

Education Committee January 28, 2019

GROENE: Let's get started on time. Many of you hear this announcement every week, but for somebody in the audience that hasn't, welcome to the Education Committee public hearing. My name is Mike Groene from Legislative District 42. I serve as Chair of the committee. Committee will take up the bills in the posted agenda. Our hearing today is your public part of the legislative process. This is your opportunity to express your position on the proposed legislation before us today. To better, better facilitate today's proceedings I ask that you abide by the following procedures. Please turn off cell phones and other electronic devices. Move to the chairs at the front of the room when you are ready to testify. Time is critical. We want to give everybody a chance and questions, but that pause in between waiting for the next testifier adds up to time by the end of the day and we'd like to go home by 9:00. The other-- the order of testimony is introducer, proponents, opponents, neutral, and closing remarks. If you will be testifying, please complete the green testifier sheet and hand to the committee page when you come up to testify. If you have written material that you would like distributed to the committee, please hand them to the page to distribute. If you are not going to publicly testify or need to leave early you can turn in written testimony with a completed green testifier sheet and it will be put in the record. We need 12 copies for all committee members and staff. If you need additional copies please ask a page to make copies for you now. When you begin to testify please state and spell your name for the record. Please be concise. It is my request that testimony limit to five minutes. We will be using a light system. Green for four minutes, yellow one minute, and wrap up red. Sometimes if the information is critical and we're not long we let people overrun. There will be questions afterwards if you want them. Hopefully, just questions and not debates. But if you would like your position to be known-- excuse me-- yeah. If you want your-- if you want your position known but don't want to testify or don't have something to hand in there's a white sheet in the back where you can sign it and mark your position, proponent, opponent, or neutral on it and we'll add it to the record. Additionally, the letter must include if you-- if you're sending in letters-- this is for the people listening-- it's too late for this hearing but you need to have your letter in or e-mail into us prior to 5:00. We're going to try to be more lenient on-- our first hearing was a three-day weekend and it really wasn't fair for those folks who wanted to get something in on Friday, Saturday, or Monday-- Friday, Saturday, Sunday,

and Monday, but we would appreciate having it in at 5:00 p.m. the day before the hearing. And make sure you add in there that you want it in the public record. If not, my-- I don't have the ability to put a private correspondence in the record, it must be asked for by you. Please speak directly into the microphone. It's for recording purposes; everything is transcribed by the transcribers so they need a clear record. The committee members with us today will introduce themselves beginning at my far right.

MURMAN: Senator Dave Murman, District 38, Clay, Webster, Nuckolls, Franklin, Kearney, Phelps, and part of Buffalo County.

MORFELD: Adam Morfeld, District 46, northeast Lincoln.

LINEHAN: Good afternoon. Lou Ann Linehan, District 39, Elkhorn, Waterloo, and Valley.

WALZ: Lynne Walz, District 15, which is all of Dodge County.

BREWER: Tom Brewer, District 43, 13 counties of western Nebraska.

PANSING BROOKS: Patty Pansing Brooks, Legislative District 28 right here in the heart of Lincoln.

KOLOWSKI: Rick Kolowski, District 31 in southwest Omaha.

GROENE: I'd like to introduce the committee staff. To my immediate left is research and analysis, Nicole Barrett. This is her first time sitting here so be patient with her. She'd be patient with me. But anyway, and to the far right at the end of the table is committee clerk Trevor Reilly. And our pagers are-- the names don't match the mail. What is your pages' names?

MADLINE BROWN: Madeline and Erika.

GROENE: And you're the only one here today?

MADLINE BROWN: I'm Maddy and Erika will be back.

GROENE: All right. They're our pages. That's who you hand your handouts to. Please remember that senators may come and go during our hearings, as they may have bills to introduce in other committees. In fact, I'll be leaving pretty quickly to introduce a bill in General Affairs and Vice Chair Walz will be

handling the committee while I'm gone. Also remember that committee members sometimes will be on computers and on their phone, hopefully not too much, trying to gather information, texting back to the staff to-- for information so when we do ask you a question it's, it's accurate and pertinent. But, hopefully, we don't need to do that too much. So let's start the hearing on LB241. Senator Bolz.

BOLZ: Good afternoon. For the record, I am Senator Kate Bolz, that's K-a-t-e B-o-l-z, and I represent Legislative District 29. Today I bring LB241, which would provide for teacher mentoring program grants using income from solar and wind agreements on school lands. Mentorships are helpful both to experienced and new teachers. The relationship ensures that educators can collaborate and support one another. Mentorships have been proven to increase retention and student performance. Some of that data is reflected in the handout that I provided to you. In 1998, the Legislature passed LB1228 as part of the Quality Education Accountability Act. The bill instructed the State Board of Education to develop guidelines for mentor-teacher programs. As a result, the state board promulgated Rule 26 accompanying these guidelines and both the state mentor regulation and the enabling statute continue to be in law. Despite the recognition of the importance of mentoring in statute, Nebraska does not currently have a state-funded mentoring program. This gap affects new teachers as well as teacher retention in the state. Many small, rural districts are unable to provide high quality mentoring programs that match a beginning teacher with a teacher in their content area. Previously, teacher-mentor grants were funded through the Education Innovation Fund. The state lottery funds have since been reallocated by the Legislature causing many mentoring programs to be set aside. So LB241 proposes to reestablish grant funding for teacher mentoring programs across Nebraska. Under this proposal, a school district could apply to the State Department of Education for a grant for a period of up to three years to implement a local teacher mentoring program. Seventy-five percent of the funds would be received by the school district and would be used to pay stipends to participating mentor-teachers. Teacher mentoring program grants would be funded by the income from solar and wind agreements on school lands. Setting aside income from solar and wind agreements on school lands was first established under LB1014 and basically has been underutilized. Only one grant, grant was awarded in recent years to Westside School and according to information that I have received from the Legislative Fiscal Office, those

funds have remained unspent. So thereafter income from wind and solar agreements have been implementing evaluation models and other things. Even that legislation is scheduled to sunset in 2020. So the Department of Education has indicated that income in the fund derived from wind and solar agreements is approximately \$190,000. And this bill argues that we could utilize these dollars to reestablish grants for teacher mentoring programs as a wise investment. There are additional folks today who will talk about the details and models used for those programs. I'll also bring your attention to the amendment that I have shared with the committee. When I looked at the fiscal note I realized that what our intent was, was to allocate the wind and solar funds to the purpose of reestablishing this program. But I didn't provide specific enough language to say that for the first year the funds can be used for changing Rule 26 and establishing program guidelines. So the amendment says that for the first year the funds can be used to ramp the program back up and thereafter will be used for grant funding purposes. So I'm happy to take any of your questions. That is LB241.

GROENE: Any questions? Senator Kolowski.

KOLOWSKI: Thank you. Do you have any idea how much the new dollar amount would be for potential programs that would exist under the, the wind and other agreements there, solar and wind?

BOLZ: It will remain at about \$190,000. We're basically just using the existing wind and solar funds for, for the teacher mentoring purpose instead of the purposes that they're using now-- they're allocated for now, which are some quality and evaluation purposes but only Westside schools have received any of those grants and even Westside schools has not expended the funds.

KOLOWSKI: If they put more wind or solar units on school land across the state then the pool would go up, right?

BOLZ: Correct. Yep, that's right.

KOLOWSKI: And is that easy to do or difficult to do? Have you had any background on that at all?

BOLZ: I wouldn't say that it's easy to do. It hasn't grown much over time, but I think the capacity is certainly there.

KOLOWSKI: Thank you.

GROENE: Senator Linehan.

LINEHAN: Thank you, Chairman Groene. And thank you, Senator Bolz, for being here today. So this is part of the apportionment money, right? The money-- so the school lands are all put into an account and then it's apportion-- the income it generates are apportioned out to each school district by the number of children in their census. So, wouldn't this-- good idea. I'm not saying it's not a good idea, but wouldn't it take money away from schools?

BOLZ: It's, it's already being set aside for-- let me give you the reference here. It's already being set aside for grants through the State Department of Education in Section 79-308 for implementing an evaluation model for effective educators. So it is-- it's already set aside. It's-- there-- there's already a separation there. And so you, you could make the argument that that could-- should be just rolled back in. I wouldn't make that argument because I think we've already established this as a specific revenue stream and that it's good, right, and appropriate to use it for a specific purpose that reinvests in the schools and teachers.

LINEHAN: I can't remember the dates exactly, but that's-- the Legislature did that before you were here?

BOLZ: Twenty fifteen, I would have been here.

LINEHAN: So it's at the same time they took some of the apportionment money for early childhood? Or was that before that?

BOLZ: I, I'm sorry, I don't-- I don't recall. I'm sorry.

LINEHAN: That's OK. All right. Thank you very much for being here.

GROENE: Any other questions? Thank you. You going to stay around to close?

BOLZ: I'll stick around and listen.

GROENE: Proponents. Any proponents? Go ahead whenever you're ready. When that-- when the green light turns on, start talking. Your time is being wasted.

JORDAN KOCH: Chairman Groene and the members of the Education Committee, my name is Jordan Koch, J-o-r-d-a-n K-o-c-h, and I am a sixth grade teacher at the Papillion La Vista Community Schools. Thank you for allowing me to testify on behalf of myself and other novice educators in support of LB241, a bill that I believe has critical implications for novice teachers across the state. I would like to begin by telling you a little bit about myself. I am in my third year of teaching. I graduated from the University of Nebraska at Omaha in 2015 with my bachelor's degree in elementary education. My first year of teaching I accepted a CADRE position in the district. CADRE is a nationally recognized program through UNO in which first-year teachers not only teach full time in the classroom but also complete their master's degree in a year. A component of being a CADRE teacher is receiving a mentor, now one who not only is an educator but received intensive mentorship training. My mentor devoted five hours a week to provide me with new teaching and management strategies, helping with lesson plans, and teaching my class while I observed other master teachers, among other things. Not only did she help me grow professionally, she supported me during stressful, emotionally difficult times. Honestly, if I did not have her I may have left the profession that I love. As importantly, my students continue to reap the benefits of my professional growth. I am a much better teacher because I had an effective mentor. The district did not assign me a mentor who taught the same grade level as me. However, the district mentor did not receive leave from the classroom for one-on-one coaching nor formal mentor training. Their main role was to be someone who could answer questions when I came to them. Nevertheless, with state-supported mentoring and proper funding I believe districts across the state would be able to provide a high-quality mentor program for beginning teachers, including proper training through our ESUs, establishing evidence-based criterion outcomes, and determining a rigorous screening process for mentors. Teacher mentoring directly helps students. According to the U.S. Department of Education, students who had teachers that received three years of formal mentoring saw significant achievement gains. The average student moved from the 50th percentile up 4 percentile points in reading and 8 points in math. High teacher turnover costs money. Every year teacher turnover costs the U.S. school districts upwards of \$2.2 billion. Out of a sample of 1,990 first-year teachers

included in a National Center for Education Statistics study, 86 percent of teachers who had been assigned mentors were still teaching after five years compared with 71 percent who did not have mentors. This bill not only helps districts with program funding but also establishes standards to help all districts, small or large, improve their mentoring programs. Again, research shows that mentor programs have clear standards, training for mentor, release time for mentoring together, a rigorous selection process in a program assessment as outlined in the bill. As a proud third-year educator I encourage you to support LB241. This is an investment in our futures of our youth. Help me and other novice teachers meet our full potential to have the best outcomes possible with our students. My thanks to Senator Bolz for supporting novice teachers in our great state. And my thanks to each of you for all you do to support K-12 education in Nebraska. I would also like to note and share with you an article that I wrote while I was interning in Washington, D.C. for the National Association of State Boards of Education. I would be happy to answer any questions you might have for me.

