RSA TODAY

News for New York State's Rural Schools

January 2016 Issue

Rural Schools Association of New York State

I don't live in New York ,

I live In New York !

David Little, Executive Director, dal295@cornell.edu 518-250-5710
Thomas Marzeski, Deputy Director, tem75@cornell.edu 315-317-4823
Office: 607/255-8709 Fax: 607/254-2896

Department of Development Sociology,
Warren Hall 275 Flex
Cornell University, Ithaca, NY 14853
www.RSANYS.org

RSA Board of Directors :
Gordon Daniels, Chair
Linda King, Vice-Chair
Janet Ahola
Scott Bischoping
Robin Blakely-Armitage
Patrick Brady
Richard Calkins
Charles Chafee
Edward Engel
John Evans
Robert Everett
Renee Garrett
Linda Gonyo-Horne
Gilbert Green
Darrell Griff
Doug Gustin
Timothy Hayes
Christine Holt
Thomas Huxtable
Rosemary Joy
Douglas Ann Land
Kevin MacDonald
Patrick Michel
Cammy Morrison
Thomas O'Brien
Carolyn Ostrander
Joseph Rotella
Nicholas Savin
John Sipple
Dorothy Slattery
Daniel Starr
Donald Vredenburgh
Charles Walters
Michael Wendt

THE STATE OF NEW YORK'S RURAL SCHOOLS

As we begin the New Year, we're going to be hearing about the State of the Union and the State of the State, but what is the state of our rural schools? To paraphrase former New York City Mayor Ed Koch, "How are we doin'?" The short answer is "pretty well, all things considered!" Yes, we're chronically short on funding and our economic reality is perpetually ignored in the distribution of state aid. Sure, our kids are facing a future that increasingly demands their relocation away from rural home and family. There is no doubt that heroin is quietly and insidiously wreaking havoc on our society and nowhere is that more pronounced than in our rural communities. Our rural schools (and the communities that support them) exist in the most highly taxed, most indebted state in the nation and our rural businesses struggle in one of the most regulated and highly expensive economic environments. So "challenged" might be a good opening description of our rural schools. Yet, despite those challenges, we remain unbowed and unwilling to surrender our historic educational excellence. And, as we refuse to surrender to our obstacles, our formerly distressing circumstances steadily improve.

First, let's give credit where it's due. In perhaps its only recognizably productive act of governance in recent memory, Congress has reauthorized its primary education law in a manner that improves local control without reducing federal funding. The compromise legislation that resulted from years of congressional political posturing somehow gave our schools the best federal approach I've seen in 27 years of public education policy. The result is an increased focus on chronically underperforming schools. I have long considered our collective failure to improve educational results in these schools a disgraceful taint on our generation. After years of unrealistic expectations (coupled with insufficient funding) the feds have finally taken a supportive approach to local efforts. That's a good place for our rural schools to start 2016 and a good

example for our state's own attempts to reform the underperforming Common Core Learning Standards and testing regime.

I admit that I have been skeptical of recent attempts to retrench from the Common Core, largely because no one could tell me an effective approach that would replace it. The involvement of elected state officials in the local governance of public schools has rarely resulted in academic advancement. Well-meaning as they may be, state leaders are most often uninformed about the practical educational implications of their pronouncements, as they respond to political outcry rather than actual educational needs. Not so lately, however. What began as concern over how teachers would be evaluated soon blossomed into general public concern for over testing and underfunding of the professional development needed to properly change our educational approach.

Now, we seem headed toward real progress. Hopefully the cacophony is behind us and we appear poised to discern our own state standards that will allow us to properly prepare our children for the world they will face. We've stepped back from the brink of state demands that link essential state aid to compliance with ever changing testing and evaluation dictates. Instead, our state leaders have done something unique in my experience; they have affirmed the ability of the Regents and local school officials to best determine how to educate our students. It's a long awaited epiphany. State leaders appear to now understand the value of experience in determining educational policy as our governor has chosen an outstanding school administrator as his Deputy Secretary for Education, the former Senate Education Committee Chair is now that house's Majority Leader and he has appointed a former teacher and school administrator to succeed him. RSA honoree Senator Cathy Young has just been appointed the new Chair of the powerful Senate Finance Committee. It feels like a new day, folks.

