



Boards of Cooperative Educational Services

BOCES
of New York State

www.boces.org

TESTIMONY OF THE BOCES EDUCATIONAL CONSORTIUM

Joint Budget Hearings on Lower Education

Submitted by Dr. Jessica Cohen

District Superintendent of the Onondaga-Cortland-Madison BOCES

Chair of the BOCES Educational Consortium

January 23, 2012

Good morning Chairpersons DeFrancisco, Farrell, Flanagan and Nolan and other Members of the Senate and Assembly. My name is Dr. Jessica Cohen. I am the District Superintendent of the Onondaga-Cortland-Madison BOCES and the Chair of the BOCES Educational Consortium. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to share with you how the Governor's proposed 2012-2013 Executive budget proposal will impact the State's BOCES system, the school districts that are supported by these BOCES and most importantly the students who benefit from the BOCES network.

Background:

As a point of background, the Boards of Cooperative Services (BOCES) were created by the Legislature in 1948 "for the purpose of carrying out a program of shared educational services in the schools for the supervisory district and for providing instruction in such special subjects as the commissioner may approve."

BOCES' role, based on its mission can be described in three primary ways:

- 1) An **educator**;
- 2) A **facilitator** of collaborations and efficiency; and
- 3) An **engine for economic growth** for the State.

- **BOCES as an Educator:**

There are 37 BOCES located throughout the State. With the exception of the Big Five who are precluded from participating by law, all districts but 4 are components of BOCES. BOCES educate hundreds of thousands of students from around the State. The mission of BOCES is to prepare a diverse student population for roles in the global economy and to initiate collaborations designed to close gaps in student achievement.

- **BOCES as a Facilitator of Collaborations to Achieve Efficiencies:**

BOCES are the premier example of inter-municipal collaboration in New York State that works. Since its creation over 60 years ago, local school districts have been able to use BOCES to provide a wide range of educational programs and services through an organizational structure

that is a model of inter-district cooperation. In addition, BOCES is able to leverage the strength of multiple school districts and provide a wide variety of services that individually, school districts could not provide because the costs would be prohibitive.

Two state commissions (Suozzi/Lundine) both recently pointed to BOCES as an under-used opportunity to save costs through cooperation and functional consolidation. The State should expand the role of BOCES as a vehicle to drive school district efficiencies.

- **BOCES as an Engine for Economic Growth:**

A major focus of BOCES is to provide high-quality effective job training for our students through our Career technical education (CTE) programs that help them to obtain the skills they require to go onto to college and/or to obtain stable and long-term employment. Research on our CTE programs has demonstrated their effectiveness in terms of how they help students to achieve academically as well as providing them with the capacity to compete in the job market. We also provide strong programs for adults to help them obtain new skills. BOCES plays a critical role in helping to create a skilled workforce that contributes significantly to New York's economy.

BOCES also partners with hundreds of businesses throughout the State each year in its efforts to provide goods and services to school districts in a cost effective manner. Last year, the collaborations between BOCES and our private sector partners totaled over \$700 million in shared goods and services that benefited school districts.

The Governor's 2012-13 Proposed Budget:

As you know, New York's educational system is facing serious challenges. These challenges are the result of many factors including the State's struggling economy which has impacted the amount of state support that is provided to school districts and BOCES; the imposition of a local tax cap that further reduces the amount of revenue for school districts; the continuing achievement gap that confronts many students, with few answers for how to close the gap; the increasing number and severity of problems facing our students which hampers their ability to learn; as well as natural disasters including hurricanes and floods that devastated our communities and schools districts. These factors have severely limited the necessary tools that districts have in their toolboxes to help students meet their fullest potential.

Despite these challenges, the State has a network of BOCES who were created to, and continue to provide much needed support and assistance to the majority of school districts. The BOCES from around the State believe that the Governor and the Legislature should expand the authority of BOCES to allow them to do more to help districts, their communities and the State. This makes sense both programmatically and fiscally. With this thought in mind, I have highlighted below the recommendations of the BOCES Educational Consortium for your consideration.

- 1) **Maintain Funding for BOCES:** The Governor's proposed 2012-13 maintains BOCES funding which the BOCES Educational Consortium strongly supports. BOCES aid goes directly to component districts as operating aid that incentivizes them to perform core functions in a cooperative manner. In addition, the network of BOCES provides a mechanism for schools to work together to leverage purchasing economies of scale and to build targeted educational programs that
-

would be prohibitive for any one district to provide on their own. Maintaining the formula helps ensure that this critically important incentive will continue.

2) Maintain the \$1.3 million in Funding for Math and Science High Schools:

The Governor's proposed budget includes \$1.3 million for the math and science high schools which includes Tech Valley High School (TVHS). TVHS is an innovative STEM public high school which is a joint venture of Questar III, Capital Region BOCES and school districts in 7 counties that focus on education and inspiring students to embrace the increasingly important world of math and science.

3) Support the Reforms to the Teacher Disciplinary Process: The current 3020-a process is a one-sided, unfair and extremely costly process for school districts and BOCES. For these reasons, the BOCES Educational Consortium supports the provisions contained in the Governor's proposed budget and urges the Legislature to enact these much needed changes to the current teacher disciplinary process.

4) Resolve the Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR) Process: There is much focus and discussion in the State Capitol and around the State regarding the implementation of the Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR) process. The BOCES Educational Consortium supports the on-going efforts to find a resolution that provides clarity, certainty and accountability of this process.

In this process, we know certain facts to be true which include:

- The collective "we" can and must do a better job with evaluations;
- Student achievement shall be considered;
- The collective "we" can do a better job of using evaluations to improve teaching;
- We know no system is or will ever be perfect. However, our goal must be to make important and necessary changes.

At present, there is a great deal of uncertainty around the implementation of a new evaluation system both because of the lawsuit and the difficulty of renegotiating every teacher contract in the state. We know that while local control is treasured, having a consistent statewide system would simplify negotiations, be easier for BOCES to help support and administer, and move the entire state past this controversy and into implementation. For all these reasons, we support these on-going efforts not only because it will hopefully improve the educational system, but more importantly help us to better ensure academic success for our students. This is, and must always be, our mutual goal.

5) Authorize BOCES to address the Long-term Employee Costs through the establishment of Other Post-Employment Benefit ("OPEB") Reserves: Despite the large and increasing costs that BOCES continue to incur each year related to employee post-employment benefits (OPEB), we do not have the legal ability to set-aside funds for these purposes. As a result, BOCES continue to accrue very significant long-term financial liabilities that total hundreds of millions of dollars without any way in which to save to cover these long-term costs. To begin addressing this ticking time bomb that will hurt school districts, local taxpayers and the State, we urge the Governor and Legislature to authorize the establishment of these reserves to cover OPEB expenses.

6) **Expand the Role of BOCES to provide additional services to Students, Districts, the Community and other Jurisdictions:** The role of BOCES should be expanded to allow them to provide additional services and serve new entities including:

- Libraries;
- Out-of-state entities;
- Non-component districts and charter schools.

These changes will allow BOCES to serve additional entities, allowing for greater efficiencies and cost savings.

In closing, we believe that now is the time for the Governor and the Legislature to expand the role of BOCES that will allow this network to provide greater assistance to school districts and other entities that could benefit from these services. It is not only in the best interest of the districts and these entities but also to the State. For these reasons, we hope you will consider these recommendations.

Thank you for the opportunity to present these recommendations. On behalf of the BOCES Educational Consortium, we look forward to working with you on this most important issue.