GROENE: Any questions? Senator Linehan.

LINEHAN: Thank you, Chairman Groene. In your testimony here-- thank you. You did a great job. I think it's one, two, three four, fifth paragraph down. Just so I understand, the average move from the 50th percent-- percentile up to 14. Is at the NAPE? What score is that?

JORDAN KOCH: It, it, it's the NAPE, yeah.

LINEHAN: The NAPE, okay.

JORDAN KOCH: Yeah.

LINEHAN: Thank you very much.

JORDAN KOCH: You're welcome.

GROENE: Any other questions? Senator Kolowski.

KOLOWSKI: Yes. Congratulations on your success with the program--
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JORDAN KOCH: Thank you.

KOLOWSKI: --and the other work you've completed. About how many students would be able to take advantage of the program if all \$190,000 a year was put into a program like this?

JORDAN KOCH: Well, I don't know. But, I mean, I had 25 students in my classroom so and I was in with the CADRE program. I mean, I was able to-- I mean, when you say that you're just affecting one group of students you're really not, because you're affecting that one group of students but then you're continued to prove and prove. Specifically with the CADRE program, they say that once you get out of the program with the mentoring program that you're acting like a third-year educator. So, I mean, I feel like my-- what I improved my first year that I'm improving year after year after year some I'm really-- all my students are reaping the benefits not just that one class. But I don't know specifically with the \$190,000.

KOLOWSKI: I wasn't asking about the number of students you're dealing with, I'm asking about yourself and others like you that are in the mentoring program. How many--

JORDAN KOCH: I couldn't answer that question.

KOLOWSKI: OK. Does it differ between districts, they have different allocations?

JORDAN KOCH: I would, I would think it would be different, but I don't know for sure.

KOLOWSKI: Thank you.

GROENE: Senator Linehan.

LINEHAN: Thank you, Chairman Groene. On the CADRE program that you were involved with, with UNO and you were getting your master's degree at the same time. So did you have to pay tuition to get your master's degree?

JORDAN KOCH: They, they actually paid it for me and then they gave me a stipend.

LINEHAN: They being the school district?

JORDAN KOCH: It was the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

LINEHAN: OK. Thank you very much.

GROENE: Any other questions? Thank you.

JORDAN KOCH: Thank you.

GROENE: Go ahead, Miss.

TAYLOR RUZICKA-SCHEELE: Oh, OK. Chairman Groene and the members of Education Committee, my name is Taylor Ruzicka-Scheele, spelled T-a-y-l-o-r R-u-z-i-c-k-a-S-c-h-e-e-l-e, and I am here in support of LB241. I am in my third year of teaching and I attended Doane College where I received my bachelors of arts in elementary education, early childhood education, and K-12 special education, as well as my minor in leadership studies. I'd like to thank you first off for your service to our state and for serving on this important committee. I appreciate that you're open to new ideas about how we can better support retention and effectiveness of more than 1,800 first-year Nebraska teachers and ultimately benefit students. Being successful within the classroom and the community has always been a constant in my life. I decided to become a teacher because of the impact my teachers had on me. I believe my purpose in life is to invest in others and to help them find their purpose in this world. I feel like Mother Teresa put my purpose into words when she said: Alone, I cannot change the world, but I can cast a stone across waters to create many ripples. Through my three years of teaching. I have been a part of two teacher-mentorship programs. From my experiences, the programs typically assign a mentor who is in the same grade level or similar content area to a new teacher within their district. Once paired the mentor-teacher's expectations generally outline their duties as the following: someone who is supposed to help support and guide the new teacher throughout the year; explaining how observations are conducted; assisting in planning content; communicating the norms of the school on things like how to take leave, how to schedule a field trip, when and where lesson plans are due each week, communicating the enrichment activities that outside vendors may attend and so forth. Participating new teachers usually have expectations as well. They're focused on developing active listening skills, learning how to ask questions and seek guidance from a mentor, and observing your mentor-teacher at work. In one of the programs I was required to attend monthly meetings after school hours on various topics that were introduced to us about the district, including how testing would be administered and how to request buses, meeting rooms, gyms, etcetera, procedures on taking gate or doing concessions and a variety of other topics.

Prior to these programs, for me there were professors and other advisors that I had gravitated to over our time together, which was usually driven by converging personalities, passions, and outlooks on things within our lives. We had formed a relationship through working together in classes and committees and such, but never defined our relationship as mentor-mentee. I feel fortunate to have had those people to lean on during my first years of teaching. I know that some new teachers do not have this type of support to help them be successful though. During my teacher preparation, I gained many new friends in the profession who are now in various districts. Thanks to social media it's been easy to keep in touch. These feelings that new teachers shared of being overwhelmed by the amount of work there is to be done each day. The lack of time to do it is remarkable. The second feeling they tend to share is how they aren't often assigned a mentor or someone they can gather advice from. I could sympathize with each of them, feeling some days as if I barely had time to eat a meal, let alone go visit my family who lived an hour away from where I first taught because everything just seemed to feel like it took me longer to do than my experienced peers. One year into my career I was left wondering if I needed to leave teaching to ensure my own personal health and my overall wellness. While many Nebraska schools have a mentoring program in place, they differ dramatically from school to school. I've heard from colleagues and friends who have had wonderful mentors and mentorship programs and are still at their original district today. But we can't forget those who feel as if their programs could be stronger and more helpful. While the cost of mentoring programs can seem significant to a district, research has shown that induction in mentoring programs provide a significant return on investment. I believe that if you listen to research Nebraska and other states can confront the issue of teacher retention and recruitment head-on and be proactive about providing a quality education that attracts and retains families within our state. We have an opportunity through LB241 to strengthen the various established successful programs we have going in our school systems and provide additional support for those that don't. I can say I've personally benefited from being a part of mentorship programs that were built with strong foundations. I believe mentorship is not solely a give-and-take model that only provides feedback and support to new teachers. It also allows teachers to work together, gain knowledge, techniques, and insights from one another to overall foster a better environment for the sole reason of their profession and their passion and that's their students. British professor and author, Dylan William, resonates with me. He states: If we can

create a culture where every teacher believes they need to improve, not because they're not good enough, but because they believe they can be anybody-- even better, there is no limit to what they can achieve. Just like in other professions, this is also an economic development and work force issue. Engineers, software developers, and others, we can educate and train and invest in these teachers. We should do what we can to make certain they stay in the profession and stay in Nebraska. Thank you and I'd be happy to answer any questions you might have.

GROENE: We even let you go over five minutes. You could keep reading there, so you don't [INAUDIBLE]--

TAYLOR RUZICKA-SCHEELE: Sorry, I just wanted to honor your time.

GROENE: Senator Murman.

MURMAN: Thank you, Senator Groene. Thank you, Jordan. Did-- so if I understood you correctly you, you-- or Taylor, sorry.

TAYLOR RUZICKA-SCHEELE: It's OK.

MURMAN: You went through several mentoring prog-- or more than one mentoring program?

TAYLOR RUZICKA-SCHEELE: Yes. Yes. I went through my first one Ashland-Greenwood with my first two years of teaching. And then I'm currently at Superior Public Schools.

MURMAN: And if we wouldn't fund this program from the state would those programs continue or how would they be improved if we would do this program?

TAYLOR RUZICKA-SCHEELE: As much as I know about my time during-- doing the Ashland-Greenwood mentorship program, I believe it was all on volunteer basis or they were assigned those duties and it was out of their own time. Our curriculum director is the one who is in charge of it at Ashland-Greenwood, I do know that. As for my other schools I'm not certain, as I was just kind of assigned a mentor. They walked up to me and said, hey, I'm your mentor, and moved on from there. So, yeah.

MURMAN: Thanks a lot.

GROENE: Any other questions? Thank you.

TAYLOR RUZICKA-SCHEELE: Thank you.

GROENE: Next proponent.

KYLE MCGOWAN: Good afternoon, Chairman Groene and members of the Education Committee. My name is Kyle McGowan, K-y-l-e M-c-G-o-w-a-n. I'm here representing the Nebraska Council of School Administrators. NCSA supports Senator Bolz's proposal to create a grant system to provide mentoring programs for teachers. She's also offered a revenue source to fund the program. Master teachers sharing their skills with new teachers is an evidence-based program proven to improve instruction. At least 75 percent of the grant dollars in her plan goes directly to the mentors, which is also a positive way to reward the good teachers that we have. The bill provides a specific criteria to assure a minimum standard of quality for all the awarded programs throughout the state. We think it's a good plan. I'd be happy to answer any questions.

GROENE: Any questions? I have one. You were a superintendent for years, right?

KYLE MCGOWAN: Right.

GROENE: You always had a mentoring program, did you not?

KYLE MCGOWAN: Yes. Here's what our mentoring program looked like. It-- we always recruited our best teachers to volunteer to be with a first-year teacher. And, of course, they did it as a professional courtesy. We would set up meetings to talk a lot about supporting that teacher. I think this program is much better defined than what we offered. We did work with Doane College. Doane offered graduate credit to the mentors. So this is a better plan than what we had in Crete, I'll just tell you.

GROENE: But isn't that what's expected? How we pay our teachers is unique versus other unions and things where in 16 years you go from \$40,000 to \$80,000, you can. There's a doubling and part of that what we expect. You've got a third grade teacher-- first year teaching third grade and you got one that's been there 20 years making twice the money doing the exact same job. Isn't part of what we expect as a public that they do this mentoring, that they pass on the knowledge they've learned in the classroom, that they-- do they really need more pay?.

KYLE McGOWAN: I think, you know, that question has a lot of components to it. I do think there's a professional courtesy. I think we take advantage of that a lot already with our teachers. So when you're asking a teacher to take on a first-year instructor and you're going to do a good job with it, it does take a lot of extra hours. So I think those mentor teachers deserve some monetary payment for that.

