



Board of Cooperative Educational Services
www.capregboces.org
Leaders for Educational Excellence

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TO: Commissioner David Steiner
FROM: Charles S. Dedrick
RE: **Commissioner's Forum on Cost Savings**

On March 30, the Capital Region BOCES hosted a "Commissioner's Forum on Cost Savings," to discuss ways that school districts in our region could optimize existing resources and reduce the cost of doing business. All ideas were welcomed, including those that would require legislative and/or statutory action to implement.

We were pleased to have Associate Commissioner Ken Slentz as a special guest, as well as NYSSBA Executive Director Tim Kremer. Approximately 60 people took part in the forum, which involved facilitated small group discussions and a method for ranking priorities. In all, 17 of 24 school districts along with the Capital Region BOCES were represented. Superintendents, board members and administrators, representing both central office and building-level perspectives, participated from the following districts:

- Berne-Knox-Westerlo
- Bethlehem
- Burnt Hills-Ballston Lake
- Cobleskill-Richmondville
- Cohoes City
- Duanesburg
- Green Island
- Guilderland
- Menands
- Middleburgh
- Mohonasen
- Niskayuna
- North Colonie
- Schalmont
- Schoharie
- Voorheesville
- Watervliet City

The top priorities for the entire group were:

1. Reform the Triborough Amendment to eliminate automatic step increases.
2. Pursue a regional approach to contract negotiations.
3. Create one statewide health insurance plan (or regional health insurance plans) for all public school employees in New York State.
4. Streamline New York State's tangle of special education regulations so that they more simply mirror Federal regulations.

Please find attached the ideas from all of the groups that met on March 30.

CD/ry

GROUP #1

Top Priorities:

5. Create one statewide insurance plan for all public school employees in New York State.
6. Streamline New York State special education regulations so that they mirror Federal regulations.
7. Reform the Triborough Amendment to eliminate automatic step increases.
8. Provide state incentives to districts to share or consolidate both management and academic services.
9. Pursue a regional approach to contract negotiations.

Other Ideas:

- Create a Virtual High School at the state level to provide rigorous and relevant online course offerings for students, faculty and staff.
- Pursue alternative energy sources to power our schools more cost-effectively, including geothermal, solar and wind power.
- Conduct a regional study on ways to consolidate/share out-of-district transportation.
- Consolidate health insurance plan offerings.
- Provide greater flexibility in the current school calendar.
- Allow and/or incent greater intergovernmental sharing of services.
- Allow municipalities to take advantage of BOCES programs to achieve greater economy of scale.
- Explore a regional model for offering extracurricular activities for students.
- Allow districts greater flexibility in teacher certification and seat-time requirements for students in ESL, AIS and special education programs.
- Align the state budget adoption process with school budget timelines so that districts have greater certainty about state revenues when adopting their budgets.

GROUP #2

Top Priorities:

1. Regionalize contract negotiations so districts aren't competing against one another
1. Establish a regional health care benefits system
2. Cooperative purchasing on a more regional and committed basis (no "ad hoc" members) and with warehousing capacity
3. Reduce special education mandates to the federal level, or even so that NY is no longer the most regulated state
4. Provide incentives for districts to study/explore consolidation

Other Ideas:

- Lengthening the school day for students (to allow programs such as AIS or credit recovery to be offered as part of the school day and not as an add-on program)
- Flexibility in teacher contracts regarding start and end times of teacher day (staggered start and end times)
- Flexibility in state mandated programs (e.g., AIS, RTI, ESL), allowing schools to meet the general purpose of the mandates, without the additional restrictions and reporting requirements
- Regionalizing select academic programs – i.e., "floating" district boundary lines to allow students from one district to attend programs offered only in a neighboring district (and vice versa)
- Allow reverse auctions in purchasing
- Regionalize (or outsource on a regional basis) payroll services
- Regionalize bus maintenance services
- Establish bus replacement plans using private bus contractors to trade in buses
- Move to a four-day school week
- Redrawing district boundaries so there is less crossing of town/county lines
- Digitize all required reporting
- Revisit/recalibrate Triborough
- Establish regional distance learning center(s) so "niche" programs can be offered in many districts

