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Thompson, Smith, Bourne, and others.

SENATOR STUHR: Thank you, Mr. President and members of the body. Today we are debating one of the most important education issues that I feel has been before the Legislature in some time. It's important because it affects over 100,000 of our students; 45,000 of those students are in the Omaha Public Schools. I believe it is an issue that the Legislature must address. This does not mean that all of the problems can be solved immediately. I believe that we have before us some steps that we will take, slowly, step by step, to address the concerns that we have. I believe the formation of the learning community council is that first step, and we've talked a little bit about it. I do, however, believe that the multiple school districts must retain their boundaries, they must be efficiently sized, and they must have significant autonomy. The learning community will take time in our discussions to develop. In our discussions in the Education Committee, one of the amendments that we had come up with recently was to allow for a facilitator, and I believe that's a very important part, because all of the people involved certainly have their opinions and their own ideas on how to address the problem. I think it might even be important that that facilitator be someone from out of state. But I believe that's a very important first part. I can only liken it a little bit to the Water Policy Task Force that I was a member, Senator Schrock and I, who brought 49 people together and we said, this will never work. How is this going to work? All of these people with different ideas, and certainly not in agreement. We did have a facilitator, we worked through everything by consensus, which I think is an important part. We don't always agree on every detail, but the thing that was often said to us, can you live with this? Not that we agree with it wholeheartedly, but is it something that we can live with? This bill is very complex, but I do think that we can work through it, if we just take it slowly. I have served on the Education Committee for 12 years, and in all of the dealings and all of the hearings and all of the bills that we have brought forth, I believe the Education Committee has always had the student foremost in the decisions that we are making. They are our first priority, as has been stated. Also, another concern is accountability of funding. We are talking