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Education Committee  
February 26, 2018

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[LB1033 LB1125]

The Committee on Education met at 1:30 p.m. on Monday, February 26, 2018, in Room 1525 of the State Capitol, Lincoln, Nebraska, for the purpose of conducting a public hearing on LB1033 and LB1125. Senators present: Mike Groene, Chairperson; Rick Kolowski, Vice Chairperson; Laura Ebke; Steve Erdman; Lou Ann Linehan; Adam Morfeld; Patty Pansing Brooks; and Lynne Walz. Senators absent: None.

SENATOR GROENE: If everybody would sit down and we'll get started here. Welcome to the Education Committee public hearing. My name is Mike Groene, from Legislative District 42; Lincoln County. I serve as Chair of this committee. Committee will take up the bills on the posted agenda. Our hearing today is your public part of the legislative process. This is your opportunity to express your position on the proposed legislation before us today. To better facilitate today's proceedings I ask that you abide by the following procedures. Please turn off cell phones and other electronic devices. Move to the chairs in the front of the room when you are ready to testify. The order of testimony is introducer, proponents, opponents, neutral, and closing remarks by the introducer. If you will be testifying, please complete the sheet in the back and hand it to the committee clerk or page when you come up to testify. If you have written material you would like distributed to the committee, please hand them to the page to distribute. If you are not going to publicly testify or need to leave early, you can turn in written testimony with a completed testifier sheet. We need 12 copies for all committee members and staff; if you need additional copies please ask the page to make copies for you now. When you begin to testify, please state and spell your name for the record. How many folks are here for LB1033, to testify? We'll go four minutes; three minutes green, one minute yellow, and then please wrap up your comments when it turns red. If you would like your position to be known but do not wish to testify, please sign the white form at the back of the room and it will be put in the official record. If you are not testifying in person on the bill and would like to submit a written position letter to be included in the official hearing record as an exhibit, the letter had to be e-mailed to us by 5 o'clock yesterday afternoon. The committee members with us today will introduce themselves, starting at my right.

SENATOR LINEHAN: Hi, Lou Ann Linehan, District 39.

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SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Good afternoon, Rick Kolowski, District 31.

SENATOR MORFELD: Adam Morfeld, District 46; northeast Lincoln.

SENATOR ERDMAN: Steve Erdman, ten counties in the Panhandle.

SENATOR WALZ: Lynne Walz, District 15.

SENATOR GROENE: We expect Senator Pansing Brooks and Senator Ebke to be joining us. They didn't indicate otherwise. You may see senators on their cell phones, not talking but typing; it's usually because we're contacting our staff back in the office to look up some information so we can ask intelligent questions from what we heard from the testifiers. Today...immediately to my left is legal counsel, LaMont Rainey. At the end of the table to my right is committee clerk, Kristina McGovern. Pages today are Heather Bentley, student at the university, and Sam Baird, student at the university. Let's get started, Senator Murante, on LB1033.

SENATOR MURANTE: Thank you, Chairman Groene. Members of the Education Committee, my name is John Murante, J-o-h-n M-u-r-a-n-t-e. I'm the state senator for District 49, which includes Gretna and western Sarpy County. I'm here today to introduce LB1033. And if I may just take a moment to go over the history of the learning community as I recall it. In 2007, the Legislature enacted the learning community functionally as it exists today, less the common levy. The learning community was instituted to solve a myriad of problems. One, it froze school boundaries in an era where school districts were absorbing portions of other school districts and essentially getting into annexation wars. Second, it attempted to redistribute property tax dollars through the common levy in a way which the Legislature at that time felt to be more fair and more appropriate. There was a lot of talk of collaboration; in the years that led up to the learning community there was much discussion about how the schools districts did not communicate very well with each other. And one of the stated goals of the learning community was that the superintendents in the school districts communicate with each other more often. And I think to a certain extent that that certainly has been successful. That the days of school district wars are largely over and there is now a dramatic amount of communication between the school districts. And as the state senator from Gretna, I take a lot of pride in having Dr. Kevin Riley as our

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superintendent in Gretna who, I believe, helped led the way to changing that culture of competition and one into collaboration, as I see it. But, in many peoples' minds as the Legislature began to...excuse me, as the learning community evolved and became older, we found that the learning community was not accomplishing many of its stated objectives. Accordingly, this Legislature, two years ago, abolished the common levy which was the, probably, the single-most controversial element of the learning community. Which was, at the time, 95 cents of property tax dollars for every property owner in Douglas and Sarpy County would be funneled into a common levy and then redistributed, what is essentially based on the TEEOSA formula. This Legislature abolished that. And with that abolition, eliminated a great deal of the angst that occurred with the learning community. I can tell you as the state senator from Gretna, one of the most active time periods in my legislative career is immediately after property tax statements are mailed to property owners. And when, in years past, property owners saw the line "learning community" and they saw 95 cents and they saw several thousand dollars, they were outraged. And they contacted their state senator and they made it clear that when they elected me to this Legislature that my...one of my top responsibilities, if not the very top responsibility, was to eliminate that problem. With the elimination of the common levy eliminated a lot of the controversy. And so the issue you have before you today, in my view, is far more technocratic than it is passionate. As you may have inferred from my opening thus far, what we were talking about when the learning communing issue was brought before this Legislature in years past were very emotional, very controversial issues. Which school district do you belong to, what are your property taxes, who do you pay your property taxes to, how much of your property taxes do your schools get to keep, how much of your property taxes are redistributed elsewhere; those...with the abolition of the common levy, those questions have been eliminated. And now we are left with what I think is a much more simplistic question; is what is left of the learning community, does it require an entire political subdivision to effectuate? Right now what is left of their property tax levy is two cents for early childhood education. And that's it. They get a \$500,000 appropriation from the Legislature for their administrative costs. I would submit to you that, in my view, that is insufficient to justify the creation of an entire political subdivision and that, simply put, the school districts can do the job that the learning community is doing, but do it themselves. So what you have before you is not simply a bill to abolish the learning community. It also allows the schools districts which are currently in the learning community to create an interlocal agreement to do for themselves that which the learning community is doing today.

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That is the stated goal; that everything that the learning community...everything that is currently under as a duty and responsibility statutorily for the learning community we give to the school districts to do themselves. In my view that is a much more efficient way of accomplishing the same end. The same amount of money will be there and that collaboration which was stated as a fundamental objective of the learning community--wherein each of the school districts had to communicate with each other and work together--that goal will continue because to...each school district will have the opportunity to participate or not participate. And each school district will have to be justified whether what is happening benefits their district sufficiently for them to want to participate. Which, in my view, is a strong element of the local control issue where they can choose for themselves whether they feel the cost-benefit analysis is worth it. So, again, this is an issue that is very passionate to me, is very passionate to my constituents in Sarpy County. Again, this bill is not prioritized. It's my hope that this committee in the years to come will take a look at the current duties and responsibilities of the learning community, ask yourselves whether an entire political subdivision, an entire layer of government is necessary to accomplish those ends and whether there is a more efficient way of doing it. I have tried to come up with a proposal where the good things that are being done are still being accomplished but they're being accomplished with a more limited government approach to it. So, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd be happy to answer any questions. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Senator Linehan. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: Thank you, Chairman Groene. Thank you, very much, for bringing this because I heard a lot about it when I was running, too. [LB1033]

SENATOR MURANTE: Um-hum. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: How would you handle the two learning centers; there's one in south Omaha and one in north Omaha? So what would happen to them with this bill? [LB1033]

SENATOR MURANTE: So under this, the interlocal agreement that would establish works with the ESUs and that property would be transferred there. So, that's the concept there. But that's probably the single-most complicated part of the whole process. [LB1033]

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SENATOR LINEHAN: Well, I was wondering that. So there's only two ESUs involved, right? Three... [LB1033]

SENATOR MURANTE: Yes. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: ...it would be Omaha and then the rest of them. [LB1033]

SENATOR MURANTE: Um-hum. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: So, I was thinking that, too, that maybe that the ESUs could play a role. [LB1033]

SENATOR MURANTE: Um-hum. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: Okay, thank you, very much. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Any other questions? All the statutes are based on the learning community; the authority to tax two cents is based on having the learning community. So the two-cent tax would go away then? [LB1033]

SENATOR MURANTE: It would be transferred...it would give the authority of the interlocal agreement to utilize that tax, but it would only...the intent of the bill is that it would only apply to those school districts which are currently in the learning community. So, it doesn't...if you're not currently in the learning community it doesn't expand the ability to levy a property tax that does not already exist, but it does allow those school districts who are currently in the community to engage in an interlocal agreement to levy that same tax. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: So...and I apologize, I didn't get a chance to read it thoroughly. But...so, the tax transfers to the interlocal agreement...the authority? [LB1033]

SENATOR MURANTE: Yes, the authority to do it. Yes. [LB1033]

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SENATOR GROENE: And only those schools who wish to call local control? [LB1033]

SENATOR MURANTE: Yes. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Thank you. Any other questions? Senator Erdman. [LB1033]

SENATOR ERDMAN: Thank you, Senator Groene. Thank you, Senator Murante. So the \$500,000 appropriation from the state goes away? [LB1033]

SENATOR MURANTE: You would have to look on your fiscal note, I would believe so. I don't know what else it would go to, but I believe so. [LB1033]

SENATOR ERDMAN: Why don't we just abolish the learning community altogether? [LB1033]

SENATOR MURANTE: You know, I... [LB1033]

SENATOR ERDMAN: Let the schools figure it out. [LB1033]

SENATOR MURANTE: As a person who campaigned very passionately on abolishing the learning community, I very much sympathize with that mentality. Quite frankly, I think the vast majority of my constituents don't see the purpose. However, in talking about it and having the many conversations that I've had with what to do with the learning community if it's abolished, one of the common statements in opposition is; well, they're doing this early-childhood education process now, it's serving a purpose, why don't we just keep doing that? So the second portion of the bill was essentially to allow...to shrink the government insofar as we're abolishing the learning community but make sure that the services that are currently being provided continue to be provided. [LB1033]

SENATOR ERDMAN: Okay. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Senator Kolowski. [LB1033]

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SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Senator Murante, thank you for your presentation today. And you know I have a history with the learning community, having been their chairman for the first three years of their existence and the things that we were able to accomplish in that time and moving up. What impact have you seen as far as the dealing with the issues of poverty in every district in the learning community? What kind of gains have been made and what kind of research has been done on that? Are you familiar with that? [LB1033]

SENATOR MURANTE: With what's been done through the learning... [LB1033]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: With poverty. [LB1033]

SENATOR MURANTE: So, in...I work with a great program called Partnership 4 Kids, which is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization where we spend an incredible amount of time with our volunteers and our mentors. And I think you and I have talked about my work to try and increase the amount of mentors in the state. And there's a lot of work that has been done. Undoubtedly there is, both from the private sector and the public sector, a tremendous amount of effort that has been put in to what to do with kids that are...you know, in getting the school lunch programs and so forth. So I know there's been a lot of effort put in on both sides of the table and I know the learning community has attempted to facilitate that. My question here is whether the learning community is necessary to effectuate that goal or whether it can be done from the school districts themselves. [LB1033]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Are you familiar with the research that has been done through the learning community and validated by the...the Med Center has been one of our major locations that we've gotten a lot of different research grants and money through to judge how well they're doing. Are you familiar with the results of many of those documents? [LB1033]

SENATOR MURANTE: And by they, you mean the learning community? [LB1033]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: The learning community (inaudible)... [LB1033]

SENATOR MURANTE: Sure, absolutely. I... [LB1033]

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SENATOR KOLOWSKI: ...early childhood, poverty, (inaudible)... [LB1033]

SENATOR MURANTE: Absolutely, I think one of the reasons why I included in the bill that this was not a strict abolition but it was a transfer of authority was for that very reason; that people were...I heard examples of success stories. And I think that to the extent that we can ensure those success stories don't go away, I think we ought to do that. That's why I think...that is why I included the provision in this bill at the same amount of money, the same property tax levy would be transferred so that those...and including the buildings, those objectives continue to go forward. But it...I don't want to beat a dead horse, but it goes all back to the same question; do we need an entire political subdivision to do research and levy a two-cents property tax levy? I'm not sure that we do. [LB1033]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Who would do that work, if that didn't exist? [LB1033]

SENATOR MURANTE: Sure, I think the interlocal agreement where the school...first of all, I think the school districts are very capable and do a lot of research themselves. The idea that we need a learning community to do research...the school districts themselves do a lot of research as well. But engaging in the interlocal agreement allows the school districts the flexibility through the Interlocal Cooperation Act to create that how they see fit under the law. So, to the extent that they feel it's important and necessary that there be a research component involved in the interlocal, I don't see any prohibition against that. [LB1033]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Okay. The research, in my personal opinion, pales compared to what the districts...what the districts do pales compared to what actually gets done as far as the level of the research being done by the Med Center and other locations that we've employed over many, many years to get to where we are today with the learning community. I hope you'll have a chance to read some of that and understand that as we move through this discussion on the learning community. It's significantly different and improved upon. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Any other questions? Thank you, Senator Murante. [LB1033]

SENATOR MURANTE: Thank you. [LB1033]



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SENATOR GROENE: The first proponent. [LB1033]

DOUG KAGAN: (Exhibit 1) Good afternoon, Senators. My name is Doug Kagan, D-o-u-g K-a-g-a-n, Omaha, representing Nebraska Taxpayers for Freedom, and in support of LB 1033. The standard answer to academic failure usually is to raise taxes, increase spending, and create additional bureaucracy. The learning community fiscal year 2017-18 budget increased spending by almost \$1 million--from \$7.5 million to over \$8.4 million for its programs--and raised the tax rate. We see a Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan to cost \$2.6 million; Family Support liaisons to cost \$228,000-plus; a Parent University budget totaling \$721,000-plus, including computer training; a diversity plan evaluation wastes \$5,000; \$88,000 annually to a PR firm to boost its reputation in the community. Moving on, a few thousand for unbudgeted conference expenses; thousands for child care, exorbitant meal service at Parent U.; newspaper advertising, and cabs for transportation; over \$279,000 in health care services, one wonders if the learning community is an educational entity or a welfare service. Excessive numbers of staff flying on junkets; an incorrect payment of over \$450,000, sloppy accounting; \$7,000 for a communications consultant; a mystery payment of over \$1 million to OPS for who knows what. Monthly rental fees are so high that the learning community could construct its own buildings. Multi-year signed contracts limit learning community options to lower future tax rates or eliminate useless programs. Not frugal with its budgeting, hefty percentage overruns occur in several areas, leaving a deficit of over \$522,000 in fiscal year 2016-17. Tax dollars spent recklessly on programs of questionable value. Teachers in the Jump Start program consistently report that some of their tykes became more proficient but others showed no difference in skill level compared to peers not in that program. Intensive Early Childhood preschool demonstrated scores at or above the top 10 percent of all Head Start programs nationally, however, the Head Start program shows no substantive gains for children after an initial few years. Large numbers of children fell below the national average on vocabulary skills despite learning community programs. At Parent U., fewer parents met goals in "Promoting Learning" and "Supporting Confidence." We believe that the learning community conducts programs that individual school districts and other existing entities already perform. It splurges thousands on truancy evaluation, though public school districts handle this issue satisfactorily. Preschool programs copy public schools, funded with an additional tax levy. On-site child care and child care training sessions and coaching compete with private businesses. Parent University that dispenses basic literacy,

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ESL classes, wellness and life and employment skills duplicates services provided elsewhere. Also, we believe this bureaucracy operates unnecessary programming. English classes for parents and other family members who are illegal aliens. Thousands for a literacy program for these families, with bilingual parent educators. No surprise that clients now request more taxpayer support in career development and in parenting older children. The board purposely holds its public hearings before supper time, so that those who pick up children from school are still working or are preparing to eat supper are unable to attend. This bureaucracy we believe is unnecessary, redundant, and deserves elimination. Thank you. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Questions? Doug, did you identify how much of their \$8 million just goes to administration? [LB1033]