- Establish regional or statewide textbooks
- Redefine textbooks so that more classroom resources are aidable

GROUP #3

Top Priorities:

1. Regionalize health insurance – consortium lower cost. Create palatable solution for retirees benefits (state pick up as part of retirement system)
2. Repeal Triborough Amendment
3. Phase out all seat time requirements and introduce competency-based virtual assessments
4. Eliminate educational finding based on property tax
5. Revisit 180-day school year to extend time

Other Ideas:

- Eliminate requirements for director of PE, Health, Athletics (state-required)
- End compulsory high school education at end of 10th grade; offer alternative options for continuing education:
 - Attend community college or trade/certificate program
 - IB program type model (International Baccalaureate)
- Facilitate state-wide access to broadband to allow for virtual education
- Move toward regional contracts
- Eliminate tenure
- Modify Taylor Law to allow for last—best offer arbitration
- Change seniority rules related to layoffs
- Allowing for regionalized high schools
- Greater sharing among districts – specialized staff examine regulations to facilitate this type of sharing (i.e., pupil personnel director)
- Regionalize transportation – collect at different points to deliver to districts (hubs)
- Share services with municipalities (i.e., snow plowing)
- Share buses — athletic teams to events
- Better scheduling for costs — alignment of leagues

- Reinststate Tier IV contribution — allow districts to negotiate this
- Increase 4% allowable fund balance
- State pick up pension costs (unfunded mandate)
- Oneida BOCES – Energy consortium for purchasing gas, electric; all schools should take advantage
- Alternative aid structure for energy seed money to further alternative energy (i.e. geothermal heating, wind energy, solar)

GROUP #4

Top Priorities:

1. Repeal Triborough
2. Regionalization of health insurance (possibly statewide)
3. Lessen restrictions on schools – lift mandates and allow all schools to follow charter school rules (including lift smaller ‘nickel & dime’ rules like the AED mandate)
4. Regional collective bargaining
5. Simplify the 3020A process
6. Lessen restrictions on categorical aid

Other ideas:

- Eliminate Civil Service
- Regional transportation
- Reduction of duplicative SED reporting requirements
- Consolidate/reduce auditing requirements (now required at many levels)
- Simplify Section 75 Civil Service law
- Enable more online learning/the growth of virtual high schools
- Repeal Wicks Law
- Change lottery revenue so that it is truly dedicated to education
- Find new revenue sources for education, such as a portion of sales tax in all counties
- Change the funding structure for schools – i.e., the formula
- Unleash the power of BOCES – lift legal restrictions on what BOCES can do
- Make required annual payments into the retirement system more consistent
- Create an “economic breaker”, at which point districts would be allowed to renegotiate labor contracts
- Allow greater flexibility in regulations so that districts and municipalities can work together

GROUP #5

Top Priorities:

1. Negotiating with unions on a regional level
2. Mandated consolidation of school districts. Districts will never voluntarily merge, and how long can New York realistically support 700+ school districts?
 - a. Be sure a merger is cost-effective before forcing
 - b. Don't make districts pay for consolidation studies
 - c. Look at county based model – can share big stuff like administration and business functions, while allowing districts to still keep autonomy and identity.
 - d. Look at changing some of the current consolidation laws
 - i. Requiring districts to be contiguous – for example, Cohoes and Watervliet could never merge even if they wanted to because Colonie is between.
 - ii. City school districts currently take precedence over other districts in mergers so if Cohoes and North Colonie were to merge it would become Greater Cohoes City Schools, which immediately puts up barriers with North Colonie residents.
3. “Don't waste a good crisis” State needs to come in and make the hard decisions that districts hesitate to pull the trigger on due to community backlash. (Closing under enrolled schools, forcing consolidation, taking on NYSUT)
4. Regionalized professional development and curriculum development. Expensive initiatives should be shared, BOCES should play a bigger role
5. Increase 4% cap on fund balance
6. Create task force to bring all of these ideas into focus
 - a. Must have diverse membership (educators, taxpayers, parents, legislators)
 - b. Realistic timeline for analysis and implementation.
 - c. Must be held accountable for creating REAL cost-saving opportunities for school

