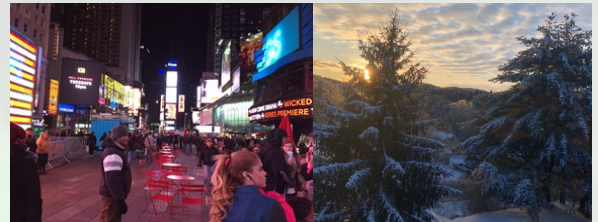




RSA TODAY

News for New York State's
Rural Schools

March 2020



I don't live in New York,

I live in New York

"Communities Committed to Educational Excellence"

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David Little,
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RURAL IMPACT-RURAL RESPONSE

TOP WAYS THE VIRUS IS AFFECTING RURAL NEW YORK

We simply don't yet know all of the effects of the pandemic in rural areas. Few cases have been reported in our rural communities, as testing equipment is largely nonexistent. We don't know who has the virus and how widely it's likely to spread. What we do know is that the impact of the pandemic is raising serious questions that are highlighting all of the challenges being faced by our rural schools. Here's a partial list:

1. **Testing:** We don't know what we don't know. It's difficult to impossible to find testing for the virus in rural communities. We don't know the difference between folks who have the flu and folks who might have the virus. This makes dealing with existing conditions untenable, let alone preparing for what might develop.
2. **Contradictory Policy:** The state (as of this minute-events are obviously evolving rapidly) has a contradictory policy regarding the virus and educational institutions. The SUNY and CUNY systems are closed in order to prevent large numbers of students from being in close proximity. When they go their separate ways on spring break, they aren't being allowed back on campus, so that they aren't bringing the virus back with them. Yet, most of the state's students are in K-12 schools that remain open. They are interacting daily with at risk populations within the community.
3. **Childcare:** Closing public schools for an extended period would have far reaching implications, not only for education but society generally. Childcare would be an emergency for most parents and likely require many parents to miss work. Standardized tests like the Regents would have to be delayed, contractual agreements and working days would need altering. Duties of non-instructional staff might need to be altered.

4. **Broadband:** The lack of broadband in rural areas will exacerbate the “homework gap”. Inability to carry on educational programming from remote locations will likely put rural schools further behind their suburban and urban peers. The general public and perhaps even our state leaders don’t recognize the increased impact on rural education; you can’t just send everyone to the library. That kind of defeats the purpose!
5. **Healthcare:** The lack of healthcare in our rural communities creates a number of issues. First, there’s the testing issue. Secondly, if our preventive measures are inadequate, the few rural healthcare centers are likely to be overrun. Healthcare workers themselves are afraid of being put at risk and any hesitation on their part could well mean harm to vulnerable community members.
6. **Nutrition:** Increased rural poverty is certainly making itself known as we face this crisis. Many of our children receive critically important nutrition through school. We obviously need a way to provide meals to kids outside of school, which requires flexibility in the regulations currently governing how we go about that work. The federal government is currently considering providing the increased latitude we need to reach out to remote locations where children are found outside of school...apartment complexes, central bus stops, etc. We need to be able to provide “meals to go” and multiple meals at once, so that pick up trips are minimized. Food scarcity is compounded when food sources are few and far between to begin with.
7. **Transportation:** Always an issue for anything we provide in rural schools but particularly critical when attempting to feed or care for students outside of our buildings themselves. Can our transportation aid regulations be amended to allow us to do what’s needed first for the wellbeing of our students and then (hopefully) for the community at large? We have the equipment and the personnel. We just need permission.
8. **Lack of funds:** Last year rural schools used their fund balance reserves at twice the rate of other school districts. As a group, we attempted to restrain both spending and taxes. We understood that further taxing our few remaining businesses and homeowners wouldn’t work in the long term. That leaves us vulnerable to the kind of expenses likely to attach to this crisis.

You are doing heroic work. If you are doing something to address the crisis that you think would be helpful elsewhere, please let us know. We’ll pass it on to all rural school districts. Please contact your state and federal representatives to let them know what’s happening and about the need for increased funding and flexibility. We’ve always worked well as tight knit communities. Let this be our finest hour!

