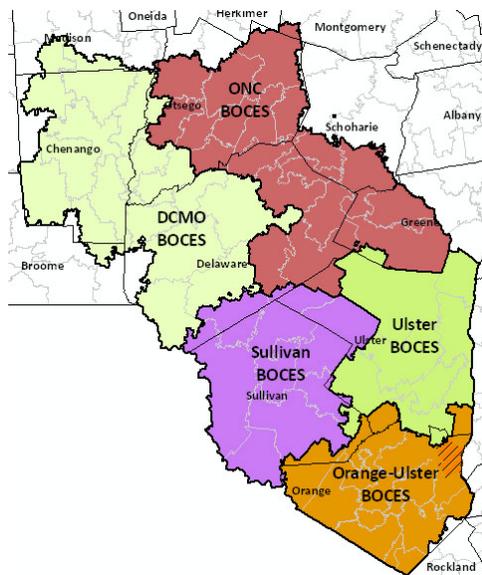


# The Sole Supervisory District of Sullivan County

## A Study of Potential Educational Reorganization of the Sullivan County BOCES



Prepared for the Commissioner of Education  
New York State Education Department

*January 2009*



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## **Summary**

After reviewing the potential reorganization of the Sullivan County BOCES, the Rockefeller Institute study team concludes that overall, the supervisory district does an effective job providing quality educational services to the community, especially given the challenges presented by the low enrollment base. However, the team believes that a merger with Orange-Ulster BOCES would benefit the students and component school districts of Sullivan County, and recommends such a step. 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 enhanced educational and management services. Although challenges exist and the merger will involve considerable work, the study team anticipates these issues will be more than offset by potential educational advantages from a merger.

### **I. Introduction**

Under State Education Law, district superintendents are assigned two broad, overlapping functions that carry important implications for the quality and cost of education. Each of the 37 district superintendents is the chief executive officer of a regional Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES), a corporate entity created to provide cooperative educational programs for two or more school districts. These services include educating students with disabilities, career and technical education (CTE), and computer and telecommunications services. In addition, the district superintendent is the regional representative of the State Education Commissioner. In that role, the district superintendent is responsible for improving student achievement — a function that includes implementing state standards, helping to select school district superintendents, promoting staff development, and other tasks. As the Board of Regents has raised educational standards over the past decade, the role of district superintendents in providing leadership through work with individual school districts has become increasingly important.

#### **A. Study Background**

When a vacancy occurs in the office of district superintendent in any supervisory district, New York State Education Law requires the State Education Department to conduct a survey of the district and those contiguous to it to determine if reorganizing the districts will better serve the educational interests of the region.<sup>1</sup> If the survey results indicate that additional analysis is needed, the Commissioner of Education may order a more in-depth study to examine possible reorganization options. The Commissioner authorized this study following the resignation of the district superintendent of the Sole Supervisory District of Sullivan County.

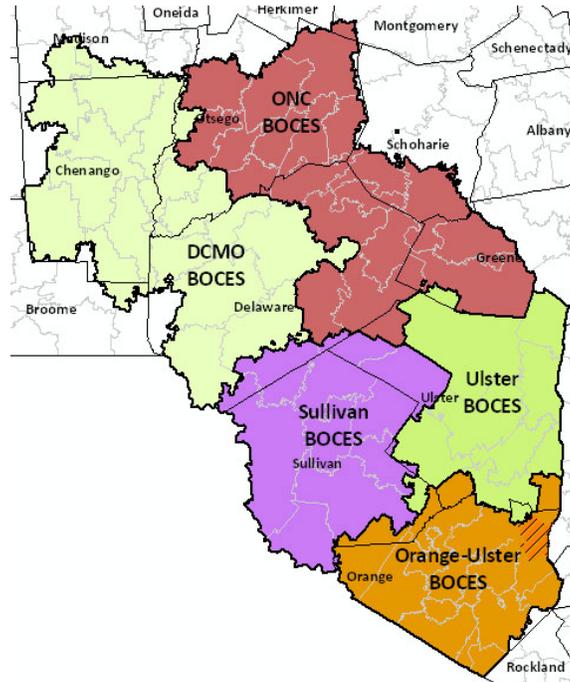
The Commissioner retained the Nelson A. Rockefeller Institute of Government, the public policy research arm of the State University of New York, to research and analyze a possible reorganization of the Sullivan County BOCES Sole Supervisory District in relation to four contiguous districts. Those contiguous

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<sup>1</sup> New York State Consolidated Laws, Article 45, Section 2201.

districts cover all or parts of Delaware, Chenango, Madison, and Otsego counties (DCMO); Otsego, Delaware, Schoharie, and Greene counties (ONC); Orange and Ulster counties (Orange-Ulster); and Ulster County. The study area includes five BOCES covering all or parts of eight counties.

**Figure 1: Sullivan BOCES and Contiguous Districts – Status Quo**



In keeping with previous studies of potential supervisory district reorganization, the Commissioner identified the following reconfiguration options for consideration:

1. Retain the Sullivan County supervisory district as currently constituted;
2. Combine the Sullivan County supervisory district with a contiguous district;
3. Transfer one or more school districts from the Sullivan County supervisory district to a contiguous district; or
4. Transfer one or more school districts from a contiguous district(s) to the Sullivan County supervisory district.

In his charge to the Rockefeller Institute, the Commissioner requested that the study address the following questions with regard to potential reorganization options:

- Educational Benefits: Would educational benefits result from reorganization or would it be more beneficial to retain the Sullivan County supervisory district, as currently organized?

- District Superintendent: Would the district superintendent(s) affected by reorganization be able to fulfill the dual roles of representative of the commissioner of education and chief executive of the BOCES district? Would the district superintendent(s) be able to address the needs of all component school districts? Would the district superintendent(s) have the support and capacity needed to implement the reorganization properly?
- Cost-Saving Benefits: Would there be cost savings from reorganization or would it be more cost effective and beneficial to the educational interests of the region to retain the Sullivan County supervisory district as currently organized?
- Workforce Development Implications: Would the reorganized supervisory district(s) better serve the workforce/economic development needs of the region or would they be better served by retaining the Sullivan County supervisory district, as currently organized?
- Academic Standards: Would reorganization result in improved services to help raise academic standards and close achievement gaps or would this be best achieved by retaining the Sullivan County supervisory district, as currently organized?
- Other Factors: Are there other factors that support or mitigate against a reorganized Sullivan County supervisory district?

The Commissioner also requested consideration of the following criteria for an effective supervisory district:

- The number of component districts and geographic size are such that the district superintendent can execute his/her statutory and administrative responsibilities as a state officer, in accordance with Section 2215 of New York State Education Law, in a competent and cost-effective manner.
- The district superintendent should be able to carry out effectively his/her responsibilities as the chief executive officer of the BOCES, in accordance with Section 1950 of New York State Education Law.
- The reorganization should not infringe upon the ability of the BOCES to provide shared services to component school districts and respond effectively and efficiently to educational needs.
- The pupil enrollment base must be sufficient to support a variety of quality instructional and support services at appropriately located educational centers to extend and enhance the programs of component school districts.
- The financial base is sufficient to support BOCES administrative, instructional, and related support services costs at affordable levels for component school districts.

## **B. Methodology**

The Rockefeller Institute of Government collected input on the potential reorganization of the Sullivan County supervisory district and its contiguous

districts from stakeholders in an open and inclusive manner. Institute staff obtained feedback through the following efforts:

- Interviews, focus group sessions, and follow-up with administrators and staff of the Sullivan County (including the Sullivan Board), Orange-Ulster, and Ulster supervisory districts, including district superintendents (current and interim), assistant district superintendents, business officers, and program staff.
- Letters to district superintendents of DCMO and ONC, as well as electronic mail and letters to component school district superintendents and board presidents in all four contiguous regions, inviting their input.
- Interviews and focus group sessions with component school superintendents of Sullivan County BOCES.
- Telephone interviews with district superintendents and senior staff from contiguous supervisory districts, state and local union representatives, and business and community leaders.
- Letters and electronic mail describing the study and its purpose, and inviting feedback from federal, state, and local elected officials; area government agency officials; presidents of higher education institutions; educational and cultural organization representatives; leaders and representatives of area workforce development boards; and leaders of parents' organizations of Sullivan County and contiguous districts.
- A brief project description and a website developed by the study team that included a description of the study and its purpose, and invited comments.

Field interviews, phone calls, and focus group sessions produced direct comments from more than 70 leaders, staff, and other individuals in Sullivan County and contiguous supervisory district areas. Several emails and letters with comments from individuals interested in the study also were received.

The Rockefeller Institute study team collected information from the websites and publications of the Sullivan County BOCES and its contiguous districts, governmental reports on the economic condition of the Sullivan County region and surrounding counties, and BOCES administrative manuals of the New York State Education Department.

Finally, Institute staff analyzed fiscal and demographic data provided by BOCES officials and the New York State Education Department. Such sources included BOCES annual budgets; CoSers (cooperative service agreements); audit reports; the Education Department's *Preliminary Survey of Alternatives for the Sole Supervisory District of Sullivan County*; *Public School Enrollment and Staff Data, New York State*; annual 602 reports; annual 655 reports to the Governor and Legislature; annual BOCES Report Cards; financial statements; and BOCES program and administrative/capital budget summary data.

NOTE: Unless noted otherwise, this report uses 2006-07 data.

## **II. Profile of Sullivan County and Contiguous BOCES**

The Commissioner of Education directed the Rockefeller Institute to examine potential reorganization options involving the Sullivan County BOCES and contiguous supervisory districts.

Sullivan County and its four contiguous BOCES exhibit considerable diversity in terms of enrollment, area covered and other important factors. Of the five supervisory districts in the region, only one, Orange-Ulster BOCES, meets the Education Department's suggested enrollment threshold of 40,000 students. Sullivan County, Otsego Northern Catskills, and DCMO are among the smallest in the state in terms of enrollment. The five BOCES also span a wide range of geographic areas, although most are above average in size. DCMO BOCES is three times the size of the Sullivan and Orange-Ulster BOCES.

