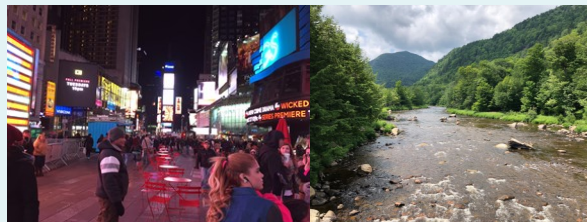




RSA TODAY

News for New York State's
Rural Schools

August 2019



I don't live in New York,

I live in New York

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David Little,

RSA Executive Director

IF WE'RE NOT CHANGING IT WE'RE CHOOSING IT!

The beginning of the school year is a lot like the NFL pre-season or baseball spring training. Hope springs eternal, all things are possible, everyone's a winner.

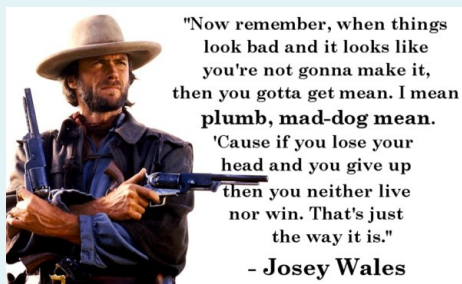
But what happens when the game is rigged against us? By now, you've probably heard or read my warnings that a new and challenging day is dawning for New York's rural school districts. Enrollment and rural population in general has plummeted and once the U.S. Census verifies it next year, that phenomenon will result in decreased state and federal aid to rural communities and a redrawing of legislative district lines that will further disenfranchise rural residents.

Add to that our current lack of rural representation in positions of statewide leadership (or even majority status in either house of the state legislature) and the political horizon for rural schools appears clouded by challenges. Districts used to coping with an inequitable aid formula by receiving "bullet aid" or "member items" from individual legislators may well now find themselves represented by minority party members to whom such discretionary aid is unavailable. Relaying your district's issues and concerns to your state representative may now result in them being discussed in a conference without the clout to turn concerns into policy changes. In the past, we've had either the Assembly or the Senate represented by a different political party, with the governor's office alternating every dozen years or so. In that environment, rural schools could count on their issues being heard by a representative in one of the houses who was capable of garnering either legislative or budgetary support. The long and short of our current situation is that within a couple of years there will be fewer rural legislators of any party, as the census will require larger geographic districts to incorporate the decreased population. The loss of a million residents from rural areas (while the rest of the state either gained in population or stayed steady) will dictate fewer legislators for rural New York.

CHANGE
STARTS HERE.
CAN WE COUNT YOU IN?

If traditional voting holds true, those fewer legislators will also be in the minority of both legislative houses, preventing rural issues from being heard in the conferences and leader meetings where policy is decided.

What to do? There's a great quote from the Clint Eastwood movie The Outlaw Josey Wales...



"Now remember, when things look bad and it looks like you're not gonna make it, then you gotta get mean. I mean plumb, mad-dog mean. 'Cause if you lose your head and you give up then you neither live nor win. That's just the way it is."

- Josey Wales

If our rural schools are outnumbered and without their traditional legislative champions, then it's time to get loud. It's time to make our issues heard and our people seen by those who have the ability to change our circumstances. Rural school districts are tremendous at making the best of diminished resources. That doesn't mean they should have to. Last winter the new legislative leadership promised that the lack of rural representation wouldn't mean that rural students were ignored. They swore to make sure that every child received what was needed irrespective of where they lived. It didn't happen. Instead, it got worse. So far, our response has been to suck it up and make do. If I'm right, soon that won't be an option.

Now, I know that no school administrator or even school board member went to school to become an advocate for rural schools. But it's become one of the most important parts of your leadership. This fall, your Rural Schools Association will travel the state to hold Rural Issues Forums. We'll hear from you and your community about your needs, your issues and your suggestions for change. We'll review everything we hear with a task force of experts, who will create a Policy Brief to present to our state and federal leaders. Then we'll embark on an advocacy campaign to enact the changes needed to empower our rural schools and give rural kids a future. On September 13th we're also hosting a [national meeting](#) to arrive at ways to develop the rural workforce. USDA, US Department of Labor, business, K-12 and higher education leaders will all convene at Cornell under the auspices of RSA to create national rural workforce policy proposals. On your behalf, we're elevating the visibility of rural issues.

