

BOCES can be instrumental in cost-saving programs for school districts

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As Gov. David Paterson and legislators struggle with the state's fiscal crisis and seek to save taxpayer dollars, they should consider the untapped potential of intermunicipal cooperation — and the Boards of Cooperative Educational Services.

Recently, two state commissions — the Commission on Local Efficiency and Competitiveness and the Commission on Property Tax Relief— made numerous recommendations to increase economy and efficiency in the delivery of local services and provide tax relief. Both commissions cited the role BOCES play in implementing cost-saving programs and services for school districts.

BOCES are uniquely positioned to help state and local governments deliver regional services. Over the past 12 years, BOCES have been materially improving student achievement across the state. They have collaborated with school districts to provide quality educational programs and management services — at affordable prices. They have leveraged public and private resources to expand education for adult learners through work force development efforts.

New Yorkers face the future encumbered by a local tax rate that is 79 percent higher than the national average. This is compounded by a projected deficit exceeding \$25 billion over the next three years.

BOCES district superintendents look forward to working with state policymakers to address the state's fiscal problems through expansion of BOCES' regional work. In doing so, they will seek to remove obstacles to achieving the full potential of BOCES. These include updating BOCES aid to school districts consistent with 21st century economic and educational realities, expanding BOCES' authority to save local taxpayer dollars through expanded inter-municipal cooperation and strengthening BOCES' capacity to support and implement Regents and state educational policy.

Additionally, the state should consider how local aid formulas promote inter-municipal sharing and cooperation. Currently, there is no provision for encouraging intergovernmental cooperation through state aid to general purpose local governments. And BOCES aid constitutes approximately 3 percent of the total aid paid by the state to school districts. More can and should be done by redirecting existing resources to encourage widespread intermunicipal sharing and tapping the leadership of BOCES to facilitate that process.

James N. Baldwin
East Greenbush

The writer is district superintendent of Questar III BOCES.