GROENE: How much of the school fund's money would you be willing to give up?

KYLE McGOWAN: Well--

GROENE: We could start granting that all over the place.

KYLE McGOWAN: Absolutely. And this is-- for Senator Bolz, I mean, I was thinking it was more like \$250,000. It's not a lot of money. At Crete we offered almost nothing because you do have to prioritize your dollars. And some of our teachers said, you know, I just don't have the time to do this. And I said, OK. Thank you very much.

GROENE: Senator Linehan.

LINEHAN: Thank you, Senator Groene or Chairman Groene, I'm sorry. Thank you-- is it doctor?

KYLE McGOWAN: Mister is fine. Kyle is okay, too.

LINEHAN: Mr. McGowan, what are you thinking a mentor-teacher would get in addition to their salary if they were doing this? So what, I mean, \$250,000. So with \$1,000 apiece, it gets you 250 teachers. What are you thinking?

KYLE McGOWAN: Yeah. It, it, it will never be enough. There would have to be-- for this program to work I think it would be supplemental to what the school would offer. It might also be a good use of consortium dollars to work with your service units to provide things. I do like in here, as I just was attempting to explain to Senator Groene, we ask a lot of our teachers and we ask them to put in a lot of hours under the category of professional courtesy. And I think at some point we should look to reward that.

LINEHAN: It doesn't concern you at all that we're taking money from the apportionment funds that the schools get?

KYLE McGOWAN: Well, I think it's already in the pool, right? I think this is already a concept that schools support and funds so--

LINEHAN: So it doesn't bother the schools that we're taking money from their portion-- apportionment funding to do this, because that money goes to schools anyway. But if it didn't go into this bucket it would just go out to the schools--

KYLE McGOWAN: It's in the same bucket, in my opinion.

LINEHAN: --according to their census data. So it's-- right? Isn't that how this works?

KYLE McGOWAN: I'm not sure what you're referring to. I would say that, that, that, that this apportionment fund that you're talking about is the same bucket of money. And so how you move that around-- I believe this to be a worthy cause to spend dollars for schools to have.

LINEHAN: But, but wouldn't it cause this problem? If you, if you have this one bucket of money, the apportionment funding, which is the school lands. So this would enable the department-- I'm not saying that it's not good or bad, but just so they would pick winners and losers. So instead of all the money going out equally to each kid in Nebraska, my census data, the department would be put in a situation where they'd have to pick one district over another district to give this money to.

KYLE McGOWAN: Well, you're right. In grants they're competitive. Grants are competitive. What I would be a proponent for is this is a research-based, evidence-based program so that we know that this money is going towards something that makes a difference for student progress.

LINEHAN: But doesn't that kind of go against local control?

KYLE McGOWAN: You don't have to apply for the grant if you don't want to.

LINEHAN: Oh. OK. All right. Thank you.

WALZ: Senator Kolowski.

KOLOWSKI: Thank you, Madam Chair. Kyle, how many districts do you know of that, that have-- that have a program of one or two

or three years when new teachers come into their district and people are at different places and doing quality work with these programs? In your own background and knowledge, what does that look like?

KYLE MCGOWAN: Well, I think most schools have some type of program that supports first-year teachers. And to the extent of it really is the amount of resources that they have. And in schools with smaller enrollment I think they have looked to their service units to offer regular training, training for mentors, rather than just being a master teacher of how you can also be a good mentor. So I'd like to think that many schools--most schools would have a mentoring program. I think the criteria in this bill sets up some clear standards to make sure that if there is a minimum level of excellence or quality, I'll say. Absolutely.

KOLOWSKI: The district side in the metro area, almost every one of them of course has some kind of one-, two-, or three-year program with the new students that they hire. You sign on the line with that district knowing that those are before you no matter where you're coming from if you come in with experience or you're a brand new teacher coming out of a teacher's college. So those are options that are available and you're paying for them in multiple ways. Millard's is a three-year program and that comes out of-- I don't think in any way, shape, or form we are close to getting enough money to pay for every one of the teachers to be involved in that. But it's that important as far as the culture and climate of those buildings to get people into those, those programs to understand what it is to teach in X, Y, or Z district, whatever it might be. And they do a great job of that. And it may be money from this type of funding, but it certainly isn't enough. And they have to go to their, their, their planned budget to, to make that work.

KYLE MCGOWAN: Right. No, I, I think one of the reasons that this is easy to support, it does have a funding stream. Most funding streams are not enough to, as this one isn't either, to maybe do everything, but that's the whole concept behind a grant and to apply for those dollars.

KOLOWSKI: This funding stream is more or less a little creek.

KYLE MCGOWAN: Yeah, OK. Right. That's right.

KOLOWSKI: Thank you.

WALZ: Senator Brewer.

BREWER: Thank you, Madam Chairman. All right. Just to backtrack a little. I mean, I like, I like a lot of what you're saying. My son went to Doane. As a matter of fact, I would check-- I think he was probably the same year as someone else here. I'll check with Taylor. But he-- his first teaching job was in Davenport, Iowa. And, and I really think he was just thrown to the wolves. It was a survival drill. And he almost hung it up and said, you know, it's not what I thought it was going to be. And then he got hired in OPS and the experience there has been a lot different. I mean, I think he's, he's realized that, you know, it's, it's a much better situation than he had thought it was going to be and that he's happy with what he's doing. I guess what I'm going to try and visualize here is what the program looks like. So you designate those within the school who would be the mentors. And, again, if this isn't something that you and Senator Bolz have had a chance to converse on then just let me know. But the ones that are designated then are given an individual or individuals who are their direct mentees that, that are going to have the one-on-one coaching. And, and what you then do is as a stipend or an additional allowance they would be given this compensation because they're going to have to put in extra time, do weekends, whatever it is. And that's, that's in essence what it is and then that's their compensation for whatever extra hours they've got to put in to do that. Is that as simple as it is?

KYLE MCGOWAN: Well, first of all I haven't talked to Senator Bolz at all about this.

BREWER: Well, just commit her to whatever you want.

KYLE MCGOWAN: Right. The, the, the key components are first of all you want a master teacher.

BREWER: Right.

KYLE MCGOWAN: You want your best. And you'd like to reward your best for the extra work because they're probably already doing extra work in everything else which makes them the best, if that makes sense. This particular bill-- and I keep looking back here and I don't have it in front of me-- I think requires 75 percent of the grant dollars to go towards paying the mentor. Now as a mentee, I think you better do everything you can to become the best teacher you can. And so I see those dollars going the right

direction to reward the extra time with the master teachers. And forgive me if I'm wrong on those numbers, but-- otherwise you described it and you've just had a very important point. If you are a first-year teacher and you're just taken by chance that someone's going to take you under their wing, well, hopefully, that works much the time but not all the time. So something organized should be in place and it will definitely help that teacher have a better impact on kids. And I think it will also help retain those people to stay in the profession.

BREWER: All right. Thank you.

WALZ: Other questions? Senator Kolowski.

KOLOWSKI: Just for the record, I think it's important that we understand that you look at your activity schedule for the school. And on that activity schedule you have all the coaches' salaries, all the sponsors' salaries of the clubs and organizations that you may have within that particular school, whatever the level might be, elementary, middle, or high school the same way. When I was principal at Millard West for 15 years we worked off those sheets and we're hiring the very best people. If the head football coach is 8 percent or 10 percent of the base salary, then you have that figure before you. And we're not seeing any more or any less with this aspect as far as the mentoring program that you had some opportunities and advantages with your classes being paid for by the college or university and all those other options that were there for you, because we want you to be successful with that over time because the mentors want you to be successful as well. They're all chosen as part of that. So I, I would not denigrate the possibility of you having the very best mentor any way or shape or form that I would have our kids have a less basketball coach or a football coach or anything else. It's similar. And very, very symbolic in that sense that what, what we stand for as a school.

WALZ: Thank you. Any other questions? Senator Linehan.

LINEHAN: Thank you, Chairwoman. Is there a definition-- when you say master teacher, what's the definition of a master teacher?

KYLE MCGOWAN: An effective teacher whose students are succeeding in the classroom.

LINEHAN: Thank you.

WALZ: Other questions? I just have a comment and I can ask Senator Bolz, too, possibly when she gets back up here. But I just wanted to refer back to the amendment that says the amount of income from solar and wind agreements on school land shall be used to fund the development of guidelines to-- by the State Department of Education for teacher mentoring. So I would imagine that that is-- would be helpful to this mentoring program. As a, as a mentoring teacher you would spend a lot of time just coming up with the guidelines and a mini-curriculum. So I would imagine that that would be helpful just--

KYLE MCGOWAN: Yeah. If you're going to have a competitive grant there should be a clear framework of what the awardees are going to shoot for-- aim for.

WALZ: All right. Thank you. Other proponents?

CINDY COPICH: My name is Cindy Copich, C-i-n-d-y C-o-p-i-c-h, I'm teaching and learning specialist with NSEA. I'm also a former elected school board member and a kindergarten, first, and second grade teacher. Thank you, Education Committee, for being here today and listening to this information that the teachers and this Nebraska Council of School Administrators have shared. I support as well as NSEA supports, LB294 or LB241, excuse me. NSEA is currently in their first year of implementation of a three-year grant program focused on providing mentoring and instructional coaching to teachers within their first few years of teaching. I have a fact sheet I prepared that I provided for you for your review, based on the information outlined in the bill. This information highlights that strong mentoring programs assist new teachers with new teacher retention, thereby also supporting recruitment and positively impacts student learning. I'm available for any questions you might have regarding mentoring. And one thing I'd like to add around the state development of a program. I think it would help to leverage the funds. So when you talk about paying mentors, our new teachers are sometimes the only teacher in their school district teaching in a specific content area or grade level. For example, I worked for-- with over 30 different school districts in Senator Brewer's area for the last three years. And many of them might be the only first grade teacher in their district, so it would be really hard to say that their mentor would be paid to mentor them in that district. So by operating a state program they can then perhaps leverage those funds better and match that teacher with a master teacher in a different district that teaches in that same grade level and

content area. We've had some unique circumstances we've seen with teachers. For example, the district might provide them with a mentor in music but they don't have an English language learner mentor and that music teacher was also assigned ELL responsibilities. And so they have-- our program has been able to match and supplement the district provided mentor with a mentor in a different content area, because we have-- especially in rural areas we have teachers, teachers teaching in a variety of content areas, sometimes at the same time. And I think this program could help leverage that from a state level and so I think it's very positive. But do you have any questions I might be able to help with?

WALZ: Senator Linehan.

LINEHAN: Thank you, Chairwoman. The grant program that NSEA is working now on the mentor program, were those funds from federal funds?

CINDY COPICH: No they were from the National Education Association.

LINEHAN: Thank you.

WALZ: Other questions? Senator Kolowski.

