



RSA TODAY

News for New York State's Rural Schools

March 2016 Issue

Rural Schools Association of New York State



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

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STATE BUDGET HOURS (OR LIGHT YEARS) AWAY

As this issue of RSA Today goes to press, state leaders are doggedly attempting to meet the state's constitutional budget deadline of 11:59 of Thursday night, March 31st. Some budget bills are said to be at the printer, so that the passing of legislation can begin. Up until recently school aid amount and distribution were said to still be under negotiation, though this year's deliberations by the "three men in a room" have been particularly secretive, with little information emerging. What we know is this: There is an agreement to eliminate the GEA this year. Of course, this doesn't necessarily mean that there will be a sufficient amount of total aid, only that some of it will be used to get rid of the GEA once and for all. There is no hint of what the total will be, other than the governor proposed a little over \$900 million (including grant programs), the Senate offered \$1.6 billion in new aid and the Assembly pushed the number to \$2.1 billion. Historically, the Senate has come closest to what is finally provided. This amount would leave schools short of what is needed to merely provide current programs and services into the upcoming school year. State officials are having to offset the impact of their tax cap law that has left districts unable to raise local revenue this year.

Stay tuned! RSA will provide you with a state budget analysis as soon as possible following passage by the legislature.

RSA LEADS THE WAY

EDUCATION INNOVATION SUMMIT INFORMS POLICY MAKERS

At RSA's recent Education Innovation Summit, attendees learned about programs that are not only unique, but are changing the way we approach education. Scott Jordan of Cuba Rushford's Fish and Wildlife Program CRCS Outdoors stunned participants with stories of the district's own fishery that releases 100,000 fish into local streams annually, a deer management park, turkey banding operations and studies, 26 television shows a year on Direct TV, all culminating in seniors with a leg up on college and careers.



RSA Innovation Summit participants listen as P Tech High School Principal Michael Dardaris explains how project based learning has changed the lives of their formerly "at risk" students.

HFM BOCES DS Pat Michel and Principal Mike Dardaris regaled those present with the impact of project based learning, where teachers mentor students on projects that are presented to the public and business leaders. Not there to grade, teachers facilitate the students' quest to answer real life studies like website design and on line ordering for local companies and yellow light timing studies for the insurance and law enforcement communities. "At risk" students combine their experience with the Fulton Montgomery Community

College program that provides them both a high school diploma and associates degree.

Not enough students in your district? Supplement them with international students that will capture your heart, expand your thinking and prepare your students for today's global environment. Innovation Summit attendees heard not only from district leaders who do it, but from an international student with a firsthand story of growth, acceptance and love for her new home away from home.



International Students are literally changing the face of public education-and district culture and finances in the Newcomb Central School District, while combining high school diplomas and associate degrees is becoming the norm in some districts. Here, Newcomb Superintendent Skip Hults, Hamilton Central's Dr. Anael Alston and International Student Ms. Mariamawit Wasihum take the stage.



Dr. Pamela Buffington tells Innovation Summit attendees how new methods of using technology in the early grades, combined with collaborative learning are changing the face of early childhood education.

Finally, the Northeast Regional Educational Lab's Dr. Pamela Buffington showed attendees how computer based collaborative learning is improving the math skills and cognitive process for students in the earliest grades. Dr. Buffington brought her research from Maine to prepare those present with the latest on early learning techniques.

ROXBURY SPELLS OUT PLIGHT OF RURAL SCHOOLS

Roxbury Central School District Superintendent and RSA Board of Directors member Tom O'Brien recently sent a letter to Senator Jim Seward. That letter describes in clear detail the challenges facing a great many of our rural schools. From finances to declining enrollment to the menace of heroin, Roxbury's experience is a bell weather for rural New York. It's not only worth reading, it's worth copying. Plugging in your own district's figures and sending to your legislators would be a tremendous method of expanding legislative awareness of our issues. Personalize the letter to your district, send it off and then follow up with a request to meet with your legislators. Better yet, hold that meeting at your district and show your legislators what you are doing and what you could be doing if they were to take action on your behalf. Here's an excellent template. Let's get this information to the people who can help!

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February 22, 2016

Senator James L. Seward
41 South Main Street
Oneonta, NY 13830

Dear Senator Seward,

Our school, along with many of our neighbors, is experiencing a social and fiscal storm that indicates a larger socio-economic problem for our region. Let me paint a picture for you of what is occurring here in Roxbury and other parts of your Senatorial district.

Our increasing poverty rate in conjunction with a higher level of mental health and substance abuse challenges has overwhelmed our ability to deliver quality programs to all of our students. School districts and municipalities only have finite resources to address this crisis. On the district level, this crisis is compounded by the unanticipated expenses we face since there is no place fiscally to turn due to the restrictions of the tax cap and not being permitted to have an established "Unanticipated High Needs Reserve".

