



RSA TODAY

News for New York State's Rural Schools

November 2017 Issue

Rural Schools Association of New York State



I don't live in New York , I live In New York !

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Each fall your RSA Board of Directors holds a retreat to set goals and legislative priorities. This year's retreat was held in Lake Placid in conjunction with the Rural Schools Summit of the NYSSBA Convention.

RSA SETS 2018 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

At its recent Annual Board of Directors' Retreat, your Rural Schools Association set its legislative priorities for the upcoming state legislative and federal Congressional sessions. They used the survey that was provided to all members, staff recommendations and their intuitive sense of what will be most important to our member districts in the coming year. They are:

- 1. REFORMING THE STATE AID FUNDING FORMULA TO ACCURATELY ADJUST FOR POVERTY, OTHER COSTS:** If the state simply updates the current formula, rural schools will lose out, due to the loss of enrollment. The new formula must adjust for increased poverty, increased numbers of English Language Learners, transient students and other challenges, if rural districts are to address the needs of its changing student population.
- 2. IMPROVING THE LOCAL PROPERTY TAX LEVY CAP:** The state senate has urged making the cap on local property tax levies permanent. If that's the case, then we must remove inequities in the current cap. For instance, no school district should ever face a negative tax cap and the cap should actually be a 2% cap (as advertised) and not the negligible increase that the consumer inflation rate has allowed in recent years.
- 3. DEVELOPING FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR RURAL COMMUNITY SCHOOLS:** The Community Schools model takes advantage of the available space created by Excel Aid funding and the loss of student enrollment. School space would be used to provide afterschool, weekend and summer programming. Other uses might include mental, physical health care, dental or vision programs for either students or the community.

4. **PRESERVING FEDERAL FUNDING PROGRAMS AND TAX EXEMPTIONS:** Proposals by the federal administration have urged the cutting of education funding, as well as the elimination of state and local tax deductions for federal income tax purposes. Either would be extremely harmful to rural schools.
5. **SUPPORTING ADDITIONAL PRE-K, INCLUDING TRANSPORTATION AID AND “UP FRONT” FUNDING:** While the state claims to support “Universal Pre-K”, in fact, it is far from universally provided. Rural school districts have a difficult time securing the funds necessary to begin these programs. Currently, they must “front” the money and await state reimbursement in the following year. This keeps many districts from providing this vital service. Others are unable to operate the program as a result of the lack of state aid for transportation (which is essential for rural parents.)
6. **FOCUSING STATE ATTENTION ON STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE ISSUES:** The annual NYSCOSS survey of superintendents identified student mental health as their most pressing issue. Mental health and substance abuse are wreaking havoc on rural school funding and rural student learning; often with tragic results.
7. **IMPROVING STATE SUPPORT FOR RURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:** Unlike New York’s cities and suburbs, our rural areas remain in the throes of economic decline. We have lost jobs and population in record numbers. At present there does not appear to be a comprehensive state plan to address this crisis. Without rural economic development, we cannot support our schools and our students have no opportunity to remain in their home communities upon graduation.
8. **OPPOSING VIRTUAL CHARTER SCHOOLS:** While digital learning offers tremendous opportunities for rural education, New York State’s charter school law would make the prospect of a virtual charter school incredibly damaging to our already challenged public schools. Homeschooled students would become an economic drain and more students would be deprived of the social experience that is the backbone of the rural community (leading to increased isolation and further mental health issues.)



Autumn means front porch time in rural New York!



Rural Schools Association Winter Conference: Better People-Better Programs

December 1, 2017

*Wayne Finger Lakes BOCES Conference Center
Newark, New York*

10 a.m. Registration

10:30 a.m. Keynote Speaker Johns Hopkins' Tyler Enslin on Achievement Now

How to achieve success in every aspect of your life. Determine what really is most important to you and the steps to achieve it Learn the practices that will have the greatest impact on your life. Professional development, managing your attitude, and strategically setting yourself apart are all part of this dynamic training.

Noon Lunch is Provided

1-3:30 p.m. Breakout Sessions

Practical sessions to improve student performance and make your district more efficient stewards of resources!

Registration Fee: \$85 Contact NAM33@Cornell.edu to register for this important summit

Registration form [here](#)

A Better You and Better Programs = Better Student Outcomes!

Sponsored by:





The sun rises over the Adirondacks' Mirror Lake on the final day of the Rural Schools Strand at the annual NYSSBA Convention.