Following is a short profile of each contiguous BOCES, and a more detailed profile of Sullivan:

Delaware-Chenango-Madison-Otsego: With 1,825 square miles, DCMO is the largest of the five BOCES in this study and the eighth largest in the state in terms of area. Its enrollment is 15,026. DCMO contains 16 school districts and the average enrollment of each is about 939, one of the lower average enrollments among all the state's BOCES. In terms of enrollment density per square mile, DCMO is roughly equivalent to Sullivan: 8.2 versus 9.9, respectively. DCMO has one of the higher rates of student participation in career and technical programs in the region — 32.6 percent of all 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> year students.

Orange-Ulster: Of the five study districts, Orange-Ulster BOCES covers the smallest area, 855 square miles, but is significantly larger than the other supervisory districts in the region in terms of its total enrollment of 55,552 (ninth largest in the state), and its high enrollment density of 65 students per square mile ranks 10<sup>th</sup> highest in the state. Orange-Ulster has 17 component districts and an average enrollment of 3,268 students, almost three times that of Sullivan. Approximately 19.3 percent of Orange-Ulster's 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> year students are enrolled in career and technical education programs.

Otsego Northern Catskills: The ONC BOCES is in one of the more rural areas of New York State. With 10,212 students, it has the second lowest enrollment of all 37 supervisory districts. ONC covers 1,661 square miles, and is the 12<sup>th</sup> largest BOCES in terms of square miles served. The combination of a relatively large land area and a small enrollment means a very low enrollment density per square mile — 6.15 for fall 2006. The ONC BOCES has 19 component districts with an average enrollment per district of 537, one of the lowest average enrollments among all the state's BOCES. Approximately 23.7 percent of the district's 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> year students participate in career and technical education programs.

Ulster: This BOCES has an enrollment of 24,875, the second-highest in the region. With one of the smaller land areas (893 square miles) of the five BOCES, it has also a relatively high enrollment density, with 27.9 students per square mile. Ulster serves nine component school districts, with an average enrollment of 2,764 students. Career and technical programs enrolled 24.7 percent of the district's juniors and seniors.

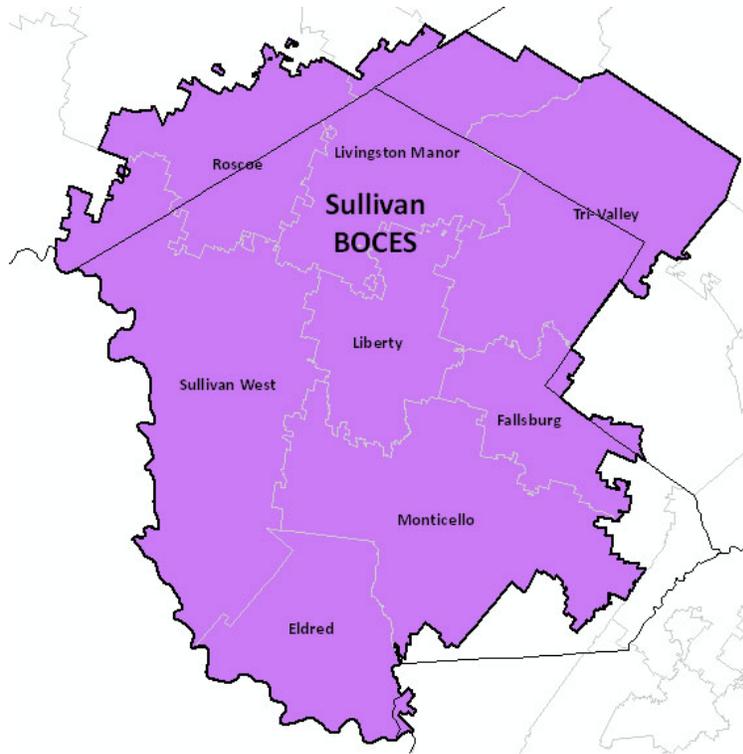
Sullivan: Sullivan County is often characterized as being “in between upstate and downstate.” Largely rural, it has geographic, economic, and cultural ties to both the Southern Tier and Hudson Valley regions, and historic ties to the downstate metropolitan region, particularly as a tourism destination.

Following is a more detailed profile of the Sullivan County BOCES supervisory district, from the standpoint of its size, enrollment base, and other structural characteristics.

### **Location**

The Sullivan County BOCES is located in the southern Catskills, southwest of the Capital Region and southeast of Binghamton. To its southeast is Orange County and I-84, to the north Delaware County and I-88, the east Ulster County and the NYS Thruway, and the west Pennsylvania and I-81.

**Figure 2: Sullivan County BOCES – Status Quo**



During the course of interviews with Sullivan BOCES personnel and component school district officers, geography was mentioned several times as an important factor in the day-to-day management of the BOCES. Similar to the ONC BOCES, Sullivan’s challenges arise from the mountainous terrain of the Catskills and relatively difficult travel within the region, particularly during winter months. The only major highway in the Sullivan BOCES region is NY 17, which runs from the Pennsylvania border through the Southern Tier and east through Binghamton, and then southeast through Delaware, Sullivan, and Orange counties.

## Size

Sullivan BOCES serves a relatively large geographic region, although not nearly as large as some other BOCES regions. Covering approximately 1,073 square miles, Sullivan is about average in terms of square miles served.

## Demographics

The population served by the Sullivan BOCES is relatively diverse (see Table 1). Component districts have non-white enrollments ranging from under 10 percent to near 50 percent. There are few large employers, with tourism, health care, and retail services predominant. Labor and economic data indicate that there is little commutation out of or into Sullivan County for employment purposes; most residents work within the county. Those who commute outside the county for employment purposes travel primarily to Orange County.

**Table 1: Enrollment by Race, Sullivan County School Districts, 2006-07**

School District Name	Fall 2006 Enrollment	Enrollment Distribution By Race				
		White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Other
Eldred	686	88%	4%	6%	2%	0%
Fallsburg	1,460	57%	19%	23%	1%	0%
Liberty	1,610	66%	11%	21%	2%	0%
Livingston Manor	568	79%	6%	14%	2%	0%
Monticello	3,430	54%	23%	21%	2%	0%
Roscoe	267	92%	1%	4%	3%	0%
Sullivan West	1,413	92%	3%	5%	1%	0%
Tri-Valley Central	1,207	90%	3%	6%	1%	0%
<b>Total Sullivan BOCES</b>	<b>10,641</b>	<b>70%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>0%</b>

Source: NYS Education Department, School Report Cards for the 2006-07 School Year  
[www.emsc.nysed.gov/irts/reportcard](http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/irts/reportcard)

## Enrollment

Total enrollment for the Sullivan BOCES in fall 2006 was 10,641. This enrollment places Sullivan near the bottom of the enrollment range for all BOCES, with only the Otsego Northern Catskills BOCES (10,212) and the Franklin-Essex-Hamilton BOCES (9,086) recording lower enrollments. The enrollment density of 9.9 students per square mile is higher than both ONC (6.1) and DCMO (8.2), but significantly lower than the state average (34), and nearby Ulster and Orange-Ulster supervisory districts, which have enrollment densities of 27.9 and 65 students per square mile, respectively.

The State Education Department has determined that an enrollment base of 40,000 students is the minimum desirable enrollment for a BOCES. State education policy makers consider enrollment below this level insufficient to enable the BOCES to provide the broad range of services to meet student characteristics, needs and interests. For fall 2006, only 15 BOCES in the state, one of which is Orange-Ulster, met this suggested enrollment threshold, and four exceeded the threshold by fewer than 5,000 students. Four other BOCES fell between 35,000 and 40,000 enrollment. Twenty-two out of 37 BOCES

have less than the recommended 40,000 student base, and of these, 12 have fewer than 20,000 students.

Sullivan’s enrollment has undergone a steady decline in recent years. From a fall 2001 enrollment of 11,286, the pupil count has declined by 5.7 percent. This mirrors the attrition experienced by many BOCES in the upstate region. Local leaders do not expect any significant turnaround in this trend to occur in the foreseeable future. Of the five supervisory districts in this study, only the Orange-Ulster BOCES has experienced enrollment growth.

Appendix B lists all 37 BOCES with their 2006-07 enrollments, the land area in square miles for each, and the enrollment density per square mile. Data for the five supervisory districts included in this study are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: Number of Component Districts, Enrollment, Area, Density, 2006**

BOCES	# Component Districts	Enrollment (Fall 2006)	Area (Square Miles)	Density (Pupil/Sq. Mile)	Rank (Based on Density)
DCMO	16	15,026	1,825	8	4
ONC	19	10,212	1,661	6	5
Orange-Ulster	17	55,552	855	65	1
Sullivan	8	10,641	1,073	10	3
Ulster	9	24,875	893	28	2

Source: NYS Education Department, School District Enrollment, Fall 2006  
[www.emsc.nysed.gov/mgtserv/BOCES/enrollment.shtml](http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/mgtserv/BOCES/enrollment.shtml)

### Component Districts

The supervisory district includes eight component school districts with an average enrollment of 1,330. This is the smallest number of component districts of any supervisory district in the state, along with Rockland BOCES, and far below average for the state’s BOCES. The average number of component school districts in the state’s BOCES is approximately 17, (excluding the two largest BOCES, Nassau and Suffolk 1, each containing more than 50 component school districts, which skew the unadjusted average).

Although component districts of the Sullivan BOCES have an average enrollment of 1,330, they vary dramatically in size. Three of the eight component districts have enrollments of less than 1,000 students. These low-enrollments are offset by one relatively large district, that being Monticello with 3,430 students, almost 13 times larger than the smallest district, and more than twice that of the second largest district.

**Table 3: Number of Component Districts and Enrollment in Sullivan and Contiguous BOCES, 2006-07**

BOCES	# Component Districts	# of Districts with Enrollments<1000	Average Enrollment per District
DCMO	16	9	939
ONC	19	17	537
Orange-Ulster	17	5	3,268
Sullivan	8	3	1,330
Ulster	9	1	2,764

Source: NYS Education Department, School District Enrollment, Fall 2006  
[www.emsc.nysed.gov/mgtserv/BOCES/enrollment.shtml](http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/mgtserv/BOCES/enrollment.shtml)

The component school districts of the Sullivan BOCES are mostly rural with a few more urban areas, offering varying degrees of diversity among student populations.

