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Appropriations Committee  
March 07, 2017

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[LB221 LB270 LB465]

The Committee on Appropriations met at 1:30 p.m. on Tuesday, March 7, 2017, in Room 1524 of the State Capitol, Lincoln, Nebraska, for the purpose of conducting a public hearing on LB270, LB465, and LB221. Senators present: John Stinner, Chairperson; Kate Bolz, Vice Chairperson; Rob Clements; Robert Hilkemann; John Kuehn; Mike McDonnell; Tony Vargas; Dan Watermeier; and Anna Wishart. Senators absent: None.

SENATOR STINNER: (Recorder malfunction)...Appropriations Committee. My name is John Stinner. I'm Chairman of this...of the Appropriations Committee. We will start today with self-introductions, starting with Senator Clements.

SENATOR CLEMENTS: Hello. I'm Rob Clements from Elmwood. I represent District 2.

SENATOR KUEHN: John Kuehn, District 38, seven counties in south-central Nebraska.

SENATOR HILKEMANN: Robert Hilkemann, District 4, west Omaha.

SENATOR STINNER: I'm John Stinner, District 48, all of Scotts Bluff County.

SENATOR BOLZ: Senator Kate Bolz. I represent District 29 in south-central Lincoln.

SENATOR WISHART: Senator Anna Wishart, District 27, west Lincoln.

SENATOR VARGAS: Senator Tony Vargas. I represent downtown and south Omaha, the great District 7.

SENATOR WATERMEIER: Dan Watermeier, District 1 from Syracuse.

SENATOR STINNER: Thank you. And Senator McDonnell will be joining us later. Today I do not have my script so I'm winging this. There are green sign-in sheets on both sides of the...on the tables and a white sign-in sheet. If you are going to testify, you need to make 12 copies of the green sheets (sic). And if you also want to...that's if you're going to testify at the microphone. If not, you want to fill out a sign-in sheet and a white sheet over on the sides located. They will be entered into the record. I would ask that you turn off your cell phones or quiet the cell phones. When you come up to testify, I would ask that you spell your first and last name. We are going to limit testifiers to five minutes. And on that we will start with LB270. Senator Kolowski. [LB270]

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SENATOR KOLOWSKI: (Exhibit 1) Good afternoon, Chairman Stinner and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Senator Rick Kolowski, R-i-c-k K-o-l-o-w-s-k-i, representing District 31 in Omaha. I'm here today to introduce LB270 to appropriate an additional \$750,000 per year to the Expanded Learning Opportunity Grant Program Act. In 2016, the Legislature appropriated \$250,000 to ELOs. This requires a one-to-one match with community partners. This funded 11 projects that served 1,489 students all around the state of Nebraska. ELOs focused on STEM, health and wellness, career exploration, community engagement, and agriculture. These programs are an investment in our future and will save the state money. These programs provide a high-quality educational opportunity before and after school and in the summer and/or other times when school is not in session. Want to take just a second and put this within the context of a larger educational picture that I have been working on with my bills at this present time this...during this session. And I think it's important to get a bigger picture of what we're talking about as we look at the educational opportunities that are before us. Senator Walz has a bill that's currently...has been heard in Education on early childhood education for the three- through five-year-olds. We have this expanded learning opportunity bill today, LB270, before you, and that's important because of the...we're one of the states with the highest percentage of both parents working and this giving their children an opportunity to experience these different classes or other experiences in their communities by this particular grant money. The TEEOSA Act is also important to us as far as K-12 education, and I have a commission bill that I presented yesterday to the Education Committee relooking at the TEEOSA formula after 27 years, since 1990. And then lastly another bill that I've put...presented in the Education Committee was on the college and career readiness aspects of 11th grade, 12th grade, 13 and 14 as far as community colleges or colleges where dual enrollment credit would be available. It's an important piece to look at the whole spread of what we're talking about because that fills a lot of different gaps in our state as we're working to make education stronger. I thank you for your consideration of this request today and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have at this time. And we have a number of speakers behind us. Thank you. [LB270]

SENATOR STINNER: Are there any questions? Senator Hilkemann. [LB270]

SENATOR HILKEMANN: Yes. Senator, now these are one-year? Is this a one-year grant? [LB270]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Yes, it's on a one-year basis and we'd like to see it renewed, of course, every year. And just as I brought the bill to us last year with that \$250,000 grant that we used last...during this last year's time, this would be another one for \$750,000 this time. [LB270]

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SENATOR HILKEMANN: And so if from then we add the \$750,000 this year and then going forth this program will continue or is it going to have to...you'll have to come for funding each year? [LB270]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: At this point in time, we're coming every year for funding. We'd love to see it picked up on a more permanent basis, if that's possible, and repeatable on a yearly basis if funding would be there. [LB270]

SENATOR HILKEMANN: Uh-huh. I can just say that I had the opportunity to visit one of our schools in OPS that has this ELO program going and it's amazing the kids that participate in it, the meal that they get, and the advantages certainly that those folks saw. So... [LB270]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you. [LB270]

SENATOR HILKEMANN: ...thank you for bringing this. [LB270]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Yes, sir. [LB270]

SENATOR STINNER: Senator Vargas. [LB270]

SENATOR VARGAS: Thank you very much, Chairman. I just had a question. Thank you for bringing this, by the way. [LB270]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Yes, sir. [LB270]

SENATOR VARGAS: As a former teacher, I know the impact of extended learning opportunities for students, especially in low-income backgrounds. So I appreciate you bringing this. Just a question. I know that there was \$250,000 awarded and I know in the fiscal note there is mention around a certain amount being appropriated for evaluation and technical assistance. What does that look like in the first year of the program, the evaluation? What are some more statistics around the impact of this that can help bolster, you know, why this is necessary? [LB270]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Oh, excellent, excellent question. Thank you very much. I think it's important and others speaking behind me will elaborate in more depth on that because the program evaluations, assessments they do every year with the different sites that they have, wherever they might be across the state. And they do move them around. They have moved them around in different years depending on how much money they have and matching money they

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can come up with. So we have volumes of data over a longitudinal time period that would show you the difference this makes in the lives of those kids, their families as far as the exposure they have to certain classes or different experiences that they'd be going through. But also there's districts that are doing things beyond this money, beyond our money, and the things that they are doing as well, taking the math skills or other skills in science or whatever else the students would need help with, and homing in on the after-school time period with those students so they have elongated experiences with a trained teacher to get some exposure to the difficult concepts they might be struggling with. So there's lots of different tentacles through this whole thing, how it spreads across the state, and our money only goes so far. We'd like to do more. We've got excellent administrators and organizers that have managed this but we'd like to experience it in more places, in more districts, at more times. That's our goal. [LB270]

SENATOR VARGAS: That's great. And I ask because I think you're often talking, when we're talking about programs we're talking about the return on investment and... [LB270]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Absolutely. [LB270]

SENATOR VARGAS: ...the efficacy of each program, especially in this year. So appreciate that. [LB270]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you. [LB270]

SENATOR VARGAS: Thank you. [LB270]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Appreciate the question. [LB270]

SENATOR STINNER: Additional questions? [LB270]

SENATOR CLEMENTS: Yes, Mr. Chairman. [LB270]

SENATOR STINNER: Uh-huh, Senator Clements. [LB270]

SENATOR CLEMENTS: Thank you, Mr. Kolowski. Senator, just a point of clarification. You said this is just a one-year program but I'm reading \$750,000 in '17-18 and '18-19. Doesn't that make it a two-year program? [LB270]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Within our time period of the biennium, yes, you're right. [LB270]