KOLOWSKI: Thank you, Madam Chair. I-- Cindy, thank you for being here and for your comments today. I think it's important that we remember the diversity of schools that we have in our state. And that doesn't mean we forget any one portion of the districts as we move along, but the delivery of services can be such a different combination. In Omaha it can be severely different compared to X, Y, or Z school out in far west Nebraska. And I think we, we need to look at the whole aspect of what are we trying to accomplish? Where do we want these teachers to be and knowing that their schools are entirely different than what Omaha might have or Lincoln might have.

CINDY COPICH: That's right. So you might have a mentor, for example, in our program it's mostly virtual because many of them are teachers in rural areas where they don't have the mentor actually in their district or they might be two hours away. And so they're meeting after school hours, on weekends virtually over the phone, on Skype, whatever the case may be. So I think the stipend is important for that reason, because we might-- you know, it might not be someone within their district that they

can just pop in over the lunch half hour and visit with them. So I think that's important.

WALZ: Other questions? Thank you.

CINDY COPICH: Thank you.

WALZ: Other proponents? Opponents? Is anybody here for neutral?

BRIAN HALSTEAD: Good afternoon. For the record, my name is Brian, B-r-i-a-n, last name is Halstead, H-a-l-s-t-e-a-d, I'm with the Nebraska Department of Education. Last Thursday, the state board legislative committee met to advise the commissioner on what to do on bills and this was a great discussion today because they had the same discussion many of you are having about the topic. As you can see, back in 1998 this body, the Legislature created the Quality and Accountability Act and devoted lottery funds to a grant program for mentor-teacher. And that ran for three years until the 9/11 recession and then the Legislature changed the law to use the lottery funds to balance the General Fund budget of the state. So in that regard, the state board hasn't had a conversation about this topic in over 15 years. And I can't recall the last time there was a bill before this committee on this topic. So number one, the committee members wanted to thank Senator Bolz for at least bringing the bill so we can all start having the conversation about the importance of mentoring programs and the strategies. I did want to correct what Senator Bolz said about the current uses of those funds, because there is more-- there are six school districts right now that have received grants. I do not have the details of that, but I do know there are at least six. The first year when these funds were available there were \$5,000 grants given out to a large number of school districts. And if I can find it I will tell you the exact number of school districts. There were 32 grantees in the '16-'17 school year. So that was all for effective educator and adopting evaluation systems that better inform the needs of what teachers need to learn and how to do to become better teachers. And it somewhat connects with this topic about making our teachers better regardless. So with that, I'll stop and see if you have any questions.

WALZ: Senator Brewer.

BREWER: Thank you. I guess the part I'm still trying to fully understand is \$5,000 per grant, 32 grants. Would your-- again,

not Senator Bolz, but your vision of what this would look like if we did it right, would it be something similar to that or--

BRIAN HALSTEAD: Well, the, the grants and the numbers I gave you, that is for school districts to design their teacher evaluation system against the effective frameworks for teachers or principals that the state board adopted back in 2013, I think it was. So that's about an evaluation system and how you can help inform teachers of areas in which they need to improve on their practice and connect professional development to that. This is an entirely different topic and it's right, there's only about \$225,000. I believe the lottery funds in 1999 there were \$800,000, a little over a million dollars in 2000, and just under a million dollars in 2001. So there was more money back then going to a program for mentor-teacher. And it's right, Rule 26 still does exist, but all of the people at the department who were doing that work, believe it or not, they've retired and the materials are a little out of date, so there's work we're going to have to do. So in the sense of we just got from the Treasurer's Office the allocations of-- Senator Linehan-- a portion of what portion of that is solar-wind energy-- what portion goes out as apportionment funds that go to the school districts in that regard. So I don't have the answer as to what this mentor program would do, because as I said the board members themselves haven't really had a conversation about what the vision is for mentoring in Nebraska. It's an important conversation and it's just a recognition that we've all been busy with other things and this is the first time the topic has come back up in quite some time.

BREWER: All right. It probably wasn't fair to ask you that one. I'll wait and hit Senator Bolz up when she closes.

WALZ: Other questions? Thank you. Anybody else here to speak neutral? Senator Bolz.

BOLZ: Well, thanks for your time and attention this afternoon. I'll try to be concise, as Senator Groene encouraged me to do. But I do want to provide some additional information in response to some of the questions that came forward. First, in response to Mr. Halstead's testimony, I have correspondence from the Legislative Fiscal Office dated Wednesday, October 10, 2018, and I'll read directly from it. The department sent me a list of all the wind grants: Westside Public Schools received two grants; the first grant was \$47,700 and the grant period has ended. No funds were spent. The second grant period grant is for the same

amount. The grant period ends 8-31-19. So I'll maybe have the page make copies of this correspondence for the committee. They can share it. I'd suggest that maybe Mr. Halstead wants to provide some clarification and additional information beyond what was provided to the Legislative Fiscal Office in October. Second, I want to respond to some of the questions that I think are very fair from Senator Linehan about the apportionment. I guess, I would argue that this funding stream from the wind and solar projects was always intended to improve quality. It was sort of an add-on. It wasn't part of the apportionment vision, it was in addition to and that's why Senator Haar worked on it. And I would also argue that sometimes a small amount can have a really big impact if you're trying to spread money like the fairly modest pool of money we have from wind and school-- solar across many schools. You may not have the same impact as I think is possible through these competitive grant funds. And that relates to another topic that I wanted to touch on briefly which is one of the things that I think is so exciting about this idea and this proposal is that when you have a competitive grant strategy you can encourage innovation, you can encourage best practices, you can encourage that competition that can-- then can be seeded out and can have the greatest efficiencies. Personally, I really like the idea of working with the ESUs and having that hub that helps all programs kind of raise their boat. As much as I hear from the testimony of the teachers who testified this afternoon about how helpful it can be to navigate the building or understand a bus schedule, I think the vision here is really what are the best practices in pedagogy? How do you understand early childhood education and English as a second language and take that all to the next level in the classroom, resulting in those quality outcomes that you saw in the report we distributed? I'm pushing my luck in terms of time. But the last thing I would say is that I think this has real potential to improve teacher retention and I would just point out that teach-- lack of teacher retention can be very costly because of turnover and retraining and all of that recruitment costs. So I'm happy to answer any further questions, but wanted to get those points in.

WALZ: Senator Brewer.

BREWER: Thank you, Madam Chairman. All right, so we go back and take a look, because inevitably this is a question I'm going to get, so I've got to figure out the right answer for it. Whatever that lump sum is, to be determined, how will it be distributed

so that-- is it so much per student or size of school or what would be the vision there?

BOLZ: Some of that-- and it's an excellent question. Some of that relates to the amendment that I brought which contemplates having the first year of funding be allocated to the Department of Education to establish those parameters, best practices, expectations, you know, those things that are really informed by the field of education that are beyond my field of expertise. But I know that information and research is out there about how you really move the dial in terms of somebody's skills and abilities. But as was previously mentioned on the mike, once we turn the corner to actually distributing the grants, 75 percent of those funds are intended to be for those teachers that are doing the mentoring. So we're, we're creating a partnership with those folks that have the best skill sets and can implement those mentoring strategies in the best way. I think that some of the testimony that you heard today was about how the status quo works in teacher mentoring in schools. And that might be professional courtesy, it might be informal practices, it might actually be formal practices. But I think this grant program allows us to take it all to the next level. For example, you may have one person who works full time doing mentoring and is the best in the world at that and can help multiple school districts or multiple teachers. Am I answering your question?

BREWER: You are. I guess kind of the root of some of that is there's always a concern, especially with my district, is that if the grant demands were such as-- certain schools are going to be struggling, whether it be a Sandhills or in Ashland-Greenwood, that sometimes there's no one left to do too many tasks if you stack the plate too full. But you think it will be a grant system and that they'll, they'll have to apply and then there'll be some resolve that comes out of this that will say how much and how that's going to be managed?

BOLZ: Right. You know, I think that, I guess, I have enough legislative humility to say that I'm not sure that I or, or even the Legislature as a whole should, should manage to that level. I think somebody who's got that skill set and that academic knowledge base, you know, somebody who's been teaching teachers for 20 years is, is better positioned to say exactly how those funds should flow out and what their goals should be and how you manage for factors such as school size or socioeconomic status or student mix. And so I think we need to rely on the Department of Education for some of that work.

BREWER: All right. Fair enough. Thank you.

BOLZ: Thank you.

WALZ: Any other questions? Senator Kolowski.

KOLOWSKI: Just so we don't forget, it can be delivered by a district or a combination of districts in a zone or an area or ESUs. Don't forget our ESU structure in the state and what they might be able to do and deliver to any school, anytime, anywhere. Thank you.

WALZ: Thank you. All right. Just for the record, we received no letters in opposition and no letters from proponents. So that concludes our hearing on LB281.

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WALZ: LB241.

BOLZ: Thanks so much.

WALZ: And now we'll open up with LB281 and Senator McCollister. Go ahead, Senator McCollister.

MCCOLLISTER: Good afternoon, Vice Chair Walz and members of the Education Committee. I am John, J-o-h-n, McCollister, M-c-C-o-l-l-i-s-t-e-r, and I represent the 20th Legislative District in Omaha. Today I'm offering LB281. This bill's a reintroduction of LB912 from last year. LB281 would provide for the creation and display of one or more posters in English and Spanish in public school buildings to give easy access, especially for students, visitors, and volunteers to the Department of Health and Education's toll free child abuse hotline and neglect, neglect, neglect hotline telephone number. As an alternative to posting signs, the school could provide a link to the sign on its Web site. The handouts you received are samples of these posters. According to the National Children's Alliance, more than 300,000 children were abused in this country in 2017, 2017. Of that number more than 5,700 of these children live in Nebraska, according to estimates. Some children are a victim of more than one form of maltreatment. Even more frightening is the fact that a parent of a child victim is the perpetrator in 78 percent of the verified cases of child maltreatment. According to this study by Time Magazine as few as one in ten of the incidents of abuse or neglect in this country is actually confirmed by social

service agencies. This tends to marginalize children and create an environment in which their ability to heal and thrive becomes even more difficult. We all know that school employees have a statutory obligation to report abuse and neglect. Posting Nebraska's toll free child abuse hotline number would serve as a helpful reminder to these employees. In addition to posting the number in an area that is frequented by children, visitors, and volunteers is a perfect way to accomplish these goals. First, it would give children the knowledge that they have the right to self-report abuse. Second, it would give children a way to do just that. Third, it would give all adults who are present in the school building from time to time the same type of information and awareness. As you will see, LB281 is a permissive proposal with no fiscal impact to schools or the state. LB281 would provide a way for Nebraska to join 27 states that already created a way for children and know every day that they have the right and the means to seek help for themselves, their siblings, or their friends if abuse is present in their lives. I ask for your support for this simple solution to a challenging problem. Kyle McGowan, with the Nebraska Council of School Administrators, will follow me to describe how the NCSA will accommodate the provisions outlined in LB281. I would just note, last year LB912 was advanced by this committee on a clean vote. I would ask that LB281 be advanced to the floor in the same manner to ensure its eligibility for a consent calendar. I'm prepared to answer any questions.

