



# RSA TODAY

News for New York State's Rural Schools

December 2015 Issue

Rural Schools Association of New York State



I don't live in New York , I live In New York !

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## RSA 2016 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES



### REFORM SCHOOL FUNDING

The legislature has promised to eliminate the GEA this year. Doing so is complicated by the fact that legislators will need to replace hundreds of millions of dollars of locally raised revenue that will not be available this year under the tax cap. Traditionally low need school districts will need to politically compete with their neighbors to offset their inability to increase local taxes. The bulk of remaining GEA is allotted to these districts as well. This makes obtaining sufficient funding for rural schools all the more of an immediate and important issue. New York State's rural schools support the Regents' approach of blending the original CFE Foundation Aid formula and GEA restoration, so that all high and average need districts receive sufficient aid this year. In the long term, New York State must prioritize the development of a permanent, adequate and equitable funding formula for school aid.

During the recession, many communities were dramatically affected by a declining economic base. Many schools experienced significant declines in student enrollment that are not capable of being offset by concomitant fiscal reductions under our current laws and regulations. Worse, our current funding formula utterly fails to correspond a community's ability to contribute to the education of its students with the amount of aid provided by the state. The result is an unconscionable, unconstitutional system of separate, unequal public educational services. New York State spends the most of all states, per child and yet utterly fails to provide sufficient resources in high need communities. It is an affront every bit as egregious as the segregation of races and it impedes our state's economic progress and thwarts the economic success of its residents.

## REFORM THE TAX CAP



The school property tax cap has proved itself to be both unnecessary and burdensome. School districts were fiscally responsive to their taxpayers prior to the imposition of the cap. (Districts were taxing at what are now tax cap rates prior to the enactment of the law.) New York State's tax cap is much more restrictive than any other state. (Other states have higher caps and much higher percentage of state aid.) While some needed reforms to the cap were made last year, including adjustments for PILOTS and BOCES capital construction, the tax levy limit's most onerous provision remains; fluctuation with the Consumer Price Index. Schools are not individual consumers. They don't purchase the same goods and services and their costs are mandated by the state. (For instance, consumers don't have mandated double digit retirement system contributions, or double digit employee health care cost increases.) Linking the tax cap to consumer costs is irrational and destructive (particularly when it results in the inability to raise any meaningful local revenue, like this year.) The cap's history shows us that school budgets under the cap pass, those over it do not. As imposed, a cap that can eliminate any and all additional revenue is a state ordered revenue freeze on our school, resulting in wholesale deconstruction of educational programs and services. New York State needs to make school district budgets a matter of local control once again.

## REFORM THE RETIREMENT SYSTEM

The State of New York provides little more than one third of funding for public education; relying on local taxpayers to foot the vast majority of costs. This is the reverse of virtually all other states. This inequity could be addressed by simply having the state make specific contributions to what are now the local costs of ERS and TRS. Retirement system costs are not a local decision, but are mandated by state law. School staff members are employed in furtherance of the state constitutional obligation to provide a sound, basic education to every New York State resident. Yet, the state abrogates its responsibility to contribute to public education by avoiding contributing to the cost of the retirement system assigned to its employees as part of their compensation. Apart from state aid, New York State should provide annual contributions for each employee, to the state and teachers retirement systems.

The state should also authorize school districts to create a TRS reserve fund, similar to their ERS reserve fund. Schools are virtually precluded from long range fiscal planning by annual state aid payments and annual local school budget voting. Schools need long range planning tools to prevent spikes in local tax rates. Creation of a TRS reserve would guard against periodic and regular increases in local school district costs. State concerns that creation of such a reserve would lead to an increase in local taxes are unfounded, given cap limited spending. Local taxpayers deserve to be protected from spikes in local costs due to fluctuations in state ordered retirement system contributions. School districts have proven to be wise stewards of their ERS reserve funds and should be authorized to create them for TRS as well.