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SENATOR CLEMENTS: Okay. [LB270]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Yeah. I was thinking in terms of the two-year biennium as one year. [LB270]

SENATOR CLEMENTS: Oh, okay. I see. [LB270]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Yes, sir. [LB270]

SENATOR CLEMENTS: Thank you. [LB270]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you. (Inaudible). [LB270]

SENATOR STINNER: Additional questions? What's the average size of a grant? What is the average size of (inaudible)? [LB270]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: They vary and the grant recipients and those who have worked with those are in the audience. I think that would be an excellent question. [LB270]

SENATOR STINNER: Okay. [LB270]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: They can elaborate on the sources and the amounts of those grants and how they're used, sir. [LB270]

SENATOR STINNER: Senator Bolz. [LB270]

SENATOR BOLZ: Thank you, Senator Stinner. And I think it would be helpful if you would talk or we could talk about the underlying Expanded Learning Opportunity Grant Program, because that came through the Education Committee... [LB270]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Uh-huh. [LB270]

SENATOR BOLZ: ...and it sets out parameters and expectations. So I don't know if you have any comments about the structure that's put into place, but I think it's worth noting for this committee that there are expectations in terms of matching dollars, in terms of the programs that can be offered, in terms of the expectations that they're in line with existing academic programs and

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other responsibilities of the Expanded Learning Grant Program that's already established in statute, even though it's not necessarily articulated directly in the bill. So I don't know if you have any comments about the policy best practice that's already in place through the underlying statute. [LB270]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Just briefly, if I may. I think the major thing is to connect it with the academic programs, experiences of the students during the school day. Where are they having difficulties or troubles in a particular classroom, set of concepts that they're going through in their class, and then linking that with, say, a STEM experience with technology with the student doing something of that nature, and combining things in a different pattern than they would have a chance to do in their regular school day. And enhancing those concepts that they learned from the experience during the school day to an application, for example, in a chosen STEM experience that they might be constructing something, building something, designing something, and then seeing how that runs or works. So I think it's important that we think in terms of the school day and then with the instruction being carried over into the after school time or during the summer or during the weekends or other holidays, time periods when students are in this capacity within our community. It's a really important outreach of extension, any way you want to look at it, of what they're getting in their classrooms. And that takes...one of the things, of course, you have to have is the coordination between the school and that location, so there is a very tight coordination with the students and their particular needs of what they're experiencing. [LB270]

SENATOR BOLZ: Great. That's helpful and I just think it's worth noting that that's already in statute... [LB270]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Absolutely. [LB270]

SENATOR BOLZ: ...and so those expectations are already existing in the way that the program continues to run with the lottery dollars and, of course, the request would add to that initiative. [LB270]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Again, I can't emphasize enough the impact of dual working families, both the parents being employed and the amount of hours and sometimes two jobs or more in their families. Where do the kids go and what experiences do they have in the community that would be safe and secure and nurturing in a positive way as far as their growth in experiences? [LB270]

SENATOR STINNER: Any additional questions? Seeing none, thank you. [LB270]

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SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you, sir. [LB270]

SENATOR STINNER: Any additional proponents? Good afternoon. [LB270]

JEFF COLE: (Exhibit 2) Good afternoon, Senator Stinner, members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Jeff Cole, J-e-f C-o-l-e, and I'm representing Beyond School Bells. That's Nebraska's statewide ELO network, a program of Nebraska Children and Families Foundation. Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of LB270. We support this bill because we feel like it is both the right kind of targeted investment in Nebraska's ELO programs and an important investment in the skills Nebraska youth need to grow our economy. Nebraska's Expanded Learning Opportunity, or ELO, programs are high-quality, school-community partnerships that provide children and their families with school-based, community-powered learning opportunities during the after-school hours and over the summer months. ELOs target that 80 percent of a young person's waking hours that are not spent in a formal classroom environment. These hours of opportunity represent key, underutilized touch points when Nebraska communities can provide educational experiences that complement and enhance the learning taking place in our state's high-quality public schools. LB270 is important because it provides much-needed funding that is targeted on building and strengthening local ELO partnerships. As Senator Kolowski mentioned, communities that received these grants last year are seeing positive results in terms of partnerships, leveraging resources, and supporting exciting new program opportunities, including new science, technology, engineering, and math, or STEM, programming. This type of programming is critical because the national research released last week and summarized in the materials I just distributed show the important role that ELO STEM plays in helping youth develop an identity as a STEM learner--a person who can do well and succeed in the important STEM areas. More importantly, this study found that when young people participate in quality ELO STEM activities they: one, are more interested in STEM learning; two, show improvements in perseverance, critical thinking, and other key twenty-first century skills; and three, have a better understanding of and are more interested in exploring STEM careers. Nebraska was 1 of the 11 states that participated in this national study. Unsurprising to all of us, Nebraska youth showed the highest gains in the nation in these important measures of how participation in the ELO STEM activities support the development of a strong STEM identity and interest in STEM careers. The Nebraska communities participating in this study had partnerships providing innovative STEM programming in their communities. Youth participated in hands-on engaging programs, including robotics, coding, planning and maintaining community gardens, tinkering in mobile maker spaces, taking part in experiments, extracting DNA from plant material--the kinds of exciting, inspiring learning experiences that we know have a long-term impact on youth. More Nebraska youth need access to important learning opportunities such as these. Survey research indicates that for every youth in a quality ELO program in Nebraska, more than one more would participate if a program were available and affordable in their community. The new national STEM research provides important evidence

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showing that ELO can play an important role in addressing one of the most challenging issues that you deal with on the Appropriations Committee--how to strategically invest very limited resources in activities that will promote long-term growth and opportunity for future generations. ELO programs are just that--a strategic investment in our future. ELO programs can and indeed are providing an important platform for inspiring Nebraska youth to be the creative problem solvers and STEM innovators that the future economy demands. Investment in ELOs are part of a continuum of strategic educational investments that represent our best hope for a strong and vibrant future. LB270 would play a key role in helping to support more of these important learning opportunities in additional Nebraska communities. Because of the need for these kinds of expanded learning opportunities and the proven impact they have, we urge you to support this bill. [LB270]

SENATOR STINNER: Questions? Senator Wishart. [LB270]

SENATOR WISHART: So for full disclosure--and thank you, Jeff, for being here--I work with Jeff and with this organization, Beyond School Bells, so I got to kind of see more in-depth what these \$250,000 went towards in terms of the grantees last year. So, Jeff, can you expand a little bit on where these dollars went and how these programs are doing. [LB270]

JEFF COLE: Sure. Yeah, these are investments made across the state from, you know, Omaha to Chadron and really do reflect some of the innovative partnerships that we see emerging to support these kinds of innovation. So, for example, in Omaha there was an association, I believe it was called PACE, that supports police and it's a Police Athletic and Community Engagement group in Omaha. So they do after-school activities, providing young people with opportunities to engage in sports and other positive developmental activities. You've got programs here in Crete where they're partnering with Doane College to do some innovative work around aquaponics in agriculture, so experimenting with community gardens and doing a lot of that kind of hands-on work that are so important for kids to do. You know, we've got partnerships with Chadron State College, another university partnership that allows kids to utilize some of the facilities on the university campus to do, again, experiments with STEM so that kids can see where their interest in STEM can take them in the future. So it's a broad cross-section. You've got health and wellness programs that are, you know, so important to young people today that are being supported by these kinds of partnerships. These dollars are highly leveraged, so for every dollar that was invested the communities were required to raise a dollar of community match, and were able to do so without much of a problem. The range of investments were from between \$10,000 and I think the cap was \$50,000, so it was kind of a medium-size grant program that did require local communities to kind of step forward to raise matching dollars. So it's a range of activities that we think kind of expose the diversity of programming that make for quality activities. I emphasize the STEM program and we understand that there's lots of good programming outside of the STEM area. We just wanted to focus on that because of the impact on the economy and

