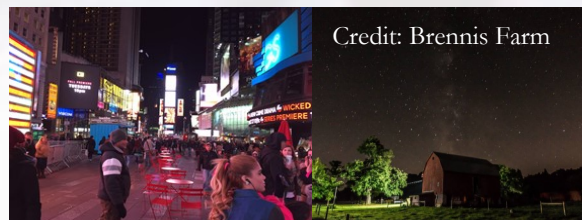




RSA TODAY

News for New York State's
Rural Schools

May 2020



I don't live in New York,

I live in New York

"Communities Committed to Educational Excellence"

David A. Little, Esq., Executive Director, dal295@cornell.edu 518-250-5710

Dr. Gretchen Rymarchyk, Deputy Director, gkr1@cornell.edu 607-254-3557

Natalie Mitchell, Administrative Assistant, nam33@cornell.edu 607-255-8709

Fax: 607/254-2896

Rural Schools Association of New York State

Warren Hall 275 Flex

Cornell University

Ithaca, NY 14853

www.RSANY.org

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David Little,
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NEW YORK: THE BEST OF STATES IN THE WORST OF TIMES

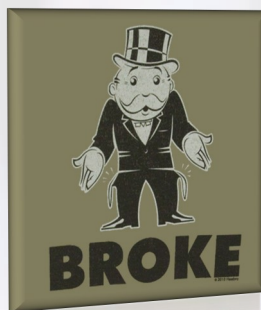
We're getting used to the U.S. Census being important to us. We've been hearing calls to complete this year's census form, knowing that (with our population loss) everyone counts more than ever. In early January the Census Bureau confirmed that our rural areas of New York State had lost 1.4 million people over the last 10 years. That alone is staggering in its implications. Now, the Census Bureau is documenting another devastating statistic: New York State ranks highest in the nation in several school spending categories. Why would this be devastating? Because even with our "highest in the nation" spending, our rural students can't get the resources they need-and it's likely to get worse very soon.



First the facts. 1. Our state spends an average of \$24,040 per student. (We could stop right there if we could only change the word "per" to "on each.") That figure is twice the national average and ranks **first in the nation**. 2. We are also **first in the nation** in total education spending. This means we spend more than states that have a greater number of students than New York. Again, good news taken by itself. 3. New York is the **first in the nation** in educational spending by local revenue. Here we're starting to get to the heart of the issue. \$15,840 of our \$24,040 per student average spending comes from the local taxpayers, not the state. 4. We spend the most of any state on teacher salaries and we're **number one** in spending on teacher benefits as well (for administrative and school board costs, we're middle of the pack.) What can we glean from our top ranking?

First, it shows that our state places a high collective priority on public education. After that, the news gets a little more distressing. Our high average is largely due to the high spending of our wealthy districts. Our Number One ranking in local revenue contribution to that high average begins to tell us how we can possibly still have school districts teetering on the brink of fiscal disaster and tremendous disparities in curriculum while spending more in total than anyone. With nearly 2/3 of our spending coming from the community and not the state, it is the comparative wealth of the community that deter-

mines school district resources. Wealthy community, wealthy district and sadly of course, the opposite is all too true. We've known all of this for a very long time, but we've never been the undisputed champs before! While we are first in spending, every major assessment of the equity in student spending by states shows New York dead last. That's right, the Empire State is last in equity. I don't want to get specific, but that means we're worse than some historically inequitable states. Mississippi comes to mind.



Now we get to today. The state is broke and has set in motion a way for the governor (who doesn't have to face the voters again for two more years) to cut education without legislative approval. That makes it easier for representatives to run this fall, get re-elected and determine their own legislative district lines for the next 10 years. Once they're ensconced in power for the rest of their careers, trying to get them to make substantive changes to major funding programs will be next to impossible. With cuts looming from the economic shutdown, the legislature didn't want to be identified with the resulting devastation to their schools. Layoffs, cuts to programs and services, cuts to guidance and social work in the midst of a crisis, increases in spending just to reopen to a diminished curriculum. Who wants to lead THAT parade? So they ceded authority for the cuts to the governor, who now waits on Washington for help.

