

Another Voice  
The Buffalo News  
PO Box 100  
Buffalo, New York 14240

More than half a century ago the then Governor and Legislature of New York State took action to address the inequities in school revenues, capacity, and opportunities for kids that existed between the hundreds of small rural districts and the schools of the wealthier population centers. Their solution provided authority to school boards across the State to form regional cooperatives to share services.

Today, we all know the extent of our State's looming deficits and the urgency of its financial crisis, and the search for solutions is on.

Amidst the grim budget landscape are the recent recommendations of two State Commissions: on Local Efficiency and Competitiveness, chaired by former Lt. Governor Stan Lundine; and, on Property Tax Relief, chaired by Nassau County Executive Tom Suozzi.

The centerpiece of the Suozzi Commission report is a property tax cap, and the Senate has introduced a bill to impose that cap. The cap by itself has little ability to improve public education or stem increasing costs. The mandates still in place will just continue to consume a larger share of diminished resources. However, the recommendations in their totality are a solid starting point for substantial reforms to instill discipline in spending and awareness that efficiency and effectiveness must rely on restructuring and also investment.

To its credit, the Senate offers its own priorities for reducing and controlling expenses, and these reflect more thoughtful, long-term solutions. For example, we can applaud the Senate's recognition of an expanded role for Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) to control costs and foster innovative solutions through collaboration.

During 2006-07, New York State schools spent \$1.9 billion for BOCES services. The \$623 million of BOCES Aid to school districts had the effect of reducing property taxes because this model gives higher need districts more Aid than lower need districts, while all benefit from lower costs through sharing of services.

The District Superintendents of the State's 37 BOCES look forward to working with elected officials to advance solutions to the State's fiscal problems. We believe the BOCES model can play a part in managing the growth of property taxes but more importantly, focus the schools on innovation, collaboration and solutions, rather than cutting valuable programs and services.

This Governor and Legislature could be our generation's visionaries by: 1) removing some of the 50-year-old obstacles to permitting inter-municipal cooperation through BOCES; 2) authorizing the Big 4 City School districts (Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, and Yonkers) to purchase BOCES services with incentive aid, to the same extent as the suburbs; and, 3) empowering regional leaders, with greater knowledge of regional issues, to act within discretionary boundaries in the interests of those they serve.

The times may be urgent but the BOCES solution is time-tested. It is now time to use what we know to make a difference.

Donald A. Ogilvie  
District Superintendent/CEO of Erie 1 BOCES