

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
Appropriations Committee February 27, 2025

CLEMENTS: Good afternoon. Welcome to the Appropriations Committee. My name is Rob Clements. I'm from Elmwood and represent Legislative District 2, which is Cass County in eastern Lancaster County. I serve as chair of this committee. We will start off by having the members do self-introductions, starting with my far right.

SPIVEY: Hi. Good afternoon. I'm Ashley Spivey, district 13, which is northeast and northwest Omaha.

M. CAVANAUGH: Machaela Cavanaugh, District 6, west central Omaha, in Douglas County.

ARMENDARIZ: Christy Armendariz, District 18, northwest Omaha and Bennington.

STROMMEN: Paul Strommen, District 47, the Panhandle.

PROKOP: Jason Prokop, District 27, west Lincoln and Lancaster County.

CLEMENTS: Assisting the committee today is Cori Bierbaum, our committee clerk. And to my left is our fiscal analyst, Bill Biven. Our pages today are Demet Gedik and Wesley Earhart, UNL students. If you're planning on testifying today, please fill out a green testifier sheet located in the back of the room and hand it to the page when you come up to testify. Online position comments must have been submitted on the Legislature's website by 8:00 a.m. the day of the hearing to be included in the record. If you have submitted a comment online, we ask that you not testify in person today. If you will not be testifying but want to go on record as having a position on a bill being heard today, there are yellow sign-in sheet at the entrance to my left. These sign-in sheets will become exhibits in the permanent record after today's hearing. To better facilitate today's hearing, I ask that you abide by the following procedures. Please silence your cell phones. Move to the front chairs to testify when your bill or agency is up, if you can. In this small room, it's a little different. When hearing bills, the order of testimony will be introducer, proponents, opponents, neutral, and closing. When we hear testimony regarding agencies, we will first hear from a representative of the agency, then we will hear testimony from anyone who wishes to speak on the agency's budget request. When you come to testify, please state and spell your first and last name for the record before you testify. Be concise. We request that you limit your testimony to 5 minutes or less. When you begin your testimony, the light on the table will be green. When the yellow light comes on, you will have 1 minute remaining, and the red

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
Appropriations Committee February 27, 2025

light indicates you need to wrap up your final thought and stop. Questions from the committee may follow. Written material may be distributed to the committee members as exhibits only while testimony is being offered. Hand them to the page for distribution when you come up to testify. If you have written testimony but do not have 12 copies, please let the page know so they can make copies for you. And those who, who can, after you testify, it would be helpful if you could exit the room so other people who are waiting could come in. With that, we'll begin today's hearing with Agency 13, Department of Education budget. Welcome. Good afternoon, Commissioner.

[AGENCY HEARINGS]

CLEMENTS: Well, right now, we'll open a hearing for LB173, Senator Prokop.

PROKOP: Well, thank you, Chairman Clements and my colleagues here in the Appropriations Committee. My name is Jason Prokop, spelled J-a-s-o-n P-r-o-k-o-p, and I represent District 27, which consists of west Lincoln and rural Lancaster County. In years like this year, when the budget is tight, I know we're all laser-focused on what the state, what the state needs most, and we want to make sure we're supporting what works. I can tell you dual enrollment checks both of those boxes. It creates a pipeline of skilled labor that Nebraska employers desperately need. Students from every corner of the state and all walks of life benefit from, and has proven to yield positive results for the entire state. Dual enrollment provides Nebraska students with the opportunity to gain college credits and industry-recognized credentials while still in high school. Upon graduation, these students are more prepared to enter the workforce, requiring less costly and time-consuming training, allowing them to contribute to their companies-- and also allowing them to contribute to their companies and local economies much sooner. At a time when many employers are struggling to find the skilled workers necessary to sustain or expand their businesses, dual enrollment has emerged as the effective remedy to combat the workforce crisis that has plagued our state over the past few years. The benefits of dual enrollment, which we've already talked a little bit about, are not just limited to the workforce, though. Dual enrollment has a meaningful impact on students before they even begin their careers. Data shows that they graduate high school at higher rates, they enroll in college at higher rates, they-- probably more important-- importantly, enroll in Nebraska colleges at higher rates, and persist in college at higher rates than non-dual enrollment students. In addition, dual enrollment plays an important role in bridging the poverty gap in our state by affording

low-- lower-income students the opportunity to experience the life-changing benefits of higher education they might not otherwise be able to reach. Dual enrollment provides students from all income levels, from public schools to private schools and even home schools, from rural to urban, as well as those students who plan to attend college to those who wish to join the workforce immediately upon graduation with the opportunity to accelerate their path from high school to a rewarding career. All of these benefits have caused dual enrollment to skyrocket over the past few years, with Nebraska's communities coll-- with Nebraska's community colleges offering 95-- 85% of all dual enrollment courses in the state, having seen dual enrollment increases by over-- around 65% over the past 4 years alone. Soaring participation in dual enrollment is a nice problem to have, but a problem nonetheless, because it does require funding. The community colleges, as has been mentioned, received ARPA funds amounting to \$5 million annually from 2022 to 2025, but ARPA has ended and no alternate funds have been appropriated to fill that gap. Furthermore, baseline funding for dual enrollment has lagged for many years, with no adjustments to support the dramatic enrollment increase. As a result, in order to merely maintain their existing service levels without considering expected future growth, community colleges have requested an additional \$10 million in funding this year, and then \$11 million in funding the next year. As we entertain the many requests for limited state funds, again, it's not lost on me the tough work that we have to do. But I'd urge us to consider the return on investment the state will receive for each request. There likely is no better ROI for state funds, especially those targeting the workforce development, than dual enrollment. It presents a win-win-win opportunity for all of us. The state wins because it receives a proven, excellent return on investment that directly addresses its workforce crisis and benefits every corner of the state. Employers win because they receive more well-trained employees faster. Students win because they receive high-quality education and training with less debt and are able to secure productive careers-- which I forgot to do at the beginning here, but I also have an amendment to this. And it's a simple amendment. It does not do anything to change the purpose of the bill. It just harmonizes language with LB261. So, thank you very much for hearing this bill today. I know there's several testifiers-- form-- we have a, a, a-- behind me, because we have a full house. But-- so with that, I will be happy to answer any questions.

CLEMENTS: Are there questions? Senator Lippincott.

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
Appropriations Committee February 27, 2025

LIPPINCOTT: Our goal, of course, is to keep students in the state. So this dual enrollment, would it fund out-of-state colleges or just Nebraska?

PROKOP: I'm sorry. Could you say the question.

LIPPINCOTT: Would it fund just in-state college?

PROKOP: Yes.

LIPPINCOTT: Yeah.

PROKOP: Yeah. Students in--

LIPPINCOTT: And not out-of-state.

PROKOP: Students in-state. Yes. Yes. Yeah.

LIPPINCOTT: Thanks.

PROKOP: Thank you.

CLEMENTS: Are there other questions? Seeing none, will you be here to close?

PROKOP: I sure will.

CLEMENTS: All right. OK. We are on LB173. We're, we're using a 5-minute clock. And we'll now open it up to proponents.

PROKOP: Chairman, do you mind if I just return to my seat since we're short, or--

CLEMENTS: Yeah. You can use--

PROKOP: Is that OK?

CLEMENTS: You just won't be asking questions.

PROKOP: I will, I will not. I will not

CLEMENTS: Good afternoon.