That help may very well come, but not as soon as any New Yorker would like. Our fiscal year began April 1, but 46 other states' begin on July 1. They're working on last year's money right now and so the fiscal crisis won't pervade their reality until June. Then I'm guessing we see much more support for stimulus aid to the states, as every state joins the chorus in trying to pay for basic (and expected) services. That federal stimulus funding may not be enough to stave off state aid cuts to education and if that's true, we need to cry out for some sense of sanity in how those cuts are made.

The governor has already signaled an intent to do cuts "across the board." This sounds like fairness; sounds like everyone gets treated the same. Far from it. An across the board cut of 20% to a wealthy district receiving 7% of their budget from the state suffers very little. A school receiving 80% of their budget from the state getting an across the board cut of 20% is out of business. Don't forget that state aid has already been cut, but supplanted by the same dollar figure in federal funding. When that stops, your district will have to somehow make that up. In making those cuts, the state unfortunately went "across the board" (just as it did at the start of the Great Recession a decade ago.) The state learned valuable lessons when it restored that funding; first, that it was far more equitable to restore funding based on lack of wealth and secondly that it had the sophistication needed to calculate aid cuts and restoration based on wealth. It doesn't need to go "across the board." It can be nuanced and fair in its approach.

It's great for New York State to be Number One! Let's make sure that this time around, it doesn't treat our rural schools like Number Two....





WHILE THE WORLD WATCHED **YOU WERE AT YOUR BEST**

THANKS TO YOU!!!

PLEASE help us thank everyone in your school community for the heroic work they're doing! Boost their spirits and inspire them by sharing this [video](#) with your teachers, board members and administrative team. Parents could use some appreciation too! Thanks for helping RSA support your district community for their dedication, innovation and love of students and learning during this crisis!

RSA MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

OK, so we're in a brand new environment! "Virtually" everything about how we provide public education has been turned on its ear. We're doing the impossible, overnight. To top it all off, money is going to be tight.

We at your Rural Schools Association are trying our best to provide you with very real benefits from your membership. Our advocacy on your behalf at both the state and federal levels has been continual and effective. Our research and resources are allowing you to make the best of a bad situation. More importantly, they will allow you to take advantage of this moment in history to come out on the other side as more efficient and more effective.

We like to think of membership in RSA as the best \$750 investment your district could make.

We understand the fiscal pressure you're experiencing and so the RSA Board of Directors has determined that for the third year in a row, dues will remain at \$750. In the past we've done our very best to have increased revenues from outside sources offset any inflationary increases at your association. This year with the necessary cancellation of the Spring and Summer Conferences, that won't be possible. So, we're tightening our belts. Just like you, we'll be more efficient, work harder and make do with what we're provided.

To make your membership easier, we are moving up our membership drive to allow you to pay your dues in the current budget year. You'll be receiving your membership request soon. **Please support your RSA in supporting you!**



