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Education Committee  
October 03, 2011

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[LR211]

The Committee on Education met at 9:00 a.m. on Monday, October 3, 2011, in Room 1525 of the State Capitol, Lincoln, Nebraska for the purpose of conducting a public hearing on LR211. Senators Present: Greg Adams, Chairperson; Gwen Howard, Vice Chairperson; Ken Schilz; Brenda Council; Abbie Cornett; Kate Sullivan; Bill Avery; and Ken Haar. Senators absent: None. [LR211]

SENATOR ADAMS: We are scheduled to begin at 9:00, and we have two hearings today, and we are going to have to limit the time. It looks as though we have a lot of people that would like to testify and probably have a lot of things to say. We do have more committee people coming, but we are going to go ahead and to begin. I want to welcome everyone who is here today. The first hearing that we have is on distance ed, and that was LR211, and then at 10:45, we are going to switch over to higher ed, governance, and so...pardon? And that's right, that particular session will be...we will go into Exec Session on that, but this is a public hearing. Let me begin by first of all not only welcoming you but introducing the committee members and staff people who are here, and I'm even going to take the liberty of introducing those that are going to be here, better be. First of all, to the far right, our committee clerk is Becki Collins. Senator Schilz can't make it today, and I no sooner than begin the introductions, and here comes Senator Council. Next to her hopefully will be Senator Cornett. The committee's legal counsel, Tammy Barry, is next to me. My name is Greg Adams. To my left is the committee Vice Chair, Gwen Howard. Next to her, Senator Sullivan. Senator Avery I am confident will be here. We will send out the troops looking for him. And Senator Haar is here, and the research analyst for the committee, Kris Valentin is here. For purposes of making sure that we can get as much testimony as possible in this first hearing, we are going to use the light system and go with 5 minutes, and so if you could kind of, at best you can, restrict yourself and watch the light. Otherwise, I fear that we may not get everybody up to the mic that would like to and get all the questions asked that the committee may want to ask. I am going to introduce this this morning, and then what I

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will do is to open it up to testimony. There is no defined order today for this first hearing. You can come up at will, and the committee will hear your testimony and ask questions if they have it. In 2006, actually in 2005, a bill was introduced in the Legislature by Senator Stuhr, then Senator Stuhr, and cosponsored by Senator Raikes, which was designed to create a task force to look at the technology needs of schools in providing distance education. In fact, I might reach back further than that, and I won't tell you the date when I sat in an undergraduate class at Wayne State College and was shown how to thread a 16 mm film projector in anticipation of the technology needs that I would have while a teacher. I was also shown how to start up a cassette player, and the instructor told all of us in the class that this will eventually replace you. (Laugh). Well, I didn't believe it that then any more than I believe necessarily that distance education might completely replace teachers or should. However, however, I think that the Legislature knew in 2005 that we were headed in a direction of new technology, and we needed to stay on board here at the Legislature to make sure the schools had access to it, and that task force was primarily tasked with looking at the technology needs of distance education. Out of that, LB1208 was passed which was to help schools get on board with technology, and it is my feeling at this point that what we need to do is to find out today where we are at. This committee needs to find out where we are at with distance ed and what does the state have to offer. Where are school districts at today compared to where they were at the time of LB1208, and see what is there and to determine whether or not ultimately there is more that needs to be done, and if so, what role the Legislature may need to play in all of that. So with that, I put in this LR211, and I anticipate that we will have a lot of folks here to testify, and hopefully, we come away by 10:30 today with a broader picture of where the state is at. We know that particularly in our rural schools, but probably in all 251 of our school districts, there is some need for distance education and the use of this kind of technology. And again, I say this committee needs to find out what the status of things are. So with that, I will open up the testimony and we'll begin the morning. First testifier? Good morning. [LR211]

J.B. MILLIKEN: Hi. No one was moving, so I decided to... [LR211]

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SENATOR ADAMS: Break the ice. [LR211]

J.B. MILLIKEN: ...get mine in now and get this part over with. You may wonder why...well, first of all, my name is J.B. Milliken. I am the president of the University of Nebraska. You may wonder why the first testifier today on virtual education for K-12 is from higher education, but I wanted to be here today. And I thank you for the invitation to be here today to express our very strong support for efforts by this committee and the Legislature and the Governor to provide opportunities for Nebraskans that don't currently exist, at least in a systematic way, so that all students across the state of Nebraska in our K-12 education system have the opportunities that those students at our largest high schools do. That in rural areas in Nebraska in particular, smaller schools have the opportunity for their students to take advance placement courses, senior level science and mathematics courses that might not otherwise be available. So the University of Nebraska has joined with our colleagues in the P-16 Initiative which is cochaired by Senator Adams and Commissioner Breed, chaired by the Governor, and I serve as one of the cochairs as well. And a key part of our strategy is to provide maximum educational opportunities to students across Nebraska. Now the University of Nebraska has a longstanding tradition in this area. For about 80 years, the Independent Study High School has provided education at a distance for students in Nebraska and elsewhere. You will hear later today from my colleague, Barbara Shousha, who is the director of the Independent Study High School. It may interest you to know that most of our enrollments are outside of Nebraska. We began with correspondence courses. We now have an entire digital curriculum to provide students the opportunity to learn with a laptop at a distance using current technology. The Governor announced a couple of months ago the Nebraska Virtual Partnership, and there are several of our colleagues from the Department of Education, ESU network and the university who are here today to discuss the virtual partnership. At the time of his announcement, the university announced that it would launch a pilot program called the Nebraska Virtual Scholars Program. We wanted to test whether there was demand for the courses offered by the

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virtual high school, and particularly by the Independent Study High School, so we offered 50 free enrollments that, and I say free, and I will clarify this, and Barbara will be able to discuss this in more detail, but the Nebraska Independent Study High School is a self-supporting entity, always has been. It does not receive state funds but exists on the basis of tuition generated. Nebraskans get a discount currently on tuition, but there is still a cost to supporting the Independent Study High School. We offered 50 free courses. We said that we would look particularly at those schools that didn't have the opportunity for AP courses for science and math and also look at those schools that had a traditionally underrepresented number of students participating in those courses and in our high school. We received 74 applications, and they were all good applications, and we decided to accept all of them. So instead of 50, we provided 74 free enrollments including students taking AP calculus and physics and other course that were not offered in their high school and where there was only one student who had an interest in enrolling, but in this way, offering them to have the same opportunity that they would have anywhere in the state. So the key question it seems to me that this committee is left with, and this is...I see I have turned yellow, and I am finishing now...is if this is indeed an important part of offering a full range of educational opportunities to students across Nebraska regardless of where they live, regardless of the size of the school district where they attend, what means does the state need to provide to provide this opportunity as part of its educational system? It can't be done...it can't be continued indefinitely the way this pilot program is, and it seems to me an unsatisfactory solution for parents and students to pay for the opportunity themselves to take what students would have available in a larger school district in one of our metropolitan areas. So I commend you for taking this on in this study. I think this is a critically important piece in how in 2011 Nebraska provides educational opportunity across the state. I would be happy to answer any questions, but if you are as wise as I think you are, you will wait until my colleagues are here who have far more answers than I would have for you, but I just wanted to express our strong support for this pilot, our strong support for the work you're doing and diving into this important area. Thank you. [LR211]

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SENATOR ADAMS: Thank you, J.B., for being here and for your comments. Are there questions of the president? Yes, Senator Sullivan. [LR211]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you Senator. Thank you, Mr. Milliken. I will save my other questions on the...for your colleague, but one particular one on your comment about the virtual partnership of all the entities. What is your vision of how that partnership might play out? [LR211]

J.B. MILLIKEN: Well, there is a good deal of work, and I think that you will hear from the ESU coordinating group from Matt later this morning. There is different levels of work going on at different ESUs in providing distance education today, and some are providing more opportunities. NET provides opportunities and is creating a virtual library and has support through, now it's digital conversion, to provide lots of opportunities to supplement the work that we're doing and others. So I think that what we want to try to do, and that was really the goal of the partnership, and we signed an MOU maybe two months ago when we announced this, that the entities involved, the Department of Education, the ESUs, the university and NET were going to work together to take advantage of the work that each had done and take advantage and leverage each other's work so that we offer the most cost effective way to deliver what I think will be digital education across Nebraska. [LR211]

SENATOR ADAMS: Senator Haar. [LR211]

