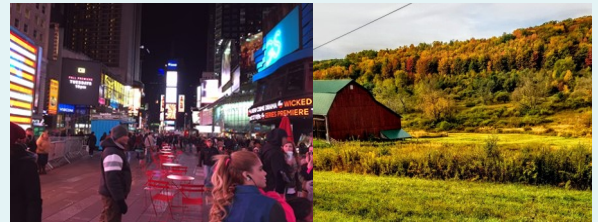




# RSA TODAY

News for New York State's  
Rural Schools

November 2019



I don't live in New York,

I live in New York

**"Communities Committed to Educational Excellence"**

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## NYS AG SEEKING TO BLOCK RURAL BROADBAND ACCESS

There are few things as vital to rural educational parity as access to broadband internet. Children in New York's rural communities lack access to high-speed broadband connectivity, meaning they fall further and further behind their better-connected peers. Seven in 10 teachers assign online homework, but 15% of U.S. households with children have no home Internet. Students without home Internet access consistently have lower scores in reading, math, and science. Our students deserve better. That's why your RSA has been helping to lead the effort to gain governmental approval of the merger between Sprint and T Mobile. Thus far our efforts have resulted in the U.S. Department of Justice and the Federal Communications Commission approving the merger.

Ordinarily, we wouldn't intervene in the business affairs of private corporations, but widespread connectivity creates access to opportunity, and the merger of T-Mobile and Sprint can open that door for millions of Americans. How? In enforceable contracts approved by the FCC and DOJ, the new company will deploy a nationwide 5G network; with 14 times the capacity of standalone T-Mobile—that will make wireless connectivity more accessible to underserved rural consumers.

The New T-Mobile is dedicating itself to putting this massive network capacity to work for good by:

- **Helping to close the digital divide:** After the close of the merger, the New T-Mobile will execute an aggressive rural buildout plan, bringing coverage to 85% of rural Americans within three years of close and to 90% within six.
- **Working to end the homework gap:** After the merger's close, New T-Mobile will launch Project 10Million, a new program aimed at ending the homework gap for underserved students by offering free service, hotspots, and reduced cost devices to 10 million households over five years, backed by a \$10 billion investment.

- **Making cell phone plans more affordable:** Soon after closing, New T-Mobile will make available T-Mobile Connect, a cell phone plan for \$15/month—half off T-Mobile's current lowest price plan. Everyone is eligible for the service, which includes unlimited talk and text and 2 GB of data per month. Every year, New T-Mobile will give customers an additional 500MB of data per month without increasing the cost of the service.

As champions for rural students and educators, it is important that we recognize these benefits and support making them a reality. RSA recently attended a day long legislative hearing on rural broadband in New York State. Current efforts to create rural broadband access were shown to be flawed, a hodgepodge of plans that have been ineffectively implemented and sometimes fraudulently reported as achieving widespread coverage when none exists. Yet, there was no mention of what appears to be the only real prospect of bringing broadband to our rural communities.

Even worse, RSA is concerned about a lawsuit brought by a group of state attorneys general, led by New York Attorney General Letitia James and California Attorney General Xavier Becerra, trying to block the New T-Mobile. This lawsuit remains on track for trial even though the key federal regulatory bodies (the U.S. Department of Justice and the Federal Communications Commission) have approved the merger. The states say they are seeking to block the merger because they believe it will decrease competition and ultimately raise prices. RSA believes that there is little to no competition currently; decreasing it would be of little consequence when the alternative is to continue to be without broadband internet at all (in many areas.)

Because T-Mobile can only offer these services if it can complete the merger, this litigation threatens progress toward closing the digital divide and homework gap and making wireless service more accessible. **The trial is scheduled to start on December 9, so please voice your support now and call on our state attorney general to drop the lawsuit.**

Contact information for the Attorneys General's office is below. If you'd like to share your support on social media, please feel free to use the drafts below:

- @TMobile-@sprint will be a game-changer for rural New Yorkers—particularly students. #5Gforall will cover 85% of rural Americans within 3 years after the merger, helping to close the homework gap 💎 @nreal newtmobile.com
- I support #NewTMobile because of the company's commitments to bring 5G to rural areas & better connect underserved students through programs like #Project10Million. Let's close the homework gap for good! 💎💎 #5Gforall @nreal newtmobile.com
- I urge [**Insert AG Twitter Handle**] to drop the lawsuit that is delaying the @TMobile-@sprint merger. #NewTMobile's commitments to bring 5G to rural areas and better connect underserved students is something we should stand up and applaud! #5Gforall @nreal newtmobile.com
- Letitia James, Attorney General, [Letitia.james@ag.ny.gov](mailto:Letitia.james@ag.ny.gov)
- Ibrahim Khan, Chief of Staff, [ibrahim.khan@ag.ny.gov](mailto:ibrahim.khan@ag.ny.gov)
- Twitter handle: @NewYorkStateAG Address:  
Office of the Attorney General  
The Capitol  
Albany, NY 12224-0341