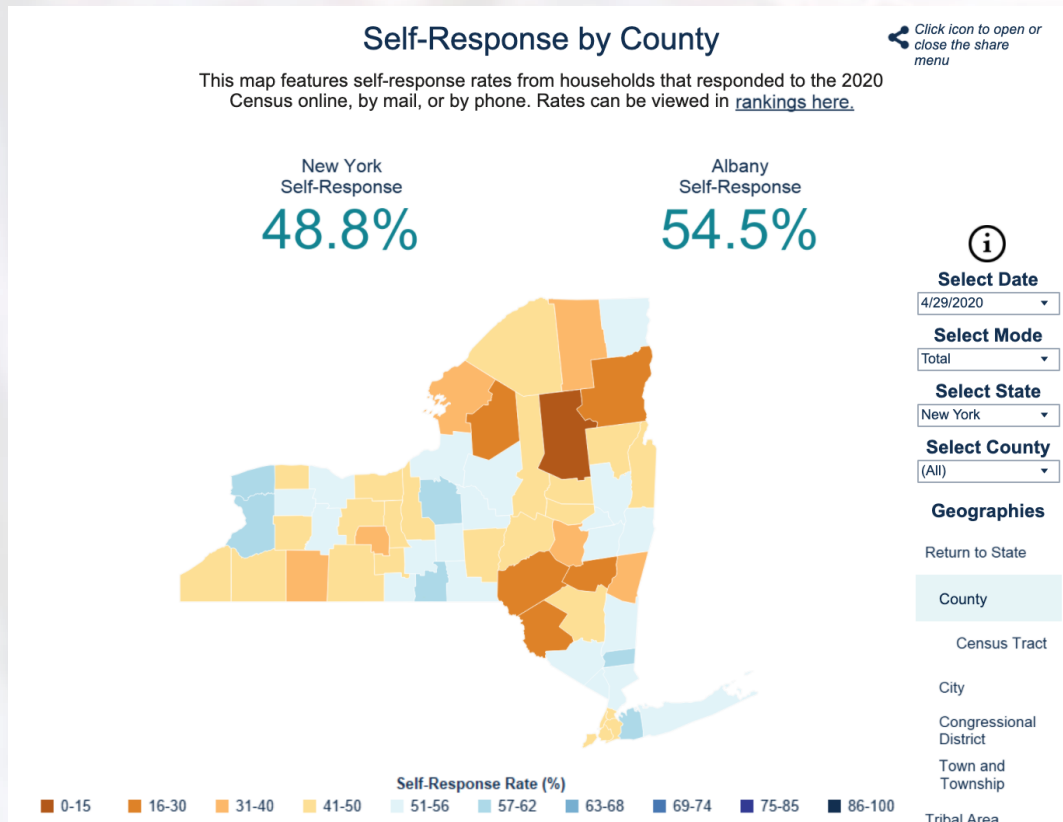
THE CORNELL CONNECTION

2020 Census Update

As of this writing, New York is falling behind that national response rate for the 2020 Census, and not even half of our citizens have been counted. Specifically, rural communities in NY are lagging behind:



Dr. Gretchen Rymarchyk,
Deputy Director, RSA



It is imperative that we get as many people counted as possible so we can secure fair funding for schools, roadways, health care access, fair representation, sound business decisions, and accurate research. Please get the word out loudly and often! The Census page can be found here, with links to fill out the Census, and information on why the data matters: <https://2020census.gov/en/response-rates.html>

RSA Text Messages

The Cornell Connection has been working hard to figure out ways to stay in touch, collect information, and get information to all of our members. Sending one (bigger and bigger) survey in the fall, when everyone else is sending out surveys too, has not been as exciting as we had hoped. We have developed a means to send out questions via text messages – no more than one per week. You would respond directly to the text with a brief answer right away, and be done. We can then generate some quick results and get them to you through the website. This has the potential to tap into not only administrators and board of education members, but also teachers, other school staff, and even families.

To get started, we need the phone numbers to text to – and ideas for the kinds of questions you'd like to see. So we are going to ask you to give us yours at this link: https://cornell.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_71ZhToYukHT6JOR And invite whomever you want from your district to add theirs as well – the more, the merrier, and the better we can serve you!

Rural Cultural Competency Training

With the launching of the Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education Framework from NYSED (<http://www.nysed.gov/crs>) earlier this year, we have been getting requests for Rural Cultural Competency Training. Many rural school staff commute in from suburban or urban areas and are struggling to connect with families and communities. As we know, rural is a culture of its own. While many trainers are telling us that poverty, for example, presents the same issues in rural areas as it does in urban areas, those of us working in rural areas know better. Generic diversity training, or training that focuses on race and/or class generally is not sufficient, and often not accurate for rural populations.