LEAH BARRETT: Good afternoon, Chair Clements. Good afternoon, all members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Leah Barrett, L-e-a-h B-a-r-r-e-t-t, and I'm president of Northeast Community College. I'm here today on behalf of the Nebraska Community College

Association, as well as Northeast, to testify in support of LB173. In 2020, the state of Nebraska began a process of investing dollars on an annual basis to support dual enrollment. In the midst of COVID, the colleges received an additional allocation, as been described, of \$5 million a year for 3 years, allowing significant reductions in the tuition rates for dual enrollment, including 2 community colleges offering an opportunity for free, and that would be Metro Community College and Northeast Community College. The investment requested in LB173 will replace those COVID funds, it will cover the cost of dual enrollment, and continue to provide the win-win-win situation that Senator Prokop did such a nice job of describing. Dual enrollment provides all students, rural or urban, from public, private, and homeschool backgrounds and of all income levels, the opportunity to accelerate their path from high school to a rewarding career, regardless of whether they attend a 2-year or a 4-year college. Data provided by NSWERS, who you heard from in LB11, shows that dual enrollment in Nebraska is related to positive outcomes. Students who earn dual enrollment credits graduate high school at a significantly higher rate than non-dual credit earners, 99.1% compared to 83.1%. Upon high school graduation, 87.6% of dual enrollment students go to college, compared to 60.9% of those students who did not take a dual enrollment course. Dual enrollment also impacts college persistence and graduation rates. For 2-year colleges, 81% of dual enrollment students continue into their second year compared to 67% of non-dual credit earners. Additionally, high school students are not eligible for financial aid. The funding provides significantly discounted dual enrollment opportunities to provide low-income students with the opportunity to gain college credits and industry-recognized credentials while still in high school. In the coming weeks, NSWERS will be distributing an update to the 2024 Dual Enrollment Report. Preliminary findings from this report identify causal effects such as: Dual enrollment participants were 4 percentage points more likely to graduate high school on time; participants were 10 percentage points more likely to enroll in college within 16 months of high school graduation; participants who went to college were more likely to persist at Nebraska 2-year and 4-year institutions; and finally, participants were overall 13 percentage points more likely to attain a post-secondary award within 6 years of high school graduation. In '23-24, nearly 21,000 high school students-- high school age students earned more than 207,000 credit hours offered by Nebraska community colleges, saving families thousands of dollars in college costs. The enrollment in dual credit and community colleges in the past 10 years has grown 179%. Industries in Nebraska have historically relied on community colleges to help train and equip employees, especially when

there are shortages of workers with a particular skill. And our 4-year partners rely on us to prepare students to successfully transfer into their institutions, ready for the rigor of the next step. If we go to the, to the statutes that formed our community colleges, Statute 85-962, the community college's institutional and instructional priorities are described simply as applied technology in occupational education, often referred to as career and technical education. Our other instructional priorities: transfer education, including general academic transfer programs or applied technology, and occupational programs, which may be applicable to the first 2 years of a bachelor's de-- degree program. We also are the institutions that are charged through statute to provide foundational education. These are the reasons why community colleges across our region and across our state offer dual enrollment, and we want to continue to offer it at a very reduced cost or for free. LB173 is an investment in our students, our regions, and our Nebraska. I ask for your support and I'm happy to answer any questions. Thank you.

CLEMENTS: Senator Spivey.

SPIVEY: Thank you, Chair. Thank you so much for being here again, another day. If you don't receive the funding and what this looks like with the, the request, would you all still offer it but the, the cost would go up or like, what is the contingency plan?

LEAH BARRETT: Yeah. The con-- the contingency plan, as most definitely the costs will go up. We will not be able to con-- I can only speak for Northeast Community College. I believe my colleague from Metro Community College will follow me, but we will not be able to continue to offer it for free.

SPIVEY: Thank you.

CLEMENTS: Other questions? Seeing none, thank you for your testimony.

LEAH BARRETT: Thank you.

CLEMENTS: Next proponent for LB173.

RANDY SCHMAILZL: There you go. Thank you.

CLEMENTS: Good afternoon.

RANDY SCHMAILZL: Good afternoon, again. This time I'll make sure I go by the light there, Senator. My name is Randy Schmailzl, R-a-n-d-y S-c-h-m-a-i-l-z-l, president of Metro Community College. I'm here

today to testify in support of LB173. When we jumped from \$3 million with \$5 million of ARPA, it was certainly a test to see if this was going to work or not in the state, to see if we could get the school districts and the community colleges working closer with our business partners. And it maybe has been the most successful higher ed partnership with community-- with K-12s and businesses than, than I've seen in all my years in education. And the reason it is, is we, we need good stories in education, where everybody is involved, the parents are happy, the students are happy. You know, Metro Community College in this handout, it's about our dual enrollment program. We served about 9,000 high school students last year, and 87% of that number was from public schools, 8% from private schools, and 5% from some students that were in high school outside of our district, like Plattsmouth, right on the line and that, and homeschool. So the important part of this, it's for all. And finances were taken away and the public voted with its feet and the businesses stepped forward. And the money that we receive from the Appropriations Committee is calculated through the Coordinating Commission. So we turn in a audited FTE, make sure that all these students are legitimate students, and I'm proud to say that it all goes to enro-- tuition. I don't accept, the others don't accept administrative money, there's no cuts, it all goes back to the public. And those are really important things when you run a program like this, because the school districts have to help with books yet, they have to help pay teachers. If their teachers qualify to teach, they can teach these classes. Metro has to pay for teachers to do this. And really, the only money we-- that, that go-- that goes to the, the program goes to the students to cut tuition. So there is no barriers. And businesses not only have stepped forward, businesses in the Omaha area have offered sponsorships. So we have 22 career academies that we started with that now are at 41 career academies in the trades. And lo-- for example, Lozier company, if you are in a career academy and you're indicated you want to go into welding or whatever, they are going to offer you an opportunity of a sponsorship that means they're sponsoring you to go to Metro. In turn, you're going to take a job with them in the end because they're paying the bill and it works great. We have over 300 businesses that we're working with across, large and small. So the stories you're going to hear after I'm done here are stories of how each school district, each business, each family utilized this. And I can't say thank you enough to you for taking a chance on this. Iowa has done this for some time. The state pays 70% of the tuition and the, the community college is discounted 30. It works well. Ours works better because it doesn't have as many hooks. It doesn't have as many problems with it. And if you go-- can go out there and find somebody

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
Appropriations Committee February 27, 2025

that doesn't like this, send them my way, because I want to talk to them and find out what I need to fix. So, I'm going to stop before that light goes off, Senator.

CLEMENTS: All right. Thank you.

RANDY SCHMAILZL: Any, any questions?

CLEMENTS: Are there questions?

DORN: Give him a red light.

RANDY SCHMAILZL: Oh, Senator Dorn. That's not fair. You're the light. You're the magic-- you're the Wizard of Oz behind the, the--

CLEMENTS: Senator Armendariz. Do you have a question, Senator Armendariz?

ARMENDARIZ: Yes. Thank you for being here. And thank you for what Metro does for Omaha, as well. So when I look at the numbers, because I'm here to look at the numbers, eye of the taxpayers. So the classes that are taken, are they taken alongside-- say it's an English class. The kid is in high school. Are they not taking the K-12 English class and they're taking yours instead and applying it toward a college degree, or are they taking an English class that they're required to take in a K-12 along with the class you're take-- your giving?

RANDY SCHMAILZL: You're going to hear from Millard today. And they have a program where the classes you take in this program equal the classes you need at, at Millard, even at a higher level. And 150 of their students graduated with an associate degree before they graduated from high school.

ARMENDARIZ: OK. So we fund--

RANDY SCHMAILZL: So the stud--

ARMENDARIZ: So we fund the K-12.

RANDY SCHMAILZL: Yes.

ARMENDARIZ: And now we're layering on more money.