### **Sullivan County BOCES Service Infrastructure**

Sullivan County BOCES offers career and technical education, special education, alternative education, adult education, and other services.

The career and technical center is located in Liberty; facilities for innovative programs, alternative education, and adult education are located in Liberty, White Sulphur Springs, Youngsville, and Monticello. These locations were chosen in part to provide relatively central locations to minimize travel times for students, but also because the Sullivan BOCES is at capacity and rents space from its component school districts. In general, the location of these facilities has allowed the component school districts to take advantage of BOCES services.

### **III. Assessment of Potential Reorganization Options**

The fact that Sullivan County BOCES abuts only four other supervisory districts limits the potential reorganization options available to the Commissioner, especially if the Sullivan County component school districts are to be kept together in the same BOCES. The brief profiles presented in Section III illustrate the considerable diversity that characterizes the four supervisory districts. The study team recently completed a review of potential reorganization options involving Otsego Northern Catskills BOCES and this study considered in-depth the issues associated with potential mergers involving ONC, DCMO, and Sullivan BOCES ([www.rockinst.org/pdf/education/2008-11-Rockefeller\\_Institute\\_ONC\\_BOCES\\_Report.pdf](http://www.rockinst.org/pdf/education/2008-11-Rockefeller_Institute_ONC_BOCES_Report.pdf)). This previous study forms the basis for certain conclusions described below.

If the Sullivan County components are not kept together in the same supervisory district, it is theoretically possible to effectively eliminate the Sullivan BOCES by dissolving its administrative structure and assigning its component school districts to multiple, contiguous supervisory districts. However, because the Sullivan BOCES is relatively contained (including only districts in Sullivan County) and offers the bulk of its student services at one center for technical education in Liberty, such an option would require many students to travel to other campuses, adding to their travel times and potentially damaging their educational programming. Accordingly, the study team recommends that the eight school districts in Sullivan County be considered as a whole and kept together in the same BOCES.

#### **A. Merger of Sullivan and Otsego Northern Catskills (ONC)**

The study team's recent, in-depth review of the ONC BOCES included an examination of a potential merger involving the southernmost component school districts of ONC with the Sullivan BOCES. The report identified a number of drawbacks to that potential merger. The most significant was found to be the difficulty of travel in the region, caused in turn by the lack of high-speed roads, challenging topography, and adverse weather conditions. The study team concluded that this factor raised material challenges to the effective administration of the potential reorganized supervisory district, and recommended that this option not be pursued by the Commissioner.

We continue to believe that this presents a nearly insurmountable obstacle to an effective merger between the Sullivan County BOCES and the ONC BOCES. In fact, whereas the previous study examined a break-up of ONC with only the southern components being merged with Sullivan, the current review would involve a merger of the Sullivan BOCES with the existing ONC supervisory district. The travel and transportation difficulties, as well as the administrative burdens associated with management of the sprawling, very rural ONC BOCES that were raised by the more limited merger would be exacerbated by a merger between the two existing supervisory districts. For this reason, although this option would join two of the smallest supervisory districts (by enrollment) in the state, and potentially achieve greater economies of scale, the study team recommends that a merger between Sullivan County BOCES and ONC BOCES not be pursued.

## **B. Merger of Sullivan and Delaware-Chenango-Madison-Oneida (DCMO)**

The study team's in-depth review of the ONC BOCES also included an examination of a potential merger involving ONC with the DCMO BOCES. While this option was attractive on the basis of several factors, the report pointed out that DCMO has recently concluded an extensive capital program and incurred some \$48 million in new debt to finance it. The costs of servicing this debt would be "shared" by all of the component districts of the combined DCMO and ONC supervisory districts. Accordingly, the budgets of the ONC components would be allocated significant new capital costs even though the districts' students would have limited ability to utilize these distant facilities to receive services. The study team concluded that this factor raised serious fiscal challenges to a potential merger between ONC and DCMO BOCES, and recommended that this option not be pursued by the Commissioner.

This factor would apply as well to a potential merger between DCMO and Sullivan County BOCES. In fact, the added distance from the DCMO BOCES to Sullivan County merely accentuates the perceived inequity that would ensue if Sullivan County school districts were to absorb a share of DCMO debt service costs following a merger — the districts would absorb these costs, while their students would have little, if any, practical opportunity to utilize the DCMO facilities. Such a merger would also create a sprawling, unwieldy supervisory district, stretching from the edge of the downstate metropolitan region to southern Madison County in Central New York. The study team recommends against consideration of such a merger.

## **C. Merger of Sullivan and Ulster**

The two other supervisory districts contiguous with Sullivan BOCES — Ulster BOCES and Orange-Ulster BOCES — present the two other possible reorganization options.

On the surface, there are some apparent potential advantages to a merger between Ulster and Sullivan BOCES. They share long common borders and there are economic and demographic ties among them, particularly between southern Ulster County and Sullivan County. In addition, a merger would join two relatively smaller supervisory districts, each with enrollments below the 40,000 minimum enrollment threshold recommended by the Education Department. Such a merger would raise the total enrollment of the supervisory district to over 35,500. Each supervisory district has fewer than 10 component school districts and combining the BOCES would raise the number of components to 17, which the study team believes is a manageable number and just below the average number of components in BOCES statewide.

Both Sullivan and Ulster supervisory districts have approximately the same number of students with disabilities as a percentage of total enrollment – 13.6 percent and 14.0 percent, respectively, according to 2005-06 NYS education data. However, Sullivan BOCES has a higher poverty index as of 2007, 18.3 percent versus Ulster's 12.5 percent. And Sullivan has a greater number of students eligible for free and reduced price lunches. Two of its districts have greater than 50 percent of its students eligible for this service, whereas none of Ulster's component districts meet this level of need. On balance, Sullivan and Ulster share some commonalities, but the Sullivan BOCES student base is notably more disadvantaged in economic terms.

There are two important challenges to a merger between Sullivan and Ulster supervisory districts. First, in many ways, Ulster County appears to have a stronger connection to Dutchess and Orange counties than to Sullivan County. These three Hudson River Valley counties share many historic and economic links — each has a central city surrounded by smaller suburban and rural communities. Each county has a significant higher education presence and growing technology jobs.

The relative lack of economic and other links between Ulster and Sullivan counties stems largely from the second set of obstacles to a potential merger between the Sullivan and Ulster supervisory districts: geography and transportation. Ulster BOCES has its career and technical education complex in Port Ewen (just south of Kingston) and its central office and regional information center (RIC) is headquartered in New Paltz. The only practical route of travel between the central offices of Sullivan BOCES in Liberty and Ulster BOCES in New Paltz is a difficult drive over the Shawangunk Mountains. While not a very high chain, the area is prone to bad weather. The main road (State Route 44 and 55) climbs more than 1,200 vertical feet in a few miles, with switchbacks and sharp turns. Even in the best of weather, travel between Liberty and New Paltz is slow: the 43 mile trip takes slightly more than an hour, illustrating the slow pace of travel.

The leadership of Ulster BOCES strongly opposes a merger with Sullivan for these reasons. The remoteness of their central office from Sullivan facilities and component districts would weaken the ability of Ulster BOCES management to provide effective services, guidance, and oversight to the Sullivan BOCES operations. For those reasons, and given the relatively low level of existing economic and educational relationships between the two areas, the study team recommends that Sullivan and Ulster supervisory districts not be combined.

#### **D. Merger of Sullivan and Orange-Ulster**

The fourth supervisory district contiguous with Sullivan BOCES — Orange-Ulster BOCES — presents the remaining possible reorganization option. This section reviews a potential merger from several key perspectives that are integral to the success of a supervisory district.

##### **D1. Demographic Considerations**

As the study team noted in previous reviews, the role of the BOCES within the educational community can vary significantly in different regions of the state, where demographics and the nature and size of the component school districts can be quite dissimilar. In more rural, sparsely populated regions, the BOCES often plays a much more expansive role in providing services to the component districts. And Sullivan County BOCES is one of the smallest supervisory districts 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 merger with Sullivan would bring the total enrollment to more than 66,600 students, making the combined BOCES the seventh largest in New York.

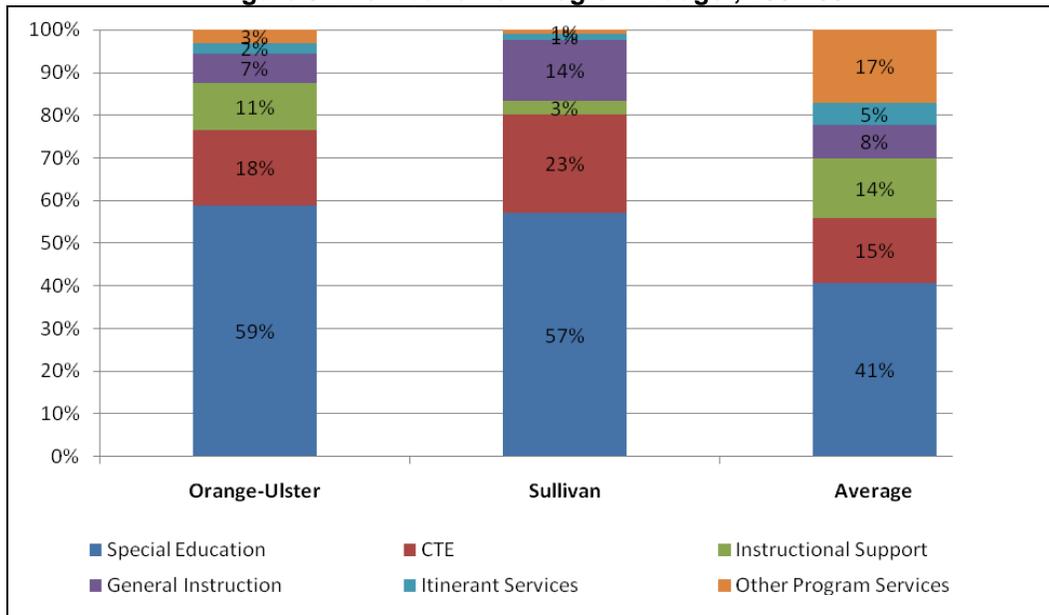
Both supervisory districts have approximately the same percentage of students with disabilities — 13.6 percent in Sullivan and 11.3 percent in Orange-Ulster,

according to 2005-06 NYS education data. Orange-Ulster has a lower poverty index, 11.3 percent compared to Sullivan’s 18.3 percent. And Sullivan has a greater proportion of its component districts with high rates of students eligible for free and reduced price lunches. Two of its eight districts have greater than 50 percent of students eligible for this service whereas two of Orange-Ulster’s 17 component districts meet this level of need. And as to the number of students with limited English proficiency (LEP), Sullivan’s eight districts have an LEP rate ranging from 0-8.2 percent, while Orange-Ulster’s 17 districts range from 0.6-25.4 percent, with two districts above 10 percent.