As local rural school leaders, our usual MO is to advocate during the budget season and then return to the important work of good stewardship of resources and educational leadership. What that has come to mean in the halls of government is that if they can withstand our noise for a couple of months, they know we'll largely disappear until the next year...so just paper over the concerns with a small increase in aid and hope it doesn't turn into a public outcry. With a nearly unanimous passage rate for local budgets this spring, there was anything but an outcry. Their strategy is working. Ours isn't.

It's time to get mad dog mean on behalf of kids who don't have a fighting chance otherwise. So far, we've argued internally about whether it's better to prepare students to remain in their community and help preserve the rural way of life, or prepare them for the demands of a fastmoving and demanding external economy. Without action now, we won't have that choice...and we won't be much good at either. So welcome back. Take stock of the amazing work being done in your district. Appreciate how difficult it is to carry on despite the challenges and congratulate your staff. Inspire your students. Make them as safe as you can. Then look beyond your district boundaries, because the fight's coming. The theme of this year's summer conference was "Doing the Hard Work of Staying". Without our advocacy, that hard work could soon become a fight for survival.



TWO IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENTS

1. National Northeast Regional Rural Workforce Summit will be held on

**September 13, 2019 from 9:30 AM - 5:00 PM
Cornell
Warren Hall
137 Reservoir Avenue
Ithaca, NY 14853**

There's no question that rural communities are under considerable stress. The National Northeast Regional Workforce Summit is intended to inform policy makers of ways to support the rural workforce. Hear from top level experts, then be part of the solution through round table discussions.

Registration and Information available [here](#)

2. Please take this brief, anonymous, 2-question survey to help guide the [2019 Priorities for the Cornell Connection](#) before Friday 9/6/2019.



Join Us For The Day And Enjoy The Beautiful Views Cornell University Has To Offer.



RSA SUMMER CONFERENCE TOO COSTLY FOR RURAL SCHOOLS OR LEARNING BARGAIN?

Each year the RSA Summer Conference connects high level national and state leaders, as well as practical and innovative programs to New York's rural schools. Each year those who attend relay their excitement about the quality and helpfulness of the information they take home and how easily they're able to incorporate ideas learned into their own district. But can cash strapped rural districts afford to take advantage of the opportunity?



Ray McNulty

Every so often, a member writes to complain about the cost of the summer conference. They often suggest we hold the conference at a more modestly priced hotel, in a location with lower cost housing and meal options or that RSA find a way to lower the cost of registration. All valid suggestions and every year we evaluate whether the conference's current location and structure best suit the needs of our members.



Conference Attendees Networking

Here are some factors we take into account: First, the actual cost of registration for the summer conference is right around \$300 (\$295 for last month's conference.) That is just about half of the registration cost of the NYSCOSS and NYSSBA conferences. Now, you may say that their conferences are much larger, which is true. But, since you can only attend one session at a time, our conference offers just as many chances to learn about issues and opportunities available to rural schools; and the RSA summer conference is the one conference that specifically addresses the challenges faced by rural districts from beginning to end. But you knew that.



Conference Attendees Meet Vendors

Most concerns center around the cost of holding the summer conference at The Otesaga. Folks look at the registration form, see the daily rate for The Otesaga and cringe. We do too, but only because we know that it gives the wrong impression.



Attendees Share A Meal And Network

People rarely understand that the Otesaga's daily rate includes all of your meals. It's not any more expensive than staying at a different hotel and purchasing your meals separately. Seeing that larger number without understanding what you're actually getting is cause for concern; we get that. Add up your conference registration, your hotel cost and the estimated cost of your meals and you'll find that the RSA Summer Conference costs less than its counterparts.

Plus, you don't even have to stay at The Otesaga to have a won-



Annual FFA Student Speakers

derful conference experience. You can stay at a nearby hotel, spend less per night and still sign up for conference meal functions. This saves you some on your hotel costs and still allows you to hear all of the excellent mealtime speakers and award winners. There are four hotels within two blocks of The Otesaga-an easy walk. Cooperstown also now has more than a dozen chain hotels within four miles of the conference and you can park at The Otesaga, allowing you the full conference experience without The Otesaga cost. (Those of you who want, but aren't able to get conference housing at The Otesaga know this all too well!) For those of you within driving distance, commuting is an extremely viable option too. You can even customize your conference by purchasing individual days, rather than the full conference registration.

