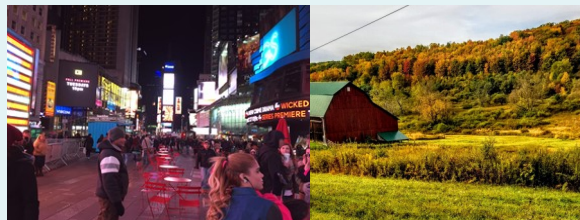




# RSA TODAY

News for New York State's  
Rural Schools

October 2019



I don't live in New York,

I live in New York

**"Communities Committed to Educational Excellence"**

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**David Little,**  
RSA Executive  
Director

## 2020: THE YEAR THAT CHANGED EVERYTHING?

### RSA ADVOCACY CAUSING NEEDED CHANGE

The air cools, leaves turn and our thoughts turn to...the state budget?

Must it always be about money? Yes. Money can't buy love, but it can buy a better future for rural children and rural communities. This past year's change in legislative leadership came with promises of school funding reform. Despite spending astronomical amounts in total, our state continues to have the nation's worst method of distributing those funds; systemically creating educational "haves and have nots" based on individual community wealth. Damning a child's future based on their zip code is abhorrent and beneath a state as sophisticated and forward thinking as New York can be.



The change in Senate majority leadership was supposed to bring a new Foundation Aid formula. It didn't and instead the state budget brought an even more convoluted means of doling out aid, based more on political than financial need. Your RSA railed at a state budget that not only failed to produce the promised reform, but at the subsequent inactivity on the part of state leaders that revealed little of the planning needed to enact reforms next year either! RSA alone criticized the lack of hearings, task forces, costing out studies and other foundational work needed to enact an effective and equitable state aid formula.

Leaders listened. Senate Education Committee Chair Shelley Mayer has set a series of statewide "roundtable" discussions and a hearing in New York City. It's a necessary first step in establishing anything other than a political approach to educational funding. The new Senate leaders don't have much time, as next fall's election will either solidify their leadership for a decade or overturn them (like their brief hold on the majority when David Paterson was governor.) The new Senate Majority needs to control the legislative redistricting process that takes place after the 2020 census and they can only do that by retaining the majority next fall. They ran on a state aid reform platform and it's time to deliver or be held accountable to voters counting on sound schools and property tax

relief. They needed prompting and only RSA stepped forward to call for the work to begin. Now, that work has begun and the focus is rightly on building the foundation for change.

This coming year, RSA will need to work with school and communities to be sure everyone in our rural areas is counted in the 2020 census. We've lost a million residents. We need to minimize the loss by making sure we don't undercount those who remain. Population loss will not only decrease federal and state aid, but it will reduce the number of rural state legislators. We will need our legislative champions more than ever and a shift in power to the cities won't help. RSA will be at the forefront of protecting our rural schools.

Similarly, lack of broadband access in our state's rural areas continues to be an impediment to student learning and the economic development needed to bring back jobs and rebuild viable communities. The state's history of building broadband capacity is not a profile in effective management. Half of all the Smart Schools Bond Act money continues to sit idle. State contracts with providers like Frontier, Charter and others have witnessed delays, misleading reporting of coverage and overestimation of viable service. 5G (which I first heard about over 20 years ago) is mired in a bureaucratic morass of public/private negotiations.

Seeing the tremendous need for rural students to have more high speed internet options than staying after school or enduring the hell of using dial up or satellite service, RSA entered the fray. We worked to support the merger of Sprint and T Mobile who have offered verifiable and enforceable timelines and service coverage measures, with the specific business model of bringing high speed broadband access to rural New York. The state's response? Prior to RSA's involvement, it was to sue to block the merger on the premise that the new company would suppress competition. Really? In a market that has been completely devoid of action thus far? RSA went to Washington to support the merger at the FCC and the Department of Justice. They agreed and approved. Now, the state is taking notice and held a joint hearing of the Legislative Commission on Rural Resources and the Assembly Local Government Committee. After hours of hearing of delays, discord and misinformation by other providers, RSA's testimony was the first they'd heard of the proposed merger...or the state's attempts to thwart progress in bringing broadband to rural New York. Now they know.