In the 14 years I have been in Roxbury the needs have increased and our resources have dwindled. In 2002 we had approximately 380 students, our special education classification rate

"Our vision is to provide a safe and caring environment in which our students can develop academically, creatively and socially. Each member of our school community will demonstrate personal integrity, a commitment to learning and an appreciation for cultural diversity."

was around 17% (NYS average) and our Free & Reduced Lunch Program rate was around 25%. What does Roxbury look like now?

As of 2/9/16:

- Enrollment: 317
- Special Education Rate: 24% (not including 504's) - 7 students placed out of district with 2 of those students in high cost residential placements
- Foster Care: 4 students placed in homes in our district, 4 students placed in other districts with Roxbury as the school district of origin.
**Every one of these foster placements is drug related. Only 2 of these 8 placements were known last spring during budget formulation.*
- Custodial Guardian Placements (Grandparents, etc.): 16 students (5% of the district's population)
**A majority of the reasons for this high number is also due to substance abuse or mental health issues. These folks have stepped up out of love for family and know there is no other viable option.*
- Free & Reduced Lunch Program: 178 students (56% of student population)

Of the 178 students, 138 are direct certified, meaning they are receiving public assistance.

That represents 43% of our general population, and 85% of our free lunch students.

This is a summary of our shifted demographic which places a larger socio-economic concern into a two dimensional list of numbers and percentages. Many of these students are not from here. The unexpected enrollment of high needs students, typically in the summer, has been unprecedented for the last few years. The fiscal limitations and lack of access to resources for specialized placements and services from educational, county and State-wide supports are inadequate and exacerbated by the geographical limitations of this rural area. We are asked for increased levels of academic achievement and fiscal accountability while facing unfunded mandates and other human obligations that continue to stifle our progress. If the Regent's Reform Agenda and the cycle of poverty could ever be broken, a new paradigm needs to be realized and resources must be allocated. Let's now look at Roxbury Central School's fiscal situation.

As you are well aware this district is property rich and people poor and the divide is increasing.

Roxbury's Fiscal Statistics 2015-2016:

APWR = .583 on income

PWR = 1.967 on property value

These factors now place our CWR at 1.274

For illustrative purposes our present CWR is similar to Saratoga, Pleasantville, West Hempstead, Northville, Yorktown, New Hyde Park, North Colonie, Ithaca and Rondout Valley to name a few. But how does that make sense and what are some of the other socio-economic limitations we face that is not true for most of those districts with similar CWR's? (Access to services, a viable economic infrastructure and a level of sustainability.)

I understand that a reconfiguration of the funding formula would be a Herculean task. Though there are flaws in the State Aid formula exacerbated by a poorly designed tax cap, I am well aware of the political realities. The local burden can often be easily absorbed by our more affluent second homeowner population but they have also become more vocal and tax weary. For our full-time population as evidenced by our increasing poverty rate, taxes due to an increased local burden from rising property wealth are becoming untenable. Poverty rates must be more strongly weighted to provide extra financial resources and to off-set the local share beyond "High-Tax Aide". Our district and other districts

need greater flexibility and the ability to establish an “Unanticipated High Needs Reserve” for specific reasons to off-set unanticipated and increasing expenses in meeting our ever growing needy population. Unanticipated expenses are unfunded mandates and there should be a mechanism to address those unencumbered expenses.

The growing deterioration of our rural economy compounded by an unsuccessful war on drugs in conjunction with a serious mental health crisis must be addressed or the core fabric of our social institutions will crumble even more. The paradigm must shift and it must happen with aggressive help from our State government. As a long standing school administrator, local hospital board member and volunteer emergency medical technician, I have been provided with multiple perspectives of this growing social crisis. I would appreciate the opportunity to share my perceptions in greater detail about the growing rural and larger social crisis we are facing and our failure to act will exponentially accelerate these problems.

Sincerely,
Thomas J. O'Brien
Superintendent

cc: Board of Education
D. Little, Rural Schools Association
B. Lowry, New York State Council of School Superintendents
N. Savin, ONC BOCES District Superintendent



RSA Partner Global Teletherapy: Serving Kids-Saving Resources

For over a year, your RSA has partnered with [Global Teletherapy](https://www.dropbox.com/s/giz9whyylx2wx8q/Chadron%20Vdeo.mp4?dl=0) to make sure our rural districts have access to high quality, effective speech therapy services. This innovative and cost effective method of helping students with speech therapy needs has expanded throughout the country and is being used by a number of districts here in New York. If you're having trouble securing speech therapy services because your district is in a remote location, or you only need additional services for a couple of students, teletherapy may be your solution. All speech therapists involved in Global Teletherapy are New York State certified and teletherapy has been validated by speech therapy's national licensing body. Given the saving of travel time, it's highly cost effective. Here is a link to a video showing how it works.