CAUTION IN THE WIND

Dear RSA Members,

Recognizing that you don't have time for much reading at present, this column and this issue of RSA Today will be brief. Addressing the virus has taken the time and attention of state leaders that otherwise would be directed at the state budget negotiations. Advocacy efforts on your behalf continue to the extent possible. Some events at the state, local and national levels have been cancelled and identified cases throughout the state continue to mount. Please know that your RSA stands ready to answer questions and to help with specific situations you encounter. Our offer is as broad as possible. If you think we can help, call.



NYSCOSS has been invaluable in providing up to date guidelines, protocols and alerts from both SED and the NYS Health Department. [Here is a link](#) to the new guidance. This was provided to us by NYSCOSS.

Last week the less obvious problems embedded in the Executive Budget proposal for school aid began to reveal themselves. Let's start with the good news: The state has agreed on an estimated additional \$700 million that can be included in state spending for the upcoming fiscal year. That is in addition to the \$1.1 billion planned for school aid in the state fiscal plan prepared prior to releasing the Executive Budget. Both the Senate and Assembly estimated increases of over \$1 billion but settled on \$700 with the executive for negotiating purposes. In theory, this should provide the resources needed to reject the consolidation of reimbursable aid categories, the caps on aid, etc. that the governor proposed.

That's good news indeed, because the proposals disproportionately affect our rural districts. High need rural districts in particular lose the most from the consolidation of aid categories and caps on transportation aid. More of our districts would move into save harmless status and off of the remnants of our school aid formula. While the governor touts the fact that the majority of the new aid would be directed at high need districts, he conveniently omits the fact that New York City is categorized as high need and annually takes the lion's share of the revenue. This, despite the fact that the City's income and property wealth have expanded fairly dramatically, while in rural areas, both have experienced significant decline.

Here are some specifics:

- * Districts would lose a total of \$86 million through the governor's consolidation and capping of aid categories. (Urban areas like NYC and Buffalo would be unaffected. The \$86 million would come from rural and suburban areas.)
- * There is a little understood provision in the Executive Budget that would move the date on which the state sets the reimbursable aids from November to February. Aid reductions would be recognized in the new calculation, but not increases. Simply updating the data base (in a legislative fix in the final state budget) would eat up a significant amount of additional aid. The plan is functionally flawed, as you simply can't set something like high cost special ed aid in November.
- * The cost to restore reimbursable aid categories is \$228 million, putting us at the original state fiscal plan figure of \$1.1 billion in total aid.
- * Aid for districts on Save Harmless is only a quarter of 1%.

We clearly need to inform local representatives of the impact of these proposals.

We will continue to advocate on your behalf! I would also like you to know that plans for the RSA Summer Conference are moving full speed ahead, with an absolutely stellar line up of presentations and keynote speakers. While events are currently being rightly cancelled out of caution, we remain hopeful that the flu season will have passed and that (with proper precautions) we will be able to offer you not only timely and relevant information, but a welcome respite from the stress of this situation.

Take care of yourselves!

RURAL ADVOCACY EFFORT REAPS HUGE WIN

Your RSA helps steer the efforts of the National Rural Education Advocacy Coalition (NREAC). Each year NREAC sets an agenda to advance rural education and then carries out its advocacy efforts, with each state making regular contact with its federal representatives and the U.S. Department of Education. Recently we learned that the department sent out a notice to rural schools that REAP funding would now depend on a new method of calculating eligibility (moving away from the number of students receiving free and reduced price lunch.) The result would have meant that hundreds of rural schools would lose their REAP funding. REAP funding is particularly important to rural schools because it is unrestricted, per pupil funding. NREAC members immediately began contacting our federal representatives and the media. RSA director and designated Federal Issues Liaison Heather Zellers and Executive Director Dave Little called Members of Congress and the offices of Senators Gillibrand and Schumer and alerted media outlets of the pending cuts.