SENATOR HAAR: Yes. Thanks for being here. Does the university currently work with other universities? I mean, I kind of hear snippets of stuff like this going on all over the country. To what extent, you know, do you participate with other schools? [LR211]

J.B. MILLIKEN: You know, I think that is a good question to ask Barbara to follow up on. [LR211]

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SENATOR HAAR: Okay. [LR211]

J.B. MILLIKEN: I don't think there is a lot of collaboration between schools. There are other states that offer virtual high school plans. Florida has been doing this for years. There are others, and in fact, they offer them across the country and compete with other institutions. We're, I guess we're confident in the quality of the University of Nebraska Lincoln's Independent Study High School, and we would hope that in Nebraska policy makers would recognize the, I think the importance of building on the work, the good work that has been done by Nebraska institutions who are, in fact, accountable to you. [LR211]

SENATOR ADAMS: Other questions for the president? If not, J.B., thank you for taking your time this morning. [LR211]

J.B. MILLIKEN: Thanks very much. [LR211]

SENATOR ADAMS: Next testifier? Good morning. [LR211]

BARBARA WOLF SHOUSHA: Good morning. [LR211]

SENATOR ADAMS: Could you state your name for the record, please? [LR211]

BARBARA WOLF SHOUSHA: (Exhibit 1) Yes. I'm Barbara Wolf Shousha. I'm the director of the UNL Independent Study High School. [LR211]

SENATOR ADAMS: Go right ahead. [LR211]

BARBARA WOLF SHOUSHA: Thanks for your attention this morning. I would like to talk just briefly, a few more details about the school, how we serve Nebraska schools in partnership to serve students, and then more about the virtual scholars pilot that

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President Milliken referenced. So, we've been in operation, as he stated, for 80 years. In the beginning, the goal was to provide high school coursework throughout Nebraska to communities regardless of their geography, so that is still the mission that we have 80 years later. And in addition to serving the rural areas, however, with curriculum, now that we are a fully operational Nebraska public high school which offers our courses on-line, we are also into the urban districts as well. And our offerings include everything that any other Nebraska public school has to offer, and so it's a full course catalog of core programs as well as alternative options too for schools. So in the past two years, just to give you a sense of our scope, we have served Nebraska with 2,800 course enrollments, and these have been distributed across the state, rural and urban. And that's, a lot of students that we're serving, a lot of schools, approximately 150 different schools that we've partnered within that time. That's Nebraska, and that is about 11 percent of what we do. We're also in every one of the other 50 states and over 100 countries around the world. So really, when I say regardless of geography, that's exactly what I mean. It's delivered over the Internet, so anyone with an Internet connection can participate. So why would a school choose to use us, and in particular, in Nebraska, what are schools trying to get done with us? And really, what they're trying to do is solve problems. So if you imagine yourself a building level administrator in a small school in Nebraska looking at your resources to serve, it's a balancing act to provide everything that is needed for all of the students that you serve, and I would say that Nebraska schools do that well. There are, however, always those situations where there isn't a match, whether it's a very high-performing student who desires curriculum options that the school doesn't have or alternative students that aren't performing well because of the, I guess, emotional noise of a high school classroom, and they are better suited for the on-line individual instruction. So, we are challenging the schools to make use of the resources and to see what Nebraska has to offer, because I have always said that Nebraska can do this well. A little bit later Matt Blomstedt will talk about the Nebraska Virtual Partnership in more detail. But one of the goals, to answer the question that I have for the partnership, is to connect those local schools with the nationally recognized curriculum that we have. So the Independent Study High School has for 8 years won

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national awards for the strength of our curriculum. It is matched to Nebraska standards, and it is provided only by Nebraska public high school teachers and recognized by the U.S. Distance Learning Association for Best Practices. So the partnership is a way to connect local schools with that strength. When schools work with us, one of the advantages that they find is that we are delivered over the Internet. There is no equipment to purchase beyond that. There is no licensing that a school has to purchase. They aren't in a contract where they have to have a minimum. We really try to solve problems. If they have one student who needs one offering, we do that if they have a full curriculum line that they need to extend. So, some examples I think to share would be from the Nebraska Virtual Partnership, which is happening right now, the applications that President Milliken referenced. What problems were they trying to solve? So one school in particular, the smaller rural school, they are challenged with new requirements of schools having to offer three years of good strong mathematics. Not all students that they are serving can achieve three strong years of mathematics. It's hard for them to offer such a variety to address all the types of students that they have. So with us they're in a blended approach of using their own curriculum offerings and some of ours. So that is an example of how we partner with the schools. So really, this pilot is showing clearly that there is a need and a desire for on-line learning options. The partnership I think will be a way to connect that to the local schools, and the goal would be to keep those students in their community enrolled in their schools but still accessing the coursework that Nebraska can provide, and I believe that we can do that well, and I would be happy to answer any questions that you have. [LR211]

SENATOR ADAMS: Thank you, Barbara. [LR211]

BARBARA WOLF SHOUSHA: Um-hum. [LR211]

SENATOR ADAMS: Before we start in on questions, it has been several months since we held a hearing, and this Chair forgot that you also need to fill out your testifier sheet and spell your name for the record so the Clerk can transcribe all of that, if you would



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please. We will open it up for questions. Committee members? Yes, Senator Haar.  
[LR211]

SENATOR HAAR: Uh...,a number of questions here. Do you see a potential, and this is just sort of brainstorming, I mean right now, so often community colleges get students who haven't gotten up to, you know, where they need to be in high school, of using the electronic media as a way of catching kids up before they go to junior college or whatever. [LR211]

BARBARA WOLF SHOUSHA: Yes. Yes, and we do that now actually. We are serving in that instance because of the level of coursework that we offer, the college preparatory, that we have help schools get those students ready to achieve, to meet those admissions requirements. [LR211]

SENATOR HAAR: So, and there are actually...okay, I just went to my 50th high school reunion (laugh). When I went to Lincoln High way back when, there was this large room, and they had televisions all around the side, and there were 200 of us who sat and watched history on television. That's not the way it's, teachers are used anymore, is it? [LR211]

BARBARA WOLF SHOUSHA: There are options for that. Not through my particular school, but in Nebraska, there is the use of video still, and again, that is something that probably Matt through the ESUs could address. [LR211]

SENATOR HAAR: So what then would yours look like? [LR211]

BARBARA WOLF SHOUSHA: Ours looks like, it has a variety of appearances depending on the school that we partner with. It may be, in the case of a school which is using our Spanish right now, all of the students are together in a cohort, but they are working individually at a PC. And that advantage is that they work at their own pace

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one-on-one with our instructor and the material, but the school provides that structured setting where there's accountability from their local proctor and the language lab materials. Or, it could be a case where we have a student who is trying to stay on sequence for graduation. It is a one-off student. The school has sponsored her the use of our program, but she is working entirely independently at her own, so she is working at home with her own Internet connection and will achieve credit with us which will then transfer into the local school, so it really becomes the school's credit. [LR211]

SENATOR HAAR: And is there always real interaction? I mean, you know, 50 years ago it was just watching somebody. With modern technology, though, there is a give and take between students and instructors, right? [LR211]

BARBARA WOLF SHOUSHA: Yes. In our case, we are asynchronous which means that it's not in real time, so the student works at their own pace, and the interaction with the instructor is over the Internet, and it is a question and answer, it's e-mails to get information. We are NCAA approved, and that means that the NCAA requires us to have a certain high level of interaction for our students, but that is done through the Internet connection. [LR211]

SENATOR HAAR: So, would a teacher, if I were a teacher in your school, is that my only job, or am I a regular teacher in another school, or is there a combination? [LR211]

BARBARA WOLF SHOUSHA: It's a combination. We have some full-time teachers, and we have part-time teachers who may be already teaching in a local public school, and then they are doing part-time instruction with us. [LR211]

SENATOR HAAR: And then you said a full range of courses, and I could see how where this would really work well with math. What about chemistry? How would you do chem lab? [LR211]

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BARBARA WOLF SHOUSHA: We actually do laboratory work for chemistry and physics, and when I mentioned the U.S. Distance Learning Award, the Best Practice Award is for our physics class this year. And so the laboratories are on-line laboratories. They also receive materials that they have to work with internally, so we provide a science kit that they work with at their own local location, but then their lab reports are all uploaded to us, so all of the results have to be provided up to us through an uplink. [LR211]

