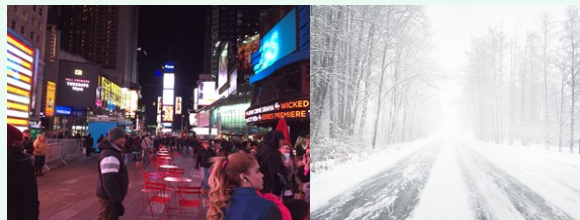




RSA TODAY

News for New York State's
Rural Schools

December 2019



I don't live in New York,

I live in New York

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**David Little,
RSA Executive
Director**

BEFORE WE PUT OUR SHOULDERS TO THE WHEEL

LET'S PUT OUR NOSE IN THE WIND

Happiest of holiday seasons, everyone! As advocates for rural students, we have an advantage over old Ebenezer Scrooge in that no ghost needs to convince us that life's joy comes from helping others. It's our privilege and our calling to prepare those who follow us to live their best lives. Making their lives better gives meaning to our own. Yet, that doesn't mean we're all about holiday snow and mistletoe. In fact, it often means we have to scratch and claw to give those kids a fighting chance against some pretty astronomical odds. Its rewarding work, but the rewards are hard earned. So be it!

Both the Board of Regents and the Educational Conference Board (made up of PTA, NYSSBA, NYSCOSS, NYSUT, AASBO and others) have called for an additional \$2 billion in school aid for the upcoming state budget. The Empire Center for Public Policy claims neither group is operating in the real world, where the state faces a \$6 billion deficit over the next three years as a result of federal cuts shifting responsibilities to the state. They indicate that our state already has a much higher per student spending average than other states, is much higher than the rate of inflation and causes the rest of the state budget needs to suffer. (See story reprinted pages 8-9)

Which side is right? Sadly, both. It's true that we consistently spend more than other states. We have a high proportion of high needs students and we live in a high cost state. We pay our school employees comparatively well and public education is a labor intensive operation. We live in the Northeast and our costs of operating are high in all areas, like fuel, insurance and construction. But if you've been in public education for any time at all, you know that the problem in New York State isn't in the total amount we spend, but in how we pass it out. Simply put, no state does a worse job of making sure every child gets a fair piece of the pie. Don't take my word for it. Google it! Literally every national evaluator puts us dead last. We rely too heavily on the local taxpayer and too little on the state, which creates tremendous variations in resources (and therefore, opportunities for kids.)



The state legislature has shed light on the problem through this fall's hearings and roundtable discussions on funding reform. The discussion has revealed a real schism in how the state should approach its attempt to increase both equity and adequacy in the state aid formula. One side urges updating the funding formula to accurately adjust for increases in poverty, English Language Learners, transience and needed social and emotional programs. The other side says you can't figure out whether you need to change the formula until you've fully funded the current one (and the state is still billions behind.) Not surprisingly, the opinions fall along the same lines as the distribution of potential aid increases.



New York City's student population has increased and the formula does a pretty good job of measuring their collective level of poverty, so low and behold, they prefer fully funding a system that focuses on a per pupil count. Most other districts need a more strategic revision, correcting the formula for outdated and now inaccurate numbers. As a group, they've (we've) lost students but endured significant increases in the rate of poverty, loss of local revenue and staggering increases in student needs. Simply increasing funding under the existing formula means that rural schools would see years of further decline, despite money going to high needs districts (as New York City is a high need district and has a third of all students in the state; including recent increases in student numbers that would boost their state support.) Both groups are right to push the position that addresses their legitimate student needs. It's hard to argue against either correcting blatantly inaccurate information forming the basis of your aid, or that having more students should mean more funding.

The state itself will of course claim that it can do neither in the current fiscal climate. After all, we have a \$6 billion deficit on our hands! They are likely to use that hyperbole to prevent either side from getting what they need and no doubt, they'll use the division within our own ranks to politically cover their inadequate increase. The truth, as usual is somewhere in the middle. The state doesn't have a \$6 billion deficit; if nothing is done, it may have one three years from now. That's a big difference that is ignored by not only the state but the media. As Mark Twain said, reports of our demise are greatly exaggerated. Fact is though, we spend so much in total, that it takes a boatload of cash to keep providing increases for everyone when you've capped how much local communities can contribute. Sure the tax cap is tough on schools in struggling communities but we know you can't overtax the few remaining folks who are trying valiantly to stick it out. The real impact of the tax cap is in wealthy communities that under our current system should be contributing more and freeing up state aid for those who really need it. The way we work it now, we have to provide for them regardless of the fact that the formula says they don't need a state increase. As long as we don't shift state funding increases to where it's truly needed, we'll need to keep asking for an unrealistic amount of funding.



For many years, NYSCOSS' Bob Lowry has said the state should either fix its rules or fund them. Right now it's trying to figure out which is more realistic. The state's political picture has created an environment where change is possible. Our advocacy right now will determine whether rural students are winners or losers in that effort. So my friends, in this season of giving, I ask that you join me in once again steering the hearts of our leaders to the minds of our children. Creating a future for kids with little hope will be a wonderful holiday gift! May God bless us in that work.