We are currently gathering a resource base for this kind of work. If you are aware of organizations or materials that specifically address RURAL cultural competency, please forward them to our Deputy Director, Gretchen Rymarchyk, at GKR1@cornell.edu

Shifting from Whole-Child to Whole-Family in Rural Communities

Part I: Families Are the Smallest Human Service Organization

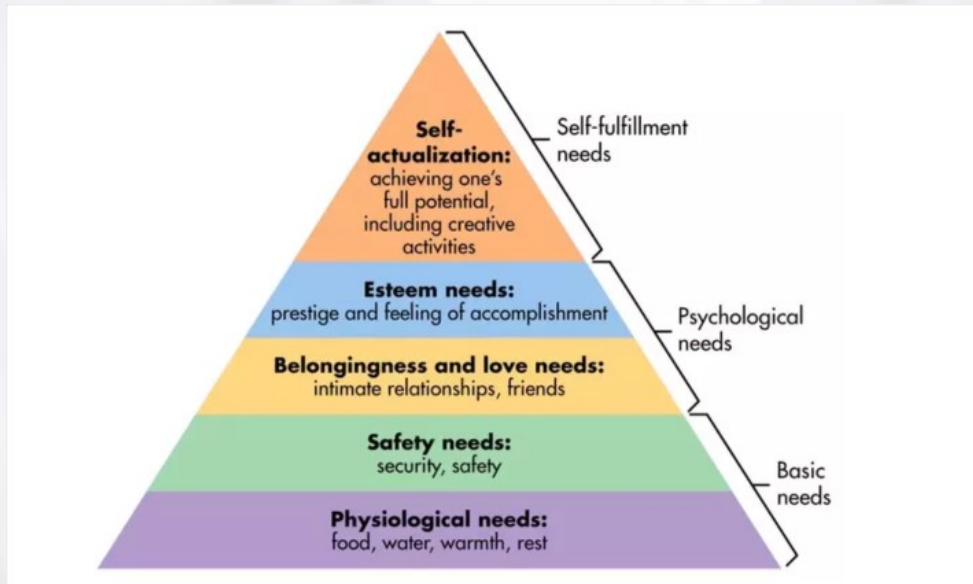
Rural areas have seen a dramatic decline in population over the past 30+ years, but all areas still have families.

Families are the smallest human service organization. Regardless of structure and culture, their purpose is to ensure the health, safety, and well-being of their members.

According to Bogenschneider (2012), families have five broad functions:

1. Family formation - Regardless of structure, families serve to keep groups of people together for support, whether this means two people or twenty. All members understand to which family they primarily belong, even when this may span multiple households, or when membership is temporary (raising children who will eventually move away, or caring for a terminally ill adult/parent) or permanent (getting married). They know who depends on them, and upon whom they depend; where they sleep at night, where they dine and for which meals; who will notice when they are sick, or not "home" when expected.
2. Partner relationships - Families determine their own respective roles and functions: who makes decisions and how are they made, who is responsible for income, meals, caring for dependents, representing the family to the outside world, cleaning, recreation, teaching various topics to others, supporting children in becoming functional adults, who gets to leave and go out on their own, and who remains.
3. Economic Support - Families determine how money will be procured, how much, and by whom. More broadly, they determine how to obtain the resources needed to sustain the family and its members, how much is "enough" and when they do not have enough. Rules are made about acceptable and unacceptable sources (as when a family refuses to accept charity, or sell illicit drugs, etc.). They decide who will be responsible for obtaining these resources - sometimes everyone is involved, sometimes it's only one member.
4. Childrearing - Families are responsible for the creation and raising of the next generation. While not all families have children, the vast majority do at some point. These families are responsible for making sure children are healthy and grow well physically, mentally, and emotionally. This includes either ensuring they attend a school, or they homeschool. The ultimate goal is to ensure a functional new generation of adults who will become the heads of families and the citizens and leaders of communities. This then includes indoctrination into society, politics, culture, and sometimes religion.
5. Caregiving - Families care for those who cannot care for themselves, whether that's temporarily as when someone is ill, or permanently as when someone is disabled. Often there is caretaking of children, but it is not uncommon for caretaking to include adults who are disabled or elderly. Families know these individuals the best and are in the best position to know how to meet their individual needs in a way that is most respectful and satisfying each member.

