

good policy choices. The tax...the Nebraska Comprehensive Tax Study from the Syracuse University drew this conclusion. Interestingly enough, Dr. Jonathan Sher, who was hired by the smaller high schools in Nebraska, the NRCSA group, to come into Nebraska to make a determination on quality of the small schools, everybody was expecting, well, if he is hired by the small schools to comment on their quality, he is going to conclude that the data is there to prove that they are good. He indicated he could not. He could not find the data to support the assertion that small schools are good schools, nor could he find the data to support the conclusion that big schools are better. Data just wasn't available. In LR 181, was a study resolution that we passed a couple of years ago, set up a study by the Education Committee to look at the question of quality education, again, the conclusion is the data just does not exist to make a determination. The recommendation of the Performance-based Accreditation Study Committee by the Department of Education drew a similar conclusion. We, as a Legislature, have had some involvement in this also. When we passed LB 944 a few years ago, our Quality Education Reform Act, we made it a responsibility of the Department of Education to move our accreditation standards away from input factors over to output factors. In other words, have them work toward a quality education in determining the quality of our schools. They have been working on that, and one of their conclusions is, we need more data in order to support the work of moving toward that performance-based accreditation. Last year, we passed a resolution,...

SPEAKER BARRETT: One minute.

SENATOR WITHEM: ...one of the last things that we did as a body was directing the Department of Education to improve their data collection abilities. LB 940, last year, we mandated that they improve their accreditation requirements. All of these things, we have been moving the Department of Education toward a system of providing greater accountability to the Legislature concerning the question of whether our young people are doing well in schools. What LB 744 does is it creates the Education Data Center within the Department of Education. The duties of that center will be to be a collection point for statistical information concerning the quality of schools in our state, will provide information back to the Legislature, and will also publish a report to the Legislature on an annual basis concerning the level of quality in Nebraska schools. It creates