



RSA TODAY

News for New York State's
Rural Schools

October 2018



I don't live in New York,

I live in New York

"Communities Committed to Educational Excellence"

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VOTING MATTERS

By: David Little, RSA Executive Director

Yes, yes it does. I'm not talking about the usual entreaty to get yourself off the couch and do your civic duty. For those of us involved in school governance, our own responsibility to go vote is a given. I'm talking about our broader responsibility to get others out there too. Next month's elections will set a stage for dramatic changes in rural education in New York State. There are 12 vacant seats in the state senate alone; seats that will change the state's approach to school funding...or not. There are battles over congressional seats that will focus our federal government's attention on public education...or not. How rural New Yorkers vote (...or not) will determine more than the direction of our government and the attention they pay to rural school issues. This year how and whether rural New Yorkers vote will determine whether we matter at all, whether we can be politically ignored or not and whether our needs will be met with critical resources or our current meager resources will be siphoned off to meet the political demands of others in our state.



This year's vote needs to send a profound message to our political leaders: **Rural New York matters!** It matters to the state's economy. It matters to the state's future. It matters to who we are as a people.

Rural New York has had days when its economy was robust enough to bail out other parts of our state; when its population was large enough to swing elections and dictate policy. Today, we are at the tail end of a huge population loss, the loss of major portions of our rural economy and in some cases, the loss of entire communities. As if that weren't challenging enough, we apparently haven't sufficiently educated our state leaders about the cause of this exodus. Just last week, our governor indicated that the loss of a million residents out of rural New York was merely the natural result of senior citizens leaving for warmer climes. The mind reels.

We are facing a US Census in 2020 that will reflect our population losses in decreased state and federal funding, as well as state and federal representation. Those losses will exacerbate our already desperate circumstances. We need our leaders to take notice and take action; before our problems become insurmountable and our losses irreversible.



Next month's vote is our means of grabbing the attention of our leaders, of ensuring that they take us into account and provide the help we need. We've done it for others. Now we need the favor returned. **We do this by mobilizing our communities to vote next month!** Use social media, district newsletters, public forums; anything to impress on our residents just how pivotal this election will be to our future. The Rotary, Chambers of Commerce, Elks, volunteer fire companies, Little Leagues and Pop Warner, Boy Scouts; everyone knows that voting is important, but they all need to know that this year it is the MOST important thing we can do for our communities. Get your boosters to create email lists, use Twitter, talk it up in the diner. There simply is nothing as important to the long term welfare of your students and the community that supports them.

Sometimes you have to help people help themselves. It's our job as leaders and our privilege as Americans.



Rural Student Mental Health and Safety Conference Friday, December 14th, 2018 10AM to 3PM Crowne Plaza in Lake Placid



Hear from top experts relaying the most timely and important information to support and protect your students. The conference is planned to compress information into a shorter time frame to allow travel from significant distances. You don't have to live in the North Country to benefit from this high level summit on the most pressing issue facing our schools. You won't want to miss the chance to hear from the experts, as well as discuss implementation with your peers!

We have a lineup of experts from Cornell University and the Mental Health Association in NYS to talk with you about all things mental health: poverty's impacts, outdoor time, environment, the new health curricular requirement, etc. Our aim is for you to leave with a deeper understanding to help inform your responses, together with an array of ideas and tools you can use in the short and near term, with little or no additional resources.

Keynote speaker Dr. Gary Evans from Cornell University's College of Human Ecology will talk about his work looking at how poverty impacts students' ability to learn, and what can be done to ameliorate negative impacts.

He will be followed by the Executive Director, and North Country Regional Support from the Mental Health Association of NY to tell you about the resources they have for implementing the new mental health curriculum requirements.

Dr. Gen Meredith from Cornell will then talk with you about contextual factors that impact student mental health, and ideas for how we can work these to better favor mental health. She is currently researching the positive impacts of students spending time outdoors.

Finally, Dr. Anna Haskins from Cornell will share with you some of her work on how having an absent parent impacts student learning, how these impacts compare other separation traumas (foster care placement, family separation, death of a parent, parental addiction or mental illness, etc.), and give ideas schools can use to help buffer these impacts.