DOUG KAGAN: No, we didn't do that. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: So we don't know for sure how much of it goes to administration building? [LB1033]

DOUG KAGAN: No, we don't have a figure on that. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Thank you. Any other questions? [LB1033]

SENATOR WALZ: I have a question. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Senator Walz. [LB1033]

SENATOR WALZ: Hi... [LB1033]

DOUG KAGAN: Yes? [LB1033]

SENATOR WALZ: ...thanks for coming. Have you ever visited...have you spent some time in these schools? [LB1033]

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DOUG KAGAN: The actual school... [LB1033]

SENATOR WALZ: Yeah. [LB1033]

DOUG KAGAN: ...functions of the learning community? [LB1033]

SENATOR WALZ: Well, just like spent some time volunteering or visiting the classrooms or the schools or the programs that are associated with them? [LB1033]

DOUG KAGAN: No, but we've looked at the programs as advertised on the Web site. [LB1033]

SENATOR WALZ: Okay, so you've never really physically been inside? [LB1033]

DOUG KAGAN: No. [LB1033]

SENATOR WALZ: Okay, thank you. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Anybody else? Senator Linehan. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: Thank you, Chairman Groene. Mr. Kagan, thank you for being here. Do you know--I think you mentioned here, I'm looking real quick--the buildings that they occupy in both in north and south Omaha, they lease them, right? They don't own them? [LB1033]

DOUG KAGAN: They lease them, they don't own them. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: But they...it's like a ten-year lease, right? Isn't that part of the situation... [LB1033]

DOUG KAGAN: I think that's true. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: ...they signed a ten-year lease? [LB1033]

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DOUG KAGAN: And they paid plenty of money for rent for leasing the buildings. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: Okay, they're both new buildings but they're leased, I think. [LB1033]

DOUG KAGAN: The space they're leasing... [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: Right. [LB1033]

DOUG KAGAN: ...in the buildings. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: Okay, thank you, very much, sir. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Senator Erdman. [LB1033]

SENATOR ERDMAN: Thank you, Senator Groene. Thanks, Mr. Kagan, for coming. Okay, so the last sentence of your first paragraph says not frugal budgeting and it talked about the deficit of \$522,000; who picks that up? [LB1033]

DOUG KAGAN: Well, if there's a deficit they have to pick it up somewhere. [LB1033]

SENATOR ERDMAN: The schools in the learning community will pick that up? [LB1033]

DOUG KAGAN: I think the learning community has to pick it up. [LB1033]

SENATOR ERDMAN: Okay. I did look up the fiscal note, it wasn't in my packet but I looked up fiscal note. And that \$500,000 that was given, that's appropriated for the administration is going to remain with the state. [LB1033]

DOUG KAGAN: From the state...comes from the state taxpayers. [LB1033]

SENATOR ERDMAN: They're going to retain that so it's \$500,000 not cut from budgets. Thank you for your information, it's good information. [LB1033]

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DOUG KAGAN: Okay. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Thank you. Next proponent. [LB1033]

JIM SAZAMA: Chairman Groene, good afternoon. Committee members, my name is Jim Sazama. I reside in Omaha, Nebraska. Been there for a number of years and my bride and I rent a house there from the county, Douglas County. It's cheaper to rent than it is to buy a house, I found out. But in the last few years, the taxes keep going up and up and up and up... [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Did you... [LB1033]

JIM SAZAMA: ...we actually paid for our house six times now... [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Could you spell your last name? [LB1033]

JIM SAZAMA: Sure, S-a-z-a-m-a. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Thank you. [LB1033]

JIM SAZAMA: We good? [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Yes, go ahead. [LB1033]

JIM SAZAMA: (Exhibit 2) Thank you. I was supposed to continue on here with what Doug...Doug didn't get time to finish his little...(inaudible)...the learning center early childhood plan with home visitations by educational navigators to help parents parent their three- and four-year-olds while learning and developing skills and needs assessments impinges on parental rights. Visiting parents at home for coaching skills, setting up routines and schedules for kids invades privacy. Connecting parents with resources and model supportive learning activities. Working with families for activity planning, particularly for pregnant mothers. Learning center bureaucrats want to place pregnant moms into Parent Universities with a social worker assigned to each unborn child as a mother (sic--monitor). Professional parent trainers for consultation and

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support for discipline, decision-making, and self-control. I'm going to say something here, this is off Doug's script here a little bit; but most of you are old enough to remember "affirmative action" that took place in 1964 and Equal (Employment) Opportunity Act in 1964. Some of you may not have been born yet then, but others have. Now, we have spent a lot of money in this country on poverty. We're going to declare on poverty, we did that, LBJ did that years ago. You know what's amazing to me is recently I read an article that 5 percent of children born today are born out of wedlock. That was in 1960. Today, take a guess what it is, of children born out of wedlock. It's 45 percent. Now, if we jump ahead again another 50 years, we're going to have 90-plus percent of the children born today out of wedlock. Now, I would suggest that we all look back a little bit farther here because I don't care how many learning centers you have and how much money you throw at these programs here; you know, what about the family unit? Family unit: mom dad, kids. Religion, we need to get back to basics here, just look what's happening around our country today. And you can all realize that. Now, I want to say some other things here. Talked about tax...property taxes on my house, told you I paid for that six times already. So, you want to raise more taxes here? I don't think that's going to go too far with people today. We have two granddaughters, twins, age seven. You know what's amazing to me is? Those old turkeys know how to read in a book. But do you know why they know how to read? Because when they were little, grandma, my bride, would go up...take them up to bed and they would read out of a book. They still do this today. They can add numbers, just basic things. They can write in cursive and they know how to print. Seven-year-old twins, but yet I hear about people in the eight grade that don't even know how to read. Man, we're missing a boat here in our education system someplace. And we're all responsible for this here. But if we go back to the family unit where mom and dad spent time with these little turkeys, you know, they'll know how to do these things. But it's unfortunate because look how many kids are born today to a single mom and whatnot, look at the results what's going to happen here. We can see that. Family unit, got to get back to that. And I hope you people all take this serious. You know, we got a whole bunch of little kids out here that are wanting to learn but we also need to incorporate some discipline in their years as they're growing up out here. There's got to be a dad figure around the house. In a lot of cases...I got the red light already. Thank you, very much. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Any questions? Steve. [LB1033]

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SENATOR ERDMAN: Thank you, Senator Groene. Thank you for coming. Your comment about renting your house from Douglas County caught my attention. What did you mean by that? [LB1033]

JIM SAZAMA: Renting the house? [LB1033]

SENATOR ERDMAN: You rent your house from Douglas County, you said. [LB1033]

JIM SAZAMA: Yeah, you got to be 60 years of age to qualify for that. You would probably qualify. [LB1033]

SENATOR ERDMAN: And then you can rent your house from the county? [LB1033]

JIM SAZAMA: Yeah. They have a program (laughter). You're not familiar with that? [LB1033]

SENATOR ERDMAN: Can you help me a little more; what's that program? [LB1033]

JIM SAZAMA: You guys all know what this is. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: It's property taxes. [LB1033]

JIM SAZAMA: Property taxes. [LB1033]

SENATOR ERDMAN: Oh, okay. [LB1033]

JIM SAZAMA: Property taxes. You know, my bride and I have been in our home for 44 years now, and wasn't too many months ago since I've retired now. Pilot by trade, and so on. So I've been around the country a little bit here. I didn't fall off of a turnip truck here over the years. Now, if I tally up what I spent on real estate and property taxes on our home that we've been in for 44 years, I've paid for that house six times. Don't you think that's a little ridiculous? [LB1033]

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SENATOR GROENE: I agree. [LB1033]

JIM SAZAMA: But people don't look at it that way. They don't look at it that way. Sad and it keeps going up and up, that's why I said by rent. [LB1033]

SENATOR ERDMAN: Okay. [LB1033]

JIM SAZAMA: You never really own your home. You might not have a mortgage but you never really own it. [LB1033]

SENATOR ERDMAN: I get it, thank you. [LB1033]

JIM SAZAMA: You're welcome. Yes? [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Senator Kolowski, then you're next. [LB1033]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for your testimony today. I wanted to ask you; the programs you were quoting from the learning community, are they mandatory or are they voluntary? [LB1033]

JIM SAZAMA: Which program are you talking about here? [LB1033]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: All the different child programs you talked about. [LB1033]

JIM SAZAMA: With the learning center? [LB1033]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Yes, with the learning community people. [LB1033]

JIM SAZAMA: You know, I'm going to say something here. I had the opportunity to do...attend a couple meetings down at the learning center on North Lake Street. It was really appalling to me what I experienced there at these two meetings here. Now, we need to get back to basics here, sir. You know, mom and dad teaching these kids here. It's not going to do any good to take a three-



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and four-year-old and put them in some kind of little building and what not and hire people to come in here and we're going to teach them how to read and write and behave. [LB1033]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: You haven't answered anything of my question. Is it mandatory or voluntary, those programs of the learning community? That's my question. Mandatory or voluntary. [LB1033]

JIM SAZAMA: I would say it's probably mandatory, isn't it? You have a lot of kids around here that need help. I don't know, I don't run that place. [LB1033]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Senator Walz. [LB1033]

SENATOR WALZ: Thank you, Senator Groene. Thanks for coming today. A lot of things you said caught my attention, actually. And I guess I'm just curious as to know what would be your answer to poverty. [LB1033]

JIM SAZAMA: What would my answer be, boy. Got unrestricted time here for a couple deals? [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Just talk until I cut you off (laughter). [LB1033]

JIM SAZAMA: Yes, sir, we got a deal. In 1964, I was a GI, okay? Now, we had a lot of things that changed my...I'm a farm kid by trade, grew up on a farm. And I learned a lot in 1964 being in the military with these "war on poverty" and "affirmative action," these programs that came about. It was appalling to me how we hand out things to people and they don't have to earn them. You know, working on a farm you worked all day long here. But now we're going to have a program that we're going to give people things, awards and whatnot, for not earning them. You know, it's become a way of life in our society here. Now we have a whole lot of kids out here, lots of kids, millions of them, that we just give, give, give, give. They don't have to earn anything. I coached girls fast-pitch softball for 11 years. And I was a tough bird, ran it like a

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marine drill deal. But we were good. But the kids knew when they come to the ball game, by God, they were there to play ball, not horse around and this other stuff. If you go to a school today and sit in there in the back--I don't care, just pick a school in OPS--and watch the...not the lack of discipline, but the behavior of some of these children in the classroom today, it's phenomenal. Now, you put a guy like me in there I wouldn't put up with that, you're out of here. But that's what we're doing today, we don't have these little tyke's attention and whatnot. But you go to my little grandkids, that's why they know how to read, because mom and dad demand it of them. Now, if you have a family here, I'll call it "family" for now, that has a mom and she may have three or four kids but there's no dad figure around, she's got her hands full. Now, how is she going to work and still take care of these kids at night? Pretty tough; how am I going to go to a job? Can't go to a job. But we have a program out here that we give women so much money if they have a child and no husband. If they would have a second child, they get more money. This has been perpetuating itself for 50-plus years now. Now, how many more years are we going to do this, folks? But nobody wants to address this. [LB1033]

SENATOR WALZ: I guess that that's part of my question, is that we do have moms out there and they do have one or two children and they are working two jobs and they don't have...so, that's my question; how can we help them, how can we deal with that type of poverty right now? [LB1033]

JIM SAZAMA: Right now? [LB1033]

SENATOR WALZ: We can't just ignore that. [LB1033]

JIM SAZAMA: No, we can't, but do we allow it to keep perpetuating itself here? I don't think so, we're going to be in a hell of a mess down here, excuse me. [LB1033]

SENATOR WALZ: So how do we help those parents right now? [LB1033]

JIM SAZAMA: They have to earn, earn their way out here. What do we do with the kids in the meantime? That's going to be a pretty tough deal, real tough. So, we have programs, what, like the learning center? I don't see where that's the answer to this deal here. But maybe if we took

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some of these dads and say; hey dad, you work, mom you stay home and take care of these kids here. But that's not in the deck today, unfortunately. But nobody wants to talk about that. Did I help you out at all? [LB1033]

SENATOR WALZ: No, that's all right. Thank you, though. [LB1033]

JIM SAZAMA: Sorry. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Sir, you mentioned the "war on poverty" in the '60s. Wasn't funding public education supposed to be the cure for poverty? [LB1033]

JIM SAZAMA: Yeah, yeah. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Thank you, sir. [LB1033]

JIM SAZAMA: Yeah, look how successful that's been. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Shouldn't have any, should we? [LB1033]

JIM SAZAMA: That's right. So, we're dropping the ball here. Now, you guys are all smart people here. At the state level here we should be able to do something, figure out something here where at least the state of Nebraska can jump on the bandwagon here and make it better. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Thank you, sir. Any other...you're... [LB1033]

JIM SAZAMA: You done? [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: ...any other questions, I guess I should ask. Thank you. [LB1033]

JIM SAZAMA: Thank you for letting me talk. [LB1033]

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SENATOR GROENE: (Exhibits 12 and 13) Any other proponents? We have two letters of support for LB1033; Nebraska for Founders' Values and Leroy Becker, Nebraska Parental Rights sent two letters with a clarification; they support Section 1 but not the continuation of the programs. Opposition. [LB1033]

DAVID PATTON: (Exhibits 3, 4 and 5) Good afternoon, Senator Groene, Members of the Education Committee. My name is David Patton, I am the CEO of the Learning Community of Douglas and Sarpy Counties. And it's David, D-a-v-i-d, Patton, P-a-t-t-o-n. I am here to testify in opposition to LB1033. My comments will focus on student achievement and the role of the community, two points not addressed so far today. Learning Community of Douglas and Sarpy Counties is narrowing the achievement gap between children in poverty and those who are not. We are a long way to go, but progress is measurable, significant and inspiring best practices strategies across the learning community. By third grade, our students aim for proficiency in reading and math. In your packet you will see in your handout that children and parents in our south Omaha community classes surpass the achievement test levels of lower-income students statewide and all students in their local district. There's a reason to take notice, especially with a three-year pattern--again, a three-year pattern--of success. In programs based in our north community center, we see preschool teaching teams in the top 10 percent of Head Start programs nationwide. With children consistently making significant progress. Again, families are the real difference-makers in education. The highest-level of students' success occurs among children who have a parent or a primary care giver enrolled in Parent University. Our evaluations demonstrate that parents enrolled in classes have a positive impact on their child's success and build on their strengths as a family. You'll see that...you've all seen the research of family stability and how important it is to the child's achievement. That's why our parent and child programs are tied together. The learning community guided by a 12-member locally elected coordinating council works to improve opportunities and outcomes in all our programs. Working collaboratively with a deep network of community partners, we have more and better resources for children and families. Why does that matter; because improving student achievement extends beyond the school day and the calendar school year. No where else will you find this level cooperation and generosity. We easily have more than 50 nonprofit organizations contributing to our programs for free or reduced cost. No other metropolitan area in the country has a comprehensive early childhood initiative like the Superintendents' Plan. The ongoing early

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childhood professional development open to all 11 school districts, nonprofit organizations, and community child care providers adds tremendous value. We now have the first-of-its-kind pilot program for community childcare directors in north Omaha. They care about children and want to operate quality businesses. Every director in our program is working to meet the Nebraska Step Up to Quality standards which was put in to place by the state of Nebraska. Higher education has partnered with us to develop the Community Achievement Plan. Aligning our educational efforts to our young people is a critical step. With the University of Nebraska-Omaha and two community colleges on board, we are moving towards better student pathways for success. Something powerful happening in our metro-area communities, together we share the growing understanding that children...stronger children and families make us all stronger. I'm happy to take any questions. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Any questions? What percent of your budget goes to early childhood versus these elementary learning community...learning centers? [LB1033]

DAVID PATTON: Our budget is basically broken into thirds; so a third of it goes into the Superintendents Early Childhood Plan. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: And a third goes to the... [LB1033]