CONFERENCE ON THE WHOLE CHILD COMPELS A RSANY WEBPAGE OF RESOURCES

Attendees from around the state gathered in Latham, NY on December 13 to learn more about serving the “whole child,” particularly in support of mental wellness. By the end of the day, so many resources had been shared that RSA vowed to create a page on their website for student mental health resources. Look for it under the “Features & Services” menu.



**Assembly Education Committee Chair
Michael Benedetto opens the RSA
Winter Conference on The Whole Child.**

The morning began with an address by Honorable Michael Benedetto, Chair for the Assembly Committee on Education. He stressed that we have children with additional needs that we need to figure out how to serve in a holistic manner. While many people have ideas about how to address issues in public education, it takes an insider to create effective solutions. In the case of student mental health and wellness, this will mean more than simply adding a school counselor; we need to look at family and community resources, nutrition, physical activity, etc and make sure all of these are meeting children’s needs.

Dr. Michael Patton, Superintendent for Saratoga City Schools moderated the first panel. Dr. Sue Baldwin, Coordinator for the Buffalo City Schools’ Whole School Whole Community Whole Child Model shared the building blocks of the model, and foundational processes for success. Among these, creating policy and measurement systems around wellness activities are imperative for proper implementation. This

was echoed by other panelists throughout the day. To contact Sue you can email her at sbaldwin@buffaloschools.org

Melissa Seale discussed her practice model as a Psychiatric Nurse Practitioner within a pediatric clinic. In a region with very few pediatric psychiatry providers, this model allows her to not only have her own case load of a couple hundred children, but also to consult with and inform the work of all the other non-psychiatry-trained practitioners in her clinic. This way she is able to expand her reach and address psychiatric needs of children exponentially. She also strongly encouraged schools to reach out and develop relationships with mental health practitioners as early as possible so that they can give ideas for preventing escalation of difficulties for children and families. To contact Melissa you can email her at meleq1@aol.com



**NYSSBA Deputy Executive Director & General
Counsel Jay Worona provides a child centered
legal update to attendees of
The Whole Child Conference**

The reality is that schools “don’t know what we don’t know” in terms of what is and is not a symptom or sign that ought to be flagged, and community mental health practitioners also “don’t know what they don’t know” about children’s disclosures or behaviors that may be subclinical, but signal something to keep an eye on, or even act on. Rebecca Baldwin, Executive Director of the Saratoga Center for the Family addresses this with her program. She directs a clinic that has established satellite offices in school buildings across her region – many rural. In this way, a licensed mental health practitioner (MHP) has an office in the school building and can provide therapy to students AND THEIR FAMILIES. Not only this, but the MHP can also consult and provide trainings for teaching and support staff in the building. Rebecca has even staggered hours for MHPs so that before- and after-school hours can be covered to meet families’ needs. To contact Rebecca you can email her at rbaldwin@saratogacff.org

Sue Wollner, an Education Consultant with the School Mental Health Resource and Training Center at the Mental Health Association of NYS (MHANYS) helps identify and fill training gaps at schools. She explained that MHANYS has several Education Consultants assigned regionally, and each county has affiliated organizations that provide resources as well. She can help you connect with yours so you can tap into a LOT of FREE training – not just for teachers, but for parents and students as well! This includes the Youth Mental Health First Aid training that helps youth identify and respond to others who may be struggling. They have, and continue to develop, online training modules and webinars too. To contact Sue you can email her at swollner@mhany.org

A strong message coming out of this group was that while we can support student mental health at school, if their families are not also supported, there is only so much we can do for the student. Getting to know community resources relevant to families (food pantries, housing organizations, homework and tutoring help, heating and utility assistance, WIC, health care options, etc) and being able to help connect families to these resources is an important role schools can play, and families often expect schools to have this information and offer it. Your county department of social services can give you much of this information in one call.

During lunch, we heard the latest from NYSSBA's Deputy Executive Director and General Counsel, Jay Worona. He shared the latest information on several topics, including free speech (including in-person and online bullying) and related disciplinary strategies. Jay's slides will also be available on our RSA Student Wellness Resources webpage.

The afternoon panel was also moderated by Dr. Patton, who highlighted the need for us all to understand that some stress is good. We often see parents or teachers trying to eliminate ALL stress for students, when some degree of stress and difficulty helps prepare them for life as an adult, particularly when we can help them learn stress management techniques along as they move through it.

Donna Bradbury, Associate Commissioner for the Division of Integrated Community Services for Children and Families at the NYS Office of Mental Health stressed that student mental health is their #1 concern among superintendents right now. She pointed out that the uptick in children's mental health problems coincides with the widespread use of the smart phone, and while these have not been formally linked, we do know that children's use of social media often has negative impacts on their mental and emotional well-being. Donna also talked about one of the best ways to link into your community mental health network for children is through your county's Sing Point of Access (SPOA) group. Again, a call to your local department of social services will help connect you to this group. This is a group of your local service providers who meets regularly – generally once a month - to problem-solve the most serious cases involving children in your community. Joining this group regularly will help you better understand services available, and allow the school to participate as a support, and as a receiver of support, when it comes to the toughest challenges we face. To contact Donna, you can email her at Donna.Bradbury@omh.ny.gov

