

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY THE CLERK OF THE LEGISLATURE
Transcriber's Office
FLOOR DEBATE

May 20, 2005

LB 126

Mr. President, members. The numbers are real. I have to say that I'm disappointed. I have to say that as we've looked at this--and perhaps this has been good for me, because it has certainly brought community education onto my radar screen. And I think for too long I've taken things for granted, that once you've had something for a while, you think it's always going to be there, and you take it for granted. Shame on me. I regret that. It's been a very interesting journey, and like I said, I'm disappointed. I'm disappointed mostly because we are turning a curve in the attempt to improve schools, and yet we are totally turning our heads, our eyes, and our backs on quality, and especially quality in an affordable format. We have gotten so caught up in bureaucratic methods in education today that we're chasing quality teachers out of the profession, we're costing the taxpayers more and more dollars, and they're getting mad. We get frustrated when we can't leverage that community support, and expect a new building to be built with a bond issue. We at the state level get frustrated; wonder why. When I hear that this bill is not about closing buildings, but it's just about organization, it's that bottom-line vote. It is centralizing control in a larger format, and I would like to know when large is large enough. It's been interesting, in my research lately, to learn that the size of the Lincoln Public School District and Omaha Public School District is actually very large, even in the national context. When we look at the size of school districts around the nation, a lot of them are much smaller. Even in an urban format, those school districts are smaller than Lincoln Public Schools and Omaha Public Schools. But you know what? Lincoln Public Schools insists, absolutely insists, on getting bigger, and I say that because there are board members wanting to take over Norris, Waverly, Malcolm. They've said that. And then they fight legislation on school district boundary policy, so that as...the bigger the city of Lincoln gets, so goes the school district, even though they don't need to get bigger, and they probably shouldn't get bigger. But how dare we even look at quality as a measure. As long as they can get their fancy school building that costs 50 percent more than Papillion-LaVista, they're okay. Now they even want more. I have a problem with that. But then again, that was a local decision. All I want is a local decision across Nebraska for a lot of the education policies. I don't