up those-- the completion of those applications so that those teachers can get put into service more quickly. And we're hoping that the flexibility that is in LB1218 with regard to those fees and, and the department might address some of those challenges. And so we're pleased to see that. And while not in LB1218 but it has been mentioned, critical for this committee to start to look at is that out-of-state certification process. As again, as I travel the state and you go out into the Panhandle, you, you-- those rural districts there rely not on educators who have been educated, protect-- maybe in Lincoln or Omaha, but have been educated in Colorado or Wyoming and, and want to come here fear a district in, in Senator Murman's district that borders the Kansas/Nebraska line, you might be trying to pull educators from Kansas. And so it's really important that we take a look at not lowering the standard because we have high standards here, but making the-- it easier for qualified educators from other states to come in. And so that's not part of this bill, but I'm hoping this committee will take a look at that as well.

MORFELD: Thank you, Mr. Coash. Any questions? Senator Murman.

MURMAN: Thank you. And thank you for testifying. I'm, I'm all for reciprocity between states, but I do have some concern that, you know, with Nebraska's high qualification or high standards for teachers, that there's some risk that we'll lose more teachers across the border than what we'll gain across all the borders.

COLBY COASH: I understand that, but we're in Nebraska, right, we've got a lot of, of good things to offer and I don't want to lower the standard, right? We have high standards and we should have high standards for our educators. Our kids deserve that. But given the choice of an educator who could go north, you know, into Nebraska or south into Kansas or west into Colorado or east into Nebraska, given the choice we sure would like-- we, we sure think that young teachers or emerging educators would choose our state and we want them-- we

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don't want to put a barrier in front of them if we can help it and keep those standards high.

MURMAN: Thank you.

MORFELD: Any other questions? OK,--

COLBY COASH: Thank you.

MORFELD: --thank you very much. Next proponent testimony on LB1218. Welcome back, Mr. Skretta.

JOHN SKRETTA: Thank you. Senators, distinguished members of the Education Committee, my name's John Skretta. That's J-o-h-n S-k-r-e-t-t-a. Again, I've spoken proponent on the two preceding bills here this afternoon, and I am the Educational Service Unit 6 administrator and I'm here today on behalf of STANCE, Schools Taking Action for Nebraska Children's Education; coalition of 19 midsize Nebraska Public School districts and also ESUCC, which is the Coordinating Council. That's the umbrella organization for Nebraska's 17 Educational Service Units. And it's my privilege to represent those two organizations and submit our proponent testimony for LB1218. Want to, first of all, thank Senator Walz for her leadership and the entire Education Committee for the keen interest and understanding of the very real magnitude of this issue. You've got the written testimony that's circulating to you right now. As previously stated, we're proponent on each of the three bills that were brought forward today. With that said, we are because we acknowledge the profound need for systemic change in order to address the educator workforce shortage issue, while noting our support for the whole buffet of the options before you today. We would emphasize that LB1218, the bill under your consideration right now and supported as an Education Committee priority bill, contains the most explicitly stated and thoroughly supported rationale regarding the clear and compelling need to address educator shortage through a multipronged approach which the bill offers. LB1218 expands pathways for future educators to demonstrate skills proficiency by adding a, quote, portfolio of options and LB1218 capitalizes on the best Praxis recommendation among human resources professionals working in education. And that's the use of loan forgiveness as a tool to incentivize entry into the profession. And we commend that significant gesture of support for those who successfully complete student teaching to receive \$1,000 loan forgiveness component. Just a couple of things kind of in conclusion, I think I would be remiss if I did not note the importance of LR1157