As we progress through this discussion, it is important to keep Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs in mind:



As with individuals, when families are not able to get their most basic physiological needs met (food, water, warmth, rest), they will not be able to prioritize higher-level achievements like education and schooling, which are in the top two levels of this pyramid.

Having said all that, the policies and programs we create for them need to consider how to support, rather than substitute or undermine (however unintentionally), the functions of families. If families are able to continue to provide for their members with a little help, it will be less expensive for society than if social programming takes over.

Consider the example of providing meals for students at school, and the fallout that has resulted in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis: not only do schools have to figure out how to provide formal education to students who are at home (the proper role of schools), but they now have to figure out how to feed students who are at home (the proper role of families). Schools have rapidly risen to the challenge, sending busloads of meals out into communities for these students. Looking at it from a family's point of view, however, what happens in the home when one or two meals arrive for a family of 5? Who gets the food? How would you solve this at your home, assuming there is no other food coming to the home? Would the school children eat while younger children do not? What about the parents - how do they continue to function well without food? What about other dependents - adults who may be frail and/or disabled?

In many communities there are food give-aways, however one needs transportation to access these, or friends who can pick up and deliver. Either way, this increases COVID-19 exposure opportunities. Many families needing help with food also do not have adequate health insurance, if they have any at all. And when you are talking about rural families, even if one has health insurance, there may not be a medical facility nearby.

Such complicated problems are called "wicked" problems - there is no one, simple solution because the problem is embedded in so many different inter-related systems. Rather than parsing out problems and creating solutions that substitute for family functions, how can we think about supporting family functioning in a way that could impact multiple issues? For example, delivering groceries to families would be far less expensive to put together, and allow families to create whatever meals they wanted/needed for their members. The workers creating school meals might be redeployed taking grocery orders, packing food boxes in a balanced way, and adding nutritious recipes for families to try.

Stay tuned to this series for more information on how to think about the Family Impact when designing and evaluating programs and policies. The more self-sufficient our families, the better off our students and communities.

DESIGNING HEALTHY EDUCATION ENVIRONMENTS

As everyone is acutely aware, the COVID-19 health crisis has drastically impacted people's everyday lives and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. No one is more familiar with this impact than our students, parents, teachers and educational leaders.

One group able to assist school districts in complying with the Governor's directive to plan for the reopening of buildings in the fall is the team at Bergmann. Bergmann has been partnering with clients in the education space for years, as a full-service architecture, engineering and planning firm headquartered in Rochester. Most importantly for schools currently however, is the fact that they recently created a formal Education Practice after seeing the unique needs of clients across the state. This focus, along with their multi-disciplinary team of 450+ experts firm-wide, places them in a unique position to support school districts in creating a safer educational environment during this time of crisis.

Governor Cuomo has required school districts to plan for the reopening of school buildings in the fall, taking into account the myriad implications of social distancing and potential viral transmission. Bergmann's education group has been closely collaborating with colleagues in their Interior Design group, as well as their Science, Technology and Industry (STI) Practice; experts who design cleanrooms, R&D labs and highly specialized spaces for clients such as Merck, Pfizer, Bausch and Lomb and others. Together, they have identified a new approach for designing healthier education environments that utilizes scientific best practices to kill bacteria and vastly reduce the transmission of viruses.

Their approach starts with a campus wide audit and building assessment to identify immediate enhancements allowing for the safe and healthy return of students and staff to the school campus. According to Jim Hickey, Education Practice Leader at Bergmann, this partnership will also provide solutions to improve the overall health of district buildings, along with disease transmission reduction strategies to support the district's long-term efforts, becoming more resilient against the changing post-COVID education landscape.