RSA periodically assesses whether staying in Cooperstown is the best option for our members. As we continue to grow each year, is The Otesaga still the best fit for the conference? We have been very deliberate in evaluating other locations and other conference properties, assessing whether new locations would be accessible for our speakers and presenters and whether our vendors and sponsors (who have been responsible for our financial ability to present such high level national speakers, host our tremendous receptions and help defray costs that allow us keep registration costs so far below those of our sister organizations) would be as committed, were the event to be held elsewhere. We are frequently asked by other hotels to consider holding the event at their place and even sticking to rural settings, there are many viable options (think the Catskills, Adirondacks, Finger Lakes and Thousand Island areas.) There's no shortage of options.

Fact is, people love Cooperstown. We have a history and tradition there. We have a good working relationship with The Otesaga and it provides an atmosphere that allows conference attendees to rejuvenate, as well as learn. That's important when your conference is only two weeks after the end of an always stressful school year. Every year, while there are some folks who are upset that the all-inclusive nature of their bill at The Otesaga looks high, there are many, many more who are upset that they weren't lucky enough to get a room there. Please know that we never stop evaluating and if we ever get to the point where The Otesaga is too small, or too costly, we'll move the conference.



Award Winner Linda Gonyo-Horne and RSA Executive Director David Little



Attendees Relax and Enjoy The Evening And Fire Pit

RSA staff works hard to secure as many rooms at The Otesaga as possible and then to secure additional rooms at the nearby hotels as well. Despite the fact that our conference comes at the height of the season in Cooperstown (usually only a week before the Baseball Hall of Fame induction) and The Otesaga would be sold out one way or the other, they have been very good in responding to our never ending requests for more rooms.

Speaking of the annual crapshoot of getting a room at The Otesaga, there are some things you should know. First, RSA only reserves rooms for the paid staff that work the conference and for speakers coming in from out of town (and then only for either the night before or after they speak, depending on whether they are an evening or a morning speaker.) This is intentional on our part, to ensure that as many rooms as possible are available for attendees. Every year we have sponsors and vendors

who rightly tell us that they've been supporting RSA for years and they'd like the convenience of staying at the conference hotel. We have to tell them that not even our own RSA Board of Directors are guaranteed rooms. We send out a Heads Up that registration will be opening within the next few days and to look for the email. Then, everyone gets the email at the same time, with the same chance of getting into The Otesaga. The only alternative would be to hold a housing lottery, but that would result in just as many disappointed people.



Time to Relax, Enjoy The Natural Beauty and Rejuvenate

Whether you stay at The Otesaga, at a nearby hotel or drive in, the RSA Summer Conference is a relaxing and really enjoyable way to make sure your district has the most up to date, innovative and inspirational information and programs. Given our challenges, that's vitally important. RSA is acutely aware of the fiscal struggles of our districts and so we continually look for ways to make the Summer Conference affordable, as well as the most targeted outstanding learning opportunity for rural school districts available anywhere. Take a look at this year's conference photos at the link provided [here](#). See the list of speakers and [break out sessions](#) and you'll agree with our attendees, who every year talk about the inspiration and information they receive, in a tremendous summer setting.

There's no free lunch, but each year the RSA Summer Conference provides a superior learning opportunity at the very lowest cost possible. If you haven't been yet, do us a favor; ask anyone who has. Then join us next summer from July 12th through the 14th for what we believe is simply the best conference at the best price anywhere!

Student Inspiration Changing the World

Buddy Benches In North Dansville



The Livingston County Youth Employment program and the town of North Dansville, with the help of Dansville junior Billy Barrett, made "Buddy Benches" in memory of the late Liz Green. Ms. Green was a social worker who inspired youth and adults to show empathy and spread kindness. Benches are designed to help address loneliness and foster social skills at parks and playgrounds. A child who is feeling lonely can sit on the bench to signal they need someone to play with or an adult to talk to.



Dr. Gretchen Rymarchyk,
Deputy Director RSA

DEPUTY DIRECTOR'S CORNER

**** IMPORTANT! PLEASE TAKE THIS BRIEF, ANONYMOUS, 2 QUESTION SURVEY TO HELP GUIDE**

2019 PRIORITIES FOR THE CORNELL CONNECTION!

WHAT IS IT YOU NEED TO LEARN ABOUT RIGHT NOW?

DUE FRIDAY 9/6/2019**

Website & Social Media News:

⇒ News Blog:

- ◇ We have had a few new blog posts.
- ◇ We are in the middle of a series on rural economic decline and issues for remediation.
- ◇ We are gathering a team of interns to read and report on some books relevant to rural schools and communities. Reports will include some media & written report.