GROENE: Any questions for the senator? Thank you. You staying around to close?

McCOLLISTER: Yes, sir. I will.

GROENE: Proponents.

KYLE MCGOWAN: Good afternoon, again, Chairman Groene and members of the Education Committee. My name is Kyle McGowan, K-y-l-e M-c-G-o-w-a-n, and I'm here representing the Nebraska Council of School Administrators. NCSA supports Senator McCollister's bills which encourage all schools to post signs and help notify the public, our teachers, visitors about reporting child abuse and neglect. As the senator mentioned, there's always-- already laws requiring school employees to report child abuse and neglect. But, of course, more than just employees come to our school, we have volunteers, we have substitute teachers and, in fact, these postings are also supposed to be made available so that students themselves may be encouraged to know who to contact. The wording

in LB281 clearly expects the schools to comply, but it doesn't create another level of bureaucracy or auditing requirements. We do believe that the school personnel knows the best and most effective places to post signs. It might be in the bathroom, it might be above the water fountain, but it allows that flexibility for those people to know how best to communicate that. NCSA has over 2,500 members and we'll provide all the hard copies that anybody wishes to request. There's also a very large conference at the start of every school year that's well attended by school administrators and we would be promoting this posting, not only at that event but all of our events that we have. One might ask, why do we need the bill if it's just going to be voluntary? And I would say that particularly my experience as both a principal and a school superintendent, we get a lot of requests to post things in schools, lots. And there's lots of good causes. And one of the things that-- and most schools will have a policy what they're going to allow in their school. But we need to be very sensitive to the captive audience that we have with our students. And by having legislation it moves us to the front of the line. So when we get this question of why do you-- why are you posting that and why can't you post my, my piece then we can certainly explain the value and the legislation referred to in LB281. So with that, I would just answer any questions that you might have.

GROENE: Any questions? Senator Walz.

WALZ: Thank you. I think this is an important communication to students. How typically, with your experience, how would you communicate the fact that there is something hanging on the wall to students to let them know? I mean, I know that it will be on the wall, but typically would you communicate or do a little bit of a training session with students or how does that--

KYLE MCGOWAN: Different-- most schools have curriculum that talks to children in age appropriate ways about maybe bad things that are happening at home and how they can get assistance. This would be an addition. For instance, if it was-- if I was an elementary principal, which I was for a while, I'd be posting this in the lunchroom where kids were lining up waiting for their food to be. And so you never know the impact of those, those messages. It's one thing to hear it and it's another to hear it and see it and hear and see it and that sort of thing. So does that answer your question?

WALZ: Sure.

GROENE: Senator Linehan.

LINEHAN: Thank you, Chairman Groene. Thank you, Mr. McGowan. Were you supportive of this bill last year?

KYLE MCGOWAN: Yes.

LINEHAN: Was it-- last year was it mandatory or is it-- was it different? Or two bills?

KYLE MCGOWAN: I think there was-- there were two bills out last year and I know Senator McCollister had one and I'm not sure if it was Senator--

LINEHAN: Senator Wayne.

KYLE MCGOWAN: Wayne?

LINEHAN: So did you support both of them?

KYLE MCGOWAN: No, we support Senator McCollister's.

LINEHAN: Thank you. Was it because one was-- one was not voluntary?

KYLE MCGOWAN: One was-- yeah, I don't want to-- I'm not, I'm not, I'm not remembering a lot about Senator Wayne's. One of the issues would be, sometimes these bills can be so prescriptive, the size of the paper, where it's going to be posted, and it almost feels like it's a gotcha moment. So now someone comes in and we're using eight and a half by eleven instead of, you know, 14 by whatever. If that makes sense.

LINEHAN: Do most schools already have something posted?

KYLE MCGOWAN: You know, we brought this to attention to our schools last year that we were promoting this, even though the bill didn't get passed. So it's my understanding that there's many schools already implementing-- some are similar. I'm not-- I don't think they're using that exact poster, but that's the one we would be promoting.

LINEHAN: OK. Thank you.

GROENE: Senator Pansing Brooks.

PANSING BROOKS: Thank you, Chairman Groene. Thank you for coming, Mr. McGowan. I was trying to-- where did this-- where did this form come from, do you know? Or maybe I need to ask--

KYLE MCGOWAN: Ask Mr. or Senator McCollister.

PANSING BROOKS: OK, I'll ask Senator McCollister. The reason I'm wondering about it is that I think it's really important to let kids know that they can say, no, and they can tell an adult. It, it ties into the whole trafficking issue as well and stuff that we're-- we're trying to work on information for schools to be able to get that information across to kids as well. So I'm not sure if it goes-- it is clear enough in that regard. But, I don't know, I'm just-- I will be happy to work with Senator McCollister on this. But have you seen anything else regarding trafficking and some of that information that kids need to know that they have to be able to protect themselves or take a stand?

KYLE MCGOWAN: Right. I think that issue is becoming more prevalent and therefore more discussed.

PANSING BROOKS: OK. Thank you. I'll talk to Senator McCollister.

GROENE: Senator Murman.

MURMAN: Yeah, thanks a lot. This post, this would be something you would be promoting to use then?

KYLE MCGOWAN: Yeah. The reason I think it's important to be consistent so that that-- the color, the style all becomes associated with that topic.

MURMAN: OK. Well, the reason I'm asking, I would think it'd be good to say: It's okay to tell if someone hurts you or someone you know hurts you or someone you know, because for instance if a person is getting bullied sometimes they are too timid to report it themselves. But if someone else sees it maybe they would report it.

KYLE MCGOWAN: Would-- wouldn't disagree with that message at all. And Senator McCollister I think may have been receiving some-- I'll let you ask him, but there is certainly a national movement in this direction and so I think that was the foundation for the poster.

MURMAN: OK, thanks.

GROENE: Senator Kolowski.

KOLOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And, Kyle, thank you again for bringing this forward today. It's really important that we remember to keep in mind it's an elementary issue, it's a middle school issue, and it's a high school issue. We should not denigrate any one of the levels that we're dealing with within the school district itself, because it's extremely important to have-- to have the kind of schools that we would want kids to come to, to attend and be a part of. And this really gives a start to that in the sense of a bigger picture what we're all about.

KYLE MCGOWAN: Yeah. And on that same vein, schools entertain a lot of people. And so it's not just the employees. And then also to encourage or give an opportunity for students also. So many students have cell phones now and have access to make a phone call that having a phone number there I think becomes a very viable opportunity to make a, make a call.

GROENE: Any other questions? The bill says the State Department of Education may contract-- so you will work with the State Department of Education. Do you have a contract written up? Assumingly, that's what it says you have to do.

KYLE MCGOWAN: If there's a contract there'll be no cost. Certainly--

GROENE: The way the bill is written you just can't come up with a poster, you have to be the one designated by the State Department of Education it seems--

KYLE MCGOWAN: That, that would be fine.

GROENE: --to create the poster. The last two major ones really-- I know this happens all the time-- were school employees, teachers. The one in Omaha, that individual and there was a, a, a administrator at Millard, I believe.

KYLE MCGOWAN: There was a teacher-- I'm not-- go ahead.

GROENE: Do you know how those were reported? I believe they were fellow employees that turned them in, wasn't it?

KYLE McGOWAN: I, I, I, I don't know anything about it. I would hope that school employees are the first to police their own and the first to report.

GROENE: So I think the last one, it was reported on this hotline.

KYLE McGOWAN: Oh, really?

GROENE: I remember [INAUDIBLE].

KYLE McGOWAN: As I said, we've been-- since last year in working with Senator McCollister we've been encouraging schools to put up these posters.

GROENE: And you've seen some?

KYLE McGOWAN: I, personally, have not been in a building that I've seen one.

GROENE: And how many different versions are out there?

KYLE McGOWAN: Well, there's an English and a Spanish.

GROENE: But I mean this is an accepted--

KYLE McGOWAN: This is what we're-- this would be the poster that we would be using to create some sort of consistency and familiarity.

GROENE: And as you said earlier-- I've been in schools, of course, like with grandkids recently. There's a collage of posters everywhere. I mean, I don't even notice. It's like walking in a subway and all of the posters you just become "immune" to it.

KYLE McGOWAN: Right.

GROENE: I mean there just seems to be an awful lot of stuff on the walls already.

KYLE McGOWAN: I agree. And I think it is important for schools to monitor that or we all become blind to whatever's on there. So now every-- again, every school has their own-- should have their own policy about this. I can tell you as, again, a

building administrator and a superintendent, we get bombarded with requests because, again, we have a captive audience and a lot of people come into the school. And even though it's national blood donor month maybe we don't need a poster on that. I don't know.

GROENE: Thank you. Any other questions?

JENNI BENSON: For the record, my name is Jenni Benson, J-e-n-n-i B-e-n-s-o-n. Thank you, Senator Groene and the members of the Education Committee. I am the president of the Nebraska State Education Association and I am here representing 28,000 members across the state in support of LB281. I want to thank Senator McCollister for providing a conduit for us to publicize child abuse reporting information. We have a tremendous responsibility to care for our most vulnerable citizens and it is important to have reporting information readily at hand when needed. The NSEA is committed to working with the Department of Ed and other stakeholders by providing the services of our communications department in distribution of these posters. In fact, when LB281 passes we can publish a poster in our monthly magazine that is sent to our members statewide and encourage them to post. I urge you to support LB281. The reason I gave you our magazine was we had had a recent poster in there and so I kind of wanted to show you what our magazine looks like. But this was a poster that we published this last month about-- we have lots of questions about how the Legislature works and so that was our poster. It's been incredibly popular. We've been, we've been providing it for lots of people, not it-- not in education necessarily but that ask us questions about that. So thank you very much for your time.

GROENE: Any questions?

JENNI BENSON: Thank you.

GROENE: Any other proponents? Excuse me. I think I'll wait for the end of the hearing to read the letters. So is there any opponents? Neutral? Do you want to close, Senator McCollister?

McCOLLISTER: Thank you, Chairman, Chairman Groene and members of the committee for a rather good hearing I think. This whole idea came into my head after a phone call from a woman in Texas that organized the other 27 states that put this program together. The, the poster that you actually see is the same poster that they're using in 27 other states and the language on the poster

is the same thing for all states. So I think it's a, it's a pretty good bill. And I'd appreciate your, your help in moving this to the floor.

GROENE: Any other questions? Senator Pansing Brooks.