RANDY SCHMAILZL: No. This is just going to K-2. The s that pay for--

ARMENDARIZ: The funding.

RANDY SCHMAILZL: --the tuition. Yes.

ARMENDARIZ: The funding.

RANDY SCHMAILZL: Yes. The funding.

ARMENDARIZ: We already fund K-12 to teach them English.

RANDY SCHMAILZL: So they can take the classes and not be held up by the barrier of not having money to pay tuition.

ARMENDARIZ: For college.

RANDY SCHMAILZL: For-- no, for-- yeah. For college classes. Yes. Yes. Yes.

ARMENDARIZ: After graduation.

RANDY SCHMAILZL: Yes. Yeah. Now all these classes transfer. Most of the classes that we, we serve that are transfer go to University of Nebraska-Lincoln, go to UNO, go to Creighton, and go to Metro. And so they all transfer and there's no questions on that.

ARMENDARIZ: And one more question.

CLEMENTS: Yes.

ARMENDARIZ: Do you think that it would maybe be, considering the financial situation the state is in and the funding that we provide for this program, would the, would the program be able to still maintain the same number of students if we did it on a sliding scale, according to need? So that, say, a family that's making \$500,000--

RANDY SCHMAILZL: You know.

ARMENDARIZ: --could pay for it--

RANDY SCHMAILZL: Yeah.

ARMENDARIZ: And then a family--

RANDY SCHMAILZL: When you're looking at accessibility for all, it's hard to keep track of that all on how the sliding scale works. And you'd have to turn in some kind of federal financial form system, you know, where we know what-- how much money your family makes and that. And that's hard enough to do at the FAFSA level, let alone try to make our own form up at the high school level, so we gave up on that early

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
Appropriations Committee February 27, 2025

on. We used to just charge 50%. Metro paid for 50% and the student did, but it cut a lot of people out. And you know, the-- for example, students that are low achievers in high school, for whatever reason, this helps them get up to a level that they can go on to college. And, and so, the way we do it now has been-- produced the best results through trial and error.

ARMENDARIZ: Yeah. And I like-- and I do like the program and I think it's a, a, a value add. I'm just trying to fund it. And--

RANDY SCHMAILZL: Thank you.

ARMENDARIZ: --I know we're obligated at K-12, but this is college credit.

RANDY SCHMAILZL: Yeah. These are--

ARMENDARIZ: That's why I bring it up.

RANDY SCHMAILZL: --K-12-- these are high school students taking college classes. They're the same classes. In fact, if you take them on campus, you're in there with our regular students. If you take them at Millard South High School, it's all Millard South High School students. And, and Fremont and OPS will explain what they do when they get up here. So.

CLEMENTS: All right. Are there questions? Seeing none--

RANDY SCHMAILZL: Thanks.

CLEMENTS: Thank you.

RANDY SCHMAILZL: No more lights.

CLEMENTS: Next proponent for LB173. Good afternoon.

JOHN SCHWARTZ: Good afternoon. Chairman Clements, members of the Appropriations Committee, it's good to be with you this afternoon. My name is John Schwartz. That's J-o-h-n S-c-h-w-a-r-t-z. I'm the superintendent for Millard Public Schools, and I'm actually here speaking on behalf of the Metropolitan Omaha Educational Consortium, MOEC, as it's commonly known. Millard Public Schools submitted some separate testimony online, so I'm going to try and speak more broadly to, to the MOEC organization today. For those of you that aren't familiar with MOEC, it represents 11 school districts, 2 educational service units, the University of Nebraska at Omaha, and Metropolitan

Community College. It's about 130 preK-12 public school students-- 130,000 preK-12 public school students in Nebraska, about 40% of the statewide student population. For those of you that don't know what MOEC does, it is a collaborative group of education leaders in the Omaha area that seeks to improve student outcomes. We identify high-impact issues of common interest, we set goals, and we develop a plan to, to move forward. Increasing dual enrollment access is one of those areas we've identified as a chief area of common interest, and we've been working towards that over the last several years. Dual enrollment, as you've heard from others, so I won't reiterate all the details-- it is a significant, positive thing for our students. It, it, it, it does so much to improve student outcomes, both in high school and in post-secondary, and for the economy. It also reduces things like student loan burden and burden on our families. So to, to reduce some redundancy, I'll kind of expedite my testimony, because of testimony you've already heard. To give you some perspective, though, for how that looks for the MOEC area, about 48%, or nearly 5,000 of last year's 10,368 graduates, senior graduates from MOEC school districts completed at least one dual enrollment course through Metropolitan Community College at no, no cost, tuition-free. It was an incredible benefit. Randy shared just a little bit ago, it's hard to find somebody who doesn't feel positively about MCC. I can tell you as a superintendent in Millard, there isn't a day that goes by where I don't hear from one of our, our staff members, one of our families, a, a business leader in the community, and certainly our students about how much they value this program and, and, and how much it's, it's benefited them in different ways, whether they're current students or students that have recently graduated and they're telling their story about what they've been able to do or what they've been able to avoid in terms of costs of college because of the programs that we have. I can tell you, as a, a representative of MOEC, this is a, a highly-valued investment that the state has made in order to make this tuition-free up to this point. If I could zero in just on our school district, as 1 of 11 school districts in the Omaha metro area that benefit from this program. Last year, we had about 2,200 students that participated in dual enrollment programs with MCC. About 26,000 college credits were earned tuition-free. And that's just short-- just a little bit short of \$2 million in tuition that wasn't paid. So those are students that are, are moving more rapidly towards degree completion or some sort of industry credential. So it's not only helping the, the, the student and the family, it's also helping the local economy and businesses that are, are desperately looking for, for a workforce. And so, I thought Senator Prokop captured that very well. We appreciate him bringing this bill. We appreciate your

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
Appropriations Committee February 27, 2025

consideration. It's, it's had a significant impact on MOEC-area school districts. Would gladly answer any questions that you have.

CLEMENTS: Any questions? Senator Cavanaugh.

M. CAVANAUGH: Thank you. Thanks for being here.

JOHN SCHWARTZ: Yes. Good to see you.

M. CAVANAUGH: You, too. How-- so you have the students, they go through the program. Some of them will graduate with an associate's degree. Are those students often likely to go into the workforce right out of high school then?

JOHN SCHWARTZ: Great question. And I'm going to answer that, but I'm going to frame up the, the 3 main categories of students that we have benefiting from this. We have our early college students through Millard South High School. That's the 150 students that Randy made reference to earlier-- roughly, each year, that graduate with an associate's degree at the time they finish high school. And what I would say is many of those students go on and continue their education in some capacity. They-- so they're expediting their path to a 4-year degree. Some of them do immediately enter the workforce, some of them, some of them enter a, enter a trade school. They've gotten their generals out of the way. We are, we are approaching nearly 800 students that have earned an associate's degree through the early college program with, with the MCC partnership. It's absolutely tremendous. We also have our, our traditional dual enrollment student, who maybe isn't enrolled in the early college program, but they attend Millard South, Millard North, or Millard West, or in some cases, even our alternative school, Horizon High School. And they're just doing a dual enrollment course, maybe in lieu of, of just taking U.S. history and earning high school college credit, we've got a dual enrollment partnership and they're able to do both of those things concurrently, complete their high school course while also meeting the requirements of MCC. Because there's no tuition, they're able to, to do 2 of those things at the same time and expedite the, the process. We also have the MCC academies, which tend to be more credential earning programs, where our juniors and seniors go to the Fort Omaha campus, typically, and they, they work on a credential in the medical field, like a CNA, or HVAC or diesel mechanics-- diesel mechanic credentials. And so we have students that do that, as well. So those are our 3 main category of students that benefit from this program. Probably the largest number of those 26,000 credits though, were earned through our early college program, which is-- we have yet to see something of that

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
Appropriations Committee February 27, 2025

magnitude replicated where our kids don't have to leave a high school campus, and yet, they're able to earn a fully-- a full associate's degree while they're part of their high school experience.