DAVID PATTON: To our centers, and the other third goes to the early childhood with the Omaha Public Schools. There's an Intensive Early Childhood that we do at Kellom and Conestoga, along with some other schools in north Omaha. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: All right. [LB1033]

DAVID PATTON: And then a third goes to our centers, and the other third goes to the Superintendents' Plan. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: And then this Superintendents' Plan is what? That money is given to the schools and then they decide how to spend it? [LB1033]

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DAVID PATTON: We give our funds to the Buffett Early Childhood Institute. And then they collaborate with the 11 school districts for what's the best need for those school districts. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Do you collaborate with any public/private entities with the existence...we used to have an existence of free enterprise early childhood centers and private businesses. Do you collaborate with them at all? [LB1033]

DAVID PATTON: Well, we do for the early childhood pieces. Again, the Step-Up to Quality program the state of Nebraska initiated. We have a program so that if people who run a personal early childhood center in their home or business want to get training to reach level three by that standard, we provide that for them. And then once they hit level three, the state of Nebraska picks up continuing training at that point. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Do you give grants to them so that they can continue...so the children can afford to go there? [LB1033]

DAVID PATTON: When they hit level three, then those centers qualify for Title 20 funds for poverty children so then they can... [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: That's federal money, not... [LB1033]

DAVID PATTON: Yes, correct. We do not do that. We just provide the training to help get them to level three. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Thank you. Any other questions? Senator Kolowski. [LB1033]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Patton, thank you, very much, for being here today and for your presentation. I would ask you to describe your structure as far as your board is concerned, how they are duly elected and what mix there is on that board and how that operates. [LB1033]

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DAVID PATTON: Every section of our community has two representatives for each, so that the local control is very much there. They communicate with their sub...we call them subcouncils, and they communicate with the patrons as well as the schools that are residing within those subcouncils. We even have subcouncil members that will visit with their building-level principals to provide us feedback. We communicate with the local school board members as well so that we're sure that when (inaudible) continues improving model we're getting their feedback in what is in the best needs of their local area. [LB1033]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: You feel they're really cooperating very well together? [LB1033]

DAVID PATTON: Yes, yes. I've been with the learning community now for roughly 18, 19 months and the cooperation has been very good. [LB1033]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Okay. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Senator Linehan. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: Thank you, Chairman Groene. Thank you, very much, for being here. How many students, like in a year, do you think you're touching...okay, let's go back to this; a third, a third, and a third. So a third of them are your centers in north...a third of your budget is your center in north and south Omaha... [LB1033]

DAVID PATTON: Yes. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: ...so how many students do you think... [LB1033]

DAVID PATTON: Student-wise? That would be hard to count. I would say that we are roughly...and I didn't bring those numbers...about 200 in our north center with as far as families... [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: Okay, families. [LB1033]

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DAVID PATTON: ...and I think we're over 200 in our south center. So if you average one to two children per. And their children have to be early childhood, zero to...early childhood grade. But if they have children that are older and want to come to our center, we certainly engage them and allow them to come. We don't exclude them. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: Okay, so the kids at your center, where a third of your budget goes...the little kids. Then you said a third of it goes to OPS? [LB1033]

DAVID PATTON: Yes, there's an early childhood initiative that we have at several, six, schools within Omaha Public Schools. Again, that's early childhood, it's pre-K. It's zero... [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: Okay, so it's six schools in Omaha. So that would be those number of kids. And then the other third of the budget goes to the Buffett Early Childhood center... [LB1033]

DAVID PATTON: Yes, ma'am. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: ...for their...so they help run the Superintendents' Program? [LB1033]

DAVID PATTON: Yes, ma'am. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: Okay, so have you got this in front of you? [LB1033]

DAVID PATTON: Yes. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: Okay. I don't quite...can you just walk me through this? [LB1033]

DAVID PATTON: Um-hum. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: So, learning communities..."SO" ...I'm sorry, I get learning community... [LB1033]



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DAVID PATTON: Yeah, I'm sorry. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: But what is "SO?" [LB1033]

DAVID PATTON: Our south campus, our south Omaha campus. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: Okay, south Omaha campus. [LB1033]

DAVID PATTON: Yes, ma'am. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: Okay, so is this...this is the NeSA test for math in the last one, the most recent one? [LB1033]

DAVID PATTON: Yes, ma'am. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: So, all of Nebraska's all the schools across the state... [LB1033]

DAVID PATTON: All students, yes. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: So that...it's not subgroups, it's all... [LB1033]

DAVID PATTON: Correct. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: Okay. And then south Omaha, and then free and reduced lunch Nebraska, district...when you say district all, is that OPS or is that all the districts? [LB1033]

DAVID PATTON: Primarily, those children would reside within the Omaha Public Schools, so yes. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: But this number here says "District ALL," so that's Omaha? [LB1033]

DAVID PATTON: Yes, yes. [LB1033]

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SENATOR LINEHAN: And then it'd be Omaha free and reduced lunch. [LB1033]

DAVID PATTON: Correct. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: Okay. Is there a reason you picked south Omaha and not the other?  
[LB1033]

DAVID PATTON: That program has been running now for several years, and so that's the one we have the trend data for as far as a NeSA exam. The north Omaha campus has only been running now for a few months, 16 months, so we don't have a historical analysis at this point in time...  
[LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: So is this historical now? Since this is...this...when you say the learning community students, so these are little kids who have gone through the program and now they're in the third grade and these are the test results. [LB1033]

DAVID PATTON: Correct. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: So they've been in the program starting at, what, three years old?  
[LB1033]

DAVID PATTON: Right around three years old, yes. Some may have been a little earlier, some may have been... [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: So, could you get me, and I don't expect you to have it, could you get me the number of kids that this green line represents? [LB1033]

DAVID PATTON: Off the top of my head I believe it's 28, 26, but I would have to double-check what the n was in that group. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: Twenty-eight or 26 kids? [LB1033]

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DAVID PATTON: I believe. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: Okay. Yeah, I would like if you confirm that (inaudible)... [LB1033]

DAVID PATTON: Um-hum. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: And I do think...do you know how many parents have completed the Parent University program, because I do...actually, was that...I think that was the program... [LB1033]

DAVID PATTON: Pardon? [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: Was that developed...that's a program that's used across the country. I think Boys Town does something similar and they do it in several school districts across the country. [LB1033]

DAVID PATTON: Our south Omaha program was kind of developed from multiple programs brought together. I don't know that being repeated anywhere else as far as what we're doing in south Omaha. But, like when you reference Boys Town, we might have, you know, one of those partners might be Boys Town coming in and doing a very targeted, specific event with our children and our parents. So, there would be some collaboration there... [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: Okay, because they do do parent universities all over the country, I think, for...in schools. [LB1033]

DAVID PATTON: A lot of places are called "parent universities" we've come to find out, but ours is unique. It has components that would mirror others, but we...one of the things that we have found as we're becoming more and more aware from a national level, we're being asked to come and present our program because of...it's somewhat unique. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: Okay, because I...that was one of the numbers that was brought up with what the expense was. So I was just trying to clarify that. [LB1033]

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DAVID PATTON: Yes. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: Okay, thank you, very much. [LB1033]

DAVID PATTON: You're welcome. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Anybody else? Senator Kolowski. [LB1033]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Just to clarify an earlier statement; you have a south Omaha center and a north Omaha center. The south Omaha center is a renovated building that was turned into, very efficiently, structured and run facility that impacts south Omaha. And the north Omaha is a newer building just built in the last couple of years, I think. [LB1033]

DAVID PATTON: That is correct, yes. [LB1033]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you. [LB1033]

DAVID PATTON: And we're running out of space on our south Omaha campus already as far as demand. [LB1033]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Yeah, thank you. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Sir? [LB1033]

DAVID PATTON: Yes? [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: There's 11 districts involved, right? [LB1033]

DAVID PATTON: Yes. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: What...I mean, they're all paying...Gretna's paying a two-cent tax. Are they getting...what percentage of the tax are they getting back for their community? [LB1033]

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DAVID PATTON: And I apologize, I don't have it broken down by a fiscal note as far as each district, what they're getting. In your packet, there was an impact map, I believe. And if you reference that impact map, you'll see that everyone is getting some level of support. There we go. I believe Gretna takes advantage of the Professional Development for All series. I could get you actual dollar amounts, I just don't have those with me, I apologize. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: In your learning...are we talking about early childhood facilities in south Omaha and north Omaha? Or where are the elementary learning centers at? [LB1033]

DAVID PATTON: So the early childhood centers are within those...within six different schools for the Omaha Public School District. The two centers that we run are two-generational programs. So, the little ones come to this center with their parents. And so we provide the classes that are taking place inside those centers. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: When you say little ones, I read the work elementary I'm thinking five- to six-graders. [LB1033]

DAVID PATTON: No, these would be zero, age zero to... [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: That's early childhood. [LB1033]

DAVID PATTON: Yes, it'd be early childhood. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: So you really don't have an elementary learning by the real definition of elementary. [LB1033]

DAVID PATTON: I would...I understand what you're saying, yes. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: There's a big chunk of this statute that you were supposed to have...that you...not focus there at all? [LB1033]

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DAVID PATTON: Well, there's a statute that required us on early childhood education, that's why that's what we're doing within those. That was an update a few years ago, before my time. I can't remember the exact bill number. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: I'm just reading the statute...(inaudible) so we'll just... [LB1033]

DAVID PATTON: I understand. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Thank you. Anybody else? Thank you for your testimony. [LB1033]

DAVID PATTON: Thank you. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Next opponent. Go ahead, any time you're ready. [LB1033]

ALLEN HAGER: (Exhibit 6) Good afternoon, Senator Groene and Education Committee members. My name is Allen Hager, A-l-l-e-n H-a-g-e-r, and I reside in Omaha, Nebraska. I am an elected member of the Learning Community Coordinating Council and past council chair of the budget and finance committee. I currently represent Subcouncil 4: the community of children, families, teachers, taxpayers of the Millard School District. I am quite familiar with the sentiment in LB1033 because when I first ran in 2012 for this body and I was elected, I agreed with Senator Murante's position on abolition of the learning community. I don't anymore believe in that position, especially with this legislation. I believe in the learning community and I'm here to tell you why. In the Millard Schools, almost 21 percent of our students qualify for free or reduced lunches. That's 5,000 kids in suburban Omaha. Our council studies the demographics, the pockets of poverty in every school district. So how do we get proven and best practice answers to children and families faster, with clear measures of success? That's where we were in 2012, guys. The senator...the answer is independent evaluations for accountability, consistent success measures, and a staff that works with community partners to leverage taxpayer dollars in a responsible manner. I am a fiscal conservative and I have been ever since I started voting in 1991. So I see the structure in this legislation as not being necessarily very impactful. Learning community standards for funding are very tough. I have seen programs pushed out for some that are good but not good enough. Under this bill, you would lose that accountability of rigorous

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evaluations and the collaborative environment that makes the programs that we offer better. Let me tell you something about Sandoz Elementary School in Millard, where 53 percent of the 400 students come from lower income homes and 28 percent of those children are English language learners. The education needs of children are changing in all our school districts. And we see that all over, not just Douglas and Sarpy County but the entire state. The school district pilot programs there include Extended Learning for children in danger of learning loss over the summer. Sandoz is also an early childhood site in the Superintendents' Plan supported by the learning community. The school-as-a-hub philosophy is working at Sandoz. When you walk in the door, the support for early childhood education just absolutely permeates the culture, from the principals to the paraprofessionals and on down to even the janitors and the cafeteria workers. On our Superintendents' Plan site visits, council members saw a high level of consistency, a key to quality early childhood education. And I'll say this; at Sandoz, it is a culture. It is part of who they are. They have that culture permeate everywhere in that school district and that school. And it shows all the way down. Did you know that professional development in early childhood is open to all staff at every level, from all 11 school districts, with community organizations and small business child care providers are welcomed as well? This is the largest and most comprehensive early childhood program in the country. It makes no sense to disrupt 11 school districts that are collaborating and all working together as you all requested them to in the best interests of children and families. It's only happening here. We are proud of our investments and we are looking at options within our budget to increase programs for children and families who feel the impact of poverty in many of our suburban districts. I feel confident that what we see on a small scale today in the six subcouncils of the learning community will make our children, families and communities stronger. I appreciate the opportunity to share today. And I would welcome any questions that you may have. Thank you, so much. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Senator Linehan. [LB1033]

ALLEN HAGER: Yes, Senator Linehan. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: Thank you, Chairman Groene. Thank you, Mr. Hager, for being here. [LB1033]

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ALLEN HAGER: Yes, ma'am. Thank you. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: Do you know what percent...so, how many preschoolers are at Sandoz? Do you have an idea? [LB1033]

ALLEN HAGER: When I was there I believe it was around...all the classrooms were full. I would say probably between 50 and 100, but I could get you, certainly, get those numbers for you. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: And then...how is that paid for? Some of it evidently comes from the Buffett Learning Community... [LB1033]

ALLEN HAGER: Right. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: ...or the Superintendents', so what...what's your...how does your...you know how you gave us a third, a third, a third? [LB1033]

ALLEN HAGER: Right. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: How does your preschool budget break down? [LB1033]

ALLEN HAGER: The Sandoz Elementary budget would come from the Superintendents' Plan. That is money that comes from Superintendents' Plan that is dedicated to that program. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: So, I think it's...if it's a third and it's \$8 million, it's like about \$2.5 or \$2.7 million. So, does that take...is that all that is spent on these preschools in all these schools, or do the schools themselves have to add money to it too? [LB1033]

ALLEN HAGER: No, that's...that money that goes to the Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan--and especially like for Sandoz--that money comes from the tax levy that was initiated through LB585. [LB1033]



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SENATOR LINEHAN: I don't want to go down too much in the weeds here, so we'd be here until... [LB1033]

ALLEN HAGER: Right. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: ...(inaudible) o'clock tonight; but could you get me that budget because obviously the school, the buildings, are paid for by the school. [LB1033]

ALLEN HAGER: Right, the buildings are paid by... [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: And maintenance is paid for by the school... [LB1033]

ALLEN HAGER: Yes. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: And the heat and water and all that. [LB1033]

ALLEN HAGER: Um-hum, right. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: So, I would like to know exactly what the Superintendents' fund. I assume it's paying for the staff. [LB1033]

ALLEN HAGER: It's paying for the staff and the programming that is offered at school district...at the school. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: So if you could get me breakdown of it, that would be wonderful. [LB1033]

ALLEN HAGER: Yes, ma'am. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: Okay. And then, I find it...are you doing tracking at Sandoz and Millard as they present in this chart? [LB1033]

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ALLEN HAGER: Yes, that...well, that would be part of...the program started last year...  
[LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: Okay. [LB1033]

ALLEN HAGER: ...I believe it was. And so I think we're still too early to see where that is, but I do believe that there is impact being made. I would give you an example; the principal sent staff to a conference and they came back and it's that culture that they learned at the conference that's being permeated all the way through Sandoz. And I would invite you to go to Sandoz and speak to the principal about the programs and everything that's going on at Sandoz because I believe we are going to see an impact. And as that chart showed for south Omaha, I think we're going to see some very impactful numbers come down the pipe for stuff at Sandoz too. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: I hope so too. Okay, thank you, very much. [LB1033]

ALLEN HAGER: You're welcome. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Any other questions? Sir, Sandoz is a school in the Millard School District. [LB1033]

ALLEN HAGER: Yes, sir. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: You just said it's all paid for by the Superintendents' Fund. [LB1033]

ALLEN HAGER: The early childhood offering at Sandoz is paid for through the early childhood plan. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: That's zero through three? [LB1033]

ALLEN HAGER: Yes. [LB1033]

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SENATOR GROENE: Because once they're four, they're a part of the equalization formula.  
[LB1033]

ALLEN HAGER: Yes. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: But the four-year-olds aren't in the same room or... [LB1033]