RSA COMMITS TO HIGH LEVEL PROGRAMMING OPPORTUNITIES

Your Rural Schools Association is expanding programs for rural school leaders like never before! In addition to the annual Summer Conference, RSA just completed the Rural Schools Summit and strand of programming at the Lake Placid Convention Center. This learning opportunity was held in conjunction with the New York State School Boards Annual Convention and Education Expo. Rural school leaders had the opportunity to learn about rural education topics as far ranging as how video gaming can be used to promote educational outcomes to how the Community School model can be used to address rural community and student needs. With this RSA-NYSSBA collaboration, for the first time attendees at the NYSSBA Convention had the chance to focus all of their learning sessions on rural-specific issues, programs and services.



RSA Vice Chair Charles Chafee of Waterville CSD helps staff the Rural Schools Association

RSA also staffed a helpful booth in the Education Expo area to respond to the questions and needs of rural school leaders. Dozens of convention attendees stopped by to have their questions answered, arrange for a service or just to get directions to the Rural Schools Summit. Following the convention, tired but dedicated members of the RSA Board of Directors stayed on for a two day annual retreat to set the association's goals and legislative priorities. (See related story on page 1)

The Lake Placid location was NYSSBA's first rural convention setting in decades and by all accounts was one of that association's most highly attended events on record. Rural school leaders were in evidence throughout the conference, as every session of the Rural Schools Summit was filled to capacity. Rural attendees also packed the nearby High Peaks Resort for the annual Rural Schools Breakfast (despite the 7 a.m. starting time!) The breakfast was limited to 100 people (due to space constraints), but the sold out event could have easily filled a room twice the size!

The early risers heard RSA Executive Director David Little lay out the state and federal political and financial outlook for rural schools. Little also previewed the upcoming RSA Winter Conference: Better People-Better Programs to be held on December 1st at the Wayne Finger Lakes BOCES Conference Center. Attendees at that conference will hear from nationally recognized motivator Tyler Enslin on how rural districts can experience "Achievement Now!" The keynote session will be followed by several individual workshop presentations highlighting programs and services already working in rural schools that can be easily replicated in other school districts.

Your Rural Schools Association is committed to bringing you educational and personal growth opportunities that easily translate into increased student performance for your kids and assistance to your rural communities.



2017 was a highly successful year for RSA. The addition of Deputy Director Dr. Gretchen Rymarchyk resulted in additional information being produced for you, our member districts and new programs and goals being advanced. The summer conference was generally considered to be “the best ever”, with the highest number of attendees and vendors in RSA’s history. Your RSA was very successful in its advocacy efforts at both the state and federal level, resulting in important contributions to the federal ESSA law, the state’s ESSA plan and regulations, a significant state aid increase (with a focus on directing new aid to high need districts), the rejection of several inappropriate policy proposals (including the abandonment of the state school aid formula altogether) and dramatically increasing the interaction of RSA with the governor’s education staff and the State Education Department (as evidenced by the commissioner’s continuing participation in our summer conference and the governor’s highest ranking education staff member participating.)

Federal efforts in particular were at an all-time high, with RSA helping lead national efforts of the National Rural Education Advocacy Coalition, resulting in improvements to federal programs. RSA has become a leader among rural education associations throughout the nation, as evidenced by the selection of RSA’s nominee as National Rural Teacher of the Year. In addition, RSA continued its service to its membership by conducting local and regional presentations. These were performed both in conjunction with regional and statewide organizations, as well as with individual school districts. In 2017 the association successfully advanced the interests of its members and the influence of the association itself. It is financially sound, appropriately staffed, well positioned in its relationship with Cornell University and state and federal leaders. Your RSA is ready to enter 2018 as a vibrant and energetic partner in public policy.



RSA BOARD OF DIRECTORS SET GOALS FOR UPCOMING YEAR

Each year, your RSA Board of Directors takes advantage of its annual retreat to set the direction and goals of the association for the upcoming year. This year the retreat was tacked onto the RSA Summit and NYSSBA Convention in Lake Placid. This allowed the directors to advance legislative priorities and goals earlier than in prior years. This was needed, as the governor and legislative leaders have moved up the timetable for the state budget. Here are the goals advanced by your Board of Directors:

2018 RURAL SCHOOLS ASSOCIATIONS GOALS



1. **MAXIMIZE THE CORNELL CONNECTION:** With RSA's recent emphasis on advocacy, it is important that the association also continue to bring insight and a broad array of information to school districts. By adding Deputy Director Dr. Gretchen Rymarchyk to our staff (at our Cornell offices), we are able to gain access to Cornell research, conduct our own research (using Cornell resources) and provide our members with timely and relevant information on a regular basis.
2. **CREATE A HIGH LEVEL WINTER CONFERENCE:** The RSA Summer Conference has become a premier professional development opportunity for rural school leaders. The RSA Fall Summit (held in conjunction with the NYSSBA Convention) also provides the latest information to hundreds of RSA members. Your RSA is now planning to provide a high level winter conference, with national experts and replicable rural school programs and services. The first of these conferences will be held at the Wayne Finger Lakes BOCES Conference Center on December 1st.
3. **ASSESS YOUR ASSOCIATION'S LONG RANGE FINANCIAL STABILITY:** RSA has worked hard to provide new and important services to its member districts. Rural schools have never had a legislative champion and now RSA serves as their advocate at both the state and federal levels. Your RSA has added staff to do crucial research that is specific to the needs of rural schools. In the process, it has kept dues at a minimal level (recognizing the financial challenges facing rural districts.) RSA has also maximized partnerships, vendor participation at our events and sponsorships to offset the costs of operating the association. This year, we will explore new ways to keep costs down for our members, while continuing to provide the very best of services.
4. **EXPAND RSA'S SOCIAL MEDIA FOOTPRINT:** This year, RSA created a brand new website (RSANY.org) to highlight our programs and services and keep members up to date on the latest information that is vital to our member school districts. We have expanded the number of RSA Today issues, in an effort to reach out to our membership, again with timely and relevant information on everything from policy and programs to classroom practices. RSA has a Facebook page, where we present photos and information on our events and available information. In an effort to reach folks across a broader array of electronic platforms, this year we will explore Twitter as well.
5. **DEVELOP A STUDENT GRANT WRITING PROGRAM FOR MEMBER DISTRICTS:** State and federal governments love to give out money through grant programs. The only problem is that small, rural school districts don't have the staff to devote to writing grants. They also don't often have the means to create and retrieve the data demanded in grant applications. RSA wants to help by creating a program where Cornell graduate students help districts apply for game changing grants. Making full use of grant opportunities should help rural schools create and sustain important gains in student learning.
6. **UTILIZE STUDENTS IN RSA'S PROGRAM WORK:** Researching information for members and policymakers is a goal shared by your Rural Schools Association and the Cornell students doing work in the Community and Regional Development Institute (CaRDI). With our Cornell office fully staffed, we are positioned to maximize this important resource, on our members' behalf. Look for high level research that will inform our advocacy with state and federal policymakers, as well as the stories available through RSA Today and RSANY.org.

You and your Rural Schools Association. Together, we're making great strides for kids.

Helping Rural Teachers: PBS Brings New Training Program to Idaho

By: JULIE WOOTTON-GREENER jwootton@magicvalley.com

WENDELL — Try to create and share a document using Google Docs, Kari Wardle told a group of Wendell teachers.

The content doesn't have to be creative, Wardle said Friday, pointing out a couple of teachers working in Wendell Elementary School's computer lab. "Those guys are busy putting clip art in over there."

About 25 teachers were learning how to create and share digital documents. It's a tool they can bring back to their classrooms to share information and collaborate with fellow teachers, or have students submit assignments digitally and provide quick feedback.



Wendell Elementary School teachers participate in google Docs training offered by Teacher Ambassador Kari Wardle piloted by Idaho Public Television

The training was part of a PBS pilot project, the Teacher Community Program, launched last year.

It operates in five states with rural areas: Idaho, Montana, Oregon, North Dakota and Iowa. A full-time certified teacher for each state is working as a teacher ambassador.

"What they're trying to do is really figure out how they can support teachers in states that are largely rural and have fairly large populations of low socio-economic students," Wardle said.

Training focuses largely on helping teachers implement technology and digital media in a meaningful way in their classrooms.

Teachers are navigating challenges such as poverty among their students and a lack of devices such as iPads or Chromebooks to use in their classrooms — or a lack of training on how to use what they have.

Wardle, who has been a teacher ambassador for Idaho Public Television since January, is working with teachers in rural communities across Idaho. She was previously a fifth-grade teacher at White Pine Elementary School in Burley for eight years.

She works regularly — with visits at least once a month — with four Magic Valley schools: Wendell Elementary School, Wendell Middle School, Gooding Elementary School and Popplewell Elementary School in Buhl.

Wardle has also partnered with elementary schools in Marsing and Emmett to provide teacher training, but doesn't visit on a regular basis.

She wants to increase awareness of free, standards-based resources from PBS and Idaho Public Television available for teachers to use in their classroom.

Wardle said she has learned there's often a lack training for teachers on how to use technology in their classroom. Schools and school districts invest money in devices, roll carts of iPads and Chromebooks into classrooms and say, "See you later," she said.

As a result, some teachers don't use the equipment or use it ineffectively, she said.

