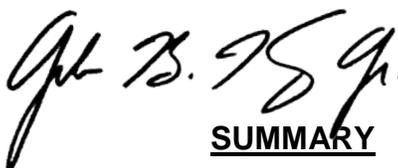




THE STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT / THE UNIVERSITY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK / ALBANY, NY 12234

TO: Subcommittee on State Aid
FROM: Ken Slentz 
DATE: April 20, 2012

AUTHORIZATION(S): 
SUMMARY

Issue for Discussion

Do the Regents support the development of a legislative proposal for regional high schools, as further described in Attachment A?

Reason(s) for Consideration

Review of Policy.

Proposed Handling

This question will come before the Subcommittee on State Aid for discussion at the April 2012 Regents meeting.

Procedural History

The Regents have asked staff to develop a legislative proposal for Regional High Schools to increase educational opportunities for students across the State. Attachment A provides additional detail for a proposal for regional secondary schools to be used as an option for addressing the challenges faced by school districts which cannot offer the scope and quantity of enhanced course offerings that prepare students to be college or career ready.

Background Information

The economic recession and student enrollment declines have reduced educational opportunities in some districts, especially for secondary school students seeking advanced coursework. For the past three years, State Aid has been frozen or reduced and school districts have cut spending on administration and non-personal

services and, to an increasing degree, educational programs. The Regents 2012-13 State Aid proposal made recommendations for the distribution of aid reflecting the State's fiscal capacity and school district needs. School districts have begun exploring the potential to implement a regional high school as part of a solution to maintain or enhance course offerings. The Board of Regents has endorsed the concept in its legislative program and discussed approaches at the March meeting of the Subcommittee on State Aid. Attachment A provides additional details for a proposal for regional secondary schools.

Timetable for Implementation

This conversation will inform discussion for the development of the Regional Secondary School Legislative Proposal which will be part of a larger proposal to develop BOCES as a regional leader.

Regional Secondary Schools¹

Rationale for Regional Secondary Schools:

1. There is strong evidence that the financial crisis facing school districts will not be alleviated to any significant degree in the future.
2. Many of our school districts may have difficulty meeting financial obligations and will risk cutting programs and personnel to the point of not being able to provide a sound, basic education to our students.
3. The financial and program challenges faced by many school districts are primarily at the secondary school level.
4. The number of mergers has slowed to a standstill in recent years. Differences in wealth and tax rates make mergers difficult.
5. Communities are reluctant to give up the local control and identity of their districts through merging their district with another.
6. School districts are the "hub" of small rural communities. These communities believe they would suffer dire consequences if a school did not exist in their village or town.
7. Residents may not be as reluctant about a combined secondary school if it increases the chance to preserve the identity of their individual elementary programs and provide more opportunities to secondary students.

Benefits of a Regional Secondary School:

1. Economy of scale would result within the instructional and supervisory services. Full classes will allow for the efficient staffing and administration of the secondary school program.
2. Combining the resources of multiple districts would improve the quality of instruction and provide more opportunities for students such as:
 - Advanced Placement and College Credit course work
 - Opportunities or science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) programs
 - Enhanced elective courses

¹ This report has benefited from information provided by school districts that have shared their insights with the State Education Department.

- More choices for studying Foreign Languages
 - Student internship programs
 - Opportunities for career and technical training
3. An opportunity for students in small rural settings to still attend a secondary school that offers highly personalized relationships between students and teachers within a setting that honors the culture of the communities sending the students to the regional secondary school.

Success of this program may motivate other school districts to examine the financial and programmatic benefits of regional secondary schools operated by BOCES or a host school district.

Legislative Proposal to Allow Regional Secondary Schools

The proposal would allow three or more school districts to implement a regional secondary school while each school district retains its separate school district status. In addition, the proposal would allow a district with multiple secondary schools to close one school and participate in the regional secondary school. Two models are proposed:

1. Host District Model: One of the participating school districts provides the regional secondary school, serving as host district
2. BOCES Model: BOCES operates the regional secondary school.

The salient features of both models include:

- The regional secondary school is accountable for the results of students and awards diplomas to students who graduate from the regional secondary school.
- Sending school districts may send all or part of their secondary school student population if at least one high school is closed.
- The regional secondary school will offer athletics and sending school districts will discontinue their athletic programs for students attending the regional secondary school.
- The boards of participating school districts must approve participation in the regional secondary school and adopt a resolution to present in a referendum for voter approval in each school district.
- Upon agreement of all participating school districts, the districts will prepare a contract and plan for approval by the Commissioner.
- The proposed legislation specifies that employees that may be displaced from the sending districts will have rights to positions in the regional secondary school.

- The proposed legislation specified that existing facilities are to be used where possible.
- Sending school districts will provide pupil transportation to the regional secondary school.

The plan prepared by participating school districts and BOCES (as applicable) and approved by the Commissioner will have the following elements:

- The contract will demonstrate how the regional secondary school will provide increased educational opportunities to prepare students for college and career readiness and improve performance.
- It will specify costs, staffing, current and future enrollments, current and future capital construction plans, the delivery of special education programs and procedures for the discipline of students.
- The contract will be for a minimum of five years and may be renewed.
- It will specify the fiscal implications of the regional secondary school including expected State Aid and expected changes in expenditures and property tax levies.
- The plan will include the cost of the regional secondary school and require a detailed list of the estimated cost savings for each participating school district.
- A regional secondary school advisory committee, with representatives from each participating school district and BOCES, will oversee the regional secondary school.

Each sending school district will pay the providing school district or BOCES a tuition amount. State Aid will be provided to each sending school district based on the characteristics of the sending school district. Regional High School Transition Aid will be provided for a period of five years, equal to 10 percent of the 2006-07 Selected Operating Aid per Pupil X Total Aidable Pupil Units², for documented costs associated with implementing the regional secondary school. Additional incentive aid of five percent of the 2006-07 Selected Operating Aid per Pupil X Total Aidable Pupil Units will be available if districts demonstrate they have met academic achievement goals set by the Commissioner.

² Currently, Reorganization Incentive Aid provides .40 X 2006-07 Selected Operating Aid per Pupil X Total Aidable Pupil Units for five years. The additional 40% apportionment is reduced by 4 percentage points each year until the apportionment reaches 0 in the fifteenth year of reorganization.