M. CAVANAUGH: Thank you. I should com-- I should have commented earlier that my nephew actually went to Metro, and he got his associate's degree for auto repair. And if this program had existed when he was in high school, he would have-- definitely have done it and probably gotten into a lot less trouble than he did the last couple of years of high school, because he was doing something that he was so passionate about. And that-- the program, when he went through it, he was paired with an automotive company, so he was getting the real-life experience working there, and they paid for his tools and his education. So just-- there's so many opportunities here for building our workforce, so thank you for coming and sharing that with us.

CLEMENTS: Are there questions from the committee?

JOHN SCHWARTZ: Can I speak to that real quick?

M. CAVANAUGH: Oh, can he, can he speak to that? Yes, I'd like--

JOHN SCHWARTZ: The president from Northeast Community College really spoke to it. That, that anecdotal story right there is exactly why programs like this increase student outcomes. You're in the business of determining return on investment. You have hard decisions to make, especially this biennium as you build the budget. For the fiscal note associated with this bill, the thousands of kids that will be impacted and families that are impacted, it's just tremendous. So thank you for your consideration and thank you for your sponsorship of this bill.

CLEMENTS: OK. Thank you. Thank you for your testimony. Next proponent for LB173. Good afternoon.

SAPPHIRE GUZMAN: Good afternoon. OK. Good afternoon, Chairman Clements and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Sapphire Guzman, S-a-p-p-h-i-r-e G-u-z-m-a-n. I am a student from the Southeast Community College's Lincoln campus, and I'm here to testify in support of LB173 because of my experience as a dual credit student. I appreciate the chance to share my story, and I hope my testimony highlights just how valuable dual credit programs are for students like myself to explore career and technical education. I graduated from the Career Academy, or TCA, in 2024 with a certificate in welding technology, which led me to continue my education at SCC. I'm

currently enrolled in the welding technology program, and I could not be more thankful for the path that brought me here. TCA's message of test-driving your future stood out to me. The dual credit program gave me an option to explore a path I thought I wouldn't fit into. I've always had plenty of interests, but after trying TCA out just for a year, it felt right to stay, although it wasn't a hard decision because of the supportive environment and the reduced tuition. That made all the difference. The TCA dual credit program and SCC's welding program have challenged me in ways that have fueled my love for hands-on technical work. The structure at TCA was so aligned, in fact, that transitioning to SCC's program felt completely natural, allowing me to continue learning with confidence. And I recognized that this was an opportunity and an incredible privilege that others may not have had. My short-term goal is to make the most out of my experience at SCC, joining organizations and being a part of the infrastructure, and of course, graduating with my associate degree, hopefully. Eventually, I'd love to become an instructor so I can help others discover their passion. On top of that, I plan to earn a bachelor's degree in business to start a community-focused trade center, somewhere that offers services and training to support workforce, interpersonal, and communal development. None of these opportunities or goals would have been possible without the affordability of the dual credit program. I had paid for my first year with personal savings from my job at a Pizza Kitchen in Milford and a daycare center in Crete. My second year, however, it was so fulfilling and the experience was more-- is-- was built up more, because of SCC's discounted tuition and scholarship funding I received from SCC Foundation-- from the SCC Foundation. During that second year, I participated in numerous events and organizations, almost too many to list because it was so affordable. I also was able to tack on more learning opportunities, like precision machining courses. This dual credit program connected me with Lincoln's business community, which helped me land a job as a machinist at TCMCO, for a summer, at least. Even now, my instructor at SCC is recommending me for an engineering internship there. Overall, I believe that LB173 will help ensure that future students have access to affordable dual credit programming, just like I did. For those students like me, these programs don't just offer college credit. They create a pathway to career success, financial stability, and the ability to dream bigger. Thank you all for your time and consideration, and I'd love to answer any questions you may have for me.

CLEMENTS: Are there questions? Senator Spivey.

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
Appropriations Committee February 27, 2025

SPIVEY: Thank you, Chair. And thank you so much for being here. I just wanted to commend you for your-- sharing your story and your journey, and especially, being a woman in the trades like that is so important. And so I hope you stick with it, because 1) there's a lot of money to make; and 2) we have to represent. So I just appreciate you being here today.

SAPPHIRE GUZMAN: Thank you. I agree.

CLEMENTS: Are there questions? Thank you for your testimony.

SAPPHIRE GUZMAN: Thank you.

CLEMENTS: Next proponent for LB173, please. Welcome.

JASON BUSS: Hello. Chairman Clements, thank you. My name is Jason Buss, J-a-s-o-n B-u-s-s. Before I start, I want a show of hands. How many people got here or have in their garage a Ford F-150, Ford Explorer, or a Chevy Malibu? Anybody? A few? Not as many as I thought, but it's good. Well, my-- I'm the HR manager and the global environmental health and safety manager for a plant here in Nebraska that makes seats for the Ford F-150, Ford Explorer, and the Chevy Malibu. And our facility has more robotic welding than any other plant here in Nebraska. So we depend upon a steady pipeline of skilled workers in welding, automation, and advanced manufacturing. Dual credit programs are critical in preparing students for careers in these high-demand fields. Many high school students, especially those in FFA, welding programs, technical education tracks, they depend on these dual credit courses to gain industry-relevant skills before graduation. A really good one I want to highlight, the iMEC program, goes into our high schools, offers, offers kids the opportunity to take 12 credit hours in control systems. iMEC basically takes them into the mechatronics program at our community colleges, where they can-- the average wage after 3 years out of college is \$38 an hour, which, in my business with overtime is, is over 100 grand-- 3 years out of high school with a 2-year degree. So there's some excellent opportunities out there for students, and, and these programs really help to develop them with that. The different welding programs just offer so many high-paying jobs. And, and believe it or not, you can't program a robot to weld right if you don't know how to weld. So it's, it's really critical that we teach these skills in our schools. Addressing the issue about the cost and cost difference. I experienced this situation on a first hand-- you know, we-- we're good parents. I've got a 16-year-old and a 13-year-old at home, and we, we participate in everything, help with everything. My daughter took a, a

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
Appropriations Committee February 27, 2025

class through CCC through dual credit course last year, and we missed an email and we missed the enrollment period. And through that administrative thing where they needed to get \$54 from us, we missed out on an opportunity for my daughter to get dual credit in a course, just because of that administrative step. So I think if we can offer to make it free in the, in the region and eliminate those administrative steps, we won't have missed opportunities. I know I'll pay for that in the end at a, at a, at a college to have to replace for those credit hours for the total and, and it's, and it's a big deal. So I-- I'd like everybody to have that opportunity and not worry about it. I tried to get more data on how many people miss those opportunities, but it's, it's really hard to measure how many people finish the class but don't get the college credit. At Central Community College, which I'm a member of the board of governors representing industry there, they offer a really high level of education for a really low cost, and I think that keeps students here in Nebraska, especially for the dual credit programs, because those transfer agreements work everywhere here in Nebraska, and it helps keep kids here. So it's an investment in our students, in our businesses, and Nebraska's economy. I urge you to support the bill and take any questions you have.

CLEMENTS: Senator Armendariz.

ARMENDARIZ: Thank you. Thank you. I just wanted to say I do have an F-150, but it's not in a garage, so that was a trick question.