**D2. Educational Considerations**

Just as any other independent organization, a BOCES can be expected to devote more of its total resources to program activities as the total budget increases. Smaller organizations can be expected to devote a proportionally larger share of their total resources to non-program expenses such as administration and capital costs than larger organizations. This is the case with Sullivan BOCES. The 2007-08 total budget for Sullivan was \$24.4 million, of which 83.1 percent was earmarked for educational programs such as special education, itinerant teachers, and CTE courses. In contrast, Orange-Ulster, with a budget of \$91.1 million, allocates 94.4 percent of its budget to educational programs.

**Figure 3: Distribution of Program Budget, 2007-08**



Sullivan BOCES offers the typical range of educational programming to serve the students of its eight component school districts. Certain program areas are modest in scope, while others appear to be well developed. This appears to be a function of the small size of the supervisory district in terms of total enrollment and number of component districts. As shown in Figure 3, there are many similarities in the distribution of program expenditures by sub-category in the Sullivan versus Orange-Ulster supervisory districts. The program expenditures in both BOCES

focus on special education, career and technical education, and general instruction more than does the average BOCES statewide.

### Special Education Programs

Special education plays the major role in program activities of both Sullivan and Orange-Ulster BOCES. Nearly one-half (47 percent) of total expenditures budgeted for 2007-08 at the Sullivan BOCES were in special education, while at Orange-Ulster, the corresponding percentage was 55 percent. Key metrics for special education are shown in Table 4.

**Table 4: Special Education Budget Data, 2006**

BOCES	Special Education Budget(\$)	Special Ed. Budget Per Pupil(\$)	Special Ed. Budget as % of Program Budget	Special Ed. Budget as % of Total Budget
Orange-Ulster	50,571,232	910	58.8%	55.5%
Sullivan	11,565,794	1,087	57.1%	47.4%
<b>NYS</b>	<b>905,377,540</b>	<b>566</b>	<b>40.6%</b>	<b>36.8%</b>
Source: NYS Education Department, BOCES Budget Information <a href="http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/mgtserv/BOCES/budget-info.shtml">www.emsc.nysed.gov/mgtserv/BOCES/budget-info.shtml</a> NYS Education Department, BOCES Enrollment for pupil counts <a href="http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/mgtserv/BOCES/enrollment.shtml">www.emsc.nysed.gov/mgtserv/BOCES/enrollment.shtml</a> Note: Pupil counts are based on enrollments numbers for Fall 2006				

Special education services and programs are offered in four traditional settings, categorized by the ratios of professional staff to pupils to paraprofessional staff: 1:12:1, 1:6:1, 1:8:1, and 1:12:3. Sullivan offered no courses in the 1:6:1 category, while Orange-Ulster offered courses in all four groups. As shown in Table 5, in 2006-07 Sullivan had by far the highest special education enrollment in its 1:8:1 program, and a much greater predominance in this category than statewide average data indicate. Orange-Ulster's programs were more evenly spread among the 1:6:1, 1:8:1, and 1:12:3 settings. Sullivan charged higher tuition rates than Orange-Ulster in all three categories where it offered programs. Sullivan's tuition rates also exceed the statewide BOCES average in 1:12:1 and 1:8:1 settings, while Orange-Ulster's were below the average, significantly so in all but the 1:12:1 category.

**Table 5: Special Education Enrollment and Tuition per Pupil, 2006**

BOCES	Pupils (Based on Staff-Pupil Ratio)				Tuition Per Pupil (Based on Staff-Pupil Ratio)			
	1:12:1	1:6:1	1:8:1	1:12:3	1:12:1	1:6:1	1:8:1	1:12:3
Orange-Ulster	13	432	250	371	22,339	20,757	22,642	26,669
Sullivan	79	0	182	21	24,969	0	37,035	29,984
<b>NYS Total</b>	<b>5,371</b>	<b>5,600</b>	<b>5,531</b>	<b>1,741</b>	<b>N/A</b>			
<b>NYS Average</b>	<b>153</b>	<b>187</b>	<b>198</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>22,907</b>	<b>32,621</b>	<b>30,071</b>	<b>31,743</b>
Source: NYS Education Department, BOCES Financial and Statistical Outcomes, Annual 602 Report <a href="http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/mgtserv/BOCES/financial-statistical.shtml">www.emsc.nysed.gov/mgtserv/BOCES/financial-statistical.shtml</a>								

## Career and Technical Education (CTE) Programs

Sullivan offers 19 programs at its CTE center in Liberty, including building trades, cosmetology, health occupations, vehicle maintenance, information technology, culinary arts, and New Visions/medical technology. Typically, the career and technical courses are half-day programs, open to high school juniors and seniors. Sullivan's 19 CTE courses are just below the 20 offered on average by BOCES across the state. In contrast, 31 courses are offered by Orange-Ulster. In addition to the general categories noted above for Sullivan, Orange-Ulster offers others programs, including fire science and law enforcement, visual arts and communication, and New Vision programs in education, engineering, and law and government studies.

The study team found that both Sullivan and Orange-Ulster BOCES are involved in their economic and workforce development communities.

As shown in Table 6, both BOCES devote a slightly greater proportion of their educational budget to career and technical education than the statewide average: 23 percent in Sullivan, 17.7 percent in Orange-Ulster and 15.3 percent statewide.

**Table 6: CTE Budget, 2007**

BOCES Name	CTE Budget(\$)	CTE Budget Per Pupil(\$)	CTE Budget as % of Program Budget	CTE Budget as % of Total Budget
Orange-Ulster	15,199,769	274	17.7%	16.7%
Sullivan	4,658,711	438	23.0%	19.1%
<b>NYS</b>	<b>340,168,713</b>	<b>213</b>	<b>15.3%</b>	<b>13.8%</b>
Source: NYS Education Department, BOCES Budget Information <a href="http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/mgtserv/BOCES/budget-info.shtml">www.emsc.nysed.gov/mgtserv/BOCES/budget-info.shtml</a> NYS Education Department, BOCES Enrollment for pupil counts <a href="http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/mgtserv/BOCES/enrollment.shtml">www.emsc.nysed.gov/mgtserv/BOCES/enrollment.shtml</a> Note: Pupil counts are based on enrollments numbers for Fall 2006				

Since 2001-02, Sullivan's CTE enrollment recorded very strong growth in the early years, followed by a sharp enrollment reduction. This runs counter to trends statewide, which show more consistent enrollment increases. Nevertheless, Sullivan's overall CTE enrollment growth since 2001-02 still ranks far above the statewide growth rate. Orange-Ulster's enrollment growth has remained relatively stable with a rise in recent years; its overall growth was 12 percent over the period, one-third the rate of Sullivan BOCES.

**Table 7: CTE Enrollment, 2002-2007**

BOCES	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	% Change, 2002-07
Orange-Ulster	1,351	1,381	1,406	1,430	1,518	1,510	12%
Sullivan	295	358	384	427	472	411	39%
<b>NYS Total</b>	<b>33,651</b>	<b>34,236</b>	<b>34,074</b>	<b>35,233</b>	<b>35,903</b>	<b>36,710</b>	<b>9%</b>
<b>NYS Average</b>	<b>886</b>	<b>901</b>	<b>897</b>	<b>927</b>	<b>944</b>	<b>992</b>	<b>12%</b>
Source: NYS Education Department, BOCES Financial and Statistical Outcomes, Annual 602 Report <a href="http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/mgtserv/BOCES/financial-statistical.shtml">www.emsc.nysed.gov/mgtserv/BOCES/financial-statistical.shtml</a>							

Sullivan’s CTE programs serve a greater percentage of the eligible high school juniors and seniors than those in Orange-Ulster. As reported on the 2006-07 New York State Education Department Report Cards, in Sullivan, 26.1 percent of these eligible students participated in CTE, compared to a participation rate of 19.3 percent in Orange-Ulster.

Sullivan BOCES does well in preparing CTE students for post-secondary endeavors. According to the 2006-07 Report Cards, 91.7 percent of 2<sup>nd</sup> year students completed their CTE program. At Orange-Ulster, the completion rate was even higher, 95.1 percent. And 63 percent of Sullivan’s CTE graduates were engaged in related employment, post-secondary education or the military, one year after completion of the CTE program, versus 42 percent in Orange-Ulster.

As Table 8 indicates, in recent years, Sullivan BOCES has imposed CTE tuition rates that are much higher than those of Orange-Ulster and the statewide average. Over the period, Sullivan’s and Orange-Ulster’s rates have increased somewhat faster than the statewide average.

**Table 8: CTE Tuition per Student, 2002-2007**

<b>BOCES</b>	<b>2001-02</b>	<b>2002-03</b>	<b>2003-04</b>	<b>2004-05</b>	<b>2005-06</b>	<b>2006-07</b>	<b>% Change, 2002-07</b>
Orange-Ulster	6,447	6,602	6,685	7,068	7,560	7,964	24%
Sullivan	7,843	8,025	8,025	8,575	8,191	9,763	24%
<b>NYS Average</b>	<b>6,279</b>	<b>6,412</b>	<b>6,723</b>	<b>6,853</b>	<b>7,095</b>	<b>7,544</b>	<b>20%</b>
Source: NYS Education Department, BOCES Financial and Statistical Outcomes, Annual 602 Report <a href="http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/mgtserv/BOCES/financial-statistical.shtml">www.emsc.nysed.gov/mgtserv/BOCES/financial-statistical.shtml</a>							

### **Itinerant Services**

Itinerant services provide a valuable function, particularly in areas with low school district enrollment, by assigning BOCES teachers and specialists to schools where enrollment is too low to justify or support the direct employment of these staff by the districts themselves. Sullivan’s itinerant services program is limited even though three of the eight component districts have total enrollments of less than 700 students. As shown in Table 9, Sullivan’s entire budget for itinerant services is slightly below \$275,000 and on every measure is a more limited area of activity than in Orange-Ulster BOCES; in both supervisory districts, itinerant services play a more limited role than in the average BOCES in New York.