SENATOR HAAR: So in a chemistry class, they actually get chemicals... [LR211]

BARBARA WOLF SHOUSHA: They do. [LR211]

SENATOR HAAR: ...and all that equipment, and is that through the ESUs then as well, or do you work with them? [LR211]

BARBARA WOLF SHOUSHA: I don't know how the ESUs provide that. This is through the Independent Study High School that we provide that, and that is mailed out to the students. [LR211]

SENATOR HAAR: Okay, and then the role of administration, I mean, is there a future where there are no school buildings? [LR211]

BARBARA WOLF SHOUSHA: I cannot imagine that. I really, I don't think that that is an either/or proposition, and that is something that in the partnership we've talked about a lot. There is both/and scenarios where is both an administration and a local presence and the use of distance education. And I think that that serves the varying purposes of a high school beyond just the transmission of academics, but that whole high school environment. I think what the great thing is about the partnership and what we're talking about through our school is that the building level administration really can decide what are they able to provide and where would they need that assistance. So the flexibility for

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a building level administrator to craft a program that is right for that community is very important. [LR211]

SENATOR HAAR: And then do you find...I mean, in a way this is a real choice for students and parents, that parents like homeschoolers use it, I'm sure... [LR211]

BARBARA WOLF SHOUSHA: Yes. Yes, they do. [LR211]

SENATOR HAAR: ...parochial schools and so on. [LR211]

BARBARA WOLF SHOUSHA: Yes. Yes, they do. We do. Of the 150 or so just Nebraska schools that were working with it. It's variety of actual schools and communities, learning centers, which are not local accredited schools, or we have homeschool cooperatives who work with us. And again, it's a matter of the flexibility that people need that drives them to choose a solution like ours. [LR211]

SENATOR HAAR: Is there anything similar to what you do, your high school, in elementary? [LR211]

BARBARA WOLF SHOUSHA: The only element in Nebraska did you mean? [LR211]

SENATOR HAAR: Yeah, yeah. [LR211]

BARBARA WOLF SHOUSHA: I don't know of any in elementary for Nebraska. []

SENATOR HAAR: Okay. Thank you very much. [LR211]

SENATOR ADAMS: Senator Sullivan. [LR211]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you Senator, and thank you for your remarks. What

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percent of the student enrollment are Nebraskans? [LR211]

BARBARA WOLF SHOUSHA: Of my entire school population, which is about 3000 students, 11 percent are Nebraska students. [LR211]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: So you're worldwide or... [LR211]

BARBARA WOLF SHOUSHA: Yes. We're in about 130 countries right now. [LR211]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: So how do you market yourself? [LR211]

BARBARA WOLF SHOUSHA: Well, that's an interesting proposition, because we are a nonprofit, so we are priced just above our operating cost. We don't carry a very heavy infrastructure, but we generally market through educational conferences, so the U.S. Department of State sponsors educational conferences for overseas schools, and we attend those, and that is where we connect with other learning organizations in other countries who desire, in that case, a U.S. based high school education. [LR211]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: And the cost is on a per-credit-hour basis, and if so, what is it? [LR211]

BARBARA WOLF SHOUSHA: It's per class. [LR211]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Per class. [LR211]

BARBARA WOLF SHOUSHA: And so, there is a discount for Nebraska students, but generally the cost is \$160 plus a \$50 administration fee, so about \$210 for the course, and books are on top of that. And the cost for books, or in the case of science laboratory materials, would vary from course to course. [LR211]

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SENATOR SULLIVAN: And that scholarship offering that you made available to students... [LR211]

BARBARA WOLF SHOUSHA: Yes. [LR211]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: What were the standards for the application? [LR211]

BARBARA WOLF SHOUSHA: It had to be a Rule 10 or Rule 14 school, so accredited or approved school in Nebraska, and then we had preferential criteria which were first-time users of the program. Schools who were interested in science, technology, engineering, and math would have been given a preference. Schools who had an underserved population, rural or harder-to-serve students. But as President Milliken mentioned, in the end he served all of them rather than making a selection from the applications. [LR211]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: And who is your faculty, and where do they come from? [LR211]

BARBARA WOLF SHOUSHA: They are all Nebraska public school teachers, and so they are kind of distributed. There is a, I would say the majority of them are probably around the Lincoln or the eastern part of the state, but they're distributed, and they're all Nebraska high school teachers. [LR211]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: So they are, these teachers are on staff at their respective school districts, and they're not faculty at the University of Nebraska? [LR211]

BARBARA WOLF SHOUSHA: It's a mix. [LR211]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Oh, it's... [LR211]

BARBARA WOLF SHOUSHA: Yeah. I have some who are full time with the

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Independent Study High School and others who are either just working part time for us, so they're not on the faculty anywhere else. They have to be, obviously, certificated and currently up to date with all of their requirements. And then some do work in other schools and then serve with us part time. [LR211]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: I see. Thank you. [LR211]

SENATOR ADAMS: Senator Council. [LR211]

SENATOR COUNCIL: Yes. Thank you, Senator Adams, and thank you, Barbara. I had just a couple of quick questions. In response to Senator Sullivan, you stated that about 11 percent of your current enrollment are Nebraska students, so that's about 330. How many school or school districts are represented by that 330? [LR211]

BARBARA WOLF SHOUSHA: The statistics that I looked up was a snapshot of the past two years, so it's aggregated over two years, but it's about 150. [LR211]

SENATOR COUNCIL: Okay. So there is about 150 different schools that these approximately 330 youngsters are associated with. [LR211]

BARBARA WOLF SHOUSHA: Correct. [LR211]

SENATOR COUNCIL: Now, do you have to have some type of a contractual arrangement with the school in order for that youngster to participate in your program? [LR211]

BARBARA WOLF SHOUSHA: Well, again it depends on what would cause them to use it. We do have MOUs with some of our larger engagements. Like, we have an alternative program that we work with a large number of students. And in that case, we really kind of spell out the support that we will offer and what they will offer. But there

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are other schools where a student has decided they and their family will pay because they have an interest in the coursework and it's not offered locally. And in that case, our agreement really is just with the school to accept the credit, which because we are a Nebraska public high school, it's just a transfer of credit from one school to another. [LR211]

SENATOR COUNCIL: Okay, so all you determine in that latter case is whether the high school that the youngster is enrolled in will accept the credit... [LR211]

BARBARA WOLF SHOUSHA: Um-hum. Correct. [LR211]

SENATOR COUNCIL: ...and not whether the high school will approve the youngster taking the course. [LR211]

BARBARA WOLF SHOUSHA: No. Typically, they do work through the local school, but any individual in Nebraska, any student could enroll with us. We have open enrollment as a public school, so. [LR211]

SENATOR COUNCIL: Thank you. [LR211]

SENATOR ADAMS: Another question, Senator Haar. [LR211]

SENATOR HAAR: This goes back to what Milliken was asking about. What about cost. So if I'm a little, if I'm at a high school and I want to take a course, does that school pay for it, or do I still pay for it? [LR211]

BARBARA WOLF SHOUSHA: If the school has determined that they would like to use our curriculum offerings to extend what they can offer, then the school can pay us directly. [LR211]



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SENATOR HAAR: Okay, and if somebody graduates from your high school, do they have a GED, or do they have a regular certificate? [LR211]

BARBARA WOLF SHOUSHA: No. It's a high school diploma, because we are a Nebraska public school. Like other public schools, we are a diploma-issuing body. [LR211]

SENATOR HAAR: Okay. My one son got his MBA through the University of Phoenix. He really worked hard. I was surprised at the discipline required to do on-line learning, and they also have a high school curriculum. Do you work with other groups like that that offer a high school curriculum? [LR211]

BARBARA WOLF SHOUSHA: No. In many cases, they would be competitors to us, so all of our curriculum is developed at the university by our own instructional designers who are certified in high school, building high school curriculum. So, we do have I would say a very good collegial relationship with the other university-sponsored programs. Some other universities have high school programs, and we see them at conferences and I would say share with them on a benchmarking basis. But no, we really are able to offer what we develop directly to Nebraska. [LR211]

SENATOR HAAR: Okay, and then finally, you say you have about 3,000 students. Why don't you have more? And that is not a criticism. [LR211]

BARBARA WOLF SHOUSHA: No, no. [LR211]

SENATOR HAAR: I'm just saying, what are the barriers to actually increasing? [LR211]