Price is \$75.00 per registrant (lunch is included)

Watch www.rsany.org for registration materials and agenda details to come out around late October/early November

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RSA recently served as the keynote presentation at the annual conference of School Facilities Managers in Saratoga Springs. It's been a busy fall so far, as your RSA has also spoken at the fall NYSCOSS conference, the Grange Legislative conference and the fall meeting of the Chautauqua County School Boards Association (with more on the way!)





CCE STEM Efforts Included In NYS Impact Feature

Cornell Chronicle launched a new NYS multimedia feature on Cornell's K-12 outreach programs. The feature highlights Cornell's (and CCE's!) work statewide to provide learning opportunities in science, math, technology and engineering fields for students. [View the feature here.](#)

Potsdam Central Gets First Batch of Produce From Farm to School Program

CANTON -- St. Lawrence-Lewis BOCES delivered the first batch of produce to Potsdam Central School on Sept. 24 as part of the new Farm to School Program.

SLL BOCES was the recipient of \$79,615 in grant funding for a Farm-to-School program, which operates in partnership with the Cornell Cooperative Extension of St. Lawrence County and Big Spoon Kitchen.

The funds support a system which enables schools to purchase locally grown foods from 25 producers and growers in the region.

The CCE coordinates with producers to purchase vegetables, fruits, and other locally grown foods.

Big Spoon Kitchen then provides minimal processing and packaging to prepare the foods for consumption in school cafeterias across the North Country.

SLL BOCES delivers the food directly to the 21 participating school cafeterias, which serve roughly 18,600 students daily.

The grant funding also provided for additional capital improvements to the CCE's Harvest Kitchen, including a walk-in cooler and dry goods storage space for finished products awaiting delivery.

"We are thrilled to have this program up and running for the 2018-19 school year. The farm to school program will provide a market for our local farmers to sell their products, and benefit the thousands of students who will enjoy fresh, healthy food each day. This is a true example of partnership and collaboration and we are proud to act as a model for the rest of the state," said Artie Frego, Director of Food Service at St. Lawrence-Lewis BOCES.

"Extension is very pleased with the progress this partnership has forged with the Farm-to-School Program. The resulting process addresses many gaps that have existed in the local food system, as it related to getting usable local products into school districts. This includes sourcing raw product, processing and packaging it, storage, and distribution. We remain very optimistic about the potential impacts of this program," said Patrick Ames, Executive Director of CCE of St. Lawrence County.

CCE will conduct a "Know Your Farmer" campaign in conjunction with the Farm to School Program to help students better understand and appreciate where their food comes from.

For more information about St. Lawrence-Lewis BOCES, please visit www.sllboces.org.

To learn more about the Cornell Cooperative Extension of St. Lawrence County, visit <http://www.stlawrence.cce.cornell.edu>.

From: thisweek@northcountrynow.com





Watertown High School Receives Grant Toward New Agriculture Program

WATERTOWN — An agriculture program has been launched at Watertown High School for students to gain experience in the field.

To promote the program, the high school received a \$10,000 educational grant Friday at the school's homecoming pep rally, sponsored by Monsanto Fund's "America's Farmers Grow" rural education program.

The grant will provide curriculum and equipment for the development of a student-run system that combines raising aquatic creatures with cultivating plants in water.

Watertown High School agriculture teacher Melissa A. Fregoe-Cronk said she has been pushing for this program in the school district for years. Previously a teacher of living-environment and animal-science courses, Mrs. Fregoe-Cronk said she will now also teach courses in food and natural resources and plant science.

In the new system, she said the students will have tilapia and brook trout, as well as growing vegetables to be distributed throughout the district's cafeterias. Elementary and intermediate schools will also receive some education by sharing three mini-units, known as aquasprouts, which can grow herbs and lettuce.

Mrs. Fregoe-Cronk said this program in the area is crucial considering the wide variety of job opportunities students may not be aware of.

"By guiding the younger grades through the maintenance of a system, both older and younger kids are being immersed in the study of agriculture," she said.

By OLIVIA BELANGER
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Local schools declining in enrollment

By Allison Collins Contributing Writer The Daily Star
Sep 30, 2018 Updated Oct 5, 2018



It's no secret that rural schools face challenges and, according to a list published on Sept. 21 by NYUpstate, several local districts are among the Top 50 fastest-shrinking statewide.

A representative from the New York State Department of Education said, while the agency does not rank districts, it does aggregate the data used in NYUpstate's list. The ranking examined the number of students lost over the past five years.