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the recent research that I distributed that really shows how these programs help youth identify themselves as STEM learners and become more interested in a long-term career in the STEM fields. [LB270]

SENATOR STINNER: Additional questions? Senator Clements. [LB270]

SENATOR CLEMENTS: Thank you, Mr. Cole. I was wondering if parents pay a fee for their child to be in this program. [LB270]

JEFF COLE: It really varies across the state. You have some programs that are dealing with very high poverty populations that don't charge any fees. You have other programs that are based on a fee structure that charges parents for a fee for this service. So it really is...kind of reflects the diversity of experiences we see in communities across the state. [LB270]

SENATOR CLEMENTS: So each school can set their fee requirement? [LB270]

JEFF COLE: Right. Yeah, it's typically a school-community partnership, so they'll kind of figure out what works for that community and really, importantly, what's sustainable. A lot of times you'll start a program with grant funds and when the grant funds go away you realize you haven't developed the sustainability that you need to keep the programs going. So some combination of fees and grants and other funding sources typically are what are needed to keep these programs going. [LB270]

SENATOR CLEMENTS: All right. Thank you. [LB270]

JEFF COLE: Great. [LB270]

SENATOR STINNER: Additional questions? Senator Hilkemann. [LB270]

SENATOR HILKEMANN: Quick follow up... [LB270]

JEFF COLE: Yes, sir. [LB270]

SENATOR HILKEMANN: ...to that question, Jeff. What would be for the centers, what's the range of fees that you're looking at, at some of these programs? [LB270]

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JEFF COLE: Yeah, I think you know typically we see during the school year a fee structure from...and again, starting at zero. [LB270]

SENATOR HILKEMANN: Right. Right, I understand that. [LB270]

JEFF COLE: You know, zero is...many, many youth are participating at no cost. You see, you know, I'd say it averages around \$25 or \$30 a week is the normal range you see, you know, for a full-paying service. [LB270]

SENATOR HILKEMANN: Thank you. [LB270]

SENATOR STINNER: Thank you. Senator Wishart. [LB270]

SENATOR WISHART: Following up with that conversation, you said \$25 to \$30 a week... [LB270]

JEFF COLE: Right. [LB270]

SENATOR WISHART: ...per kid is average. Do you know what it would cost for those same parents to put their kid in childcare? [LB270]

JEFF COLE: Right. It's much more expensive. I don't have those numbers in front of me. But, you know, these are dollars that are typically leveraged with other dollars in the community, so the cost is much less than it would normally be for, quite frankly, a lower quality experience. These are quality experiences because they're in the school buildings, community-owned buildings. And all of our communities across the state have access to computer labs, exercise facilities. All the things that make Nebraska's public schools so great are available to these after-school programs at a minimal fee. So it's really leveraging the investment that we've made as a state in high-quality public schools and providing kids who don't normally have those opportunities the same opportunities that their more affluent peers have. One of the driving factors behind this work is research that really points out that high-income parents are spending about six times as much on their children's out-of-school time learning experiences as high-poverty youth, and we really feel that's a big driver between the opportunity gap that we see separating low- and high-income youth. And we think school-based after-school programs can be a real strong contribution to bridging that opportunity gap. [LB270]

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SENATOR STINNER: Additional questions? Seeing none, thank you. Additional proponents. Any proponents? Seeing none, are there opponents? Seeing none, are there people in the neutral capacity that would like to testify? Seeing none, Senator, would you like to close? [LB270]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Yes, sir. I thank you for your time this afternoon and thank Mr. Cole for coming and sharing his vast background as far as the experiences he's had with this particular topic, which is important to all of us. I wanted to share also the aspect from my own experiences in life as a high school principal. Even high school kids need lots of activities, lots of things to possibly be involved in, and one of the goals as a founding principal of Millard West High School for my 15 years there as I concluded my education career, one of the goals the activities director and myself, that we set for ourselves, was to have our students as involved as possible in the life of the school and clubs and organizations and sports that would be attractive to them and sharing their experiences with the entire school. We were rated by the state Activities Association as the highest percentage of student involvement in the state. That was one of our goals. We met it. And it's remarkable when you have a grand total that's about 140 percent says that your kids are in multiple sets of things, among the population of your high school of 2,300 or 2,400 kids. That pays dividends beyond comprehension because their involvement in the culture and climate of the school and adding to that with things they're doing, be it music, be it art, be it activities in debate, forensics, other experiences, as well as all the sport opportunities, brings a whole different nature to the environment of your particular building because of the outreach that you have. Yes, my activities director and I usually went broke every year doing that because those things are not cheap. And we had good fund-raising on the part of our parents and parents' groups in the school that raise additional funds for a number of things for us. But I use that as an example of the things we're talking about here that add to the life of our students and the dividend comes when you think of if they weren't in those activities and they were getting into difficulties in their communities we pay for on the other end. We have to remember that because it comes out somewhere if they're not doing some positive things and nurturing different activities within a school environment or a connection into the community that's having one of these ELO experiences. So I share that with you because it's extremely important within the big picture of where kids are, where families are, and the outreach that you can get from this. Ideally, I wish I had a dozen parents here to also testify, but they're all working. That's why we need these programs. Thank you. [LB270]

SENATOR STINNER: (Exhibits 3 and 4) Thank you. We also additionally have a support letter from Lincoln Parks and Recreation and I'll enter that into the record. Any additional questions? Otherwise, thank you. [LB270]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you, sir. [LB270]

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SENATOR STINNER: That concludes the hearing on LB270. We will now go to the hearing on LB465, Information Technology Initiative. Senator Watermeier. [LB270 LB465]

SENATOR WATERMEIER: (Exhibit 1) Senator Stinner, Chairman Stinner, Appropriations members, I am Senator Dan Watermeier, W-a-t-e-r-m-e-i-e-r, from Syracuse, representing District 1, the southeast corner of the state, and here today to introduce LB465. LB465 would appropriate \$500,000 in each year of the biennium to the Department of Education for the Nebraska Information Technology Initiative under the Center for Student Leadership and Expanded Learning Act. I became aware of the Nebraska IT Initiative when it was first introduced three years ago in the 2014 Session. The program has continued to grow since that school year, and the partnership between the state, students and the teachers, and Microsoft has become a true driver for preparing a work force for the future. As you know, the number of jobs that require some set of technology skills is continuing to increase despite the fact that only 15 Nebraska schools offered an AP computer science course in the '15-16 school year. In order to help both students and teachers become better prepared for the types of jobs that will be in high demand, I think it is wise to continue making a state investment in this program. The Nebraska IT Initiative is a partnership between the Nebraska Department of Education and the industry-led education and technology companies, like Microsoft. Although the program currently identifies Microsoft as its collaborator, other technology companies that offer education curriculum can certainly ask to be included. Part of Microsoft's investment includes subject matter expertise, a combination of virtual and in-person training workshops for teachers and start kits for industry certification, and exam vouchers for educators in each participating school. High school and community colleges can apply to participate in the initiative. Currently, 85 high schools and 12 community colleges are participating. There is currently a waiting list of schools that would like to participate as well. Students work through a series of curriculum and practice tests before they can take an exam on the actual program. Once they have passed they are issued an industry backed certificate that they can add to their resume, as well as their college and job applications. Understanding that we are in a tough budget situation, I brought this bill forward to help ensure that the momentum currently taking place across the state because of this program did not come to a halt. Since the first investment by the state was made, the number of participating schools has more than doubled. Additionally, the number of students receiving certificates in programs like Word, PowerPoint, Excel, and Access has tripled from year one to two, and we are on pace to do the same thing this school year. The IT Initiative has already made a major impact on students and teachers in its short lifespan. Today you will hear from a couple of students, teachers, and professor from locations such as Hastings, York, Lincoln, and Bruning-Davenport. I also have a stack of paper which I'll give you, too, on closing which talks about 175 Nebraska students and teachers. While I didn't make copies of them for you all, I hope that you would look through them to see how important this program really is. I believe that public-private partnerships, like the Nebraska IT Initiative, are important for growing the future work force. Technology changes so rapidly and helping students to achieve industry certification in these