BARBARA WOLF SHOUSHA: Well, part of it is just that marketing reach on a global basis, that marketing reach is finding the students in the world who desire a U.S. high school diploma. Nationally, some of the issues are school districts accepting a

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relationship with somebody who is not in their home state, so I have a large relationship with several other school districts in other states where they have been using our offerings because they didn't find a way to develop it on their own. But that can be a barrier with people saying that we would like to do this within our own state. And in Nebraska, the challenge is really just getting the word out, working, you know, and that is something the partnership may be able to do is letting school officials realize what is available to them. And again, the schools who are under resourced are in a balancing act of trying to offer everything that they need to offer and maintain a good strong curriculum in their district, and so it's really those one-off situations where we serve. So it's a niche market in many ways where we've really got to match ourselves to people who have a need for us rather than a sort of broad-based marketing that we could do. [LR211]

SENATOR HAAR: Um-hum. But it's a big change too, and you, that is part of the resistance I would think. [LR211]

BARBARA WOLF SHOUSHA: In some cases, yes, because I think people understand distance education in so many different ways. There is a lot of programs which are just offering curriculum over software, or there are others where it's a sort of national level offering, and you really don't know where the instruction is coming from, and all of that plays into people's aversion, I think, to distance education. But what we're able to show is that it's a school with teachers and a relationship with the Department of Ed, and I think we are successful in working with schools because what they have to do for their students, we have to do for ours, so it's very recognizable. [LR211]

SENATOR HAAR: Okay. Thank you very much. [LR211]

SENATOR ADAMS: Any final questions? Thank you Barbara. [LR211]

BARBARA WOLF SHOUSHA: Thank you. [LR211]

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SENATOR ADAMS: Next testifier? And again, I would remind you about filling out the testifier sheet and stating and spelling your name for the record. [LR211]

MATT BLOMSTEDT: (Exhibit 2) Good morning. I'm Matt Blomstedt. It's B-l-o-m-s-t-e-d-t, and I'm the executive director of the ESU Coordinating Council. It's my pleasure to be here today. This has been kind of a, maybe a year or a 2-year-long saga in talking about what resources Nebraska has in this arena, and I'm really actually quite pleased and excited that we've arrived at a point in time where this partnership is actually possible. I do have a handout, actually for you, relative to the partnership agreement that President Milliken had referred to as well as Barbara. Within the partnership, we tried to identify the types of things that we wanted to be able to accomplish, and so there is some goals there. I won't read them all to you, but one of the first goals was ultimately to identify what is going on within Nebraska, and how do we start to organize those resources to better enhance what is going on in virtual education but education generally as well. So, that's a substantial thing. I think what we did was examine, you know, who could be core partners, and I say core partners because we actually don't want to close the door to other future partners relative to this activity. It's really important that we, as we study it, as we look at who is available doing what different elements of this virtual education world, that we actually find a way to open those doors relative to bringing them in and having real assets within the state. There are several partners hopefully that will come to the table as a result of that effort. I do want to kind of highlight a few of the things that we've done in the ESU world, and I think as part of kind of creating an inventory of what has been going on, I will try to hit some of those. But, there is several different things that ESUs and now the ESU Coordinating Council are trying to bring to the table relative to that partnership. And one is kind of an overall, I'll say technology aptitude that we have within the ESUs. There is certainly the notion of having reliable Internet and bandwidth for all these different types of digital things, but one of the things that we do try to provide within the ESUs is something called a learning management system, and learning management systems

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are things like Blackboard or ANGEL or Moodle is another one, so if you hear those terms and you hear LMS, that's what that means. But we've tried to do that in several different ways, because that is a good portable, consistent way of delivering digital media, digital resources, and digital courses. Digital media is kind of the next point, and you'll hear later from Gary Targoff with NET, but one of the points when you're talking about loading film strip...well, ESUs for a long time have actually tried to provide media services relative to school districts, and that included film strip at one point in time. Now, it's obviously a digital media world, and we've worked with actually PowerMedia Plus through Discovery Ed now to provide kind of a base product for school districts to have access to media. Now we're looking at and excited about the potential of working with NET relative to bringing even more resources to the table, so that is another component that we've worked on. Distance ed, I'll touch briefly on that. Distance ed, like Senator Adams had mentioned earlier, was part of the LB1208 push for entering into how can we do video transfer of courses essentially between schools. And there was activity already going on within the ESUs in different regions, and so LB1208 actually brought that together relative to having a statewide project on the delivery of those courses. Associated with that is kind of the notion of we have the responsibility within the ESUCC to broker the exchange of courses, and that is actually implemented as part of statute. And so what we've done underneath that is actually develop and recently develop a new kind of public-looking clearinghouse of the exchange of those courses, so you can actually go on-line and look at we call it NVIS, which we're not really good. We're really good at putting letters together whether they mean something or not, but Nebraska Virtual Instruction Source is that case. And so you can go on-line and look at the courses that are being exchanged. Gordon Roethemeyer is actually here, and I think he will touch a little more on some of those subjects, but we also have dual credit, so we kind of, as part of that activity is actually working with community colleges in dual credit. And then a big part is working relative to blended education, and that is making sure that we have a whole spectrum of opportunities available from on-line to video to traditional classroom settings that incorporate these different technologies. And then ultimately, professional development is a big component of what we do within the ESUs

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and trying to have...help teachers use these digital resources as effectively as possible. So we're committed to going ahead and working through this partnership. You see the goals and the processes there. We'll have actually, I think over the next 30-60 days even kind of some more pieces put together that help hopefully in your study of the situation and really look forward to continuing that work. [LR211]

SENATOR ADAMS: Thank you, Matt. Questions for Matt? Yes, Senator Sullivan. [LR211]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Okay. Your goals of the partnership are identified. Would you say there is a overarching mission to what you're trying to accomplish? [LR211]

MATT BLOMSTEDT: Well, I mean, I think all of the partners kind of bring their own strengths to the table, and I think our overarching mission is to be able to bring those strengths into one unifying place. And it kind of lays out, you know, let's put all the resources in one place and then allow for the state of Nebraska to make decisions about how we continue to invest in this. We want schools to be able to participate, and we want all the potential providers to be able to participate in that activity as well. So I think the overarching goal is let's start by bringing those resources to one place and coming up with somewhat that common vision for where we go. [LR211]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: And in that process, is there going to have to be someone, some entity that is sort of the "lead dog" so to speak? [LR211]

MATT BLOMSTEDT: I think we'd get to that point eventually. I mean, we certainly with the partners that we've had there, there is kind of an...and I'll let folks from the department speak, but there's a role already somewhat defined relative to the Department of Ed. There is a role somewhat defined for the ESU Coordinating Council. There is a role somewhat defined for NET, and the university, and the Independent Study High School. Whether or not that is exactly where you want it to go as a

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legislator, as a state. I mean that is, I think, things that we want to continue to work on, so. [LR211]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you. [LR211]

SENATOR ADAMS: Are there other questions? Matt, explain to me. Barbara was pretty definitive about Nebraska High School and how they operate. How do the...what do the ESUs do differently than Nebraska Independent High School? [LR211]

MATT BLOMSTEDT: Yeah. I think it's different. We actually don't provide the courses, per se. We have examples of where that might happen within the ESUs, but generally, from our statewide perspective, we're helping link up school districts that are offering a course in one place to a school district that wants it on another side. [LR211]

SENATOR ADAMS: So if Central High School is offering an AP calc course, the ESU becomes the conduit for delivery. [LR211]

MATT BLOMSTEDT: Right. That we actually help in that exchange and actually provide the professional development and the assistance in making that exchange possible. And part of it, another big part, is starting to identify the needs of those school districts in the sense that we used to be limited by the technologies available in this state, that you couldn't do that type of exchange easily across the state, and we're still actually engaged in making sure that those courses can be exchanged when you are using video like that. We also have on-line and blended environments, so you actually...you end up helping school districts kind of come up with the best models for those particular courses to exchange. [LR211]

SENATOR ADAMS: All right. So Barbara indicated that, I believe, that their offerings are asynchronous whereas the ESU is different than that? [LR211]

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MATT BLOMSTEDT: Yeah. Most of the courses when you're talking the traditional video exchange are obviously synchronous, so at the same time. When I mention blended, it's the idea of trying to use both sets of tools, that you might have some synchronous activity and some asynchronous activity being able to use both modes to make it hopefully more effective for the student regardless...and we've learned things. I think I've probably mentioned even in front of the committee before, you learn things in the exchange of any type of course that you have to come up with different policies, like cell phones have changed dramatically and student use of cell phones and how they contact instructors at a remote site. So I think there is a lot of those examples that we can learn from. [LR211]