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[SIC--LR157] and the commitment of this committee to addressing diversification of the education workforce. If we look at this and pair it up, synthesize this with the issue of Praxis, I want to point out that according to the data from the Nebraska Department of Education, I think there's fairly clear disparate impact that the Praxis test has. I know you've seen some of this data before. I want to remind you of it and make sure we note it on the record. If you look at subgroup population performance percentages on Praxis basic skills over a five-year trend line, white students subgroup is close to 90 percent passing percentage. It drops to 83 percent with Native subgroup population. It drops to 70 if you look at the Mexican-American Hispanic subgroup and it drops to 70 or below if you look at the African-American subgroup student population in terms of passing percentage on the Praxis. I think that's really relevant data in consideration of trying to meet a couple different, really important objectives that the Education Committee and the broader education community have. So I wanted to share that with you. Kind of in conclusion, as we shared this testimony within our group's STANCE subgroup or the STANCE group looked at this and I immediately started hearing from superintendents about positions that they already have open for next year and are struggling to fill. One of our districts has been advertising for a ninth grade physical science teacher for next year since mid-November. As of yesterday, not even one applicant. It's a great district. It's an attractive place. It's in Senator Murman's Legislative District. So why wouldn't you want to reside there? Come on. That's it. Thanks.

MORFELD: OK, thank you, Dr. Skretta. The charm [INAUDIBLE] with Senator Murman. Any questions? OK, seeing none,--

JOHN SKRETTA: Thank you.

MORFELD: --thank you very much for your testimony. Next proponent testimony for LB1218.

ANN HUNTER-PIRTLE: Good afternoon, Vice Chair Morfeld and members of the Education Committee. My name's Ann Hunter-Pirtle, A-n-n H-u-n-t-e-r hyphen P-i-r-t-l-e. I'm the executive director of Stand for Schools, which is a nonprofit that works to advance public education in Nebraska. Stand for Schools supports LB1218. We also support LB960 and LB690. Wanted to be respectful of your time this afternoon. We hear regularly from teacher education professors and students across the state that using the initial Praxis exam is the only measure of basic skills competency is limiting the students who

enter a teacher education program. Specifically, it is making those programs less diverse. LB1218 would allow a portfolio of options to meet the basic skills competency requirement and would also create \$1,000 per semester of student loan forgiveness for student teachers. Students with diverse perspectives and life experiences are desperately needed in the teaching profession and the Praxis is an unnecessary barrier. We appreciate the committee's attention to this matter. Appreciate so many committee members as cosponsors and urge you to advance one or more of these concepts. Thank you.

MORFELD: Thank you, Ms. Hunter-Pirtle. Any questions? OK, seeing none,--

ANN HUNTER-PIRTLE: Thank you.

MORFELD: --thank you. Next proponent testimony on LB1218. Welcome.

PAUL TURMAN: Good afternoon, Vice Chair Morfeld, members of the committee. My name is Paul Turman. That's spelled P-a-u-l T-u-r-m-a-n. I'm the chancellor of the Nebraska State College System. I'm here in support for the system behind LB1218, which really does a, a-- significant steps in reducing some of the barriers that we see with our teacher education programs and bringing students into these important fields. I know that not only this bill, but on the previous testimony for the two previous bills, highlight the impact potentially of the pandemic and decreasing the overall need that we have or decreasing the, the students that want to go into teacher education programs, but also the growth and the need. I think over the last two years, I've had the opportunity to share with this committee the big, significant gap that we are seeing long before the pandemic happened. You heard numbers earlier with roughly about a 50 percent decline in the total number of teacher ed candidates that we have in, in the state. That's not just the state college system, it's the university system, it's the private institutions that provide teachers here for the state of Nebraska. While at the same time, the total number of completers has gone down by almost 13 to 14 percent. And so ultimately, the candidate numbers are going to catch up to the completers. And as we look at it currently, we need roughly about 14-- or we're producing about 1,400 to 1,500 completers every year in the state of Nebraska. And as we look out to 2028, the Department of Labor is specifying that we'll need about 2,800 a year to meet that ongoing need. And so there is a, a significant hole that needs to be filled, and I think the pandemic is only going to make that worse. And so a strategy that potentially sunsets a, a solution is something I think