JASON BUSS: There you go. There you go.

ARMENDARIZ: And I wanted to clarify. And Randy knows I'm a huge fan of what you're doing, in particular. Because we've had many conversations on how do we get kids, especially kids in underserved areas, in high-paying jobs out of high school if they're not going to go to college, which, where I grew up, hardly any did. So how do we capture them, get them into high-paying jobs like you're talking about, with those skills out of high school? I like this program that much, that if we can get them to do that, because my understanding is we have a captive audience K-12, and then they're-- they have to make up their mind to go after that. So my goal is to get that done, get those skills while we still have that captive audience. Huge supporter of that. I'm on Appropriations for the state. We're \$270 million in the hole still. So I still have to ask those questions, right? It's a hard, it's a hard spot to be when I'm really passionate about what you do, in particular, and we still need to balance that. So that's why I asked the question, would it make sense to keep these programs going

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
Appropriations Committee February 27, 2025

and those parents that really can afford to pay for those dual credits-- could, could we keep it going that way? I'm looking at all the options.

JASON BUSS: Yeah, I, I understand your position, trying to look at all options that just. If there's still an administrative barrier. I just wanted to highlight you can still slip through, even if you're willing and able.

ARMENDARIZ: I appreciate that, and your testimony.

JASON BUSS: Thank you.

ARMENDARIZ: It was very helpful.

CLEMENTS: Other questions? Seeing none, thank you for your testimony. Next proponent, LB173. Good afternoon.

MARK SHEPARD: Good afternoon. Senator Clements, Senator Prokop, and members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Mark Shepard, M-a-r-k S-h-e-p-a-r-d. I'm currently the superintendent of schools in Fremont. I'm honored today to present testimony in support of LB173, representing both Fremont Public Schools and the Greater Nebraska Schools Association, the GNSA. The GNSA represents 25 Class A and B school districts across the state, which collectively have over 17,000 students currently enrolled in dual enrollment courses. We view these programs as a true game-changer for our state. They not only help meet the growing demand for a skilled workforce, but they also give students an invaluable head start on their college education, setting them up for success. As you've already heard, Fremont High School has an enrollment of approximately 1,700 students, 60% of whom qualify for free and reduced lunch. The funding provided through LB173 will ensure that all of our students, regardless of their personal or family financial circumstances, continue to have access to these life-changing educational opportunities. Nine years ago, we had a unique opportunity. A request came from Valmont Industries for us, Fremont Public Schools, Metropolitan Community College, and Valmont to partner to start a welding program. Since its beginning 9 years ago, we've graduated nearly 200 students through that program, earning a local industry certificate that's valued in our region while completing a third of their welding degree through Metro. Currently, 70 graduates-- and it's in the information that I handed out. It's on the back side of the page with the testimony-- are working in welding-- in the welding industry or in trades and manufacturing in Fremont and surrounding communities. We are inc-- we are incredibly

proud of this program's success. In 2021, the voters in Fremont approved a facility bond issue by a 2 to 1 margin. \$9.5 million of that bond issue were obligated for building a 33,000 square foot career technical education center. This center has allowed our students to gain valuable, career-ready skills in a variety of fields such as construction, welding, health occupations, diesel, automotive, computer-aided design and manufacturing, and automation and robotics. Taxpayers in Fremont built the facility, FPS and Metro equipped it, and local industry has come alongside us and is supporting the sustainability of these programs. Our dual enrollment programs are not limited to career technical education. Fremont Public Schools, in partnership with MCC, offers a range of dual enrollment courses in fields such as education, developing our future teachers, business, entrepreneurship, criminal justice, economics, EMT, and gen ed classes, which have already been discussed. At present, 340 of our Fremont High School students are actively enrolled in dual credit courses, allowing them to earn credits towards 2- and 4-year degrees while simultaneously completing the high school requirements. We have a combination of our teachers and Metropolitan Community College's teachers teaching those courses. And some of those, we fund. Some of those, Metro funds. These students are truly changing their futures. Workforce, workforce development is a priority identified by the Legislature, the governor, the Chamber of Commerce, and local industry. We often hear about the issue of brain drain in our state, but the funding outlined in LB173 offers a unique opportunity to reverse this trend and transition Nebraska towards a brain gain model, where our young people stay in-state, build successful careers, and contribute to the local economy. I urge you to advance LB173. I want to thank Senator Prokop for bringing this bill forward, and you, as legislators, for serving our students and our families, and the great state of Nebraska. Thank you.

CLEMENTS: Senator Armendariz.

ARMENDARIZ: Sorry. I haven't spoke all session, hardly at all.

MARK SHEPARD: Well, I have an answer to your question that you asked earlier, so.

ARMENDARIZ: But I, I am very passionate about this and what you're doing. And it, it is really a comment. I did come and tour your facility--

MARK SHEPARD: Oh, great.

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
Appropriations Committee February 27, 2025

ARMENDARIZ: --before session started.

MARK SHEPARD: I remember that.

ARMENDARIZ: Yeah. Per Brett Richmond's recommendation, so.

MARK SHEPARD: Absolutely.

ARMENDARIZ: It is an amazing facility and more like that in the school is needed. How we pay for it, I like how you used a lot of different avenues to pay for it. And, and my intent is to get those businesses that are going to benefit, like you did, funding parts, at least, if not a, a big chunk of it, because they do benefit very long-term by getting those kids.

MARK SHEPARD: Absolutely. We have over 40 local industry representatives that are sustainable partnerships with us. You can see in the materials that I handed out, there is a program where they can, for as little as \$5,000 spread over 5 years, participate and get recognition. It gives them opportunities to get in front of our students, it gives them opportunities to work side by side with our students. We tell our students every day, when somebody from industry is in the building, they are interviewing you, even if they're just asking you a simple question. But we really do appreciate that. One question I would like to answer that you had asked other people prior, would we-- if, if we had the students that were able to-- so in our case, that would be 40% of our students that don't qualify for free and reduced lunch-- pay for their own tuition, would that impact the numbers? And I really do believe it would. We've experienced that in the past. Barriers are real, and barriers are not what we always think of as a barrier, but the fact that you have to have tuition, the fact that you have to go through some kind of a waiver process to apply for that waiver, that creates a barrier in and of itself. And we know that students just won't pursue that whatsoever. Great example of another barrier was transportation. And with our center on our high school site, we eliminated that barrier and we saw our numbers just skyrocket.

ARMENDARIZ: Thank you.

CLEMENTS: Go ahead. Thank you. Any other questions? Seeing none, thank you, Superintendent Shepard.

MARK SHEPARD: All right. I'd invite all of you to come out to Fremont and see what we have going on. It's pretty cool.

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
Appropriations Committee February 27, 2025

CLEMENTS: Next proponent. Good afternoon.

