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**To:** District Superintendents of BOCES  
Board of Education Presidents  
Superintendents of Public School Districts

**From:** Jeffrey Matteson, Senior Deputy Commissioner

**Subject:** Extension of Deadline for the Strengths and Needs Tool Submission and Other Regionalization Related Items

**Date:** October 16, 2024

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Since March of 2024, the New York State Education Department (NYSED) has been traveling across the state meeting with superintendents of schools, school board members, stakeholders, and advocacy groups, regarding a policy that requires a local conversation to explore opportunities for students that might be expanded through regionalization. These conversations with educational leaders have provided valuable input to NYSED on the potential to improve student access to educational opportunities and framed the regionalization narrative from the outset.

Most recently, during ongoing discussions with NYSED staff, the following concerns came to the forefront:

### **The Strengths and Needs Tool**

We have heard feedback about the timeline to complete the Strengths and Needs Tool and have extended the deadline to complete it until **December 6, 2024**. This will allow for district leaders to complete the survey in a thoughtful and reflective manner.

As has been conveyed to districts during these conversations, as well as through the P-12 Weekly Newsletter, the Strengths and Needs Tool for the regionalization planning process is now available in the “SED Monitoring and Vendor Performance System” application of [NYSED’s Business Portal](#) for BOCES component districts. See this [cover letter for further instructions](#). For questions or technical assistance, email NYSED staff at [regionalization@nysed.gov](mailto:regionalization@nysed.gov).

In addition, we understand the Regional Information Centers of New York State (RICs) have collaborated to provide a resource that will assist districts in compiling the data for the Strengths and Needs Tool if requested. Information regarding this is available from your local RIC.

## **Goals of Regionalization Conversations**

Regrettably, there has been some misinformation regarding the goals of regionalization conversations. For accurate information, we encourage you to review the numerous resources NYSED has made available on the [regionalization website](#), including the [Regionalization Presentation to the Board of Regents on September 9, 2024](#). These resources outline the intent and goals of regionalization conversations and clarifies what this work is and is not.

As stated in these documents, the goal of this work is to provide space for local education leaders to envision, and convey to NYSED, what strategies and actions they will take locally to provide students with equitable opportunities to learn, grow, and thrive, and what supports, regulatory and statutory actions, and funding are needed to achieve these aims.

Some have encouraged the Department to rename the initiative, noting that the term “regionalization” can be interpreted by some as a mandate to merge programs/districts. NYSED has been clear in every presentation and in all related literature, that this is not the case. As educators, all of us must set an example for our students by ensuring that accurate information is shared. Therefore, we have determined that any rebranding of the initiative would confuse the field as this term has been publicly used to describe this effort since the beginning of March 2024.

## **The role of the district superintendent & CEO of BOCES, and the roles of school superintendents and their school boards**

The Regionalization regulations, recently adopted by emergency action by the Board of Regents, require conversations and preparation for such discussions by component school districts. BOCES District Superintendents serve as the Commissioner's representative in the field, and through that role they are expected to convene regional education leaders, identify local areas of collaboration in a progress report to NYSED, and share ideas from across the state with their region. This will allow NYSED to more effectively facilitate work with districts to advocate for local needs through the state budget process, legislative reform, and regulatory action. It will also highlight efforts to collaborate regionally made by school systems within the scope of their own local authority.

## **Contents of the Regionalization Plan**

Concerns have been raised about the language mandating plan implementation in the 2026-27 school year. In response, NYSED is including a section in the final plan submission, which the BOCES District Superintendents will compile based on information received through the conversations and information received from their component school districts and regional stakeholders, where the most creative ideas and suggestions for resources, legislative reform, and regulatory action can be shared. As such, and in noting that impactful examples of regionalization are already being implemented in all corners of the State, regions can submit items they deem actionable in the body of the plan, while still giving NYSED feedback on items that can serve a legislative/regulatory agenda for assisting every region in the state to expand access to educational opportunities for students.

## **What comes next?**

The first regionalization conversations, which focus on logistics, unpacking the aims of the policy, and building a foundation for future collaboration, do not require data from the Strengths and Needs Tool. Therefore, the deadline for holding these initial meetings remains November 1, 2024.

Subsequent to completion of the Strengths and Needs Tool and dissemination of data to help inform regional discussions, an Interim Progress Report will be drafted by the BOCES District Superintendent, shared with their component school district governance teams, and then transmitted to NYSED on or before April 1, 2025. After feedback, the District Superintendent will submit a Regionalization Plan on or before October 1, 2025. These deadlines, as set forth in the regulation, also remain unchanged.

Finally, as a reminder, the Regionalization regulations are still out for public comment, and we encourage your continued engagement in the process.

Thank you for your ongoing efforts to come together and address the educational challenges facing districts across New York. We look forward to continuing this critically important work with you.