It's easy in a field as broad as public education to think that your efforts aren't enough to move such a massive ship. But RSA has proven to be one helluva tugboat, steering public education and state leaders to greater recognition of the needs of rural school districts. Dramatic change is needed and dramatic change is possible in the coming year. The answer to whether that change will really help our rural students lies in whether we intend to be "good lay people" and just lay there. The fewer in number we become, the louder we need to become, the more involved we must become, the more effective we must become. As traditional political representation in Albany shifts away from long held rural affiliations, the need to address our issues through non-partisan organizations like RSA becomes vitally important.

As we enter the time of year when the state budget is formed, when state aid is potentially adjusted, when leaders get their information, let's not keep our heads down. Yes, of course local stewardship and local leadership are imperative but our future will be dictated from afar and we had best set our sights on Albany and Washington, if we are to do right by the next generation of our rural children. Your RSA has proven itself a capable and effective advocate. Use it wisely by making sure it knows your specific local information that merges fact and theory. You have the powerful stories that move the hearts of leaders. RSA has the visibility and the influence to use those stories to change policy. It's a powerful partnership we can't afford to ignore. We're right here for you. Make sure we know the latest and most important impacts on your district, so that we can be an effective champion on your behalf!

# CONFERENCE ON *THE WHOLE CHILD*

# RSA Winter Summit

# December 13, 2019

## NYSSBA Building

## 24 Century Drive, Latham, NY

**9:00 AM - 3:00 PM**



This summit is a follow-up on last year's focus on student mental health. Schools have been asking for information on what they can do about this issue, and this conference aims to supply you with loads of ideas, information, and actions you can implement immediately.

9:00 AM - 10:00 AM	Registration & Coffee
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**10:00 AM - 10:30 AM** Welcome: Hon. Michael Benedetto, Chair: Assembly Committee on Education

**10:30 AM - 12:00 PM      What Works: Programming in Our Schools and Communities**

Panel 1: moderated by Dr. Michael Patton, Superintendent: Saratoga Schools

Panelists: Sue Baldwin, District Wellness Coordinator: While 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, MHANYS

**12:00 pm - 1:00 PM      Vaping, Sexual Assault, Red Flag Laws & Other Issues Affecting Students**

Lunch provided with speaker Jay Worona, Deputy Executive Director and General Counsel, NYSSBA

1:00 PM - 3:00 PM	Trends, Resources, and Outlooks
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Panel 2: moderated by Dr. Michael Patton, Superintendent: Saratoga Schools

Donna Bradbury, Associate Commissioner, Division of Integrated Community Services for Children and Families, NYSOMH

## Pat Breaux, Suicide Prevention Center of NYS

Laura Ficcaro, NYS Office of Alcohol and Substance Abuse Services

Each panel has plenty of time built in for questions from the audience, so please come prepared to challenge our experts with your questions on rural student mental health and wellness.

# ADVENTURE 2 LEARNING ADDRESSES

## SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL WELLNESS IN RURAL SCHOOLS

*Chicago teacher Quinlan O’Grady is preparing her students for success with video lessons from Adventure 2 Learning*

**By Dennis Pierce**

Growing up on Chicago’s South Side, a neighborhood whose history of gun violence earned it the moniker “Chiraq,” can be traumatic for students. Many students come to school having witnessed violence or abuse in their lives. When they take their seats for the morning bell, learning fractions or the parts of a sentence is often the furthest thing from their minds.

These are the challenges Quinlan O’Grady faces each day as a teacher at Schmid Elementary School. And yet, her students are not only overcoming these challenges, they’re thriving — thanks in no small part to the use of mindfulness videos that give them effective strategies for coping with their emotions.

In fact, O’Grady’s third graders last year performed 10 points higher than the national third-grade average on NWEA’s Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) benchmark exam. She attributes this success to a number of factors, one of which is her use of mindfulness content and other instructional videos from Adventure 2 Learning.

