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FLOOR DEBATE

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\$125 million in the upcoming biennium. This would increase state spending for K-12 education for the second year of our budget biennium to more than \$920 million, even without an increase in special education funding. There are no more important expenditures than those for K-12 education, and I hope you will join me in supporting that request. But I hope you will also insist along with me that the additional funding be provided only if we are willing to move to a more efficient and equitable organizational structure. Concerning equity, we cannot justify a system that allows students and parents, or taxpayers, to withdraw from the broader community that supports public education. You will hear the comment, quote, Class I's should be allowed to decide on their own when to close, end quote. Let me rephrase that, as follows. Quote, if you have an educational issue that should be addressed in your K-12 school, you cannot do so because I, the Class I board, can dictate that you use funds instead to support an expensive parallel elementary school, end quote. If a decision is taken to close an attendance center under the provisions of LB 126, then that is a local decision by locally elected school board members who represent both parents and students and the others who pay the local share of education costs. Everyone is needed to help support the K-12 education system that we all benefit from, and everyone should be allowed a voice in the decisions about how money is spent. Every teacher in our public education system deserves equitable treatment. We cannot justify paying teachers in Class I systems substantially less than those in K-12 systems given our need to attract retain an outstanding teaching staff. More on equity: We cannot defend a structure that allows those students most in need to be underfunded compared to those less in need. I repeat, we cannot defend such an arrangement. I will provide you evidence that our current organizational structure allows just such an arrangement. Finally, we cannot hide from our responsibility. This situation will not correct itself. The equity issues will not go away, and the longer we wait the more taxpayer money that is wasted on high cost per student and on schools that have no students. We can address these issues by moving forward with LB 126. I have prepared a four-part handout for you. It's white and it's got more than four pages, but I would ask that you look at this. The first page is a summary of information about our current school