Dr. Brett Harris from the Suicide Prevention Center of NYS spoke about how important it is to create school policies around prevention, intervention, and post-vention (which is also prevention) at your school right now, when you are not having a crisis. Acting on this outside of crisis, we can think more rationally without emotions getting in the way. This also supports everyone when a crisis does occur and people are very emotional and want to do something to help. The Suicide Prevention Center does offer trainings to schools and communities on many of these issues. She stressed that while suicide rates have plateaued in the past few years across NY, in rural areas, suicide rates have increased across age groups. This is due in part to more access to firearms and less access to mental/health services. To contact Brett, you can email her at Brett.Harris@omh.ny.gov

Dr. Laura Ficara from the NYS Office of Addiction Services and Supports (still OASAS, but formerly called the Office of Alcohol and Substance Abuse Services) said that while substance use has slightly decreased since 2015, in rural areas vaping is much higher than in other areas. She said that mental health issues are often connected to substance use. For example the NYS Center on School Health reports that 30% of students in grades 9-12 feels sad or hopeless, and 20% report substance use – this is not a coincidence. Having ADHD or a learning disability increases the risk of substance use. Laura stressed that we need to focus on bolstering protective factors for all students, as these are helpful in reducing risk of many things, so as substances morph and change, students' risk remains steady. She mentioned that engagement at school and with the school community is a protective factor. Social and emotional learning (SEL) competencies are the skills for wellness, and a Tier 1 intervention. To contact Laura, you can email her at Laura.Ficara@oasas.ny.gov

All three panelists stressed that the issues of substance abuse, mental health, and suicide are often co-occur and are intersectional, meaning not only do you often see more than one of these issues at the same time in a person (co-occurrence), but co-occurrence can often create additional and/or amplified issues. And sometimes, it's hard to know which of these issues you are looking at, as people often "self-medicate" their mental health symptoms with substance use (as when someone drinks alcohol to relieve depression). All three panelist also shared a large number of resources with attendees. And the size of the crowd allowed for some excellent discussion through out.

Thank you to all who made this a rich and informative day! And please keep an eye on our website for the addition of the resource page in mid-January. If you are a member organization, we will announce it in our newsletter. If you are not a member, check us out and join! www.rsany.org



RSA PUSHES FOR RURAL BROADBAND

Securing broadband internet access is an integral piece in rebuilding our rural economy and providing educational opportunity for our students. Recently, the state legislature held a hearing that revealed that this effort in New York State is fraught with problems (both with providers and with state oversight.) RSA Executive Director Dave Little [testified](#) that the state's current approach is insufficient and in some cases, harmful. Click [here](#) for the transcript of that hearing. Dave's testimony can be found below.

Dear Chairs May, Santabarbara, Thiele and Members of the New York State Legislative Commission on Rural Resources and the New York State Assembly Standing Committee on Local Governments,

I am David Little, Executive Director of the Rural Schools Association of New York State and the Rural Schools Program of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Cornell University. I am grateful that you have focused on this critically important issue and honored to appear before you today.

While the economy of our state progresses at a moderate pace, rural New York State is in crisis. The population of New York City has increased over the last decade. Long Island and the four other major cities have all either increased slightly or retained their population. Not so in rural New York, where the next U.S. Census is likely to immortalize the fact that roughly a million people have fled in recent years. The Great Recession decimated the rural economy and unlike other states (where rural businesses and their employees relocated within their state to urban or suburban areas) in New York, people exited the state in a Grapes of Wrath-like outward migration; in search of work.

This largely unacknowledged calamity has resulted in historic declines in student enrollment in our schools, the deterioration of our communities and a unique pattern of young adult migration that will, if left unaddressed, leave our state at an economic competitive disadvantage. You see, young (largely college educated) adults leave home. It's a rite of passage. In other states, however, they return (statistically) to raise their own families. That is not occurring in our state and has not occurred for many years. We do a wonderful job of educating our college-age students and then (as a result of our failure to provide employment opportunities in their home communities) we lose them forever. It's no way to build our state's future and yet to date, we have no comprehensive economic development plan for an area that was so fiscally vibrant just 40 years ago, it was able to help stave off financial disaster in New York City. Now that our state's economic expansion is taking place downstate, it's time to return the favor.

One of the most significant impediments to rural economic expansion is the inability of businesses to gain ac-

cess to broadband internet service. Schools and hospitals often serve as the “anchors” for a community’s access and all too often offer the only access within the community. In the long term, this creates tremendous disadvantages for our students, who must compete with urban and suburban counterparts who enjoy easy access to the internet. Learning today, both in form and content rely on internet access. Our failure to provide it to rural students is a societal failing that limits their employability and often forces them from their homes. As SUNY Cobleskill President Dr. Marion Terenzio says, our policy is a barrier to our progress.

I am not naive enough to think that lack of broadband is all that stands between our circumstances and rural economic prosperity. Our state battles high taxes, high per capita debt, comparatively high transportation costs, an aging infrastructure and other challenges that put us at a competitive disadvantage when vying for potential economic development projects. Yet, it is the lack of broadband access that prevents us from even attempting to somehow overcome the other issues and secure rural employment opportunities. From an educational standpoint, lack of broadband is devastating. Our schools are so desperate to provide this game changing information source that Watkins Glen and other rural schools park their buses in remote areas as wifi hotspots for their students. Broadband is the library of its day, today’s encyclopedia, the source of knowledge itself as well as the most accessible and often most effective way to learn it. The internet is today’s school bus, overcoming time and place (as well as transportation inequity) to bring the world to physically isolated students. Should you doubt the impact of broadband internet effectiveness to learning, ask the Pentagon what it thinks of the video game Call of Duty, where millions of the young people of the exact demographic they require are being trained on military tactics, chain of command, loyalty in the field, weapon systems, logistics and other vital aspects of service. Hearttrates while playing the video game are identical to actual battlefield conditions. Today’s learning opportunities are far more similar to surgical or aeronautical simulations and are often tailored to the individual.

