
Creating Equitable Student Opportunities Through Regionalization

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Summary

The problem: There are growing inequities in educational opportunities for students in New York State, particularly in under-resourced and rural areas, in part due to enrollment and fiscal issues.

Why it matters: New York State is committed to preparing every student for an increasingly diverse and dynamic workforce and allowing them to build their future in the community of their choosing.

What is happening: The recent New York State budget process brought to light proposals by state leaders to draw down funding to school districts that have been losing enrollment. Specifically, State Aid formula modifications have impacted over 300 school districts. Concerns remain that recently proposed reduction in state funding due to enrollment would continue.

The response: The New York State Education Department (NYSED) will require all component districts of a Sole Supervisory District to work with the District Superintendent to develop a regionalization plan that addresses student needs and operational efficiencies.

The details:

- The District Superintendents will facilitate the development of regionalization plans for the 37 Sole Supervisory Districts (37 total plans).
- NYSED will provide technical assistance, templates, guidance, and data throughout the regionalization planning process.
- The planning process includes the components districts completing a Strengths & Needs Tool, the District Superintendent facilitating a conversation among component districts based on data gathered from the tool, and the District Superintendents submitting an Interim Progress Report and Regionalization Plan to NYSED on behalf of their component districts.
- NYSED will propose regulations to enshrine the planning process every ten years, developing a regular cycle where the BOCES and districts work together towards continual improvement.

Step	Deadline
1. Strengths & Needs Tool	November 1, 2024
2. Regionalization Plan Convenings	By November 1, 2024
3. Regionalization Plan Interim Progress Report	April 1, 2025
4. Regionalization Plan Submission, Review, and Approval	October 1, 2025
5. Regionalization Plan Implementation	September 2026

In sum, the regionalization plans:

- Create equitable educational opportunities for all students, including academic programs (e.g., variety of course offerings, early college) and student support services.
- Establish a systematic mechanism for districts to engage in continual improvement.
- Develop a model for addressing ongoing educational and fiscal challenges.

Background and Context

As a state, a systematic approach to continually improve schools and districts is essential for supporting successful outcomes for our students. We all have a shared and interconnected role to play in creating opportunities for students in our communities as well as neighboring communities—whether we live in rural, suburban, or urban settings. NYSED recognizes that a forum is needed for districts to engage in conversations with each other to ensure that all students, particularly those in historically underserved districts, have equitable access to high-quality educational opportunities that open a pathway to college, career, and civic readiness. By collaborating as an educational community and utilizing a strengths-based approach, districts can shift our educational culture.

There is not a one-size-fits-all approach to creating opportunities for students. Moreover, no matter how well-resourced they may be, no single district can do this work alone. Rather, collaboration and partnerships are essential for creating equitable student opportunities across all schools, districts, regions, and communities throughout New York State. Through harnessing the collective strengths of districts, all students can benefit from a rich and varied educational experience.

Call to Action

Enduring solutions to district challenges must be developed and implemented locally through shared resources and support. The lack of student opportunities and fiscal concerns across the state will continue until districts start considering regional solutions to their academic and operational issues. The time to act is now, while districts have time to think through regional issues from areas of strength, rather than waiting until they are facing moments of greater crisis.

Creating Equitable Student Opportunities Through Regionalization

Regionalization is a collaborative model for addressing local challenges and educational goals that leverages the state's existing capabilities, talent, and infrastructure. This model provides a strategic solution to increasing educational opportunities for students and responding to the pressing issues of declining enrollment and fiscal constraints, especially in an evolving educational and demographic landscape.¹

Overview of Regionalization

Regionalization is a broad tool for addressing student needs and operational efficiencies. New York State's educational landscape already features many examples of partnerships across schools and districts as well as existing regionalization infrastructure, such as cross-district contracts and Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES). Regional conversations and partnerships will involve collaboration between a district's Sole Supervisory Districts, schools, neighboring districts, and community stakeholders including, but not limited to, business and industry groups, collective bargaining units, institutions of higher education,

¹ The article "[K-12 Regionalization in Connecticut: Pros, Cons, and Surprises](#)" serves as a cautionary exemplar and discusses the complexities of regionalizing school districts in Connecticut. It highlights that regionalization does not always result in cost savings, both in the short and long term. The impact on educational achievement is also mixed, with the potential for both positive and negative outcomes. The report suggests considering alternative strategies like sharing administrative staff or cooperating on contractual services to reduce expenditures. It also emphasizes the importance of considering community impact, especially for disadvantaged students in urban areas, and the potential benefits of deconsolidation for increasing educational achievement and school choice. Optimal district efforts to achieve regionalization benefits are discussed. New York can perhaps learn from this work.

parents/caregivers, and neighboring Indigenous Nations. This collaboration, already occurring in many areas of our state, is essential in a 21st century global economy where students will be entering an increasingly diverse workforce and may be employed in jobs that do not yet exist.