### Promoting Active Learning

O’Grady began using Adventure 2 Learning’s instructional videos a few years ago as a way to promote active learning in her classroom.

Adventure 2 Learning’s 7,000-plus videos are available for streaming to any interactive whiteboard, computer, tablet, or phone. The videos, which come with teacher guides and lesson plans, span a wide variety of subject areas — including math, science, social studies, ELA, art and music, physical education, and financial literacy.

The videos are highly interactive and engage students in learning through their favorite medium. For instance, the science videos include experiments that kids can do either at home or at school. And a series of videos called “Adventure to Fitness” gets students up and moving while they’re learning key content. Children run, jump, climb, paddle, and swim along with their guide, Mr. Marc, as he travels the globe in search of adventure, taking students on a virtual tour of places such as the Great Pyramids of Egypt.

“My students love the videos because they’re super engaging,” O’Grady says. “They’re like a virtual simulation, and kids feel like they’re immersed in that world. They’ll even talk back to the characters.”

When Adventure 2 Learning added mindfulness videos to its instructional library, O’Grady recognized this as a perfect opportunity to extend her students’ social and emotional learning (SEL).

### Teaching Self-Control

Schmid Elementary already had a strong focus on SEL in place. Each day, teachers are encouraged to spend at least 10 minutes in the morning and another 10 minutes in the afternoon on SEL instruction.



**Students Engaging with Smartboard Video Learning**



“Our philosophy is that students’ social and emotional needs must be met before they are ready to learn,” O’Grady explains. “If students aren’t able to regulate their emotions, we can’t expect them to be academically focused.”

O’Grady has used this SEL time to show mindfulness videos from Adventure 2 Learning featuring singer, songwriter, and yoga instructor Bari Koral, as well as Fitbound yoga videos and other mindfulness programs. She plays the videos in the morning before students begin working and later when they come in from recess. “This allows them to refocus and center themselves for the afternoon,” she observes.

The mindfulness videos teach students guided breathing exercises, visualization techniques, and other strategies for regulating their emotions.

“It’s important for students to learn these self-control and self-management skills,” she says. “It builds their capacity to monitor their emotions and respond effectively when they’re feeling angry or frightened or sad. We’re in one of the more dangerous areas of the city, and there is a high need for students to develop these coping mechanisms.”



**Students Practice Yoga as a Mindfulness Program**

### **A Powerful Example**

While *all* children can benefit from mindfulness instruction — and the success of O’Grady’s students is a convincing testament to its effectiveness — there is one student in particular whom she holds up as a powerful example.

This young boy came from a troubled home where he was regularly exposed to domestic abuse and other childhood traumas. When he transferred into Schmid Elementary from another school, his record of behavior was “really daunting,” O’Grady says. However, he immediately took to the guided meditation lessons from Adventure 2 Learning.

“He would actively engage in the strategies shown in the videos, such as: ‘Picture releasing your anger like you’re a balloon releasing air,’” she recalls.

By the end of third grade, this boy showed one of the highest growths on the MAP exam of any of O’Grady’s students. His scores far exceeded both the national average for third graders and his own learning goals — and his disciplinary referrals had plummeted.

“If I were to begin the day by saying, ‘Open your reading books to page 23,’ he wasn’t ready to engage in that space,” she concludes. “By starting with social and emotional learning, we’re saying: ‘We care about you as a person first and foremost.’ This has a big impact on how children function academically.”

*Dennis Pierce is a freelance writer with more than 20 years of experience writing about education. He can be reached at [denniswpierce@gmail.com](mailto:denniswpierce@gmail.com)*

# NY: TOO MANY LACK BROADBAND ACCESS

By JOE MAHONEY CNHI State Reporter  
Oct 8, 2019

HUDSON — Students in rural schools and patients relying on services offered by hospitals in small towns have found themselves on the wrong side of the digital divide in New York due to large gaps in broadband access that is readily available to most people in urban centers.

That was one of the consistent themes that emerged Friday at a federal hearing hosted by Rep. Antonio Delgado, D-Rhinebeck, who is seeking solutions to extending the availability of high-speed internet access to residents of rural communities in upstate New York.