Our rural schools face increasing poverty among our students as a result of rural economic decline. Broadband access can increase learning opportunities and overcome the challenges of increased numbers of English Language Learners and student mobility. This is vitally important, given the current state of rural education in New York State. Our state leaders have failed to recognize the crisis in rural education, due to the high rate of student graduation when compared to urban school districts. It’s true that our students almost all graduate. However, it’s also true that most of them never complete even a two year post-secondary education. Three fourths of them are unable to succeed at a course of study at their local community college.

One of New York State’s most important innovations historically was a geographically diversified system of post-secondary colleges. Few New Yorkers live more than 30 miles from either a SUNY four or two year institution of higher learning. But we are not equipping rural students to succeed there through our failure to provide sufficient resources to provide a broad enough curriculum to compete. Rural students spend so much time in remediation or in obtaining the preliminary knowledge required to adequately participate in college level classwork that they often fall behind, incur too much debt and ultimately drop out. Broadband is changing that in rural areas where it is offered. Higher level coursework can be provided digitally in locations where either distance or financial resources prevent it being provided in person. It works in other states, but our state continues to maintain regulatory and legal barriers to its expansion.

These barriers would likely fall away if broadband were accessible. With several high profile federal and state initiatives, one would presume this issue would be behind us. The federal E Rate program has provided billions in cell phone surcharge revenue toward rural connectivity. In New York State our own \$2 billion Smart Schools Technology Bond Act should by now have provided the infrastructure needed to bring broadband service throughout all of our communities. Neither has lived up to expectations, falling behind on the distribution of funds. But even where funds have been distributed it has addressed the need largely in school buildings themselves and not in student homes. This is the result of private industry failing to enter the arena. Rural sparcity simply never provided the economic incentive to invest in broadband infrastructure. E Rate has been a help, but its nationwide application spreads it too thin to be of real assistance (and federal leaders have now proposed expanding its use to health care providers, making it even less accessible for educational purposes.) The Smart Schools Bond Act should have provided \$2 billion worth of practical assistance, but years after statewide voter approval, less than half of the money has gone out the door.

For years there has been a tremendous gap between the internet access available to urban and suburban students and their rural counterparts. Even when a rural community is fortunate enough to have quality internet access in its “community hubs” like our schools, town offices or emergency services, getting it out to the homes of our students has been a struggle. The standard explanation has typically been that there simply isn’t enough population density to warrant the investment by major carriers. As a result, most areas have simply gone without, trying instead to have their students stay after school to get internet based homework done.

That has recently changed on a national level and yet, once again our state has set up roadblocks.

When the Rural Schools Association learned that T-Mobile and Sprint were seeking to merge, with the intent to build broadband access to rural areas, we investigated. We needed to be convinced that allowing the merger of these two mega-carriers would have substantial benefits for rural education. Fortunately, we were. The business model that they have submitted to the Federal Communications Commission and Congress is well thought out and resourced, combining the strengths of each company with the specific priority of addressing rural broadband access.

Combining T-Mobile and Sprint has the potential to get affordable broadband access into rural communities much more quickly. The real question has been whether the newly formed company would follow through with universal accessibility and (just as important) affordability. After reviewing verifiable and enforceable contractual provisions, this merger appears to be our best hope of getting real access in a timeframe that will actually help our students and the communities that support them (as well as to promote the economic expansion that is the ultimate salvation of our rural communities.)

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has received verifiable and enforceable commitments from T-Mobile and Sprint that map out exactly what they will deliver, including the construction of a “world leading 5G network where rural Americans receive robust 5G broadband service.” As a result, the FCC has announced its support. Here in New York, however, the state’s Attorney General continues to oppose this effort. I don’t purport to be an expert on the litigation or on the merger of these two companies. I fully understand that such a merger raises questions. How universal will coverage be? How affordable will service be to this increasingly financially challenged demographic of our residents? What is the societal risk in creating such a tele communications giant?

Yet, the economic statistics in rural New York are undeniable. 17 million in agricultural production has dwindled to just 7 million. The tremendous population loss will create the loss of per capita federal funding once the 2020 U.S. Census is complete. Combined with our state’s reliance on the property tax and comparatively high tax and debt rates, we have created a downward spiral of economic prospects for rural New York State that will be difficult to overcome. That in no way absolves us of our constitutional responsibility of providing our students with the educational tools they need to build a bright future, or the moral imperative of the Family of New York rescuing our rural neighbors in the same way in which we rescued our New York City brothers and sisters in the 1970s.

Having served as Local Government and Home Rule Counsel to this legislature for 7 years, I would suggest that we are in desperate need of a public private partnership and a commission to coordinate the work of creating a pathway to prosperity for our rural residents. We must collaborate with private providers and experts and allocate our own public resources toward bringing our rural areas into a competitive position; in much the way we provided electricity and phone service in previous generations. The speed in which we engage in this effort will determine our economic viability in relation to our sister states. Just as importantly, it will allow an entire segment of our state’s residents to regain their dignity and live their lives in a manner expected by all in our Empire State.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify on such a seminal issue. Respectfully submitted.