By engaging in regionalization planning, schools and districts may identify, explore, and pursue a variety of possible solutions to the academic and operational challenges they face by tapping into the full span of capabilities that already exist in their larger region. This may manifest as new extracurricular opportunities and offerings; access to advanced coursework with qualified educators, such as through expanded distance learning; shared administrative staff; or other innovative examples of collaborative practices for enhancing individual district capacity.

While regionalization is distinct from reorganization, some districts may even choose to reorganize in response to their local situation. This process supports regionalization but does not preclude districts from selecting the alternative statutory reorganization process.

Benefits of Regionalization

Collaboration and partnership are central to regionalization and are necessary to close the opportunity and transcript gap² in all historically underserved communities across New York State. Regionalization holds particular significance for students in rural areas, who might otherwise have limited access to specialized courses and programs, by ensuring equitable access to a comprehensive educational experience. However, the benefits of regionalization are not only for small or resource-constrained school districts. All districts can benefit from regionalization efforts. Regardless of a region's size, resources, or structure—from the Niagara Frontier to the sandy shores of Long Island—student mobility and community interdependence create an ecosystem where the opportunities available for students in each school and district shape the entire region's future trajectory.

Given this ecosystem, all districts need to consider students within their region and not only within their boundaries. For example, the technology sector or high-tech manufacturing consider locating or expanding in regions, not just districts, where there is a skilled workforce. Additionally, student mobility is blurring district lines. Finally, all students would benefit from interacting with diverse populations across the region by learning how to work with others who have different worldviews and experiences. Engaging in regionalization will ensure that all districts are able to continually improve in this increasingly complex and interconnected world.

In far too many communities across the state—urban, suburban, and rural alike—students are choosing to leave for workforce opportunities elsewhere and not return. Consequently, communities are missing out on the skills these graduates could contribute to local economies and workforces and the next generation of New York students. To encourage students to remain in our communities after graduation, we must lay a foundation of opportunity that supports long- and short-term career development through college or district workforce preparation. Regionalization will provide students across the state with increased opportunities to participate in innovative educational programs, close the opportunity gap, provide for impactful social-emotional supports and scaffolds, and promote increased advanced course and early college opportunities.

² The transcript gap is part of the opportunity gap, which also includes mental and social-emotional supports. The transcript gap is the inability for students to participate in academic or enrichment opportunities such as pathways to higher mathematics courses, AP/IB courses, college credit in high school, the arts, or extracurricular activities that support students in becoming college and career ready.

Regionalization Plans

For these reasons, NYSED is launching a statewide regionalization planning process. NYSED will require all component districts of a Sole Supervisory District³ to work with the District Superintendent to develop a regionalization plan that creates educational opportunities for ALL students. The proposed regionalization planning process will afford districts the time, space, and structure to engage in meaningful conversations with neighboring districts to meet this goal and address local issues, such as fiscal concerns. Through regionalization plans, districts will have an opportunity to examine and explore potential cost savings in program delivery and implementation, which is especially critical for districts facing an uncertain future with the potential elimination of the save harmless provision.

Description

The resulting outcomes and action items from the regionalization conversations described below will vary from region to region, building upon the strengths inherent in local communities and reflecting innovative ideas from the individuals who live in them. We aim to move from a system that promotes siloed, limited opportunities for some students to a mutually beneficial model where districts within and across regions partner to deliver life-changing experiences for students and to solve local challenges through local solutions.

BOCES within Sole Supervisory Districts stand at the forefront of enabling this essential work for the following reasons:

- **Subject-matter expertise:** With their extensive experience in providing shared services, such as special education, career and technical education, alternative education, and instructional technology solutions, BOCES are well-equipped to lead discussions on regionalization.
- **Regional convening power:** Regionalization planning will benefit from the convening power of BOCES to bring together districts and stakeholders and facilitate broad, inclusive, and collaborative efforts across regions.
- **Fiscal mechanism:** BOCES also have the benefit of directing state aid through cooperative service agreements (CO-SERs) that can support regionalization and offset the costs of plan development and implementation. BOCES and NYSED will leverage CO-SERs to support the regionalization planning and implementation process for districts.

The solutions that districts would be developing alongside the BOCES and neighboring districts may take many shapes as the districts seek to address academic, organizational, and/or fiscal problems of practices. They also may fall within or outside of the BOCES model, or involve collaboration with neighboring BOCES and/or Big 5 school districts. Solutions within a BOCES may not involve a centralized role by the BOCES, such as satellite CO-SERs. No matter how these ideas take shape, NYSED's belief is that the solutions to the problems that students and districts face, such as the transcript gap, cannot solely be solved at the state level.

