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

COMMENTARY:
IS “GOING TO THE DOGS”
THE ANSWER TO SCHOOL SECURITY?

It’s an all too familiar scene; glaring headlines and video, grief stricken parents, running children and staff, hushed “on the scene” reporters and loud commentators demanding everything from providing guns to teachers, stricter gun control, better mental health care, anti-bullying programs and the construction needed to “harden” our schools to threats. “Thoughts and prayers” has become a cliché for our lack of action in protecting those who are least capable of protecting themselves.

School lock down drills and “active shooter” preparation has become this generations’ atomic bomb attack “duck and cover” of the 50s and 60s. Do they help? Like our time during the Cold War, we hope to never find out. What we do know is that the drills themselves are traumatic to children and staff. In practicing for “the real thing”, the reality can seriously frighten students and the frequent news reporting of the latest school attack makes the simple act of going to school every day one that requires courage from even our youngest kids.

It’s a new day and while society debates its response, the shootings continue. Colorado, Virginia, Illinois, Connecticut, Texas, Florida. Yet in all of the discussion, in all of the political pandering and all of the collective horror, no one is talking about the one thing that might actually help…

Dogs. Yes, dogs.

Trained police canines and handlers. Think about it. Dogs can smell gunpowder and sense tension….from a distance. They are every student’s best friend as they roam the halls every day. As they walk the perimeter, children call out their greetings to the dog and its handler. “Buddy” is just that, 179 days of the school year…until that one day when she smells gunpowder or senses that something with that one student just isn’t right. And as the would be shooter frantically tries to produce his weapon, Buddy is trained to attack and pin…many times quicker and many times more powerful than a human response. Buddy at the school...
door has a better than even chance at neutralizing the threat before it ever gets to its target. Guns stored in a locker; found in time. Shooter’s arm pinned in the vice-like jaws of the “K-9 unit” before it can pull the trigger. Ammunition sniffed out before it can be loaded. Trained to unhesitatingly rush to the shooter and stop them without thought of self-preservation.

Police dogs are expensive to train and to keep. They require handlers to be on site with them. But if you’ve ever crossed the border into the U.S. you know that they work quickly and effectively in locating the things we don’t want in our schools and they’re a lot cheaper than providing weapons and training to teachers too horrified to use them or attempting to protect kids in one direction and shoot an attacker in the other.

Yes, our society needs to respond to this new aspect of our lives in a meaningful and effective long term way. We are fragmented, poorer, frustrated, isolated and bombarded with images and commentary that make it all worse. But if all we’re going to do is think and pray for our dead children, the most we can ever hope for is a delayed response and we can’t afford that delay. Our children are being regularly murdered. Say that out loud and slowly, folks. Our children. Regularly. Murdered. Let’s counsel, legislate, socialize, befriend and yes, think and pray. But first let’s put a dog on campus and save some lives.

Dave Little is RSA’s Executive Director. He is grateful to B.A. Schoen of the Nassau BOCES for whispering the word “dogs” in his ear the morning after the Parkland shooting. Please consider attending RSA’s School Safety Summit, July 8th at The Otesaga in Cooperstown.

School Safety Summit and RSA Annual Conference

The Rural School Association is offering a School Safety Summit on July 8th at The Otesaga in Cooperstown, NY. The summit will feature sessions with NYSIR Director of Risk Management, J. Brett Carruthers, CSP, RSSP and NYSSBA General Counsel and Deputy Executive Director Jay Worona.

Immediately following the summit, the Rural Schools Association will host its Annual Conference July 8-10. The conference theme is "Better People, Better Programs," and will feature a host of educational sessions and networking opportunities designed to maximize your district's educational program and efficiency.

Click here for program and registration information on the School Safety Summit and the RSA Annual Conference.

STATE COMPTROLLER DINAPOLI TO MEET WITH RURAL LEADERS AT ANNUAL SUMMER CONFERENCE!
It’s baaaack…..Yet again, talk of forced school district mergers or consolidations is being heard in the halls and back rooms of state government. Erie County Executive Mark Poloncarz recently held a series of presentations focusing on school fiscal efficiency and “taxpayer savings.” His report is full of claims that schools have fielded many times; consolidation offers administrative savings, some districts achieve greater academic results at a lower cost than others, other states use county wide models and spend a lot less money. Elsewhere in government, whispers of the need to reel in school spending are getting louder. In an effort to inform policymakers on this issue and perhaps head off the usual misperceptions held by state officials in the past, RSA has compiled “Mergers: Money Saving Magic or Myth?” a policy brief on the realities of school district mergers and consolidations in New York State.