Broadband access for our rural students has been one of the most pressing concerns expressed in all of our RSA Rural Issues Forums. In every rural area of our state, you have spoken out about the need to put our kids on a level field with their urban and suburban counterparts. This lawsuit is standing in the way of the only sincere and workable effort to make that happen. You can't decrease nonexistent competition. Let's make our voices heard!



# Rural Schools Association Winter Summit



## CONFERENCE ON THE WHOLE CHILD

School leaders want information that will help address the mental health needs of their students.

This conference will provide concrete ideas and actions that can be implemented immediately.

### Tentative program:

- 9 - 10:00 amRegistration & Coffee
- 10 - 10:30 amWelcome  
Hon. Michael Benedetto, *Chair, Assembly Committee on Education*
- 10:30 am - NoonWhat works: Programming in Our Schools and Communities  
Panel - moderated by Dr. Michael Patton, *Superintendent, Saratoga City Schools*
  - Sue Baldwin, *District Wellness Coordinator, Whole School Whole Community Whole Child Model at Buffalo Public Schools*
  - Melissa Seal, *Psychiatric Nurse Practitioner, Glens Falls Pediatrics*
  - Rebecca Baldwin, *Executive Director, Saratoga Center for the Family*
  - Sue Wollner, *Education Consultant, School Mental Health Resource and Training Center, Mental Health Association of New York State*

- Noon - 1:00 pmVaping, Sexual Assault, Red Flag Laws & Other Issues Affecting Students  
Lunch Speaker - Jay Worona, *Deputy Executive Director and General Counsel, New York State School Boards Association*
- 1 - 3:00 pmTrends, Resources, and Outlooks  
Panel - moderated by Dr. Michael Patton, *Superintendent, Saratoga City Schools*
  - Donna Bradbury, *Associate Commissioner, Division of Integrated Community Services for Children and Families, New York State Office of Mental Health*
  - Pat Breaux, *Suicide Prevention Center of New York State*
  - Laura Ficcaro, *New York State Office of Alcohol and Substance Abuse Services*

➤ Ample time has been incorporated into the panel sessions for Q & A, so take this opportunity to get advice and answers about the mental health and wellness of rural school students from the experts!

December 13, 2019

9:00 AM - 3:00 PM

New York State School Boards Association Conference Room  
24 Century Drive • Latham, NY

For more information and to register visit  
<https://www.rsany.org>

Walk-ins welcome!







## FIRST ROUND OF RURAL ISSUES FORUMS REVEAL DEEP CHALLENGES

It was an odyssey for the ages. Dunkirk, Oneonta, Madrid-Waddington, Riverhead, Saratoga Springs, West Seneca and Plattsburgh...and that's only the first round! Last month, RSA set out to hear firsthand what's challenging our rural schools. What are the financial barriers? How has the loss of population and business affected us? What issues do we share and which are unique to each area? What laws and regulations most need changed? Each forum provided a vibrant image of life in our rural communities and the valiant efforts of our schools to overcome significant barriers to student success.

Much of what we heard was an affirmation of what has become painfully obvious: The Great Recession robbed our rural communities of much of their economy. When the jobs left, so did families; in a Grapes of Wrath-like exodus. In other states' rural decline caused a migration to urban and suburban areas of the same state. Not so in New York, where a million people left the state in search of a better life. What remains is what National Rural Teacher of the Year Wade Owlett calls "the hard work of staying."

Some of the challenges listed are: 1. Lack of state funding and the failure of the state to accurately reflect the increased poverty in rural areas. 2. Student enrollment decline. 3. Inability to attract and keep certified teachers 4. The need to change laws and regulations that stand in the way of innovative school structuring (like regional high schools, magnet schools, incentivizing tuitioning of students.) 5. The need for transportation aid for pre-school and after school programs and services. 6. The lack of access to broadband internet in rural areas, keeping business away and students behind their urban and suburban counterparts.

