

to. Before I get into this specific amendment, a comment or two on what 744 does and why I think it's maybe one of the three or four most important bills dealing with education policy before the Legislature this session. We, each year, are called upon as policymakers in our state to make countless decisions about education, about what will improve education quality, what will...things we want to avoid that might deplete education quality, what...how we want to see our schools behave and what we want to see happen to our young people. We have found in the last three or four years that there is an amazingly lack of concrete information that helps us evaluate our school system and helps us make a determination whether those young people coming through our system are, in fact, receiving a quality education. You may, if you were an early riser this morning, have seen an article that appeared with my name on it in the Omaha World-Herald this morning, commenting on the Secretary of Education's comments relevant to the so-called "Wall Chart", the Wall Chart being the...the report put out each year by the Secretary of Education. And even that Wall Chart gives us precious little information about how well our schools are really doing. LB 7...and then this Legislature has in the last three or four years made repeated requests to our Department of Education to improve its data collection abilities. We have passed legislation in 994 requiring a performance based accreditation system. We have done studies of the amount of data available on education. We have reviewed independent studies from outside individuals, outside consultants, and we passed a legislative resolution last year urging the department to do a better job of collecting data. LB 744 is the bill then that was introduced this year to bring this about. I might also comment that we have, as an Education Committee, heard proposals from other legislators calling for a far, far stricter accountability system than you would see in LB 744. The committee has chosen to advance a bill that is less onerous to local school districts than some of those other proposals, yet one that we think will provide information and data that will be helpful to us in evaluating our school system. Since LB 744 went to Final Reading, there have been people in this state who have, in my opinion, I will say it's my opinion, been misinterpreting what the effects of LB 744 will be. They have expressed a number of concerns to me and other members of the Legislature...I know some members of the Legislature have said they have received more comments on this piece of legislation than they have on any other bill this session. I would like to say that, you know, the concerns that were expressed were not