the committee should seriously consider as you're working through these discussions. I think we have heard a, a number of good proponents here today on a number of these bills talking about these barriers and those barriers certainly resonate within our traditional student population, students who come-- need to be able to pass the Praxis, Praxis exam or the, the high-needs challenge. They either have backgrounds that preclude them from being able to be successful. We also have students who come from learning disabilities, while at the same time we have students who have English as a second language, all of those having adverse impacts, which you've heard testimony related to. I also think it's important to compare this to that the range of other licensure exams that are out there. Oftentimes, we ask students who are going into accounting, going into engineering, going into nursing that they are expected to pass a licensure exam of some kind. But normally that comes at the very end of their career. They finish their degree program, even before they move into their career, they're asked to meet that. We've added another barrier for teacher education that has significantly impacted the total number of candidates that we have the capacity to try to educate and then bring into this field going forward. And I think the two very good examples of individuals who highlighted, I've come forward, I've had struggles with the exam. I'm on my third or fourth. We've heard 14th attempt and I think there is certainly a level of perseverance that exists there for those students. The vast majority of students do not persevere at that level. Oftentimes, they see the first time that they fail, that they are looking for other opportunities or they simply walk away from education altogether. And so I think time really is the enemy that we're struggling with. And the longer we ask students to stay in that trajectory of getting their degree completed in teacher education, the more likely we're going to lose those students over time as well. I think it's important to recognize that each of my three institutions: Chadron, Peru, and Wayne, and also the institutions, the university system and the privates have nationally established accreditation standards. We're only-- not only accredited by NDE, we're also accredited by CAEP. And they've updated recently their Standard 3, which are the candidate recruitment, progression, and support requirements of which they have embedded the capacity to not only look at things like a Praxis exam, but also other multiple measures. And so you're seeing this field move in that particular direction. I know you've asked some questions about dating back to 1983 and what seems to be the impetus for some of these conversations that are unfolding now almost 30, 40 years later. So the, the nation at risk was an analysis or a report that the state of Nebraska obviously took up and

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said, we need to do something different with teacher education. That became a national dialogue in 2000s, 2001, when no child left behind became in effect, which then implemented Praxis. ETS filled that void and had a test that a lot of states adopted. And now we're starting to see a lot of those states move back. So Michigan in 2018, Illinois in 2019, Iowa in 2020, and then most recently, you've heard about California have all moved away, implemented multiple measures. I will also say a lot of other states have incorporated at least multiple measures for certain subsets of their teacher ed programs that have been of the highest risk moving forward. So I would ask that you would support this bill. It's a priority bill for the Education Committee, it certainly is a priority bill for my education deans in, in the Nebraska State College System. I'd be happy to answer any questions you might have.

MORFELD: Thank you, Chancellor Turman. Any questions? OK, I don't see any. Thank you, Chancellor.

PAUL TURMAN: Thank you.

MORFELD: Next proponent testimony, LB1218. Welcome.

CHRISTY FLAHERTY-COLLING: Thank you. My name is Dr. Christy Flaherty-Colling, C-h-r-i-s-t-y, Flaherty, F as in Frank -l-a-h-e-r-t-y hyphen C-o-l-l-i-n-g. Expecting that yellow light come on already. So members of the Education Committee, thank you for letting me be here. I am a 21-year educator at Omaha Central High School and I also facilitate new teacher induction activities and coordinate field experiences for college students who are looking for practicum student teaching placements. At the start of the school year, we were short 12 certified staff members in our-- of about 180 certified staff members, we were down 12. As a result, I am now teaching the Introduction to Education course, which is one of the grow-your-own programs that Senator Walz referred to. And I have a population of beautiful, diverse, wonderful kids who many of them started off looking for an elective credit and are now realizing that teaching may be a profession that is available to them. We started talking about the Praxis exam and what that entails, and you could see the same looked of pained incredulity that you could see on many of your faces when this young educator who works with early childhood education gave her story and they realized that this was out of their reach when they hadn't even started their journey. We also have an exemplary second year teacher who is teaching with a provisional license, and so he is just now needing to take the Praxis exam to

