



Ninety-Seventh Legislature - Second Session - 2002
Committee Statement
LB 1079

Hearing Date: January 28, 2002

Committee On: Education

Introducer(s): (Thompson)

Title: Provide for tuition reimbursement for teachers and paraeducators and reallocate the Education Innovation Fund

Roll Call Vote – Final Committee Action:

Advanced to General File

Advanced to General File with Amendments

X Indefinitely Postponed

Vote Results:

7	Yes	Senators Wickersham, Suttle, Coordsen, Price, Brashear, Raikes, Stuhr
1	No	Senator Maxwell
0	Present, not voting	
0	Absent	

Proponents:

Senator Nancy Thompson
D'Anne Welch
Tip O'Neill

Representing:

Introducer
Self
Assn. of Independent Colleges and Universities

Opponents:

Sister Michelle Faltus
Terry Crum
Leonard Skov

Representing:

Archdiocese of Omaha
St. James/Seton School
Excellence in Education Council

Neutral:

Representing:

Summary of purpose and/or changes:

Legislative Bill 1079 would authorize the Department of Education to provide grants to school districts to fund stipends and tuition payments for teachers and paraeducators who are taking classes to become teachers. The grants would be funded by lottery proceeds.

Eligible teachers would be enrolled in courses offered at or through a certified Nebraska teacher training institution, which is either a state-supported university or college or an independent, not-for-profit, regionally accredited college or university. The teacher would need to be taking the courses in order to:

1. Earn additional college credits in his or her subject area or a related field of teaching;
2. Earn a master's degree in his or her subject area or a related field of teaching; or
3. Earn an endorsement in another subject area.

Such teacher would be eligible for 100% of the resident tuition charges for up to 9 credit hours per academic year, except that a teacher who attends an independent college or university would only be eligible for an amount up to the amount he or she would receive if he or she enrolled in courses at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

A paraeducator who enrolls in courses at or through the same institutions in order to become a certified teacher in Nebraska would be eligible for payment by the employing school district of 100% of the resident tuition charges for up to 30 credit hours per academic year, except that a paraeducator who attends an independent would also be limited to the amount he or she would receive if he or she enrolled in courses at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. This portion of the proposal is similar to LB 625 from 2001, which is currently being held by the Education Committee.

The department would be authorized to adopt and promulgate rules and regulations to carry out this section. Such rules and regulations could govern applications by school districts to the department and applications by teachers and paraeducators to their employing school districts.

Tuition reimbursement payments pursuant to this section shall not be subject to state withholding or income tax. Tuition reimbursements pursuant to this section would probably be subject to federal taxation, unless there is a specific exemption.

For purposes of this measure:

1. Paraeducator would mean the following job classifications: Education aide, special education aide, special education assistant, teacher associate, teacher assistant, teacher aide, pupil service aide, library aide, child development aide, child development assistant, and physical education aide; and
2. Teacher would mean a person holding a current certificate issued under sections 79-806 to 79-816.

Section 9-812 is amended by replacing the current statutory allocations from the Education Innovation Fund for fiscal years beginning with 2003-04. The Education Innovation Fund receives lottery proceeds to be used for education. For fiscal years 2001-02 and 2002-03, the fund has been allocated to a distance education network completion grant, to operating expenses for the Excellence in Education Council, and to the General Fund. The current statutory allocations beginning with 2003-04 are as follows:

1. 10% to the mentor teacher program;
2. 60% to the quality education incentives;
3. 20% to the Attracting Excellence to Teaching Program; and
4. 10% to be allocated by the Governor.

The new allocation provisions would first subtract administrative expenses, with the remainder to be allocated as follows:

1. 60% for grants for the teachers pursuant to this act;

2. 20% to the Attracting Excellence to Teaching Program;
3. 10% to mentor teacher programs;
4. 5% to the Master Teacher Program; and
5. 5% to fund payments for paraeducators pursuant to this Act.

The Attracting Excellence to Teaching Program would provide forgivable loans to qualified students in teacher education programs. The Master Teacher Program would provide salary bonuses for teachers who earn credentials from a qualifying credentialing organization. Both programs are in current statute, but have not yet been implemented due to funding. As is shown above, the Attracting Excellence to Teaching Program is currently scheduled for implementation for 2003-04 using lottery proceeds.

Language governing grants allocated by the Governor would be removed along with the provisions authorizing the Excellence in Education Council. The Excellence in Education Council currently administers the lottery funds. The annual reporting requirement would be transferred from the Council to the Department of Education and references to consultation with the Council would be removed from the provisions authorizing the State Board of Education to issue rules and regulations.

Section 79-1018.01 would be amended to remove references to lottery grants for special education and to clarify a reference to federal statutes.

Sections 79-758 and 79-1108 would be outright repealed. Section 79-758 provides for quality education incentives. Currently, local systems may receive quality education incentives for meeting certain criteria. The incentives are paid from lottery proceeds allocated to the incentives. Section 79-1108 requires school districts to identify learners with high ability and authorizes the districts to provide accelerated or differentiated curriculum programs for such students. School districts may apply for funds from the Education Innovation Fund to be used for development and improvement of the programs.

Explanation of amendments, if any:

Senator Ron Raikes, Chairperson