Sullivan BOCES reports that there has been growing interest recently among component district educators in obtaining itinerant services, as well as shared business office functions through the BOCES. This may be attributable to growing fiscal stress being felt by districts as a consequence of the worsening economy and proposed state aid reductions.

**Table 9: Itinerant Services Budget, 2007**

BOCES Name	Itinerant Budget(\$)	Itinerant Budget Per Pupil(\$)	Itinerant Budget as % of Program Budget	Itinerant Budget as % of Total Budget
Orange-Ulster	2,145,679	39	2.5%	2.4%
Sullivan	274,699	26	1.4%	1.1%
<b>NYS</b>	<b>113,442,766</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>5.1%</b>	<b>4.6%</b>
Source: NYS Education Department, BOCES Budget Information <a href="http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/mgtserv/BOCES/budget-info.shtml">www.emsc.nysed.gov/mgtserv/BOCES/budget-info.shtml</a> NYS Education Department, BOCES Enrollment for pupil counts <a href="http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/mgtserv/BOCES/enrollment.shtml">www.emsc.nysed.gov/mgtserv/BOCES/enrollment.shtml</a> Note: Pupil counts are based on enrollments numbers for Fall 2006.				

### Other Factors

Sullivan BOCES offers BOCES-based services in three locations: its CTE center in Liberty, adult and special education in Monticello, special education in Liberty and White Sulphur Springs, and alternative education in Youngsville. Most facilities are rented.

The percentage of students successfully passing the English Language Arts (ELA) test is lower than in Orange-Ulster BOCES. In Sullivan, 60 percent of general education students passed ELA while in Orange-Ulster, the passing rate was 72 percent. For pupils with disabilities, the passing rate was 10 percent in Sullivan and 32 percent in Orange-Ulster.

Sullivan’s component districts currently 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 through cross contracts. Nearly half of this activity was in learning technologies including IT purchases; there is significant cross contracting in the special education area, including 1:6:1 services, for which Sullivan does not offer its own programming. This total level of activity was by far the greatest amount of such cross contracting among the three supervisory districts in the immediate area (Sullivan, Orange-Ulster, and Ulster).

### Summary

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. On balance, the study team believes that Sullivan County’s school districts could well benefit from a merger with Orange-Ulster supervisory district, at least on the basis of improved educational services. Orange-Ulster has a far deeper administrative and planning capacity than Sullivan, which could strengthen the programming available to Sullivan County

students, such as itinerant and support services and develop greater ties to the school districts, employers, and the community college.

### D3. Financial Considerations

This section presents an analysis of key financial metrics for Sullivan BOCES and Orange-Ulster BOCES.

For the 2007-08 fiscal year, Sullivan County BOCES adopted a budget totaling nearly \$24.4 million. At \$91.1 million, Orange-Ulster’s budget is more than three and one-half times larger. BOCES activities are categorized into the following elements:

#### Program Expenses

This category includes all direct programs and services including career and technical education, special education, adult education, and alternative education activities. Services are financed through tuition rates charged to districts choosing to purchase the particular service from the BOCES. Sullivan’s budget for this category was \$20.3 million, which accounts for 83 percent of its total budget. Orange-Ulster’s \$86 million program budget is more than four times larger. Reflecting the smaller size of the BOCES, on a per pupil basis, Sullivan’s program expenses are about 37 percent greater than the statewide average and 23 percent higher than Orange-Ulster’s.

#### Administrative and Capital Expenses

Non-program expenses include administrative and capital items. Sullivan budgeted \$4.1 million to support these categories, while Orange-Ulster budgeted \$5.1 million. Sullivan’s administrative and capital spending per pupil is about 162 percent greater than the statewide average and more than four times that of Orange-Ulster.

Table 10 illustrates the total budget and the two main sub-categories for Sullivan and Orange-Ulster BOCES as compared to the statewide average for all BOCES. In general, per-student expenditures are expected to be relatively higher in low-population areas and lower in more densely populated areas due to fixed costs for many programs and administration.

**Table 10: Program and Administrative/Capital Budget, 2007**

BOCES	Program Budget(\$)	Admin/Capital Budget(\$)	Total Budget(\$)	Program Budget Per Pupil (\$)	Admin/Capital Budget Per Pupil (\$)	Total Budget Per Pupil (\$)
Orange-Ulster	86,003,306	5,130,614	91,133,920	1,548	92	1,641
Sullivan	20,258,244	4,133,428	24,391,672	1,904	388	2,292
<b>NYS</b>	<b>2,227,512,223</b>	<b>236,068,059</b>	<b>2,463,580,282</b>	<b>1,393</b>	<b>148</b>	<b>1,541</b>
Source: NYS Education Department, BOCES Budget Information, <a href="http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/mgtserv/BOCES/budget-info.shtml">www.emsc.nysed.gov/mgtserv/BOCES/budget-info.shtml</a> NYS Education Department, BOCES Enrollment for pupil counts, <a href="http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/mgtserv/BOCES/enrollment.shtml">www.emsc.nysed.gov/mgtserv/BOCES/enrollment.shtml</a> Note: Pupil counts are based on enrollments numbers for Fall 2006.						

Administrative costs include central and certain fixed costs, including salaries and fringe benefits of central office staff. These expenses are allocated to all member

school districts on the basis of pupil enrollment. Table 11 illustrates administrative spending, in per pupil terms (based on fall 2006 enrollment numbers) and as a percent of the budget, for Sullivan, Orange-Ulster, and the statewide average.

**Table 11: General Administrative Budget, 2007**

BOCES Name	General Admin. Budget(\$)	General Admin. Budget Per Pupil(\$)	General Admin. Budget as % of Total Budget
Orange-Ulster	3,323,045	60	3.6%
Sullivan	1,707,825	160	7.0%
<b>NYS</b>	<b>159,289,689</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>6.5%</b>
Source: NYS Education Department, BOCES Budget Information <a href="http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/mgtserv/BOCES/budget-info.shtml">www.emsc.nysed.gov/mgtserv/BOCES/budget-info.shtml</a> NYS Education Department, BOCES Enrollment for pupil counts <a href="http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/mgtserv/BOCES/enrollment.shtml">www.emsc.nysed.gov/mgtserv/BOCES/enrollment.shtml</a> Note: Pupil counts are based on enrollments numbers for Fall 2006.			

Sullivan BOCES spends considerably more on general administrative items per student and also allocates a greater portion of its total budget to administrative costs than does Orange-Ulster and the statewide average.

The \$1.7 million spent on general administration by Sullivan County BOCES is very low compared to the statewide average, and the study team found that Sullivan’s administrative operation was lean and efficient. The administrative budget also appropriately includes the costs of retiree health insurance and the team understands that some number of BOCES incorrectly include in their program expense category some spending on retiree health insurance. Finally, the administrative budget is subject to approval by the superintendents of component school districts, who exercise oversight of the administrative budget.

The study team believes that Sullivan’s relatively high per pupil general administrative spending is a function of its very small enrollment base, across which BOCES costs are spread either pro rata or through tuition rates. The vastly different sizes (as measured by enrollment) of the state’s BOCES yields quite dissimilar levels of budget allocations to central or fixed costs, as opposed to categories of service that are more directly dependent on enrollment. In this way, smaller BOCES, such as Sullivan, almost inevitably incur greater administrative costs on a proportional or per student basis than a larger BOCES — the comparable metric for the much larger Orange-Ulster is \$60 per student, well below the \$100 statewide average and the \$160 level in Sullivan.

It should be noted that although there is an appropriately heightened level of scrutiny on administrative spending, this category amounts to a relatively small portion of total BOCES expenses. Statewide, the average share of the BOCES budget devoted to administration is 6.5 percent; Sullivan’s is slightly higher but Orange-Ulster’s is much lower.

The capital category includes the cost of central headquarters facilities and centers where educational and career training services are provided. Capital costs vary

from year to year and are allocated to districts based on enrollment, similar to administrative expenses. Sullivan’s 2007-2008 budget for this category was \$2.4 million or nearly 10 percent of its total budget. This reflects the lease costs of its several facilities and an unusually high level of spending in that particular year, reflecting non-recurring expenses. Orange-Ulster’s capital spending was actually lower even, though its facilities serve more students. Neither BOCES has debt outstanding on its facilities.

**Table 12: Capital Budget, 2007**

<b>BOCES Name</b>	<b>Capital Budget(\$)</b>	<b>Capital Budget Per Pupil(\$)</b>	<b>Capital Budget as % of Total Budget</b>
Orange-Ulster	1,807,569	33	2.0%
Sullivan	2,425,603	228	9.9%
<b>NYS</b>	<b>76,778,370</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>3.1%</b>
Source: NYS Education Department, BOCES Budget Information <a href="http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/mgtserv/BOCES/budget-info.shtml">www.emsc.nysed.gov/mgtserv/BOCES/budget-info.shtml</a> NYS Education Department, BOCES Enrollment for pupil counts <a href="http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/mgtserv/BOCES/enrollment.shtml">www.emsc.nysed.gov/mgtserv/BOCES/enrollment.shtml</a> Note: Pupil counts are based on enrollments numbers for Fall 2006.			

At \$228 per pupil, Sullivan’s capital spending is considerably higher than the statewide average of \$48, and Orange-Ulster’s \$33. At nearly 10 percent of the total BOCES budget, capital spending is a significant portion of overall costs and this share of budget allocation for capital purposes is more than three times the statewide average. In contrast, Orange-Ulster earmarks two percent of all spending to capital.