continue in his studies. He did not pass by the slimmest of margins, and he is worried about whether or not he will be able to continue in his high-need area in the fall semester. He is an exemplary teacher. He is someone that you would want for your own children. And if the provisions in LB1218 were in effect right now, he would be deemed as qualified, minimum skills. He is not English as his first language. English is not his first language, and he found that it was exceedingly difficult to pick the best answer in the reading component because both answers were correct. It was just differentiating between good and best in terms of answers. As I was preparing for this testimony, I spoke with one of our assistant principals who said, you know, it's not just the Praxis that makes me crazy. It's being unable to hire highly qualified people from another state who are available to teach. And she said, I just had to pass-- or someone passed on us, actually, because he would have to take 30 credits of college courses in order to teach in our district-- or in our state. And he was an experienced special educator, African-American, has coaching experience, ticks so many boxes, would be so good for our kids, but he was not willing to go through the hoops necessary to become certified in Nebraska. I also shared the story of me coming here with my students and they read the rationale about this bill so they can get their heads wrapped around exactly what it was. All but two of them think that it achieves its stated standards, which for adolescents, that's pretty doggone good. If you can have that few detractors in a group, that's great. One of them said that he just thought that it didn't quite address the burnout the teachers had with COVID. And there was another one who said, what's \$1,000 going to do for me when I've got a four-year degree I've got to pay for it. So that is the input the kids have provided. Take it as you will. But they are excited that you are looking at making education a profession that is attainable to them, and they are excited to know that I'm here speaking and you are hearing about their specific stories and know that you are working for their benefit. So they're really hoping you're going to be able to get LB1218 passed. Thank you so much.

PANSING BROOKS: Thank you.

LINEHAN: Oh, I'm, I'm sorry. [INAUDIBLE]. You want to take over? Thank you for being here. Are there any questions from the committee? Seeing none, thank you very much for being here.

CHRISTY FLAHERTY-COLLING: Thank you.

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LINEHAN: Appreciate it. Next proponent. Are there any more proponents? Are there any opponents? Is there anyone wanting to speak in the neutral position? Senator Walz, would you like to close? Senator Morfeld is back so we have letters for the record.

WALZ: I am going to-- do you want to do the record-- letters first or can I go ahead?

MORFELD: No, I'll do it once we're done.

WALZ: I'm going to make this short and sweet. First of all, you know, obviously this is an issue that we've all heard about over the past few years, and this is an issue that affects the whole state, you know, not just your district or my district. The entire state is affected by this issue. I will tell you the one consistent message that I did not hear today was that we want to lower standards. That was one message I absolutely did not hear. I look around the room and I see many, many people who have years and years of experience and expertise in this, in this area, and they have been diligent in working together to come up with solutions that will help us with the teacher workforce shortage. You've heard from many testifiers about the barriers related to entering into teacher college, as well as the barriers related to reciprocity, barriers that prohibit very, very qualified teachers from teaching in Nebraska. Education really is the cornerstone of our state. It's the cornerstone to our state's success, and it's the cornerstone to our state's economic development. We have the opportunity today to take the advice and the solutions that have been brought to us and make necessary changes that allow us as a state to move forward and increase our ability to provide quality education to our kids. And with that, I end my testimony. Any questions?

MORFELD: Thank you, Chairwoman Walz. Any questions? Senator Linehan.

LINEHAN: Thank you, Vice Chairman Morfeld. But, but does LB1218 address the out of state?

WALZ: LB1218, if you look on page 2, I believe, line 24: candidates for certification, including those coming to Nebraska from other states, should be able to use a portfolio of options to demonstrate basic skills competency. So, yes, it does.

LINEHAN: So is Department of Ed and you figured out what that is exactly?

WALZ: I don't know how to answer that question.

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LINEHAN: That's OK. That's why we have [INAUDIBLE].

WALZ: I can talk to you about that later. Yeah.

LINEHAN: Thank you very much.

WALZ: Yeah.

MORFELD: To be continued.

WALZ: Thank you.

MORFELD: Any other questions for Chairwoman Walz? OK, seeing none,--

WALZ: All right.

MORFELD: --we do have six proponent letters, zero opponent, and zero neutral for LB1218 for the record. Thank you, Chairwoman Walz.

WALZ: Thank you, Vice Chair Morfeld.

MORFELD: OK, that ends our hearings for LB1218 and for the day. Thank you.