



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR
Suzi Oppenheimer

Senators Brian Foley, Suzi Oppenheimer and Ken LaValle at the Senate Education Committee hearing exploring ways to achieve taxpayer savings through the BOCES model of shared delivery of services

SUZI OPPENHEIMER October 14, 2009

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The Senate Education Committee, chaired by Senator Suzi Oppenheimer (D-Mamaroneck), held the first of three public hearings exploring how the delivery of shared services through Boards of Cooperative Education Services (BOCES) or related entities might be expanded to create greater efficiencies and lead to further taxpayer savings. The hearing took place on October 2, 2009 at the Western Suffolk BOCES Conference Center in Wheatley Heights, New

York. It was attended by representatives of BOCES, school districts, unions and governmental organizations.

BOCES was created to help school districts improve their educational offerings by delivering shared services. Over the years, BOCES' mission has expanded to include special education, career and technical education, management services, as well as "back office" functions, such as payroll, employee benefits administration and transportation services. In 2008, the Commission on Local Efficiency and the NYS Commission on Property Tax Relief identified BOCES as a model that should be replicated for its ability to deliver cost savings programs and services.

The Committee heard testimony about how the BOCES model might be utilized to achieve cost savings in the provision of several additional shared services, including internal auditing, printing, information technology and telecommunications, out-of-district transportation, purchasing and health care. Allowing BOCES to contract with municipalities and other entities for these shared services would require specific legislative and regulatory reforms, as several individuals testified. The Committee also heard that while BOCES is well positioned to expand its shared service offerings, the proposals under consideration must be thoroughly reviewed to ensure that the core purpose of BOCES remains educational in nature. BOCES currently provides its member school districts with enrichment programming, vocational and arts training, clinical programs and programs for the physically and emotionally challenged.

"Every student in New York is entitled to a first class education, but in today's economy it is increasingly difficult to balance the needs of our students with what taxpayers are willing and able to pay," said Senator Oppenheimer. "It is therefore imperative that we explore every possible means to create efficiencies that will reduce school costs and alleviate the pressures on local property taxes," said Senator Oppenheimer. "These hearings have identified numerous ways in which the cooperative structure of BOCES might be utilized to deliver additional shared services, and the Committee will carefully consider them all."

In addition to the chair, Senator Oppenheimer, Friday's hearing was attended by three members of Senate Education Committee, Senators Brian X. Foley, John Flanagan, and Kenneth P. LaValle.

While every dollar we spend on our children's education is an investment in our state's future, it's important that school districts spend this money as efficiently as possible," said Senator Foley. "I am pleased to work closely with Sen. Oppenheimer on the Senate Education Committee as we take steps toward increasing the quality of education and decreasing the burden faced by taxpayers across the state."

"One of the keys to taking back control of escalating school taxes is to cut costs without sacrificing quality and this hearing is a step to finding solutions that will protect taxpayer's money. During these tough economic times, New York State must examine every conceivable way to reduce a resident's tax burden and the BOCES model can be an integral part of that solution. Families and business owners are constantly going through this very same process and it is time that the state does its part," stated Senator John Flanagan.

"School taxes have become an enormous burden for Long Island homeowners," said Senator Kenneth P. LaValle. "I have always considered shared services to be a viable way to reduce school costs and the taxpayers' liability. We must look at every model and review every opportunity to help taxpayers get out from under the tremendous pressure of school taxes. It is my hope that the end result of this series of hearings will be the tax relief our residents demand and deserve."

The Committee will hold additional hearings on this matter on Thursday, October 8th in West Seneca, New York and on Tuesday, October 13th in Watertown, New York.