As severe as these issues are, they're just the tip of the iceberg in the total list of rural school concerns. Most of the issues are shared among all districts, like the impact of the upcoming U.S. Census on state and federal aid, as well as the decreased numbers of legislators representing our rural communities. Some are unique to a few areas, such as a viable means of transporting Amish students to their schools when their lack of vaccinations forces schools to keep them separated.

The forums themselves proved beneficial in bringing community and school leaders together. State legislators, SUNY college presidents and professors, town and county leaders, State Education Department staff, BOCES program directors and district superintendents, as well as concerned parents, teachers, board of education members and students all joined to provide an accurate picture of what we're facing and offer suggestions for improvement. Media coverage of the forums helped spread awareness of the rural crisis from one end of the state to the other. PBS in Plattsburgh broadcast the entire forum!

Where do we go from here? The plan is to complete the remaining forums over the winter months (we still have forums in the southern Adirondacks and Central New York to go) then bring in education, economic development and other experts to offer their recommendations on addressing the identified challenges. The resulting policy brief will be the subject of an Advocacy Action Plan to turn your best ideas into student achievement. Thanks to all who have participated in the forums! With your help, we can bend once more the hearts of our leaders to the minds of our children.

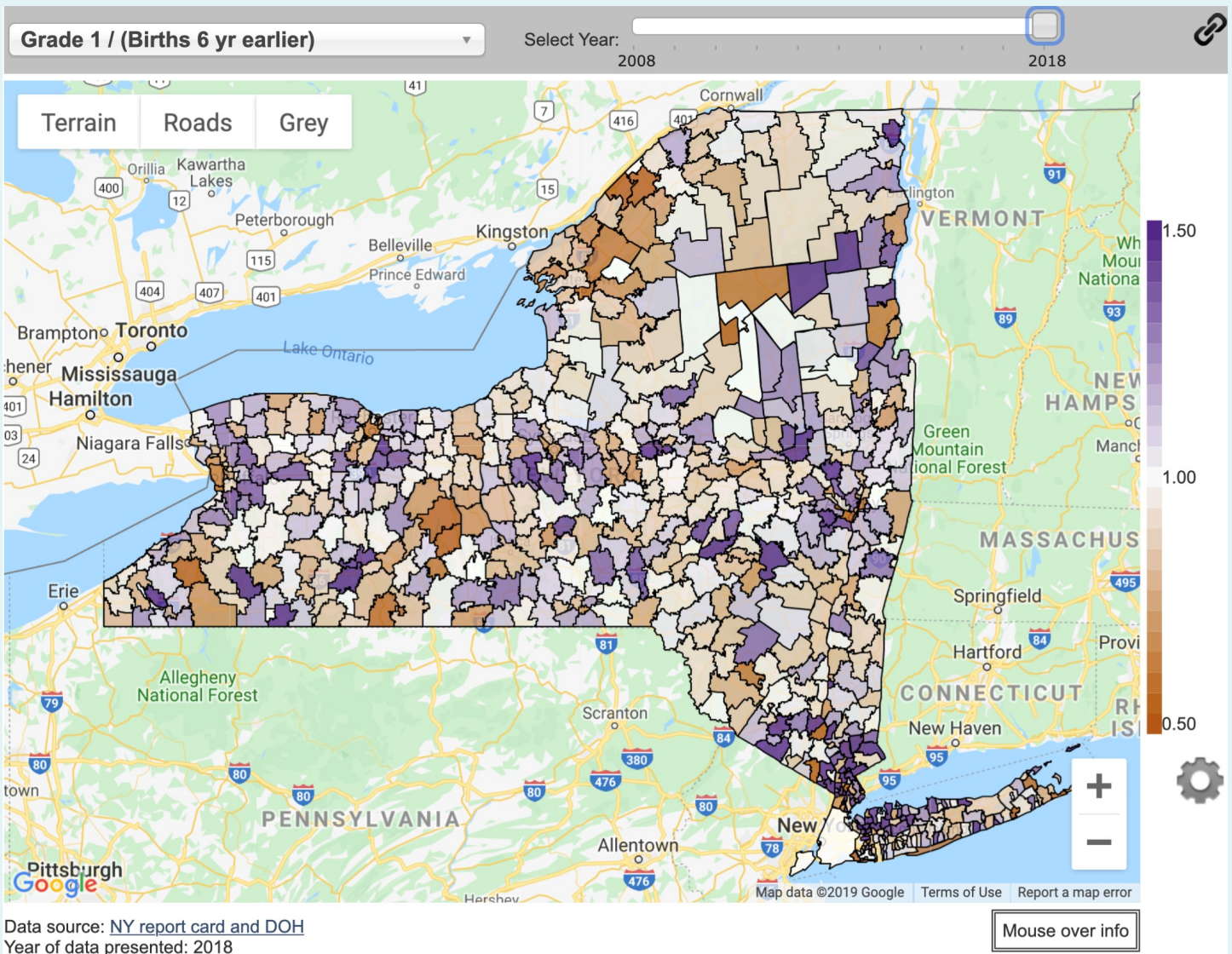
David Little Interviews:

WCAX: <https://www.wcax.com/content/news/NY-rural-educators-gather-to-exchange-ideas-564574251.html>

Rural Schools Issues Forum Plattsburgh, NY - Weds evening, 11/6/2019 <https://youtu.be/jDzGguhik4I>

# NEW AND USEFUL DATA FOR ENROLLMENT PLANNING

Ever wonder how local birth rates relate to your first grade enrollment? We recently added a new variable to the suite of data tools at <http://NYEducationData.org>. The new variable uses Live-Birth data from the State Health Department and includes it in a calculation that gives some sense of whether your first grade enrollment is larger or smaller than the number of births in your community 6 years earlier. As seen in this map, you can see how the purple districts have a value over 1 meaning that the first grade public school enrollment is larger than would have been predicted by simply looking at births 6 years earlier. The Brown districts have first grade enrollments smaller than the number of births 6 years earlier. The white districts are about even and have roughly a 1-1 ratio between the two. Multiple tools now use this data including our **Enrollment Projections**, The **25 Year Trend** tools, and the **Map your Favorite Variable** tool. Check out the ratio for your own district! Please reach out to John Sipple if you have questions ([jsipple@cornell.edu](mailto:jsipple@cornell.edu))







## ACTIVISTS PROTEST USDA CHANGES THAT THREATEN FREE SCHOOL LUNCH

When Elle Simone Scott was a young girl, her family relied on food stamps and her school's free lunch program to get by.

"At several points in my life, receiving free lunch when I needed it the most, it was so beneficial for me," she says. "You know, it was sometimes the most complete meal that I and some of my friends would have in a day."

Now Scott, a chef and [TV host of \*America's Test Kitchen\*](#), is part of a coalition fighting to save the program from a proposed rule change

by the Trump administration.

Scott was among a few dozen people – including anti-hunger groups, parents, students and local activists – who staged a "lunch in" outside the U.S. Department of Agriculture on Thursday. They were there to deliver petitions with 1.5 million signatures urging the agency not to adopt the proposed rule change.

The change, first announced over the summer, would eliminate Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits, or SNAP, as the food stamps program is now known, for more than 3 million people by eliminating something called broad-based categorical eligibility, a policy that gives states the flexibility to waive some asset and income limits for households that receive both SNAP and other welfare benefits.

As NPR's Pam Fessler has reported, "most states take advantage of these waivers, in part because it makes it easier to administer safety-net programs, which often have different eligibility requirements."

Last month, the USDA released an analysis showing that the change would also result in nearly a million children losing automatic access to free school lunch.

The agency estimates that even with the change, about half of the affected children would still be eligible for free lunch if they applied to the program separately. Even so, the additional paperwork required could be burdensome for families that are already struggling to make ends meet, says Dionna Howard, a D.C. parent and local activist with [PAVE](#) (Parents Amplifying Voices in Education), who spoke at Thursday's event.

"It's a lot that they take you through for the little bit that they give you," says Howard, who told the crowd gathered for the event that she had first-hand experience with the SNAP program. Her mother, she said, still relies on the benefits.

The USDA analysis suggests 51% of affected kids would likely be eligible for reduced-price school meals, instead of free ones; another 4 percent, or 40,000 children, would lose free lunches altogether, because their family incomes exceed eligibility limits.

In announcing the rule change over the summer, Agriculture Secretary Sunny Perdue noted that it would save \$2.5 billion a year from SNAP. But [Mike Curtin](#), CEO of DC Central Kitchen, an anti-hunger nonprofit, argued that SNAP is "one of the most efficient, least abused, most successful governments support programs that was ever been invented." He said leaders should be looking for ways to expand access to the program, not limit it.

"We often in this country talk about the kids ... and the kids are the future," he says. "Well, if we want to give our kids a future, the first thing we need to do is give them lunch."

