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federal infringement on this sacred philosophy. We've attempted to honor that important value over the last ten years, even as the state has moved from funding 25 percent of the cost of K-through-12 education to funding about 50 percent of the cost today. In building the K-through-12 funding formula, local decision making was honored in many ways, and the money has been distributed with few strings attached. Over the next two years, over \$200 million in new money will flow to K-through-12 districts. Locally elected school boards across our state will decide how best to spend this money based upon their own districts' priorities. Now we are being asked to depart from this practice in some form or fashion to address teacher salaries. An issue that historically has been handled at the local level, district by district, has been carried to the door of the State Capitol. First, I want to say thank you to the Teacher Salary Task Force for their effort to develop recommendations on this issue. We have a much better understanding of the complexities of the issue today than a year ago when they began their work. Today I am announcing my support for some of the task force recommendations. I commit funding for two programs that will help attract students into the teaching profession and improve the quality of teachers in the state of Nebraska. The Attracting Excellence to Teaching Program will provide loans to teacher education students who agree to teach in Nebraska's public or private schools. Borrowers will be eligible to have loan repayment forgiven each year that they teach in our state. The Master Teacher Program will provide an annual financial incentive for public and private school teachers who achieve rigorous national certification. I also want to say thank you to Senator Redfield for introducing legislation at my request to adopt the mentoring program supported by the task force to assist teachers entering the profession. However, one-size-fits-all, across-the-board bonus plan suggested by the task force, in my judgment, is not a workable solution. Their work shows that teacher salaries are above the national average in some areas of the state, while in other areas they are not. This is a complex issue because there are 563 school districts in our state that have been historically free to negotiate and set their own teacher compensation packages. The system has evolved to include endless differences in pay and benefit plans, but that's