PANSING BROOKS: Thank you. Thank you for bringing this, Senator McCollister. So does, does the language of this poster then go into statute as-- I'm sorry, I didn't see the--

McCOLLISTER: No, it does not.

PANSING BROOKS: So it's just a recommendation of what might--

McCOLLISTER: It is. And if, if we see a need to change the language to make it more "Nebraskaesque," I suppose we could do that. But it's an example. And maybe a few of us should get together at some point and review the language and make sure it covers and it does what we want it to do.

PANSING BROOKS: I'm just interested because, because of the trafficking issue. Thank you. Thank you for bringing it.

McCOLLISTER: Thank you.

GROENE: Senator Linehan.

LINEHAN: Thank you, Chairman Groene. Thank you very much, Senator McCollister, for bringing this. Have you talked to anybody at Health and Human Services, because don't-- I think they're responsible for the hotline. I would assume they would be very supportive, but--

McCOLLISTER: Actually, we have.

LINEHAN: OK.

McCOLLISTER: And the hotline goes to Omaha, ultimately to Project Harmony.

LINEHAN: OK.

McCOLLISTER: And so any incidence of this first gets reported to the sheriff or the police chief or whatever. So now they've got

an established protocol how these calls are handled and I think they do a pretty good job.

LINEHAN: OK. Thank you very much.

GROENE: Any other questions? Senator Murman.

MURMAN: Thank you. You stirred my curiosity now. What is Project Harmony?

McCOLLISTER: Well, it's a group in Omaha and they're I think primarily funded by law enforcement agencies and HHS to handle these calls when they do come in. And, you know, they classify the calls and try to determine whether it's the parents or it's a drug related thing or what the cause of the abuse is. So I know they are professional. And I can certainly provide more information to you about Project Harmony in the next few days.

MURMAN: OK. And then it would always be referred back if they determine it's a legitimate complaint, it would be referred back to local law enforcement?

McCOLLISTER: Yes, sir. Absolutely.

GROENE: Any other questions? That closes the hearing on LB281. And now, LB251. Senator Walz.

LINEHAN: Do you have any letters?

GROENE: What?

LINEHAN: Do you have letters?

GROENE: Oh, I had a few letters. Thank you, Senator. Let me read the letters on LB281. Proponents: Janice Bundas, self; Jack Moles, Executive Director, Nebraska Rural Community Schools; Dr. Mark Adler, Superintendent, Ralston; Dr. Blane McCann, Superintendent, Westside; Mary Bahney, Advocacy Committee Chair, National Association of Social Workers; Ivy Svoboda, Executive Director, Nebraska Alliance of Child Advocacy Centers. Opponents were none. Neutral was none. Thank you. Now we'll start LB251. Senator Walz.

WALZ: Thank you, Senator Groene. Good afternoon, Chairman Groene and my colleagues on the Education Committee. My name is Lynne Walz, L-y-n-n-e W-a-l-z, and I proudly represent District 15.

I'm here to introduce LB251, which would create the Child Hunger and Workforce Readiness Act. Currently, the School Breakfast Program and the National Lunch School Program under the Child Nutrition Act of 1966 provides students of low-income families free or reduced price meals. These programs are federally funded to participate in school districts. Families that make 130 percent or less of the federal poverty level qualify for free meals, which is under \$26,546 for a family of three. While families that make between 130 and 185 percent of the federal poverty level qualify for reduced price meals, which is \$26,546 to \$37,777 for a family of three. LB251 would pay the remainder of the balance for the reduced price lunch for families that are 130 to 185 percent. The cost is 30 cents for breakfast and 40 cents for lunch. Research shows that under the reduced price category families are still struggling to make ends meet, as rising household expenses such as childcare and housing put pressure on budgets. The costs for school meals can quickly add up for a low-income family, leaving many low-income students vulnerable, vulnerable to hunger during the school day. The future of economic prosperity in Nebraska is built upon the health and the success of our children. Work force challenges can only be met when children are able to reach their full potential, beginning in the classroom. Hunger during childhood has a potential to derail proper development leaving lifelong and negative consequences for cognitive, physical, and mental health, behavior, and academic performance. For many families school meals provide a crucial buffer between children and hunger. LB251 would remove the barriers to learning from many children in Nebraska by eliminating the copay that low-income students are currently required to pay for school lunch and breakfast programs. I find this to be an appropriate way to start off the Education Committee. As a former teacher I've witnessed how important it is for a child to be well nourished if we want them to be successful in the classroom. In this legislative body we take lunch breaks. And I've noticed, Senator Groene, as we get closer to lunchtime and people start getting hungry our attention starts to fade. And it's the same case for children even more so than us adults, because they are growing. We are talking about making sure that every child has the ability to get a hot meal during the school day. For some kids this might be the only hot meal they get all day and for some they may not get a hot meal all weekend when they return to school on Monday. When I was teaching I intentionally kept extra snacks in the classroom for students who had not eaten any breakfast. The attitude and the focus shift within those students after having food was dramatic. They were more

attentive, driven, and willing to learn and my classroom was just one example. Oftentimes when a child did not bring lunch money for a third time they were given a peanut butter sandwich or a cheese sandwich for lunch instead of a full lunch. Many times these children would decide not to eat any lunch as opposed to being ridiculed by students for not having enough money to pay for lunch. This bill has the ability to ensure that every student has access to a hot breakfast and lunch during the school day allowing them to focus on why they are there, to get an education. At this time I would like to direct you to some information from my LR393 study of unpaid meal debt. The research illustrates some of the school policies in dealing with students with unpaid school meal debt along with examples of debt incurred by schools. If you look at some of the policies you will see some examples of what I've talked about today. This bill is an attempt to relieve some of the strain on school debt. But, more importantly, it is an attempt to prevent a meal refusal from happening in the first place. I hope you advance this bill to General File so the full body can debate it. Thank you.

GROENE: Senator Walz. Questions. Thank you. Do you have to stay around to close?

WALZ: Absolutely.

GROENE: Of course you are, you're right here. Proponents.

JULIA TSE: Good afternoon, Chairman Groene and members of the Education Committee. For the record, my name is Julia Tse, J-u-l-i-a T-s-e, and I'm here on behalf of Voices for Children in Nebraska, which is a nonprofit advocacy organization that works to build pathways to opportunities for all children in our state. Children are Nebraska's greatest and most precious resource and we all have a stake in ensuring that every child is able to reach their full potential in adulthood. But research shows that hungry children are less equipped to learn and that significantly reduces their chances of becoming a productive member of the work force in the future. Voices for Children in Nebraska supports LB251 because it would ease hunger among many of our state's most vulnerable students. Together the National School Lunch Program and the School Breakfast Program have effectively kept students ready to learn with nutritious meals during the day for decades. Both programs support all children enrolled in school, but are especially important for children from low-income households and schools that have higher

concentrations of poverty. Senator Walz alluded a little bit to this but I'll briefly go into the structure of our child nutrition programs. So schools receive reimbursement for every meal served. But there's a tiered structure, so schools receive a higher reimbursement for meals served to students who are eligible for free meals, and that's the 130 percent. And then schools receive a slightly smaller reimbursement for reduced price meals that are served to those eligible students. And then they receive a smaller reimbursement for full-pay meals. So because of this reimbursement structure, federal funds account for the vast majority of child nutrition programs. In FY '17-'18 it worked out to be that General Funds were just .7 percent of general expenditure-- of actual expenditures on child nutrition. You're probably looking at some of the data that I've attached to my testimony. This is based off of school year '18-'19 data. There were over 151,000 Nebraska students that were eligible for free or reduced price meals. Of those there were nearly 29,000 students that were eligible for reduced price meals, which is what this bill-- the population that this bill would, would affect. Much like the data on food and security in our state, the trend data on those eligible for free and reduced meals has increased pretty significantly in the last few years without recovery. So about ten years ago we were in the neighborhood of 30 percent of all students, including private school students. And currently we're pretty steady at a 40-ish percent statewide. Research shows that child nutrition programs can improve student performance and behavior, improve attendance, lower levels of hyperactivity, fewer disciplinary referrals, and even fewer visits to the school nurse. So this is really a win-win-win situation for students and schools and their classmates. LB251 would concentrate the benefits of increased meal participation in the schools that need it the most by targeting low-income students. Similar bills adopted in other states have resulted in an increase in meal participation, which is of significance to Nebraska because historically we have struggled with breakfast participation. In years past we've always been last or near last in, in the country for breakfast participation. So this would really help some schools achieve economies of scale in their breakfast programs, particularly important for smaller or rural school districts. In closing, I'd just like to reiterate our support for this bill. School meal programs provide a critical safeguard against hunger for many Nebraska children and LB251 would strengthen existing protections against child hunger and its adverse outcomes. Ensuring that no needy student will have to worry about missing lunch is an investment that produces many long-term benefits in the form of improved academic performance,

behavior, and overall, overall student wellness. I'd like to thank Senator Walz for her commitment to this issue and this committee for their time and consideration. And I'm happy to answer any questions.

GROENE: Questions from the committee? I have one. Go ahead, Senator Kolowski.

KOLOWSKI: I'll ask one, if I can. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. How much of an increase have we had in the last ten years, for example?

JULIA TSE: So I don't have my Kids Count in Nebraska report with me today, but you will get a new copy tomorrow. It looks-- I-- if I'm remembering correctly, about ten years ago we were at 30-ish percent and the most recent numbers that I looked at were 40, 41 percent. And, of course, there was an increase during the recession, but much like our food insecurity data on Nebraska households it hasn't recovered in the same way that other measures have recovered a few years after the recession. So pretty significantly is the short answer to your question.

KOLOWSKI: So you were counting the 2008, 2009 recession--

JULIA TSE: Yes.

KOLOWSKI: -- for the decade we've had?

JULIA TSE: Yes.

KOLOWSKI: Thank you very much.

JULIA TSE: You're welcome.

GROENE: Any other questions? So your data-- could Nebraska's culture be that we feed our children breakfast and income doesn't play into that? Rural Nebraska, 130 to 150 poverty is a wage for a lot of folks in communities where housing is lower. Then maybe they are-- parents are feeding their kids breakfast. They're not looking for a free lunch.

JULIA TSE: That could certainly be the case. I think we would just hope that if there are children who are out there who could benefit from a breakfast that would be free from that-- for the reduced price category that it would be available and we could remove any barriers to it. And certainly Senator Walz pointed

out some of the figures for 130 versus 185. And I just wanted to bring it down to a more granular, granular level so 130 is roughly a \$13 an hour wage for a single parent of two. And then 185 is in the neighborhood of \$18 per hour for two if it's a single parent household, so. And that's right roughly around the range where we believe that its-- families are approaching a living wage somewhere in the neighborhood of 185 to 200 percent, but--

GROENE: We are talking about \$3.50 a week. That's not 20 percent of one hour's labor for a family to buy their child a little bit of their share of the breakfast. But the question is, would this be mandatory? I mean, would every low-income person be forced to take a free lunch? Maybe they don't want to. Maybe they have a little bit of pride that they do some input in their children's welfare. And even if it's 30 cents they can claim they did have some skin in the game.