SENATOR ADAMS: May I ask you, Barbara mentioned 11 percent of their enrollment are Nebraska high schools or high school students. What about the ESU? How broad is your involvement with the public schools? [LR211]

MATT BLOMSTEDT: Well, I mean just on distance ed exchange courses, I think there are, and Gordon can correct me later, but there is roughly about 400 exchange courses with about 4,000 students, so. [LR211]

SENATOR ADAMS: About 4,000 students you say. [LR211]

MATT BLOMSTEDT: Or it might even be 4,500. [LR211]

SENATOR ADAMS: And those are just Nebraska. You're not reaching beyond Nebraska? []

MATT BLOMSTEDT: No. That is just within the state. [LR211]

SENATOR ADAMS: Okay. Other questions from the committee? Thank you Matt. Good morning, Greg. [LR211]

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GREG SMITH: (Exhibit 3) Good morning. I'm Greg Smith. I'm the president of Central Community College, also representing this morning the five community colleges that remain in the Nebraska Community College Association. I heard Matt mention community colleges, so I thought this might be a good time to jump in. As you are aware, LR211 does not mention community colleges, and we are not part of the Virtual Partnership, but Senator Adams asked us to come and testify today just to give you some information about what we're doing. The handout that I've given to you basically provides quite a bit of detail on what community colleges are already doing in terms of virtual education. If you will look at page 2, you will see that if you added those numbers, we're offering well over 800 courses on-line, and that does not include what Metro is offering as well, so the number would certainly be well over 1,000. You see the number of degrees and diplomas and certificates that we offer on-line. I would mention, and I will use my own college as an example...you see there Central Community College is offering seven degrees on-line. I think most of you are aware that we are accredited by the North Central Association Higher Learning Commission, and you do need to be accredited for individual on-line degree programs. Central actually has carte blanche. We are approved to offer all of our degree programs on-line. That's 34 degrees that we could conceivably offer on-line. Right now, we are offering seven. You heard both J.B. and Matt mention, you know, leveraging resources, and I don't know how community colleges fit into the virtual high school, if at all. I would say that certainly one advantage, if they do fit into the virtual high school in any sense, is that the students taking our courses would be taking them not only for high school credit but would simultaneously be getting college credit. Since we aren't part of this agreement, I think I'll stop at this point. I know there are others behind me waiting to testify, and just take any questions you have for us. [LR211]

SENATOR ADAMS: Thank you, Greg. Are there questions for Greg? Yes, Senator Avery. [LR211]



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SENATOR AVERY: Thank you, Senator Adams. Why is it the Metro data are not here? [LR211]

SENATOR HAAR: That's my question. [LR211]

GREG SMITH: Because Metro Community College, as is allowed under current law, LB1072, withdrew from the Nebraska Community College Association effective July 1, 2011. [LR211]

SENATOR AVERY: And do not...they don't report data? [LR211]

GREG SMITH: Well, it's, I am not collecting data or testifying for Metro. I am testifying for the five community colleges that remain in the Nebraska Community College Association. But I would say in direct answer to your question, I am sure that Metro, they've got...Metro has good systems. They could easily pull their data together to complement this report, and then you'd have the whole picture for Nebraska community colleges. I'm confident that Metro has this data readily available. [LR211]

SENATOR ADAMS: Other questions? Senator Haar. [LR211]

SENATOR HAAR: Yes. Do you see a possibility, I mean, we hear more and more that the community colleges are doing remedial work that should be done in high schools. Do you see a future potential for that remedial stuff, instead of being done in the community college, being done on-line? [LR211]

GREG SMITH: Do you mean with high school students? [LR211]

SENATOR HAAR: Well, as a prerequisite so that community colleges wouldn't have to spend the time to do remediation so much. [LR211]

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GREG SMITH: Nationally, some community colleges are already doing some foundations education on-line, but in general, if you think about the skill deficits that that group of students have, sometimes they also include technology skill deficits, and I'm not speaking for all community colleges, but more or less for myself. I do not personally believe that it's a great idea to teach remedial courses on-line. I think for the most part, those students need a lot of one-on-one and face-to-face, and I certainly wouldn't recommend that community colleges get in the business of remediating students while they're in high school. [LR211]

SENATOR HAAR: Um-hum. Okay. [LR211]

SENATOR ADAMS: Other questions? Greg, I was looking through the course offerings that you handed out, and I'm curious. I just turned to one page, and I see Concepts of Electronics I, Concepts of Electronics II, Transformers and Rotating Machines, Introduction to Music, and History of Jazz. Now, the first ones I get. They're probably demand-driven based on your statutory priority. How does, the community colleges, how do they determine that they need to offer Introduction to Music and History of Jazz? [LR211]

GREG SMITH: Well, you are aware that Central Community College has three full-service campuses, and two of them historically were independent community colleges, which is another story, but (laugh) our Columbus campus is where most of our fine arts are, and there is strong demand for both of those courses there. [LR211]

SENATOR ADAMS: Student demand? [LR211]

GREG SMITH: Yes. Yes. [LR211]

SENATOR ADAMS: Okay. Thank you. Are there other questions for Greg? Appreciate you coming in, Greg. [LR211]

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GREG SMITH: Okay, thank you. Thank you for the opportunity. [LR211]

SENATOR ADAMS: Next testifier? [LR211]

GARY TARGOFF: Good morning. [LR211]

SENATOR ADAMS: Good morning. [LR211]

GARY TARGOFF: My name is Gary Targoff, T-a-r-g-o-f-f. I am the assistant general manager for education at Nebraska Educational Telecommunications, and I want to thank the committee and let you know how pleased I am to be able to visit with you briefly this morning about NET's role in the Nebraska Virtual Partnership. I think as many of you no doubt know, NET has a long history of creating and delivering educational content, dating back to 1954, and in reference to your comment earlier, Senator Haar, when you were looking at an instructor on a television show, that might have been KUON when NET began broadcasting as instructional television. Since that time, as technology has changed, so too has the manner in which we have designed and begun delivering educational content, from the creation of educational video discs to today's production of on-line training utilizing video, flash, animation, and other digital technologies. As a core member of the Nebraska Virtual Partnership, NET is bringing its expertise in the field of educational media to the development of a comprehensive virtual learning library. That's the role that has been carved out for us. That is one that we bring our expertise to. In a staged implementation, it is our intent to provide access to a repository of multimedia digital resources that supplement teaching and learning here in the state of Nebraska. By way of what is taking place, the first phase of this initiative is to bring the power and credibility of public media to Nebraska teachers and students via a Nebraska branded version of the PBS learning media platform. Learning media is a digital library aligned to common core state standards for PreK-16 classrooms. To date, the library currently consists of over 14,000 research based

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instructional resources including video, audio, PDF, lesson plans, etcetera that are developed by a growing list of content contributors from around the nation including NASA, the National Archive, the Library of Congress, the National Science Foundation and over 1,500 public media producers such as those that create shows that you're familiar with like Nova on Boston WGBH. Phase 2 anticipates growing content offerings by working in conjunction with the ESUCC to start to ingest existing Nebraska resources into the platform and to start customized services such as providing detailed analytics, integration with assessments, or professional development programs. Finally, Phase 3 will be designed to meet specific Nebraska instructional needs through the identification, acquisition and/or production of content where gaps may exist. At this hearing today, I'm happy to report to you that Phase 1 is underway, and we anticipate bringing the first components of Nebraska's virtual library on-line within the next 60 days. With that, I would be happy to answer any questions. [LR211]

SENATOR ADAMS: Thank you, Gary. Questions? Senator Haar. [LR211]

SENATOR HAAR: So in terms of the PBS media or virtual library, that would be...well last night, I started watching the Ken Burns series on Prohibition and found out what a bootlegger was and so on. But, so that would be the real potential of bringing in information to supplement coursework and so on. [LR211]

GARY TARGOFF: That's exactly right. What the learning media platform is doing is taking information such as what you're referring to but creating very specific what we call learning objects that are 2-, 3-, 4-minute segments, in this case of a particular show such as Prohibition, and if a teacher wanted to show or share with the class or if a student wanted to access a particular component on Prohibition, maybe it was the temperance movement and the beginnings of the temperance movement. They could go on-line, they could search by grade level. They could search by subject, and then they could bring up whatever available media might be accessible to them to deliver either in the classroom or on-line on the computer. [LR211]