The New York times responded to the issue with a story that shed light on the impact of this decision by the department to unilaterally alter their longstanding eligibility requirements. The Times story and NREAC efforts led to inquiries like the one described below and a return to the current eligibility rules. Ultimately, Congress may have to write new legislation to keep the department from attempting similar efforts in the future, or the department may have simply gotten the message to leave rural funding alone, but in either case, rural schools win! Three years ago your RSA board of directors set a new goal for the association to become highly influential in federal issues affecting our rural schools. Since that time, RSA has achieved that goal in several arenas; this being the most recent example. If you have the chance, please express your appreciation to Members of Congress or our U.S. Senators for their efforts on our behalf.

Reprinted from Politico

BLUNT PRESSES DEVOS ON RURAL SCHOOL FUNDING POLICY SHIFT

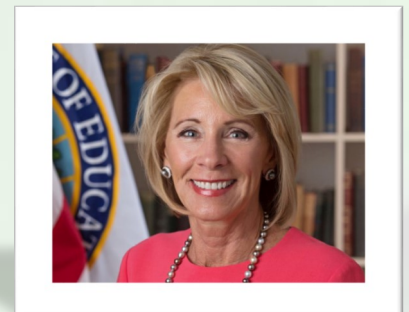
By Juan Perez Jr.

03/05/2020 11:51 AM EST

A top Republican lawmaker pressed Education Secretary Betsy DeVos on her agency's now-delayed decision to change a rural school funding model in a tense exchange at a Senate hearing Thursday.

DeVos, in turn, indicated that the move was announced to the rural schools before she had an opportunity to review it, but also insisted that it's up to Congress to make a fix following a one-year transition period.

The department's shift would have tightened how states qualify for money under the Rural Education Achievement Program and potentially jeopardized funding for more than 800 rural, low-income schools. That prompted a stream of bipartisan criticism this week, including a letter signed by mostly Republican



Education Secretary Betsy DeVos

senators opposing the decision . Many GOP senators represent red states with significant numbers of small-town schools.

Now the Education Department has put off its action for a year, allowing states to continue submitting the number of students participating in free school lunch programs to qualify for rural school grants.

DeVos, however, continued to urge Congress to fix language in the law to solve the legal problem the department said prompted the change. That invited some skepticism from Sen. Roy Blunt (R-Mo.), chairman of the Appropriations Labor-HHS-Education Subcommittee.

“Did nobody recommend this to you before you announced you were going to make the cuts?” Blunt asked DeVos about the decision to delay the policy shift.

“Well, unfortunately, it's one of those things that got communicated, probably prematurely, directly to the involved individuals rather than coming to my attention and others,” DeVos replied.

“We clearly don't want to see individuals and students in rural areas hurt. That said, clearly for this long period of time, the data on which the grants have been let out has been inaccurate and not in compliance with the law,” she said.

Lawmakers have said the department’s decision created “a funding cliff for hundreds of rural, low-income schools that are already balancing tight budgets.” The department’s response acknowledged states need more time to adjust to the plan, citing the disruption that comes with the change.

DeVos used similar language to defend the one-year policy transition plan to lawmakers on Thursday.

“And so having a year of transition — and I think that the defense for it is that the disruption that would take place for those schools that have been budgeting accordingly for this period of time — is an appropriate transition. But it is something that is going to have to be fixed in the law,” DeVos said to Blunt.

“We feel that there's a valid reason to use a transition authority for a limited period of time,” DeVos said.

Blunt replied: “We'll see what the authorizers decide about that.” His reference was to the Senate HELP Committee, which would consider changes in education law.



Senator Roy Blunt

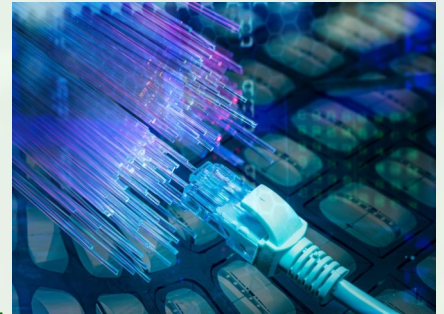


QUESTIONS ASKED BY STATE SENATORS ABOUT FCC'S FUND FOR RURAL BROADBAND

By JULIE ABBASS
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WASHINGTON — A coalition of U.S. Senators asked the Federal Communications Commission for clarification, transparency and consideration relating to eligibility for its Rural Digital Opportunity Fund supporting broadband access in rural areas in a letter sent Tuesday.