NOT WHAT YOU WANT TO HEAR BUT NEED TO KNOW GETTING SCHOOL AID IN A DEFICIT ENVIRONMENT

Budget deficit? *What* budget deficit?

With today's state Board of Regents budget request, New York's education establishment is united in proposing that state aid to America's best-funded preK-12 public school system be increased next year by at least \$2 billion. The figure is nearly double the amount projected in Governor Cuomo's recent Mid-Year Financial Plan Update—which showed the state is running deeply in the red and facing its largest budget shortfall since the Great Recession.



In keeping with a perennial tradition of disregarding fiscal reality, today's Regents' spending proposal comes a few weeks after the Education Conference Board, a statewide alliance of school boards, administrators and unions, called for an aid increase of \$2.1 billion.

Meanwhile, back in the real world, Governor Cuomo has projected a \$6 billion budget gap for FY 2021, ballooning to \$8.5 billion by FY 2023, due mainly to \$4 billion in over-spending on Medicaid. His financial plan assumes that, under the current statutory formula, school aid would increase by \$1.1 billion—a 4 percent boost (on a July 1-June 30 school-year basis) at a time when the consumer price index is growing at a 2 percent annual rate and public school enrollment statewide is declining.

The Regents recommendation for 2020-21, as formulated by its state aid subcommittee, recommends a total increase of \$2 billion. Nearly all of that amount would be distributed as “foundation aid,” the revised school funding formula first enacted a dozen years ago under then-Governor Eliot Spitzer but sidetracked by Governor David Paterson during the fiscal crisis touched off by the Great Recession. It also calls for \$108 million to be spent on a variety of other education programs.

Under the Regents' proposal, General Support for Public Schools in the next budget would rise by 7.3 percent, from \$27.5 billion to \$29.5 billion. That would be just the down-payment on a three-year phase-in of the foundation aid formula's automatic annual “inflation adjustment”—which, as figured by the formula, would be higher than consumer inflation.

In its own recommendation for a \$2.1 billion increase, the Education Conference Board also renewed its call for loosening the statewide cap on school property tax levies, which was permanently enshrined in state law this year. In districts outside New York City, Yonkers and the four largest upstate cities, the cap requires approval by a 60 percent supermajority of district voters for any proposed school budget exceeding an allowable levy growth limit of 2 percent or the rate of inflation, whichever is lower (subject to varying local allowances). The ECB wants the cap raised to a flat 2 percent, which would apply even in years when base inflation is lower (as it has been several times since the cap was first effective in 2012).