Using a phone or iPad as an individual is “a way different ball game than putting it in front of 30 second-graders,” Wardle said. “I think districts take that for granted.”

Also, the playing field for school technology isn’t level, she said, adding many Boise-area schools have one device per student, a ratio often lower in rural districts.

At Wendell Elementary School, Wardle comes to campus twice a month for “Tech Talk Thursdays.” She provides training to small groups of teachers during their 40-minute preparation time.

Wardle connects well with teachers and shares stories from her own classroom experiences, Wendell Elementary Principal Paula Chapman said, and that keeps training sessions engaging and relevant. “Teachers benefit most from when it comes from another teacher.”

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It’s also beneficial to receive on-site training focused on smaller schools, she said, without having to drive to Twin Falls. In addition to training and curriculum resources, Wardle can also help with co-teaching or watching a lesson.

“She has really become a wealth of different resources,” Chapman said.

Last school year, Idaho Public Television started by looking at seven potential Magic Valley school districts to serve, including the percentage of children living in poverty and test scores.

“We felt like surrounding the Magic Valley area would be a good place to start,” Wardle said, partly because Twin Falls is a nearby hub that could help with finding community partners.

Wardle conducted a needs assessment with six schools interested. She narrowed down the pool to four schools.

Chapman found out last school year Wendell Elementary was among the schools selected for the three-year Teacher Community Program. Now, it’s in the second year.

Wardle said she has discovered teachers are hungry for training on how to use technology in their classroom, and to make technology-driven lesson plans.

“Teachers see the value of using it,” she said. “They just don’t have the training they need.”

Not anymore.

Rural means more than farmland in New York State. Here is the Village of Port Jefferson on Long Island.

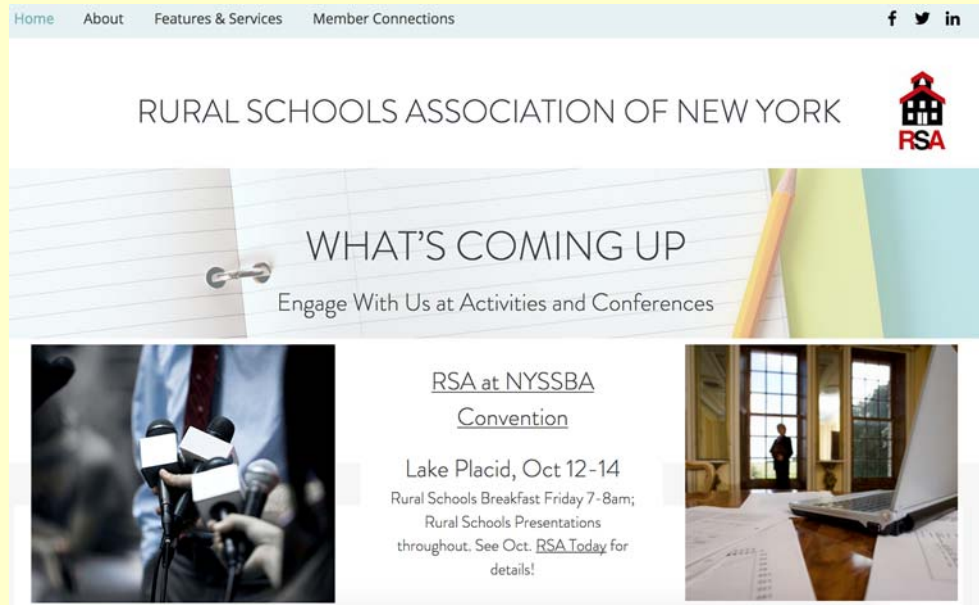




Dr. Gretchen Rymarchyk,
Deputy Director RSA

News From RSA Deputy Director

Check out our new website at www.RSANY.org



There you will find the latest on what's going on at RSA, including:

- * Conference and summit updates;
- * The latest issues of RSA Today, Albany Alert, and Washington Watch;
- * Advocacy Materials you can use to contact your representatives, and send to teachers, parents, and community members to do the same;
- * Links to New York school data from John Sipple; and
- * Membership information

We are still working to add more value to our website, and soon you will see a Featured Programs section, highlighting some of the successful programs rural school are using throughout the state. We will also be including an interactive section for the NYEducationData.org to help you reach into that data and pull out statistics you can use.



So bookmark www.RSANY.org, and make a point to check it often!

Also, “like” us on Facebook to get more updates, announcements, the most recent blog posts from the website. We can be found at “**Rural Schools Association of NY.**”

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The Colonel visited the RSA Latham office on Halloween!