ALLEN HAGER: I believe they are. They just have them broken down in to different areas of the school. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: So the ones with the four-year-olds are public school employees.  
[LB1033]

ALLEN HAGER: I would not be able to answer that, but I believe so, yeah. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: All right, thank you. [LB1033]

ALLEN HAGER: You're welcome. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Any other questions? Thank you. [LB1033]

ALLEN HAGER: Thank you. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Next proponent...opponent. [LB1033]

MIKE AVERY: Good afternoon, Senator Groene and Education Committee. I am Mike Avery, M-i-k-e A-v-e-r-y. I'm a member of the Learning Community Coordinating Council and past vice chair. I'm standing in, kind of, today for Lorraine Chang, which is out-of-town, as the current chair. I was elected by...to the voters of Subcouncil 6 which include the communities of Gretna, Elkhorn, Papillion-La Vista, Springfield Platteview, and DC West--which is Valley and Waterloo. I'm opposed to LB1033 but I appreciate the chance to tell you about today's learning community. We value accountability for the way we spend our dollar. Our independent

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evaluations help the learning community target investments to support children, families, and school districts. They are also a tool to make education programs and practices even better. You know, the dollars that we spend today will provide multifold dividends for the future and for our next generation. The legislative changes that come about with LB1067 supports our focus on children and families. Through the years of debate the learning community has worked hard on behalf of more than 52,000 children and families and have never missed a beat. Our community centers, Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan, and our district pilot programs are all about partnerships. We harness the power of 11 school districts and many community organizations. That's right...I think today over 50 community organizations that help. Let me give you an example of what this bill will undo and tell you about the north and south community centers. In north Omaha, we connect our programs for children and families. What are the results? Preschool teachers are learning...and teaching teams exceed national Head Start standards. And the kiddos are doing great. For the first time and just one year after starting Parent University, we see children with parents who that engaged in the program. And they're doing better than the peers all the way through. Not only are parents learning new ways to help their children, but they are improving themselves in ways of new jobs and other (inaudible). When family stability improves, we all know the powerful factor of child success in our schools. In south Omaha participation in our family learning programs are exceeding all outcomes. Our independent evaluations confirm three-year pattern of success through third-graders at both the district and state levels. Why? Parents are learning English and they're building on the success of the family. In closing, with your intelligence, passion, and concern for public dollar, I have a lot of faith that you will see the value of our investment in the next generation. Happy to answer any questions. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Senator Linehan. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: Thank you, Chairman Groene. Thank you for being here, Mr. Avery. You said 52,000 kids; but in Sarpy and Douglas County there's a lot more school...kids...there's a lot kids. Isn't more like 150,000 kids? [LB1033]

MIKE AVERY: That's the total. We're...you're talking about in poverty. Kids that are in the FRL levels. [LB1033]

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SENATOR LINEHAN: Okay, so do you know on these preschool programs that Mr. Hager was talking about, so Sandoz for example and there's others, I think DC West I'm pretty sure has one. I don't know if Elkhorn...I think maybe they have one. Do parents have to pay for any of those? [LB1033]

MIKE AVERY: No. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: So they're all free. [LB1033]

MIKE AVERY: Yes. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: And that's free and you drop your three-year-old off at 8 o'clock in the morning, you don't pick them up until 5 o'clock in the afternoon, or is it... [LB1033]

MIKE AVERY: It varies with the programs. And I'm, you know, we'll have to get you a detail on each of those schools and what's actually happening. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: Yeah, I would like to see if there's a...how it works laying out because I've heard...and I don't have any details, that's why I'm asking you because I thought for some there's sliding scales; some pay, some don't pay. And it's fine that you don't know that because it's down in the weeds, but if you could provide that. If the learning community has...I'm sure they must know, I'd hope they'd know who's paying and who's not paying. [LB1033]

MIKE AVERY: Yeah. I'm more familiar with, like, in Gretna. Those that pay in the Head Start programs or the preschool programs are those that are able. And it's...the scale goes down as far as when you get to free and reduced lunch. So you're able...those that are able are able to pay for those types of early childhood programs. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: So there's some kids in these programs that are not free and reduced lunch kids. [LB1033]

MIKE AVERY: Yes. [LB1033]

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SENATOR LINEHAN: Okay, that's a good clarification. Thank you. [LB1033]

MIKE AVERY: Any other? [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Sir, you keep saying that...you want to ask a question? [LB1033]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Go ahead. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Your predecessor said that there's these great outcomes; how do you measure the outcomes? I mean, you're only in to this...what are they, third grade? The first ones are...how far along in school are the first kids who went in to the program? [LB1033]

MIKE AVERY: Well, it's through the evaluation process. Both the university Med Center is doing evaluations and I blank on the other one, but their programs' evaluations are being done on what we have when we started... [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: But we don't know what's going to happen when they turn 17 or out of high school yet, do we? [LB1033]

MIKE AVERY: No, the whole idea originally was trying to get those kids in poverty up to a standard level as the rest of the kids who might not fall under the poverty. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: But we don't know if the kids that started when the public school preschool or kindergarten, by the time they're seniors there's any difference, do we? [LB1033]

MIKE AVERY: No, we don't know that yet. We're hoping that by changing it now and seeing the success that we're having in improving early childhood kids that they will go on. And I think there is other studies, nationwide, that have shown the improvement... [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: And there are studies that have shown no improvement, pick your study. [LB1033]

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MIKE AVERY: Yeah. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: But, are you tracking those 52,000 kids so that we know? [LB1033]

MIKE AVERY: We will be. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Are you? Are they tracking the name of the child through...are you planning on tracking them through high school to see if there's a difference? [LB1033]

MIKE AVERY: I don't...right now don't know, and we've basically just got started. So we won't know that...you know, my thought, bottom line, is there is some correlation between possibly poverty and the criminal records in that. And I'm hoping we get these children on the right track, that we don't have to pay for them--because I think it's \$30-some thousand you pay to keep someone in a prison. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: How many hours a day are they in this early childhood environment? Six and a half, seven, eight? [LB1033]

MIKE AVERY: Probably six hours, give or take the breaks they have... [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Five days a week if there's not a holiday? [LB1033]

MIKE AVERY: I believe that's right. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: One hundred and sixty-eight days a year? A lot of other hours of the day they're not there. [LB1033]

MIKE AVERY: Right, well, and that's...our Parent University is hopefully changing the way parents deal with the kids in poverty and their poverty as well. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: That's a good argument. You're trying to train the parents so when they go home the learning environment continues. [LB1033]

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MIKE AVERY: They invest and learn how to better educate their kids and work with the school systems to do that. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Thank you. Any other questions? [LB1033]

MIKE AVERY: Thank you. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Next opponent. Any time you're ready... [LB1033]

SAMUEL MEISELS: Thank you. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: ...you can go ahead. [LB1033]

SAMUEL MEISELS: (Exhibits 7, 8 and 9) Chairman Groene, Honorable Members of the Education Committee, good afternoon. My name is Dr. Samuel Meisels, S-a-m-u-e-l M-e-i-s-e-l-s. I'm the founding executive director of the Buffett Early Childhood Institute at the University of Nebraska. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak with you today in opposition of LB1033, legislation proposed by Senator Murante that would result in eliminating the Learning Community of Douglas and Sarpy Counties. I'm testifying today in my professional capacity as Buffett Institute director, and my testimony does not represent the official position of the University of Nebraska. Independent evaluations, as you've heard this afternoon, demonstrate that the learning community's programs and initiatives are effective. One prominent example is the Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan, developed in 2014 by the superintendents of the learning community districts in partnership with the Buffett Institute. This initiative is the nation's largest, most comprehensive approach to reducing income- and race-based achievement gaps for children from birth through grade three. Created with funding authority granted by the state Legislature, that would be LB585 in 2013, the Superintendents' Plan demonstrates what the learning community is meant to be. Eleven school districts that share geographic boundaries but vary in size, urbanity, and demography have come together around the idea of supporting the learning and development of young children growing up in poverty. Decades of research demonstrate that early intervention can level the playing field for children placed in circumstances of risk and can change their life chances and their trajectory. The Superintendents'



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Plan offers three options for school district participation. First, the Professional Development for All educational series provides free professional learning opportunities to all educators and child care providers who work with young children in the Omaha area. The events attract approximately 1,000 participants each year and are held on weekends as well as weekdays so as to be accessible to school districts and community child care providers as well as others. Sessions are offered in Spanish and English. We've had more than 150 community organizations that have participated in this since we started around three years ago. A second option of the Superintendents' Plan is...it takes place in eight of the school districts. And it involves districts that receive intensive customized assistance and consultation tailored to specific district early childhood needs that they identify. Third, 12 schools representing 6 school districts are implementing a comprehensive approach for working with children from birth through grade three. All 12 of these schools have more than half of their children eligible for Free or Reduced Lunch, and many of those schools have 70, 80, 90 percent of their children eligible. Known as School as Hub for Birth Through Grade 3, this effort involves more than 3,500 children and 500 educators. The underlying premise is that schools can serve as hubs that connect vulnerable young children and families to education and services throughout the first eight years of life. The Birth Through Grade Three continuum includes voluntary home visiting for children birth to age three that would be three to four times per month, high-quality preschool for three- and four-year-olds, and aligned kindergarten through grade three curriculum, instruction, and assessment for five- through eight-year-olds. Family engagement is emphasized very, very strongly throughout. Key to the progress is cross-district collaboration and networking, which have proven important and effective in generating innovation, expertise, and consolidation. This would not have been possible were it not for the existence of the learning community. Thank you for your past support of young children and the learning community and for giving me this opportunity to share my thoughts with you today. I'm happy to take any questions. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Any questions? Steve...Senator Erdman. [LB1033]

SENATOR ERDMAN: Thank you, Senator Groene. Thank you, Doctor, thank you for coming. So, Doctor, are you an employee of the university? [LB1033]

SAMUEL MEISELS: I am. [LB1033]

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SENATOR ERDMAN: Explain how that works. You work for the Buffett Childhood Early Education, but you're an employee with the university, can you explain that? [LB1033]

SAMUEL MEISELS: Sure. The Buffett Early Childhood Institute is a four-campus, that means we work across all four of the university campuses, institute of the university. I report to the president and the provost of the university system. I have tenure on all four of the university campuses as a faculty member. But we are independent of any campus. Rather, we are a part of the university system so all of our employees are university employees. [LB1033]

SENATOR ERDMAN: So you report directly to President Bounds? [LB1033]

SAMUEL MEISELS: I do. I don't report to Susie Buffett, which many people say to me they think I do (laughter). But I don't. She's a lovely, lovely woman who obviously had a lot to do with the initial gift to found the institute, but we are entirely independent of the Buffett family and the Buffett Foundations and we work directly for the university and with university faculty. [LB1033]

SENATOR ERDMAN: Thank you. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Senator Kolowski. [LB1033]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Dr. Meisels, would you again go over briefly the breadth and depth of what you're trying to do in the Omaha area with this particular plan and how it's unlike anywhere else in the country? [LB1033]

SAMUEL MEISELS: Sure. We're trying to transform the lives of young children at highest risk by improving their learning and their development. Which is a, obviously, very large goal and challenge to set before us. And the way we're doing that is starting at birth with home visitation with a curriculum that's intended...that's a research-focused curriculum intended to help parents to solve the problems of raising their children. And all of these children and all these families are living in poverty. Then we help them make a transition when they reach age three in to pre-K programs that we also are working with. Some are in the community, some of them are part of

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school districts--like Sandoz for example which is...the preschool there is a part of the school. But in many other schools, it's part of...they are community-based organizations where children are attending. And again, to make a transition into kindergarten through third grade. Senator Groene, you mentioned that some of the Head Start research has shown some fade-out of effect over time. I believe that much of that fade-out is a result of the fact that there is very little that takes place after children leave Head Start. And poor children typically attend poor schools. What we can do, and by "poor" I'm talking about socioeconomic status. And those poor schools don't always attract the same resources that other schools may attract. We can do something about that, and that's what we're doing here. From birth through third grade...and we also provide professional development, as I said, to roughly 1,000 people per year and in addition to that customized assistance to school districts around issues that they've identified. And we do evaluation as well. We've raised more than \$1.5 million of private dollars--some from Nebraska, some nationally--to support the evaluations that we do that are written up in the materials that you have at hand. [LB1033]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Talk to us about the long range view that we need to have in order to see the results. [LB1033]

SAMUEL MEISELS: Sure. Again, a good question raised; how do we know what's going to happen to these children when they graduate from high school? We don't know, but the evidence is clear that this is the best investment we can make. Economists, Nobel Prize winners, have pointed out that the best investment you can make is actually in the first three years of life, not at later stages of education. But this is where we get the most bang for the buck. So, what we're doing here is something that engages families, that engages teachers, principals, superintendents, communities. And we think that that is going to have a changing effect so that I hope that I will be around when these babies turn age 17 and when that happens...or 18. When that happens, I think we will all be thrilled by the findings that we'll have. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Senator, are you done? [LB1033]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Um-hum, thank you. [LB1033]

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SENATOR GROENE: Senator Linehan. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: Thank you, Chairman Groene. Thank you, Dr. Meisels. I do appreciate your passion, I really do. How many employees does the Buffet Early Childhood Institute have? [LB1033]

SAMUEL MEISELS: We have roughly 40 employees, not all funded by the Superintendents' Plan by any means. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: But they're all University of Nebraska employees? [LB1033]

SAMUEL MEISELS: They are. There are another roughly 20 people who are funded by the Superintendents' Plan with the dollars flow directly from the learning community to school districts to cover the costs, let's say, of a home visitor. So they're not...if someone is working with a family in their home, they're not a University of Nebraska employee they are an OPS employee or they are a Millard employee, and so forth and so on. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: But they're paid for by the \$2 million... [LB1033]

SAMUEL MEISELS: Yeah. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: ...or \$2.5 million that comes from the Early... [LB1033]

SAMUEL MEISELS: That's right, yeah. Right. But it doesn't come through the university and the university accepts no overhead for this work. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: Okay. Thank you, that's very good. You said, I think, if I understood, about half the kids in the program are free and reduced lunch. [LB1033]

SAMUEL MEISELS: Not exactly. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: Okay. [LB1033]

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SAMUEL MEISELS: All of the schools, and we're working with a dozen schools in six of the districts where we have this comprehensive program. All of those schools...at least half of those children enrolled in those schools have to be eligible. Many more than that are the case is what we find. But then, when those children are in a school, and in elementary school, our intervention has to do with the entire school through third grade... [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: Right. [LB1033]

SAMUEL MEISELS: ...within all the classrooms. So that means there are many children there, some of whom won't be eligible for Free or Reduced. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: So that brings me to, I had one other question...two more questions. Independent evaluations... [LB1033]

SAMUEL MEISELS: Yes. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: What, who...and then I heard UNMC. Which you're a scientist, that's a little too close to be, I would think, really independent. So you have more evaluations than from UMNC, right? [LB1033]

SAMUEL MEISELS: Our evaluations are being done by UNMC and by UNL. And you're right, that's not arm's length. But, nevertheless, we will open every single drawer and every single number to you. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: But you know as a scientist why that's problematic? [LB1033]

SAMUEL MEISELS: I do. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: Okay. Then, lastly, and I really like this part; grade three curriculum instruction assessment for five- to eight-year-olds. So, is there a particular program that the institute thinks is the best program for kindergarten, first, second, third grade? [LB1033]

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SAMUEL MEISELS: No, because if I try to do that across six school districts, or for that matter 11 school districts...and if I look to Senator Kolowski as a person who spent his whole career in public education, I would still be talking to them about which one they have to use. So instead, what we do is work with their curriculum. And they are experts in what their children need, and help them to focus on the kinds of strategies that we think will help to close the achievement gap. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: And could you tell me what those strategies might be? [LB1033]

SAMUEL MEISELS: They include involving the family, they include focus on rigorous and challenging curricula in math and in literacy, and a range of other things like that. We more or less individualize that per school district rather than asking the school districts to change what they've been doing. And truly we also know that there are...it's hard to say that this is the best curriculum for teaching reading, for example... [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: But there are some districts in the learning community that have a pretty robust curriculum for early reading... [LB1033]