The public comment period on the proposed change to SNAP closed on Nov. 1. But Bethany Robertson co-founder of [ParentsTogether](#), which helped [organize the petition](#), hopes it will galvanize lawmakers to block the change from taking effect.

"We expect that the additional petitions will hopefully motivate some lawmakers and also other officials to just say, 'hey, wait a minute, we need to take a second look at this,'" Robertson says.

## BEST WISHES FOR A PROMPT AND COMPLETE RECOVERY!



RSA Board of Director and Hinsdale Board of Education member Jennifer Howell continues her recovery from an automobile accident this fall. Jenn was hit head on by a vehicle that crossed the center line. Her injuries were severe, but Jenn's trademark positivity and determination are winning. Jenn has pledged to be present at RSA's April board meeting and we have no doubt she'll triumph! Jenn's insight and enthusiasm for the task of improving the lives of rural students is an inspiration. We have no doubt that the story of her recovery will be one as well! Go get 'em, Jenn!



## SPECIAL MESSAGE FOR SUPERINTENDENTS

Not only is it the holiday season, it's RSA's membership season. If you haven't responded to your invoice yet, we ask that you do it as soon as you can. RSA is holding its dues steady for the coming year and we continue to be a tremendous bargain at \$750 per year. If your district is experiencing a particularly difficult time financially, please contact me at 518-888-4598 and we can arrange for a deeply discounted one time membership rate for this year. Fact is, being able to speak for all of our rural schools is just as important as the revenue. We need you to be able to help all rural schools! Please help us help you by joining with your sister districts.

**One last thing:** The information RSA puts out in RSA Today and in its Albany Alerts and Washington Watch alerts is important to the whole school community. We send RSA Today to superintendents with the expectation that they'll forward it to their administrative team, the board of education and (hopefully) the entire school staff. This helps alert them to resources they may need and helps bolster our advocacy efforts by including more voices. If you don't already forward RSA Today and the alerts to your school community, please, please start now!

With fewer residents of our rural communities, fewer students in our schools and (soon) fewer legislators representing our areas, our rural schools need to speak loudly and with a unified message. Please share the information, so that we can all benefit from the knowledge and speak out on behalf of our schools, our communities and most importantly, our students.

**Thanks so much for your help in this vital effort!**

## ON THE ROAD WITH RSA



**Attendees at the Hearing**



**Emerson Brown of Auburn City Schools Testifies at the Hearing**



**Senate Education Committee Chair Shelley Mayer hosts one of several forums on state aid reform. This one was in Syracuse. Senators Mayer, May, Liu and Little at the Hearing**



## ON THE ROAD WITH RSA



NYSSBA Director B.A. Schoen stops by the RSA booth at the Education Expo of the NYSSBA Convention in Rochester. The booth was a busy place and RSA not only answered questions of members (and potential members) and vendors, but also held a successful Rural Schools Summit with a full convention of programming specifically aimed at our rural districts.

RSA made full use of the NYSSBA Convention in Rochester by holding its Rural Summit, staffing an information booth and hosting the Rural Schools Breakfast. This is Rochester's High Falls with the Convention Center above it.



RSA recently presented a plaque to Scott Jordan and the Cuba Rushford Central School District honoring Scott's selection as New York State's first National Rural Teacher of the Year. Pictured here are Supt. Carlos Gildemeister, Scott's wife Jody, Scott Jordan, Dave Little and board president Mark Neu.



New York State  
School Boards  
Association

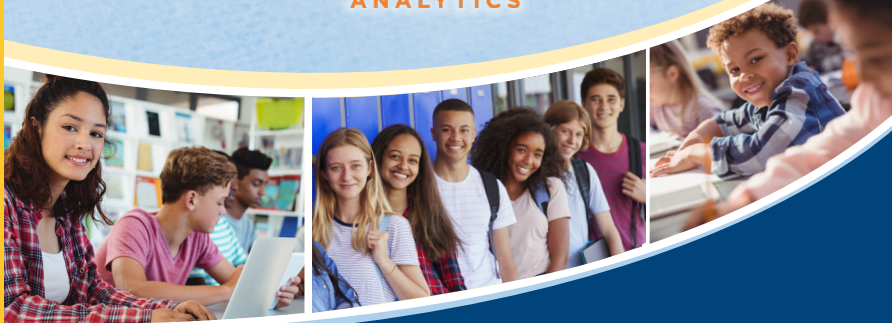
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*Happy Thanksgiving*