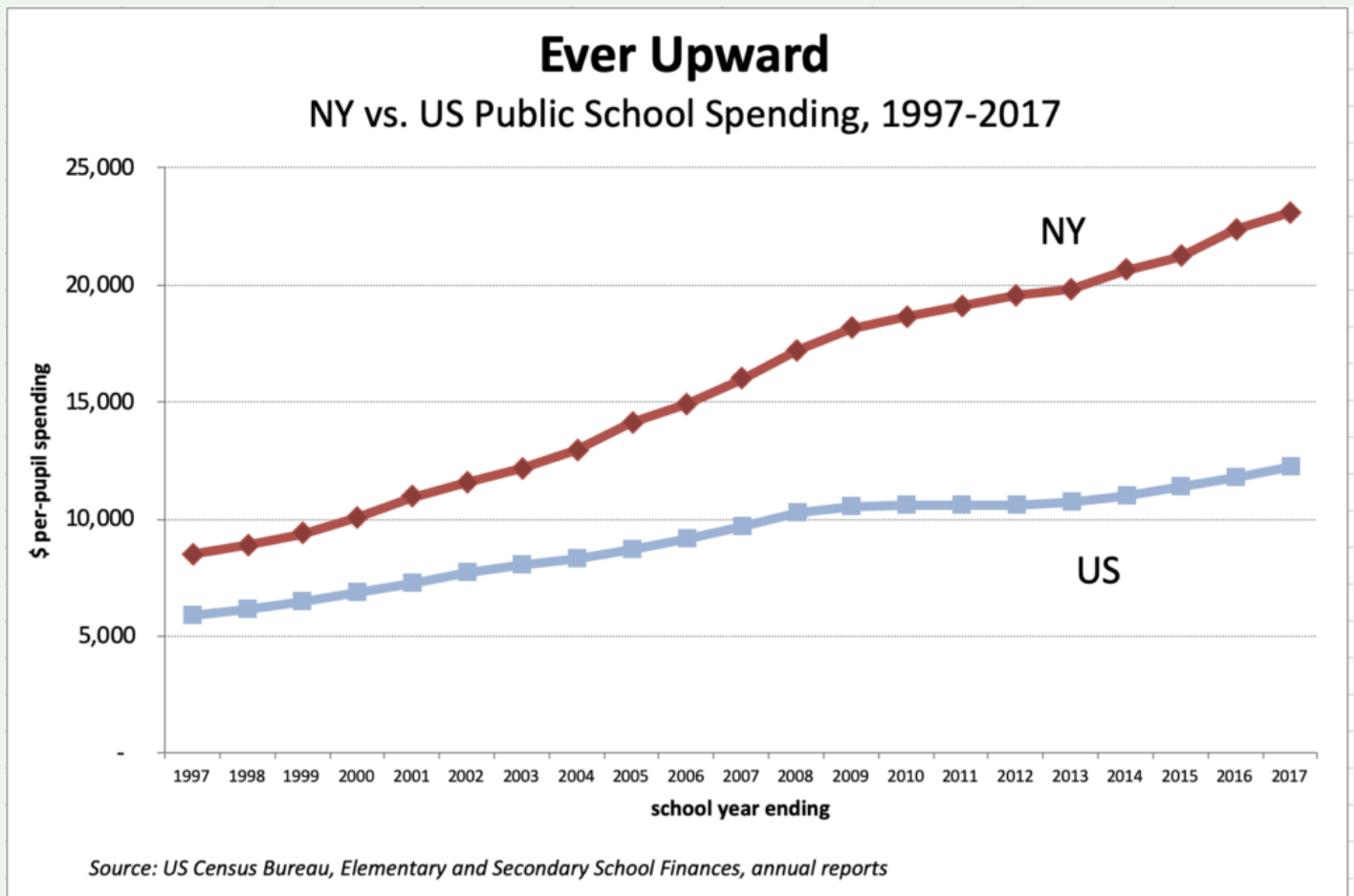
Fitting it all in

To comply with a self-imposed state spending cap of 2 percent, Cuomo will have to reduce all projected spending by \$6 billion in the Executive Budget he'll submit next month for FY 2021, which begins April 1.

Assuming he cuts \$3 billion from Medicaid, as indicated in his financial plan, another \$3 billion will have to come from all other budget categories—the largest of which, by far, is school aid.

The Regents traditionally don't worry about where the money will come from to finance their spending wish list, and neither does the Education Conference Board. However, the NYSUT front group [Alliance for Quality Education](#) perennially pushes a further increase in state income taxes on high earners to finance bigger school spending increases. Faced with Medicaid deficit, Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie said last week that [Assembly Democrats would favor higher taxes](#) over reductions in prospective spending. The Assembly's one-house budget this year [included such a tax hike](#)—despite the new federal cap on state and local tax (SALT) deductions, which has raised New York's net effective marginal tax rate on millionaire earners to the highest level ever.

According to the latest U.S. Census data, New York's spending on elementary and secondary education [reached a record \\$23,091 per pupil in 2017](#), once again topping all other states in this category. As [noted here back in May](#), the education spending gap between New York and the rest of the U.S. has grown considerably over the past 20 years. The Empire State's per-pupil spending was 45 percent above average in 1997, and 65 percent above average in 2007. As of 2017, New York spent 89 percent more than the national per-pupil average.



Reprinted from www.empirecenter.org

by E.J. McMahon | December 09, 2019 | [NY Torch](#)

NEARLY ONE IN FIVE U.S. STUDENTS ATTEND RURAL SCHOOLS. HERE'S WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THEM



More than 9.3 million U.S. students attended a rural school last year, a number larger than the combined enrollment of the nation's 85 largest school districts, a new report finds.

But, despite their collective impact, rural schools sometimes lack the resources of those in more populous areas and they often get less attention, says the newest edition of "Why Rural Matters," released Thursday by the [Rural School and Community Trust](#).

Many rural students live in poverty, some lag behind in academic achievement, and many are taught by teachers with relatively low pay, says the report, which provides a state-by-state look at a range of factors that affect rural students' education. And logistical factors, including geographic isolation, can make it difficult for rural students to access things like advanced courses and for their schools to engage in improvement efforts.

"While some rural schools thrive, others and their communities continue to face devastating obstacles in the education and well-being of children," Robert Mahaffey, the executive director of the Rural School and Community Trust, said in a statement. "Leaders in every state and our nation's capital must work together to better address the issues facing rural students, schools, and communities with great haste."

The report, which uses a definition of "rural" from the U.S. Census Bureau, finds the median enrollment for U.S. rural districts is only 494 students. Using factors like per-pupil funding, poverty rates, and student mobility data, it ranks states that it deems the highest priority for those concerned about rural education, providing individual profiles for all 50 states. The top five priority states are Mississippi, Alabama, North Carolina, Oklahoma, and South Dakota.

Here are some other key findings.