NYSED will consider legislative and budget priorities to facilitate the implementation of regionalization plans. Depending on the regionalization work that is identified through the planning process (described below), new state aid may or may not be necessary. NYSED will also work towards securing the resources and

³ A list of all 37 BOCES/Sole Supervisory Districts can be found at <https://www.boces.org/contact-a-boces/#districtsupt>

developing the policies to assist with local regionalization efforts during this transition but cannot guarantee the availability of such funding.

Requirements

All component districts of a Sole Supervisory District will work with the District Superintendent to develop a regionalization plan. Non-BOCES component districts will be invited to voluntarily participate in the regionalization planning process by the District Superintendents in neighboring Sole Supervisory Districts. NYSED strongly believes that all districts, including non-component districts, can benefit from discussing and exchanging effective practices and programs.

Districts and Sole Supervisory Districts will work together to develop 37 regionalization plans⁴ by following the five steps outlined below. This process will be completed every 10 years, establishing a mechanism for continual improvement in New York State schools. NYSED will provide technical assistance and data throughout the regional planning process.

- **Step 1.** Strengths & Needs Review
- **Step 2.** Regionalization Plan Convenings
- **Step 3.** Regionalization Plan Interim Progress Report
- **Step 4.** Regionalization Plan Submission, Review, and Approval
- **Step 5.** Regionalization Plan Implementation

Step 1. Strengths & Needs Review

Each component district of the state’s Sole Supervisory Districts will complete a formal review using a Strengths & Needs Tool provided by NYSED to determine the types of regionalization efforts needed to improve student opportunities as well as their school and district operational efficiencies, with the goal of ensuring that each student can meet the vision of a high school graduate portrayed in the Blue Ribbon Commission on Graduation Measures.⁵

Table 1: Strengths & Needs Review

OWNER	RESPONSIBILITIES
NYSED	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develops and disseminates a strengths & needs tool in a form, manner, and platform as directed by the Commissioner, to be released in the summer of 2024. • Creates and disseminates FAQ/guidance. • Provides technical assistance and data. • Shares the regional results with the District Superintendents.
District Superintendent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Works with component districts to ensure completion of the strengths & needs tool.

⁴ NYSED is seeking 37 plans total, one for each BOCES; not individual plans for each of the over 700 districts.

⁵ The recommendations in the Blue Ribbon Commission Report, including the portrait of a graduate, have not been approved by the Board of Regents as of this date.

School District	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyzes district data and information for the Sole Supervisory District and region at large. Collects and summarizes the regionalization needs of the district via the strengths & needs tool provided by NYSED. Submits the strengths & needs tool to NYSED. Meets with the District Superintendent to discuss aggregate needs from the region.
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Strengths & Needs Tool Due by November 1, 2024

Step 2. Regionalization Plan Convenings

Across New York State, component districts will engage in local discussions with other districts and stakeholders in their Sole Supervisory District with the goal of developing regionalization plans. Non-BOCES component districts will be invited to voluntarily participate in the conversations by the District Superintendents in neighboring Sole Supervisory Districts. The discussions will be facilitated by the District Superintendents⁶ who serve as representatives of the Commissioner of Education.

Table 2: Regionalization Plan Convenings

OWNER	RESPONSIBILITIES
NYSED	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides technical assistance and additional data, as needed.
District Superintendent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Convenes all component districts (and any non-component school districts who voluntarily participate) within the Sole Supervisory District. Ensures direct participation. Leads conversations to process the regional needs identified in the strengths & needs tool data (Step 1) and explores additional needs and innovative collaborative opportunities. Serves as a point of contact for NYSED regarding any technical assistance or data needs relating to the convenings.
School District	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The superintendent of each component district and other personnel attend and participate in each convening, as directed by the District Superintendent.

First Convening to Occur No Later than November 1, 2024

⁶ As the CEO of the BOCES, District Superintendent of the Sole Supervisory District, and representative of the Commissioner of Education in each Sole Supervisory District (See Education Law §§1950(2) and 2204), the BOCES District Superintendent, and no other officer or employee of the BOCES, shall have the responsibility of convening, directing, and reporting back to the Commissioner of Education and NYSED the outcomes of these regionalization conversations.

Step 3. Regionalization Plan Interim Progress Report

The District Superintendent, in collaboration with the component districts, will lead the writing of the interim progress report based on data and ideas discussed at the convenings. These reports will provide NYSED with information that could help shape budget and legislative priorities, lead to policy or regulation changes, as well as prompt the Department to provide new or additional types of support for the planning process.