The light bulb had clearly turned on during the last legislative session, as we saw significant improvements in state aid to schools, as well as common sense approaches to challenging issues like whether to increase the number of charter schools, offer tuition tax credits to private and parochial school donors and whether to adjust the tax cap to account for the effect of PILOTS and BOCES capital projects. Yes, our rural schools face significant challenges; not the least of which is a tax levy limit that this year amounts to a tax freeze on local revenue. If the state doesn't accept responsibility for this self-induced crisis and provide sufficient aid this year, all bets are off. But assuming that this newfound perspective continues, our rural schools may get a respite both from a constantly evolving state approach to education policy and from heavy handed state mandates. Let's hope that as the state prepares its New York State-specific learning standards and takes yet another stab at creating an effective and workable teacher evaluation system, it continues to hear the views of those actually providing educational leadership in our rural schools.

If that effort goes well (and the long awaited ruling in the RSA sponsored Campaign for Educational Equity case forces the state to re-evaluate the distribution of state aid according to what communities can actually afford to contribute to their schools) our rural schools will be poised to do what they do best: Deliver high quality education in a highly personalized environment, where everyone has the best interest of every child at heart and everyone is involved in their success. It's a tried and true approach that demands the continued support of our leaders. With your help, RSA is making sure those leaders know full well the importance of rural education to our state's future. With RSA's help, you are changing the future for thousands of rural students. The State of Rural Schools, you ask? Ready, willing and able.

RSA School Innovation Summit

Saturday, March 5, 2016

1:30-5 PM

Held in Conjunction with the NYSCOSS Winter Conference

The Hilton Albany, Albany, NY

Hear the Latest Program and Structural Innovations in Public Education !

Registration Fee: $50.00 Registration Assistance Provided if Needed

RSA Registration Form / Invoice

RSA School Innovation Summit

Saturday, March 5, 2016

1:30– 5 PM

The Hilton Albany

40 Lodge Street, Albany, NY 12207

Cost: $50.00 per person

District: _____

Attendee Name : _____ Title: _____

Reservation Deadline – February 29, 2016

Please return completed form with check to:

Rural Schools Association

275 Flex Warren Hall

Cornell University

Ithaca, NY 14853

Questions contact: Natalie Mitchell

Email: NAM33@Cornell.edu

Tel: (607) 255-8709

Fax: (607) 254-2896

DOES THE BEST WAY TO IMPROVE RURAL EDUCATION HAPPEN AFTER SCHOOL?

That's the conclusion of the soon to be released report by the New York State Learning Community on Expanding Learning through School-Community Partnerships. Months in the making, the report is the work of several educational and academic organizations interested in determining effective ways to improve academic performance in challenged schools. It is set to be released in early February. RSA is proud to have made major contributions to the study.

While the study includes strategies for all school districts, it takes pains to focus on the unique challenges of rural schools. In short, the work highlights ways that school districts can collaborate with partners within their community to minimize impediments to academic achievement and provide the enriched learning opportunities that make students successful. Expanded learning time is one such strategy and it can take a number of forms, from the formation of community schools, afterschool programs and summer learning programs.

Both New York State and the federal government have recently begun to recognize the value of such efforts and are starting to increase their financial support. As a result, rural schools are more frequently reaching out to those resources and expertise that exist within their community. The report will first explore current conditions and challenges and then provide recommendations for how government can restructure its policies and funding to allow these efforts to succeed.

Partnerships between schools and the community have already shown an ability to improve academic outcomes for kids. They also increase the community's involvement in school activities and community support for their schools. It's true for all schools, not just the challenged ones and the activities don't need to be academically centered. Most activities where kids can get personally involved will do the trick and the effort reaps tremendous benefits, from reducing absenteeism and summer learning loss, to increasing test scores and grade point average. Students are also helped by increased school participation in medical, dental, mental health and other non-academic programs.

Great stuff! But the report recognizes that pulling off these kinds of partnerships is more difficult in rural areas. For starters, there are fewer potential partners. Most potential rural partners are county based agencies or located within community colleges. Funding for staff to coordinate between the school and the partner is tough to come by. Regulations can get in the way and the process of competing for grants can be a challenge for minimally staffed rural schools. Even figuring out how to share needed data is a problem, given privacy concerns and (particularly in rural areas) transportation is a major hurdle.

Yet, nowhere is the value of this approach more apparent than in our rural schools, where opportunities for educational enrichment are often scarce. Finding ways to attract the needed partners, pay staff to direct needed programs, find the time for school staff to coordinate with those outside programs and services are all keys to incorporating out of school programs into the students' total educational experience. And so the report will lay

out ways for the state to support collaboration, to encourage school-community partnerships with everything from technical assistance to coordinating transportation. The report is set to be released at a press conference at the Capitol on February 3rd. Since RSA had a hand in its development, we'll be there to show our support and to express our appreciation for recognizing the unique obstacles confronting rural communities and schools. Once the recommendations are public, it will be up to all of us to provide our state leaders with examples of where school community partnerships are working and how expanding them will help our students succeed.

