



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Suzi Oppenheimer

Senator Oppenheimer to Push for Mandate Relief and Expansion of BOCES Services as Means to Achieve Cost-Savings in Education and Reduce Budget Deficit

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School Officials Call for Greater Flexibility to Consolidate Services and Achieve Taxpayer Savings

Senator Suzi Oppenheimer (D-Mamaroneck), chair of the Senate Education Committee and a member of the Senate Finance Committee, today called upon her Senate colleagues to pass vital legislation to ease state mandates on schools and afford school districts and municipalities greater flexibility in the provision of shared services. These bills, which Senator Oppenheimer introduced earlier this year, would permit school districts to realize significant cost savings and ease taxpayer burdens.

“The Senate Finance Committee hearings on Governor Paterson’s Deficit Reduction Plan (DRP) have made patently clear the enormous hardship that mid-year cuts in state education funding would pose,” said Senator Oppenheimer. “In addressing the State’s current fiscal crisis, we must ensure that school districts have the tools and flexibility they need to contain unnecessary or duplicative expenses and achieve real cost savings.”

A key component of such flexibility would be to permit Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) to provide additional shared services to school districts and to contract with other entities, such as municipalities and private schools, to achieve cost savings through consolidation of services. The Senate Education Committee recently held a series of hearings exploring the ways in which the cooperative structure of BOCES might be utilized to deliver additional shared services to generate taxpayer savings.

“NYSUT recognizes the importance of spending education dollars wisely by reducing non-instructional and administrative costs through greater economies of scale, efficiencies and investment in energy conservation and green buildings. BOCES should be given direction and authority to pursue regionalization of procurement, payroll and other back-office and administrative services,” said Steve Allinger, Director of Legislation for the New York State Teachers Union (NYSUT).

David A. Little, Director of Government Relations for the New York State School Boards Association, addressing the Assembly Ways and Means Committee, told lawmakers that “[a]s school districts face decreased enrollment, a stagnant tax base, flat aid revenue, all the while attempting to meet the increased educational expectations of the public, federal and state governments . . . you alone have the ability to . . . expand the ability of BOCES to enable school districts and other local municipalities to share and combine needed functions.”

In addition to expanding the role of BOCES (S.5523), Senator Oppenheimer’s legislation would:

- Prohibit the implementation of new state mandates after the start of a school fiscal year unless required by executive order or federal law, or made optional to the school district (S. 5523);

- Eliminate unnecessary or duplicative state reporting requirements and require the Commissioner of Education to conform state reporting requirements to federal law, where possible (S. 3874);
- Authorize the creation of reserve funds for future employer contributions to the Teachers' Retirement System (S. 5523);
- Exclude year-to-year increases in costs associated with health insurance premiums, pension contributions and retirement benefits from the calculation of total spending under a contingency budget (S. 5523);
- Repeal the Wicks law, which requires school districts to award multiple construction contracts for virtually every public construction project. This requirement alone is estimated to add as much as 30 percent to a school's overall construction costs.

"There is never a time to stop teaching our children, including recessionary times," said Senator Oppenheimer. "But given our deepening fiscal crisis and the enormous strain on taxpayers throughout the state, we must redouble our efforts to save taxpayer dollars and cut school costs wherever possible."

"The legislation I have proposed would permit schools and local governments to operate more efficiently, without impacting core educational programs. At this extraordinarily difficult time, I will continue to work closely with my Senate and Assembly colleagues to ensure that these measures are enacted into law," pledged the Senator.