## TECHNOLOGY FLEXIBILITY



New York State is losing both educational effectiveness and efficiency in failing to promote digital learning. Digital learning can have the same dramatic impact on public education that the school bus once brought; overcoming the obstacles of distance and student sparsity. The state must increase technology flexibility for instruction, particularly by certifying instructional programs as well as teachers. The sophistication of digital learning programs has the capability of dramatically improving the range of curriculum options for rural schools. They are there for the using, but for New York State's outdated laws. Digital Learning Programs that have been certified as effective by the state should be allowed to be offered, with proper student supervision. In addition, there is a need for greater access and authority for digital learning opportunities, as well as greater community access to broadband (to ensure student access for homework purposes.) Federal E-Rate, Smart Schools Bond Act and Governor Cuomo's suggested private-public partnership funding (intended to improve broadband access) are all merging this year to provide a unique opportunity. New York State should maximize the likelihood of these combined sources leading to universal broadband access for educational opportunities by allowing a broad range of learning options to be offered by our public schools.

## REFORM MERGER-CONSOLIDATION

When communities consider school district merger or consolidation, one community is always at a disadvantage by virtue of having a lower tax rate than they would have if merged or consolidated with a district having a higher rate. Despite educational need, this fiscal consequence has almost always been enough to prevent a successful vote, irrespective of the educational opportunities that merger or consolidation might provide to students. Voters know that despite temporary state incentive aid, eventually they would pay a higher rate. State law should blend the tax rate for school district mergers, so that there is a permanent change in aid status with no eventual drop off. Mergers or consolidations should remain a local decision, but based on educational implications and not the eventual effect on tax rates.

Mergers and consolidations have been shown time and again to provide only minimal financial benefits to local taxpayers. Decreased need for a few administrators is more than offset by the "leveling up" of staff salaries to the formerly lower paying district. However, merger or consolidation does have the potential to provide significantly improved and expanded educational opportunities for children. Classes consolidated in such a move would allow educators to teach a broad range of curricula, previously provided only to wealthier school districts. Expanding the curriculum for rural students would make them competitive with their suburban counterparts and ultimately lead to a more vital rural New York State.

## STRUCTURAL FLEXIBILITY

In an era of insufficient and poorly distributed resources, structural flexibility becomes the key to maintaining educational effectiveness. Collectively, the following changes would have a dramatic impact on rural education. **A.** New York State's schools need the authority to facilitate college credit collaboration. Districts should be able to join in this effort without it raising either financial or staffing issues. Students currently take course in high school that count for college credit, but they are prohibited from receiving high school credit for college level course work! **B.** Similarly, schools need to be able to tuition high school students to other high schools without it raising collective bargaining issues. Rural schools simply can't afford to limit course offerings when they could be offered through the sharing of staff between districts. **C.** Schools need the community option of regional high schools and magnet schools for art, or math and science to be shared between districts. Regional high schools have been a successful (even the traditional) model in many other states for over generations. New York's lack of regional high schools severely limits the educational opportunities of our students. Districts need the local option of sharing a high school or a concentration of high school subjects offered at a shared location. **D.** Rural schools need expanded learning time (longer school day or year) and the funding to support it. With issues of teen pregnancy, drug and alcohol abuse at rates similar to inner cities and with cultural and extra-curricular activities severely limited, one of the most effective ways to improve rural education would be to expand the school day and year. Afterschool and summer programming would provide educational context, expand cultural awareness and decrease social issues associated with idle, unsupervised time for students. For rural schools, expanded learning time is not merely a financial consideration, but must be supported by partners that are often absent from rural communities. As such, partnerships with county and higher educational partners should be expanded. These opportunities must be supported by state transportation aid, as school provided transportation is central to the ability of rural students to attend programming of any kind. Simply put, the difference between rural students and their suburban counterparts is often the availability of social and cultural opportunities offered outside of the classroom. Expansion of these opportunities would provide tremendous educational benefits (through providing a context in which to apply content knowledge) as well as retard negative social influences that impair student success.