COVID-19 is forcing us to think differently about how to design our education spaces. Bergmann is on the cutting edge of helping schools address this new logistical and financial challenge. Three months ago no one would have dreamed of reorienting our classrooms, redirecting traffic, altering schedules, providing barriers and a host of other considerations that now appear imperative for the safe operation of our schools. Given the monumental task ahead, having a professional partner to assess your needs is welcome news. Looking at the unique needs of a school district and creating a plan to address the implications of the pandemic will be a monumental undertaking for school districts. Knowing that the help of experienced experts is readily available can only help.





BERGMANN
ARCHITECTS ENGINEERS PLANNERS



James Hickey, AIA
Education Practice Leader
jhickey@bergmannpc.com
716.710.3948

Designing Healthy Education Environments

Bergmann has been a long-time design partner for School Districts across New York State. Our multi-disciplinary expertise uniquely positions us to provide valuable support in light of COVID-19.

We can help your district navigate the evolving regulatory landscape while implementing necessary changes to ensure the health and safety of students and staff, all personalized to your district's unique needs.

Let us help you create a personalized plan for creating a healthy education environment.

[BERGMANNPC.COM/EDUCATION](https://bergmannpc.com/education)



NATIONAL FIRM. STRONG LOCAL CONNECTIONS

SCHOOL FUNDING AND REOPENING

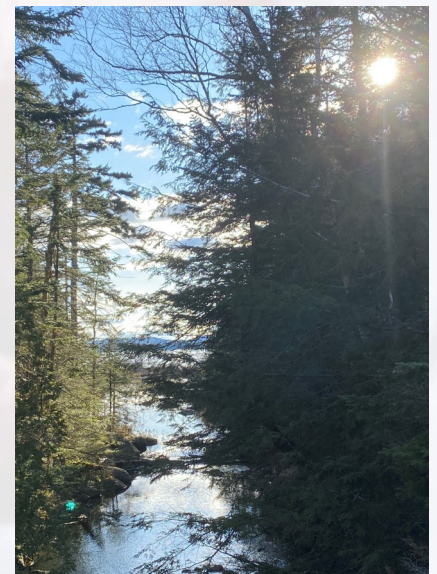
IMPORTANT INFORMATION ON SCHOOLS' BIGGEST CONCERNS

No issues loom larger than how schools will work in the fall and how they'll be funded. RSA's partners at LPI have put together two significant resources to help you address them:

How could each states education budget be impacted by increased education-related expenses and declines in state revenue? LPI has created the following [Individual State 2-pagers](#). These downloadable PDFs project the impact of COVID-19 on state education budgets using a conservative estimate of a 5% budget cut in FY20 and a 20% cut in FY21 and a limited set of necessary new education expenses. The 2-pagers include national data as well, which shows a close to \$230 billion shortfall over the next 18 months using this conservative estimate.

How can the U.S. Reopen schools safely? Across the country, policymakers and school leaders are making plans for when it is safe to reopen schools. In order to reopen schools safely and mitigate disease spread, state and district leaders will need to address several important health considerations. Released today, LPI's brief

["Reopening Schools in the Context of COVID-19: Health and Safety Guidelines from Other Countries"](#) compiles preliminary information on health and safety guidelines from five countries that have continued or reopened schools during the COVID-19 outbreak: China, Denmark, Norway, Singapore, and Taiwan.



SUFFOLK COUNTY EXECUTIVE: WE'RE SEEING RELIEF FROM ONONDAGA COUNTY

By Susan Arbetter /New York State/NYStateofPolitics.com

Suffolk County on Long Island is similar to upstate New York in that it's rural, agricultural, and has far fewer hospitals and doctors than neighboring Nassau County and New York City.

And like upstate, it's geographically large.

"I like to say you can fit Brooklyn, Queens, and Nassau County into Suffolk and have plenty of room to spare," Suffolk County Executive Steve Bellone told Spectrum News over Skype on Monday.

At the same time, Suffolk is close to both population centers and has become a COVID hotspot.

"We always had the expectation ...that we were 7 to 14 days behind New York City, and actually behind Nassau County as well, and that has turned out to be the case," Bellone said.

Sunday, more than 500 people died in Suffolk County alone.