Via press release, U.S. Sens. Kirsten Gillibrand and Charles E. Schumer “denounced” the FCC’s decision to move the fund forward with eligibility restrictions for some areas in states that have their own broadband programs and have received U.S. Department of Agriculture’s ReConnect broadband program funding.



“This order could be devastating to rural New Yorkers and rural communities around the country, and I’m disappointed that the FCC has chosen to exclude certain unserved communities from potentially accessing crucial broadband funding to improve internet services,” said Sen. Gillibrand in a written statement.

The core of the letter to FCC Commissioner Ajit V. Pai signed by 22 senators asks questions because “so much uncertainty remains around key details of the program.”

The group requested answers from Mr. Pai to their eight questions by March 23.

The senators requested a list of states that will be excluded from the fund due to broadband subsidies as well as timeframes surrounding those subsidies that would cause a state to be excluded, for example, states with subsidies enacted over a decade ago to those that have not yet been completed.

The group wants to know how the FCC will collect more accurate data “to assess these eligibility questions,” whether or not the information they find will be released to the public and how the “final list” for eligible areas will be created from the “preliminary list.”



The FCC’s “educational outreach” plans to provide information to ensure states know how to make the “preliminary list,” and what is required to be moved to the “final list” also interests the senators.

Relating to states, like New York that already has a broadband program, the senators inquired if carriers paid through those state programs for providing services in some areas would be eligible for the FCC funding in other areas in the same state.

The final two questions focused on states that either have their own programs ready to send out notices for providers or are applying for the second round of ReConnect funding that will overlap the Rural Digital Fund’s deadlines.

In those cases, the senators asked whether or not states should go ahead with their programs or applications or should just apply to the FCC’s program first so they won’t end up ineligible.

“The federal government should not be punishing New York, or any other state, for taking initiative, especially not for securing broadband access for rural communities that need and deserve top-notch high-speed internet,” Sen. Schumer said in a written statement.

The order for the Rural Digital Opportunities Fund originally excluded only two states, New York and Alaska, from funding eligibility because, in New York’s case, the state had created its own comprehensive broadband program and received federal funding for rural broadband through ReConnect, while Alaska has a separate federal fund created for it.

After protest letters were sent to Mr. Pai by Sen. Schumer and Gillibrand, as well as one signed by 22 members of Congress including U.S. Rep. Elise Stefanik, R-Schuylerville, and U.S. Rep. Antonio Delgado, D-Rhinebeck, urging New York state not be excluded from the rural fund program, the FCC reversed New York’s complete ineligibility.

Mr. Pai responded on Jan. 30 that some areas of the state would be eligible for the first funding phase of the FCC’s program.

The Rural Digital Opportunities Fund “represents the single biggest step to close the digital divide by providing up to \$20.4 billion to connect millions more rural homes and small businesses to high-speed broadband networks,” the order says, giving preference to higher-speed networks with fewer delays and interruptions.

The funding will be allocated over the next 10 years through two rounds of “reverse-auctions” based on the same process used by its predecessor, the Connect America Model and Connect America Fund established in 2011.

While progress was made in the north country through the state’s Broadband for all Programs, over 2,800 locations in Lewis County alone remain without the fiber-optic internet, with about 1,260 of those waiting for Frontier Communications to fulfill its contract with the state.

Through the \$55.4 million awarded to the state through the federal Connect America Fund in August to provide “fiber-based broadband access” to 23,000 unserved homes and businesses across the state, only 57 locations in Lewis County, 625 in St. Lawrence and 695 in Jefferson Counties were included along with 372 in Oswego County, all through Verizon.