## REJECT TUITION TAX CREDITS

Providing state sponsored tuition tax credits for donations to private or parochial schools is poor public policy. Tuition tax credits remove needed funding from existing public schools. They set up a structure that in the future could be used to divert hundreds of millions away from rural school districts, in favor of private, parochial and charter schools. Supporters claim that public schools would benefit by allowing individuals to donate to public schools too: What they forget to mention is that high need districts can't afford to pay for schools now and private donors aren't lining up to help. Charter schools on the other hand, have a network of donors ready and eager to receive the tax benefits of funneling what would otherwise be state revenue to their privately run enterprises. Other states have a far more equitable approach to tuition tax credits, where they are provided to help special education students, impoverished students and the amount of the credit is limited in both amount and to which parents may receive the credit. New York State has done none of those things. Do-

nations would be virtually unlimited, tax breaks would be generous and there would be no benefit whatever to any class of challenged students. Since New York State admittedly can't support one educational system (to its court ordered levels), it certainly shouldn't be trying to support two. This year the state will pay prior year aid claims due to private and parochial schools. This assistance is equitable and raises none of the concerns listed above. Having paid this huge sum, there should be no further call for the untoward policy of providing tuition tax credits to private and parochial school donors.

## MATCH FEDERAL AND STATE SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL REQUIREMENTS

New York State's special educational requirements duplicate and often far exceed federal law and regulation, as well as those of neighboring states. Our state's laws and regulations in this area are administratively burdensome and so cost prohibitive that special education currently impedes the ability of school districts to provide a sound, basic education for the general population of students. In rural schools this is more than just a social and fiscal phenomenon; it becomes intensely personal, as the identities of special educational students are well known and the proportionate impact of the cost of special educational services on the school budget is most severe. In some cases, one individual child's needs can force the loss of an entire area of instruction for traditional students. Matching federal and state requirements would provide predictability between states, eliminate duplicative and often unneeded provisions and increase local district authority in the allocation of resources. To accomplish this, New York State needs a plan where all state special educational requirements outside of those imposed by the federal government would expire on a future date certain. In the interim, the state should empanel a commission to recommend those New York State anomalies that should be retained. The legislature could then vote to retain aspects of New York law and regulation it deems too important to jettison, while allowing dozens of inappropriate mandates to expire. This would fulfil the state's promise of providing significant mandate relief when it imposed the tax cap.

In addition, our schools desperately need a dedicated reserve fund to adjust each year to the dramatically fluctuating costs of special education student services. The transient nature of New York State residents often brings students with high cost special educational needs to a school district after passage of their annual budget. Tax cap limitations makes it impossible to set aside budgeted funds in preparation for a potential addition of high need students. A high needs reserve fund would allow any remaining fund balance at the end of the fiscal year to be dedicated and thus protect local taxpayers from spikes in local tax rates.



# RSA GOALS FOR 2016

Your Rural Schools Association Board of Directors met in mid-November to determine our goals for the coming year. Many of these goals are operational in nature, allowing us to progress in our ability to further the mission of your association. Here are some of the things your association will be doing this year to improve service to you and your district:

1. Complete the financial and operational goals directed by Cornell, including implementation of a payment system for RSA expenses outside of the Cornell accounting structure, hiring and orienting of new (board authorized) staff, hiring of an auditor, establishment of RSA checking and investment accounts, finalization of a revised Cornell-RSA Memorandum of Understanding.
2. Produce an RSA introductory brochure to be provided to school districts, other educational associations and state leaders.
3. Produce a series of electronic webinars on timely and important topics, to be provided to RSA member school districts.
4. Increase the number of vendors and sponsors participating in the summer conference.
5. Create electronic lists of legislators, Regents, other state leaders, all school districts, administrators and school board members to better share important information and improve the influence of advocacy efforts.
6. Continue to increase RSA's public and legislative visibility.
7. Explore participation in RSA by rural community colleges.
8. Initiate RSA's involvement with the National Rural Education Association.
9. Increase RSA's participation in Cornell CaRDI and CALS activities.
10. Produce two annual RSA summits (fall and winter) in addition to the summer conference.
11. Increase RSA's presence in social media, including the creation of an RSA Facebook site.
12. Help school districts sustain rural education by assisting them in redesigning programs and services, with an eye toward efficiency and thus, their existence in the long term.