Area districts in the Top 20 included No. 19, Gilbertsville-Mount Upton; No. 15, Downsville Central School; No. 11, Gilboa-Conesville Central School; No. 10, Jefferson Central School; and No. 9, Richfield Springs Central School.

Districts in Stamford, Greene, Edmeston and Sharon Springs were also named, at 33, 38, 44 and 45. Though awareness of the ranking varied among administrators interviewed, all said they've watched as their enrollments decline.

According to the ranking, Gilboa-Conesville, a pre-K through 12 Schoharie County district, has experienced a 22.2 percent, 80-student drop.

Principal Jack Etter said, after student population peaked around 500 pupils many* years ago, it sits at about 300.

Etter said Gilboa-Conesville's struggles reflect larger economic issues not unique to rural areas, but affecting them especially.

"Here we have no industry," he said. "So, it's trying to get industry to come back to the area and that's not a school district's job, but that is what we need, a reason for our kids to stay."

At Downsville Central School, a pre-K through 12 district in Delaware County with about 230 kids, administrators said they expect the 19.58 percent drop to level off.

"It's not surprising," Robert Rhinehart, Downsville principal, said. "We saw the trend approaching several years ago, but we actually plan on stabilizing at the numbers we're at now."

Downsville, the ranking stated, has lost 56 students.

"Our grade level sizes range from the smallest, 12, to our largest of 20," Rhinehart said. "When I started 16 years ago, our average class size (was) in the 20s, with an occasional 30. We don't have any class now that's greater than 20; our average for each grade level is 17 and that's pretty consistent all the way down to pre-K." Rhinehart said he wasn't aware of particular factors driving the drop, but called decreasing enrollment "just a trend of the area."

"All or most of our area schools are experiencing the same trend," he said.

Gilbertsville-Mount Upton Superintendent Annette Hammond said she'd seen the listing and, though familiar

with G-MU's shrinkage, was surprised to find it ranked 19th.

"We've been looking at this for years and watching it go down, so we certainly knew enrollment was declining," she said, "but we didn't know where we were at compared to schools across the state."

Like Etter, Hammond pointed to economic depression as a factor in her district's 18.5 percent, 79-student, decrease. G-MU has roughly 347 K through 12 students. Though the district offers pre-K, Hammond noted, the state does not apply those numbers to overall student population.

"When we merged (Gilbertsville and Mount Upton) 20-plus years ago," she said, "we were in the 600 range. But there's not a lot of economic opportunity for families and ... that certainly plays a role in keeping people here."

While recognizing the challenges, physical and fiscal, of decreasing enrollment, administrators said their focus remains on keeping things student-centered.

"Yes, the numbers are down, but we are only embracing that," Etter said. "We're not sitting here going, 'Oh, my god, we're going to close.' We try to use technology and field trips to expose kids to as much of the outside world as possible."

"One of the challenges is trying to maintain opportunities and programming for students," Hammond said. "My hope is to be able to offer programming that keeps us competitive."

To do that, rural schools are increasingly relying on each other, Etter and Hammond said.

"With technology and working together, I think you're going to start to see us becoming stronger," Etter said. "It's utilizing connections and ... using every piece of everything. That, and everybody does everything. In some districts, teachers work to the rule; here, everybody does whatever they can to help kids."

"We're very proud of what we do ... but good teaching is hard and even harder in small communities," he added. "We take care of each other, but it's a struggle."

"We're collaborating a lot with neighboring districts and that helps," Hammond said. "It's about out-of-the-box thinking and regional collaboration." She noted that through the DCMO BOCES, programs designed to promote population retention while matching students with area businesses are underway.

In a written statement, Jeanne Beattie of NYSED's Office of Communications said the U.S. Department of Education's approval of the Every Student Succeeds Act, passed earlier this year, will potentially help rural districts.

"ESSA is about creating a set of interlocking strategies to promote educational equity," she said, "and this begins with the approximately \$1.6 billion annually that the federal government provides New York ... to enable additional educational services (for) students who, according to our data, need extra support to succeed."

Beattie named low-income students, English language learners, migrant and homeless students and "students in rural districts where sparse population density creates its own challenges" among areas earmarked for ESSA funding.

Visit nyupstate.com to view the complete rankings.