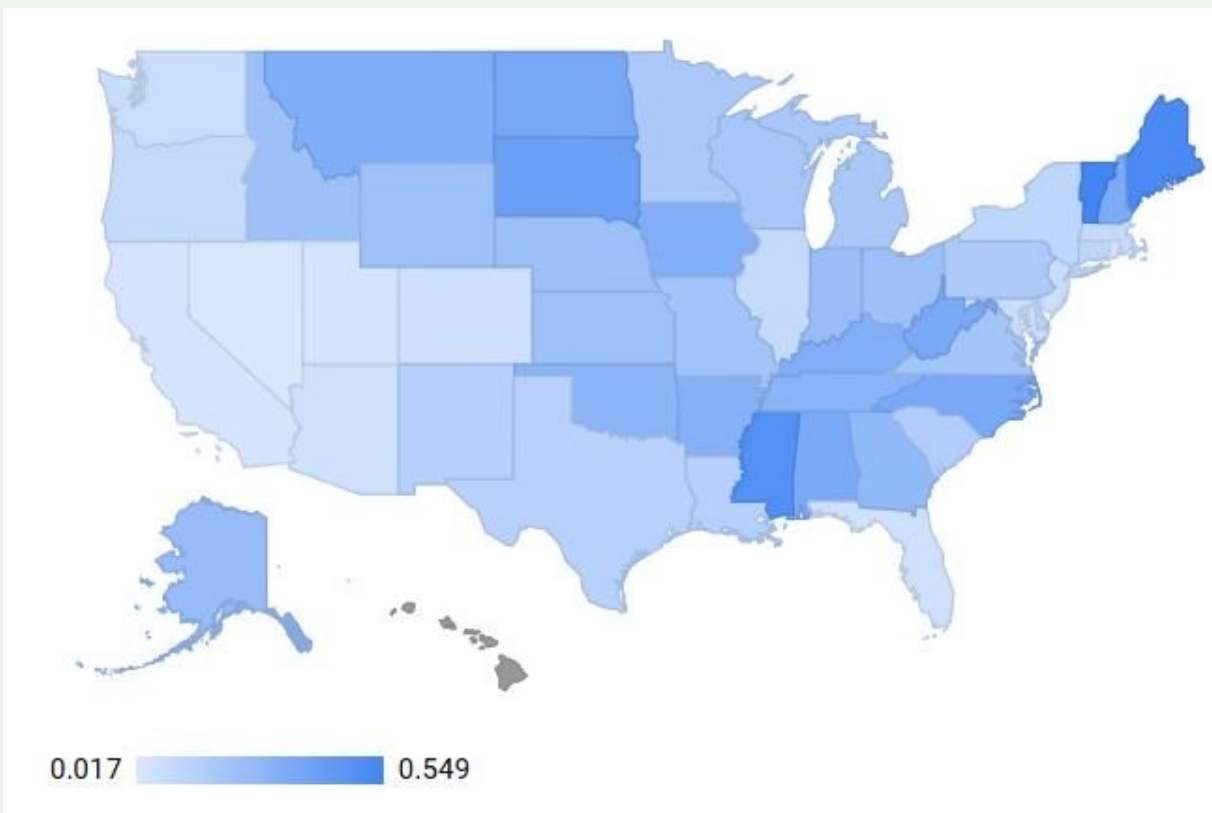
When Rural Schools Are Few, Their Needs Are Less Prominent

At least half of public schools are rural in 12 states: Montana, South Dakota, Vermont, North Dakota, Maine, Alaska, Oklahoma, Nebraska, Wyoming, New Hampshire, Iowa, and Mississippi. But many rural students make up a much smaller share of their state's enrollment, which can make their needs seem like a lower priority, the report says.

"Rural schools and students often seem invisible because many leaders never encounter these communities di-

rectly or lack a full understanding of rural America's challenges," the Rural School and Community Trust says. "The majority of rural students attend school in a state where they make up less than 25 percent of public school enrollment. More than one rural student in four lives in [a state] where rural students constitute less than 15 percent of overall enrollment."

The map below, pulled from the report, shows the percentage of rural students in each state, ranging from 1.7 percent in Nevada to 54.9 percent in Vermont.



Rural Students Lag in AP But Lead in Dual-Enrollment Programs

A smaller percent of rural students earn passing score of three or higher on Advanced Placement exams than those in other areas, the report finds. Authors calculated that figure by dividing the total number of students from rural districts who scored a three on at least one AP test by the total number of juniors and seniors in those districts. By that measure, 9.5 percent of rural students succeeded at AP tests, compared with 19 percent of all public high school students, 18.8 percent of urban students, and 24.1 percent of suburban students.

But juniors and seniors at rural high schools were more likely than peers in other areas to take dual-enrollment courses, the report finds. Twenty percent of male students and 26 percent of female students at rural high schools took at least one dual-enrollment course. That compares to 14.4 percent of all male students and 17.8 of all female student nationwide.

Academic Performance

In a majority of states, rural students outperformed their non-rural peers on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, the report finds. But they lagged behind in some states. And, as in schools as a whole, rural schools showed gaps in achievement between students from low-income households and their peers from more-affluent families.

Read the whole report, and see all of the state profiles, [here](#).



WE NEED PRIMARY MENTAL HEALTH PROVIDERS

By Adrienne A. Williams, Chicago Tribune
Dec 9, 2019

Whenever there is a mass shooting, two questions are repeated in the news and social media: Did the shooter have a history of mental illness? And why weren't warning signs identified earlier?

These questions reflect the barriers to better mental health care. Questioning whether the shooter ever had mental illness reinforces the false idea that some people experience mental illness while the rest do not, which is the foundation of stigma. Questioning why the shooter didn't have an earlier intervention highlights the lack of prevention in our current mental health system, which focuses on identifying existing illnesses. If we want to reduce the stigma of getting mental health care and prevent mental health crises, an updated approach to mental health care is needed.

Primary mental health providers, as I described in the *Journal of Clinical Psychology in Medical Settings*, is an approach that addresses stigma and prevention in which general practitioner psychologists, like primary care physicians, would be primary care providers for people to receive regular mental health checkups and prevention, and would be the first stop for mental health care.