Other ideas:

- Sharing services with neighboring districts, especially special education services
- BOCES negotiating health-care costs – or helping to develop some centralized way for schools to do this. Pool everyone together regionally to get better costs
- Increasing BOCES threshold from \$30,000. Defeats purpose of sharing services if a district can hire someone for less money than they would pay BOCES
- Revamp AIS- look at federal mandates, especially at the high school level
- Revamp delivery of ESL services – look at requirements at the state level
- Offer more virtual (distance learning or online) courses in conjunction with other districts for classes with lower enrollments. (A way to continue to offer electives and advanced classes that certain students may need to increase their chances of college acceptance into certain programs, for example advanced language courses)

- “Take the handcuffs off BOCES” to allow them to really offer programs and services that districts want. (increasing threshold, not requiring schools to commit to buying service in order to create co-ser)
- Increase the capacity of BOCES services with higher demand.
 - Also look at why some services you can get a person full time (communications) and others you can’t (NERIC techs) and can this be changed?
- Make it easier for districts that are close to share services even if they are in different BOCES. For example, Cohoes, Lansingburgh and Waterford would like to share, but they are in three different BOCES
- Governor should give up 100 of his 200 personal State Police detail and make them SROs
- Work with BOCES to widen drop-off window at program host sites so it is easier for districts to share transportation
- Reduce special education mandates. Why does NYS have 200 more requirements than the federal government?
- Look at 180 day requirement. Could a 4 day week save money? Could work with local community resources for 5th day care for younger students
- Regional summer school. Districts can take turns hosting to save wear and tear on a certain district. Can this be a BOCES service?
- Can BOCES find a way to help districts afford/purchase/provide Academic Recovery programs?
- More of an effort to obtain grant money on a regional basis (help more districts qualify – could BOCES help?) More federal money will be competitive in the future
- Change seat-time requirements to allow for more online-learning
- Utilize technology more to save money on textbooks. Change guidelines on textbook aid to allow districts to use this money to purchase software, Kindles, Ipods etc. These guidelines currently keep districts from exploring/investing in these options
- Change laws so that schools have more than 24 hours from time of incident to report financial cyber-crimes

GROUP #6

Top Priorities:

1. Regional contracts that include regional benefits
2. Amendments to the Taylor Law
3. Public Employees Relation Board (PERB) should be made an independent third party
4. Amend the Tenure Law to possibly include renewable tenure and/or performance data
5. The state removes regulations/mandates for schools in good standing. Schools who meet the state accountability standards would be able to do things as they see fit, and be able to receive variances more easily
6. Return to the federal guidelines for special education

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- Return to the federal guidelines for special education
- New state mandates for districts should have a comment period
- Being able to privatize services without impact
- Reorganize/allowing more flexibility through BOCES CoSers (The current CoSers do not allow districts to share civil service employees. Being able to share other jobs, such as athletic directors or purchasing agents would benefit districts)

- The Legislature legislates/mandates pay freezes for teachers
- Increased use of energy-saving initiatives, such as solar
- Year-round school
- A four-day work week
- Virtual/online classrooms
- Could one classroom teacher oversee multiple TAs who are each assigned to a group of students? At the high school level, would this help prepare students for college-level coursework?
- Forcing the consolidation of districts
- Closing schools for an additional week during the winter to save energy
- Could the Regents be completed online?
- Eliminate Grades 3-8 testing