Blog Series Photo

⇒ Researchers & Data:

- ◇ We have added two new buttons at the top of this page:
 - “All Data Tools (External Site)” – This button takes you right to Dr. Sipple’s www.NyEducationData.org page with all its fun toys.
 - “Featured Research” – This button takes you to the newest thing out of the Sipple Lab™ (we don’t actually have that lab yet, but it sounds good, right?). As I write this, there is a nice summary of the dynamics of child care and K-12 policies, with policy recommendations. Hurry and check it out before they change it to something even newer!



⇒ Social Media:

- ◇ We are now connected to Twitter. Anything we post on Face Book will also appear on Twitter. Find us on Face Book at <https://www.facebook.com/RSANYORG/>
- ◇ Find us on Twitter at @NYRuralSchools



Cornell Connection:

- ⇒ Gretchen Rymarchyk has begun work, in collaboration with John Sipple and Heidi Mouillesseaux-Kunzman (CaRDI), with a group of faculty across the university engaged in research and community projects in rural areas and/or with rural audiences in mind. The purpose of this group is to help researchers know what else is happening on campus around rural issues, and catalyze some collaborations and new research. Gretchen brings hot topics from RSA members to these meetings so researchers know what’s important to rural people in NY, so please communicate with us! TAKE THE [CORNELL CONNECTIONS PRIORITIES SURVEY](#) as a first step

- ◇ Earlier this year, John Sipple lead a team of graduate students to examine data trends for NY's rural schools, and they produced several infographics with accompanying explanations to help us make sense of it all. You can find a synopsis of them here.



Within this, there are a couple links to videos and interactive maps, so you can better understand and customize the graphics to your own locality.

Conference News:

Thank you to all who attended our summer conference and made it so fun! Also thank you to those who completed the online evaluations. In the past we made adjustments based on this feedback, and have seen improved evaluations as a result. A couple examples include reducing the number of speakers at meals, including a break on Monday afternoon, reserving a block at the Inn at Cooperstown for those who were unable to get a room at the Otesaga or Cooper Inn, and making presentation materials available online.



Invitations:

- ◇ We are identifying **guest bloggers**. If you, or someone you know, have/has something to contribute to our News Blog, please contact Gretchen at gkr1@cornell.edu



- ◇ If you are reading any books you think your rural school colleagues would appreciate, we would love to post your **book review** on our News Blog. Please send!



- ◇ We are inviting nominations of **promising programs** for our [Featured Programs](#) page on the website – especially those who have presented at our conferences, though this is not a requirement. To nominate a program, go to the Featured Programs page, scroll to the bottom for the link to the information form. Self-nominations are just fine!
- ◇ The Research, Grants, and Member Surveys Committee of the RSA Board is seeking a **BOCES District Superintendent to serve on the committee**. We could use your perspective! Please contact Dr. John Sipple at jws28@cornell.edu, or Dr. Gretchen Rymarchyk at gkr1@cornell.edu to join.
- ◇ Applications for the [Ed Elements Grant for Personalized Learning Schools](#) are due September 30, 2019.



- ◇ Central Michigan University wants to hear from **rural principals** in their survey: [Leadership Challenges of Principals in Rural America](#). Please forward this to principals you know. There is not a lot of research out there on rural education issues!



Community Schools Information and Support:

Many have been asking for more information about the Community Schools Model. We see this as a very powerful way rural schools can partner with their communities to leverage local resources in a way that benefits all: students, schools, and communities.



Probably the best place to start is at the [National Center for Community Schools](#) website. There, you will find a link to their upcoming (October 16-18) Community Schools Fundamentals Conference in NYC this year. You can also learn more about what Community Schools are, and how to get started.

New York has set aside money to help districts implement community schools. One way this money is being used is in the development of regional Technical Assistance Centers (TAC). There is one for downstate, one for the eastern corridor of Upstate NY, and a Western & Central regional TAC. They are keeping us informed of their efforts and support offerings on the New York State [Community Schools Technical Assistance Center](#) website. This group is here to help you start and build your community school at whatever point you are on in the continuum of development. Check out the whole site, especially the EVENTS tab and RESOURCES tab.



Mental Health in Schools:

[The Mental Health Association of New York State, Inc.](#) can help you locate and develop resources to help with prevention, identification, and response efforts to mental health issues in schools and communities. This year's conference (Oct 31-Nov 1) is titled: ***Advancing Mental Health and Wellness in Schools, Families and Communities***. More information is on their website. They have developed the [School Mental Health Resource & Training Center](#) with online trainings, webinars, and in-person trainings. They also have LOTS of resources to help comply with the new educational requirement for integrating mental health instruction in curricula.