

New NY Education Reform Commission

September 10, 2012

SUNY Orange County Community College,

The Great Hall in Kaplan Hall,

80 Grand Street,

Newburgh, NY 12550

# BOCES Educational Consortium Testimony.

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## Introduction

Good morning/afternoon. Thank you for inviting us to address the Commission on what may be one of the most important challenges facing the future of this state. My name is Dan White and I am the District Superintendent of Monroe 1 BOCES and Chair of the NY State District Superintendents. I would also like to introduce Tom Rogers, the District Superintendent of Nassau BOCES and the Chair of the Policy and Government Committee for the District Superintendents.

This Commission has organized itself around 3 tasks:

1. Examining the structure and efficiency of the public education delivery system;
2. Ensuring teacher and leader effectiveness; and
3. Raising student achievement, particularly in high needs communities and through emerging technologies.

We believe that the state's system of BOCES represents a solution to each of these challenges.

1. We represent the mechanism for functional consolidation – pooling the administrative tasks of school districts to achieve the efficiencies of consolidation without the loss of community identity or local control.
2. We have served as the state's primary training and technical assistance resource for implementing the new Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR) system enacted by Governor Cuomo earlier this year. Moreover, we collect, maintain and analyze student achievement data for every student we serve.
3. We offer region-wide educational programs, to ensure an equality of educational opportunity that is independent of a student's zip code or socio-economic status. BOCES Aid is a progressive funding stream to school districts that facilitates this equity of opportunity. And we are leaders in researching, testing, deploying and maintaining new educational technologies.

4. BOCES are an Economic Development Engine – Although not an explicit charge to this commission, it bears noting that Governor Cuomo has made “putting New Yorkers back to work” a key component of the New NY initiative. Here too, BOCES play a crucial role:
  - a. Our Career and Technical Education programs and adult training programs provide skills and credentials that lead to employment; and
  - b. Through our cooperative purchasing, BOCES drives over 700 million dollars of business annually to the private sector.

## Detail

**Structure** – As you know, all but the largest of the state’s roughly 700 school districts are organized into 37 supervisory regions. Each region has a District Superintendent, who is both the statutory representative of the Commissioner of Education, and is the Chief Executive Officer of the BOCES – a regional education services agency. Similar education service agencies exist in other states. The BOCES themselves were created to use the efficiencies of scale to efficiently offer services that would be otherwise uneconomical **and therefore unattainable** at the school district level. Together, we provide essential services to the districts that serve almost 2 million New York school children:

- *Instructional services* range from traditional programs for students with disabilities, and career and technical education programs, to science, technology, engineering, & math (STEM) schools, to performing arts schools. These services are designed to provide students of all academic levels, attending schools of many sizes (small, medium and large) and locations (urban, suburban and rural) with expanded opportunities to succeed.
- *Non-instructional services* include professional development, technology integration, data warehouse, and a host of back-office administrative services – shared business offices, shared human resources departments, shared purchasing departments, shared transportation departments and more. These services are designed to provide component school districts with new capacity to deliver essential services in a more efficient and cost effective manner.

Your predecessor commissions, one headed by former Lt. Governor Stanley Lundine, the other by then Nassau County Executive Thomas Suozzi, both recommended expanding the scope of services offered by BOCES and widening the pool of municipal entities with whom we can partner. I’m pleased to note that the Legislature and Governor just enacted two of these commission’s recommendations and we’re optimistic about the direction this signals. Already BOCES drive the following efficiencies:

- *Purchasing* – Over 90% of school districts use BOCES to save on bulk purchases;
- *Energy* – Almost 80% of school districts purchased energy through a BOCES cooperative;
- *Back Office* – 141 school districts are now members of a BOCES Central Business Office.
- *Health Benefits* – Over 50% of the state’s school districts belong to a BOCES health benefits consortium;
- *Transportation* – Over 25% of NY’s BOCES offer regional transportation services.

These initiatives are encouraging, but much more can be done to ensure school districts' administrative operations are as efficient as possible.

**Teacher and Leader Effectiveness** – The Governor has placed a great deal of emphasis on the training, professional development, and evaluation of teachers and building leaders as a strategy to raise student achievement statewide. The state's Race to the Top application highlighted the BOCES as the delivery system to deploy statewide reform initiatives, and we have responded to the challenge:

- *Professional Development* – The state's BOCES together offered more than 10,000 workshops, including on-line professional development, to school districts' educators;
- *APPR Training* – Over 55,000 administrators were trained in the new Common Core Curriculum or the Annual Professional Performance Review system ;
- *Network Teams* – Nearly 80% of school districts use BOCES as their primary provider of RTTT professional development and student data analysis.

As the state's 4-prong reform effort gains momentum in the area of student achievement data analysis and turning around low-performing schools, regional entities like BOCES will be essential to success.

**Raising Student Achievement** – The state is engaged in refocusing high school on college and career preparedness. That focus is urgent. A recent study illustrated that nearly all of the employment growth of the last two decades required some post-secondary education and that the unemployment rate for recent high school graduates is a staggering 24% (Carnavale et al 2012). BOCES play a key role in three critical initiatives advanced by the Regents:

- *College and Career Readiness* – The Regents have redefined the goal to which we aspire, and have adopted a more rigorous national Common Core Curriculum. That transition and the instruction needed to succeed at higher levels will come through professional development, largely offered through BOCES.
- *STEM* – The Regents have identified the need to prepare more students for success in careers in the sciences, technology, engineering, and math. BOCES programs range from pre-engineering, health sciences, and computer technologies to dedicated stand-alone STEM schools.
- *CTE* – Similarly, the Regents have emphasized the rigor of Career and Technical Education as a pathway to readiness. BOCES have been a leader:
  - 90% of BOCES CTE students (including students with disabilities) graduate;
  - 60% of BOCES CTE students enroll in college when they graduate;
  - 2,600 articulation agreements exist between BOCES and colleges for academic credit, guaranteed admission, or advanced standing.