**P Tech students work together on project based assignments, using state of the art technology.**

## WHO DO YOU WANT PACKING YOUR PARACHUTE?

### P TECH HIGH SCHOOL SHINES ON THE CUTTING EDGE

“Who do you want packing your parachute?” asks P Tech High School master teacher and project based learning guru Heather Buskirk, “the student who understood in the beginning and then tanks...or the one who works through it to really understand it at the end?” The entire philosophy of the innovative P Tech High School in Johnstown hinges on the belief that practical knowledge, used in relevant settings, is the key to effective education.

The P Tech High School is a collaboration of the HFM BOCES, 15 participating component school districts, Fulton Montgomery Community College (where P Tech graduates can also receive a free associate degree), areas chambers of commerce and IDO Consultants (the folks who helped Apple build the iPhone.) The process goes something like this: Take one closed Johnstown elementary school building, add in one state grant, mix in free painting donated by Benjamin Moore and a futuristic sign by Broadalbin Mfg., combine thoroughly with Fulton Montgomery Community College to assure a smooth transition, drop in technology that supports project based learning with committed staff and “Voila!” you have a high school that overcomes the odds by turning “at risk” students into potential college graduates.

“If it looks like a traditional school, we’ve failed” says BOCES DS Dr. Pat Michel, who credits technology as the “hook” that gets kids excited, but reveals that “the culture is the key.” In forming the school, founders and consultants took the extraordinary step of actually asking questions of prospective students. It seems potential drop outs and high academic performers had the same issues with traditional school; information delivery was irrelevant to them and they’d rather do almost anything else than sit in class. That wasn’t encouraging in an area with the lowest college graduation rates in the state.

P Tech High School has a unique vision. It uses a flexible schedule that allows educators to collaborate on projects between subject matters. Standards are taught through work on projects presented to business groups, such as a recent study of the timing of yellow traffic lights that was presented to insurance industry representatives and law enforcement officials. The questions are relevant and important: How long should a yellow light last for cars to safely determine whether to proceed or stop? The answers involve a number of learning standards and develops communicative skill through collaborating with classmates. Teachers aren’t there to grade you, but to facilitate your presentation to outsiders. You are measured on where you are in the standards, through work on the project. There are no textbooks and “classroom” (called innovation spaces) lights are often lowered to allow better visibility for standard issue Mac Air laptops for every student. Even the furniture is on wheels to allow the quick rearranging often needed to support spontaneous ideas.



**P Tech High School students work both individually and collaboratively and often work in darkened rooms to ease laptop screen visibility.**

Classes are student driven, but require tremendous staff planning. The educational model attempts to “get away from Henry Ford’s assembly line approach and move toward Google’s shared space.” In fact, students chose Google’s colors for the high school. Desks have been replaced with technology infused chest high table tops where the collaborators gather in a method based on doctors doing rounds in a teaching hospital. Students move at will,

addressing the issue of many high school students who find sitting still for hours a challenge. They excel emotionally, socially and academically due to the immersive and participatory nature of the experience. 25% of the students have IEPs, but the admissions procedure doesn't ask whether a prospective student has special needs. Each is "at risk" in some way, whether by minority racial status, family life, transience, having been bullied or prior academic performance. Each student applies individually to the school, where the cost to sending districts is a comparatively low \$11,500 per student.

According to Principal Mike Dardaris, the school is a STEM P Tech, where students interact on a deeper level and it's not about sorting and separating, but including and cooperating. Students work through five pathways in the two years that they are in the high school building before moving on to the FMCC campus for their junior and senior years and their associate degree. Those pathways are Information Technology, Business Administration, Healthcare-manufacturing, Green Energy and Renewable Resources. Dardaris says that an agriculturally focused P-Tech is in the works as well.