Table 3: Regionalization Plan Interim Progress Report

OWNER	RESPONSIBILITIES
NYSED	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides technical assistance and data, as needed. • Develops a form/template for the interim progress report and regionalization plans, to be released by the fall of 2024. • Reviews, analyzes, and provides feedback on interim progress reports to all District Superintendents by May 31, 2025. • Collects innovative ideas and approaches and shares them with the field.
District Superintendent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitates discussion among component districts towards the development of a comprehensive region-wide plan. • Supports component districts as needed. • Works with bordering Sole Supervisory Districts and districts on regionalization efforts if applicable. • Submits the interim progress report to NYSED.
School District	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engages in conversations with districts. • Collaborates with the District Superintendent in the development of the regionalization plan.
Interim Progress Report Due by April 1, 2025	

Step 4. Regionalization Plan Submission, Review, and Approval

The District Superintendent, in collaboration with the component districts, will lead the writing of the final Regionalization Plan and submit the plan to NYSED. NYSED will review the plan and determine if the plan sufficiently ensures that all students in the region have equitable access to high-quality educational opportunities.

Table 4: Regionalization Plan Submission/Review/Approval

OWNER	RESPONSIBILITIES
NYSED	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides technical assistance, as needed. • Reviews and provides feedback on submitted regionalization plans by November 30, 2025. • Approves final version of the regionalization plan for implementation.

District Superintendent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Works with NYSED and component districts to address feedback from NYSED on the interim reports and implement edits as needed. • Submits the Regionalization Plan to NYSED.
School District	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Works with the District Superintendent to address feedback from NYSED on the interim reports and implement edits as needed.
Final Plans by October 1, 2025	

Step 5. Regionalization Plan Implementation

Regionalization plans will commence implementation no later than the start of school year (SY) 2026-2027.

Table 5: Regionalization Plan Implementation

OWNER	RESPONSIBILITIES
NYSED	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides ongoing technical assistance, data, and evaluative metrics regarding regionalization plan implementation. • Reviews and approves any plan amendments, if applicable. • Conducts site visits and disseminates effective practices regarding regionalization.
District Superintendent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Works with components districts to ensure that regionalization plans are implemented at the beginning of SY 2026-2027. • Facilitates the submission of any plan amendments to NYSED, if applicable.
School District	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Works with the District Superintendent to implement regionalization plans at the beginning of SY 2026-2027. • Works with the District Superintendent to develop any plan amendments for NYSED review/approval, as appropriate.
To Commence No Later than the Beginning of SY 2026-2027	

Timeline

Regionalization plans will have 10-year implementation cycles, with a new cycle beginning with a strengths & needs tool (Step 1) in SY 2034-2035. This regular cycle establishes a systematic, collaborative approach to continually improve schools and districts. By engaging in this process on a regular cycle, districts and Sole Supervisory Districts can examine updated data, build on lessons learned, and create new solutions to new problems.

The timeline in [Table 6](#) describes the initial development of regionalization plans and regionalization planning for this first cycle.

Table 6: Timeline for Initial Regionalization Plans and Implementation Cycle

School Year	Step	Action Dates	Action	Owner
NYSED provides technical assistance throughout each step of the 10-year cycle.				
2024-2025 (Year 1)	Step 1: Strengths & Needs Tool	Summer 2024	Strengths & needs tool, guidance, and FAQs are developed.	NYSED
		November 1, 2024	Strengths & needs tool submitted to NYSED. NYSED shares regional results with the District Superintendents.	Districts/NYSED
	Step 2: Regionalization Convenings	November 1, 2024	District Superintendents convene component districts in a series of convenings to inform the development of the regionalization plans. <i>Nothing prohibits Sole Supervisory Districts from working with other Sole Supervisory Districts in larger regional meetings on this work as long as each Sole Supervisory District submits its own regionalization plan.</i>	DS/Districts
	Step 3: Regionalization Plan Interim Progress Report	Fall 2024	Form/template for the interim progress report and regionalization plans are developed.	NYSED
		April 1, 2025	Interim progress submitted to NYSED to all District Superintendents.	DS/Districts
		May 31, 2025	NYSED reviews interim progress reports and provides feedback to District Superintendents.	NYSED/DS
2025-2026 (Year 2)	Step 4: Regionalization Plan Submission	October 1, 2025	Regionalization plans are submitted NYSED from each of the 37 Sole Supervisory Districts.	DS/Districts
		November 30, 2025	NYSED reviews regionalization plans and provides feedback to District Superintendents.	NYSED/DS
2026-2034 (Years 3-10)	Step 5: Regionalization Plan Implementation	September 2026	Regionalization plans are implemented no later than the beginning of SY 2026-2027. Regionalization plans are designed around 10-year implementation cycles.	DS/Districts
New cycle commences with BOCES and districts completing an updated formal strengths & needs tool. Repeat from Step 1.				