

What is BOCES?

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BOCES stands for Board of Cooperative Educational Services. BOCES is a public organization that was created by the New York State Legislature in 1948 to provide shared educational programs and services to school districts.

The History of BOCES

BOCES owes its origin to a state legislative enactment authorizing the formation of intermediate school districts. Passed in 1948, the act was aimed at enabling small rural school districts to combine their resources to provide services that otherwise would have been uneconomical, inefficient, or unavailable.

Actually, BOCES was to be the temporary means by which careful transition could be made to an intermediate district framework. Though its purposes were similar to those of the proposed intermediate districts, BOCES was conceived and written into the Education Law in its own separate sections (1950 and 1951). Simpler in structure and less autonomous than projected intermediate districts, the BOCES proved itself worthy of being both means and end. Not one intermediate district was ever formed, and cooperative boards proliferated rapidly, especially during the mid-1950s, reaching 82 by 1958.

In 1972 the Intermediate School District Act was repealed. Laws pertaining to BOCES, however, have remained on the books. Thus BOCES has developed from a special purpose, interim agency into a formally recognized middle or intermediate unit in New York State's public education system. There are currently 38 BOCES incorporating all but 9 of the 721 school districts in New York State.

Moreover, other states have moved toward regional educational configurations like BOCES. At least 30 state legislatures have mandated or passed legislations, as educational service agencies study the idea.

BOCES Membership

The total area under supervision of a district superintendent is called a supervisory district.

BOCES membership is not available to the so-called "Big Five" city school districts: New York City, Buffalo, Rochester, Yonkers, and Syracuse.

Once a district has joined a BOCES, it cannot withdraw and is obligated to pay its annual share of administrative, rental, or facilities expenses. BOCES services are, however, optional. They may be purchased or not purchased as the district's board of education sees fit. The decision to purchase or not purchase BOCES services is made each year.

How Does BOCES Work?

BOCES services are created when two or more school districts decide they have similar needs that can be met by a shared program. BOCES helps school districts save money by providing opportunities to pool resources and share costs.

Sharing is an economical way for districts to provide programs and services that they might not be able to afford otherwise. It is often more efficient and less costly to operate one central service than it is to have separate programs in each school district. BOCES services are often customized offering districts the flexibility to meet their individual needs.

Who makes the decision about which BOCES services to Purchase?

Each year, local Boards of Education review their districts' needs and make decisions about BOCES services. Because districts' needs change every year, decisions about BOCES services may also change every year.

The decision to participate in BOCES services is based on the unique needs of each district. If the district doesn't need a BOCES service, it doesn't request it and it doesn't pay for it.

Why do school districts participate in BOCES services?

Because BOCES services are shared by two or more school districts, they often cost much less than if districts provided the services on their own. Districts pool their resources, and share the savings.

In addition, New York State gives a financial incentive to participate in shared services by offering school districts state aid for BOCES services. Here is how BOCES state aid works:

- Each district's Board of Education selects BOCES services for the current year.
- The following school year, a portion of the cost of BOCES services is returned to the district by the State of New York as BOCES aid.
- The amount returned to the district is based on a formula that takes into account the districts' financial resources.
Money not spent in a CoSer service is returned to the district at the end of each fiscal year by the BOCES.

How are BOCES services paid for?

A BOCES has no taxing authority. Instead, the sources of BOCES funds are primarily taxes levied by its component districts, state aid, and a relatively small amount of federal aid.

These funds support an administrative budget (covering administrative salaries, equipment, and services) and a program budget (covering other BOCES programs and services which districts select from the Service Directory, an annual listing of available services). In addition, BOCES

May receive and manage funding from outside sources (e.g., state and federal) to cover special projects.

The component district's share of BOCES administrative, lease and capital costs is based either on the Resident Weighted Average Daily Allowance (RWADA) or on real property valuation.

Program costs are proportional to the amount of use each component district requires.

Through BOCES state aid, component districts receive financial support for their participation in BOCES. The cost charged to a component district for its BOCES participation serves as the basis for the district's BOCES state aid.

How is BOCES governed?

BOCES is governed just as local districts are governed —by a Board of Education, which is made up of one representative from component districts. Board members are responsible for curricular, financial, and other policy decisions, just as they are at the local level.

Members are elected by component school board members. BOCES board members do not need to be local school board members, but they must be eligible voters in component school districts of that BOCES.

Election to BOCES boards occurs at an annual BOCES meeting, which by law is held in April.

the duties and powers of BOCES boards, as specified in 1950 of the Education Law of the State of New York, include the following:

- Appointment of a district superintendent, subject to approval of the Commissioner of Education;
- Provision of cooperative educational services-with the commissioner s approval and on a contract basis- to component school districts;
- Needs assessment and long-range planning for cooperative educational services in the supervisory district;
- Employment of teachers and other support personnel to carry out BOCES programs;
- Preparation of an adjustable budget for the supervisory district program and its administration;
- Administration of payments for and costs of provided educational services;
- Borrowing of money in anticipation of revenue due;
- Entering into contracts with a variety of public agencies as well as non-public schools in order to arrange or provide services under specified conditions;
- Renting, purchasing, or selling of property or facilities under specified conditions;
- Making reports to the commissioner of education as required.

The District Superintendent

A BOCES board appoints its own chief executive officer, contingent upon approval of the commissioner of education. As a BOCES executive, the district superintendent serves local districts and is responsible to the board of education representing the component districts of the BOCES.

The district superintendent also serves as a representative of the commissioner of education, providing educational leadership to local school districts in matter of law, policy, and practice.

