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has provided that incentive to allow those barriers to be lowered between school districts, and have resulted, I think, in opportunities for greater educational opportunities in those communities that have elected to take part in the system. So I would hope that you pay attention to the issue as it evolves in the next few minutes, and lend your support to what I believe is a good solution to what has proposed to be a very, very difficult problem. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER KRISTENSEN: Senator Stuhr.

SENATOR STUHR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and members of the Legislature. I too just rise in support of this amendment. I'm very grateful that we were able to find some additional funds. I have several schools in my area, as many of you. And there has really been a great concern, I believe, across the state in keeping this program intact, and the fact that schools working on consolidation or unifying...it does...is a process that takes time. And if it was something that they were counting on, and then to kind of pull the wool from...out from underneath of them and not being able to provide any additional money, is almost a slap in the face. So I think that schools that...if you've had the experience in your district, it does take a number of years, four to five years, for them to really come together. It starts very slowly. And so I'm very supportive of this measure, that we are finding some additional funds. Particularly, I think, those first years when the unifying or the consolidating takes place is when you have your greatest cost, and I believe Senator Vrtiska pointed that out. So we're asking for your support in this amendment. I think it will be very beneficial. Thank you.

SPEAKER KRISTENSEN: Senator Dierks. Senator Dierks.

SENATOR DIERKS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, members of the Legislature. I just wanted to add support to the effort here. If you recall, the original unification bill was introduced by Senator Bohlike two years ago, and I made it my priority bill. And the reason, I think, that it was introduced was because of some interest among three schools in my legislative district who wanted to try this process. They had a very aggressive group of superintendents who pursued this situation, did a great job. They even came down here and presented their view of this thing