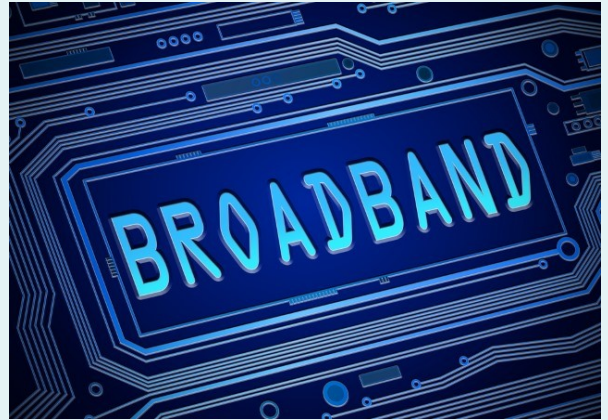
Those offering input questioned the effectiveness of the use of internet access through satellite networks. The operators of some satellite services have received state funding in remote areas of the North Country and Niagara County, among other regions where homes are so far apart that private companies have avoided offering high-speed broadband due to the high cost of wiring places where homes can be far apart.

David Berman, a retired CBS executive who is now the co-chair of a citizen's group called Connect Columbia, said "huge gaps" still exist in broadband coverage in his region though it received \$30 million in state funding.

He said "true broadband" now equates to access to 100 megabits of information per second, growing to 1 gigabit within five years. He noted that the Federal Communications Commission's definition of broadband is "considerably out of date," creating a situation where services in this country have fallen behind those offered by international competitors.

The use of satellite broadband, in some areas, "was applied to theoretically give everyone access, which it decidedly did not." He called that technology "merely a Band-Aid that cannot meet current demand much less the exponentially growing demand" in the future.

Tim Johnson, chief executive officer of the member-owned Otsego Electric Cooperative, headquartered in Hartwick, said broadband services are facing some of the same challenges navigated by the nation's rural electrification program some 80 years ago.



The cooperative, he noted, decided to offer broadband connections in 2017 and are now "off to a great start," but has encountered challenges from the government's reliance on census block maps to determine if an area is served or not served. Better data is needed for the state and federal government, along with private industry, to make funding and investment determinations, he suggested.

Johnson also said the non-profit cooperatives "desperately need" changes in the federal tax code so government grants for broadband will not be taxed as income.

"More than 100 electric co-ops, including my own, are currently working toward meaningful and diverse solutions to bridge the digital divide and jump-start local economies," Johnson said.

The importance of filling the broadband coverage gaps for the families of school children was emphasized by Brian Dunn, superintendent of Middleburgh Central School District, in a Schoharie County community speckled with rolling farm fields.

Broadband access is now a component of "high quality schooling," which is essential to the renewal of Middleburgh, a town still recovering from flooding unleashed by Hurricane Irene in 2011, Dunn said.

The coming arrival of driverless trucks and other vehicles, Dunn said, will alter the job market, making it crucial that students complete school with the digital skills they will need as employment opportunities evolve with technology.

While his district is using grant money to get laptops for all students in grades 7 through 12, Dunn said, the lack of broadband connections in some homes will create "a disadvantage, not only with their own classmates but also with students in the more populated and more resourced parts of the state and country."



**Brian Dunn, Superintendent of  
Middleburgh Central School District**

Connecting rural Americans to broadband will take "an effective mix of entrepreneurial spirit, access to capital, commitment to community" and federal support, said Jason Miller, general manager of Delhi Telephone Company in Delaware County.

"Robust broadband must be available, affordable, and sustainable for rural small businesses and underserved populations to realize the economic, healthcare, education, and public safety benefits that advanced connectivity offers," said Miller. The use of more accurate mapping data in deciding where services should be extended is vital to ensure that rural residents don't wind up stranded without access to services, he said.

Delgado told CNHI that he expects further progress in advancing broadband access. "The next step is to hold the FCC's feet to the fire" and make funding decisions that allow for federal dollars to be used effectively and efficiently in advancing toward the goal of ending coverage gaps in rural regions.

