



PRESIDENT OF THE UNIVERSITY
AND COMMISSIONER OF EDUCATION

January 15, 2009

Mr. Edward J. Furchak
Board President
Sullivan BOCES
6 Wierk Avenue
Liberty, New York 12754-2908

Mr. Carl P. Onken
Board President
Orange-Ulster BOCES
53 Gibson Road
Goshen, New York 10924-9777

Dear Messrs. Furchak and Onken:

Enclosed is the study of the Sole Supervisory District of Sullivan County, prepared by The Nelson A. Rockefeller Institute of Government, The State University of New York, that fulfills the requirements of Education Law § 2201. In commissioning this study, I requested that the investigators examine a possible reorganization of the Sullivan BOCES with respect to six general areas that are outlined on pages five and six of the study. The investigators studied reorganization possibilities for the Sullivan BOCES with contiguous BOCES and found that extending the services and resources of Orange-Ulster to the component districts of Sullivan would likely enhance the educational interests of Sullivan County and the region.

In reviewing the findings of the study, I make the following observations:

Demographic Considerations: Sullivan is one of the smallest BOCES in the State – its fall 2006 total enrollment of 10,641 places it as the third smallest. In contrast, Orange-Ulster is the ninth largest BOCES, with a total enrollment of 55,775. A reorganization of Sullivan with Orange-Ulster would bring the total enrollment to more than 66,600 students, making the combined BOCES the seventh largest in the State. (A pupil enrollment of 40,000 is considered the desired minimum level to support a variety of quality instructional and support services.)

Educational Considerations: In most respects, Sullivan BOCES does an effective job of meeting the educational needs of its region, especially for a small supervisory district. It appears to be meeting the special educational needs of the students in its component districts and devotes the greatest share of its resources to that activity. However, its facilities are small and many observers consider them inadequate. The community rejected the most recent capital plan and prospects for a significant upgrade appear limited. The study suggests that Sullivan County's school

districts could well benefit from a reorganization with the Orange-Ulster Supervisory District.

Financial Considerations: Both administrative and capital spending at Sullivan BOCES are quite high when measured as a percent of the overall operating budget and on a per pupil basis. The study suggests that this variance is due not to unnecessary or excessive expenditures, but rather to the supervisory district's small enrollment base.

Business and Workforce Development: All business and workforce development community members who provided input on the study expressed strong support for the Sullivan BOCES. Overall, the feedback neither supported reorganization, nor expressed strong opposition to the idea, providing it was beneficial to Sullivan County residents and businesses and did not diminish services to them.

Academic Standards: While itinerant services, general education, instructional support and non-instructional support services are frequently of less budget magnitude than occupational and special education, they are very important BOCES services in terms of supporting and enriching local district programs. This is particularly significant as districts move forward in their efforts related to educational reform. Orange-Ulster has a far deeper administrative and planning capacity than Sullivan which could strengthen the programming available to Sullivan County students.

District Superintendent Responsibilities: The study expressed concern about the difficulty that Orange-Ulster BOCES has had in appointing a new district superintendent. There would be several short-term challenges confronting a new district superintendent named to head a BOCES that is undergoing a large-scale restructuring. Accordingly, the study suggests that the reorganization could reasonably be deferred for a period of time after the appointment of a new district superintendent to assist in the smooth transition for the new organization.

Other Factors: The study suggests that there are instructional and administrative factors suggesting that reorganization may benefit Sullivan County's students. The percentage of students successfully passing the English Language Arts (ELA) test is lower for Sullivan BOCES than for Orange-Ulster BOCES. In Sullivan, 60 percent of general education students passed ELA while in Orange-Ulster the passing rate was 72 percent. For students with disabilities, the passing rate was 10 percent in Sullivan and 32 percent in Orange-Ulster. In addition, Sullivan's component districts rely on Orange-Ulster BOCES to a significant degree for services and purchases. In 2007-08, Sullivan's component districts purchased nearly \$3.3 million in services and products from Orange-Ulster. This level of activity was by far the greatest amount of such cross-contracting among the three BOCES in the immediate area (Sullivan, Orange-Ulster, and Ulster).

Given these observations, I concur with the study's findings that " a merger with Orange-Ulster would benefit the students and component school districts of Sullivan County. A merger would provide Sullivan with access to the resources and expertise of Orange-Ulster BOCES and provide students, component districts, and economic

development interests with additional educational and management services. Building on connections between the two BOCES that already exist in professional development, school improvement, athletics, and technology, a merger can be expected to enhance other educational opportunities to Sullivan County.”

I propose that the reorganization of the Sullivan and Orange-Ulster BOCES take effect on July 1, 2009. This should allow sufficient time for both Boards and staff at all levels to meet together on an ongoing basis to plan for the reorganization and discuss such areas as: Board membership; BOCES administration; program personnel; program offerings to students, instructional support services; technology and information systems; budget; labor contracts; and facility operations.

In accordance with Education Law § 2201, I am calling for a hearing to be conducted on February 12, 2009, from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m., at the Liberty High School Auditorium, 125 Buckley Street, Liberty, for the purpose of presenting the findings of the study and to hear public comment on the proposed reorganization of the Sullivan and Orange-Ulster BOCES. Regent Joseph E. Bowman, Jr. will host the meeting.

Please note that the study and this letter are available on the Department’s website – www.nysed.gov.

After conferring with Regent Bowman and reviewing the testimony and comments from the public hearing, I will make a final determination on the reorganization plan.

Sincerely,


Richard P. Mills

Enclosure

c: Regent Joseph E. Bowman, Jr.
Mr. Anthony Micha, Interim District Superintendent, Sullivan BOCES
Dr. John Pennoyer, Interim District Superintendent, Orange-Ulster BOCES