The school has been named a model by Bill Daggett's International Center for Leadership in Education. That's no surprise when all homework is paperless and parents see all work being done on line. 42 businesses are affiliated with the program and students get first dibs on jobs. It's no gift, as the businesses find that graduates have both the knowledge and "soft skills" needed to innovate in today's marketplace. After all, those businesses have been the beneficiaries of student developed websites, inventory program upgrades, even marketable video games. Students who come to the school below grade level in reading and math leave passing college level courses. Pat Michel attributes it to the new system's ability to address issues of poverty, where the traditional system is attuned to only the middle class.



**HFM BOCES District Superintendent and RSA Board Member Pat Michel and P Tech High School Ambassador Taylor Nellis show off the school's technology in their collaborative work space areas.**

But that's not how the students view their environment. According to school ambassador, sophomore Taylor Nellis, the focus is on giving back to the community and their world. For instance, the students developed a game program to be sold by Stride Academy, called Broken Limbo. The game combines social studies and literature in an effort to raise literacy rates. Another student success was Tactical Dodgeball, where the traditional game is taken to new heights through the use of mats, soccer goals, blocks and other equipment. For the 105 students and 7 educators in Taylor's school, the relationships are personal and intended to replicate the "real world" rather than a factory.

"It's all about them," according to Common Core Reform Commission Member Heather Buskirk. "The project becomes the motivation for the learning. The learning is needed to meet the challenge of the project, which is not just a fun thing to do after learning the information. Assessment is done continually, involving outside adults. We are there to help them meet that challenge, which changes the personal dynamic."

The school's next step is to take on student teachers. The problem, according to Buskirk, is that today's teaching ranks are populated by those who were successful in the traditional model. The temptation is to fall back on old methods and lecture when under stress. P Tech educators also serve as gatekeepers between businesses that are focused on the final products and end of the line project results - and the needs of students who must have learning standards and soft skills incorporated into their work.

One trip around the schools makes several things immediately apparent. 1. This is a whole new ballgame. 2. Students are excited and are daily overcoming tremendous challenges in their personal circumstances through the mutual support of staff and each other. 3. Formerly feared adults have become the students' biggest fans and personal expression for students is such a regular occurrence that it has become second nature. Says Dr. Michel, "the vision of the P-Tech school is to redefine secondary education." Looking around at its team of energetic, expressive and eager (formerly challenged) students, its success is impossible to ignore.





**RSA Founding Board Member Jim Loomis**

## **PROFILE IN SERVICE RSA FOUNDING BOARD MEMBER JIM LOOMIS RETIRES FROM BOARD**

There is a legal construct called the “but for” test that says that event B would not have occurred “but for” event A having first happened. Cause and effect. It is more than safe to say that your Rural Schools Association would not be serving you today “but for” the nearly 40 years of dedicated and insightful service of Jim Loomis. Having retired from the RSA board of directors earlier this month (after nearly 40 years of service) Jim gave yet another measure of his devotion in response to RSA Today’s request for an interview.

In many ways, the very life of Jim Loomis embodies the ideals of the Rural Schools Association. Born of highly educated “farm oriented” parents, Jim began his education by first tending to the animals before heading out to school each morning, then tending them again in the afternoon. His family followed his father in his successful farm equipment ventures from Van Etten to Florida, to the outskirts of Atlanta and on to Canada (where Jim remembers engaging in lumberjack competitions, as his French Canadian-speaking dad worked among the lumber camps.) They returned to the family home in time for Jim to finish high school early; but having the intellect to complete high school early didn’t mean that Jim (by his own admission) was emotionally ready for the rigors of college.