SAMUEL MEISELS: Which is why we work with them... [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: Okay. [LB1033]

SAMUEL MEISELS: That's right, that's why we do that. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: Okay, thank you, very much. [LB1033]

SAMUEL MEISELS: We've been very satisfied with what we've found. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: Thank you. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Senator Walz. [LB1033]

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SENATOR WALZ: Thank you. Thanks for coming. [LB1033]

SAMUEL MEISELS: Sure. [LB1033]

SENATOR WALZ: I'm going to go back to the proponents for this bill that talked about it being a welfare program or talked about poverty. And I understand the focus is on intervention for children, but I'm just wondering what the home visits that you're making with families if you're seeing that making a difference... [LB1033]

SAMUEL MEISELS: I think we are seeing that... [LB1033]

SENATOR WALZ: ...and how. [LB1033]

SAMUEL MEISELS: ...we are seeing that difference. We do collect data from families and about families and about the home visit. We also know, as we all do and has been discussed here that much of the learning, much of the issues that we face here must involve the family. And if they don't, we may be fooling ourselves. So we not only are working with families in the first three years of life, we have family facilitators who work across the next six years... [LB1033]

SENATOR WALZ: Nice. [LB1033]

SAMUEL MEISELS: ...as well until the children get through third grade. So it's a very, very deep commitment that we make and it's a commitment that I think has had an impact on the schools. Many, many of the districts want to do this kind of thing now. [LB1033]

SENATOR WALZ: That's good, thank you. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Senator Kolowski. [LB1033]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Dr. Meisels, where else in the country is something of this size and magnitude being attempted? [LB1033]

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SAMUEL MEISELS: There is no other place that is attempting anything of this kind. Where you see the largest programs relative to this, similar to this, it's for three-year-olds or four-year-olds through third grade. There's no program of this size, and I hardly even know of any program at all that begins at birth and goes through third grade. There are a lot of birth to three, birth to five programs, and so what we're doing is not some kind of crazy idea I came up with. It's just using the research that's been available now over a period of many decades and saying why can't we put this together on behalf of the kids living here. [LB1033]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Any other questions? Sir, at the Early Childhood Institute at the University of Nebraska, is there a field of study there? [LB1033]

SAMUEL MEISELS: We do not prepare students, though we have student researchers who work with us. We're not a...we don't deliver courses. We do have faculty members who are affiliated with us, but...so there isn't...so what we do instead is work with the three Colleges of Education: Kearney, Lincoln, Omaha. But we don't duplicate what they do. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Forty employees; how many of those are permanently at the University of Nebraska, go to work there every day? [LB1033]

SAMUEL MEISELS: I would say all of them. Some of them are working in the schools, but they're our employees and they are spending...actually, many...there are about 15, maybe fewer, somewhere around that, 12 to 15, who are four days a week in the schools themselves... [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: So, where's your headquarters at? [LB1033]

SAMUEL MEISELS: Our headquarters is in Omaha. We have space as well on city campus here. But our principal administrative home is in Aksarben Village above Jones Brothers. And you come and I'll get you a cupcake (laughter). But, so these people, about 12 to 15 are in the schools four days a week; on the fifth day, Friday, they're in our office and during the summers



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they're usually full-time in our office. But they are our employees and we're interacting with them all the time. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: So the programs don't run through the summer? [LB1033]

SAMUEL MEISELS: Most...the home visits run through the summer, the rest are school district calendars. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: And the home visits are school employees, did you say? [LB1033]

SAMUEL MEISELS: They are school employees who are covered...whose salaries and benefits are covered by learning community dollars that are a part of the Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan. And let me just say that Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan is called that because the 11 superintendents designed this program with us and are very actively involved with it. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: An earlier testifier said that the law has been changed and the entire learning community's focused on early childhood. That's not exactly true, is it? [LB1033]

SAMUEL MEISELS: Well, it's not true insofar as we definitely take it through third grade. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: The elementary part of it? [LB1033]

SAMUEL MEISELS: That's right. But there is the majority... [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: (Inaudible). [LB1033]

SAMUEL MEISELS: ...I'd say the majority of the learning community effort is in the first five years of life. [LB1033]

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SENATOR GROENE: All right, but you track each child; when they enroll they're in there from zero to... [LB1033]

SAMUEL MEISELS: You bet. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: ...eight years old? [LB1033]

SAMUEL MEISELS: Yes, yes. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: You track them all the way? [LB1033]

SAMUEL MEISELS: We do. We have had only a couple...we have no children yet who have been around that long because... [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: What are they...what's the oldest ones? [LB1033]

SAMUEL MEISELS: The oldest one is probably around three right now. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: The oldest is three? [LB1033]

SAMUEL MEISELS: That's the oldest...I'm sorry, who we're following longitudinally. But we have eight- and nine-year-olds in third grade. But they've only been in this program for a year or so. Ideally, we will follow children over an eight- or nine-year period. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: But you haven't done that yet, so... [LB1033]

SAMUEL MEISELS: We can't do it, we can't speed it up. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: ...so, the UNMC did it... [LB1033]

SAMUEL MEISELS: UNMC did it with a different sample and a different program, not our program. [LB1033]

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SENATOR GROENE: What results could they possibly come up with zero- to three-year-olds that they've improved? [LB1033]

SAMUEL MEISELS: What can you find out about, are you asking me? What can you assess and evaluate? You can evaluate, for example, language. There's all sorts of things you can learn about how children are able to understand and how they're able to express themselves. Even in the first year of life, when you're preverbal. When the baby is preverbal, the baby is still very expressive and communicative. We learn a lot about that. We can learn a lot cognitively about what the child is able to do, understands about his world and so forth. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: This is a layman's question, so bear with me; it sounds impressive, I hired a plumber but I don't want him to shingle my roof. UNMC is internal medicine, psychology, but not educators. [LB1033]

SAMUEL MEISELS: Well, let me... [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: What's the tie-in here... [LB1033]

SAMUEL MEISELS: Yeah, let me help you with that... [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: ...from education... [LB1033]

SAMUEL MEISELS: Sure... [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: ...to UNMC... [LB1033]

SAMUEL MEISELS: Yeah... [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: ...where the department of UNMC... [LB1033]

SAMUEL MEISELS: ...so, as you... [LB1033]

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SENATOR GROENE: ...has the ability to do this and be... [LB1033]

SAMUEL MEISELS: Yes, we work with the Munroe-Meyer Institute which has a special unit that focuses on educational evaluations. And this is what they do, really, that's all that they do. And so, they're a part of it, but another major part of this is UNL, the Center for (Research on Children,) Youth, Family, and Schools. And that's all...and they do a lot of research with children of this age. So, the work is divided up between these two groups. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: So how much money...do you know how much money is spent on all these studies? [LB1033]

SAMUEL MEISELS: On all these studies? Well, I mentioned the number of \$1.5 million. And that's...those are dollars that we've collected or that we've raised from three different foundations to help to pay for many years of the evaluation... [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: They're going to track it? [LB1033]

SAMUEL MEISELS: Yeah, right, so it's not for all in one year. We also contribute dollars toward the evaluation from our own endowment, and then there are some dollars that come from...through the learning community as a separate line item. I hope I'm saying that correctly. So their evaluation, this is one child at a time evaluation. It's not a group; it's only one baby at a time, one preschooler, one second-grader and third-grader. And it's not just a test, but it's a multiplicity of findings we're looking for. It is expensive and it is time consuming and it takes specialists to do it. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Thank you. Any other questions? Thank you, sir. [LB1033]

SAMUEL MEISELS: Thank you. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Very informative. Next opponent. Any more opponents? [LB1033]

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KEELEY BIBINS: Good morning, I'm Keeley Bibins; last name spelled B-i-b-i-n-s. I am...been asked to come here and speak on my experience of the learning community as a teacher as well as a parent in Parent University. Excuse me. I am a teacher in an early childhood program. And I have...this is my fifth year teaching. I am in a school that is in a partnership with the learning community. And what I have...what I wanted to talk about as being a teacher in part of the learning community is I have been able to...my goal is to become a great teacher. Anything I put my hands to I want to be great, hopefully legendary. And I think the learning community has been very instrumental in that and helping me do that because of the professional development that we receive at least once a month as well as the coaches that we have that are there in the building with us, in the classrooms with us, helping us to...I mean to better implement what best practices and research is telling us in education. So, for example, what I have learned is that, like last...just last Tuesday we had a training in the evening. We learned from our trainer what the best practices were in phonemic awareness. Phonemic awareness, if you probably already know, is basically teaching little young people about sound. There's children in my class that range from the age three to five and we have Head Start pre-K as well as special education. So what this coach, what this trainer told me, I implemented...I got excited about it. What they're basically saying best practice is teaching the kids how to sound as early as three. So, that night I got excited, I got some activities together. The next day the trainer came to the classroom with me as well as my coach. They helped me to be my soundboard, say this is how this is going to work, how can I, you know, increase their executive functioning. And we were able to present this information to the students that Thursday. So this was a two-day turn around and the kids were so excited they were asking for homework on Friday. Now, you know that is not heard of, but three-, four-, five-year-olds are asking for homework in things like syllables as well as beginning sounds. And so, that is what they provide for me. So that allows me not to even waste time on things that are not effective in teaching our children. And the scores that we have received have shown that they have great increase and that we're doing very well. Now to talk to you...let me slow down (laughter), I'm a little nervous. But...and also what I notice about being a teacher is I can also definitely tell if parents that are a part of the Parent University. They come in and we have conferences. It's more of a dialog versus me just sitting there for 15 minutes telling you what your child is doing. They're actually talking to me, they're saying this is what I see at home. You know, we're actually talking about...and we're actually creating a partnership and coming together on what the goals are for their particular child as well as doing home visits. I do

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let my parents know that you are the expert on your child, I'm just here to assist you. Now, I want to quickly, because I know my time is almost up, I can talk about the learning community forever. But I am a parent. I am a parent, I have a 17-year-old son as well as I recently adopted two, set of twin boys, they are 4. So my house goes from kindergarten to college pretty soon. And I have...I joined Parent University because I thought I was going to be a better advocate for my parents in the classroom to why they should join these classes without realizing how much I was going to learn myself. I have learned things like, in Circle of Security, when my children are four even though they're throwing tantrums on the floor I can understand where they are, what they need from me. They need me to organize their feelings. They need me to appreciate them. They need me to be their support and to bring them back on top of that circle so that they're ready to be able to explore the world and be ready to try new things. And I'm at the top of the circle supporting them there, too. What I also learned, and I'm going to wrap up really fast because this went really quickly. What I also learned is that I can get my kids to accept and know in four steps. I learned that from the learning community. I take that from my classroom in to my home. I have four-year-old twin boys who are very rambunctious and even my high-schooler, I can get him to accept and know in four steps as well (laughter). All because of things that I have learned. So, I'm open to any questions. I wish I had more time, but, you know, any questions that you may have of me. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Thank you. Any questions? Senator Walz. [LB1033]

SENATOR WALZ: Thank you. First of all, you are very much an inspiration. Thank you so much. [LB1033]

KEELEY BIBINS: Thank you. [LB1033]

SENATOR WALZ: I love your passion for teaching and learning. [LB1033]

KEELEY BIBINS: I love it. [LB1033]

SENATOR WALZ: Who provides your training for you? I mean, is there a... [LB1033]

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KEELEY BIBINS: It just depends because we've had differentiating, so they had consultants from around the country. We've had a young man by the name of...he's not very young, but I'm going to say that...Jonathan (phonetic)--he'd be so upset at me not knowing. But he comes and he basically tells us how to teach them literacy and how to take the curriculum that we use and go more in-depth into the curriculum on how to reach, like how best practices say, in each grade level. And we have this evaluation assessment which is basically making sure we have a quality program. It's called CLASS, and so what he does is he takes the curriculum and he breaks it down into how the curriculum fits into a...how we can better elevate into a quality program. And we also get (inaudible), which is basically looking over the environment we have for the students to make sure that the environment is a quality environment. And he basically lets us know...like, for example, we'll pull the materials, like, already from our lesson plans and he'll say, okay, we want to get them from this level to a higher level. So these are the questions you could ask, this is a tool that you can use. And he'll provide the research to support it. And he's just one of the many trainers that we've had before. [LB1033]

SENATOR WALZ: Do you get any training on a child's emotional needs? [LB1033]

KEELEY BIBINS: Yes, we have had training with...which is called Conscious Discipline, which I love. Conscious Discipline basically lets us know, like, where the child is when they're...in their behaviors, where they are in their mind, in their brain. So basically, when the child is being...when they're exhibiting behaviors that are aggressive or hitting or throwing, they are in their bottom brain. And so they're saying at this point what they need from you is to teach them how to calm down. So I'm not going to come in and I'm not going to try to reason with this child, I'm not going to logic with them. I'm going to get them calm. Then it's going to bring them back to their limbic system, which basically says they're in their emotions; I need to feel loved, I need to know that you accept me. So now I know when I come in I know what to look for and I'm like I love you, you are safe, this is a safe environment, it's okay to be mad. And now it's my job to validate them. You have every right to be upset, you're right, I would probably be upset too, but let me show you how we can show that you're upset in a safe way. And then I have them in their frontal lobe and so I can reason with them and bring them the high executive functioning. So we have been creating, like, cozy corners in our classroom which allows a place for the child to be upset. You're absolutely right, these are called feelings and you have the right to be upset and we

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have a cozy corner where you can go over there and explains what feelings are, it gives them strategies on what to do to calm their feelings, they have different tools to use to calm their feelings. So we have learned a lot of this particular training. We also learned that, in Conscious Discipline, that even the music that we play, what it does to the children's minds. So when you come in and you set the atmosphere you don't want to have a bunch of clapping (inaudible) to the sound of a mother's heartbeat is where you keep the kids on a certain level. It's very important to even greet the children and have them have a choice on how they will be greeted in the morning. You have to be aware that some kids are touchy-feely kids and some kids are just like, hey, I can deal with a high-five or a wink, you know. So, it's basically just letting us know that we create the environment for the child to learn because research says that when a child is ready to...when they are interested in learning, we can get them to learn pretty much whatever and they'll retain the information when they're doing something that they're interested in and they're feeling validated with relationships. [LB1033]

SENATOR WALZ: Okay, and then just real quick... [LB1033]

KEELEY BIBINS: Okay. [LB1033]

SENATOR WALZ: ...how are you involving parents in that type of process, the Conscious Discipline? [LB1033]

KEELEY BIBINS: Conscious Discipline? [LB1033]

SENATOR WALZ: Yeah, what are the emotional pieces of that through the day. [LB1033]

KEELEY BIBINS: When I involve my parents, one, I love it because when I take classes at the learning community they're in there learning things with me. Two, I involve my parents because, like I always tell them is if there's anything let them know what we're trying, what the goals are for the children--they set their goals--and I say these are the strategies that we are trying. If there's anything that we are trying that you need at home, let me know and I will try to get that for you. So I create it to be open. Like, if you need the resources that I'm using, I may not be able to give you the commercial brand of it, but I can definitely try to make something for you that



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you can use at home. And I have a lot of parents who we work together and say, okay, I created a folder where just different...like, get ready for bedtime. I don't want a bedtime tantrum. Okay, well, a lot of kids need is predictability. So if you use this one folder and it's predictable every night, then normally they'll start falling asleep before you get to the last thing. And so we have those kind of dialogs and those kind of talks. And, like, Ms. Keeley, it works, it's wonderful. And so, we invite them to...I tell them, this is what I'm learning based on best practices. This is what we're implementing in the classroom. You're more than welcome, one, to come in to the classroom and watch and be a part, as well as if there's anything you need from me to take home I can provide that for you. [LB1033]

SENATOR WALZ: Okay. I need your card because I want to go visit the Parent University sometime. [LB1033]