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/giz9whyylx2wx8q/Chadron%20Vdeo.mp4?dl=0>



RSA GOES TO D.C. FIGHTING FOR RURAL SCHOOLS AT THE FEDERAL LEVEL

It makes no sense to keep the decks clear at home if you're going to be torpedoed from Washington. Good stewardship of our local districts is our primary responsibility, but our advocacy efforts may well have the broadest and most lasting impact.

Federal issues have long been vital to the economic health of our rural schools. Everything from the new Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, formerly NCLB) or the (about to be reauthorized) IDEA for students needing special educational services, to the Childhood Nutrition Standards and Title I, federal law affects every aspect of our programs and services. This year, your Rural Schools Association initiated a federal advocacy program to protect and support New York State's rural school districts.

First, we joined the National Rural Education Advocacy Coalition (NREAC). This provides us year round updates on important opportunities to effect federal change. We then prepared positions on federal issues and joined our colleagues in rural education from around the country for a two day advocacy effort on Capitol Hill. On your behalf, RSA met with White House staff in charge of rural development. We met with E Rate administrators and the U.S. Department of Education's top rural education official. We contributed to NREAC's 2016 legislative agenda and then RSA met with our U.S. Senate and Congressional education staff. As always, Senators Schumer and Gillibrand were very receptive to our concerns and we began building a relationship that hopefully will allow them to view RSA as a resource on your behalf.

One of the most important meetings was with Peter Oppenheim, Education Counsel to Sen. Lamar Alexander, Senate sponsor of the new federal education law, ESSA and chair of the Senate Committee on Health, Labor, Education and Pensions (HELP). Peter is one of the new law's primary authors and negotiators. The new federal law is responsive to many of the long held concerns districts had with NCLB and the federal role in public education. Next up for Sen. Alexander and Peter will be the reauthorization of IDEA, perhaps one of the most important federal laws affecting New York's rural schools and the Perkins law that significantly impacts our BOCES. Also in the offing is a reworking of the federal Child Nutrition Standards that at present plans to include a new and burdensome provision that would require districts to verify the income level of 10% of all students on Free and Reduced Price Lunches. This is up from the current 3% requirement and would impose a significant administrative burden on our already stressed districts. Our schools need flexibility in implementing new nutrition standards. The bill has already passed out of committee in the Senate and we need our Members of Congress and Senators to oppose this version.



US Senate Education Committee legal counsel and ESSA negotiator Peter Oppenheim meets with RSA and other rural school advocates at a recent national advocacy event on Capitol Hill.

There is much to be done at the federal level on behalf of our rural schools and RSA now has the contacts, vis-

ibility and hopefully the influence to advocate effectively for you. One of the benefits of this advocacy effort has been the commitment of many of Washington's key rural officials to participate in RSA's 2016 Summer Conference in Cooperstown. Lucy Johnson, Assistant US Secretary of Education for Rural Schools will not only address the conference, but hold a small focus group meeting at the conference. Lucy is responsible for a review of how the department serves rural schools and this is part of her effort. It's also our chance to influence this federal agency. US Senate Education Counsel Peter Oppenheim has agreed to speak to attendees, as well as the Executive Director of the National Rural Education Association, John Hill. Just today, RSA's Dave Little and Dr. John Sipple presented at a summit held by the US Department of Agriculture. USDA's top administrator for rural development Tony Hernandez has agreed to attend the conference to inform attendees about ways they can maximize federal funding to develop rural communities and their schools.

One of RSA's 2016 goals is make sure member districts have the most influence possible at both the state and federal levels. Three months into the year, RSA is well on its way to meeting this goal, making sure policy makers are well aware of the impact of proposals on rural schools and making sure rural schools have the ability to influence the outcome of those deliberations.

