After decades of experience in Nebraska’s public schools, including 15 years as a principal, Sen. Rick Kolowski learned quite a bit about the students he taught and helped graduate. One lesson learned, he says, is that young people need to be prepared for college and careers — now more than ever before. A second lesson is the value of academic and scheduling rigor, which Kolowski says not only challenges students, but also gets them excited about their future.

“We need to work on maximizing the junior and senior years of high school,” Kolowski says. “It is especially important that these students have full, rigorous schedules that get them ready for college or a career.”

As a legislator, Kolowski is now pushing for a new law that would get the state more involved in delivering a better curriculum to students in the final years of their K-12 careers. LB 343 would reimburse school districts with successful existing programs and offer grants to schools that need help in implementing new ones.

One of the distinguishing features of the bill is its funding model. Money would not flow to local schools based solely on total numbers of students, but rather on how many of those students successfully complete a course or program — for example, earning professional certification as the result of career and technical training or passing a competency exam in an Advanced Placement course.

Kolowski’s bill also targets funding for dual-enrollment courses in which students earn college credit and for International Baccalaureate programs. In order to create a dedicated source of funding outside of the current state aid formula for K-12 schools, the bill would initially appropriate $7 million from the general fund to reimburse school districts.

LB 343 would also create a Career and College Readiness Fund, which would support schools that are in the initial implementation phase of a college and career readiness program. In the first year of the program, $3 million would be appropriated to the fund.

According to Kolowski, all of the state's 245 school districts support the legislation. At a Feb. 3 committee hearing on the bill, testimony was uniformly positive.

Nebraska legislators are also considering a second bill as they seek to ensure that students are prepared for life after high school. LB 101, sponsored by Sen. Kate Sullivan, would require statewide assessments that measure students’ progress toward academic preparedness for postsecondary education as well as a career.

By:

Wednesday, March 18, 2015 at 02:27 PM

Tags:
Policy Area › Education › K-12 Education › High School Reform