KEELEY BIBINS: Okay, please come. [LB1033]

SENATOR WALZ: Thank you. [LB1033]

KEELEY BIBINS: Any other questions? [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Any other questions? What class did you say you taught? [LB1033]

KEELEY BIBINS: I teach early childhood inclusive, so that goes from birth to third grade...I mean, sorry, I'm nervous; birth to...I'm going from three-year-olds to five-year-olds. I have early...I have pre-K Head Start as well as early childhood special education in the room. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: In the OPS system? [LB1033]

KEELEY BIBINS: Yeah, I do for OPS. Yes, but these are basically my experiences...based on my experiences, yes. [LB1033]

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SENATOR GROENE: Calm voice you got, I don't think you need any (laughter) to help calm anybody down. Thank you. Thank you for your testimony. [LB1033]

KEELEY BIBINS: Any other questions? Well, thank you all for your time, I appreciate it. [LB1033]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Good afternoon. [LB1033]

JOHN LINDSAY: Senator Kolowski, members of the committee; for the record my name is John Lindsay, L-i-n-d-s-a-y. Appearing on behalf of Omaha Public Schools in opposition to LB1033. Testifiers before me I think have laid out a really good case for the importance of early childhood education and the significance and the impact that it's having. Obviously some of the research is specific to the learning communities is not quite yet available, but research nationally I think it does indicate the importance of early childhood. But I want to take a little bit of a different approach and just do a, maybe, a little bit of a reminder, a history lesson if you will, to remind you where the learning community came from. And the learning community arose out of a very, very divisive era; both in the Legislature and out in the community of Omaha. It started when there was an attempt to repeal the statute that...what was in effect that would allow the Omaha Public Schools to expand with the city of Omaha. It had not been enforced for years, but that brought attention later on when OPS attempted to enforce that. And that resulted in, as I said, a very bitter, divisive debate and just an era here in the Legislature. It brought negative national--some international--attention. But the Legislature is the Legislature always does: worked through the issues. They worked through the issues, the result was the learning community. The learning community was fine-tuned over the years. There were changes, some of which my school district opposed strongly. Especially the repeal of the common levy. But the learning community right now is doing an excellent job at what its mission is right now. It is having an impact on kids in the metro area who face struggles that can be overcome with the property resources. I was going to go into some of the, I guess, some legal issues. I'm going to pass those over and just leave it with; the learning community right now, its programs are helping children. Let's not stop that, let's keep helping children. We'd urge you to indefinitely postpone LB1033. [LB1033]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you. Questions? Yes, Senator. [LB1033]

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SENATOR LINEHAN: Thank you, Senator...Vice Chairman Kolowski. And thank you, very much, for being here, Mr. Lindsay. I do remember that history and I remember how divisive. And it was particularly important to Elkhorn because Elkhorn was one of the targets of the one school district...When I...I understand that these are all good programs, but I'm having a hard time and I think this is where...we're trying to do so much. So, one of the testifiers said, and this is, I would guess probably low, there's 53,000 kids in Douglas and Sarpy County that would qualify for free and reduced lunch. So there has to be, like, almost 150,000 kids just in K through 12, so I don't...just 53,000 doesn't sound like it probably catches them all. [LB1033]

JOHN LINDSAY: I thought it was about 110,000, in Douglas and Sarpy. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: That sounds...that sounds...well, that's probably...that might be the whole population. [LB1033]

JOHN LINDSAY: Total population. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: So, but let's just say about half of them, which is about right, free and reduced lunch. So, and the World Herald did a great story, I'm sure you saw it awhile back, about how many kids the learning community is working with. So, in this story, and I think it jives with what people said here today, there's 183 kids in the zero to three program; there's 679 pre-K students enrolled in 29 classrooms--so that's 679, so we're still not to 1,000; and then there's 3,000--and these kids would be in school anyway, but they're in special classrooms, evidently--there's 3,000 in kindergarten through three grade. So, out of the 53,000 kids...because the learning community and I do remember this, it was about the difference between the schools and why you had subgroups whether they be people of color or immigrants, why their scores were so much lower. And the whole goal was to close those gaps, right? Well, Omaha is the minority-majority district at this point. [LB1033]

JOHN LINDSAY: That's correct. [LB1033]

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SENATOR LINEHAN: So you've got over...so you've got 25,000 kids that are in that danger zone because of their status, either being minority and free and reduced lunch. And we're reaching.. [LB1033]

JOHN LINDSAY: It's about 76 percent of OPS's free and reduced lunch... [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: Seventy-six percent. [LB1033]

JOHN LINDSAY: Um-hum. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: Because they're not all minorities either, everybody that's free and reduced lunch... [LB1033]

JOHN LINDSAY: I don't know that we've broken it down by that, but you're correct. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: So, let's just say it's 53,000 kids. And we're only getting...we're only...these programs only reach 3,000 of them. So, how are we going to close the achievement gap? [LB1033]

JOHN LINDSAY: Well, when you get... [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: Because we're leaving 50,000 kids behind. [LB1033]

JOHN LINDSAY: When you get 3,000 kids who arrive at school with that achievement gap already reduced. And the problem is when they arrive in kindergarten... [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: Well, no, before the kids arriving in kindergarten were only hitting...according to this story, we're at less than a thousand kids are we touching before they get to kindergarten. [LB1033]

JOHN LINDSAY: Okay, then the less than a thousand kids. But each one of those children, if that achievement gap is for the most part gone by the time they hit first grade, kids can continue

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to achieve at the level of their peers. And over time that entire gap is going to widen. You can't hit 53,000 kids in one year because there aren't that many that are pre-K or in any given grade. We do have, in OPS we have other challenges. For example ELL, English language learners, which is 25 percent of our K-5 students are ELL, 10 percent of our high school students. Those challenges as well, so you can't.. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: But that's not where the learning community... [LB1033]

JOHN LINDSAY: That's true. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: ...I mean, that's the original focus of the learning community... [LB1033]

JOHN LINDSAY: That's true. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: ...but that's gone. [LB1033]

JOHN LINDSAY: Right. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: The original focus...and now we've decided to focus just on...so you're right. That is a very good point, you'd have to divide the 53,000 by the number of years, so it's more like...it just seems to me...I don't...I don't know how you get there from here if we're dealing with 800 kids, preschoolers...900 preschoolers how you close the achievement gap for thousands. I mean, all this is good. [LB1033]

JOHN LINDSAY: Right. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: But we're not going to close the achievement gap with this. [LB1033]

JOHN LINDSAY: I don't think... [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: Not with this alone by any stretch of the imagination. [LB1033]

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JOHN LINDSAY: I don't think any single bullet is going to close the achievement gap. I think you have to have a whole bunch of approaches and I think this is a significant approach and it's an approach that is effective. And... [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: Pretty expensive. [LB1033]

JOHN LINDSAY: Yeah, you know... [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: Per kid. [LB1033]

JOHN LINDSAY: ...that's another part of the learning community was that if these expenses aren't absorbed by the learning community, they are absorbed by Omaha Public Schools which does not...or Ralston Public Schools or Millard Public Schools, or whichever district. Now, if we remember, part of the learning community was intended to do was to address the fact that we were taking away from the Class 5 school district, OPS, the ability to grow to the boundaries of the city. Had the ability been there, there would have been more resources available to address things like early childhood district wide. But what the learning community did was say we're not going to allow you to access the resources, and that would be in Elkhorn and parts of Millard... [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: Well, that was the first time that was not allowed...that was just this year. They've had a common levy until this year. [LB1033]

JOHN LINDSAY: Right, right. But that's different from having the... [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: So, all these...so, for the last ten years, because this passed in 2007... [LB1033]

JOHN LINDSAY: Um-hum. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: So we've had ten years where there was a common levy and we've still had the most significant achievement gaps in the country. [LB1033]

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JOHN LINDSAY: The...and you have to look at the math of the common levy. The common levy did not start working in favor of OPS for several years, the reason being it became implemented at the time of the '08-09 economic recession which also deflated or stagnated growth in property values in the western part of the world, meaning they couldn't have that growth. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: There was...okay...I'm... [LB1033]

JOHN LINDSAY: ...yeah, it's getting too much in to the weeds... [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: Right. [LB1033]

JOHN LINDSAY: ...but the bottom line; is it expensive? Yes, it is, but so are some of the negative outcomes from education...lack of education... [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: Yeah, I agree. Negative outcomes from education are horribly expensive. I do agree with that, 100 percent. Thank you. [LB1033]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Additional questions from senators? Good job, thank you, very much. [LB1033]

JOHN LINDSAY: Thank you. [LB1033]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Additional opponents, please. How many additional opponents do we have? How many want to speak, hands...one, two...thank you. Yes, welcome. [LB1033]

BLANCA LOPEZ: (Exhibit 10) Good afternoon, everybody. My name is Blanca Lopez, B-l-a-n-c-a L-o-p-e-z. I am from Mexico and I have been living in the United States for 12 years. And I am participating in learning community center for over two year, eight hours a week. I am married and my husband's name is Octavio Moro. We are parents of four boys. Alonso is nine years old, he is in fourth grade. Diego is eight years old, he is in third grade. Alejandro is six years old and is in kindergarten. He also participate in the program one and a half years before going to kindergarten. Ariel is my youngest child, he is here with me today. He is three years old

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and he is in Head Start, and also he also goes with me at the center. He loves going to school and has learned a lot. At his age, he is able to recognize the colors and shapes, letters and numbers. And all of them go to Spring Lake Magnet Elementary School. All are participating in dual language program. I am so proud of them because they are doing very well in school. The learning community center helped my family in many ways. For example, I noticed that Alejandro and Ariel's transition to school was easier than my older boys because they were prepared from going to the center. Diego was always complaining about why I left him alone in the school, and both Alonso and Diego cried in the first days of school. On the other hand, Alejandro told me; Mom, can't you go back home? Ariel also told me; I will be okay. Sorry...Alejandro is already reading in both languages now and when he needs help with his homework, I can help him easily. But it wasn't always this way. I still remember how hard it was for me to help my other kids before going to the center because I didn't know almost any English. And many times I have to take pictures with my cellphone of their homework and send them by message to their cousin asking for help. I questioned myself every night; how can I help my children? I was so stressed and depressed, and I felt I was failing as a mother in many aspects. Learning community center, when I learned about the program my life began to change because I had never heard about any place where I could learn English at the same time my kids were learning how to share and get along with others. The LCC program is an amazing opportunity for parents like me. Now I have learned many parenting strategies, for example how to establish a routine, how to set limits, and how to communicate better with my kids. We are first teachers of our children, and now I feel more confident as a parent. I have overcome my fears and now I am involved in my children's school. My time in the center is almost done, but I would like for other people to have the opportunity to learn at the center. I have goals and dreams. One of them is to be a good example for my kids and I teach them that we put our own barriers; if they believe in themselves they can do everything that they want. It is never too late to learn. I want my kids be successful. And I want them to graduate from college. Thank you so much for allowing me to share my testimony. Everything that you are investing in our education will have very good results in our kids' future. Thank you so much. I should say that I was nervous because I have never spoken in front of a lot of people. Sorry for my mistakes, but it's...thank you for the opportunity. [LB1033]



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SENATOR KOLOWSKI: You're welcome. And you did an excellent job, thank you, so much. Questions from senators, please. Yes, ma'am. [LB1033]

SENATOR PANSING BROOKS: I just want to thank you for coming. My gosh, I followed along and you had this whole thing memorized. [LB1033]

BLANCA LOPEZ: Yeah, I tried, but it's...five minutes is short time... [LB1033]

SENATOR PANSING BROOKS: Almost word for word, so I'm not very worried about your children because with a parent like you (laughter) those children are going to thrive and be incredible assets for our state. So, thank you so much for coming to testify. [LB1033]

BLANCA LOPEZ: Thank you, so much. And thank you for giving us the opportunity to learn English because now myself esteem is higher than before because before I was always thinking about what was my future for my children. And I was worried all the time. [LB1033]

SENATOR PANSING BROOKS: Well, I've been here four years and I've never seen anybody come and memorize the entire thing. Especially in not your primary language. So, thank you very much for coming. [LB1033]

BLANCA LOPEZ: Thank you so much. [LB1033]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Additional questions from anyone, please? Thank you, very much. [LB1033]

BLANCA LOPEZ: Thank you. [LB1033]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Additional opponents, please. Good afternoon. [LB1033]

JOEL DOUGHERTY: Good afternoon, my name is Joel Dougherty, J-o-e-l D-o-u-g-h-e-r-t-y. I'm the chief operating officer of the OneWorld Community Health Centers. And I'm here today in opposition to LB1033. OneWorld operates the Learning Community Center of South Omaha

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in partnership with the Learning Community of Douglas and Sarpy Counties. The Learning Community Center in South Omaha partners with experts in our community to deliver our program. These partnerships include the Omaha Public Library, Visiting Nurse Association, UNO Service Learning Academy, Boys Town, Lutheran Family Service, Child Saving Institute, and the Omaha Conservatory of Music. These partnerships have been built over many years and are yielding results. We have results to show that the Learning Community Center of South Omaha is working. Students whose parents are involved in the program scored higher on the most recent statewide math test than free and reduced lunch students across the state. On the same math test, these students scored 10 point higher than all districts students regardless of their socioeconomic status and 17 points higher than district free and reduced lunch students. On the English test, our students who spent their early years in homes where their parents spoke little to no English had a higher proficiency rate than all of Nebraska free and reduced lunch students. The proficiency rate outperformed all district students regardless of their families' socioeconomic status, primary language, income, or zip code. This is on the English test. These results are the product of years of work developing this program, assembling a fantastic team, building partnerships with experts to change the lives of our participants to the benefit of the students and their families in our community. I'm grateful for your support historically, and I look forward to your support in the future. [LB1033]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Mr. Dougherty, thank you very much. And thank you for the whole role that OneWorld plays in the success of the learning community over these last ten years. I've been a part of that, and watch that and seen it grow. And we're very grateful for the vision and the outreach that you and others have provided to help make this happen. [LB1033]

JOEL DOUGHERTY: Thank you. [LB1033]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Questions, Senators, please. Yes, ma'am. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: Thank you, Vice Chairman. Thank you, Mr. Dougherty, for being here. I've done some volunteer work at your south center and it's an amazing place. [LB1033]

JOEL DOUGHERTY: Thank you. [LB1033]

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SENATOR LINEHAN: I'm a little concerned though, on this...on these numbers that we're using. And maybe I misunderstood. But how many kids are actually in this subgroup? [LB1033]

JOEL DOUGHERTY: Twenty-seven. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: Okay, that's a lot of...I mean...and they've been in the program since they were three or since they were born, or... [LB1033]

JOEL DOUGHERTY: Those are student's whose parents started in the early years of the program. This is our sixth year in running the south center, and so those are students whose parents were in the early years when it was still small and who have now reached the third grade and were able to take that test. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: So they would have been there at three then; so three, four, five, six, seven. So...okay, well it is incredible. Is there...how do we ramp it up? I mean, how many kids are in this program now that are three-year-olds? [LB1033]

JOEL DOUGHERTY: There are 250 families in the program right now whose children are zero-to six-years old. I don't have the three-year-old specific number right now. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: So, if you divide that by six...it's about 40 kids per class? So I'm going to go back to what I was asking... [LB1033]

JOEL DOUGHERTY: Sure. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: ...the gentleman before you. It's wonderful, it clearly works, from this. But it's not a very big piece of the population. [LB1033]

JOEL DOUGHERTY: Sure. This is an intensive intervention, certainly. And if you're suggesting that we expand it, I'm open to the idea. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: Well, we got to be realistic. [LB1033]

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JOEL DOUGHERTY: Sure. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: It's...I mean, I haven't taken a pen-to-paper what we're talking per child here, but it's pretty expensive. It's like, very, very expensive. So...because a third of the...well, I don't know. Because I know you're doing a lot of things, Parent University and all that, and it's all good. But at some point we have to be realistic about what we can actually afford to do and how many lives we're touching. So, that, I guess, would be my biggest question about this is if we're talking about four...you know, whatever; 1,000 kids out of 50,000, or 2,000 or 3,000, is like, what are we going to do with the 40,000 we're not getting to? [LB1033]