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high-demand skills and programs will help them succeed in the future. At this point, I'll try to answer any questions I can, but I do have a few testifiers behind me. But I really do want to appreciate your time and I will come up and close and have a stack of letters in front of me at that point. [LB465]

SENATOR STINNER: Thank you. [LB465]

SENATOR WATERMEIER: Thank you, Chairman. [LB465]

SENATOR STINNER: Any questions? Senator Clements. [LB465]

SENATOR CLEMENTS: Senator Watermeier, is this a grant program with matching funds required? [LB465]

SENATOR WATERMEIER: It's not a grant program, per se, but there's only so many dollars that go out. Schools will apply for it. As an example, my wife is a business teacher in a local school district. She applied for it the first year and was not in line in the second and third year to get it. So it's more of a, like I described in my opening, it talks about training for teachers and if they run out of funds they only have so much they can do, so. [LB465]

SENATOR CLEMENTS: All right. Thank you. [LB465]

SENATOR STINNER: Additional questions? [LB465]

SENATOR WATERMEIER: Okay. [LB465]

SENATOR STINNER: Thank you. [LB465]

SENATOR WATERMEIER: Thank you, Chairman. [LB465]

SENATOR STINNER: Any additional proponents? Afternoon. [LB465]

DARCI KARR: (Exhibit 2) Good afternoon, Chairman Stinner and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Dr. Darci Karr, D-a-r-c-i K-a-r-r. I'm a business technology teacher and I'm here in support of LB465 on behalf of Hastings Senior High School. Thank you for this opportunity to speak to the incredible value the Information Technology Initiative has had for our students. I'm thankful to Senator Watermeier for the important proposal

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and am hopeful that I'm able to express the benefits that our students have had. For me, the initial focus when I started with the initiative three years ago was the Microsoft certification. Our students in three years have attained over 250 certifications at Hastings High School. During that time the Information Technology II course has tripled in size and enrollment because of the initiative and the value that they know those skills have on their future. The initiative has allowed me to show them that those skills are valuable and employers are wanting to see that they have those productivity skills in their future. We also have at least two universities that are requiring this same certification of their majors at both UNL and UNK, in their business majors. These students are able to obtain that certification at the high school level without that expenditure at the college level. The past year the initiative became much more for me than just the certification, however. I was able to add a class to our curriculum and start implementing some computer science curriculum in the interest of our students. The initiative provides us with curriculum in app development, programming, game development, and IT infrastructure. This was not curriculum that was available to us prior to the initiative. The initiative also has become imperative as we move forward. The state board has a goal, 4.2, that indicates by 2026, 85 percent of all Nebraska students that graduate from high school should have completed advanced placement coursework, earn dual credit, and/or obtain industry certification. This initiative provides those opportunities in all three areas. Our students are obtaining industry certification through Microsoft Office, specialist, master, and expert. They are able to obtain dual credit. I have a dual credit agreement with our community college. And the curriculum also offers AP computer science coursework. This single investment is assisting schools in meeting that state board goal. We have been fortunate to be a part of this program for three years. Hastings Senior High has over 60 percent of our students on free and reduced lunch. This curriculum is meeting all of our students' needs for technology skills. We have benefited ELL students, students receiving special education resources, our low socioeconomic students, and honor students. It is reaching all. Because of the initiative, our students are connecting what they're learning in high school to their future employment. It is motivating our students and I have students that want to take additional technology because they value those skills. I have one who wants to go beyond what is just taught in the class and worked on his own because the curriculum allows for individualized instruction, and he actually obtained his certification in Microsoft Outlook. I have others wanting to work on their expert certification and even have had two students earn their master certification. The initiative is providing incentive for them to go beyond just what they're learning in the classroom. Again, I thank you for the opportunity to share what the initiative has meant to our students. I believe in investing in our future and I believe our students are our future. The initiative has been a great investment, providing students with employable skills, encouraging students in information technology careers, including computer science, and it provides us with the opportunity to provide up-to-date curriculum, software, and training for the teachers. I understand the task before you and I thank you for your diligence. I strongly believe this initiative is one of the largest returns on this investment. I urge you to support LB465 and I'm happy to take any questions you might have. [LB465]

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SENATOR STINNER: Questions? Senator Vargas. Senator Hilkemann. [LB465]

SENATOR HILKEMANN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Any money come from the Gates Foundation for this program? [LB465]

DARCI KARR: Not that I'm aware of. [LB465]

SENATOR HILKEMANN: Okay. [LB465]

DARCI KARR: So that one I think we'll have someone behind us that could speak to that more clearly. [LB465]

SENATOR HILKEMANN: Okay. Thank you. [LB465]

SENATOR STINNER: So you apply...you applied on behalf of Hastings... [LB465]

DARCI KARR: Correct. [LB465]

SENATOR STINNER: ...to get into the program. Then do you get trained to teach this curriculum? And how long of a training program is that? [LB465]

DARCI KARR: That's the beauty of the initiative is it really is not only just student centered; it's also on the teachers and support within the school. So there's an annual training that we attend that brings forth not only the curriculum that's provided but also, of course, we have to be trained on how to run the testing software. Because it's an industry level certification, we have to become a testing center so that it protects the integrity of that. So we have that training once a year. The director of the program does a great job of bringing us all together, so it's also been wonderful because I've been able to collaborate with other teachers as we've worked through what's working well, what's not; how are your students finding success; how do we challenge some of those students that get it and need to further those skills, or those that don't. So there is training for the teachers and then we also have the opportunity to earn our certification. So its upping not only our students' skills as they go out in the future but our skills as we're working with those future (inaudible). [LB465]

SENATOR STINNER: So once you build that curriculum, you should...it should be a fairly stable curriculum, is that...other than the fact that there's new versions of Microsoft that might come out? [LB465]

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DARCI KARR: Correct. Yeah. With the new versions, that changes some things. They've added the AP computer science curriculum was in addition. That's been something that's been added in the three years that's available to us. If you're speaking to if we don't have the initiative we have the curriculum, that wouldn't be fact because it's part of the initiative so it's copyrighted and upon...if this were to go away, we would not have access to that curriculum we worked on. [LB465]

SENATOR STINNER: Is there ongoing hardware that has to also be updated and improved, and is that a cost borne by the school or is it part of the grant? [LB465]

DARCI KARR: That would be borne by the school. Part of applying is making sure that we have the ability to run it, to be a testing center, so we have to have the hardware in place. Because these courses are occurring in technology labs, that technology is there for most schools. But we have to meet those requirements in order to apply. [LB465]