Since stigma is formed when only a subgroup of individuals is thought to need mental health treatment, this universal approach will counteract stigma. People do not feel stigmatized by getting a back-to-school physical because everyone does it. Similarly, stigma would be reduced with general practitioner psychologists because care would be universal.

Since, in reality, mental health is like physical health - no one stays mentally healthy throughout their entire lives - nonuniversal approaches leave a majority of society without beneficial mental health strategies. With general practitioner psychologists providing true primary care, all people would have access to mental health care at each stage their lives and would receive preventive interventions for risk factors that could lead to more significant illness. Additionally, those who are at risk of violence would already have a psychologist screening and intervening on risk factors.

As doctoral-level clinicians trained in the human mind, behaviors and mental illness, psychologists are already uniquely qualified to serve as primary mental health providers. Like primary care physicians, general practitioner psychologists could refer to clinicians with specialized training in treating mental illness, such as other

psychologists, psychiatrists and licensed clinical social workers, when more in-depth treatment is needed.

Imagine if psychologists could screen all children for developmental and learning disorders so they could be detected and addressed earlier.

Imagine if childhood bullies already had access to psychologists to address the underlying causes of the bullying and anger; and those being bullied already had access to a psychologist for coping and self-esteem building; and all children received interventions on communication and peer support as part of prevention.

Imagine if each person had a psychologist during every major life transition for guidance and situation-specific counseling, from starting a new school or job, to experiencing a pregnancy, to suffering the death of loved ones.

Imagine how social, professional and romantic relationships would change if all people received preventive interventions on listening skills and conflict resolution.

Imagine if all people were receiving regular screening and assessment for both common and rare mental health concerns so that conditions did not go undiagnosed for years, and those who experience precursors for mental health conditions could be educated on ways to diminish risk and to recognize warning signs of worsening symptoms.

It is time that we build on health care approaches that integrate mental health into primary care because mental health cannot have parity with physical health until we have a system in which all people can get primary care for mental health. To achieve parity, insurance companies would need to provide coverage for preventive mental health, which could save money because prevention is less expensive than treatment.

The general practitioner psychologist approach offers a solution in which mental health care is for all people rather than only for some, prevents crises rather than reacts to crises, is expected rather than stigmatized and helps improve lives not just fix problems.

As election season draws near, let's hope that health care leaders and politicians work to make advances in the state of our mental health care system.

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Dr. Gretchen Rymarchyk,
Deputy Director RSA

THE CORNELL CONNECTION

Book Reviews on RSANY.org



Being surrounded by academics at Cornell, means receiving LOTS of recommendations for reading. To help us get through the ever-growing pile, we found three interns to each read a book and write a book review for you. However instead of the traditional book review you might see in a newspaper or magazine, we made comics. We created a new Featured Service on our website called “Book Reviews” where you can find comic-style reviews for 4 books, then decide if you want to read the books yourself.

We would also like to invite you to submit a review of a book you’ve read that may be of interest to our members. It does NOT have to be comic-style – you can write a traditional one, submit a video of yourself talking about the book, or come up with

an all-new idea.

Check out our Book Reviews here: <https://www.rsany.org/book-reviews> Near the top, there are instructions for how to submit your own review.

New Publication

John Sipple’s paper on child care deserts has been published! Read it here:

https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0885200619301322?fbclid=IwAR29e7aCytM_a8GXd307EpUDUtdNfBehZG9CTsER0OdaWInp5skQqvRIIXw



Youth Opportunity at Cornell



The World Food Prize New York Youth Institute will be held at Cornell University on Friday, March 27, 2020.

Student Participants

- Qualify for Internships
 - Gain Professional Experience
 - Learn about exciting fields of study that lead to careers
- Essays are due February 28, 2020.

The paper instructions and announcement are available on www.worldfoodprize.org/NewYork

Contact fj10@cornell.edu if you would like a NY Youth Institute team member to visit your school. https://www.worldfoodprize.org/.../global_youth_ins.../new_york/

Youth Opportunity at Princeton

The Princeton Summer Journalism Program (PSJP) is one of the only programs of its kind offering a free, innovative residential journalism and college prep institute for high achieving high school juniors from low-income backgrounds. Over ten days every summer, up to 40 students from across the country explore current events and world affairs through workshops and lectures led by Princeton professors, professional journalists, and alumni on campus. The summer program culminates in the publication of the Princeton Summer Journal, the student-produced newspaper. During their senior year, students are matched with a personal college adviser, who will work with them on their college admissions process. In our 17-year history, PSJP has graduated approximately 380 students who have gone on to attend some of the best colleges and universities and produce content for the most respected publications in the nation. Another 40 will join them this spring, as they complete their senior year and the college admission process! More information here:

<https://psjp.princeton.edu/?fbclid=IwAR3Y2T6yhzDgCQiLHsM-P-A3MHesGX95ANpAIVdSfOosdhO5w2fGSdwhzFo>



Parenting Resource



This may be a good resource for your PTA or parent liaison. This source is well-established as providing solid ideas based on solid research.

https://childtrends.us16.list-man-age.com/subscribe?u=2dcd6a778a067d2b0f01fd186&id=e664b29091&fbclid=IwAR2dTpXsU1jkufS2kXGPUmyRk2cF9wiFUJvUvknI_H-gMmAjflySpuG5S8o

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