JOEL DOUGHERTY: Sure, that's a fair question. I'm lucky enough to be on this side of the touching lives. And I know that we're very fortunate to be able to do the work that we do and a better economist than I could help you balance the input versus the return down the road. [LB1033]

SENATOR LINEHAN: Okay. Thank you very much. [LB1033]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Additional...senators, questions, please. Seeing none, thank you, Mr. Dougherty. Additional opponents, please. Any additional opponents? Anyone from a neutral stand? Good afternoon, ma'am. [LB1033]

TONYA WARD: Good afternoon, thank you for having me here. [LB1033]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Please. [LB1033]

TONYA WARD: (Exhibit 11) I have a handout for you. Sorry I'm a turtle. [LB1033]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: That's okay. [LB1033]

TONYA WARD: Car injuries. [LB1033]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Take your time. [LB1033]

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TONYA WARD: Okay. [LB1033]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Welcome, please identify yourself and spell your name, please.  
[LB1033]

TONYA WARD: Good...thank you. My name is Tonya Ward, my name is T-o-n-y-a W-a-r-d. And I am an elected official currently serving on the Learning Community of Douglas and Sarpy Counties in District 5. I'm here today to offer support to only the very first part of LB1033; to abolish the learning community and allow the school districts to do the jobs themselves. I'm opposed to the rest of LB1033 because it does not abolish the learning community. It simply moves the learning community right into our public school buildings, and it does not end the wasteful, expensive spending of tax...property tax dollars and money-making programs set in place to continue rich people making big paychecks off of these students in poverty. And it does not stop the overreach of their programs by the LC. Public schools do not need the LC. We raise children...I'm 50 years old. I was raised in Bellevue Public Schools, and I never went to preschool and I didn't go to college, but I turned out okay. And I think we can do better by our students. I was elected to the learning community in 2014, and in those meetings since 2014, every meeting I have asked of Buffett, Educare, Dr. Sam Meisels, and his staff what happens when families do not want to be referred to their programs or have home visits. They answered me, we just keep chipping away at them until the parents learn to trust us. I find that acceptable...unacceptable. And why doesn't no mean no to these programs that the LC is funding with all of these millions of dollars? I think that we need to abolish the learning community because it's a failed entity. It was an experiment that's very expensive and it's cost a lot of schools a lot of losses in the beginning as, they referred to, losers and winners were identified. That's not okay for me for children. All children should be winners, especially with over \$25 million dollars at stake. I believe that the learning community should be abolished and the 11 school districts and the board of education and the property tax owners...property taxpayers should all be called to the table again to discuss solutions to replace the learning community when it is eliminated. Abolishing the learning community should include termination of all of their two- to four-year contracts with all the partners and programs the LC created since they've tied up all these funds in these two- to four-year contracts. And we need to eliminate the very possibility for mandatory preschool under a nanny-state-like influence imposed upon our poor families. And I

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am a mother living in poverty with three children. Programs refer...programs in the learning community refer our infants and toddlers...they refer to them as sweet carrots, to make profit off of kids and it offends me deeply and I don't like that. Why is the ECE and the Learning Center's authority in this bill? If that authority already exists, is that giving them the authority that they do not have at this time? That's unclear in this bill. The learning community has no measurable outcomes that supports all of the millions of dollars that has gone in to evaluations and pilot programs and training for people who are not having direct impact on the lives of children. When we were being approached by families in poverty from Westside who came to me, even though I'm District 5, I brought them to the learning community. And their two ninth- and tenth-grade boys were suffering, languishing in school as their family went from affluency in a \$250,000 home all the way down to poverty, homeless, and now the kids are in CPS custody. The learning community didn't help those kids at all. Why are we rushing infants and toddlers? It doesn't make any sense. There's no measurable outcomes for all of the money that I shared with you, this document that will show you all of the financials. And I'm just tired, as a mother living in poverty who's raised children in poverty. Poverty does not equal failure automatically. Poverty is the condition of your bank account or wallet and not the condition of anyone's mind, heart, soul, or spirit of a human being. And being poor with risk factors does not mean that individual will be illiterate or become a failure in our society or a criminal. We are not disposable human beings just because we live in poverty. Many people have achieved great things, have made fantastic contributions to society. They were raised in poverty with risk factors and they never attended preschool. Removing barriers that are keeping students in poverty from achieving success is the way to end some of the negative impacts of poverty. We have spent over \$22 million dollars with the original huge common levy, and now we're on the small common levy, which is still millions of dollars. And they do not help enough students in poverty, they do not serve except a small handful of people in poverty. And that's not acceptable for all these millions. We can do better if we start over again. [LB1033]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Ms. Ward, we have to finish up; you have the red light. [LB1033]

TONYA WARD: Oh, yes. Thank you. [LB1033]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Thank you. [LB1033]

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TONYA WARD: So, why do we have such a huge achievement gap? It's because we do not have the money come down to actually remove the barriers, that are real-life barriers blocking these children from reaching academic success. And thank you for your time. And I can answer any questions. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Thank you... [LB1033]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: We asked for neutral statements, but you have a very pro-statement sounding like... [LB1033]

TONYA WARD: Both. [LB1033]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: ...rather than neutral? [LB1033]

TONYA WARD: No, I was for support of the first part only, to abolish the learning community, but I oppose the rest of LB1033. [LB1033]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Okay. Thank you very much. [LB1033]

TONYA WARD: Yes, sir. [LB1033]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Mr. Chairman. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Thank you. Senator Walz. [LB1033]

SENATOR WALZ: Thank you, Chairman Groene. Hello, thanks for coming. Hope you feel better soon. [LB1033]

TONYA WARD: Yes, thank you. [LB1033]

SENATOR WALZ: So, what would you consider an answer to the real-life barriers that kids have? [LB1033]

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TONYA WARD: Well, in OPS and Sarpy County, for example, the biggest barrier to the children in poverty from birth to 19-years-old is actually utility shut-offs. That takes the children out of the home when they're shut off. They go in to foster care. They are traumatized, and nobody can ever give them back the time that they've lost unnecessarily put in to foster care just because the parent couldn't pay utilities. Cars breaking down, attendance issue arise because children have parents whose cars broke down, and so little Johnny can't get to school on time. But instead of someone coming to his rescue, or the families rescue, repair that \$250 brake job. Instead he's sent to truancy GOALS, and we've been paying GOALS out of our property taxes, but it was a secret. It was only under...if that paper circulates for you, it was listed under Omaha Foundation. But that's actually the GOALS program, a truancy program. How are they using a truancy program now with the learning community for infants and children up to third grade? It doesn't make any sense to me. So, to fix that or a solution, is that what you're asking? [LB1033]

SENATOR WALZ: Right. [LB1033]

TONYA WARD: Solution is let's do over. Before the learning community existed, we had human beings successful, we had children successful growing up. I was raised in poverty, also with the military. But I have three sons raised in poverty. They're very successful and they're good students. And they're curious learners. But when the truancy happened to us, I had to pull them out of public school and homeschool them to protect them from the truancy law. And so one of our stories is we will never be the same again, because when they tried to steal my child under false pretenses, the same GOALS community, that program that we pay out of the learning community, the same people that lied in court, the same people that accused me of abuse and neglect with 10,000 other families. They're being paid by the learning community. (Inaudible) wasted all the money stays up here and lifts up that (inaudible) from the soles of their feet so that they can remove the barriers that are keeping them from academic success. [LB1033]

SENATOR WALZ: And when you say you disagree with...let's see, how was that...you agree...disagree with the first part of the bill, but you agree with the... [LB1033]

TONYA WARD: Opposite, I agree; abolish the learning community, with the first part. But the rest of it just simply slides the learning community into public schools. And that's not the



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answer. We need to get rid of it. Let's do over again, get rid of all these contracts that they've dug very deep; two- and four-year contracts they have made with partners of the learning community. And I don't feel that's right either because every year the council has to vote, but when they make two- and four-year contracts, even though they say, you know, it's up for a vote, they're digging their...to me, they're digging their roots deeper. [LB1033]

SENATOR WALZ: And just one more quick question; have you ever attended...and first of all, I want you know that I agree with you. You can be very successful if you live in poverty. [LB1033]

TONYA WARD: Yes, ma'am. [LB1033]

SENATOR WALZ: I fully agree with that. But, have you ever attended any of the Parent University...the Parent Universities, have you ever gone to any of those or...you said you had some involvement in the learning community, so I was just curious if you had that. [LB1033]

TONYA WARD: Yes, in the beginning when I first joined, was elected, in 2014. I did go to the south and the north centers. But I don't really attend those any more because it's a failure. And it's a failure because for all of these millions of dollars that the learning community has control over, only a handful of very wonderful families are being helped. And we only focus on Spanish when there's all kind of languages that we're not helping these children in poverty. So, I just feel we can do better. [LB1033]

SENATOR WALZ: Thank you. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Senator Erdman. [LB1033]

SENATOR ERDMAN: Thank you, Senator Groene. So, you handed us this document. Can you explain that to us a bit, what is that? Is that a monthly expenditures for the learning community that you serve on... [LB1033]

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TONYA WARD: Yeah, that's just a snippet. One month, I think I gave you December 31 of 2017? [LB1033]

SENATOR ERDMAN: Correct. [LB1033]

TONYA WARD: Yes, sir. So, the little dashes that I put are just showing you where some of these high dollars are spent. And so...did you want me to tell you a couple? [LB1033]

SENATOR ERDMAN: One of the things that caught my attention; on the back there was a \$450,000 payment to Buffett Early Childhood Institute. And then it says incorrect payment, what was that? [LB1033]

TONYA WARD: That was an error made by our treasurer or our...maybe treasurer or...I'm sorry, I got a blank what he's called. But, he handles the money. [LB1033]

SENATOR ERDMAN: Okay. So, are you on the board now? [LB1033]

TONYA WARD: Yes, sir. [LB1033]

SENATOR ERDMAN: So this was from December? [LB1033]

TONYA WARD: Yes. [LB1033]

SENATOR ERDMAN: So, in other words, looks like at the bottom of the front page, UNMC and then it says ELC Programming Evaluation. That's for four months, \$128,000? [LB1033]

TONYA WARD: Yes, yes. That's how much they got for that time period. [LB1033]

SENATOR ERDMAN: So it's \$2,229,000 for December? [LB1033]

TONYA WARD: Yes, sir. [LB1033]

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SENATOR ERDMAN: Well, I appreciate you coming today. I, too, am impressed with your ability to teach your kids and do what is right for your family. [LB1033]

TONYA WARD: Thank you, sir. [LB1033]

SENATOR ERDMAN: That is the way it's supposed to be done. I appreciate it and I agree with you. [LB1033]

TONYA WARD: Oh, thank you. My sons are wonderful. My 16-year-old, I pulled him out of public school in fourth grade but he's one of the examples of a child...they say that children who don't go to preschool...I found my constituents--I announced in our last meeting, Thursday--my constituents came to me and they sent me these emails. They said; they're always saying that our children can't succeed if they don't go to preschool. I don't want my child to go to preschool, I want them to spend time with my family. So, the family...I'm several ethnicities; I'm French, Dutch, Portuguese, African American. So I can relate with a lot of my constituents. So they said, children that don't go to preschool catch up with their peers by second and third grade. I think that's all right. That's, I think, how we were raised without the learning community. So I just don't understand the waste, I don't understand the no measurable outcomes after they've been receiving all of these millions of dollars. What a waste. We can do much better by our children if we come together. [LB1033]

SENATOR ERDMAN: I happen to agree with you. I appreciate your testimony, it solves it for me, thank you. [LB1033]

TONYA WARD: Thank you, sir, I appreciate you. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: I'm sorry, I missed it; I had...nature called. But anyway... [LB1033]

TONYA WARD: That's okay. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: But you're on a learning community now. [LB1033]

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TONYA WARD: Yes. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Which area do you represent? [LB1033]

TONYA WARD: Douglas and Sarpy, District 5. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: I appreciate...I was born poor too. [LB1033]

TONYA WARD: Oh. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Yeah, and I get a little upset when people who associate the word "poverty" with bad parents, simple people, uneducated, and ignorant. And I...thank you for standing up for the word "poverty." [LB1033]

TONYA WARD: Thank you. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: There are very good people, very good parents.. [LB1033]

TONYA WARD: Yes, sir. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: ...who just happen to be poor. Depends on whether in the generational march in our great America that we can become successful. I appreciate that. In this education chair, when they bring the word "poverty" to me, it goes nowhere. Every family, every child is an individual and I appreciate that. [LB1033]

TONYA WARD: Thank you, so much. It's painful to hear our children, just because they're in poverty...they're infants and they're going to say they're going to turn into a criminal. That they're not going to be a successful, thriving part of society... [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: As far as I'm concerned it's a hidden word for bigotry. [LB1033]

TONYA WARD: Yes, sir. [LB1033]

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SENATOR GROENE: Thank you. [LB1033]

TONYA WARD: Thank you. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Anybody else? Any other neutral testimony? Thank you, Ms. [LB1033]

TONYA WARD: Thank you for your time. I appreciate you all. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Did you read the opposition? [LB1033]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Not yet, no, I have not. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: (Exhibits 20-34) Opposition: Nancy Car, Lincoln; S. Wayne Smith, Lincoln; Ralston Public Schools; Gateway Elementary Schools, Omaha; ACLU; Lilia E. Ponce, Omaha; Yanira Cano; Marisol Ibarra De Gomez, Omaha...my staff tried to write this out so that I could pronounce it, so bear with me. Patricia Paniagua, Omaha; Bertha Ortega, Omaha; Martha Portillo from Omaha; Xiomara Andrade, Omaha; Cristian Barrios, Omaha; Eduwiges Santana Rubio; Omaha. And I apologize for butchering your names. A lot of different languages in your names. And neutral, you're neutral? Yeah. Thank you. [LB1033]

GWEN EASTER: Yes. I agree, too, with abolishing LB1033...the first part of LB1033. And I'd like to see the learning community totally abolished. And I have expressed that many times here as I have spoken with you... [LB1033]

KRISTINA McGOVERN: Can I have a name... [LB1033]

GWEN EASTER: Oh, I'm sorry... [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Spell your name. [LB1033]

GWEN EASTER: My name is Gwen Easter, G-w-e-n E-a-s-t-e-r; I'm with Safe Haven Community Center, Safe Haven preschool. I've expressed a number of times here about the

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learning community and how they have affected our businesses and also how I feel also how they take advantage of low-income families...parents, families in poverty. And how they have come into our communities, duplicate our programs and our services. The learning community, the Parent University...you know, I'm not against people helping kids, period. You know, but I am against the fact that what they're doing, other day cares are doing, my organization, my day cares definitely provided these types of services. And like I said before, over 100-some day cares have been forced out. And if these deals continue...learning community continue, this is going to affect more families across Nebraska. It's going to affect more childcare businesses. Parents should have the right to decide who teaches their children and they have a right to raise their children. It should not be the learning community and them wanting to make preschool mandatory, because this is where that's leading to. And as Tonya says, we both work a lot with families in the community with the housing services. And I've attended many meetings at the learning community where I have heard them say they have no measurable outcomes. And in fact, the Nebraska Board of Education, there is no assessment even shows kids in our school at a disadvantage. They have nothing to show for this. So, I'm just asking the same thing; is that you all take a look at all what is being presented and abolish this and let's come up with a better plan that supports all children and families, businesses. And we can help support, you know, get behind the school systems too as well. But they need to include us not try to exclude us...our families. Thank you, that's all I have to say. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Questions? Gwen, there might be a question. [LB1033]

GWEN EASTER: Oh. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Have you gone to the learning community boards or some... [LB1033]