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SENATOR HAAR: So this would be available and probably being used by a wide range of teachers, not just as a... [LR211]

GARY TARGOFF: Exactly right. Exactly right. But it's being made available only through public broadcasting stations, so if NET did not step forward to bring this service to the state, it would be difficult, if not impossible, for the state to access this service. [LR211]

SENATOR HAAR: So it would be the sort of thing when I was teaching where you would bring in the film projector and... probably. Is there a cost to schools? [LR211]

GARY TARGOFF: At the present time, this first phase is going to be absorbed. Any cost will be absorbed by us at NET. [LR211]

SENATOR HAAR: It's a very good series. Yeah. Wow. [LR211]

GARY TARGOFF: Yeah. [LR211]

SENATOR ADAMS: Other questions? So, Gary, let me just walk through this as an old teacher. So you've got this old guy sitting there, and I'm not too hot on all this technology, and you're going to tell me how this is going to work, and I'm teaching American Government in high school XYZ, and I also have a student that wants to take American Government advanced placement. I'm not certified in it, so we're going to go on-line to do that. So I've got my regular classroom, I've got a kid on line over here. Where do you guys fit into this mix? [LR211]

GARY TARGOFF: We fit in by allowing both scenarios to access these digital assets so that if you want to teach this particular course in your classroom and you want to bring a resource into the classroom to show to the whole class, you can go on-line, you can do your search, you can bring it up, and you can present it in whatever format is

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appropriate to you. The student who is doing their on-line education does the same, except they would simply access it on-line, perhaps in their own home computer or perhaps at a computer lab at the school where they then would be enrolled in a self-paced course such as Barbara has been talking about, but the resource can then be brought to bear as they do their own self-paced learning. [LR211]

SENATOR ADAMS: Okay. Good. Let me ask you this then. I know that NET has been a leader nationally in a lot of what you do. Now you are entering this MOU world. Where does that put Nebraska, do you think? Your willingness to share whether it be in my classroom or this kid that is on line with the ESUs, with Nebraska Independent High School, where does this put us nationally? [LR211]

GARY TARGOFF: Well, in a couple of respects, it puts us at the head of the class, frankly. Now there are a number of other public broadcasting public media stations that are participating in this learning media component that PBS is offering. At last count, I thought it was somewhere around 30 or 40 other stations that are bringing this service to their own area of broadcasting in Nebraska, of course with a statewide entity, and so it's going to be delivered to the whole state. But in terms of providing digital assets, helping folks manage those digital assets, we are at the head of the class. With reference to the prior speaker, we are working, for example, with community colleges. We're working with some of the private colleges. We already work a number of other institutions including the legislative body here to help them manage and archive and deliver their digital assets, and so in that respect, we are clearly head and shoulders above most, if not all, of the other states and public media. [LR211]

SENATOR ADAMS: Thank you, Gary. Are there any final questions? Senator Haar. [LR211]

SENATOR HAAR: So in a way, it's a bit like Netflix streaming. I can go get that anytime. I don't have to call anybody. I just go out and... [LR211]

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GARY TARGOFF: That's a good analogy. Yes. On-line on demand. [LR211]

SENATOR HAAR: Okay. Thank you. [LR211]

SENATOR ADAMS: Any final questions? Thank you, Gary. Next testifier. [LR211]

GORDON ROETHEMEYER: Hi. I'm Gordon Roethemeyer. Last name is R-o-e-t-h-e-m-e-y-e-r, and I am the executive director for distance education for the Educational Service Unit Coordinating Council. So, to follow up on what has been said earlier, to give you a snapshot of what is currently happening with distance education in Nebraska, Nebraska is a leader among states in its use of interactive videoconferencing for distance learning. Last year, Nebraska exchanged over 419 two-way interactive distance learning classes. Approximately 100 of those were dual credit classes, so we do, and most of those coming from the community colleges, so they are important partners. The thing that is important, I think from my perspective to understand, is we toss out the term virtual school, and I don't know that there has been a clear definition of virtual school. A lot of the connotation seems to be that it's only on-line delivery and so on, but I think in light of that, one of the things that the partnership has talked about is this can't be one mode of delivery. When we want to deliver the best education for students, it has to be broader than just one mode. So, as we develop the Nebraska virtual school, I like to refer to it as the Nebraska hybrid school, and that is kind of a term that is getting a lot more attention in the current research and so on, or Matt talked about blended learning. That's kind of a synonymous term with hybrid, but it means taking the best of what any kind of technology has to offer. And we are very proud of the distance learning exchange that we have with the synchronous. There are some unique capabilities that only synchronous can be, can provide, and to highlight some of those, for example, bringing a content expert into the classroom to actually interact with students. We have gone to the National Archives. We've gone to NASA. We've gone to Marine Laboratories and pulled those experts in. Currently, we have a project going with

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the Manhattan School of Music, and they're providing lessons to students all across Nebraska. This is out of New York, and they schedule those lessons for about a 50-minute time frame generally right before the school day starts. We have a cello player from O'Neill who is going to take those lessons. We have a chamber orchestra currently ready to start those lessons, and so that is an example of a kind of partnership that is uniquely capable through that technology, and the reason it is possible is because the technology has advanced. In 2006 when the first phase of LB1208 began, there was just, we were poised right at the point of a change in the technology from older standard definition to now. What we see in the classrooms in high-definition monitors, 50-inch monitors provide a very clear picture, very clear sound, so it's making those kinds of partnerships highly effective in the teaching between classrooms. Of the 419 classes we offer, this time for the first year, this past year for the first year, language arts moved ahead of foreign language as the most exchanged course. You know, traditionally, when I've thought of distance learning, it's been to exchange that foreign language teacher. We had the foreign language labs, and that pretty much held true. Schools certainly do need to share that distance learning teacher for foreign language. But anyway, just to run on just a little bit longer... [LR211]

SENATOR ADAMS: How much longer, Gordon? [LR211]

GORDON ROETHEMEYER: Just half a minute. [LR211]

SENATOR ADAMS: All right. [LR211]

GORDON ROETHEMEYER: Foreign language was taken over by language arts mostly for the reason that seniors want to get that college credit writing composition class out of the way and college algebra, so that's a big use of our technology (inaudible). So that is the history. [LR211]

SENATOR ADAMS: All right. Thank you, Gordon. Are there questions? Senator Haar.



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[LR211]

SENATOR HAAR: So does the Independent High School use some of your courses?

[LR211]

GORDON ROETHEMEYER: No. It's more we work in parallel, you know, the partnership. We're mostly about the synchronous. We do know that we have a lot of teachers out in our school that have developed Web content and are willing, able, and ready to teach on-line classes as well, but what we're advocating for is a range of classes. Certainly, as Barbara pointed out, there is a need for completely on-line delivery for accelerated learning, for credit recovery situations and so on, but to reach a greater number of students having multiple modes of deliver is better. All of our distance learning teachers pretty much back their courses with learning management system for the simple exchange of assignments and so on. Where they used to be faxed, now they use a learning management system like a Blackboard or Angel or Moodle, and they put that into a digital drop box. So teachers by and large have been teaching through a blended learning mode for a number of years now, because they've embraced the technology. They use the learning management system, but they also recognize that it's about identifying what is best for the students, and sometimes that means that you're going to have to interact with students. You're going to have to have them face-to-face, the synchronous makes that possible, but in other cases, you have that high-ability learner that can tackle a class completely on their own as an on-line class. [LR211]

SENATOR HAAR: Okay, so kind of the dividing line between what the high school is doing and what you're doing is synchronous versus asynchronous. [LR211]

GORDON ROETHEMEYER: Yeah. I mean, our arena is mostly synchronous, but we really address both. Yeah, so. [LR211]

SENATOR HAAR: Um-hum. And then is, like you say, kids taking music lessons

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actually. [LR211]

GORDON ROETHEMEYER: Um-hum. [LR211]

SENATOR HAAR: Do they have to pay for that, or is that? [LR211]

GORDON ROETHEMEYER: There is a cost. These are noncredit classes. They're music lessons. Right now, none of our groups have had to pay because we were able to get sponsors to support that. But the cost for ten 50-minute lessons is about \$540, and so what we've encouraged, you know, the schools to do, is, you know, make that decision with your students and band parents and so on, and we've gotten a good response, so. [LR211]