There is one more noteworthy issue regarding capital spending by the Sullivan County BOCES. As noted above, Sullivan failed to win approval of its most recent attempts to adopt a capital financing plan and has no debt outstanding. At least two of its facilities are being used under leases that may expire within two or three years. Orange-Ulster also has no debt but is considering a bond issue to address capital needs in its physical plant. Under a merged supervisory district, it may be more feasible to obtain the necessary school district approvals for new capital facilities serving the Sullivan County component districts. Under BOCES legislation and regulations, these capital costs are shared among all component districts on the basis of pupil counts; spreading the costs among the 25 components of an enlarged Orange-Ulster Sullivan district would apportion these costs over a larger base and thereby make the necessary investments more affordable.

### **Employee Relations**

One issue that must be weighed carefully in any discussion of a potential merger between Sullivan and Orange-Ulster is the matter of collective bargaining agreements. Sullivan BOCES has two collective bargaining agreements with its employees:

- Teachers
- CSEA staff

In contrast, Orange-Ulster BOCES has seven such agreements:

- Administrators
- Teachers
- Full-Time Teachers of Adults
- Assistant Teachers
- Para-educators
- Clerical
- Custodial Maintenance

A detailed comparison of the terms and conditions of the various collective bargaining agreements of the two supervisory districts is outside the scope of this study. However, the study team recognizes that if the Sullivan BOCES were to merge with the Orange-Ulster BOCES, leaders of the new, larger supervisory district will need to develop an effective consolidation plan that unites the two disparate organizations and staffs — meshing various employee groups together under a consolidated set of agreements will be a particular challenge. There is considerable concern in the Sullivan community that personal service costs (and non-cash benefits) would greatly increase following a merger with Orange-Ulster.

To illustrate where differences currently occur and the potential impact of a merger, the following chart compares selected provisions of the contracts between Sullivan BOCES and its teachers and Orange-Ulster BOCES and its teachers:

**Table 13: Select Terms and Conditions: Current BOCES Agreements with Teachers**

	Sullivan BOCES	Orange-Ulster BOCES
Salary: BA Step 1	\$41,216	\$44,338
Salary: MA Step 10	\$56,035	\$64,087
Salary increase 2007-08	3.0%	3.51%
Sick leave	15	14
Retiree health insurance	BOCES pays 100% of individual costs after 25 yrs service	BOCES pays 70% of individual costs after 20 yrs service

In Table 13, Sullivan BOCES has estimated the impact of a potential merger on personal services costs. To illustrate this potential impact, Sullivan estimated the total salary costs of its 122 teachers under the terms of the collective bargaining agreement in place in Orange-Ulster BOCES, as compared to current salary costs. Using this approach, Sullivan BOCES estimates that direct employee compensation costs would increase by nearly \$1 million, or 13.4 percent over the current costs of \$7.4 million. This computed increase does not reflect the additional costs of employee benefits that are tied to salary such as Social Security and retirement. Of course, the actual impact of a potential merger on salary schedules would depend on negotiations with employee groups and employee compensation need not be equalized following a reorganization. Moreover, any potential cost increase attributable to a reorganization would be

partially offset by savings in administrative staff; a number of leadership positions can be expected to be eliminated following a merger. If salaries for employees of the former Sullivan BOCES were to “level up” to those of the Orange-Ulster district, such additional costs might be offset, at least in part, by applying the Orange-Ulster arrangement for retiree health care costs to all retirees. The study team would encourage management of an expanded supervisory district management to investigate other potential cost savings, as well.

### **Summary**

Both administrative and capital spending at Sullivan County BOCES are quite high when measured as a percent of the overall operating budget and on a per pupil basis. The study team believes that this variance is due not to unnecessary or excessive expenditures but rather to the supervisory district’s small enrollment base. With slightly fewer than 11,000 students, Sullivan’s relatively lean total spending in these categories appears large when spread over a small base (whether the number of students or the total budget). This factor accounts for high nominal spending using these two measures. However, the study team found no evidence that spending is uncontrolled; in fact, there appear to be adequate reviews and checks in place to ensure a transparent and accountable administration, from a financial standpoint. There appears to be sentiment among several component districts that Sullivan BOCES should be more aggressive about providing additional services to the students in the area. The issue of potential cost increases following a merger with Orange-Ulster (where many labor costs appear higher than Sullivan’s) is a matter of concern and will affect public perception of a merger, especially in Sullivan County.

### **D4. Management Considerations**

The study team recognizes that any potential reorganization of a BOCES involves more than evaluating the educational implications and financial impact. Other factors must be considered as well, because of the significant operational and managerial aspects of a modern cooperative educational enterprise. This section discusses several of these management considerations.

One area of concern regarding a potential merger is the dissimilarity between Sullivan and Orange-Ulster. As described above in Section III, the Sullivan County BOCES serves a largely rural and widely dispersed population. There is little major industry with small businesses and tourism the leading source of employment. Most of the eight component school districts are themselves small in terms of enrollment, largely rural, and serve small, often declining enrollments. The average district enrollment is approximately 1,300. Monticello is by far the largest component district, with approximately 3,430 students.

Orange-Ulster BOCES, on the other hand, is much larger in every sense except its area in square miles. Its 17 component districts average more than 3,250 students each and seven have larger enrollments than the largest Sullivan component. Density, as measured by students per square mile is vastly dissimilar: there are 10 students per mile in Sullivan and 65 in Orange-Ulster. Still, Orange-Ulster already

includes four component districts with fewer than 900 students, and appears to serve their needs successfully.

In addition, the study team was struck by the degree to which components in the Sullivan BOCES appeared reluctant to act in concert. Although each supports the Sullivan BOCES and its efforts to improve the educational offerings in the community, there is considerable disagreement about the future direction of the supervisory district. Several component district superintendents favor a merger with Orange-Ulster BOCES.

### **BOCES Services to Small School Districts**

In its recent review of the ONC BOCES, the Rockefeller Institute study team was struck by the close relationship between the supervisory district and the component school districts. Many ONC districts are very small; this greatly affected school district management structures and capabilities, which in turn help shape a large part of the profile of services provided by the ONC BOCES.

The working relationship between Sullivan BOCES and its eight component districts appears to be less developed than those in ONC and many other supervisory districts. Although the Sullivan districts are generally larger than those in ONC, three have enrollments below 1,000 students. Moreover, none of the eight school superintendents has been in his or her current position for more than three years. When the relatively high poverty index is also considered, the study team believes that this community is in need of a supervisory district that aggressively and collaboratively seeks to lead the K-12 educational programs in Sullivan County.

The study team found that Orange-Ulster provided a high level of leadership and vision. We believe that extending this level of service and resources to the component districts of Sullivan would be likely to enhance the educational interests of the Sullivan County community.

### **Travel Concerns**

Sullivan County is a relatively isolated supervisory district hemmed in by mountainous terrain. Although there are notable differences between Sullivan and Orange-Ulster, and a merger would create a fairly large supervisory district, the study team does not believe these concerns are insurmountable. Whereas travel distances between Sullivan's facilities in Liberty and Ulster BOCES in New Paltz present considerable travel difficulties, travel challenges presented by a potential merger between Sullivan and Orange-Ulster are fewer and less severe. A major highway, Route 17 (soon to become an interstate highway) provides relatively easier travel between Liberty and Goshen in Orange County, the site of the central office for Orange-Ulster BOCES. Although the 43 mile distance between the two communities is approximately the same as between Liberty and New Paltz, the estimated travel time from Liberty to Goshen is much less (46 minutes) versus the 66 minutes to Ulster's offices).

Because the travel times are still considerable, it appears neither feasible nor desirable to eliminate a significant BOCES presence in Sullivan — the travel

distances would be severely disruptive to most students' schedules. Accordingly, the geographic size of the merged district appears to dictate that under any potential merger option, the existing Sullivan CTE center at Liberty would need to be retained (or replaced with an equally central facility); to do otherwise would appear to require inordinate travel times for students to other sites.

The remaining issue pertains to travel time for administrators and staff. Although not as critical an issue as bus travel time for students, lengthy travel can impair effective monitoring and consultation for central administrators. The study team recognizes that long travel times can only weaken management oversight and effective coordination and collaboration among the BOCES central staff and component school districts. Staff travel time is especially important for central office interaction with component districts, supervision of itinerant teachers, staff development, and other similar areas. The presence of a major highway goes far toward alleviating travel as a major obstacle to a potential merger.

### **Orange-Ulster District Superintendent Vacancy**

This study of potential reorganization options was precipitated by the resignation of the district superintendent of the Sullivan BOCES. Orange-Ulster BOCES is currently operating with an interim superintendent following the resignation of its district superintendent approximately two years ago.

The study team is concerned about the difficulty that already has faced the Orange-Ulster BOCES in appointing a new district superintendent. There would be several short-term challenges confronting a new superintendent named to head a BOCES that is undergoing a large-scale restructuring. Thus, under a merger of Sullivan with Orange-Ulster the new superintendent would assume the leadership of a large and complex BOCES while completing an expansion with a neighboring supervisory district. We recognize that the merger could reasonably be deferred for a period of time after the appointment of a new district superintendent to assist in a smooth transition for the new organization.

It is important to note, as well, that a decision to merge Sullivan BOCES with Orange-Ulster, especially if the latter continues to experience delays in the appointment of a new district superintendent also could undermine recent initiatives being discussed at Sullivan. For example, progress in establishing a "shared business office" could be jeopardized because of the uncertainty surrounding new BOCES leadership.