Reprinted from www.nny360.com





**THIS TOO SHALL PASS!
WINTER AND FLU WILL SOON GIVE WAY
TO SUMMER AND
THE RSA SUMMER CONFERENCE!
SAVE THE DATE...JULY 12-14**

Sooner or later the sun will shine, the weather will get hot, school will be over and it will be time to once again relax, recuperate and revitalize our approach to rural education! This year the RSA Summer Conference will offer an unprecedented array of timely and relevant presentations designed to allow you to maximize your resources and overcome your challenges.

COME FOR...

- ◇ Dr. Bill Daggett-International Educational Leader and Futurist
- ◇ Dr. Donna Beegle- Child of poverty, International Leader in teaching us how to overcome its effects
- ◇ Andrew McCrea-Author, Farmer, National Radio Host, School Leader on revitalizing rural communities
- ◇ Brandi Varnell-National Rural Teacher of the Year and Dr. Allen Pratt, Executive Director of the National Rural Education Association
- ◇ Noelle Ellerson Ng- Director of Advocacy and Policy for AASA
- ◇ More than a dozen cheap, easy and successful programs you can bring to your district!

COME ENJOY....

- ◇ “Conference Only” reception at the National Baseball Hall of Fame
- ◇ Free beer, wine and dessert receptions
- ◇ Lunch buffet on the Otesaga veranda overlooking one of New York’s most spectacular Finger Lakes
- ◇ Presentations by FFA Statewide Oratorical Contest Winners

COMING SOON!

**LOOK FOR CONFERENCE REGISTRATION
AND HOUSING INFORMATION EARLY NEXT MONTH
SPONSORED BY....**



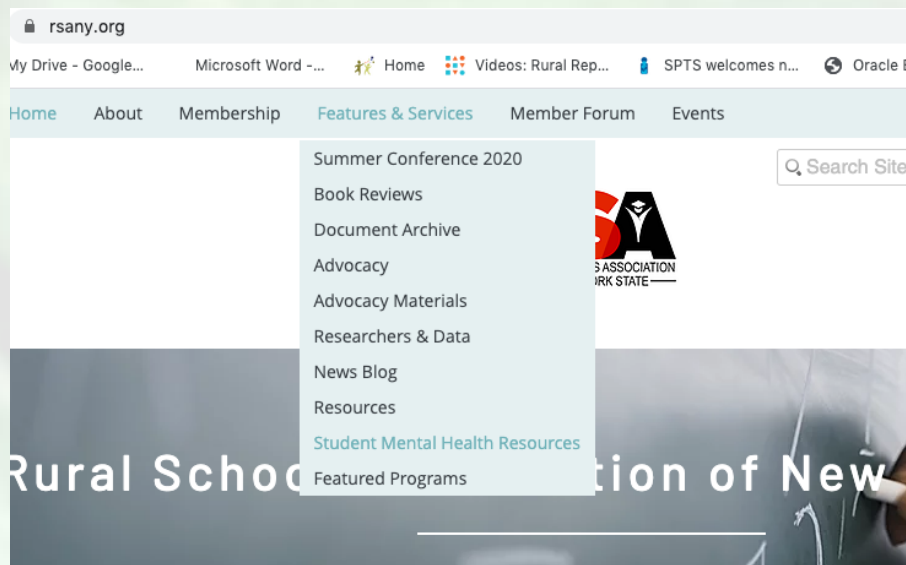
THE CORNELL CONNECTION



**Dr. Gretchen Rymarchyk,
Deputy Director RSA**

Student Mental Wellness Summit Handouts

If you want a packet of handouts left by our panelists from the Winter Summit on the Whole Child, go to www.rsany.org to our Student Mental Health Resources page, click on the button, and fill out your name and address. We will send a set along to you.



How's The Website Doing?

The website continues to attract attention: In the past three months, we have seen almost 900 unique visitors. Many of these were repeat visitors, as we had a total of 1,205 visits!

How's Social Media Doing?

Face Book –

By far, our most popular post in the past 3 months has been this:

[100 Plus Students Attend Homer Climate Change Summit](#) This story reached 561 people.