ERIN MAY: Good afternoon, Chair Clements and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Erin May, E-r-i-n M-a-y. I'm the director of extended learning at Doane University, and I'm present today in support of LB173. On behalf of my university, I ask for your consideration to update LB173 to include funding for dual credit courses offered at Nebraska's 4-year institutions. Expanding this funding will increase access to high-quality, dual enrollment opportunities that prepare students for post-secondary success and address critical workforce shortages in Nebraska. According to the '22-23 IPEDS data, Nebraska 4-year institutions played a crucial role in dual enrollment. 26,451 Nebraska students enrolled in a dual credit course, which 42% of those students earned it through a 4-year institution. Research supports that high school students who participate in dual enrollment are more likely to graduate high school, enroll and graduate from a post-secondary institution, and have college-- have higher college GPAs and retention rates. Doane's dual credit framework is supported in part by hiring qualified high school teachers to teach on ground courses. Through school district agreements, Doane pays school districts for contracting with their teachers. This funding has enabled our districts to part-- district partners to incentivize and support the retention of experienced high school teachers. Doane's dual credit program has already demonstrated success and exemplified the impact of dual enrollment delivered through a 4-year institution. Launched in the '23-24 academic year with grant funding from NDE, Doane established an educator pathway with ESUs 5 and 6 to combat, to combat the state's teacher shortage, enabling high school students to earn up to 15 credits through a state-approved and nationally accredited-- accredited teacher preparatory program. This included practicum hours in a classroom. While this grant has concluded, it removed financial barriers and fostered a pathway for future teachers. This academic year, we have since created partnerships with Sidney Public Schools and Bellevue Public Schools, and in total have served 266 students in our education pathway. In the last 2 years, Doane University has made significant investment in our dual credit students by reducing the dual enrollment tuition rate to \$75 per credit hour. We've served nearly 1,000 students who have completed 3,600 college credit hours in a variety of subject areas. This investment is equivalent to nearly a \$900,000 savings in tuitions for our students and families. Given the success of 4-year institutions like Doane University in providing affordable and high-quality dual enrollment programs, I would respectfully ask that you consider updating LB173 to include funding for 4-year

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
Appropriations Committee February 27, 2025

institutions. Doing so will ensure that Nebraska students, especially those from low-income backgrounds, have access to dual enrollment opportunities that set them, that set them up for long-term academic and professional success. Thank you for your time and consideration. And I'm happy to answer any questions.

CLEMENTS: Are there questions? Seeing none, thank you for your testimony.

ERIN MAY: Thank you.

CLEMENTS: Next proponent.

MELISSA POLONCIC: Thank you.

CLEMENTS: Good afternoon.

MELISSA POLONCIC: Good afternoon. Senator Clements and members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Melissa Poloncic, M-e-I-i-s-s-a P-o-l-o-n-c-i-c. I am the superintendent of DC West Community Schools, and I am testifying in support of LB173. This appropriation would support the dual enrollment programs in Nebraska, which allow our high school students to continue to access and earn college credits. And I really believe it's one of the best partnerships and investments that our state could make in education. DC West is a school district in Waterloo and Valley, and we have just approximately 1,100 students. So you heard from some larger school districts today. We are a C-1 school district. We're actually the smallest school district in the collaborative that you heard about earlier, which is MOEC, the Metropolitan Omaha Educational Consortium. We have roughly 325 students in our high school, and I'd like to share with you just some data from this last school year. Of those 325 students, 197 of our students took dual credit courses. That's approximately 60% of our student body. 589 dual credit courses were taken. Our total college credits earned was 1,767 credits. And the money saved for our small school in tuition costs was \$477,090. I do believe this pays benefits for our students upon graduation. Some statistics from our class of 2024: We had 89 seniors. 48 of those seniors went on to receive scholarships that were worth \$6.5 million. The college-going rate of that class was 91%, and the class also had a graduation rate as a whole of 98%. I believe that the culture of earning college credits as a high school student is tremendously meaningful to support that student's tangible goals and exploration of career pathways. The return on investment for students and their families, I believe, speaks for itself. It motivates many different types of students. My

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
Appropriations Committee February 27, 2025

own daughter and our family are a great personal example of this power of dual credit with a student who's on a nontraditional route to college. Our daughter was a 2024 graduate of DC West. Upon graduation, she had taken enough dual credit coursework at DC West that she only needed 9 classes to complete her full associate's degree in business at Metro Community College. She was entering cosmetology school in the fall of 2024, and so she continued to take coursework through the summer-- last summer, as a high school student, tuition-free. In the fall, Metro acknowledged her academics that she had worked so hard with in high school, and they awarded her a scholarship to continue finishing her coursework. That will be completed this May. This spring and summer, she will graduate with an associate's degree from Metro that is totally transferable if she ever chooses to go somewhere different with that degree, and she will also complete her cosmetology school in August. She'll be well on her path to her goal of one day owning her own cosmetology business. And I can't guarantee that she'll spend her whole life contributing to the workforce of Nebraska, but I do know without a doubt that she is an intelligent, highly motivated individual who wove a path of commitment in Nebraska because of the opportunities provided in high school with dual enrollment options. This is an important strategy to support education and workforce development and keep our best in Nebraska. I urge you as a committee to advocate and support LB173. Thank you.

CLEMENTS: Are there questions? Thank you for your testimony.

MELISSA POLONCIC: Thank you.

CLEMENTS: Sir, you've been standing. Have a seat. Good afternoon.

JON CERNY: Afternoon. Members of the Appropriations Committee, I am Dr. Jon Cerny, J-o-n C-e-r-n-y, superintendent at Bancroft-Rosalie Community Schools. And I want to give a shout out to any staff and students who are still watching, even though school's been out a half hour. But, appreciate your support. I appear before the committee in support of LB173, and I would like to provide a rural perspective. Bancroft-Rosalie is in northeast Nebraska. Part of our school district resides on the Omaha Indian Reservation. Our free and reduced rate is 67% and our race/ethnicity is 64% white. Today, I want to share some data that supports 3 conclusions: (1) Dual enrollment saves families money; (2) dual enrollment students finish college early; and (3) dual enrollment credits provide increased opportunity and flexibility for students. Here's what our students are achieving. Class size averages between 18 and 32 students in a, in a class. Our class of 2022 earned 525 dual credits, averaging 29 credits per student. Class of 2023

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
Appropriations Committee February 27, 2025

earned 1,395 dual credits, averaging 43.6 credits per student and 5 associate's degrees. The class of 2024, it earned 945 dual credits, 300-- or 32.6 per student, 6 associate's degrees; and this year's senior class, 790 dual credits, 43.9 credits per student, 8 associate's degrees. That's a, that's a class of 18 students. 100% of our students have completed a dual enrollment class. Obviously, most of them are well over 15 credits per student. Does dual enrollment actually save families money? Yes. At Northeast, tuition is \$108 per credit hour. The cost of tuition for one year is \$3,240. Our students can earn over 60 college credits at no cost. Do students actually finish college early? We have data that supports that. Yes. Our class of 2021, we had 7 students graduate with a bachelor's degree early, 4 in 3 years, 3 in 3 1/2 years. The class of 2022, we had 3 students graduate in 3 years, and the class of 2023, 4 students gradu-- will-- have graduated early, 3 in 3 years and 1 in 2 1/2 years. That means our students are entering the workforce-- force faster, with less debt, and ready to fill these critically needed jobs in our state. Then lastly, does dual enrollment provide students increased opportunities and flexibility? Many of our students leave high school, as others have said, not only with college credit, but with industry certifications that allow them to immediately enter the workforce. I have stories of students that I would be glad to share who have benefited by having all of their gen ed requirements met prior to entering college. I urge you to support LB173 and give every Nebraska student, regardless of income, access to college-level coursework. Thank you, and I welcome any questions.

CLEMENTS: Are there questions from the committee? Seeing none, thank you.

JON CERNY: I was hoping you were going to ask about number 2.

PROKOP: Finishing early.

CLEMENTS: That's great. Good afternoon.