JULIA TSE: I suppose-- I suppose that a parent could elect to give money back to the district and in that case perhaps the district could put it back into their meal programs. I know that Senator Walz alluded to this, but she brought an interim study last year that looked at the scope of meal debt around the state. And there's some really interesting numbers. I think that there is a testifier that will be coming up after me to talk a little bit about that information as well. But I, I suppose in that scenario if a parent wanted to, to pay but they were eligible for free meals that the district could just absorb that money back into their program.

GROENE: All right. Thank you.

JULIA TSE: You're welcome.

GROENE: Any other questions?

JULIA TSE: Thank you.

JENNI BENSON: Good afternoon. For the record, my name is Jenni Benson, J-e-n-n-i B-e-n-s-o-n. I am the president of the Nebraska State Education Association. I am here representing NSEA as well as Nebraska Child and, and Child Health and Education Alliance, NCHEA, both NSEA and NCHEA support LB251. I want to thank each of you for your service to the Education Committee. Your service here demonstrates that you understand the solid, well-rounded education. You know that an education

populace is vital for our economic well-being and stability and for the future of Nebraska. You understand that our children rely on our leadership and our wisdom and our experience to feed their hungry minds to give them the knowledge they need to become productive citizens. We must also feed and nourish their bodies when they arrive at school with empty stomachs, with hunger pains that come from neglect and poverty. My 30 years in the classroom have taught me one certain thing. A child who is hungry cannot learn. A child who is it not-- who has not eaten is not focused on a math problem or a spelling word. That child is wondering where and when the next meal will come from and maybe is fighting off hunger pains and wondering, why me? Senators, I want you to know that children are at the center of everything we do. In fact, our NEA Foundation has created a Breakfast in the Classroom program to help to begin to address, at least on a small scale, the problem of child hunger. I believe it is safe to say that more Nebraska families suffer from food insecurity than ever before. LB251 assists by removing the copay that low-income students must pay for school breakfast and lunch. Many families still have a difficult time raising the money for these minimal costs. Eliminating the costs removes the final barrier for these families and allows their children to eat breakfast and lunch at school each day and to learn without the pain or worry that accompanies hunger. In addition-- in addition to enhancing student achievement, there is growing evidence that well-fed students are better behaved, have better attendance records, and are generally healthier and have fewer discipline problems. For all those reasons I urge you to support LB251 and advance it to the full Legislature for consideration. Thank you for your time.

GROENE: Senator Pansing Brooks.

PANSING BROOKS: Thank you. Thank you for coming, Ms. Benson. Just following up on Senator Groene's question. It's my understanding that these programs are opt-in programs. Is that correct?

JENNI BENSON: That's my understanding as well.

PANSING BROOKS: I don't believe that it would be mandatory in that regard at least. I know that when I was at Southeast High School as the chair of PTO, I learned at that time that often the kids who are older don't want to do it because they feel there's sort of a stigma at times or something.

JENNI BENSON: Right. And sometimes it's breakfast, for example, sometimes when you're working two or three jobs it's getting them to school on time to get breakfast as well. That in my, my past has been a significant issue as well.

PANSING BROOKS: Thank you.

GROENE: Senator, Senator Linehan.

LINEHAN: Thank you, Chairman Groene. Thank you for being here, Ms. Benson. Do you have any idea-- and maybe-- I don't know who could come up, I suppose the department. But out of the probably 150,000 kids who qualify for this free or reduced breakfast, how many are actually taking advantage of free or reduced breakfast in school now?

JENNI BENSON: I don't have those numbers that are actually taking-- that would qualify in that are actually-- I agree with Senator Pansing Brooks, there are a lot of kids that don't take advantage of it.

LINEHAN: It would be-- I suppose maybe we can get that from the Department of Ed. Okay. And then you-- and I don't know if you were planning-- maybe not the right person. But somebody who's testifying could provide the amount of monies that the schools are reimbursed for free lunch, free breakfasts, reduced lunch, reduced breakfast and then I think there's free milk for everybody, but if somebody could just provide those numbers.

JENNI BENSON: The person before me had the exact percentages of reimbursement, but I don't know what the exact numbers are. She said with the percentages of reimbursement even for free, free lunch is 130 percent, I believe she said. I don't see her now. Sorry.

LINEHAN: Right. OK. OK. Okay. We'll get it. Thank you very much.

JENNI BENSON: Thank you.

GROENE: Any other questions?

JENNI BENSON: Thank you.

GROENE: Next proponent.

ANN HUNTER-PIRTLE: Good afternoon, Senator Groene, members of the committee. My name is Ann Hunter-Pirtle, A-n-n H-u-n-t-e-r-P-i-r-t-l-e, I'm the executive director of Stand for Schools. We're a nonprofit dedicated to advancing public education in Nebraska. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. We strongly support LB251. Something like 20 percent of Nebraska's children are food insecure, approximately 93,000 students. For some of those students, school meals are the only reliable barrier between themselves and hunger. We know that hunger has serious consequences for student achievement. A 2014 report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found, among other things, that hunger due to insufficient food intake is associated with lower grades, higher rates of absenteeism, repeating a grade, and an inability to focus among students. That shouldn't come as a shock. Nobody can do their best when they're hungry and we all know that. I'm also providing a handout from the American Psychological Association regarding the psychological effects of hunger on children, which includes links to a range of studies. I want to draw your attention to a couple of the findings from the APA. Quote, hunger related toxic stress can negatively affect brain development and academic achievement in children and quote researchers have found persuasive evidence that the National School Lunch program reduces food insecurity. Helping make sure that students get the nutrition they need is a prerequisite for addressing all of the other educational challenges our state faces. By reducing barriers for both students and schools to participate in school breakfast and lunch programs we make all other student challenges, whether academic performance, mental health, or behavior, easier to address. The reverse is also true. Fail to address hunger and all of the other educational investments we make are less effective. LB251 could help an additional 27,000 Nebraska children consistently access school breakfast and lunch. And we believe this is one of the smartest, most effective investments we could make in the future of our state. Thank you. I'm happy to take any questions.

GROENE: Any questions. Thank you. Next proponent.

ANN HUNTER-PIRTLE: Thank you.

BRIAN HALSTEAD: Good afternoon, Senator Groene, members of the Education Committee. For the record, my name is Brian, B-r-i-a-n, Halstead, H-a-l-s-t-e-a-d, I am with the Department of Education. Last Thursday the State Board's Legislative Committee met and advised the commissioner that the department should

support the bill so that is why I'm here today. They certainly believe that children should be nourished when they're at school to learn. So I'll stop there and take any questions you might have.

GROENE: Any questions? Next proponent.

ERIC SAVAIANO: Good afternoon. My name is Eric Savaiano and I am the program associate in the economic justice program at Nebraska Appleseed. I spell my name E-r-i-c, Savaiano, S-a-v-a-i-a-n-o. Nebraska Appleseed is a nonprofit law organization-- law and policy organization that fights for justice and opportunity for all Nebraskans. We have worked on issues of hunger in schools for the last about ten years and I have worked on it for about five. In that time we've talked to hundreds of teachers and students, administrators, and individuals about issues of hunger and programs that can move schools and districts forward. This bill we're talking about today, LB251, would invest in our school nutrition system and Nebraska's students. But I'd like to share a little bit about the cost savings that might come from a bill like this as well. I think Senator Walz mentioned the study we put together on-- that we supported, LR393, about unpaid and delinquent meal debt in Nebraska. And through this study I'd like to just share what the savings potential we might have could be. I think we describe what unpaid meal debt can be or is in our state. It can be accumulated when students don't have the money in their account to pay for the meal that they go through the line and expect to receive. It's either that or they don't have the cash in hand to pay for it at that time. Districts we've learned have made-- they can make a variety of decisions on what to do in these situations, including just giving the standard meal to the student and accruing debt, unlimited debt. They can also take the meal and give a cheese or peanut butter sandwich or they could refuse that meal altogether, we've learned happens in our state. Each decision can ripple in a student's life with either social stigma, hunger, trust, or mistrust of the school. We also know that districts suffer since nutrition budgets must be balanced with general school funds at the end of the year. So in this study we put a survey out to 244 school districts, all the districts in our state and 77 report-- responded. Of those 77 districts, 61 percent of them, 47 reported school debt in last year's school year. The total reported debt was \$582,000--and some odd and the average per district was \$12,397 per district, of those 47. We took-- we also requested that breakdown by free, reduced, and paid students in three of those schools, which is

admittedly a small number to base our findings off of, but that's what we have. They were very similar in their breakdown and we estimate that \$44,000 of the nearly \$600,000 reported debt would be eliminated with the passage of LB251. Additionally, there are savings related to the administrative burden of collecting the debt, the debt with letters home, calls home, and asking those students to give that-- come up with the money in other ways. I would like to respond to a couple of things. I do have the data requested from Senator Linehan related to the reimbursement rates by the federal government by meal. I could have you make copies or I could read them off. I'm not sure what would be easiest, but it's quite a few different categories with breakfast and lunch so maybe some copies would be in order. I'd also mention that the study that was completed by Senator Walz's office included a question to all administrators who responded as to why students in their district have unpaid meal debt. And the most common answer was that the families themselves did not have the money to pay for that amount of money, whether it be reduced, free, or paid students. Let's see, I'm looking at one last thing. We do have numbers, Senator Linehan, as to how much money was spent by the nutrition department in last year overall, but not broken down by breakfast and lunch and I guess I can mention those. In, in federal funds our state was reimbursed \$132 million for those meals. I believe that's what I have and I'd be happy to answer any questions you all have.

GROENE: Questions? Senator Linehan.

LINEHAN: Thank you, Chairman Groene. So some of this debt is not free and reduced lunch kids, obviously. Some of the debt is from people who are above 185 percent of the poverty line and they're not paying their-- they're not paying the bill.

ERIC SAVAIANO: Yeah. We have that broken down. We're estimating, based on those three districts, about 77 percent is from those paid families.

LINEHAN: So even if we pass this legislation they'd still have-- well, if it's going to cost about \$2 million if we take care of this group of people, you would still have \$6 million that's going unpaid. And they're not qualified for free and reduced lunch people, it's just people not paying the bill.

ERIC SAVAIANO: There would be a proportion that would still be around even if LB251 passed, yes. I'm not sure about the \$6 million.

LINEHAN: Well, because you don't have the advantage of having the fiscal note, so I'm sorry.

ERIC SAVAIANO: I did see the \$1.9 million per year.

LINEHAN: OK. So that's about \$2 million.