SENATOR HAAR: Interesting. Okay. [LR211]

SENATOR ADAMS: Senator Sullivan, you had a question. [LR211]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you, Senator Adams, and thank you for your comments. We've pretty much had our conversation revolve around high school. Is any activity taking place with elementary levels? [LR211]

GORDON ROETHEMEYER: There is. We have some elementary Spanish programs, primarily out at the Beatrice area, in there, but very popular with schools down there, and we see more of a demand for that statewide, so. [LR211]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Okay. And we've also kind of limited our conversation to actual course offerings. Is there such a situation where, okay, there is a lot of concern for truancy right now in this state. Do you see distance ed playing a role in helping students that might not be able to be in the classroom be involved? [LR211]

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GORDON ROETHEMEYER: Yeah, absolutely with both synchronous and asynchronous. I mean, the line of separation is disappearing more and more because with the technology and with increased bandwidth available, we are seeing a lot more desktop delivery of video connections, so it's possible with the videoconferencing systems that we use to have that come right to your desktop or laptop computer, and that could be at a home or wherever, so certainly the potential is there. [LR211]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: What are, to your estimation, the technology barriers that exist across the state that might inhibit some of this taking place? [LR211]

GORDON ROETHEMEYER: There is still issues of bandwidth, especially to some of our elementary; certainly to, you know, right to the home and so on. But otherwise, there is, of course, the cost of the videoconferencing systems, but we've found that the return on investment is such that schools find that, you know, they can pay for a \$15,000 videoconferencing system really over one year through the cost savings that would be realized where they are sharing a teacher with another school, perhaps tuition generated if that's a part of the agreement, and so on. [LR211]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you. [LR211]

SENATOR ADAMS: So Gordon, you hit on something that I'd like you to confirm for me if you can. So, in terms of bandwidth and accessibility throughout our school buildings and school districts in the state, are we pretty well up to speed? But in terms of a student at home wanting to take these classes, depending on where they're at in rural Nebraska, there may be a connectivity issue there, correct? [LR211]

GORDON ROETHEMEYER: Yeah. At the home level, there could. If the high school and elementary buildings are separate, you know in the smaller communities, sometimes that elementary building, if it's a very rural area, might not have the same connectivity as the high school. But really, Nebraska from my knowledge in talking to

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other states is really ahead of the game on the amount of bandwidth we have, our Network Nebraska is just, you know, the envy of many, so. [LR211]

SENATOR ADAMS: Thank you. Any final questions? Seeing none. Thank you, Gordon. We have about 15 minutes left in this hearing. [LR211]

BRIAN HALSTEAD: (Exhibit 4) Good morning, Senator Adams, members of the Education Committee. For the record, my name is Brian, B-r-i-a-n, Halstead, H-a-l-s-t-e-a-d. I'm with the Nebraska Department of Education. I had distributed to you a memo from the Commissioner. He couldn't make it this morning because of other prior commitments, but he is certainly fully in support of the virtual partnership we've entered into. I think there is a couple of points he would like to make to this committee: (1) What you started in 2006 is working. You incentivized school districts, educational service units, the department to start creating distance learning opportunities for students. We went from virtually nothing to the students now today who are taking it to the offering of 50 from the University Independent High School to their 75 kids who signed up for it. There is a demand for this. If you put incentives out there, it will incentivize people. It has worked very well. (2) All of this has worked because we focused on two critical elements that are necessary: (1) As you have heard from the UNL Independent High School and everybody else, they are done by certified teachers. These are people who know the curriculum. They know what it needs to be. They know how to design it, And (2) they are an accredited school system, so we in Nebraska have kept the quality control as one of our focuses. Now, what we've learned is, guess what? The synchronous part of it we're doing, but it's now more the asynchronous that is the demand, and our ability to push that envelope is what is probably needed next, which is going to require more investment and incentives by this committee if we're going to move forward. The partnership agreement, we are trying to bring together all the resources that have been out there the last five years, or with the university, we have been accrediting UNL Independent High School since the 1920s. The role of the department has been a facilitator in this. There is not a single entity that can do this for

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the entire state. It's going to take the partnerships that we have out there. The educational service units working with the school districts, working with the teachers, working with the institutions of higher ed, because as you heard, some of our biggest classes they are taking are now English composition that are dual credit courses. Kids taking the composition courses they need so when they get to college, they can, in fact, write, they can, in fact, compose what's necessary at that level. So with that, I would stop. I'd take any questions you might have. [LR211]

SENATOR ADAMS: Thank you, Brian. Other questions? Senator. [LR211]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you. Thank you, Brian. It was mentioned earlier, I don't remember who, that the Department of Ed has sort of, and I think you alluded to it too, has been the facilitator. Do you envision the department serving as the overall coordinator for this effort? [LR211]

BRIAN HALSTEAD: Well, you know, I think that's always the interesting question. I think you need the partnerships that are there. Yeah, we may run the role of coordinating this just because the constitution says we are the general "superenvision" of the schools that this Legislature creates, so we have a role in it. But we can't do it ourselves. The university has some great expertise in how they put together their on-line Independent High School courses. They bring knowledge and skills to that, and if you've heard them, they have some staff members on staff full time, but they are also using public school teachers who also have this knowledge, so I think it's not just a single entity. It's a coordinated effort amongst all of us, and I think that's what the agreement document we did this year points out. Since 2005, there has been a lot of work that has gone on, and now what we are trying to do is bring all that together so that we can all see where we're at. We can do better sharing of resources. We can work together and learn from everybody together. There may be a role that we at the department are playing more just because we're the K-12 people, but it's not just K-12 education. The community colleges and the university and the state colleges are involved because of dual credit

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courses. [LR211]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: One of the goals of the partnership is to establish a single statewide virtual education resource Web site. Who is doing that? [LR211]

BRIAN HALSTEAD: I believe that is the Web site that Mr. Bloomstedt pointed out to you that is up already, so that is one of the pieces that we're putting together. [LR211]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Okay. Thank you. [LR211]

SENATOR ADAMS: Other questions? Senator. [LR211]

SENATOR HAAR: I talked to somebody a couple of weeks ago about teaching and so on, and they were saying there is a model where they have two math teachers for 120 students. And the way this worked was the students did most of their math on a computer, and then it told those two teachers, you know, here is a place where maybe five kids need some personal work, so they would pull them off into a classroom. I guess what I'm saying is this is going to really stretch our thinking in terms of teaching models. You know, when I taught, if I had a projector in my classroom, I was there, you know, and so that was using my time at the same time. So, what are we doing to, you know, think new models, new ways of doing stuff? [LR211]

BRIAN HALSTEAD: Well, I think there are lots of people out there thinking about the new ways. You're kind of representing the day and age where the teacher was the font of all knowledge... [LR211]

SENATOR HAAR: Yes, and I was. (Laughter) [LR211]

BRIAN HALSTEAD: ...and the reality is, if I pull this out of my pocket, I can find everything you knew and were trying to teach me in less than 10 seconds. It is now

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teaching the kids how to take the information, put it together, and do the critical thinking skills that are necessary in order to use the font of knowledge that you had, and that is certainly an ongoing discussion that is going on not only in this discussion about virtual education, but all of education in the sense of are we ever going to be away from not having schools? I don't think that is ever going to happen. Because even the university system, where they have students at the university who are taking on-line courses, they are also enrolled in classes at the university. There is that interaction that you still have to have. You can't just learn it by reading a book. You can't just learn it from a laptop. You have to interact with others, and that is part of the learning experience. It is certainly transforming everything we're doing these days in that regard. This, in some ways, you know a number of the questions talked about remedial education or credit recovery. That is sort of how some of this has been thought of as a way in which I can get my diploma from the University Independent High School because for some reason I didn't get my diploma at the regular school. But you now have students who are willing to take more than that who really want to pursue on their own. This isn't credit recovery. This is my ability to take something beyond what is available. And are there challenges? Absolutely. Our schools are connected, but does every student in all of their homes have the technology and the resources? Absolutely not, and that is not just a rural issue. I suspect in urban areas, kids don't have access. They don't have the technology, and if you don't grow up with this in your hand, somebody has got to teach you what it is and how to use it to begin with, which is part of the whole equity issue we are going to have to deal with in the next 20 years. [LR211]