JOHN ROSS: Good afternoon, Chairman Clements and members of the Appropriations Committee. John Ross, J-o-h-n R-o-s-s. Senator Prokop, thank you for introducing LB173. I am a resident of the Bancroft-Rosalie School District, and have watched the dual credit course program being developed and implemented in the Bancroft-Rosalie School. The results are impressive. We are in the Northeast Community College district. The handout you just received, I'm going to go over it. Nebraska Commissioner of Education Dr. Brian Maher paid a special visit to the Bancroft-Rosalie Community School, where he engaged with

the students, staff, and administrators, witnessing firsthand the innovative programs shaping the future of education in this rural district. Dr. Maher's visit began with a warm welcome, welcome in the school gymnasium, where Bancroft-Rosalie Elementary students greeted him with enthusiasm. During a Q&A session, students posed, posed thoughtful questions like, what does a Commissioner of Education do, and why do you feel it's important to visit our school? Dr. Maher explained his role in supporting schools across Nebraska and expressed his admiration for the innovative practices at Bancroft-Rosalie, stating, visiting schools like this one gives me the chance to see the incredible work being done to prepare students for our future. The Commissioner then joined Superintendent Dr. John Cerny for a discussion with high school seniors about their dual credit courses and work-based learning experience. Dr. Cerny proudly highlighted the accomplishments of the class of '25, noting that 8 of the 18 seniors are on track to earning an associate's degree by the end of their senior year, a testament to the district's commitment to academic rigor and opportunity. Dr. Maher also met with the JAG teacher, Nikki Peirce, to learn about how the district integrates the JAG program into its broader focus on work-based learning. The conversation emphasized how Bancroft-Rosalie is equipping students with practical skills and experience that connect classroom learning to real-world careers. The visit concluded in the second grade classroom, where Dr. Maher observed students immersed in coding activities as part of the Project Lead the Way Launch curriculum. Bancroft-Rosalie uses this hands-on program as its core science curriculum fostering problem-solving and critical thinking skills and career awareness of computer science, health and science and engineering from an early age. Dr. Maher commented the district-- commended the district for a forward-thinking approach to education, saying, what I've seen here today is a shining example how schools can prepare students for the future while ensuring they remain connected to their communities. So this bill is needed to replace federal money and provide money to grow the program for the rest of the state. We cannot afford to let this program go unfunded. My school really needs this program. I'm asking you to please advance this bill, and thank you for your time.

CLEMENTS: Are there questions? Was it my understanding that Bancroft-Rosalie students get dual credit tuition free?

JOHN ROSS: You would have to ask Dr. Cerny that, but I believe they do.

CLEMENTS: I believe that's what I heard. Is it through Northeast Community College?

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
Appropriations Committee February 27, 2025

JOHN ROSS: We belong to Northeast Community College district. We also partner with Wayne State to some extent, for some of these courses.

CLEMENTS: All right. Thank you for your testimony.

JOHN ROSS: Thank you.

CLEMENTS: Next proponent. Good afternoon.

JACKIE NIELSEN: Good afternoon, Senator Clements and members of the Appropriations Committee. I am Dr. Jackie Nielsen, J-a-c-k-i-e N-i-e-l-s-e-n, assistant superintendent in charge of curriculum, assessment, and instruction at Beatrice Public Schools. I am here in support of LB173, which appropriates funding to support dual enrollment programs in Nebraska, allowing high school students to earn college credits and industry-recognized credentials supporting workforce development and career pathways. I would like to provide you some vital data on not only how dual enrollment courses help our community, but most importantly, our students and our families. At Beatrice Public Schools, we have students access dual enrollment classes at SCC and in other institutions that give them a jumpstart to college and saves family-- families tremendous amounts of money. In fall 2024, we had 90 students enroll in 117 total classes ranging from agriculture, technology, basic medical terminology, college algebra, college composition, dental terminology, general biology, nursing assistant, with the largest dual enrollment course being public speaking. Currently, in spring 2025, we have 93 students accessing 126 total classes ranging in the same areas this fall, as well as American history, plant biology, sociology, psychology, criminal justice, and interpersonal relations. So you can see there are a plethora of opportunities that our students take advantage of. We have teachers that meet qualifications of Southeast Community College and other institutions to teach these classes to sophomores, juniors, and seniors in our high school. In essence, because we are able to offer these dual credit offerings through our staff at BHS, students can elect to take the classes and pay a reduced tuition rate of \$43 to \$60 per credit hour, versus the \$80 to \$100 per credit hour. Based on these numbers and spring enrollment numbers, Beatrice families saved approximate-- approximately \$5,080 per credit. So you're looking at approximately \$15,000 altogether, which, with today's cost of living increases and college tuition expenses, we know is tremendously helpful. As a parent, I can attest to the amount of money that dual credit classes saved our daughter, who is currently a freshman at Doane University. She was able to access 37 credit hours while staying at home, and now is on track to graduate in 3 years versus the

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
Appropriations Committee February 27, 2025

traditional 4 to 5 years. And she's going into special education, which is also another feather in her cap, and maybe will come back and teach at mom school. The option for students in high school also allows-- also helps our youth make connections in the workforce and start their careers earlier, which directly impacts our overall economy and job market status. Additionally, community speakers and tours, as well as job shadow and internship opportunities arise because of these courses, reinforcing the school and community connection. In closing, I urge you to advance this bill out of commit-- committee in order to help high schools continue to support students in reaching their college dreams, while also earning dual credits, earning industry-recognized credentials, and supporting workforce development and career pathways in the great state of Nebraska. I can take any questions.

CLEMENTS: Thank you. Senator Dorn.

DORN: Thank you, Senator Clements. And thank you for being here. You, you mentioned that teachers teach this in your school, so they-- are they high school teachers at your school that qualify for the college, I call it things they have to qualify for or are some of these also college teachers coming in and teaching at your school?

JACKIE NIELSEN: We have-- currently, we have teachers that qualify because of the number of courses that they've taken. So they are Beatrice Public Schools teachers. They qualify to teach these courses. We also have students that-- or we also have-- we do not have anyone coming into Beatrice currently--

DORN: OK.

JACKIE NIELSEN: --from SCC to provide the courses, but we do it online. We send students to SCC as well.

DORN: You do some of this online, then.

JACKIE NIELSEN: Yes.

DORN: OK.

JACKIE NIELSEN: Yes we do.

CLEMENTS: Other questions? I had, had a question. You have quite a wide variety of courses. Do all those courses count toward high school graduation credits or some of them just college?

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
Appropriations Committee February 27, 2025

JACKIE NIELSEN: They will count towards high school graduating credit-- credits as well. So our students need 260 credits to graduate from Beatrice High School, which is a large number of credits. They will take the place of maybe elective courses or courses that they need, such as college composition would take the place of maybe an English 4 class that we would offer.

CLEMENTS: All right. Very good.

JACKIE NIELSEN: Thank you.

CLEMENTS: Thank you for your testimony.

JACKIE NIELSEN: You're welcome. Thank you.

CLEMENTS: Next proponent. Next person standing up.

MICHAEL JOHNSON: Thank you.

CLEMENTS: Thank you for waiting.

MICHAEL JOHNSON: Of course.

STROMMEN: So last man standing.

PROKOP: Yeah.

CLEMENTS: Good afternoon.

