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**Act No. 168 (H.630). An act relating to improving access to high-quality education through community collaboration**

**Subjects: Education; counties; regional boards of cooperative education services; shared services; specialized education settings; shared purchasing**

Sec. 1 of this act contains several legislative findings regarding the need for and benefits of the collaborative provision of educational services and the community schools model.

Sec. 2 adds a new chapter 10 to Title 16 that governs the creation and operation of Boards of Cooperative Education Services (BOCES) to provide shared programs and services on a regional and statewide level. It creates requirements for the process for supervisory unions to form BOCES; articles of agreement; boards of directors; the powers of BOCES; financing, budgeting, and accounting practices; public reporting; and employment practices, including establishing BOCES as public employers. This section limits the number of BOCES to seven statewide and limits supervisory unions to membership in not more than one BOCES, but allows supervisory unions to seek services as a nonmember from other BOCES.

Sec. 3 requires supervisory unions to consider and vote on the desirability of establishing a BOCES on or before July 1, 2026. The Secretary of Education shall review the BOCES as they exist on or before July 1, 2028 and issue a report to the General Assembly on or before November 1, 2028 with information about the use and operation of BOCES.

Sec. 4 establishes the BOCES Start-up Grant Program, to be administered by the Agency of Education, to provide \$10,000.00 grants to newly formed BOCES to be used for start-up costs. A total of \$70,000.00 is appropriated from the Education Fund for the Grant Program.

Secs. 5 through 11 of this act contain conforming amendments to include BOCES as a public employer in applicable retirement, labor relations, and healthcare statutes, as well as to include the formation of a BOCES in the enumerated duties of supervisory union boards.

Sec. 12 continues the community schools grant program that was created in 2021 Acts and Resolves No. 28.

Sec. 13 requires the Agency of Education, in consultation with the Department of Mental Health, to include certain additional information about the community schools structure in the Agency's report to the General Assembly about the community schools grant program.

Sec. 14 of this act appropriates \$1,000,000.00 from the Education Fund to the Agency of Education to fund the community schools program.

Effective Date: July 1, 2024