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## TESTIMONY

**Testimony To:** House Education Committee

**Respectfully Submitted by:** Jill Briggs Campbell, Interim Deputy Secretary and Lindsey Hedges, Interim Director of Policy and Communications, Agency of Education

**Subject:** Boards of Cooperative Education Services (BOCES)

**Date:** February 12, 2025

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### Background

In 2024 the General Assembly passed [Act 168](#), an act relating to improving access to high-quality education through community collaboration. One of the key provisions in this bill is the establishment of a Board of Cooperative Education Services, or BOCES. The goal of a BOCES is to enhance educational opportunities and operational efficiencies by allowing SU/SDs to collaborate with shared services, programs, and resources.

Before establishing a BOCES SU/SDs are required to:

1. Come together to vote to explore the formation of a BOCES
2. Negotiate articles of agreement
3. Vote on those proposed articles
4. Send proposed articles to the Secretary of Education for review

The Secretary must evaluate the agreement to ensure compliance with state laws and educational goals and may provide feedback or request revisions before granting approval. Once the Secretary has signed off, there is a final vote by all member SU/SD boards and the BOCES can then apply for a \$10,000 startup grant.

### Implementation

Since the passage of Act 168, some SU/SDs have begun to discuss the feasibility of a BOCES structure in their region. There have been some barriers to the implementation of this work, including budget constraints, lack of buy in from local school boards, and lack of expertise and capacity at the state level.

The Agency has been engaged with the Vermont Learning Collaborative (VTLC), which has developed key resources, including model articles of agreement, to support this effort. The Agency has also contracted with consultants with nationally recognized expertise of best practices for the use of BOCES and is now prepared to build on VTLC's work.



## Future Considerations

The Agency recommends that as the Legislature contemplates changes to scale, governance, funding and education quality across the education system, it revisits the role that BOCES or Education Service Agencies (ESAs) could play in a less complex system, operating at a scale that is better able to coordinate service and support across a larger system and multiple communities.

In a future system, the creation of a BOCES or ESA should:

1. Build capacity in the education system to deliver key services and support that cannot otherwise be met by the districts or the AOE;
2. Increase coherence across the system which should include close collaboration and alignment between the ESA and the AOE to limit mixed messaging or the creation of competing priorities;
3. Increase equity through the consistent delivery of high-quality services and support in a small, rural state; and
4. Support key areas of strategic importance where a statewide or cross-district approach yields specific, measurable benefits

The General Assembly may also wish to revisit the funding framework with considerations for the need for state-level direction or coordination of BOCES or ESAs. For example, in some states the funding for an ESA comes directly from the state through a categorical grant to ensure that ESA activities are informed by statewide priorities and accountability measures. A fee for service or consortium of districts model leaves less room for state-level direction and coordination of services and supports.