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## Ulster County BOCES report suggests specialized 'magnet' programs in area high schools

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NEW PALTZ, N.Y. >> Ulster County BOCES Superintendent Charles Khoury has authored a study outlining how educational offerings could be expanded by locating specialized “magnet” programs in existing high schools.

The study was released Monday by the Benjamin Center at SUNY New Paltz. Gerald Benjamin, the center’s director and associate vice president for regional engagement at SUNY New Paltz, said the report notes that high school enrollment is declining even as changing career demands require more specialized programs.

**[READ: The report “A 2020 Vision for Public Education in Ulster County”](#)**

“Resources are restricted by the tax cap and the relatively high property taxes in New York state, we’re spending a lot of money now, we’re cutting back on the range of educational opportunities, so we need to think of new ways to deliver services,” Benjamin said. “Collaborative techniques are an obvious answer.”

Khoury, who developed the report with the Ulster County School Boards Association, said it offers a way to keep school districts vital by enhancing opportunities.

“Within the context of the high costs of education, and the joint constraints of declining enrollment and fiscal austerity, how can school districts provide more opportunities for their students?” he asked.

He suggests that Ulster County could develop a “quasimagnet high school system,” with students attending programs that cross district lines.

“In conventional magnet high schools, like those in Hartford, Connecticut, students attend a specialized school of their choice for their entire high school career,” he wrote. “Under a quasi-system, students would complete core academic requirements in their home district, and then be allowed to enroll in specialized courses at another high school in the county if they choose to do so.”

Under the concept, districts would develop programs that emphasize particular academic core classes such as science, technology, engineering, and math; arts; humanities, including world languages; business; fine and performing arts; and agricultural science.

Khoury said logistics for travel time could be resolved if some of the same programs could be offered in

more than one school.

“Students in the western part of the county would choose from among the schools in the western area; students in the east would choose from among schools in the east,” he wrote. “An east-west configuration could group the Ellenville, Onteora, Rondout Valley, and Wallkill school districts into a western Ulster group, and the Kingston, Highland, New Paltz, and Saugerties school districts into an eastern Ulster group.”

Khoury did not include cost information but acknowledged there would be expenses that are not currently incurred by districts.

“In this approach, it may make more sense for two or three districts to share just a few courses as a first step,” he wrote. “Once the logistics of this arrangement have been worked out and, most importantly, the educational benefits of this arrangement made clear, other school districts could join or form their own collaborations.”

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