

## BOCES of NYS Calls On New York To Address Critical Workforce Shortages

Statewide, BOCES and school districts continue to face shortages of the qualified personnel needed to provide essential services. Not only teachers and other school related professionals, but mental health professionals, bus drivers and many other providers are in dangerously short supply. These critical shortages jeopardize equitable access to a high-quality educational experience for all students. To address these shortages and build a workforce pipeline, BOCES of NYS recommends the following key strategies:

### RECRUIT THROUGH ESTABLISHING SCHOLARSHIP FUNDS

New York state's "Nurses for our Future" program was a great first step to address a critical nursing shortage. Now, BOCES of NYS recommends establishing similar programs for **educators and mental health professionals** willing to remain in New York for at least five years. Offering scholarships to students entering these key fields, or professionals in the industry looking to upskill through continuing education, creates a strong incentive to enter and stay in the profession.

### RETAIN THROUGH EXPANDED LOAN FORGIVENESS:

Increased investment in the NYS Teacher Loan Forgiveness Program should be paired with a similar **forgiveness program for mental health professionals** working in schools or community-based organizations that partner with schools. For professionals who have already

entered these professions and stayed in the state, BOCES of NYS calls upon the state to offset their student debt after a fixed term of service.

### STREAMLINE SCHOOL BUS DRIVER LICENSURE

Recent changes in training and testing requirements for commercial driver's license (CDL) holders have exacerbated an already serious bus driver shortage. Students across the state face late and canceled bus runs — sometimes even having to pivot to remote learning — because there are not enough drivers to get students to school on time. BOCES of NYS urges policy makers to consider **expedited training programs and increased opportunities for road testing** to help get more school bus drivers behind the wheel, more quickly.

### EXTEND PENSION PENALTY DEFERMENTS

With staff shortages continuing, many school districts and BOCES look to retirees to fill vacancies. Pandemic-era executive orders, and language in the most recent enacted state budget, have allowed most public sector retirees to work in school districts and BOCES without pension penalty, regardless of age or income. However, this statutory authorization is set to expire at the end of the 2022-23 school year. BOCES of NYS recommends **expanding this authorization** through the 2028-29 school year.