We Already Know School Starts Too Early. It's Time to Do Something About It



Teenagers shouldn't have to go to class while half asleep

By David Polochanin
October 2, 2018

Common sense, as a general idea, seems easy to define. But when it comes to the time that middle and high school students start school in most places across the United States, the education community has been doing it wrong—with numerous, hard-to-ignore studies, sleep experts, and national organizations rightly blasting the negative impact on adolescents to begin class around 7:30 a.m.

On this topic, most schools have been in the Dark Ages, literally and figuratively. The vast majority of districts do not heed recommendations by the American Academy of Pediatrics to hold off beginning middle and high school until 8:30 a.m.

For advocates of a later start time for secondary schools, it was a brief ray of hope to learn of California's recent progress on the matter, with lawmakers there approving a bill that would require all middle and high schools to begin after 8:30 a.m. Unfortunately, Gov. Jerry Brown, citing that the decision should be made by local school boards, vetoed the legislation late last month.

"When you consider the negative impact of an early school day on adolescents and pre-adolescents, the facts can no longer be ignored."

Even with the California setback, the movement to push back school start times is gaining momentum nationally. From Saco, Maine, to Seattle, many districts have already successfully pushed back the start times of high schools and middle schools—and with largely positive results. For instance, according to the nonprofit group Start School Later, Saco schools have seen a 40 percent drop in tardiness, an almost 50 percent reduction in student visits to the nurse, and staff reports that students are more alert and ready to learn since they moved to a later start time in 2016.

Scores rise, too, when schools align their schedules with adolescent biological clocks. In 2014, a three-year, 9,000-student study from researchers at the University of Minnesota found that students whose high schools changed their schedules to start at 8:30 a.m. or later [improved their performance in English, math, science, social studies, and standardized tests](#).

So, if the research is clear that making this change yields an overwhelmingly positive outcome, the burning question is: Why has this taken so long? And: When will other districts follow suit?

The answers are muddled by a mix of factors, ranging from a shift in family schedules, potential budget adjustments to accommodate more buses, challenges with after-school sports and activities, and the prospect of having students complete their homework later at night than they already do. But the main issue, experts studying the change agree, is one of simple inconvenience. Schools and their communities have been so accustomed to the current schedule that many are resistant to change. It's much easier to do what has always been done.

However, when you consider the negative impact of an early school day on adolescents and pre-adolescents, the facts can no longer be ignored. [Thirteen- to 18-year-olds require 8 to 10 hours](#) of sleep daily, according to the American Academy of Sleep Medicine. Circadian rhythms during puberty force teens to go to bed later and sleep later in the morning. Anyone who has taught middle and high school, or has a child in this age range, can attest to this. (Forehead on the dining room table during breakfast, anyone?) School start times forcing teens to wake up before 6 a.m. clearly do not align with teens' sleep needs.

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, adolescents who do not get the required amount of sleep are at risk for a host of serious physical problems, including obesity and diabetes; safety concerns, including drowsy driving; issues related to mental health, including increased anxiety, depression, and decreased motivation; and a decrease in school performance, such as cognitive impairment, problems with attention and memory, lower academic achievement, poor attendance, and higher dropout rate.

The author of the failed California bill, Democratic state senator Anthony J. Portantino, recently told The New York Times that forcing teens to get out of bed so early is "the biological equivalent of waking you or me up at 3:30 a.m. Imagine how you would feel if, 187 days a year, you had to get up at 3:30 a.m. You'd be miserable, you'd be depressed—you'd act like a teenager."

With such compelling evidence, it makes one wonder how children in middle and high schools have been able to function well at all in school—at least during the early morning hours. It also calls to mind how an earlier start time could have helped millions of students who haven't performed well, faced physical problems, or dropped out because they have had to wake up far earlier than they should have.

As author Daniel H. Pink states in his latest book, *When*, this is a remediable problem. "Starts matter," he writes. "We can't always control them. But this is one area where we can and therefore we must."

Veteran educators know that, each year, communities throughout the country spend millions on costly new initiatives—technology, curriculum, new buildings, to name a few—many of which have marginal positive impact on student learning.

If school superintendents and boards of education were to examine the research behind secondary school start times, it is impossible to disagree: Outdated schedules are failing many students. We can no longer be complacent. As schools look for an answer to boost student attendance, performance, and engagement, making a change in start times for secondary students is an obvious solution.

Now, which districts will read the research and have the common sense—and the courage—to make the change?