The reliance on census block maps, the congressman said, has led to flawed assumptions that some areas are being fully served even as many residents still lack access.

In remarks at the forum, Delgado said, "Broadband services should not be treated as a luxury—but as a basic utility and essential for our communities."

Also addressing the forum was an FCC commissioner, Geoffrey Starks.

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Reprinted from the [Press-Republican](#)



## NEW LEGISLATION WILL SUPPORT NY'S RURAL COMMUNITIES



HUDSON, N.Y. — U.S. Representative Antonio Delgado (NY-19) and Senator Kirsten Gillibrand (NY) today visited Hudson Hall to unveil their new legislation that would prioritize federal investment for rural communities and small towns across New York State. The *Rebuild Rural America Act* would improve the way that the federal government supports development projects in small towns and rural communities in order to better fit their specific needs.

“During the last in-district work period, I focused on rural infrastructure and broadband needs in NY-19, and heard from community leaders across the district about the challenges they face when seeking federal grants. From Hobart to Hunter and all across the district, our communities have significant rural infrastructure needs to compete in the modern economy.” **Congressman Delgado continued**, “Today, I’m announcing the introduction of the *Rebuild Rural America Act* (RRAA) in the House to make sure upstate communities have the opportunity and resources to access federal funding and rebuild aging infrastructure. This bill gives rural communities the funding, flexibility, and technical assistance to do what they know will best help their towns — including building firehouses, repaving sidewalks, replacing old and failing water systems, and supporting economic development to make sure our upstate communities have what they need to grow and thrive.”

“Rural communities are at the very heart of New York, and their development is key to helping our state, and our nation, succeed. These communities face complex challenges that demand comprehensive and long-term solutions, but the current federal grant system is too narrow and inflexible to fully address their needs,” said **Senator Gillibrand**. “We have to reimagine how the federal government partners with and invests in rural communities, which is why I am proud to unveil the *Rebuild Rural America Act*. My bill would provide communities like Hudson with multi-year, flexible block grants to support locally-developed plans for regional economic growth. It would encourage rural communities to come together as a region and rebuild their economies. I’m proud to partner with Congressman Delgado in this effort to deliver our rural communities the federal support they actually need, and this bill is a good place to start.”

“We’re thrilled to welcome Senator Gillibrand and Congressman Delgado to Hudson Hall and applaud the leadership of our New York State representatives for their sponsorship of the *Rebuild Rural America Act*. With thanks to the support of our representatives, we were able to secure critical funding from the State of New York and the U.S.D.A. to restore our landmark building and return it to community use as a vibrant arts and cultural center. The *Rebuild Rural America Act* creates a cohesive blueprint for rural prosperity that will only have a multiplier effect on the creative economy spurring our region’s revival,” said **Tambra Dillon, Executive Director, Hudson Hall**.



“The *Rebuild Rural America Act* proposes an important new policy that offers real solutions to the unique challenges facing rural places,” said **Tom Vilsack, former Secretary of Agriculture in the Obama Administration**. “Unique to this proposal is the element of partnership in every aspect of a comprehensive vision for a powerful rural economy and an improved quality of community life for rural regions across the country. This bill places a premium on rural communities leading the effort with government assistance and carves out an expanded role for cooperatives to play in rebuilding the rural economy, all of which are essential to the success and prosperity of rural America.”

Federal grant funding is often inaccessible to rural communities and too inflexible to fully meet local development needs. This makes it difficult for rural communities and small towns to plan and implement the comprehensive, long-term development projects required to address the complex challenges they face. The *Rebuild Rural America Act* would establish a dedicated stream of federal funding for rural communities and provide guaranteed, multi-year, flexible block grants to support regional economic growth. This would help rural communities better plan for and encourage economic growth across regions.