## D5. Illustration of Sullivan and Orange Ulster Merger

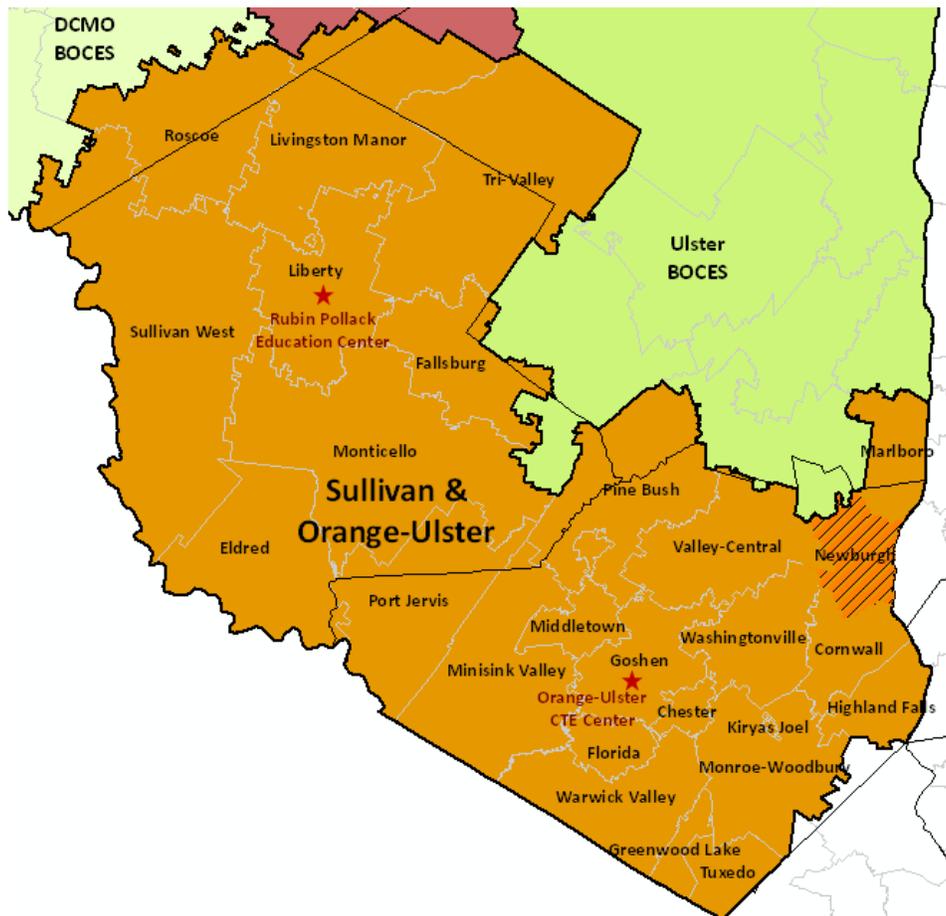
Under the potential merger, Orange-Ulster would see an increase in the number of component school districts and the geographic size of the supervisory district. Following a merger with Sullivan, Orange-Ulster would expand from 17 to 25 districts and become one of the larger BOCES in the state, as measured by both enrollment and square miles (see Table 14).

**Table 14: Comparative Demographic Data, Sullivan and Orange-Ulster**

	Status Quo		Sullivan/Orange-Ulster Merger
	Sullivan	Orange-Ulster	
Number of Component School Districts	8	17	25
Enrollment, Fall 2006 (components only)	10,641	55,552	66,193
Land Area, square miles (components only)	1,073	855	1,928
Density (pupils/sq. mile)	9.9	65.0	34.3
Poverty Index (2007)	18.3%	11.3%	12.4%

Sources: NYS Education Department, School District Enrollment, Fall 2006  
[www.emsc.nysed.gov/mgtserv/BOCES/enrollment.shtml](http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/mgtserv/BOCES/enrollment.shtml)  
 U.S. Census Bureau, School District Income and Poverty Estimates  
[www.census.gov/hhes/www/saipe/district.html](http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/saipe/district.html)

**Figure 4: Sullivan and Orange-Ulster Merger**



## **Summary**

The study team believes that a reorganization of the Sullivan County BOCES is unlikely to have a negative impact on the ability of the BOCES to provide quality services to Sullivan County's component districts. Although the resulting supervisory district would clearly be large in terms of both enrollment and geographic size, we believe there are sufficient potential benefits to outweigh any drawbacks associated with the expanded size.

### **D6. Consideration of Individual School Districts**

During the study, the team considered proposals advancing realignment of certain component districts, such as Ellenville and Marlboro. Although reassigning Ellenville from the Ulster BOCES to Sullivan has been proposed previously, in the context of the team's review, along with feedback from the Ellenville district, the study team does not recommend reassignment at this time. A potential reassignment of the Marlboro school district from Orange-Ulster BOCES to Ulster BOCES, as has been considered in the past, would not directly affect the Sullivan BOCES, and is therefore outside the scope of the study.

### **D7. Input from Community Interests**

As part of its review, the study team solicited input from a wide variety of community stakeholders, including elected officials, educational leaders, workforce and economic development experts, civic and community organizations, parent organizations, and others. This section summarizes the input received from this outreach effort, virtually all of which related to a potential merger between Sullivan and Orange-Ulster.

### **Education Community**

Six of the eight component school district superintendents responded to the Education Department's request for comments regarding the future of Sullivan BOCES. Of the five superintendents who identified a clear preference, four supported a merger with Orange-Ulster, to varying extents. The superintendents voiced satisfaction with the leadership team of Sullivan BOCES but believed that a merger would bring more expansive educational services to Sullivan County. The superintendents individually cited several factors supporting their recommendation for a merger:

- An expansion in educational programming available – both special education and career and technical education – to Sullivan students, citing the greater number of CTE courses offered in Orange-Ulster.
- A reduction in administrative costs arising from a consolidation.
- An expansion in support and resources available to the Sullivan superintendents who have little experience in their current positions.
- The potential for addressing the serious capital facility needs of Sullivan County BOCES, under a merger with Orange-Ulster.

Significant feedback from other members of the educational community supported a merger of Sullivan and Orange-Ulster BOCES for the above mentioned reasons, and also cited:

- Route 17, which allows for easier travel to and from Orange County (as opposed to traveling to New Paltz in Ulster County).
- Established collaborations with Orange-Ulster in several areas, including professional development programs, educational offerings, and athletics.

### **Business and Workforce Development Community**

The study team also solicited comments from leaders of the business community and members of the workforce development communities in Sullivan County and the surrounding area. Respondents provided comments on the performance of the Sullivan BOCES, as well as on a potential merger with Orange-Ulster:

- Respondents expressed strong satisfaction with the Sullivan BOCES employment related programs, noting Sullivan’s ability to be responsive and flexible to local community needs. However, some expressed concern that a merger would make this more difficult.
- A merger with Orange-Ulster BOCES could provide additional resources to enhance current offerings. It could potentially increase distance learning opportunities and allow for additional training cycles in specific areas.
- Additional resources made available through a merger may enhance the attractiveness of Sullivan BOCES to businesses looking to expand or relocate in Sullivan County.
- Merging could provide an opportunity for Orange and Sullivan County businesses to share and replicate best practices.
- Sullivan County’s economy is more in line with upstate counties. There is some concern that challenges unique to Sullivan will not be given attention. For example, tourism is shared with the counties that comprise the Catskills region. It is important that Sullivan BOCES be able to develop and deliver the training needed for an industry cluster that may not include Orange County.
- Many businesses in Sullivan County have specific employment needs not shared by other counties and rely on BOCES graduates to fill positions.
- There is strong concern that a merger would eliminate BOCES services in the Sullivan County area, particularly the career and technical education center, which is vital to the community.

### **Summary**

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.

#### **IV. Conclusions / Recommendations**

Sullivan County BOCES is similar to other supervisory districts faced with a small enrollment base, in an economically challenged area. The BOCES faces challenges in its efforts to provide a range of educational and management services to students and its eight component school districts. This challenge is made more daunting by the low enrollment base, a degree of independence exhibited by several of the component districts, limited resources in the districts to support additional services, and an aging capital infrastructure combined with past community resistance to improving these facilities.

The study team stresses that overall, the management team does a good job in providing quality educational services to the community and there is evidence that additional services are being developed in collaboration with the component districts. The supervisory district's officers and staff appear diligent in finding creative and cost-effective solutions to the educational and management problems associated with providing public education in small and rural districts, especially given the severe resource limitations.

On balance, however, the study team believes 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.

The study team does have reservations about the potential additional personnel costs associated with a merger. As previously noted, using the teachers' contract as an example, the existing collective bargaining agreements in Orange-Ulster typically entail a more generous compensation package than the agreement in place in Sullivan. Reorganization would involve considerable work and close collaboration among all parties to effect a seamless transition that is in the best interest of students while appropriately recognizing the interests of both taxpayers and employees. The study team urges supervisory district leaders, in case of a merger, to pursue savings in compensation and other costs, where possible.

As with other supervisory districts in small and sparsely populated communities, the study team believes that even under a merger, the expanded BOCES would need to continue to provide BOCES services at a central location(s) in Sullivan County. Although travel between Sullivan County and Orange County is not as arduous as it is in other regions of New York, the distances between Sullivan County component districts and the main facilities operated by Orange-Ulster BOCES are not inconsiderable. Students from most Sullivan County districts, other than the eastern-most ones, would be unlikely to travel to Goshen, the site of most Orange-Ulster facility-based services.

We also urge educational leaders, if a merger is implemented, to pay particular attention to the composition of the new board of the expanded BOCES. Sullivan County BOCES is far smaller than the Orange-Ulster BOCES and we are concerned that Sullivan components need to have a sizeable voice in the newly constituted board to ensure that the needs and concerns of that community are met in an efficient manner. In short, the new board needs to be aware of and sensitive to the concerns of the smaller community in a merger with a much larger one.

## **Appendices A-D**

### **Appendix A: About the Rockefeller Institute**

The Nelson A. Rockefeller Institute of Government is the public-policy research arm of the State University of New York. It conducts studies on the role of state and local governments in American federalism, and on the management and finances of states and localities. Researchers at the Institute work closely with state and local governments nationally, and especially in New York State, and draw on the State University's rich intellectual resources and on networks of public policy academic experts throughout the country.

In 2008, Rockefeller Institute staff conducted a study for the New York State Education Department on potential reorganization of the Sole Supervisory District of Otsego, Delaware, Schoharie, and Greene Counties (Otsego Northern Catskills); in 2007, staff conducted a study for the New York State Education Department on potential reorganization of the Sole Supervisory District of Albany, Schoharie, Schenectady and Saratoga Counties (Capital Region); and in 2005, the Institute conducted a study on potential reorganization of the First Supervisory District of Monroe County. These studies and other Institute reports are available online at [www.rockinst.org](http://www.rockinst.org).

The study team for this report included Rockefeller Institute staff Lucy Dadayan, senior policy analyst, and Barbara Stubblebine, project officer. The principal investigator was Brian T. Stenson, senior consultant, and former deputy director of the Rockefeller Institute. Robert B. Ward, deputy director, provided guidance on this study. The co-directors of the Rockefeller Institute are Richard P. Nathan and Thomas Gais.