Does your school have trouble finding qualified speech therapists?

Does travel time eat into instruction and your budget?

GLOBAL Teletherapy IS A PROVEN SOLUTION

Licensed, experienced therapists provide instruction on a digital platform, under the watchful eye of your district aide.

The result? Personalized, interactive therapy at a fraction of the cost.

No local therapists? No worries!

Call Global Teletherapy 888-511-9395 or email info@globalteletherapy.com.

Visit us online at www.globalteletherapy.com.

Global Teletherapy is a partner with the Rural Schools Association and has secured a discount rate for all Rural Schools Association Members. You can also reach out directly to Alan Goode at 443-743-3610 or alan@globalteletherapy.com

Invitation to Present at the
2016 Rural Schools Association Conference
July 10 – 12 in Cooperstown, NY

Dear Friends of Rural Schools,

We at the Rural Schools Association have started our planning for our **annual conference**, which will be held at the **Otesaga Hotel in Cooperstown**, July 10 - 12, 2016. Our conference planning committee has selected **"Reimagining Rural Schools, Now or Never"** as the theme for this year's conference.

Now we are interested in identifying outstanding programs that are currently operational in school districts and whose results can be supported by qualitative or quantitative assessment. The program may be related to our theme or of a general interest to our conference attendees. We know that each district has some unique and successful programs that should be shared, and we ask that you consider nominating one or more from your own district or BOCES. Please feel free to duplicate the program description form. The form is also available on our website, www.RSANYS.org.

The Rural Schools Association Conference Planning Committee, consisting of District Superintendent **Patrick Michel, Chairperson,** and members **Lorraine Hohenforst, Joanne Freeman, Michael Dardaris, Deborah Grimshaw, David Halloran, David Little, Linda King and Thomas Marzeski,** will be meeting in March to select the programs to include as part of the 2016 conference.

Our format provides for sessions on Monday, July 11 and Tuesday morning, July 12. We ask for approximately one (1) hour of presentation time and fifteen (15) minutes to respond to questions. To accommodate the large number of conference participants, some programs are scheduled for back-to-back presentations.

Thank you for your continued support of the **Rural Schools Association**. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Thomas E. Marzeski

Thomas E. Marzeski

Deputy Executive Director

Rural Schools Association of New York State
Cornell University
Warren Hall 275 Flex, Ithaca, New York 14853

RURAL SCHOOLS ASSOCIATION
Annual Conference July 10-12, 2016
Otesaga Hotel, Cooperstown, NY
Request for Program Proposal

The Rural Schools Conference Planning Team is interested in receiving proposals related to the theme of this year's conference, **"Reimagining Rural Schools, Now or Never".** Rural school districts face serious challenges to their educational viability. Such challenges aren't new to rural school superintendents, board members and staff. They have however become more common, more complex and more threatening to the quality of education students receive in rural schools.

The following are some possible program areas that could relate to the Conference theme:

- Describe or demonstrate the use of technology to improve or expand student learning opportunities especially for school districts where consolidation is impractical or undesirable
- Describe the process of utilizing community partners to create work based learning opportunities.
- Describe ways of collaborating with other school districts to offer enriched coursework options for secondary students.
- Describe unique partnerships between school districts and colleges and universities to improve educational opportunities for student learning.
- Describe instructional programs and practices that successfully address a common problem in rural schools, i.e. the limited options for language learning; under enrollment in advanced science classes.
- Provide information that assists school districts in addressing a current challenge not described above.

The majority of our attendees are school board members and school administrators, while teachers are most welcome to attend. The presentation time available is 1hr. and 15 minutes. We prefer to use 15 minutes of that time for questions and answers.

Title of Proposed Program:_____

_____

Program Description (Please be as specific as possible):

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

(Attach additional sheets as needed)

BOCES or School District: _____

Grade Level(s):_____

Contact Person(s): _____

Title(s):_____

Phone Number: _____

Mailing Address: _____

E-Mail Address: _____

Please Return No Later Than **March 14, 2016** To**:**

Thomas Marzeski, Rural Schools Association
Warren Hall 275 Flex
Cornell University
Ithaca, NY 14853

Or: E-mail proposal to tem75@cornell.edu
Fax: 607 254-2896

Questions: Thomas Marzeski
Cell: 315-317-4823

COMMENTARY:

THE MOST EXPENSIVE PLACES TO RAISE A FAMILY IN THE USA? WE CALL THEM "HOME"

According to MarketWatch, Washington, D.C. is the most expensive place in the country to try to raise a family of four. After that, the list points squarely at our Empire State. Out of the top 10 most expensive places for families, fully half are in New York. Specifically, (after Washington, D.C.) Long island is second, where it takes a family of four $103,606 just to get by. According to The Economic Policy Institute that compiled the statistics, the figure doesn't refer to a middle-class lifestyle. Rather it points to what it takes to live, with no savings whatever. The largest costs center around a Hobson's choice of either paying $19,356 a year in rent or $16, 822 in property taxes on average. Just behind Nassau and Suffolk Counties is the demographically similar Westchester County, where it takes just shy of $100,000 for that typical family to make it. Both of these areas are driven by the high costs associated with being next to New York City, which is 4th on the list.

