

Genesee Valley PTA

Monroe County
Federation of Teachers

NYS United Teachers

Monroe County
Association of School
Business Officials

Monroe County
Council of School
Superintendents

Monroe County
School Boards
Association

National Education
Association of New
York, Western New
York Region

BOCES Aid:

An essential piece of New York's education budget solution

BOCES Aid represents a key part of the solution to the state's economic woes. For the past fifty-five years, New York State has been able to count on BOCES and the BOCES Aid formula to help districts of all sizes and income levels get the most out of limited resources in a manner that is highly accountable. School districts are under constant pressure of more ambitious academic standards, additional assessments, compliance with the federal No Child Left Behind Act, and the need to serve students with a wide range of academic, social, and emotional needs.

By offering services needed by multiple districts, BOCES creates economies of scale that result in cost savings to individual school districts and taxpayers. Cost sharing has resulted in significant savings to districts for services such as alternative education, staff development, vocational education, and special education services, among others. In addition to saving money for sharing services, local districts receive aid for certain services according to their wealth ratio, thereby reducing the costs to local taxpayers. This model is especially efficient for smaller school districts, where, for example, establishing and maintaining pre-engineering, criminal justice, or other vocational programs would be prohibitively expensive. BOCES is able to provide quality vocational programs that districts can afford, regardless of size of tax base. Very often, BOCES provides special education for the more needy students that cannot be cost effectively provided by the district.

School districts pay for BOCES services in a given year, with a portion of those costs returned to the district the following year through New York State BOCES Aid funds. The amount returned to the district, based on a formula that takes into account each district's financial resources, varies from 30-90%.

New York State mandates that BOCES Aid be granted only for those services that are shared between districts, with specific commission guidelines for each service that is shared:

- Aid is given only on the first \$30,000 of shared salary
- Schools can only share up to 60% of a service
- There is a local share that must be paid with local tax dollars
- Aid is paid one year later after State Education Department has audited the sharing program

Statewide, on an annual basis, BOCES provides \$2 billion worth of educational services to school districts at a cost to New York State of \$497 million in aid to school districts. Shared BOCES services increase the capacity of a region to support its students and communities. Even if BOCES Aid is reduced or eliminated, those student needs will still exist. Any reduction in BOCES Aid will not save costs, but will more likely increase overall costs because of the loss of efficiencies. And local taxpayers, unable to shoulder the costs, will be forced to make cuts that will jeopardize student success and possibly the future of their schools.

Shared BOCES services provide equity of access to programs for school districts large and small, wealthy and poor, urban and rural, homogeneous and diverse, academically succeeding and struggling. If educational needs are present in two or more component districts, they can be met through BOCES.

BOCES provides a great value for taxpayers, equalizes educational opportunities, and touches the lives of many learners. School districts, with BOCES as a catalyst, are creative in developing shared programs that serve all children from all districts, regardless of enrollment, income wealth, or size of the tax base. Educational programs and services that have proven to be successful must be preserved by keeping BOCES Aid as part of the solution to funding education in New York State.





Dr. J. Kenneth Graham, Jr. ...

Mandate Relief is Imperative



By
Dr. J. Kenneth
Graham, Jr.

Superintendent
of Schools,
Rush-Henrietta
Central School District



...a force in our community

Mandates are federal and state laws that school districts must comply with in a specified period of time. While these laws are well intended, those who devise these mandates often fail to provide adequate funding to support them. Unfunded and underfunded mandates pose a serious threat for public education. Such mandates have severe financial implications for local taxpayers in every district, especially in times when state and federal financial support is stagnant or only slightly increased.

One example of the damage done by unfunded mandates is the implementation of the New York State Automatic External Defibrillator [AED] Law. This law requires school districts, BOCES, county vocational education and extension boards, and charter schools to retain at least one functional cardiac AED unit on each premise. It further requires that, where a school-sponsored competitive athletic event or practice is held at a site other than a public school facility, the public school officials shall ensure that an AED is also provided on site. AED units must be available so that implementation can take place within 3-5 minutes; therefore, in a large building, multiple units are required.

No additional state funding has been provided either for the AED units or for the required staff training. Training costs must include not only the training of staff, but the associated costs for the development of training protocols, materials and props. School districts must also fully fund the ongoing maintenance of the units including batteries and electrodes. In just one Monroe County school district, the cost of this unfunded mandate, which did not receive legislative funding, has exceeded \$65,000.

Although we, as educational leaders, may agree that this and other mandates are well-intended to ensure the safety and well-being of all students, faculty and community residents, the fact remains that funding for these mandates must be

provided. The AED mandate is only one example of an unfunded or underfunded mandate that places a significant financial burden on districts which, in turn, will be passed along to local taxpayers. Other mandates include:

- Funding of charter schools from local district budgets
- Budget Hearing requirements and required advertising costs for same
- Voluminous reporting requirements - STEP, NYS School Report Cards, Uniform Violent Incidents, Period-by-Period Attendance, Facility Report Card, etc.
- Special Education notifications, due process and placement requirements and parent notification requirements
- SAVE training requirements
- Professional development requirements for teachers at district expense
- Bus monitor/attendant training [newly required]
- Teacher mentoring requirements
- Fingerprinting requirements
- Construction building requirements [WICKS Law]
- Seat time requirements for students in areas such as middle school Home and Careers, middle school Technology, elementary and middle school Physical Education
- Title I supplemental instructional requirements

While there may not be consensus about which mandates represent the greatest threat to the financial stability of a school district or the mandates that present the greatest potential for appropriate fiscal relief, most educators agree that mandates have a crucial impact on the cost of public education. Seeing a continuing pattern of increased mandate demands in an era of diminished resources, we must remain vigilant and aggressively pursue desirable mandate relief, as well as persist in our demand for a moratorium on new unfunded or underfunded mandates and the reconsideration of existing mandates.