ERIC SAVAIANO: Yeah.

LINEHAN: And if you're saying that 77 percent are coming not paid from people who are not getting free or reduced lunch.

ERIC SAVAIANO: Right.

LINEHAN: So \$2 million-- if \$2 million is 25 percent then unpaid is \$6 million. That's free and reduced-- not free and reduced lunch people, but they're just not paying the bill.

ERIC SAVAIANO: Right. Who don't have the money in, in-- at least from the data we saw who don't have the money to pay the bill generally.

LINEHAN: Don't have the money or they're not paying it--

ERIC SAVAIANO: They're not paying it for some reason.

LINEHAN: -- because they're over 180 percent of poverty level.

ERIC SAVAIANO: Right and they are-- they don't get federal assistance to pay for those meals, correct.

LINEHAN: So, therefore, they're not paying--

ERIC SAVAIANO: Yep.

LINEHAN: --bad-- bad debt. OK. Thank you very much.

GROENE: Senator Pansing Brooks.

PANSING BROOKS: Thank you, Chairman. Thank you for being here, Mr. Savaiano. I was wondering and it may have been mentioned

before but I wasn't-- I'm interested again to hear about, do we know-- did you do a-- was there a study that asked how many students are being turned away? Do we know that in Nebraska?

ERIC SAVAIANO: You mean are refused a meal?

PANSING BROOKS: Yes.

ERIC SAVAIANO: Well, of the 77 responding districts, we saw 4 that were refused a meal after a certain amount of debt was accrued.

PANSING BROOKS: Four students or four districts?

ERIC SAVAIANO: So it was four districts had a policy in place that specifically outlined that they would be refused a meal after five meals or five meals in debt at least. We did that-- I don't believe that the, the Department of Education keeps record of how many students are refused a meal. The numbers of "studentswise."

PANSING BROOKS: OK. Well, I appreciate you're bringing this. Of course, this is not the child's fault that they don't have enough money in the account. So it to me--I don't know. I just think we have to look at this and to refuse a child a lunch during their day, number one, there's a stigma to it. And number two, it's, it's, it's not taking care of our children. We're a state that believes in the caring for our children. So thank you.

GROENE: Senator Murman.

MURMAN: Thanks, Senator Groene. On a survey that was sent out to school districts only 77 out of 244 replied. That's about a third or a little less than a third. Why do you think only a third responded?

ERIC SAVAIANO: Well, me, personally, I think they're just busy with a lot of other things most likely. That's probably my best guess.

MURMAN: OK. I'm thinking, you know, they didn't possibly think it was that important of an issue that only a third responded or less. You could be right, you know.

ERIC SAVAIANO: It's possible, yeah.

GROENE: Any other questions? Did you check with those four districts that had a policy that, that they-- that the children did eat because maybe the parents came in and paid their bill because they did find out there wasn't a free lunch?

ERIC SAVAIANO: The survey just asked for their policies. And so we saw the policy language, not necessarily the number of students or parents affected by the policy. So it could be zero were affected in those four districts, like you say.

GROENE: The four districts because of their policy might not have any unpaid because those parents understood there was rules and they need to pay their bill.

ERIC SAVAIANO: It's possible. It's possible, yeah.

GROENE: Just because you have low income doesn't mean you're irresponsible. You just might need a reminder that you should pay your bills.

ERIC SAVAIANO: Yeah.

GROENE: You said savings. How do you compute the term into savings when one tax entity pays for another taxes entities' bad debt? That's not savings, is it, when the state makes up the money that the school districts were not paid? Taxpayers still paid either way. Is that not correct?

ERIC SAVAIANO: I see. I think you could think of it that way. I think I'd concede that, too.

GROENE: Thank you.

ERIC SAVAIANO: Sure.

GROENE: Any other questions? Thank you, sir.

ERIC SAVAIANO: Thank you.

GROENE: Next proponent.

COLBY COASH: Good afternoon, members of the committee. Colby Coash, C-o-l-b-y C-o-a-s-h, with the Nebraska Association of School Boards. We do stand in support of LB251 for reasons that have been mentioned by previous testifiers. Cost is obviously an

issue for some of these families and this is a bill for students and our members are, are about the students. As was mentioned, there are-- there could be some administrative savings, but to Senator Groene's point this savings does move from one place to another, so we do recognize that. But this could help increase in participation in that breakfast program which we know is, is low and realize some economies of scale because of that. Most importantly though, we would point out that a lot-- most school districts do carry some type of debt for these programs, whether it's for the free and reduced students or other students as well. There is a lot of debt that schools carry on and there's a cost of trying to recover that debt. And with the type of program that is being targeted under LB251 recovering that debt is usually not happening. And so this is a way to support schools-- students in that way, but schools in that way as well. So we would-- we just want to be on record in support of this bill. Thank you.

GROENE: Any questions? Senator Linehan.

LINEHAN: I think we all agree-- thank you, Chairman Groene. I think we all agree that children need to be fed in any school that's got a hungry student should figure out some way to get them food. But I find it kind of odd that we're having this big of a conversation over \$10 million when we spend over \$4 billion dollars on K-12 education in Nebraska. It's like-- I tried to figure out the percentage. It's .00044, so it's like forty-four thousandths of a percent. I mean, is this really-- it seems like the schools could, could manage to cover this. It's \$2 million dollars between 244 school districts schools, 300,000 kids.

COLBY COASH: Schools are covering the debt right now.

LINEHAN: All right. Thank you very much.

COLBY COASH: You're welcome.

GROENE: Other question? I got told that today again by your organization members, that you like local control. A lot of schools have early childhood, they don't have to have early childhood. I heard today that a child with food is a better learner. So is that just another budget decision if you think making sure everybody has food that local school district should decide that or an early childhood or a recess time or day care? That's a local decision on with their local budget that we fund with the needs formula?

COLBY COASH: I think as it stands now this remains a local decision. Every school district has to decide how they're going to address this problem and address the debt that rolls over and so certainly this does happen already. The, you know, LB251 just released some of that burden that the schools may, may feel and spread that out.

GROENE: And then on some school district might decide this a good chance to teach some personal responsibility. Food isn't free. Someday you're going to have to pay for it unless you live a certain lifestyle you maybe never will have to.

COLBY COASH: Yeah.

GROENE: But give them free lunch through they're 18. When they leave school, where they going to go for food?

COLBY COASH: Your point is--

GROENE: They'll find out they need to pay for it.

COLBY COASH: Your point is well taken, Senator. However, the communication between school around this issue of schools typically isn't with the student, it's with the, with the parent or guardian who's responsible for doing this. It is their responsibility, yes.

GROENE: Thank you. Any other questions? Thank you, Colby. I'm joined-- now you're finding out what it's like to be a lobbyist. Any other proponents. Opponents. Neutral. We had five letters in support of LB251: Sheena Heigenberger; Peg O'Dea Lippert of the Advocacy Committee member, National Association of Social Workers; Dr. Mark Adler, Superintendent, Ralston Public Schools; Stephanie Summers, member Board of Education, David City Schools; Marcus Thoendel, Vice President, David City Public Schools. Opponents none. Neutral none. Senator Walz, would you like to close on LB251?

WALZ: Certainly. Thank you, Senator Groene. I realize that we are in a budget situation but I want to definitely get this conversation started again, like we did last year. I would like you to not write off this issue. We're talking about adding relief to hardworking Nebraskans. Not every person that cannot afford a lunch is not a hardworking Nebraskan. In fact, we, we, from what I know, value Nebraskans because of their hard work. So I don't think it's something that we can just point to

families and say that they're not working hard enough. The families affected by this bill are 130 to 185 percent of the federal poverty level. These are hardworking families, not people who are abusing the system. Not every person who can't afford a lunch is abusing the system. They are working hard but sometimes they can use a little relief. And this would provide that for them. A 30 cent and a 40 cent copay may not seem a lot to you, but it is a lot for some people and it can make a big difference in the lives of these families. For example, the 130 percent comes to about \$26,546 a year, which after taxes leaves the family with about \$2,100 a month. And that's with a family of three. If you take out rent-- and I said about \$750. I don't know what your rent is, but in Fremont that would be an average rent, utilities about \$200, your groceries, \$600 a month, gas about \$200. If you have to do daycare that would be maybe \$400, and that's very low. That didn't even take into account-- that came up to \$2,150, which is already over the amount that they're getting paid for a month. That didn't take into account if you have a car payment or if you happen to have cable TV. That didn't take into account garbage service or a cell phone. So as you can see that there are some families who even though they're working really hard are still struggling. The other thing I want to make sure that everybody understands is that there are some parents that are just, you know, maybe not responsible parents, but that's the way it is. And it is not that child's fault. Every child does deserve a chance to get a good education and every child does deserve a chance in America to have a good meal. I ask that you move this bill out of committee to General File so we can at least continue the conversation on the floor. If you have any other questions, I'd be happy to try and answer them.

GROENE: Can Senator Pansing Brooks-- was there any questions-- talked about it earlier that this is not forced, that you have to sign up for these meal programs?

WALZ: No. It's an opt-in.

GROENE: That's what I mean, opt-in.

WALZ: And there are many, many kids who don't opt in. There are a lot of kids whose-- you have to apply for this program.

GROENE: I was going to say, the child opts in or do the parents opt-in?

WALZ: And there are a lot of families that do not apply for that, even though they need that.

GROENE: But the child opts-in or the parents?

WALZ: The parents opt-in.

GROENE: So the parent-- you mentioned earlier that-- and I understand, I've seen them.

WALZ: Again, I said that we-- I'm not saying that all parents are responsible. We have a lot of parents who aren't.

GROENE: Whether or not they're responsible, but if they do not opt-in, the child's not going to get a free lunch anyway.

WALZ: That's right. That's unfortunate. You're right.

GROENE: No matter what. If we give it to free or not.

WALZ: But at least we're giving the kids the ability-- other kids the ability. At least we're making an effort, Senator Groene.

GROENE: Did you have any parents call you and ask you to introduce this bill or to claim they couldn't make the 30 cents?

WALZ: I know that there are parents who can't. Being a past teacher, yes, I know there are parents who cannot afford it. And again, you know, when you're making \$26,000 a year and your expenses come in-- again, you know, it's just a number that I came up with, but I don't, I don't know how people can make it with three kids or--

GROENE: The point is, because you're poor doesn't mean you're inept and you don't take responsibility for your life.

WALZ: I would agree with that.

GROENE: Take good care of their families. They don't need spokesmen making decisions for them.

WALZ: I think the point here is that we're giving them the opportunity to do that. Yeah, I understand, believe me.

GROENE: I appreciate it, Senator Walz. I understand where your heart is.

WALZ: I know. Thank you.

GROENE: Is there any other-- that closes the hearings for the day and it closed the hearing on LB251.