The City sneaks under the suburbs due to lower transportation costs for residents. None of this is surprising to Empire State residents, who have long known that high taxes are the cost of residing in our state. Yet, it may have shocked some upstate communities to learn that they too made the list! The economically struggling Hudson River communities of Poughkeepsie, Newburgh and Middletown collectively came in at Number 7, having been nudged out of a higher spot by Honolulu. Poughkeepsie and its neighbors' dubious distinction comes as a result of high housing costs. It takes almost $93,000 to pay the bills there.

Perhaps most surprising was the Number 8 most expensive location in the country: Ithaca, which had to beat out San Francisco to claim their ranking! MarketWatch blames the high cost of both housing, taxes and child care in pegging the cost of keeping your family's head above water at $92,603.

While it's no shock to learn that New York living costs a nominal egg (that's Brooklyn-ese for an arm and a leg, folks!) It is disturbing to know that half of the most expensive communities in the United States are our neighbors! Think about who we had to beat to dominate that list! Hollywood! Aspen! South Beach! Lots of large metropolitan areas have high cost suburbs; Los Angeles, Dallas, Atlanta, just to name a few. What makes us different? Taxes. High gas taxes, high property taxes, high sales taxes. You name it, we tax it at the highest rates in the nation. And if we still can't raise enough from that, we go into debt so we can keep spending.

I admit that's a little hypocritical when one of the things we want more money for each year is public education, (where we spend more per student than anywhere else-twice the national average.) The problem here is that we never, ever, ever decide to stop doing something so that we can pay for something new. We pile cost on top of cost, special interest on top of special interest until we (like TWA or the major auto manufacturers that had to be bailed out) collapse under the weight of our own history. We become too bound by contracts that can't be changed, laws and regulations that can't be dropped without an uproar from lobbyists, "past practice" that literally ties us to the past and prevents us from properly preparing for the future.

The result? (You're not going to like this…) We lose our children. They leave for college or employment opportunities and they don't come back. Most places lose their kids temporarily, but in New York State, it's

pandemic. According to the feds, New York State has lost 175,000 people a year for each of the last five years. That's the total, and that's after we add in the folks who immigrate here. Think about it. You're in your twenties, you have your degree and you're looking for two things: A. Work B. Someone to share your life with. The odds of success on either front are less likely (particularly in sparsely populated rural New York) than in other states where taxes are lower not only on individuals, but on businesses that can then afford to expand and offer you a job.

So how do we somehow make it all work each year? How do we keep this up in the face of such challenges? Wall Street. Financial industry bonuses are the backbone of our state's income tax revenue. That's why you'll notice that despite having huge tax burdens in virtually everywhere else, our income tax rate is pretty average. That's because we only need a few of our Park Avenue billionaires to move across the river to Greenwich, Connecticut to put a huge hole in state finances. So far, Wall Street has been able to offset upstate economic losses. I guess that's only fair, since it was upstate that bailed out the City during its bankrupt years. But that doesn't feed the bulldog in the long run. We need to rebuild our rural economy, revitalize our rural communities and make them attractive to a new generation.

You and I know that the place to start that effort is with our schools. They're the social, cultural and educational center of our rural communities. They're often the largest employer and they're the emotional glue that holds us to "home." This state budget season, as New York State faces its self-inflicted crisis of a local revenue freeze, let's hope and work toward making sure that recent progress in rebuilding those schools isn't lost to the rhetoric of how much we already spend and whether we get the results we'd want. There's no room for posturing when the fate of our state hangs in the balance. Adequate aid, provided in a way that truly recognizes what a community can or can't do on its own, is the key. Recent events at the federal and state level are encouraging and with your help, RSA will inform our leaders of the need for action and the implications of failure.

All the best,

David A. Little, Esq.

Executive Director

SAVE THE DATE:
July 10-12, 2016 RSA Conference in beautiful Cooperstown, NY at the Otesaga Resort Center.

Check the Rural Schools Association Website
www.RSANYS.org
for details in early May 2016.