**Specifically, the *Rebuild Rural America Act* would do the following:**

- Create a **new \$50 billion grant program**, the Rural Future Partnership Fund, to provide non-competitive, five-year, renewable block grants to certified rural regions to implement locally-developed regional revitalization plans.
- o Funding will be allocated proportionately based on the population of each region, with an increased allocation for regions that include areas that have a poverty rate greater than 20 percent.
- 
- o Eligible regions include those with a central community of 10,000 to 50,000 people, collections of rural census tracts or counties outside of regions with a central community of 10,000 to 50,000 people, and Indian reservations. States, in coordination with USDA, will certify the regions’ participation in the program.
- 
- Encourage rural regions to develop **comprehensive, collaborative, and locally-driven community and economic development plans** that revitalize infrastructure, provide support for public services and job training, and foster local entrepreneurship.
- Require interested rural regions to **form a Regional Rural Partnership Council** that brings together local leaders, elected officials, economic development organizations, cooperatives, higher education institutions, foundations, and other entities important to regional development.
- **Empower rural community leaders** by creating national capacity and training programs that will help connect the expertise and resources of the USDA and national and regional technical assistance providers with rural regions.
- **Establish a State-by-State Rural Innovation and Partnership Administration** to oversee this new program and offer hands-on help to local leaders.
- **Launch a Rural Future Corps** in coordination with AmeriCorps to assist rural communities with implementing Rural Partnership Plans and expanding critical services including childcare, health services, nutrition assistance, education, and job training.

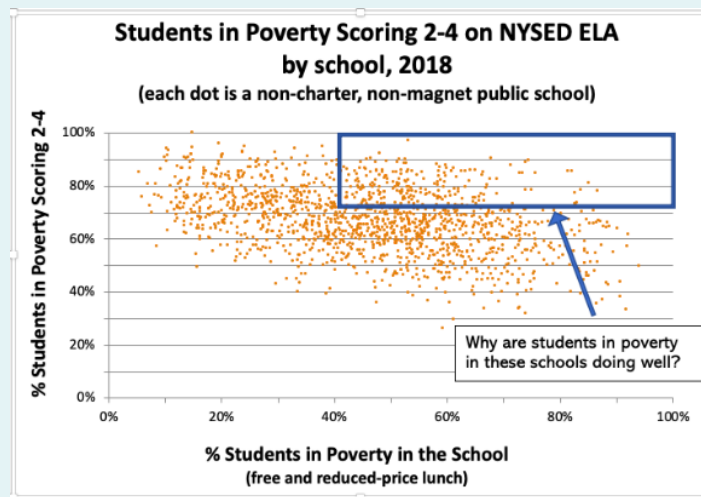
Delgado and Gillibrand will introduce the *Rebuild Rural America Act* in Congress this week. This bill has been endorsed by the Center on Rural Innovation, Fahe, Family Farm Action, Farm Credit Council, Housing Assistance Council (HAC), Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), National Association of Counties, National Farmers Union, New England Farmers Union, People’s Action, Rural Community Assistance Corporation (RCAC), The Rural Community Assistance Partnership (RCAP), and United Action for Idaho.



Dr. Gretchen Rymarchyk,  
Deputy Director RSA

## THE CORNELL CONNECTION

Consider attending this conference on evidence-based achievement strategies for students in poverty. These are all schools from NY, and many are rural!



### *3rd Annual Conference* **Beating the Odds, Building Opportunities for Students in Poverty**

**Friday, November 15, 2019**

**at**

**Monroe College, New Rochelle, NY**

**Come hear from principals and superintendents who  
boosted the achievement of their students in poverty**

*What we heard from past conference attendees...*

"The best part of the conference was the break out sessions where we heard from building leaders in charge of schools that are moving forward."

"What I liked best about the conference were the clear presentations of data with identifiable steps that can move students."

Register here: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/beating-the-odds-building-opportunities-for-students-in-poverty-3rd-annual-conference-courageous-tickets-60765835249>



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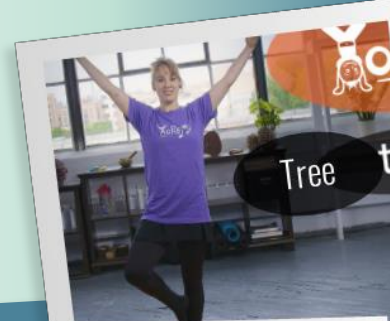
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