MICHAEL JOHNSON: Good afternoon, Senator Clements and members of the Appropriations Committee. First off, thank you for this opportunity. I've always loved being able to do this. My name is Michael Johnson, M-i-c-h-a-e-l J-o-h-n-s-o-n. I'm not the speaker of the house. I serve as the chief operating officer at the Nebraska Chamber of Commerce. I'm testifying on behalf of everyone. The Nebraska Chamber of Commerce, Nebraska Council of School Administrators and a host of local Chambers: Omaha, Lincoln, West Point, Cheyenne County, Wayne, Broken Bow, Washington County, Falls City, South Sioux City, Aurora, O'Neill, Fremont, North Platte, Kearney, and Keith County. And I'm sure everyone else just didn't get my email in time. We support this legislation for several reasons. One, the inability to find workforce in Nebraska is the number one economic competitor-- or number one barrier to economic growth in Nebraska. Our state's fiscal situation with this com-- which this committee knows well, calls for us to make sound decisions on spending that result in economic return for the state. I'm going to take a little bit of a different tact on some of

this. However we think about it, graduating from high school is a significant event, often marking a person's first real, discrete decision point in their life about their future. For many, there are grooved paths in this life, guiding a person from one step to another. High school is the first where a person may or may not have a deeply grooved path on what to do next. Every young person in the pipeline of high school students experiences these grooves, influenced by different factors: parents, mentors, teachers, friends, whether they'll choose a university, a college, military service, a family business, entering the workforce after graduating, et cetera. This bill offers not forcing the groove of which decision they'll make. Rather, it armed students with education and reduces the intensity of that decision point in their life. Through the low risk and high reward experimentation offered by these programs, students can experience higher level education sooner in their lives and make a more informed decision about their future and the path they choose. Importantly, for this committee and for our, our organizations, these students are introduced to the educational opportunities in Nebraska for themselves. This funding means that their families don't simply save money. They activate on education they would not have otherwise taken. See, I think a lot of comments made already have been about it saved my district this or it saved the family that. The point is that students are activating toward education that they would not have otherwise taken if it weren't for these reduced, funded-- either free or reduced rate credit hours. I think that data is really clear, as, as has been passed out. We talk a lot about kids and futures, and ROI and responsible spending at the State Chamber, and I think this committee knows that well. We believe it's hard to find a better bill that supports our young people and the future of our local and our state economies. A couple pieces that I, that I passed out. Some of are just kind of general talking points on the bill. I provided a breakdown of industry sector across many years, and then there are just a couple charts in there about kind of the workforce crisis, population crisis that not only the country but Nebraska finds itself in. Just brought in data-- it's a couple of years old-- of the, the largest senior class in Nebraska was the 2023 graduating class, and they all get smaller after that. So the reason the State Chamber, you know, believe-- is, is proposing-- proponent, proponent-- excuse me-- supporting this legislation is the, the amount of students graduating is getting smaller and smaller. And we have to use programs like this to get students sort of through that major decision point and into things that provide themselves with a wonderful economic future. You talked about it yourself, the kind of eye-opening salary that's available for some of these students. So really, that's, that's our

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
Appropriations Committee February 27, 2025

aim is let's, let's have a larger share of that pie of students get connected with, with jobs and education and skills that matter to them. So I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have around the State Chamber's stance on this bill. Thank you.

CLEMENTS: Are there questions? Senator Spivey.

SPIVEY: Thank you, Chair. Thank you for being here. Just more kind of, of a comment of, I think you're right, of just bringing in some of the-- at 18, 19, you have this major career decision point. And we all have probably had numerous careers. But if there is a place that can help you make that decision a lot easier and put you into a space that allows you to make money for your family, invest back into our economy-- why is that an important economic driver? And I, I feel like sometimes we talk about education over here and housing and, you know, we silo it out versus a more comprehensive vision for our state. And so I just appreciate you bringing that perspective into this conversation as we talk about this bill. So.

MICHAEL JOHNSON: Thank you, Senator.

SPIVEY: Yeah, absolutely.

CLEMENTS: Other questions? I had one.

MICHAEL JOHNSON: Sure.

CLEMENTS: How does the Chamber support this program? Does it support it directly in any way?

MICHAEL JOHNSON: I beg your pardon? I--

CLEMENTS: Does the Chamber support dual credit or partner with any schools that you know of?

MICHAEL JOHNSON: Not directly. No. We don't have-- there's not like a Chamber-sponsored sort of thing A or B. We're, we're looking at this legislation, again, for-- from this macro economic point for Nebraska, that we need to connect students with these education credits to unlock the skills to grow the, the economy in the state. We don't have a, we don't have a program at the State Chamber that's tied directly to any such thing.

CLEMENTS: OK All right. Thank you.

MICHAEL JOHNSON: Thank you, all.

CLEMENTS: Thank you for your testimony. Next proponent, LB173. We're going to stop with 13 of those then. Then, are there-- is anyone here in opposition of LB173? Anyone with neutral testimony? Seeing none, Senator Prokop.

PROKOP: I thank all the, the members of the committee for all the great questions and thank all the testifiers who, who came in to, to speak to the bill. I'll keep this brief. I, I promise. You know, just a couple things I want to address that, that came up and, and couple points I just want to hit as, as we wrap this up, is this really is something that touches every corner of the state. I don't think it came out in the conversation today, but there's 218 different school districts that have some type of dual enrollment program, and that is-- has 238 high schools that participate. So it's-- folks are involved all across the state. Also, to the, to the testifier that came in from Doane and talked about an expansion to 4 years, so that was-- in the process of, of drafting this bill, that was a, that was a choice, because community colleges serve 85% of all dual enrollment students. And so the request for \$10 million this year and then \$11 million next year, that was to, I think, be fiscally, fiscally responsible, based on what we know the needs are of the program. Because even what we're requesting in the bill, that doesn't cover the full cost what the dual enrollment program is. It allows it to, to bene-- it allows the benefit of being able to buy down the tuition costs. In some case, the community colleges are able to, to provide that for free, but it's not the full cost. Because the full cost is-- was \$18.2 million in 2023 and, and 2024, and that's likely to exceed \$20 million. So I think to some of the questions, there is skin in the game from other folks to, to cover the cost on this. So I just wanted to make that clear. But you know, I-- just kind of a final comment. I think we're all in the position and, and, and think that we want to support things that work. And it's clear through the data, it's through-- it's clear through, I think, the success stories that dual enrollment has led to more students graduating from high school, enrolling in higher ed, choosing to participate in higher ed in Nebraska, and then following out in their careers. And, you know, some of the discussion around jobs that people take-- took on of, of, of-- \$100,000 a year job in the facility that was mentioned. Those are great jobs, and those people get an earlier jumpstart into the workforce. And those are tax-- those are taxpayers, then. So this is, I really look at it as an investment when it, when it comes to this bill. So with that, I would, I would close and happy to answer, and happy to answer any last questions.

CLEMENTS: Questions? Just a basic question.

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
Appropriations Committee February 27, 2025

PROKOP: Yeah.

CLEMENTS: How did you come up with \$13,062,234?

PROKOP: So it was on top-- yeah, sure. So it's on top of the \$3 million in general, general funds that the state already received. So the \$5 million that's going to be getting pulled out from the ARPA funds, since that's expiring-- just adding the \$10 million on this year and then \$11 million next year. So it's based off the \$3 million that the, that the program already receives, and then an additional \$10 million, and \$11 million the following year.

CLEMENTS: So it's currently \$5 million of ARPA funds per year?

PROKOP: Correct. Yeah. \$3 million plus the \$5 million. So \$3 million of the, of the state funds and then \$5 million of the ARPA funds, which will be expiring here.

CLEMENTS: And the preliminary budget has \$3 million of general funds in it? Is that what you're--

PROKOP: Oh yeah. Sorry. And it's on the sheet. I'm sorry sir. What?

CLEMENTS: The preliminary budget is \$3 million of general funds?

PROKOP: Right. Right.

CLEMENTS: All right. And you're adding \$10 million to that.

PROKOP: Correct. Yeah.

CLEMENTS: Which replaces \$5 million of ARPA and \$5 million more.

PROKOP: Yes. That's correct.

CLEMENTS: OK. That's-- assume you get those. Any other questions? Seeing none--

PROKOP: Thank you very much.

CLEMENTS: Thank you. We have comments for the record. Proponents, 70, opponents, zero, neutral, zero. That will conclude LB173.