

**Testimony to the NYS Senate Standing Committee on Education
Presented by**

New York State Congress of Parents and Teachers (NYS PTA®)

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Senator Oppenheimer, committee members and staff. My name is Susan Lipman. I am the current president of the New York State Congress of Parents and Teachers and speaking on behalf of the nearly 350,000 volunteer PTA members dedicated to child and educational advocacy. My comments will be brief. Given today's economic challenges, this is a critical time to recognize the priorities that will permit us to maintain our commitment to public education. We have voiced past support for the value of the BOCES shared service model as a means of delivering quality service at least cost and welcome the opportunity to do so again.

Since the creation of the BOCES by the 1948 NYS legislature, member school districts have enjoyed the opportunity to share services without the need to relinquish local control over school programs. Experience has shown us that school district consolidations tend to be expensive and resisted by individual communities who fear loss of local control that could result from imposed mergers. The functional consolidation of services through the BOCES on the other hand has been welcomed by school communities because services are requested, not imposed. The result has been savings of millions of dollars. We have only scratched the surface of the potential for improving service while saving future tax dollars. At the present time, however, service sharing permitted through the BOCES is limited to services that are primarily educational in nature. Greater savings would be possible if support services in areas such as finance, maintenance and construction were permitted. Even greater savings would be possible if the pool of potential service clients were expanded to provide additional clients' access to the wide range of services that BOCES could readily make available. Our specific recommendations include:

1. Support legislation that would permit BOCES to offer a greater range of non-instructional services in areas of maintenance, capital improvement, fiscal management, information technology, communications, planning and professional development.
2. Support legislation and resources that would permit and encourage BOCES to offer support services to a wider range of clients including municipal governments and non profit education and human services providers.
3. Modify regulations to take advantage of the entrepreneurial nature of BOCES service offerings by encouraging individual BOCES organizations to develop specialized support services that could be effectively delivered beyond their regional service area. Quality services such as but not limited to the Questar III State Aid Planning Service, The Capital Region BOCES Communication Service and the OCM BOCES Energy purchasing consortium have thrived by offering high quality at modest cost shared by hundreds of school districts statewide.

The basic structure exists to take fullest advantage of the entrepreneurial and competitive talents that Boards of Cooperative Educational Services bring to New York's public education community. By expanding the limits on the application of those talents, and with appropriate oversight and accountability, New York State's children can benefit from improved quality of service without loss of local school district control and with direct cost benefits to local property taxpayers.