"The numbers are absolutely staggering," said Bellone. "Life was normal here just a month ago."

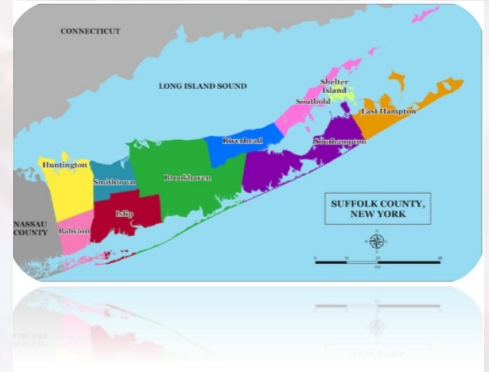
But Suffolk saw a welcome infusion of nursing staff recently when Onondaga County Executive Ryan McMahon sent nurses downstate from Upstate University Hospital in Syracuse. Bellone said the gesture by Onondaga County was inspiring.

"When those nurses arrived, it really was like the cavalry coming," said Bellone. "The cheers and just the relief and joy that they were there."

"It sent the message that it really is one New York."

Two nurses from Suffolk County who were treating COVID patients have succumbed to the disease, according to Bellone.

"Hundreds of workers have contracted the virus, and are back now, working to save peoples' lives," he said.



SUPPORTING EDUCATION IN NEW YORK

Read the article [here](#)

NEW YORK'S RURAL SCHOOLS PROVE RESILIENT DURING COVID-19

Read the article here: <https://cals.cornell.edu/news/new-yorks-rural-schools-prove-resilient-during-covid-19>



NEW YORK FARM BUREAU CHEERS BILLION DOLLAR AID PACKAGE FOR FARMS

BY NICK REISMAN/ NEW YORK STATE/NYSTAEOFPOLITICS.COM

The federal government will direct billions of dollars to struggling farmers around the country and in New York to offset the economic panic caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

The move will free up \$1.6 billion to farms, along with \$3 billion for meat, dairy, fruit and vegetable product purchases.

The pandemic has sunk demand for food products as restaurants and schools remain closed to prevent the spread of the virus.

The lowered demand has led to dairy farmers dumping milk or vegetable growers discarding crops.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture, which is funding the farm support, also plans to send the excess food to food banks around the country.

“No farmer wants to see food go to waste but is sometimes left with no other choice considering the major challenges confronting the food distribution chain,” said New York Farm Bureau President David Fisher.

“Like most small businesses, New York’s farm families are trying to cope the best they can while they continue to make sure food production doesn’t stop. The USDA announcement is an investment into food security for this country.”

3 REASONS TO BECOME A TEACHER OR THERAPIST IN A RURAL SCHOOL

It sounds like a broken record already, "Schools in Rural America are in deep trouble." Between population loss, stiff financial challenges, and their inability to match the resources of larger, more developed urban areas, at times, it doesn't seem very easy to find anything positive about schools in rural communities. If so, why would any teacher or [therapist](#) want to move to Rural America to begin or advance a career?

However, this conclusion is superficial at best. If we take the time to look beyond the pessimistic headlines, it becomes quite clear that Rural America has much to offer both teachers and therapists. We will explore but 3 of the essential reasons for any teacher or [therapist](#) to seriously consider taking a position in a school in Rural America.

- 1. Students are Real People Outside the Context of School** - There are many more opportunities to participate in the social and communal life of a rural community. This participation may take the form of becoming a member of a volunteer ambulance service or fire department, helping with economic development, or attending a house of worship and getting involved in related activities. And many times, those extracurricular involvements will be together with students and their parents.

In the big city, how likely is it to bump into a student in the grocery store or while taking a walk through the park? More so in a rural community. Because life is being lived in a more compact area, the chances of bumping into your students are increased manifold. Because life is less compartmentalized and more holistic, living in a rural community lends itself to seeing your students more often.