SENATOR STINNER: Okay. Thank you. Any additional questions? Senator Vargas. [LB465]

SENATOR VARGAS: Thank you very much for coming and testifying. I'll say my question out loud, hopefully makes sense. So there's certification that goes along with this. And as you are...it sounds like there's a benefit to teachers, right, as professional development goes? If the program were not to continue to exist or isn't at the school anymore, there's still an added benefit of having that training and certification, right? Just because the training and the certification goes away, there's still the value of what you received as an educator, correct? [LB465]

DARCI KARR: Me as an individual? [LB465]

SENATOR VARGAS: Yeah. [LB465]

DARCI KARR: Absolutely. [LB465]

SENATOR VARGAS: Okay. Okay. Great. Thank you. [LB465]

DARCI KARR: I guess I would just like to follow up that most schools also, teachers are somewhat transient so that value, you know, would diminish upon my departure if I were to leave. [LB465]

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SENATOR VARGAS: Yeah. And I ask...that's really helpful. I ask because I think oftentimes we are...I'm interested in hearing how programs are doing more train the trainer model so that if they wanted to exist for some reason down the line that there's still an added benefit that's continued on. We don't want programs to always be reliant on the program, but... [LB465]

DARCI KARR: Right. [LB465]

SENATOR VARGAS: ...instead try to figure out how to implement them in schools in districts and across the state specifically. There's a reason why we partner with them. It's good to hear there's an impact beyond just the certification. [LB465]

DARCI KARR: And that's one of the benefits that Microsoft, when Senator Watermeier spoke to their investment in the Vouchers for Teachers,... [LB465]

SENATOR VARGAS: Uh-huh. [LB465]

DARCI KARR: ...that it is...the ability is there to go beyond just that technology teacher that is teaching and improve those skills across. And I think you mentioned you have taught in the past. [LB465]

SENATOR VARGAS: Uh-huh. [LB465]

DARCI KARR: But I think we've all probably worked with people and some are more proficient in getting some things done than others. And it's nice to know that we can take it beyond just the students in front of me but also to our colleagues, because that all ends up impacting not only our productivity but eventually the students they're impacting as well as they can help. [LB465]

SENATOR VARGAS: Thank you. [LB465]

DARCI KARR: Uh-huh. [LB465]

SENATOR STINNER: Any additional questions? Seeing none, thank you. [LB465]

DARCI KARR: Thank you. [LB465]

SENATOR STINNER: Welcome. [LB465]

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RICARDO DIAZ: (Exhibit 3) Good afternoon, Chairman Stinner and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Ricardo Diaz, R-i-c-a-r-d-o D-i-a-z, and I'm here to testify in support of LB465 as a student of Hastings High School. I would like to thank Senator Watermeier for introducing this important proposal and I hope to share the reasons why the funding for the Nebraska Information Technology Initiative is critical to the continued success of students. February 22, 2016, this was the date that I passed the Access 2013 test, earning the first of my four Microsoft Office specialist certifications. I was proud of myself for passing the test, but I knew that it was more than that. I knew that I now had an actual certification that I could show to colleges and eventually potential employers saying that I was proficient in Access, then eventually PowerPoint, then eventually Excel and even Word. Earning these certifications was like a spark for me. I immediately wanted to immerse myself in all different fields of technology and get a feel for what they were all like. I quickly enrolled in the new Technology Fundamentals class that was being offered and loved it. It was a more advanced insight into the different areas of technology, such as computer science and working with the database. I was so happy when our instructor introduced databases, asking if anybody had worked with them before, and I could proudly respond, I actually happen to be certified in Access. Without the Nebraska Information Technology Initiative and students' continued interest in IT I do not think that this class would have been created and I would not have gotten this opportunity to explore the many fields that IT covers. Overall, earning these certifications has meant a lot to me. I originally was very set on having a career in engineering--and who knows, I still could--but these...but taking these IT classes and being presented these certifications has really opened my eyes. I know I have been equipped with a good solid set of skills and now have the foundation to be successful with whatever I decide to pursue. I am encouraged to learn and broaden my horizons of possibilities for my life. On behalf of Hastings High school, I would like to thank Senator Watermeier for his dedication to the Nebraska students who will continue to benefit from this program for years. I understand that there are budget issues that you must address, however, I hope that you will consider how valuable the IT initiative has been to students and will continue to be for future students. This initiative is making sure I have the skills needed to succeed in my future job. I would ask that this committee include the funding for the Nebraska Information Technology Initiative in your biennial budget recommendations. Thank you for your service to the state and I would be happy to try and answer any questions at this time. [LB465]

SENATOR STINNER: Any questions? Senator Hilkemann. [LB465]

SENATOR HILKEMANN: Ricardo, if you've got this whole certification, would you come and help some of us senators that are still having a hard time at work? (Laughter) Thank you. [LB465]

SENATOR STINNER: Senator Clements. [LB465]

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SENATOR CLEMENTS: Thank you, Mr. Diaz. How long did it take you to get the Access certification? [LB465]

RICARDO DIAZ: I actually happened to get it on my first try of testing. So we went through the process of learning, going over the material in class, and then we took a couple practice tests, and then we had our first actual test and I passed it. [LB465]

SENATOR CLEMENTS: That was one class? That was one semester class? [LB465]

RICARDO DIAZ: I got all four of my certifications in a semester, so. [LB465]

SENATOR CLEMENTS: Oh. Okay. Thank you. [LB465]

SENATOR STINNER: Thank you. Any additional questions? Seeing none, thank you very much. [LB465]

RICARDO DIAZ: Thank you. [LB465]

SENATOR STINNER: Good afternoon. [LB465]

SHAWNA GARLAND: (Exhibit 4) Good afternoon. Good Afternoon, Chairman Stinner and members of the Appropriations Committee. I understand the importance of the senators' time and I'm submitting my entire testimony in writing but wanted to cover a few key points with you. My name is Shawna Garland, S-h-a-w-n-a G-a-r-l-a-n-d, and I'm here to testify in support of LB465 on behalf of Bruning-Davenport Unified School District. I've been a business teacher at Bruning-Davenport for 27 years. I'd like to thank Senator Watermeier for introducing this important proposal and hope to share with all of you today the reasons why the funding for the Nebraska Information Technology Initiative is critical to the continued success of our students and teachers, particularly in rural/urban areas of the state. At Bruning-Davenport, I've been conducting certification exams for the past 15 years. For the first 12 years, certification was optional and if students wanted to become certified, they bore the cost of the exam. If they fail, it was money lost. Today Bruning-Davenport students still have the option to earn certification but the cost is funded through the initiative. The participation rate went from about 30 percent of the class participating when paid for on their own, to 100 percent participating now. More importantly, the pass rate went from less than 30 percent to approximately 97 percent now. From a professional and personal note, my daughter earned certifications at Bruning-Davenport. She has now graduated, but like any other college student, she needed a part-time job to help fund her...support herself. Her employer was extremely impressed that her technology skills were far

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superior over the other applicants. She was hired because of her Excel certification and that certification provided the employer documentation. On behalf of Bruning-Davenport Unified School District, I'd like to thank Senator Watermeier for his dedication to Nebraska students and teachers who will continue to benefit from this program for years to come. While we acknowledge there are budget issues that this committee must address this session, we hope you will consider the significant return on investment that policies like LB465 will have in ensuring that our state's future work force is prepared to succeed in the jobs of the future. I would ask that this committee include the funding for the Nebraska Information Technology Initiative in your biennial budget recommendations. Thank you for your service to the state. [LB465]

