



**Board of Cooperative Educational Services**  
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*Leaders for Educational Excellence*

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**To:** All Special Education Division Staff

**From:** Chuck Dedrick

**Date:** October 20, 2009

**Re:** Special Education Division study

These are extraordinary times in education—a fact underscored last week when Governor David Paterson proposed steep mid-year cuts in state aid to school districts.

Financial resources are dwindling and district needs are changing. Our Special Education Division is not immune to these market pressures, as witnessed by a significant decrease in enrollment in our programs in the last few years.

That's why our BOCES will be hiring an outside consultant to fully study our special education operations in the coming months. The size and complexity of this division will require someone with specialized knowledge of the field, which is why we will be issuing a request for proposal and interviewing candidates for this important task.

It's important to note that our Special Education Division is not being singled out for a study. In fact, we've been studying and reorganizing throughout BOCES in an effort to rein in costs and position our organization to grow and thrive in the next decade. Central Administration, NERIC, SSS and CTE have all seen significant changes as a result.

When all is said and done, BOCES is a business operating in challenging economic times. The pressure is on all of us to make sure we are delivering quality services at a competitive price. We can and we will meet these challenges—by finding new ways to restructure, retool and reorganize to meet our districts' evolving needs.

We do not know yet what changes the consultant will recommend or how these will affect our staff and our programs. But we are committed to an honest, open process and to keeping an open mind about all possible outcomes.

Please rest assured that the consultant will be seeking input from employees across the division, with the goal of gaining as complete a picture as possible before making recommendations. We will, in turn, make use of ideas and recommendations that move us closer to the shared goal of providing quality services at competitive prices.

Understandably, you will likely have questions and concerns as this process moves forward. We will do our best to keep you informed, and I encourage you to speak with Special Education Director Inge Jacobs or me as is appropriate.

In the meantime, I've included answers to some of the questions you may have about the upcoming Special Education study.

### **Why do we need this study?**

Since the 2005-2006 school year—which saw a peak enrollment of 816 students—we have seen a steadily declining enrollment in our special education programs. Today our enrollment stands at 650, or a 20 percent decrease in four years. This shrinking demand has brought consolidation and, in a number of cases, closure of some of our special education classes. Although great efforts have been made to avoid laying off teachers and teaching assistants, decreased student enrollment has forced reduction of some related service staff.

We can't ignore these warning signs. If we do nothing, additional jobs are sure to be lost, and we will price ourselves out of the special education business.

By launching this study and preparing ourselves to rethink and retool, we plan to emerge better equipped to meet the changing needs of our students and their home districts, now and in the future.

**When will the study begin?**

Anticipating a smooth process of hiring a consultant, the study will likely begin at the start of January 2010.

**What aspects of the Special Education Division will the consultant study?**

We expect the consultant to investigate all aspects of the division including: budget, staffing, program delivery models, classroom rental costs and locations, transportation, component-district satisfaction with programming, student and family satisfaction with programming, and our division as it compares to special education programs statewide.

**Do you anticipate the study will result in staff or program cuts?**

We simply don't know. The consultant will help us analyze where we can deliver services more economically—an imperative given the fiscal pressures facing our schools and our BOCES. At the same time, we'll also be exploring new opportunities to develop programs and services that meet our districts' evolving needs. The one thing we *do* know is that change is inevitable if we are to become a stronger organization, positioned to grow and thrive in the next decade.

**Will staff have any input into this study?**

Yes. We will invite a principal, teacher and support staff member to help us select a well-qualified consultant. And once hired, this person will be actively seeking information and ideas from staff throughout the division to inform recommendations going forward.

**Other questions?**

Internal communication will remain a high priority throughout this process, so watch for additional information and updates along the way. In the meantime, please don't hesitate to contact me or Inge Jacobs if you have additional questions.