Based on these responsibilities, the district superintendent has at least three important roles:

- Educational change agent
- Regional planner and coordinator
- Field representative for the State Education Department, a consultative capacity designed to improve two-way communication between state and local levels

Structure and Procedures for Providing Services

The facilities, professional personnel, and services of a BOCES are available to every local school district within the district superintendent's supervisory district. Because the BOCES board must develop its offerings to fulfill local demands and needs, levels of accountability and flex are maintained.

Under Education Law, a BOCES must furnish any educational service that is requested by two or more component districts and approved by the commissioner of education according to need and practicality in a regional context.

By January of each year, component districts specify their potential service needs for the following school year. These needs, developed by the BOCES into annual operating plans, are submitted to the State Education Department and the commissioner of education for approval. BOCES boards then notify component districts of the approved services, asking for a firm commitment to participate by May 1 of each year.

The BOCES and the component districts then enter into formal contracts. Specified in each contract are the number and types of services to be furnished by the BOCES, the number of people to be served, and the amount to be paid to the BOCES.

Signed by the BOCES and component board presidents, and then approved by the commissioner, these contracts are effective for one year, after which they may be renewed, changed, or cancelled at the component districts' option.

Districts may also authorize multi-year service requests from BOCES.

What kinds of Programs does BOCES offer?

Every BOCES is a little different, depending on the needs of the local school districts.

A large percentage of BOCES programs are instructional; that is to say, they serve students with classroom programs and services. Examples of instructional programs are vocational-technical programs for high school students, physical and occupational therapy for students with disabilities, and literacy programs for adults.

The remaining programs are called support services. Although they are not classroom programs, support services are still very important because they relate to the education of students, and because they help school districts save money. This frees up resources to better serve students directly. Examples of support services are staff development, central bus maintenance, the central business office, regional computer centers.

Prepared by:
Madison-Oneida BOCES
4937 Spring Rd., P.O. Box 168
Verona, New York 13478

Some Things NYS Educators Should Remember about the School District - BOCES Partnership

- They are not BOCES programs, they are district programs.
- They are not BOCES students, they are your students.
- You can always find anything cheaper (ex: loaves of bread, cars, skis, computers, services) somewhere else. Consistency, value, and loyalty to the client is often a different matter.
- How many service providers at 4:00 on a Friday will work on your student scheduling or payroll problem that needs to be fixed by Monday a.m. and will not charge you to help you?
- BOCES has to advocate for all of the components.
- BOCES is not a money pass through.
- Buy service for value, service responsiveness, cost effectiveness, and loyalty to you as a customer... and not because of BOCES aid.
- Have a complaint, talk to the service provider..., the director... the central office supervisor..., the district superintendent.
- Providing shared services as an advocate for all the participating partners without favoritism is delicate work.
- BOCES must meet commissioner s rules. The rules do not always allow the quickest route or what seems to be the most common sense route to achieving a shared endeavor.
- Communicate, Communicate, Communicate.
- There are enough political potholes, don't 'BOCES bash' or 'component district bash'.
- If you have a creative idea to share, share it with component colleagues and BOCES colleagues. Sharing reaps sharing and mutual benefits.
- The secretaries and staff you see at BOCES are only paid for by those who participate in the services delivered and supported by those secretaries and staff.
- Review your bill for services. Make sure it is accurate monthly. The data set to create a bill is often massive and intricate. Help the BOCES monitor accuracy. Mistakes do happen.
- Participate on regional BOCES advisory groups, task forces, and/or ad hoc committees that are formed to advise, create, and give direction to BOCES services.
- Ask for help. Offer help.
- Be an active colleague in BOCES region school business officials meetings.
- BOCES is a tool to help you provide mote for your students and community.
- Services are added or subtracted by a 'service adjustment to contract by an authorized school district official.
- A successful BOCES service is based on the success of each component district in that service.
- In a BOCES consortium, big enrollment districts don't always have the 'big, best ideas', small enrollment districts don't always have the 'small, worst' ideas.
- BOCES has a role to foster a safe, collegial, supportive, professional oasis for the educational leaders of the consortium.
- Sometimes BOCES folks need to be reminded that BOCES services are only one part of your districts educational life.
- It's not a contest; if you really can do it better or cheaper do it; be clear and honest with your analysis.

- Remember, the commissioner expects the district superintendent to focus a region of schools on school improvement and achievement of the standards. There is a delicate BOCES role balance between leadership and followship.
- All BOCES board members represent all the children of the region and not just the children from one district.
- The 60% rule of sharing.
- Each BOCES CoSer service budget must be self-sufficient.
- A district pays for only the share of a service it requests and receives.

Example:

- CoSer Budget \$100,000

	District A	District B	District C
	30%	45%	25%
	Share \$30,000	Share \$45,000	Share \$25,000
Total excess salaries or unaidable items \$15,000			
	<u>- 4,500</u>	<u>- 6,750</u>	<u>- 3,750</u>
Total Aidable	25,500	38,250	21,250

- Unspent CoSer service funds are given back to participant districts in a service in the same proportion by which funds were collected.

Example: \$1,000 unspent on June 30.

	District A	District B	District C
	30%	45%	25%
Refund	\$300	\$450	\$250

Prepared by:

Dr. Paul NI. Seversky, Deputy Superintendent

Mrs. Teresa S. Fobare, Business Manager

Madison-Oneida BOCES

4937 Spring Rd., P.O. Box 168

Verona, New York 13478

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