Runners up included:

2. Reaching 242 people: Links to the Rural Suicide Prevention Surveys for Schools and for Communities were published (in the same post). This data has been used in a Work group to help shape policy recommendations to NY for rural suicide prevention.
3. Reaching 228 people: Link to the Summer Conference RFP was published
4. Reaching 186 people: Link to 2020 NY Farm Bureau Agricultural Youth Scholarship
5. Reaching 125 people: Link to free webinar on “Mapping the link between educational opportunity and life expectancy.”

We have 335 followers, which is the number of people who have “liked” our page so that our content shows up for them regularly.

Each week, over 100 people see our posts, and over 20% will “engage” (like, share, comment, or click on a link we’ve posted). When these people “engage” it results in another 20-40 people (their friends) seeing our posts. Keep on clicking!

Twitter –

Our Face Book is linked to @NYRuralSchools on Twitter, so that each time we post to Face Book, it automatically posts to that Twitter account as well. The Twitter account has been around a little longer, and is owned by John Sipple, who has his own following and also makes his own posts. This helps us increase our exposure to another 1064 people who follow that page.

WE NEED YOUR HELP! (2 items)

Declining Enrollment: Creative Solutions

We know there are lots of things happening in response to declining enrollment. Many are creative solutions to keeping excellent educational programming for our students. RSA would like to house a collection of solutions on our website so you can all learn from each other.

As a first step, we are asking you to let us know briefly what these solutions are, and how we can gather some more details about them.

Please use this link to tell us briefly (two words is fine, if you can do that, but use more if you have to) about them, and how to get more information (name and contact info):

https://cornell.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_0pleHMNZsG2v9KR

You can also find a link under “What’s Coming Up” on our home page: www.rsany.org

College Students in the Classroom: What’s Happening

We are interested in learning about projects that bring college students in contact with rural public school students.

We invite rural public school teachers and other relevant personnel to complete a survey for any projects since Fall 2017, including current projects, that include interaction between your students and college students. Please share with anyone you feel would be able to help.

The purpose of this study is to help rural public schools learn how they might facilitate these partnerships, and/or position themselves to increase such opportunities. This survey will take approximately **10 minutes** to complete.

Here is an anonymous link: https://cornell.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_2aB9DJqQXk897KJ

NAZARETH COLLEGE - MASTER'S DEGREE

Dear Rural Schools Assoc. of NY colleague,

In response to the widespread needs for more teachers with in-demand certifications, Nazareth College has made some exciting updates to cost, convenience, and offerings for our teaching master's degrees.

To make top-quality graduate teaching degrees within reach for more people, Nazareth College has changed its costs for all graduate education programs and adjusted schedules of some programs to add convenience. •

- **Convenience:** New schedules for a number of our graduate programs — combining traditional on-campus class sessions with online sessions — make the master's degrees easier to fit around busy lives and work schedules. Students' trips to campus are limited to one night a week, except during summer. We intentionally didn't go all online because it's valuable to regularly interact with faculty and participate in authentic face-to-face learning experiences, since teaching preK-12 requires face-to-face skills.
- **Cost:** Starting May 18, 2020 (summer A term) and continuing in 2020-21, the cost of completing a master's program in education at Nazareth College will be lower.



Also, Nazareth is offering a new master's degree — **M.S.Ed. TESOL/adolescence education** — that prepares teachers who can teach English language learners at all grade levels (certified preK-12) and teach as a content specialist for grades 7-12 (certified to teach biology, chemistry, English, German, Italian, French, Spanish, math, or social studies — to both native English speakers and English language learners).

[Learn more »](#)

Please share this email with your members!

Sincerely,
Dr. Kate DaBoll-Lavoie
Dean, School of Education
Nazareth College - Rochester, NY
585-389-2618
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What's a community school?



A place and a set of partnerships

A community school is a strategy to create the conditions for learning, growth and success. Community schools address the needs of students in a holistic way — not just their academic achievement, but their overall health and well-being. Using the school as a hub, community schools integrate services, coordinate with partners and use various funding streams to meet students' academic, enrichment, social and health needs — removing barriers to learning and helping students succeed.

All children deserve community schools