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LB 577

SENATOR CUDABACK: Senator Raikes, to open on LB 577.

SENATOR RAIKES: Thank you very much, Mr. President, members of the Legislature. LB 577 expands the state of Nebraska's effort in the area of early childhood education. To introduce the topic, I would call your attention to the NCSL magazine, which you, I think, have all received recently. But I think there's an article in there that describes very well the importance of this particular effort. I quote: If you walk a good preschool classroom, you might see a teacher reading to a group of kids, children immersed in an art project, little ones playing on a computer, or getting ready for a field trip to a nearby museum or public library. Those children, mounting research shows, will do better in school, are more likely to attend college. As adults, they will have better jobs and pay more taxes. They will even be better parents. The good news is that more and more children go to preschool. In 2002, 66 percent of four-year-olds attended. Some schools are government supported. Others are private. Today, at least 40 states provide state funding for preschool programs, compared to only 10 in 1980. Parents from all income ranges send their children to preschool, although better educated parents with higher incomes have the highest participation rate. Preschools are designed to provide education and a safe, caring environment. Some states fund programs that incorporate the needs of working parents, sometimes by coordinating their programs with Head Start and childcare subsidy programs to ensure full-day services. One of the striking findings in early education is the size of the achievement gap at the start of kindergarten between children who have gone to preschool and those who have not. That difference hardly ever goes away. It continues in reading and math achievement in the early grades, and throughout school, and into the job market. I would encourage you to take a look at that article, because I think it makes basically the case for LB 577. Let me tell you a little bit about the details of LB 577. As you may recall, the Legislature has already adopted an increase in the appropriation for early childhood education grants. That occurred in our discussion of the mainline budget bill, which is now passed. Therefore, LB 577 has no A bill. There is no additional spending associated with this particular