



TO: Education Committee
FROM: Jeremy Ekeler, Associate Director of Education Policy
Nebraska Catholic Conference
DATE: January 30, 2023
RE: LB385 (Teacher Recruitment and Retention Act) (Support)

Chairman Murman and Members of the Education Committee,
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.

I am here in support of LB385 and the general approach of addressing teacher recruitment and retention issues. The NCC was also here consistently in past years to support bills related to the educator workforce in Nebraska's schools, including our support of the Teach in Nebraska Today Act that passed last year.

First, a look at how we got here: Before the pandemic, 44% of educators quit the profession within five years.¹ During the pandemic, 54% of teachers considered leaving the profession within two years.² Now as we exit the pandemic we are feeling the fallout: Many public school districts have openings and are short-staffed. Nebraska Catholic schools, especially those in rural communities, are likewise reporting that applicants are dwindling, hires are happening later, and new teachers to the profession are few and far between. The Omaha World Herald reported today that 75 positions remain open in nonpublic schools, though that number is likely closer to 100 due to some non-reporting schools. This empirical³ is matching the anecdotal, and it's being felt in classrooms and school buildings across the state.

There are many reasons for the shortage, and one is financial.⁴ LB385 helps address this issue by providing financial assistance to first, second, and third year teachers, as well as those completing certification in special education, math, science, technology, or dual credit.

We appreciate the approach of targeting these funds strategically. Every year of teaching is trying, but the first years are the most difficult. I can tell you first-hand as a former teacher that it's like drinking from a firehose as you build curriculum, form your teaching style, mature into a professional, and learn to navigate the system. As a former principal, I can also tell you that this scenario is too common: Just as teachers come into their own they realize they're still carrying a load of debt. Many of these teachers are considering marriage and starting a family, compelling

¹ <https://teachercareercoach.com/why-teachers-quit/>

² <https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/why-teachers-leave-or-dont-a-look-at-the-numbers/2021/05>

³ https://omaha.com/news/local/education/teacher-shortage-worsening-across-nebraska-state-report-says/article_0dfad018-9dd2-11ed-93a4-ff7b65261258.html

⁴ <https://www.chalkbeat.org/2022/9/6/23220508/teachers-leaving-the-profession-quitting-teaching-reasons>

them to find less fulfilling but more profitable careers.⁵ Financial assistance goes a long way to support not just the professional, but the person launching into the next phase of life.

With all of this in mind, we do have a recommendation for LB385. We believe lowering the allocation amount from \$5000 per grant to \$2000 or \$2500 would be impactful for these reasons.

- Currently this bill would serve 2000 teachers. With over 26,000 teachers statewide it seems safe to assume this bill's reach is short. Lowering the amount would mean the bill would impact more teachers at a time when quantity is key.
- Providing \$5000 to a new teacher would boost their overall take home pay above older peers, and in some cases significantly. Dropping the allocation to \$2000 or \$2500 mitigates some of that dynamic while also providing a nice boost to the receiving teacher.

In closing, we are excited to see creative and collaborative approaches like LB385 as we address teacher workforce shortages and retention issues.

Thank you for your time and consideration!

⁵ <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2013/10/why-do-teachers-quit/280699/>