SENATOR STINNER: Thank you. Questions? Senator Vargas. [LB465]

SENATOR VARGAS: Thank you for coming and testifying. [LB465]

SHAWNA GARLAND: Uh-huh. [LB465]

SENATOR VARGAS: In your testimony it says here that the first 12 years certification...you've been doing certification exams for the past 15 years. [LB465]

SHAWNA GARLAND: Uh-huh. [LB465]

SENATOR VARGAS: Are these certification exams through the Microsoft Initiative or are these... [LB465]

SHAWNA GARLAND: The last three years they have been. Prior to that I did them on my own. [LB465]

SENATOR VARGAS: You did them on your own. [LB465]

SHAWNA GARLAND: Uh-huh. [LB465]

SENATOR VARGAS: And so who was it...so you were providing certification as an instructor, as a teacher. [LB465]

SHAWNA GARLAND: Uh-huh. [LB465]

SENATOR VARGAS: Okay. [LB465]

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SHAWNA GARLAND: I became certified and had the school become a testing center, and then the students had to pay for the exams on their own. [LB465]

SENATOR VARGAS: And who was the qualifying organization? [LB465]

SHAWNA GARLAND: Certiport. [LB465]

SENATOR VARGAS: Certiport? Okay. And does that still exist? [LB465]

SHAWNA GARLAND: Uh-huh. [LB465]

SENATOR VARGAS: It does? [LB465]

SHAWNA GARLAND: Uh-huh. [LB465]

SENATOR VARGAS: So there are other schools that use that? [LB465]

SHAWNA GARLAND: Well, that is what... [LB465]

SENATOR VARGAS: That's what this is. [LB465]

SHAWNA GARLAND: ...this works through too. [LB465]

SENATOR VARGAS: Okay. So if this wasn't happening, you would no longer be able to offer those classes? [LB465]

SHAWNA GARLAND: Probably still could be but then the students would have to pay on their own. [LB465]

SENATOR VARGAS: Okay. Thank you. [LB465]

SENATOR STINNER: Thank you. Additional questions? Senator Hilkemann. [LB465]

SENATOR HILKEMANN: What's the cost of the exam? [LB465]

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SHAWNA GARLAND: Well, when we last did it, what, three years ago it was around \$80-\$85 per exam. [LB465]

SENATOR HILKEMANN: Okay. Thank you. [LB465]

SENATOR STINNER: Senator Bolz. [LB465]

SENATOR BOLZ: Just quickly, is there a sliding scale fee or is this a means-tested program in any way? [LB465]

SHAWNA GARLAND: I'm sorry, can you clarify? [LB465]

SENATOR BOLZ: Do students have any obligation to pay? [LB465]

SHAWNA GARLAND: Not now, not with the funding. Previously they did if they took the test. [LB465]

SENATOR BOLZ: And did you have students who could not afford to pay? [LB465]

SHAWNA GARLAND: Yes. [LB465]

SENATOR BOLZ: And did you have students that could afford to pay? [LB465]

SHAWNA GARLAND: Yes. [LB465]

SENATOR BOLZ: So this program makes no distinction. [LB465]

SHAWNA GARLAND: No, it would...the percentage went up tremendously from those that chose to test to now. [LB465]

SENATOR BOLZ: Uh-huh. [LB465]

SHAWNA GARLAND: And then, of course, the pass rate for those that did test to now went up tremendously as well. [LB465]

SENATOR BOLZ: Okay. Thank you. [LB465]

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SHAWNA GARLAND: Uh-huh. [LB465]

SENATOR STINNER: Thank you. Any additional questions? Seeing none, thank you. Good afternoon. [LB465]

KEELY REINERT: (Exhibit 5) Good afternoon, Chairman Stinner and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Keely Reinert, K-e-e-l-y R-e-i-n-e-r-t, and I am here to testify in support of LB465 on behalf of York High School. I am a high school business and technology teacher. I also want to say thank you for hearing our testimonies. I know that the education of our students is as important to you as it is to me as an educator. In 2014, which was my second year of teaching at Cozad High School, Cozad had just hired a new superintendent. One of his goals was to have all students graduate with a certification. This was the same time that Cozad joined the initiative. My first student earned his certification in December of 2014. It was definitely a feeling of accomplishment for him and me when we saw the passing score on the screen. During my tenure at Cozad, from 2014 to 2016, students earned a total of 130 certifications. This is remarkable because the average graduating class in Cozad is 70 students. I am now employed by York Public Schools as a computer science teacher. I have seen the same success at York as I did in Cozad. My students have earned 125 certifications this year. And by the end of this semester the students will be attempting PowerPoint and Excel certifications, so this number will continue to grow. For some of my students, it is the first time they have successfully accomplished something that will directly impact their futures in a positive way. One of my students recently said to me, this test feels more important to my future than other tests I've taken in school. Now, I know that other classes are important for the student, but taking the Microsoft Office Specialist Word exam has given this student motivation for future success. I tell my students that earning certification will help them drive to continue to be successful and have the confidence to achieve anything. I emphasize to them that they have endless opportunities in the technology field and this is just the beginning for the students at York High School and the other 84 participating Nebraska high schools and 12 community college campuses. The initiative goes far beyond the certification. It offers curriculum for my students, not only in the Microsoft Office software suite but in my computer design and problem-solving course where the students are learning Java. If funding is not continued, my students would not have access to this curriculum and would be missing out on the opportunity to learn valuable information technology and computer science skills. This program is providing students with essential technology skills for the future, and I emphasize to my students: You will need technology skills now and in the future, you will need certification as documentation for employers, and you will gain the confidence to be successful. On behalf of York Public Schools, I would like to thank Senator Watermeier for his dedication to Nebraska students and teachers who will continue to benefit from this program for years to come. While we acknowledge that there are budget issues that this committee must address this session, we hope that you will consider the significant return on investment that policies like LB465 will have in ensuring our

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state's future work force is prepared for jobs in the future. I would like to ask this committee to include the funding for the Nebraska Information Technology Initiative in your biennial budget recommendations. Thank you for your service to the state and I'd be happy to answer any questions at this time. [LB465]

SENATOR STINNER: Any questions? Seeing none, thank you. Any additional proponents? Good afternoon. [LB465]

EMILEE KNUTZEN: (Exhibit 6) Good afternoon, Chairman Stinner and members of Appropriations Committee. My name is Emilee Knutzen, E-m-i-l-e-e K-n-u-t-z-e-n, and I am here to testify in support of LB465 on behalf of York High School. I am a junior at York High School. I would like to thank Senator Watermeier for introducing this important proposal and hope to share with you all today the reasons why funding for the Nebraska Information Technology Initiative is critical to the continued success of our students and teachers, particularly in the rural and urban areas of the state. Being certified will help many people in the future, whether it be college, applying for a job, or the job itself. Getting this achievement will help them get a job because a lot of people don't know how to run a computer in an office or a work environment. That's why it is important for students, like myself and others, to be certified so it will show that we are qualified for the job. For me, it was really motivating getting certified because it showed that I had to work hard and that the hard work paid off. I got certified with Microsoft Word 2013 and Microsoft Access 2013, and was recognized for my achievement at school. So reaching this goal in high school will help many students like myself in the long run. On behalf of York Public Schools, I would like to thank Senator Watermeier for this dedication to Nebraska's students and teachers who will continue to benefit from this program for years to come. While we acknowledge their are budget issues that this committee must address this session, we hope you will consider the significant return on the investment that policies like LB465 will have in ensuring that our state's future work force is prepared to succeed in the jobs of the future. I would ask that this committee include the funding of the Nebraska Information Technology Initiative in your biennial budget recommendations. Thank you for your service to the state, and I would be happy to answer any questions. [LB465]