**Putting New Yorkers Back to Work** – Although not an explicit focus of the Commission, it is important to note that the BOCES are an important element of the state's workforce development efforts. Statewide, our adult education programs help put unemployed New Yorkers to work though:

- *Career Training* – Over 58,000 adults were trained at a BOCES between 2009 and 2011.

- *Business Partnerships* – Nearly 750 businesses statewide used BOCES as their adult training partner.
- *High School Equivalency* – Last year, more than 22,000 students received their GED through BOCES.
- *English Language Programs* – Some 20,000 adults were taught English through BOCES adult literacy programs.

## Recommendations

The state’s system of BOCES is a significant state asset and hold the potential for advancing the objectives of this Commission. However, we are not without challenges:

- the greatest benefits are achieved when services reach a critical mass of participation, but district involvement is voluntary;
- our student programs are high quality, but budget pressures tempt districts to replace them with lower quality offerings locally;
- we can bridge the capacity gap between high- and low-resource districts, but only if both districts have an incentive to participate.

Therefore to accomplish the Commission’s objectives, we would recommend the advancement of these specific action steps:

### Improving Student Outcomes

1. *Regional High Schools* – The economic contraction may soon make a well-rounded high school program unattainable in some communities. Regional high schools, operated through BOCES, could provide a means of preserving program quality, particularly if state merger aid recognized high school consolidation.
2. *STEM and other Magnet Schools* – BOCES should be authorized to offer high school credit and diplomas in order to provide students in low-performing schools with options, and to create greater diversity in program offerings for STEM academies, arts schools, humanities schools and other options.
3. *CTE Sequences* – Include 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade CTE options. CTE creates student engagement, and for many students, 11<sup>th</sup> grade is too late to be engaged. Approve only CTE programs which offer a pathway to a diploma endorsement.
4. *Reinvest in Pre-K* – The state has several balkanized funding streams for pre-K, and some private special education providers have drawn unflattering scrutiny. Public alternatives, once abundant, are now all but abandoned. Consolidating funding and rationalizing the rate-setting mechanism could make highly accountable public programs viable once more. And public programs can ensure that our pre-K programs are preparing students for success with the new national Common Core Curriculum.

### Teacher and Leader Effectiveness

5. *BOCES as Regional Leaders* – We concur with the Regents’ recommendations to leverage BOCES for regional school improvement efforts through:
  - a. Clarifying the role of the District Superintendent in oversight of local school districts, low performing schools, and Distinguished Educators.
  - b. Providing BOCES with a dedicated revenue stream to build permanent (rather than ad hoc consultant) capacity for professional development and Regents reform efforts.
  - c. Leveraging Data Warehouses for student achievement analysis and improvement.

### **Restructuring and Efficiency**

6. *Productivity Enhancements* – Technology holds great potential as a learning tool. While caution should be used until new products mature, NY can regain a leadership position through several initiatives:
  - a. Award credit by demonstrating competency, not seat time (via expanded credit by examination, dual enrollment in college, and approved on-line courses).
  - b. Increase integrated credit in CTE.
  - c. Allow middle school CTE to substitute for the home and careers mandate.
7. *Regional Transportation Cooperatives* – Some BOCES have regionalized transportation to private and parochial schools, but more could be done through regional consortia and state aid incentives.
8. *Update Statutes* – Several statutes are now out of date, but remain an impediment to efficient operations that maximize the taxpayer dollar:
  - a. Capital exemptions – District expenditures on capital expenses are excluded from the tax cap, but capital expenditures for educational facilities at BOCES are not – jeopardizing health, safety, and maintenance investments in public facilities serving students.
  - b. Co-ser Reform – The system by which BOCES programs are developed and approved dates back to the 1970s and isn’t agile enough to allow innovation, or to keep up with rapidly evolving reform initiatives and educational technologies. The state should understandably control approvals for services that drive state aid, but should permit aid-free collaborations to be developed and advanced locally.
  - c. Financial Flexibility – BOCES are unable to plan multi-year budgets or to manage out-year costs, leading to unneeded overhead costs to districts. BOCES budgeting should be modernized to be consistent with other quasi-municipal entities.

The governor and Legislature this year enacted two of the recommendations of previous Commissions: to enable BOCES to find additional customers outside NYS and to permit BOCES to partner with public libraries. Both allow BOCES to expand its base, consistent with its mission, and drive down unit costs to school districts and the State alike. More can and should be done in this regard.

## Conclusion

Thank you for your time and attention, the state's education system is facing twin threats – the urgent need to raise student achievement while the public's investment can no longer sustain the current delivery system. The state has a muscular reform agenda that must operate at scale in order to be successful and scale structures' efficiencies will undoubtedly be part of the state's strategy for addressing these twin challenges of our time. As a scale provider of both instructional and non-instructional services, BOCES we are poised to advance the reform agenda, find efficiencies through collaboration, and ultimately help create the New NY.

We'd be happy to respond to any questions you may have.

Carnavale, A., Jayasundera, T., Cheah, B. 2012. *The College Advantage: Weathering the Economic Storm*. Georgetown Public Policy Institute: Center on Education and the Workforce.