GWEN EASTER: Yes. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: ...of the members and try to work...see if there's a way that they would work with the private day cares with grants or... [LB1033]

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GWEN EASTER: Yes. I've talked at different...at the learning community. I shared with them what had happened with our businesses. Like I said, I was there in 2000...I think it was '16...or might have been early 2017, when they had given this \$2.6 million for the learning community. Excuse me, the learning community had given over \$2.6 million plus another \$150,000 or something to that effect to the Buffett Early Childhood Institute to continue their research when they told them they had no measurable outcomes on the home visits. And a lot of families are participating in those home visits because, one, that's one of the ways that they can get some free day care, you know. And not everyone wants people into their homes, but they participate anyway. Especially if they're in fear of that their names may be given to other agencies like CPS or...you know what I mean. It's not very...although they make it sound like everybody's gung ho for this, you know, people are concerned about certain things so they'll go along with things just because they don't want...you know. And like I said before, when you have them collecting data, all these different organizations and these schools collecting data on these families...got numbers connected to the families and things like that because these are things they've stated in their own board meetings at the learning community that I've been in. They stated this before. And so I was shocked. And I wondered how many parents really know that a lot...this data is being collected on their children. So, you know, you know...like I said, they're doing nothing different than any other childcare, we all are doing professional development and things like that. You know, we have to take those too, and you know all that because even before it was put in to the law it was mandatory by the Health and Human Services that we do at least 12 clock hours, you know. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: So, when a home visitor comes in and they're...if they do an evaluation on a child, they're not telling the parent they're doing an evaluation on the child? [LB1033]

GWEN EASTER: I said, I'm wondering how many parents know that all these organizations that they're connected to are also collecting the data and...yes, they go in to their homes and everything. But a lot of these parents are participating because that's one of the ways to...they're getting their child in for the free day care. And I know that too because I've called. I've asked the questions about the home visits. Do I have to participate? Well we would prefer you to participate. That's one of the ways that, you know, you can get your child in. They thought I was

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a parent, see, when I called and asked some of these questions. They're thinking that I'm a parent so they've shared a lot of information. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: So, that lady before you said that if a car broke down or something comes up, do you know what the truancy is on zero to three... [LB1033]

GWEN EASTER: No... [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: ...showing up at the... [LB1033]

GWEN EASTER: No, I don't have...I don't have...I don't have that data, but I was surprised, too, to find out that they had a memorandum in their...in their Superintendents' Plan that leads to the attorney's office. You know, for...yeah, I was surprised by that. And I'm sure that parents don't know that that's going on either. I mean... [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: But does...it's voluntary, isn't it? I mean... [LB1033]

GWEN EASTER: It is voluntary... [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: ...you can't (inaudible) a two-year-old to show up... [LB1033]

GWEN EASTER: Right, but it's voluntary for now. But at some point what their main goal is is to make preschool mandatory. And once you make things mandatory, that takes the rights of parents to the side. If they don't want their kid in one of these schools' programs, then here comes CPS or somebody else, you know, to their...knocking on their door. You know, and as far as poverty is concerned, we have families who have issues when it comes to housing, that needs help with rent, utilities assistance. I mean, since 2000, my organization has offered a home intervention referral service where we advocate for families to get help with rent, utilities assistance, we work with landlords to try to help them find housing. There's a lot of families that have these types of issues. And like Tonya said, a lot of them do not get help and they definitely do not get help from the schools. There's just a few schools that I know for sure at times that have helped kids. And Kellum is one of them, you know. And these schools get money from



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Sherwood Foundation to provide these type of services, but a lot of times they are told no, they cannot get help. And a lot of times they don't want us telling people, families, that this money is here for them. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Thank you. Any other questions? Any other neutral? Senator Murante, would you want to close for this poor Chairman? [LB1033]

SENATOR MURANTE: I would love to, Chairman Groene. Thank you, members. And I'd particularly like to thank the final two testifiers who testified in the neutral. That, I think, was interesting testimony; that at least in my observation of the learning community debate I haven't quite heard that perspective before. So I think that was good to hear, especially from a Learning Community Coordinating Council member. So, in listening to most of the opposition testimony, I'd like to make an observation. And it's an observation that I think the members of this committee are going to have to make a decision on in the years to come. You heard for the most part the justification for opposition to LB1033 all of the good things that the learning community is doing. It's important to note that the provisions in LB1033...as a matter of fact, the provisions that the neutral testifiers oppose, specifically authorize the continuation of every single program that was mentioned as justification for keeping the learning community. The question before you is whether you need an entire political subdivision, and an entire layer of government to administer \$7.5 million budget. Do you need an entire layer of government to do the things you heard about today? I would submit to you that the answer is no. By way of contrast, Omaha Public Schools has come in on \$1 billion budget; \$7.5 million versus \$1 billion. I would submit to you that there are programs within our state budget, individual programs, that are...that certainly spend substantially more money and accomplish comparable goals but that do not require the use of an entire state agency or an entire political subdivision. That's the question we have before us today. So, to the two neutral testifiers, believe me, I sympathize with the desire to just throw the whole thing out and refocus our attention elsewhere. I sympathize with it. My hope with LB1033 was to start a bit of a new discussion, which is not simply: is the learning community working. I think there is probably a lot of disagreement in this room to the answer to that question. But the more boring question, quite frankly: is this the best mechanism in government to administer these programs? I think the answer to that is no, I think it could be done far more efficiently and without the use of an entire political subdivision. So, that's why I

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brought this to you today. And I would strongly, especially those of you who do not represent the Douglas or Sarpy County area, I want you to know this is something that is extremely passionate to the property owners in my district, and in Sarpy County in particular. I know Senator Linehan experiences the same thing on the campaign trail. This is something that this is probably the single most important issue that I hear about talking on doors. This is an example where taxpayers and citizens of the state really feel like they were taken advantage of. And I think doing away with this and allowing the local school districts to engage in interlocal agreements to do these programs themselves, I think it would get much more public buy-in, it would get much more public support, and I think it's just the right thing to do. So I'd be happy to answer any final questions you may have. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Questions? [LB1033]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: You bet. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Senator Kolowski. [LB1033]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Senator Murante, would we want to close down a quarter or half of all the school districts in our state because of the size that you talked about as far as amount of money that the learning community is using...(inaudible)...that are much smaller than that? [LB1033]

SENATOR MURANTE: I'd say... [LB1033]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: They're political entities, also. [LB1033]

SENATOR MURANTE: Indeed, and there are certainly political subdivision which don't spend \$7.5 million. I think when you're talking about whether it is a political subdivision that is layered over other political subdivisions that spend massively more than that and provide comparable services, certainly comparable areas of expertise, then I think we're talking about layers of redundancy rather than providing new services that need an entire layer of government to be...to not to be provided. [LB1033]

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SENATOR KOLOWSKI: That's your opinion. [LB1033]

SENATOR MURANTE: I am here to offer my opinions, not anyone else's. [LB1033]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: You have. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Senator Erdman. [LB1033]

SENATOR ERDMAN: Thank you Senator Erdman, Senator Murante. If I listen to the questioning and concluded there's about 250 children in this program. [LB1033]

SENATOR MURANTE: I'm not sure I heard that exact, I think there was one specific program that had 250, I don't think the entire learning community serviced 250. That's not quite the statistic I heard. [LB1033]

SENATOR ERDMAN: But it cost quite a bit of money to do this. [LB1033]

SENATOR MURANTE: I believe the annual budget is \$7.5 million. [LB1033]

SENATOR ERDMAN: It appears to be one of these programs that is started by someone who donates the money and then after that donation period is over then the state picks it up. And it looks like it's a significant amount of money for the amount of value we get out of it. Now, I do agree with the last two ladies, made a pretty compelling case for just eliminating it completely. [LB1033]

SENATOR MURANTE: I agree, I would have to say relative to their funding. The predominance of their funding right now--as I understand it, and I'm certainly willing to be corrected--is a two-cent property tax levy that is...that goes to this objective and that is why that is being transferred to the interlocal agreement under this proposal. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Senator Pansing Brooks. [LB1033]

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SENATOR PANSING BROOKS: So, I'm wondering; so, are you thinking that we should do away with it and then go back to one city, one district like Lincoln has? [LB1033]

SENATOR MURANTE: Oh, no, absolutely not. [LB1033]

SENATOR PANSING BROOKS: Okay, well... [LB1033]

SENATOR MURANTE: This...under this bill, that the school district boundaries would remain frozen as they are right now. So this is absolutely not...the one city, one school district would have consolidated other school districts. Westside Public Schools would have ceased to be... [LB1033]

SENATOR PANSING BROOKS: Right. [LB1033]

SENATOR MURANTE: ...Millard...Millard, Ralston Public...not Ralston, Millard Public Schools... [LB1033]

SENATOR PANSING BROOKS: So you freeze it, then what happens? You freeze the district as it is, the learning community district. Is that right? [LB1033]

SENATOR MURANTE: Not the learning community. So the school districts as they exist today would continue as they are going forward. Unless, of course, there are mechanisms in the law where there can be agreements where the boundaries can change and that would certainly...could certainly continue to be. But the school district boundaries remain frozen. [LB1033]

SENATOR PANSING BROOKS: So, as the city grows then just...what? What happens as the city grows? I don't get that. [LB1033]

SENATOR MURANTE: So there's not a connection... [LB1033]

SENATOR PANSING BROOKS: I'm used to Lincoln where it's one district. [LB1033]

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SENATOR MURANTE: Sure, understood. There is not...there is not right now a connection between the municipal boundaries of the city of Omaha and the school district boundaries of Omaha Public Schools. There are other school districts that are currently contained within the annex boundaries of the city Omaha. And there are...undoubtedly there will be more parents who live outside of Omaha Public Schools who are annexed in to Omaha as Omaha continues to annex. Those two issues, although they sound the same, especially from a Lincolnite's perspective where they functionally are the same, they're not the same conversation. So, for example, Westside Public Schools is entirely contained within the municipal boundaries of the city Omaha. That wouldn't change under this proposal. [LB1033]

SENATOR PANSING BROOKS: All right, but as the city expands, then what? You're going to have districts that, like, are just, like, little thin districts because you're saying to keep them. [LB1033]

SENATOR MURANTE: So this...there would not be any new districts created. There would not be new school districts created under this proposal. As Omaha would annex, let's say, west of Highway 6; Omaha's boundaries would be west of Highway 6 in the event that they ever get there. But the school district boundaries, where parents sent their kids to schools, those would still not change. [LB1033]

SENATOR PANSING BROOKS: Okay, thank you. [LB1033]

SENATOR MURANTE: That's current law, it's not really impacted by this bill. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: You're not changing...two years ago when we got rid of...one...two years ago when we got rid of the common levy, that kind of broke up the common tax base. But in that original language, we took away the ability for school districts to annex other school districts. That's all still there, right? [LB1033]

SENATOR MURANTE: Yes. We didn't do that in that bill. That was done... [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Prior. [LB1033]

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SENATOR MURANTE: ...when the learning community was passed in 2007. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: But your bill or getting rid of the common levy has not changed that part of the statutes; every school district remains the same. [LB1033]

SENATOR MURANTE: Correct. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: This has nothing to do with that. [LB1033]

SENATOR MURANTE: Correct. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: You're just getting rid of the administration... [LB1033]

SENATOR MURANTE: Just the two cents for the early childhood, and then the administration of the learning community itself. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: The cost... [LB1033]

SENATOR MURANTE: Yes. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: ...is what you're looking at and local control. They still would have the ability to two cents. Do you foresee this...you know, the university is a land grant college, we have extension agents out there. They're very efficient; teach families how to...mothers how to can, dads how to can, how to raise kids, 4-H. Very efficient, they go right into the home, they have clubs. Do you foresee maybe that that's what the early childhood institute could do? Eliminate the bureaucracy of the learning community and just go right to the school district as, like, an extension agent and be what the university is? [LB1033]

SENATOR MURANTE: I probably can't answer that question directly. All I can say is under this proposal, nothing in terms of the contracts of the professionals behind me who testified. That doesn't mean if you pass this bill that they have to stop working... [LB1033]

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SENATOR GROENE: They couldn't do that. [LB1033]

SENATOR MURANTE: ...this new interlocal agreements can contract with them as well...  
[LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: They could contract with the... [LB1033]

SENATOR MURANTE: So that doesn't mean that everything that is being done...actually, as a matter of fact, when I told my legal counsel to start drafting this bill, it was a real simple direction. It was; take everything the learning community is doing now and let the school districts do it in an interlocal agreement. And that was the genesis of where we are today.  
[LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Maybe I'm wrong, but it seems to me the (Buffett) Early Childhood Institute is the genesis where all the ideals come from; the training of the employees, all the way down. Which is not a bad thing, they're experts and they do a good job. But wouldn't it be better just to go right to the school districts with those folks? [LB1033]

SENATOR MURANTE: Whether they have the resources to do that or not is probably a question for them. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Two cents; they got two cents...that isn't paying for administrators.  
[LB1033]

SENATOR MURANTE: I don't know whether they have the manpower to do that or not.  
[LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: I don't think you want to get rid of the initiative to help poor families.  
[LB1033]

SENATOR MURANTE: Indeed not, or course not. [LB1033]

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SENATOR GROENE: Thank you. [LB1033]

SENATOR MURANTE: Um-hum. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Any other questions? I close the hearing on LB1033. [LB1033]

SENATOR MURANTE: Thank you, members. [LB1033]

SENATOR GROENE: Does anyone need to take a break? All right, we'll take a five-minute break. [LB1033]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Senator Groene, welcome and the floor is yours. [LB1125]

SENATOR GROENE: Vice Chairman Kolowski, members of the Education Committee, for the record I am Mike Groene, M-i-k-e G-r-o-e-n-e, Chairman of the committee and representative of District 42. LB1125 is basically a shell bill. I just had it there like we did last year which turned into LB409 in case the \*Forecasting Board came out and said the economy crashed and we were going to be asked by the Chairman of the Appropriations Committee and the Governor to adjust the TEEOSA formula again. As we all know, that isn't necessary, so it was there just as an insurance policy and we'll just sit on it. February 28, about two days with Forecasting Board, and we all know it's not going to be...and we have discussed earlier because of valuations, property valuations in the equalized districts--Omaha...well, Douglas, Lancaster and Sarpy Counties. I think you said there's 160,000 of the students in the learning community of the 2...300,000. Their valuations went up, and so for their state aid went down. And the \$21 million, so that will be...the Education Committee's and the TEEOSA formula's donation to the budget shortfall. And so, this should just die in committee unless a disaster happens in two days. Any questions? [LB1125]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Go head, Senator. [LB1125]

SENATOR LINEHAN: So, the big school districts are, for the most part, their state aid's going to drop. So then are we going to get blamed for cutting their state aid? [LB1125]



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SENATOR GROENE: Somebody will say that, but their overall spending will be...what they lost was made up in property taxes... [LB1125]

SENATOR LINEHAN: Okay. [LB1125]

SENATOR GROENE: ...you know, that's the... [LB1125]

SENATOR LINEHAN: I do know how it is, I'm just saying it out loud on the record that it's the way the formula works. [LB1125]

SENATOR GROENE: You will see articles where our state aid got cut. Well, join the club; 175 districts went through that, to the point of no equalization aid because of the property taxes come in first, state aid fills in the hole. [LB1125]

SENATOR LINEHAN: Okay, thank you. [LB1125]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: Senators, any additional questions? Senator Groene, thank you. Other proponents, please; proponents. Opponents, any opponents who would like to speak? And anyone in the neutral category? Thank you for remaining seated (laughter). Senator Groene to finish. [LB1125]

SENATOR GROENE: I want to introduce more bills like this just so I can have my name in print and talk to you guys without any...five minutes. That ends it, I'm not going to say anything (laughter). [LB1125]

SENATOR LINEHAN: (Laughing) Yay. [LB1125]

SENATOR GROENE: He told me to do this. [LB1125]

SENATOR KOLOWSKI: And we are finished for the day, thank you. [LB1125]