

## What to teach, locations and how to pay for schools topics at NET event

By VICKI RICE, Hub Staff Writer  
10/25/2005

KEARNEY — Nebraska policy makers often hear from lobbyists or special interest groups, but Monday they had the opportunity to learn what ordinary citizens think.

About 130 central Nebraskans, some randomly selected public school employees and other randomly selected citizens, participated in small group discussions and asked questions about education during a “By the People” event at the University of Nebraska at Kearney.

UNK worked with NET Television and the University of Nebraska Public Policy Center on the project. Kearney was one of 16 communities involved across the nation.

Participants were randomly recruited from Adams, Buffalo, Dawson, Hall, Kearney and Phelps counties and received in advance a study guide that described state and national education issues. They took pre-event and post-event surveys.

“It’s not a shoot-from-the hip snapshot,” said David Feingold, assistant general manager for content for NET.

The event will give lawmakers an opportunity to see what a cross section of central Nebraska thinks, said Tarik Abdel-Monem, research specialist for the University of Nebraska Public Policy Center.

Because they were randomly selected, participants were there not to talk just about what is wrong or just about what is right, said Alan Tomkins, director of the University of Nebraska Public Policy Center. The event was an opportunity to gather input from people who are not lobbyists, members of an interest group or who have a particular axe to grind, he said.

Small group discussions centered on topics such as what educational services Nebraska public schools should provide; what role the federal, state and local governments should have in determining those services; how the services public schools provide should be paid for and delivered; and what role federal state and local governments should have in determining education standards and how they are assessed.

“It’s overwhelming what a lot of people don’t know,” said Carrie Hock of Lexington, one of the citizens selected to participate.

She is especially interested in the disparity in funding and what some schools can offer that others can’t.



Hub photo by Vicki Rice  
Donna Devine, left, technical director, and Sue Maryott, director, monitor the recording of a small group discussion during a “By the People” event Monday at the University of Nebraska at Kearney. They did their work in a 53-foot long production truck parked near the Nebraskan Student Union, where the discussion was taking place.

“It’s sad that some kids have better opportunities than others.”

Two panels were also part of the event. One panel featured several members of the Legislature’s Education Committee. A second panel featured state Sen. Joel Johnson; state Education Commissioner Doug Christensen; Marilyn Hadley, dean of the UNK College of Education; Jim Griess, executive director of the Nebraska State Education Association; and Matt Schnell, president-elect of the Nebraska Association of School Boards.

Christensen said he was interested to see what the participants, a broad collection of people who don’t normally come together, focused on. “Nebraska has not shown a great deal of interest in No Child Left Behind,” he said.

Nebraskans have shown interest in school finance and workforce development, he said.

“A community that will engage in self-learning will become better,” he said. “It’s hard for a community to learn. It’s hard for people to find time to come together.”

NET Television recorded the event and will provide highlights of the discussions to PBS for a national program that will air at 8 p.m. Nov. 10. A local program, “Your Schools,” will air at 7 p.m. Dec. 1.

e-mail to: [vicki.rice@kearneyhub.com](mailto:vicki.rice@kearneyhub.com)

*©Kearney Hub 2005*