**Appendix B: NYS BOCES Rankings  
Student Base (K-12), Number of Component Districts,  
Area (Components Only), and Density, 2006-07**

<b>BOCES</b>	<b># Component Districts</b>	<b>Enrollment (Fall 2006)</b>	<b>Area (Square Miles)</b>	<b>Density (Student Per Square Mile)</b>	<b>Rank (Based on Density)</b>
Albany	24	71,000	1,213	58.5	11
Broome	16	35,133	1,116	31.5	16
Cattaraugus	22	19,532	2,159	9.0	30
Cayuga	9	14,373	744	19.3	23
Clinton	17	16,001	2,344	6.8	34
Delaware	16	15,026	1,825	8.2	32
Dutchess	13	47,156	848	55.6	12
Erie 1	20	75,423	434	173.6	6
Erie 2	27	41,690	1,791	23.3	18
Franklin	10	9,086	2,499	3.6	37
Genesee	22	25,449	1,696	15.0	27
GST	21	33,741	2,143	15.7	26
Hamilton	15	16,825	1,640	10.3	28
Herkimer	12	11,293	1,250	9.0	31
Jefferson	18	24,426	3,339	7.3	33
Madison	9	16,809	815	20.6	22
Monroe 1	10	47,151	294	160.4	7
Monroe 2	9	38,334	412	93.1	9
Nassau	56	206,576	292	707.0	1
Oneida	12	23,701	549	43.1	15
Onondaga	23	62,202	1,433	43.4	14
Ontario	25	40,519	1,750	23.2	19
Orange	17	55,552	855	65.0	10
Orleans	13	37,349	770	48.5	13
Oswego	9	23,214	1,021	22.7	20
Otsego	19	10,212	1,661	6.1	36
Putnam	18	57,407	523	109.7	8
Rensselaer	22	36,294	1,602	22.6	21
Rockland	8	41,770	211	198.2	4
St. Lawrence	18	16,542	2,643	6.3	35
Suffolk 1	51	168,248	933	180.3	5
Suffolk 2	18	90,596	209	432.7	3
Sullivan	8	10,641	1,073	9.9	29
Tompkins	9	13,769	744	18.5	24
Ulster	9	24,875	893	27.9	17
Washington	31	43,338	2,686	16.1	25
Westchester	33	77,568	160	483.5	2
<b>Total NYS</b>	<b>689</b>	<b>1,598,821</b>	<b>46,572</b>	<b>34.3</b>	

**Appendix C: BOCES Component School District Enrollment Data  
Student Base (K-12), Percent of Total Component School District Enrollment,  
Area, and Density, 2006-07**

<b>BOCES</b>	<b>Enrollment (Fall 2006)</b>	<b>% of Total Component SD Enrollment</b>	<b>Area (Square Miles)</b>	<b>Density (Student Per Square Mile)</b>
<b>DCMO</b>				
Afton	672	4%	87.0	7.7
Bainbridge Guilford	983	7%	101.0	9.7
Delhi	907	6%	192.1	4.7
Downsville	335	2%	141.6	2.4
Franklin	274	2%	63.0	4.4
Georgetown-So. Otselic	418	3%	118.0	3.5
Gilbertsville-Mt. Upton	510	3%	62.5	8.2
Greene	1,283	9%	126.9	10.1
Hancock	446	3%	119.5	3.7
Norwich	2,145	14%	105.2	20.4
Otego-Unadilla	1,178	8%	83.2	14.2
Oxford	934	6%	116.9	8.0
Sherburne-Earville	1,614	11%	157.9	10.2
Sidney	1,170	8%	79.9	14.6
Unadilla Valley	1,015	7%	123.0	8.3
Walton	1,142	8%	147.1	7.8
<b>Total Component SDs</b>	<b>15,026</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>1,824.6</b>	<b>8.2</b>
<b>ONC</b>				
Andes	131	1%	99.2	1.3
Charlotte Valley	422	4%	80.5	5.2
Cherry Vall.-Springfield	596	6%	137.2	4.3
Cooperstown	1,048	10%	98.3	10.7
Edmeston	533	5%	84.8	6.3
Gilboa Conesville	393	4%	134.8	2.9
Hunter-Tannersville	517	5%	163.8	3.2
Jefferson	286	3%	70.1	4.1
Laurens	410	4%	28.2	14.6
Margaretville	495	5%	169.7	2.9
Milford	460	5%	58.4	7.9
Morris	452	4%	66.6	6.8
Oneonta	2,069	20%	21.8	95.0
Roxbury	334	3%	84.0	4.0
Schenevus	390	4%	66.0	5.9
South Kortright	338	3%	95.0	3.6
Stamford	445	4%	45.9	9.7
Windham Ashland	453	4%	94.8	4.8
Worcester	440	4%	61.5	7.2
<b>Total Component SDs</b>	<b>10,212</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>1,660.6</b>	<b>6.1</b>

**Appendix C (continued)**

<b>BOCES</b>	<b>Enrollment (Fall 2006)</b>	<b>% of Total Component SD Enrollment</b>	<b>Area (Square Miles)</b>	<b>Density (Student Per Square Mile)</b>
<b>Orange-Ulster</b>				
Chester	997	2%	10.9	91.1
Cornwall	3,256	6%	38.3	85.1
Florida	844	2%	23.8	35.4
Goshen	2,905	5%	81.1	35.8
Greenwood Lake	641	1%	13.9	46.1
Highland Falls	1,188	2%	25.3	47.0
Kiryas Joel	264	0%	4.5	58.7
Marlboro	2,136	4%	51.2	41.7
Middletown	6,714	12%	26.5	253.4
Minisink Valley	4,645	8%	115.0	40.4
Monroe-Woodbury	7,492	13%	64.4	116.4
Pine Bush	6,115	11%	107.8	56.7
Port Jervis	3,224	6%	71.4	45.2
Tuxedo	655	1%	17.8	36.8
Valley (Montgomery)	5,145	9%	78.8	65.3
Warwick Valley	4,521	8%	65.0	69.6
Washingtonville	4,810	9%	59.0	81.6
<b>Total Component SDs</b>	<b>55,552</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>854.7</b>	<b>65.0</b>
<b>Sullivan</b>				
Eldred	686	6%	97.4	7.0
Fallsburg	1,460	14%	36.5	40.0
Liberty	1,610	15%	82.0	19.6
Livingston Manor	568	5%	131.1	4.3
Monticello	3,430	32%	190.1	18.0
Roscoe	267	3%	108.7	2.5
Sullivan West	1,413	13%	238.5	5.9
Tri-Valley	1,207	11%	189.0	6.4
<b>Total Component SDs</b>	<b>10,641</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>1,073.4</b>	<b>9.9</b>
<b>Ulster</b>				
Ellenville	1,740	7%	122.6	14.2
Highland	1,935	8%	47.0	41.2
Kingston	7,363	30%	103.0	71.5
New Paltz	2,271	9%	78.5	28.9
Onteora	1,937	8%	314.1	6.2
Rondout Valley	2,643	11%	121.4	21.8
Saugerties	3,295	13%	50.8	64.9
Walkkill	3,650	15%	55.3	66.0
West Park	41	0%	0.1	410.0
<b>Total Component SDs</b>	<b>24,875</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>892.7</b>	<b>27.9</b>

## **Appendix D: Evolution of Supervisory Districts and BOCES**

Supervisory districts are sub regions of New York State created to improve the overall supervision of local schools. In 1910 the State Legislature authorized the Commissioner of Education to divide the state, with the exception of cities and villages of more than 4,500 people, into supervisory districts. These first districts did not have the authority to provide educational services and were headed by district superintendents, who were state officials with salaries paid by the state.

In the 1930s, groups began to express concern that the range of educational services available in rural school districts was inadequate and sought an intermediate or regional system to provide expanded services. Although there were efforts to consolidate schools, by the early 1940s there were still more than 4,000 small schools. Many of the schools serving rural students continued to lack sufficient enrollment and fiscal resources to provide the variety of programs available to students in city districts and emerging suburban schools.

In 1948, an intermediate school district bill was signed into law that, among other things, authorized the establishment of a Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) to provide shared educational services in a supervisory district. To form a BOCES, the boards of education of a group of school districts could vote to request the Commissioner of Education to approve the establishment of a cooperative board. The district superintendent would also serve as the chief executive officer of the BOCES, and receive a salary for these responsibilities from the participating local school districts. Eleven BOCES were established in the first ten months following enactment of the 1948 legislation. During the first decade, the services offered by BOCES were limited primarily to shared itinerant teachers for rural districts with too few students to employ full-time instructors in areas such as art, music, and driver education.

In the 1950s, BOCES membership was expanded from central and small union-free school districts within a supervisory district to include larger, independent districts. This expansion ensured growth, and by 1960 82 BOCES had been created. School districts in cities, except those over 125,000 in population, were permitted to join BOCES in 1963. With this growth, the nature of services provided began to change from shared itinerant teachers to include services for students with disabilities, and career and technical education services. Growth in programs that brought students together from a variety of schools to one location was limited, however, by the inability of a BOCES to own facilities.

Legislation was passed in 1967 that allowed BOCES to construct and own facilities with voter approval and to use the Dormitory Authority of the State of New York to finance the cost of the facilities. As a result, BOCES services began to expand, as most BOCES constructed buildings with classrooms and shops having state-of-the-art equipment. Subsequent legislation was adopted authorizing BOCES to provide data processing services for schools on a multi-BOCES basis. School districts began requesting other services such as computer-assisted instructional services, planning and staff development services, and

programs for adults. BOCES services continued to grow through the 1970s, and by 1980 most school districts in the state were members of a BOCES. BOCES were given the authority to operate academic programs such as summer school and alternative high school in the early 1980s.

There are currently 37 supervisory districts in New York State with a BOCES located in each. A district superintendent continues to lead each supervisory district and serve as the chief executive officer of the supervisory district's BOCES. A portion of the district superintendent's salary is paid by the state and a portion by the component school districts of the BOCES. All but nine of the operating school districts in the state are members of a BOCES. Of the nine, five (Buffalo, New York City, Rochester, Syracuse, and Yonkers) are not eligible to join BOCES, as they are city districts each with a population over 125,000.