SENATOR HAAR: So all of my knowledge in 10 seconds. That is probably true.  
(Laughter) But yeah, and I think you hit on part of it there that the thinking has been we're just going to do what we've done but supplement it a little bit here and there, but I think this could change teach...just the way things happen in a regular classroom.  
[LR211]

BRIAN HALSTEAD: Oh absolutely, in the sense of Senator Adams when he started he

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was talking about the filmstrip and the cassette recorder, and I was thinking, well, when I started school, it was a phonograph, and the teacher had to decide whether it was a 78 or a 33 1/3. But where she started the phonograph, you can see where the technology has gone. If you're just a regular classroom teacher today, if you're just standing up and lecturing to the students, you've already lost them. They are expecting you to provide them information the way they see it and know it and access it. So in the sense of our teaching profession, lots of work, and some of what was doing here is what classroom teachers need to know how to do just in the regular classroom. [LR211]

SENATOR HAAR: When I started teaching, we didn't have electricity either, so...(Laughter) [LR211]

SENATOR ADAMS: Senator. [LR211]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: That begs the question of professional development... [LR211]

BRIAN HALSTEAD: Absolutely. [LR211]

SENATOR SULLIVAN: ...because we have to train our current educators to teach in these models. Is that being done? [LR211]

BRIAN HALSTEAD: That is part of what the service units have been doing. It's one thing for a teacher to create this synchronous course and learn how to do it themselves, but to teach others how to do it, how to then integrate that, that is part of the professional development. That is one of the critical things the service units have done in the past five years. The university has some expertise that they have been sharing also in how to do this, and they both do it well because (1) certified teachers, accredited schools. We have stuck with quality control. We didn't just throw this out to the free market and everything. We kept some quality control on it, so in that regard, that is a positive. And again, what you did in 2006 by offering incentives, it has worked. You



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have gone from virtually no course sharing to what you've got now, and what you're learning is the demand may be greater in the next five years than what was anticipated, and it may be greater in the asynchronous realm, but at the same time, it's not just asynchronous. It's that blended. The student still has to connect with somebody. If I'm still taking the AP American Government course, I'm probably still going to need some connection to a human being in the school where I'm at for help, and that person has to know what the heck it is I'm doing in the AP course also, so that's part of that connectedness. That's part of what the university has done. They haven't done this on their own. They've gone back to public school teachers to connect. [LR211]

SENATOR ADAMS: Senator Haar. [LR211]

SENATOR HAAR: So how does all of this influence teacher's college then and teacher education? [LR211]

BRIAN HALSTEAD: It has a great deal to do with that, and there is an ongoing discussion amongst all of our teacher colleges on how to deal with the whole issue, and that is probably an all-day hearing you could have, and you would learn a lot of great things that are going on in our teacher colleges. We have good teacher colleges in Nebraska. Can they get better? Sure, and that is a focus the state board has been on the last two years is working on making sure they're preparing the people we need for the future too. [LR211]

SENATOR HAAR: Okay. []

SENATOR ADAMS: Are there other questions for Brian? Yes, Senator Howard. [LR211]

SENATOR HOWARD: Thank you. I just have a comment. I really appreciate that you continue to stress accreditation both in the schools and with the teachers. I compare that to the current debacle with Health and Human Services and how they've resisted,

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resisted for years, being accredited, and you know, it really does tell. So thank you.  
[LR211]

SENATOR ADAMS: Any final comments? Thank you, Brian. We probably have time for one more testifier. Please. [LR211]

LISA BOURLIER: Good morning. My name is Lisa Bourlier, and I'm with Class.com. The spelling is B-o-u-r-l-i-e-r. I appreciate the opportunity to be here today. Class.com, as many of you know, was developed by the University of Nebraska in the final stages of the class project, which was a multimillion Star Schools grant that they received in 1996. And Class.com has been making courses available to schools through a license agreement for the last 12 years. These schools are located across the United States and have been using their own teachers to provide instruction to the students. Training for those teachers has been provided by Class.com. We are very comfortable in providing the teachers with the skill set they need to be effective on-line teachers. The courses that are taught in the local schools are taught in a blended environment which means the students have access to the on-line content, but the teachers also have the same access, and the teachers may be providing supplemental activities for the students face to face. Students are learning in an on-line environment and using the teacher skills to make the blended environment effective for the student. We've had quite a bit of success over the years with this process, with this model. Schools have continued to use our program. Schools such as (inaudible). We could talk about the Louisiana Virtual High School. That is a virtual program that Lincoln National Academy, that I'm the administrator for, provides some instruction. We have teachers that work with their program. Los Angeles School District is one that also uses Class.com. So we have significant experience in the field of distance education. When the University of Nebraska and Class.com parted ways a few years ago, the decision was made at that time not to market to Nebraska. We recently have made arrangements with the Grand Island Public Schools. They have been using our content for three years. They are going into their third year now. They have been very successful using our content. Most

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of their teachers who have gone through our training use the courses in a blended environment. It allows the teachers to have content that is written to standards, content that if there are weaknesses, we identify them. We work with the teachers to determine what activities could be used to supplement the content if standards are needed to be covered, and the teachers have found quite a bit of success. Now Grand Island is one of your larger schools in Nebraska. There are other schools, of course, that use many different providers for on-line content, but Grand Island uses Class.com courses. They have...as well as Class.com, they have others. They have chosen to use our curriculum for a multitude of different types of students from their after school program through their adult ed program that they're starting this year. They've utilized the content through the Ombudsman program. That is the first program to come into the state of Nebraska that has teachers not associated with the public school providing instruction to students who are enrolled in that public school. So there are many, many different opportunities available for students in Nebraska, and what we offer through Class.com is yet another opportunity that we make available. Schools may license with us to have the content available for their teachers to provide instruction, or if they choose, they could enroll their students in Lincoln National Academy which is Class.com's on-line school. When I was hired by Class.com, and I used to work for the Independent Study High School, when I was hired by Class.com, my role was to start an on-line school, which I did. We have accreditation through AdvancED as a north central school, and we earned that accreditation in June of this year. So we've been working with students for a number of years. Part of the procedure to gaining accreditation is proving that you can do what you say you do. And so, when I started working with Class.com, they had just received a grant through the Educational Development Corporation out of New York to work with students in Maine and Vermont, 8th graders, who needed an opportunity to take on-line algebra at 8th grade to enhance the opportunity for them to take additional courses in high school. The research project was, if we offer 8th grade students math, algebra, will they need higher level math when they get into high school? Now as an educator, I can tell you absolutely yes. Well, over the years of the project, we have proven that to be true. We've had over 800 students participate in the course. We've had a 90 percent

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completion rate. Courses are available to students in a synchronous environment. Teachers are certified Nebraska teachers all teaching in their endorsed subject area, and with that number of students, we have synchronous instruction where the students log on to their course at the same time the teacher logs on. We utilize all of the tools available within the delivery system, the learning management system that Matt talked about and others talked about. Our courses are delivered in Moodle. Moodle offers a number of options for delivery of communications, which in my opinion, is one of the most important for students. We have local proctors who monitor student progress, our teachers who are providing synchronous instruction using all the tools that are available in the delivery system. And with that, I'll take any questions you may have. [LR211]

SENATOR ADAMS: Thank you, Lisa, and we will take just a question or two, because we do need to conclude this hearing so that we can prepare for 10:45 and the testimony we have. So, Senator Haar. [LR211]

SENATOR HAAR: Okay. So we've heard all the different sources doing all this stuff, okay. So, is the greatest challenge for more competition or more cooperation? [LR211]

LISA BOURLIER: In my opinion, it's more cooperation. We need to know what our competitors are doing so we can be better at what we do. But I think that Nebraska offers a huge variety of opportunities for our students, and if our goal is to allow our students to be more successful, then our goal is to provide those teachers with the tools they need to be successful so their students can be successful. And if that means that we work cooperatively together making all of these options available to teachers and students, then we will achieve our goal of making our students better learners. [LR211]

SENATOR HAAR: Okay. [LR211]

SENATOR ADAMS: Any last questions? Lisa, thank you. Appreciate it. [LR211]

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LISA BOURLIER: Thank you. [LR211]

SENATOR ADAMS: That's going to conclude the hearing on LR211, and we will resume again at 10:45 and begin the higher ed in Exec Session. Thank you all. [LR211]