Despite academic success at Ithaca College in his first semester and facing an extended recovery from mononucleosis, Jim soon enlisted in the Coast Guard and worked first on the Mackinaw Icebreaker, then on to Air Station Kodiak, Alaska to work with one of the first computer based communications systems in the military. It wasn’t all desk work though, as Jim remembers stopping Soviet fishing trawlers that “never seemed to have any fish” to determine whether they were in fact engaging in surveillance off the Alaskan coast. The early interest in electronics (that had Jim building his own TV at 14) soon had him building hospital communications systems for Blue Cross Blue Shield, which gave him the funds to re-enter Ithaca (where he was both employee and student) earning his bachelors and master’s degrees while teaching students who are now communications industry giants. Jim was a college lecturer in the fledgling communications school before he had his own degree. As one of those students that approach their formal education with significant real world experience, Jim soon rose to the highest levels of what is now the Park School of Communications at Ithaca, where he served as deputy to the dean of the school and helped design the first school facilities.

Throughout his career, Jim juggled home and career with educational leadership. By the late 1970s Jim was serving what would become a 16 year stint on the old SCT BOCES Board of Education. That service would also be interspersed with several extended periods of service on the board of his home Spencer-Van Etten Central School District. You’d think that kind of legacy of community service would suffice, but Jim had a family history to uphold.

When you grow up playing Scrabble with a grandmother who was a “gifted classroom teacher”, frequently teaching 80 children in a one room schoolhouse, raised under the guidance of a mother who taught home economics to farm groups, a father who used his master’s degree to benefit the agricultural community with innovative equipment practices and an extended family that included school board presidents, college physics instructors and an aunt on the Cornell faculty (teaching modern kitchen techniques to post depression and war era farmers) Jim comes by public service naturally. Almost from the outset of his school board service, Jim became involved in what is now your Rural Schools Association.

If the USA has its Washingtons, Jeffersons and Franklins, the RSA has its Bails, Josephs, Everinghams and Burroughs; founders Jim calls “strong willed people from an agricultural background who saw the importance of a rural organization.” Jim was there at the first gathering, where Joe “Bail Out Joe” Bail (a former bomber pilot) worked with Cornell and the New York State School Boards Association (NYSSBA) to gather rural educational leaders to the first rural issues conference. The one day affair soon grew into today’s multi-day event, with co-founder Mike Joseph establishing the operational structure prior to taking the executive director role and his compatriots (Superintendents Bob Everingham and Dave Burroughs) moving the infant association into legislative advocacy on behalf of rural schools. Jim credits NYSSBA with early support, highlighting RSA events across the state and Superintendent and RSA Deputy Director Dan Porter for pushing the program to become an association and stabilizing RSA finances along the way.

The work of the founders would not have developed into a viable organization without the work of Jim Loomis, however. Jim succeeded Mike Joseph as executive director after serving many years on the RSA board (four as president), returning from retirement in Finland in 2003 to take the helm when Joseph needed to step away. Jim then went on to serve on the board a total of 39 years. Why, you may ask, would someone devote their life to serving rural education? Because failing to continue the work would result in ultimately failing to meet the needs of rural students, according to Loomis. Jim likens rural school advocacy to the work of the Greek king Sisyphus. “If you stop pushing the rock up the hill, it falls back down, even though we never seem to get it over the top. Stop advocating for school funding and they take it away.” One constant during all those years has been the desire of the membership to have their issues heard, according to Loomis and along the way, he has seen the helpful development of relationships with the Future Farmers of America, the Grange, Farm Bureau and recently, commercial agricultural interests like John Deere and others.



Jim completed the conversion of the association from its first iteration as a Cornell University program to its own not for profit corporation. He also built its first website. Calculating the value of Jim’s service to RSA would be a herculean task. Perhaps it’s best to leave it in Jim’s own words, taken from his letter of retirement to RSA Board Chair Gordie Daniels:

“In my time with Rural Schools, the organization has grown and become a more powerful and effective voice for our members. From the early years, when RSA was a workshop program of the Education Department at Cornell, it has increasingly organized our members for advocacy. Now, RSA is taking the next step, while remaining affiliated with Cornell, to becoming more independent in the field.

Over the years, it has been my privilege to serve in nearly every capacity with RSA. The formative members were rural school board members and superintendents, including a few district superintendents and Cornell (CALs) faculty and administrators. As a very young rural school board member, service veteran and father, it was an honor and great good fortune to know these capable and visionary educational leaders.