SENATOR STINNER: Thank you. Additional questions? Questions? Seeing none, thank you. Good afternoon. [LB465]

SAMANTHA REDFERN: (Exhibit 7) Good afternoon, Chairman Stinner and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Samantha Redfern, S-a-m-a-n-t-h-a R-e-d-f-e-r-n, and I'm here to testify in support of LB465 on behalf of York High School. I'm a senior at York High School this year. I would like to thank Senator Watermeier for introducing this important proposal and hope to share with you all today the reasons why funding for the Nebraska

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Information Technology Initiative is crucial to the continued success of our students and teachers, particularly in rural and urban areas of the state. I'm not going to lie to you, I have actually never really liked technology. In fact, until my senior year of high school I avoided all information technology classes. I knew the bare minimum to get through normal courses. However, over the summer I got a job at a law firm which I had to know how to use the Microsoft Office Suite. My boss was shocked that I didn't already have these classes covering this information. After signing up for Information Technology I, my boss told me that if I earned a Microsoft Office certification I would have a very well-paying job with them for the coming years. In getting certified, I was able to become a more desirable job applicant, was able to improve my resume and receive college credit at my chosen university next fall. More importantly, however, I gained a ton of confidence in the use of these programs that are part of many of the classes and will play a role in my collegiate success. Before becoming certified, I always felt as if I was one of the only teenagers who didn't feel comfortable with technology, but now I've received the tools necessary to be one of the most educated in the room. These programs are our future and I think that there would have been a hole in my high school education without these certifications. On behalf of York Public Schools, I would like to thank Senator Watermeier for his dedication to Nebraska students and teachers who will continue to benefit from this program for years to come. While we acknowledge that there are budget issues that this committee must address this session, we hope that you will consider the significant return on investments that policies like LB465 will have in ensuring that our state's future work force is prepared to succeed in jobs of the future. I would ask this committee include the funding for the Nebraska Information Technology Initiative in your biennial budget recommendations. Thank you for your service to the state, and I would be happy to try to answer any questions at this time. [LB465]

SENATOR STINNER: Questions? Senator Hilkemann. [LB465]

SENATOR HILKEMANN: Samantha, you said your chosen university. What's your chosen university for next fall? [LB465]

SAMANTHA REDFERN: I will be attending Nebraska Wesleyan University. [LB465]

SENATOR HILKEMANN: And what do you hope to major in? [LB465]

SAMANTHA REDFERN: I would like to double major in political science and communications. [LB465]

SENATOR HILKEMANN: Okay. If you graduate from Wesleyan, we'll have graduated from the same college. Good luck to you. [LB465]

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SAMANTHA REDFERN: Thank you. [LB465]

SENATOR STINNER: Thank you. Additional questions? Seeing none, thank you. [LB465]

TERRI TIEDEMAN: (Exhibit 8) Good afternoon, Chairman Stinner and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Terri Tiedeman, T-i-e-d-e-m-a-n, and I am here today to offer my support for LB465 on behalf of Southeast Community College. I'm a business computer applications instructor at Southeast Community College. I understand your time is valuable so I will try and summarize my comments quickly. One of the things that I want to speak from the heart just for a minute here, and Samantha kind of helped me remember what I really want to tell you. I've been a teacher for more than 35 years at the community college and I've been teaching computer applications classes, and I honestly thought that this class would be a class we would not need to be teaching today because a lot of employers and a lot of people like me thought students like Samantha would just know how to use these applications, they would know how to use Word and know how to use Excel and know how to use Access. But guess what. They don't. I talked to a university professor just last year, we were talking about this course and she said she was shocked to find out that today's graduates from our Nebraska high schools did not even need the...did not even know how to attach a file to an e-mail. The technology classes in the high school have gotten so diluted, they're taking so many different things that they're not taking a lot of times what we think or what we know they should be taking, and this initiative has pushed us back in that direction. At Southeast Community College, we prepare students to go out into industry and work. All jobs require a knowledge of technology and applications. It doesn't matter what vocational or academic program you enter, you will be using technology in some form or manner. Employers expect graduates to be technology literate. But Samantha went and she found out her employer expected her to be literate. But guess what. She wasn't, until she got involved in this initiative. If we want to promote Nebraska as the Silicon Valley of the Plains, we need to make sure that students at all levels of education have the very best technology skills possible. Not only will they be better students; they'll be better workers and they can contribute to the economic development of their communities and our state. There's a trending skill that new workers, if you look in the top 20 jobs for the next ten years, that workers need to have and it's the ability to make sense of big data. We call it sometimes data mining. And so what these...this initiative will help these students do, it will help them analyze data by using technology application programs like Excel and Access. These two programs require the use of skills related to managing data and databases, and our students will have technology skills learned through this initiative if we allow this initiative to go through again and help prepare them for their future careers. On behalf of SCC, I would like to thank Senator Watermeier for his dedication to Nebraska students and teachers who will continue to benefit from this program for many years to come. I know that you have your budget issues you have to deal with, like we all do. But I do hope you will consider the return on investment the policies like LB465 have in ensuring the state's future work force is prepared to succeed in jobs of the future. I would ask that you include

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funding for this LB465 in your biennial budget recommendations. Thank you for letting me come speak today. Any questions? [LB465]

SENATOR STINNER: Thank you. Questions? Seeing none, thank you. [LB465]

TERRI TIEDEMAN: Uh-huh. [LB465]

SENATOR STINNER: Good afternoon. [LB465]

EASAN SELVAN: (Exhibit 9) Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman, members of the committee. My name is Easan Selvan, E-a-s-a-n S-e-l-v-a-n, and I am an education account executive for Microsoft. Thanks for having me today. I came to Microsoft from a ten-year career in higher education where it was my pleasure to ensure that students got the best education possible and pushed forward society. I have been encouraged in my role with my current corporation because that seems to be the tenor of the organization moving forward and what I've been asked to do in my role. I have expanded my responsibilities to include three states: Kansas, Nebraska, and Iowa. And what I've been asked to do is empower every administrator, teacher, and student to do more. We all understand that jobs are changing and we're being asked to show and not tell the qualifications that we have. For example, when I was in higher education I was approached by deans of schools who said, we really need a way to prove that when our students get into the work force they're not just academically educated; they have the capacity to perform the day-to-day skills that are necessary in order to accomplish business. As a result of that, at the university that I worked for, we implemented the Microsoft Imagine Academy and it became part of the standing curriculum for the business school. We can see this happening across the country and in Nebraska. There is more opportunity in STEM careers and even information workers are being expected and required to become digital natives and understand the digital ecosystem in our world. As of March of this year, there were nearly 3,000 IT and computer science jobs that were posted on [Indeed.com](http://Indeed.com), and over 2,400 jobs across the state of Nebraska that require experience in the Microsoft Office Suite of products. So that's over 5,000 jobs that we're talking about that would benefit through this kind of certification. Now consider for a moment that positions that require Microsoft professional certifications and skills frequently pay more than \$50,000 and that the average salary for a technical employee based on the nonprofit organization [Code.org](http://Code.org) is over \$70,000, to the average in the state of Nebraska at \$42,000. So you're investing not just in students' educations but the well-being of families in Nebraska as those students get older and start families here, and then the fiscal solvency of the state. I have to say I work with three states that have Imagine Academy and without comparing anyone to anyone else, Nebraska is a lighthouse of success with this program. The pass rates, the number of certifications, the genuine interest in the program have all been completely overwhelming and I'm humbled to be able to work with a group of people who has done so much good with this program. The Microsoft

