

DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENT

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To the BOCES Community:

These are difficult times for our students, families and school districts. Students are pursuing academics online, without the benefit of in-person instruction; families are struggling to make ends meet, while supporting the needs of their children; and school districts are facing a financial crisis of unprecedented proportion.

Specifically, the State has frozen this year's Foundation Aid to schools at last year's level. But that "freeze" is more like a "cap" because the legislature has given the Governor the power to cut Foundation Aid below last year's level. And that can happen three times in the next several months: 1) right now, 2) after June 30th, and 3) after December 31st. The first cut to Foundation Aid could be as high as twenty percent, which would significantly impact our schools. Additional cuts to Foundation Aid this year or next could absolutely devastate many school districts.

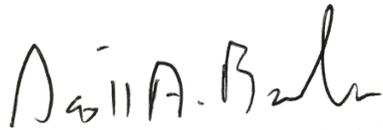
In this landscape, our component school districts have had to make very difficult choices. Unfortunately, one of those choices was to withdraw their participation from our Alternative Education Program. As a result, I regret to inform you that the Madison-Oneida BOCES will no longer operate the SOAR Academy, effective July 1, 2020. As a practical matter, this means students previously enrolled in our Alternative Education Program will return to their home school district when schools reopen this fall. Students enrolled in all other BOCES programs are unaffected by this change.

This was not an easy decision for our school districts to make; for they have invested themselves in the Alternative Education Program for many years. Beginning in 1984, they annually came together as a committee to develop, review and revise campus-based services for students who learn best in alternative settings, outside the confines of traditional classroom structures. In recent years, they supported a multi-year Strategic Plan, implemented in phases to further enhance learning opportunities for students. And that plan paid off. Students were provided with instructional supports for individualized learning, social emotional wellness, youth leadership and Career and Technical Education. They attended class, improved their social skills, engaged in learning, and graduated from High School with a Local or Regents Diploma. They emerged from our Alternative Education Program confident, accomplished, educated, skilled and ready for the world.

Of course the plan would not have succeeded without the committed perseverance of our highly talented Alternative Education staff. They built the SOAR Academy from the ground up, step by step so that students could flourish and grow. Their commitment to educational equity is unsurpassed and they have used every tool available to them to make school what it should be for kids. The educators of our region and in other BOCES admire them for their knowledge, skill, finesse, drive and ability to convert vision into action. The children of our region are better off because of the outstanding work of our Alternative Education staff.

Moving forward, the BOCES mission for shared excellence will become even more essential to schools in financial distress. We are their collective resource, providing strength, talent and flexibility exactly when and how they need it. And as always, we stand ready to help them meet the needs of our students in the weeks, months, years and decades to come.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Scott A. Budelmann". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial 'S'.

Scott A. Budelmann
District Superintendent