Thinking of these early leaders, I am encouraged that the work on behalf of our rural children must continue. The particular needs may change, but will always need strong advocates. Our children will always need a learning environment that encourages a growth mindset and the opportunity to excel. The resources will always be limited, but must not be allowed to discourage or stand in the way of their education.”

Through thought, word and deed, Jim Loomis has provided nearly two generations of rural educational leadership. On behalf of a grateful membership, the RSA that he so capably molded and served extends its heartfelt appreciation to Jim for his insight, his vision and his dedication to the communities and children of rural New York.

# Congress finally close to vote on new education law

November 19, 2015 8:31 pm • By JENNIFER C. KERR

WASHINGTON (AP) — Congress is finally close to a vote to rewrite the outdated and highly criticized No Child Left Behind education law.

The compromise legislation, approved Thursday by House and Senate negotiators, would sharply reduce the federal role in education policy but still require students to be tested in reading and math in grades three to eight, and once in high school.

The conference committee action paves the way for a vote in the House during the first week of December, and days later in the Senate.

The bill would let states decide whether or how to use student test performance to assess teachers and students, ending federal efforts to tie the scores to teacher evaluations, something teachers' unions have railed against. At the same time, it would embrace state-driven protections to ensure that all students, no matter their race or background, have access to a quality education.

Under the bill, the Education Department may not mandate or give states incentives to adopt or maintain any particular set of standards, such as the college and career-ready curriculum guidelines known as Common Core.

But important to Democrats, the conference bill includes accountability measures that would require states to intervene in the nation's lowest-performing 5 percent of schools, high school dropout factories and schools with persistent achievement gaps.

The bill does not include so-called portability, which would have allowed federal money to follow low-income children to public schools of their choice instead of current law, which has those dollars remain at the struggling schools. Republicans wanted the money to follow the student, and it was included in the version of the education bill that narrowly passed the House in July.

Instead, the compromise bill would allow for a small pilot program that would let federal money move with students in some school districts.

An administration official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the measure that emerged from the conference committee was an improvement over the versions that passed the House and Senate this summer. But the official, who could not speak publicly because details of the bill were still under review, stopped short of saying whether President Barack Obama would sign in it.

Rep. John Kline, R-Minn., who chaired the conference committee, said the compromise legislation would "replace a failed approach to education with a new approach that will reduce the federal role, restore local con-

trol, and empower parents."

Kline's Democratic counterpart on the committee, Rep. Bobby Scott of Virginia, praised the bill's accountability safeguards. "This agreement ensures that when achievement gaps are found, meaningful action will be taken to intervene and support the needs of students," he said.

Republican Lamar Alexander of Tennessee and Democrat Patty Murray of Washington, sponsors of the original bill in the Senate, said the compromise measure marked a proud moment for Congress that would help end uncertainty in federal education policy.

Included in the new bill was an amendment from Sen. Michael Bennet, a Democrat from Colorado, aimed at reducing over-testing in the nation's schools. His amendment encourages states to set caps on the total amount of time kids spend taking tests.

Bennett says the federal requirement for assessments isn't the problem, but that it resulted in additional layers of state and district level tests, and some of those may be redundant or unnecessary.

The committee will have the full bill ready for lawmakers to read by Nov. 30, followed by votes in both chambers.

Congress has tried for years to update the Bush-era law.

It expired in 2007, though its mandates remained in place. Critics have complained there is too much testing and the law is too punitive for schools deemed to be failing. In 2012, the Obama administration began issuing waivers to dozens of states to get around some of the law's strictest requirements when it became clear they would not be met.

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**SAVE THE DATE:**

- \* **School Innovation Summit March 5, 2016, Desmond Hotel, Albany. Held in conjunction with the NYSCOSS Winter Conference**
- \* **July 10-12, 2016 RSA Conference in beautiful Cooperstown, NY at the Otesaga Resort Center.**



Check the Rural Schools Association Website  
[www.RSANYS.org](http://www.RSANYS.org)  
for details in early May 2016.