Here are informational highlights of recent and looming federal issues:

- 1. While ESSA has been characterized as returning authority to state and local decision makers in public education, its regulations are currently being negotiated. The only rural representative in the regulatory working group is a paraprofessional from Wisconsin. We need to let our federal representatives know that the intent of the law needs to be carried through to the regulations that implement the law.**
- 2. Check with your BOCES to be sure your district is receiving its full share of the Rural Education Achievement Program (REAP) Funding under this program is extraordinarily flexible, allowing you to use it for almost anything you think would help your district.**
- 3. There is a White House demonstration project that allows districts to apply to receive funding to hire a grant writer. Given the number of state and federal grants currently available, making this service accessible for rural school districts would be helpful to many of our districts.**
- 4. E Rate and Connect Ed provide devices, software and professional development in digital learning. This program allocates \$150 per student. Even more is available to rural schools because New York State's Smart Schools Bond Act is matching state money for increased federal funding. E Rate currently has more funding than at any time in its history; over \$5.8 billion. Schools should seek funding now before a new presidential administration changes the focus or requirements for funding.**
- 5. E Books is a free program that makes classic children's books available free on line. Over \$250 million in free e books have been donated by publishers so far for use by schools.**
- 6. Federal funding to social service recipients for "land line" telephones will shortly allow them to choose to use their subsidy for data instead. This will assist students in receiving and producing homework assignments. Soon all phones under the federal subsidy will be wi fi hot spots and phones under the federal program will all be smartphones to allow students to do homework.**

For more information check out the Reap Website

<http://www2.ed.gov/programs/reapsrsa/index.html>

DID YOU KNOW...?

RSA recently presented at a symposium held in Albany by the Northeast Regional Educational Laboratory. Here is some of what we learned when we weren't too busy talking!

1. **75 % of the United States of America is rural. (If you've ever looked out the window of a plane flying west of the Mississippi, you know this already!)**
2. **20% of all students and 51 million US residents are rural.**
3. **Drug abuse is highest in rural areas.**
4. **Rural students are 25% more likely to be obese than their suburban or urban counterparts.**
5. **Many rural schools are encouraging families to take in foster children, just to keep their doors open.**
6. **Rural schools have a much higher rate of volunteerism than other schools.**
7. **The presence of a school in a rural community improves the quality of life in the community across all categories.**
8. **Rural schools are often drivers of economic development in the community.**
9. **Yet, the governmental approach to rural schools often fails to recognize the impact of the school on the community and instead, treats rural schools as inefficient, needing to be larger, combined and more cost effective.**
10. **In fact, "rural" is often the residual category on many governmental forms and studies, leaving us on the periphery of power and influence.**

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.

By JACKLIN STARKS

March 09, 2016 3:00AM

GUEST VIEW: Building partnerships helps build BOCES mission

The New York State Afterschool Network recently put out a white paper about the importance and value of school-community partnerships. Our longtime ally, New York State Rural Schools Association, participated in that initiative to provide a voice for the educational and community needs specific to rural school districts like the ones in our region.

Among the report's recommendations: The state should encourage partnerships with county services, hospitals, community colleges, BOCES, or other schools. The report encouraged schools to develop and promote an education curriculum that "can be put into context and used as an effective foundation for college or career."

At Madison-Oneida BOCES, we couldn't agree more. For nearly 50 years, we have been working collaboratively with our member school districts, and we have been establishing and facilitating partnerships throughout our local communities.

BOCES in New York State were founded on the idea of supporting shared services between schools. In our region, we've expanded that idea to include long-lasting and effective partnerships with businesses, government agencies and service organizations across Madison and Oneida counties as a way to provide additional educational benefits to our area students.

For example:

-- We have agreements with 21 colleges and trade schools across the northeastern U.S. to grant college credit to students who complete our CTE programs.

-- We maintain partnerships with 167 community organizations, including schools, government agencies, companies and nonprofits, and we provided more than 300 high school students with work-based learning site placements last year.

-- We are currently working with a number of partners – including county health departments, local law enforcement, and social service agencies – on a Youth Mental Health First Aid training program, which allows us to offer no-cost training to 250 community members across Madison and Oneida counties.

-- We have long-standing partnerships with our local hospitals to offer internships and clinical rotation slots to our nursing students at both the high school and adult level, and our nationally-recognized Allied Health Partnership was designed and implemented in conjunction with Oneida Healthcare Center, which has offered us classroom space and shadowing opportunities for about two decades.

-- High school seniors in our special education program participate in work-study experiences through rewarding partnerships with 19 local businesses, nonprofits and government offices.

In September, we formed a new partnership with SUNY Polytechnic to offer interested seniors a unique option – a full-day, research-focused STEM course located on the SUNY Poly campus, with an emphasis on environmental science and nanotechnology. We're now in the early planning stages of another school-community partnership between our component districts and area businesses to develop an advanced manufacturing program for high school students.

These two major initiatives, undertaken in collaboration with school and community partners, fit right along with State Education Commissioner Mary Ellen Elia's statement that we need to "invest in our education and workforce pipeline." They also fit in with our own mission of offering real-world and hands-on education to students from our region and preparing our students for the world of tomorrow.

Jacklin G. Starks is District Superintendent of Madison-Oneida BOCES in Verona.

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