- 2. Your Impact Will be Felt** - Teachers and therapists are known to be passionate about making a difference in the lives of their students. In a rural community, you are not only making a difference with the children, but you are making a difference with the community as a whole. The school is a centerpiece of the town and, as such, the good vibes can be felt everywhere.
- 3. Rural Areas have a Strong Sense of Community** - It is well known that rural communities have a strong sense of community. Generally speaking, parents of the student body take part in the various aspects of their children's education more than their counterparts in urban areas.

Your class events will become an opportunity for the entire community to participate. Participating in school events allows everyone to experience being a part of something larger than themselves. The school building is seen as a "community center" invested with a purpose that goes beyond education.

In one rural school, the school's motto, "Tradition of Excellence," takes an honored place in practically every school activity. On the walls throughout the building can be found class photos over 100 years old that serve as a constant reminder of the value ascribed to the traditions and importance of the previous generations. These schools breathe a sense of belonging and continuity.

Because of this closeness within the community, there is a greater sense of identity, and it becomes more difficult for individuals to fall through the cracks. The urban syndrome of being nothing more than a number practically doesn't exist. In today's increasingly faceless world, this tangible sense of identity can profoundly impact students' self-esteem and go a long way to arresting toxic loneliness.

The Bottom Line

Don't believe half of what you hear about schools in Rural America. Granted, there are problems, and much is being done to solve them. If you are the type of person who sees beyond the paycheck and appreciates what it means to connect to people, teaching or providing [therapy](#) in Rural America may be just what you want!



NEW TO ONLINE LEARNING WEBINAR SERIES



Teaching and Online Learning:

Virtual Special Education 101

Jenny Kendall 5/18 at 1 PM EST [REGISTER HERE!](#)

This session will be a broad overview of how special education services - academic and related services - can be provided in a virtual setting. Topics of discussion will include using web-based conferencing tools, using accessibility features, and free assistive technology resources.

Starting a Virtual Program:

Making the Shift to Virtual Schooling- Tips for School Principals

Joel Medley 5/18 at 4 PM EST [REGISTER HERE!](#)

This session, designed for educational leaders, will provide specific ideas in moving to online learning. The presentation will focus on training for families, supporting teachers, and leading everyone. The speaker has experience in opening a new virtual school and serving as a learning coach for children in the online model.



Starting a Virtual Program:

Transitioning from Brick and Mortar to Online Learning

Faith Shanholtzer on 5/19 at 1 PM EST [REGISTER HERE!](#)

Transitioning from a traditional learning environment to virtual learning can be overwhelming. This webinar will guide you through three to five key focus areas for a successful transition with a continued emphasis on learning and achievement.



Starting a Virtual Program:

Career Readiness Education

Pat Michel 5/19 at 4 PM EST [REGISTER HERE!](#)

Virtual Career Readiness/CTE is possible!! We will discuss the design of a virtual CTE program and what pathways we have created and are developing. We will also discuss virtual project based learning, the cornerstone of any vibrant and robust virtual learning experience.



Virtual Leadership:

Pandemic Mentoring: How to Care for Your New Teachers

Veronica Clemons on 5/20 at 1 PM EST [REGISTER HERE!](#)

We know that the 1st year is tough for any new teacher; however, imagine if this was your first year of teaching and all these changes were happening. The session will offer some strategies for mentors of new teachers during this unique time.

Virtual Leadership:

Leading Virtual Teams

Niyoka McCoy on 5/21 at 1 PM EST [REGISTER HERE!](#)

It can be difficult to manage teams virtually without the proper methods and tools. This session will identify 10 strategies to effectively manage and support virtual teachers.



Virtual Leadership:

Building a Positive and Healthy Virtual School Culture

Jeanna Pignatiello on 5/22 at 1 PM EST [REGISTER HERE!](#)

Culture is intangible, but it's an essential foundation of high-quality learning environments. This is even more critical in a virtual school environment as it directly impacts student and family engagement in learning. This session will focus on strategies school leaders can use to be intentional in the creation and ongoing nurturing of their virtual school's culture and climate.