



TO: Education Committee
FROM: Jeremy Ekeler, Associate Director of Education Policy
Nebraska Catholic Conference
DATE: March 13, 2023
RE: LB724 (Praxis Test – Elimination of Mandate) (Support)

The Nebraska Catholic Conference advocates for the public policy interests of the Catholic Church and advances the Gospel of Life through engaging, educating, and empowering public officials, Catholic laity, and the general public.

Nebraska should be proud of its educators and schools, including the 2500 teachers in our 112 Catholic schools who bravely weathered the COVID pandemic.

We believe the work of our educators is mission-driven, but between the stresses of the job exacerbated by COVID, the typically lower salaries (compared to public schools), and the general trends in teaching shortages, our schools now have a hiring crisis that must be addressed.

There is no singular panacea. The work in front of us requires multiple creative and collaborative efforts. Nebraska Catholic schools are proud to be part of finding solutions as we broaden the pathway to teaching without lowering the bar. Ideas for consideration to support the work of teacher recruitment and retention include loan forgiveness programs, eliminating unnecessary barriers and coursework for out-of-state teachers, opening up reciprocity to proven educators, removing redundant and/or onerous human relations requirements, and the focus of LB724: Reconsidering of the practical value of mandating a test such as the Praxis.

Regarding the Praxis, here are thoughts from two of our Diocesan superintendents:

Vickie Kauffold (Archdiocese of Omaha – 70 Schools with 17,000 kids): “It is not necessary for a college student to take and pass the Praxis to enter a college education program when they’ve already proven themselves equipped and capable by their university through ACT scores and other college acceptance requirements. Additionally, I have witnessed too many instances of outstanding teachers who, due to failing one section of the Praxis or their own testing anxiety, face an unnecessary barrier to teaching. This is despite being in good standing with the college education department, acceptable college coursework, and/or prior professional experience. We must focus our energy on how to manage the student teacher process and equip future teachers with effective experiences.”

Jordan Engle (Diocese of Grand Island Superintendent (12 schools with 1500 students), Math Teacher, Principal of Grand Island Central Catholic): “It’s been said for years: The Praxis doesn’t indicate good teaching and it does little to explain pedagogy. It’s really a content and assessment exam that says more about how a person does under a pressure situation than it does their aptitude. Outside of its inability to measure what it’s designed to measure is the cost for

young teachers. The Praxis exams are expensive, and that expense is not helpful for first year college graduates.”

With all of those thoughts in mind we request your consideration of LB724 and thank Senator Vargas for presenting this concept once again.

Thank you for your time and consideration!