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Imagine Academy is active in 23 states, 135 countries, and we provide the most popular certification programs across not just IT and computer science platforms but also information workers and many, many other platforms that are necessary in order to move forward with careers. So in closing, I'd like to say I think you've made a really amazing investment in the future of your students and I sincerely appreciate working with the wonderful people who have been administrating this program to this point. It would be my pleasure to field any questions that you may have, including but not limited to a question that I heard Senator Bolz ask previously about how this works with regard to funding and people's ability to pay, so. [LB465]

SENATOR STINNER: The last I looked, Microsoft had a whole lot more money than the state of Nebraska. And a program like this really helps Microsoft continue to dominate in this type of endeavor. Wouldn't it behoove Microsoft to pick up the cost of this program and...? [LB465]

EASAN SELVAN: So to the extent that I am capable of talking about it, being in the education vertical and not necessarily at the top of any particular corporation, what I can say is that Microsoft has a heavy investment in the Imagine Academy Program, the vast majority of the costs being borne on the certification side, which is not an area that we necessarily make money in. So if you're interested more in the finance aspect of this, I would be happy to bring back as much information as you'd be interested in looking at, but I will say that from an education standpoint, Microsoft invests more in education than many of its competitors. And this is an effort to push forward the success of individuals and society as a whole more than to make money off of certification. [LB465]

SENATOR STINNER: Would you think that this should be a core curriculum for all schools? [LB465]

EASAN SELVAN: I would certainly encourage all schools to consider that technology is becoming a driving force in the world and it's increasingly necessary to be a digital native in order to interact with any field of study. Now, there are other companies that produce other certifications that would be great to have in terms of one professional career. But in terms of the depth and breadth of technologies that are used across industries, the best value that I think anyone can have is to invest in both the technical and professional resources that Microsoft offers. [LB465]

SENATOR STINNER: Okay. Thank you. Additional questions? Seeing none, thank you. [LB465]

EASAN SELVAN: Thank you. [LB465]

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RAMONA SCHOENROCK: Good afternoon. [LB465]

SENATOR STINNER: Afternoon. [LB465]

RAMONA SCHOENROCK: (Exhibit 10) Good afternoon, Chairman Stinner and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Ramona Schoenrock, R-a-m-o-n-a S-c-h-o-e-n-r-o-c-k, and I'm here to testify in support of LB465. I am the project manager for the Nebraska Microsoft IT Initiative. I would like to thank Senator Watermeier for introducing LB465 and I know that the Appropriations Committee, your time is limited and valuable, so I would like to submit my testimony in written format to you. I will entertain any questions that you may have. [LB465]

SENATOR STINNER: Any questions? Seeing none, thank you. [LB465]

RAMONA SCHOENROCK: Okay. Thank you, Chairman Stinner and members of the Appropriations Committee. [LB465]

SENATOR STINNER: Any additional proponents? Seeing none, any opponents? Seeing none, anybody in the neutral capacity? Seeing none, would you like to close, Senator? [LB465]

SENATOR WATERMEIER: I certainly will. Thank you. It was good discussion and I could read all these letters into the record if you'd like me to. (Laughter) Or I could just tell you that these are from schools, these are from community colleges, these are from graduates of Kearney, and these are the student letters that I received in my office for this program--around 175 letters. This is what I can envision government doing. It's a public-private partnership. And your question about shouldn't Microsoft be doing this because of certification, in my opening I reminded you that any other office software company can be doing this. They can be coming to Nebraska. The way it's set up, anybody can be involved. Microsoft is the one that's actively doing it. But this is a perfect, what I consider, a public-private partnership. And I'm all about economic development. If you remember, the freshmen weren't obviously here last summer, but when the Department of Economic Development did its study, the SRI study, and we were talking about tax incentives and what really Nebraska is doing, what they're doing right, and a lot of the debate came back to the tax incentives. And I was highly involved in those issues, too. But Nebraska years and years ago decided to spend money on creating jobs with companies, thinking that people would come to the jobs. Well, it's very clear, it's very evident today that you invest in the worker. You invest in the work force and the jobs come to the work force. That's the environment that we live in across the country. Nebraska is starting to see that. This is an easy, this is a relatively inexpensive way for us to continue our investment in the work force. Think about it. These kids coming out of high school can make...can potentially make as much as an associate degree or a four-year

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degree if they're in the right spot with these simple certifications. Keep in mind as well what I'm asking for today, this \$500,000, is not an increase over what we've had in the last two and three years. I think this is a three-year program. It's level funding. It started out at \$250,000, then it went \$500,000 and \$500,000. So we're not asking for more dollars like some...and many programs come and ask for more funding. We're asking for level funding. So I'll just close with that and then appreciate your time today. Thank you so much. I will leave these around. If somebody wants to look through them, I'll have them. But I don't think we need to read all these in the record. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. [LB465]

SENATOR STINNER: (Exhibit 11) Thank you. I also have a letter from NSEA in support, so. [LB465]

SENATOR WATERMEIER: Of course. All right. [LB465]

SENATOR STINNER: Any additional questions? Thank you. [LB465]

SENATOR WATERMEIER: Thank you. [LB465]

SENATOR STINNER: That concludes testimony on LB465. We will now start the hearing on Agency 13, Department of Education. Good afternoon, Director. [LB465 AGENCY 13]

#### AGENCY HEARINGS

SENATOR STINNER: Questions? Seeing none, thank you. Any additional proponents? Seeing none, are there any opponents? Seeing none, is there anybody in the neutral capacity? Seeing none, that concludes Agency 34, Nebraska Library Commission. We'll now open testimony on LB221. Good afternoon, Senator Bolz and fellow members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is John Stinner, spelled J-o-h-n S-t-i-n-n-e-r, and I represent the 48th District, and that's all of Scotts Bluff County. LB221 is a fund transfer bill that would amend the General Fund transfer to the Water Sustainability Fund for the fiscal year 2016-17. Under current statute, that fund transfer would be \$11 million. The proposal under the bill would reduce the transfer to \$10,560,000. LB221 was originally introduced as a shell bill which was introduced as part of a contingency plan in the event that the fund transfer would be needed under the committee's budget recommendations for the upcoming biennium. It is now fulfilling its purpose as a placeholder bill. Maintaining the stability of the fund is important for our continuing commitment to water systems management in Nebraska. However, this is not business as usual. In the Appropriations Committee, we are tasked with making thoughtful and prudent decisions to rebalance the state's budget. LB221 is part of the commitment to our budgetary

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responsibilities. As the committee moves forward with its preliminary recommendation to the rest of the Legislature, I'm confident that we will secure a sustainable budget for the following biennium. I thank all of you for your hard work this session and am looking forward to tackling the challenges that lie ahead of us. Thank you for your time. I'd be happy to take any questions. [AGENCY 34 LB221]

SENATOR BOLZ: I don't see any questions. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. [LB221]

SENATOR STINNER: Thank you. And I'll waive closing. [LB221]

SENATOR BOLZ: (Laugh) Do I have any proponents? Any opponents or anyone in the neutral capacity? I think that closes the hearing on LB221. [LB221]