The brief examines the difference between the perception of what should happen when districts combine with the actual history and factors affecting this important community decision. For instance, consolidation doesn’t offer much in the way of savings in New York, due to the “leveling up” of employee contracts to the higher of those earned by employees in the districts to be merged. That doesn’t mean there won’t be educational advantages for students, though.

The report makes five important recommendations for state policymakers:

1. **Update the school district merger and consolidation laws and regulations to enable a more democratic and workable expression of the public’s will.** The current requirements virtually assure failure of any local effort to combine school districts.

   Features of an updated system should include:
   - **A. Affirmative votes of the boards of education in each affected school district.**
   - **B. A comprehensive study of the educational, economic and logistical impact of a proposed merger or consolidation.**
   - **C. A single majority (combined) affirmative vote on whether or not to merge or consolidate rather than affirmative votes in each of the affected school districts.**
   - **D. Consent by the commissioner of education.**

2. **School districts should be given the authority to join together in creating regional high schools.** These schools should be allowed to form based on subject focus, as well as geography. The goal of these schools is to preserve local community identity and economy by retaining a school district’s elementary and middle schools, while expanding educational opportunities at the high school level.

3. **Additional authority should be provided to school districts to utilize digital learning.** Laws and regulations currently limiting its use should be reviewed and updated to reflect the dramatically improved educational opportunities available to fiscally challenged school districts through the use of digital learning platforms.

4. **The state should undertake a comprehensive review of existing educational requirements in an effort to eliminate outdated and overly burdensome laws and regulations.** Much of the fiscal challenge of public education stems from the overlaying of new requirements onto existing ones, without an examination of the cumulative educational and administrative impact of these laws and regulations.

5. **Improve the state’s school funding distribution scheme.** Always sited as the nation’s most inequitable school funding system (due to its over-reliance on local revenue), the state must address the disparity between wealthy school districts and those unable to raise significant local revenue. The current system has been ignored, cut and manipulated, all without accurately assessing a community’s ability to contribute to the education of its children and making up the difference. Increased poverty, decreased local economic activity in vast rural areas of the state and increased student transience have increased educational challenges, all without any change in the state’s funding mechanism.
Food for Thought, Part 2:

In the last issue of RSA Today, I outlined a series of research reports with various indicators of social and economic decline in rural America, including NY, showing increasingly fatal desperation in rural regions. I ended with an optimistic nod toward prevention as a low-budget, high-return, universal-level, local approach to addressing some of these issues. In this issue, I share some of the most promising for NY’s rural schools and communities.

One area that has shown excellent outcomes in behavior and academic achievement is incorporating a trauma-informed approach – to teaching, programming, discipline – any interactions with students. From the Substance Abuse and Mental health Services Administration’s (SAMHSA) website (https://www.samhsa.gov/nctic/trauma-interventions):

**Trauma-Informed Approach**

According to SAMHSA’s concept of a trauma-informed approach, “A program, organization, or system that is trauma-informed:

1. **Realizes** the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery;
2. **Recognizes** the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, families, staff, and others involved with the system;
3. **Responds** by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices; and Seeks to actively resist re-traumatization.”

1. A trauma-informed approach can be implemented in any type of service setting or organization and is distinct from trauma-specific interventions or treatments that are designed specifically to address the consequences of trauma and to facilitate healing.
2. **SAMHSA’s Six Key Principles of a Trauma-Informed Approach**
3. A trauma-informed approach reflects adherence to six key principles rather than a prescribed set of practices or procedures. These principles may be generalizable across multiple types of settings, although terminology and application may be setting- or sector-specific:
   1. Safety
   2. Trustworthiness and Transparency
   3. Peer support
   4. Collaboration and mutuality
   5. Empowerment, voice and choice
   Cultural, Historical, and Gender Issues

From SAMHSA’s perspective, it is critical to promote the linkage to recovery and resilience for those individuals and families impacted by trauma. Consistent with SAMHSA’s definition of recovery, services and supports that are trauma-informed build on the best evidence available and consumer and family engagement, empowerment, and collaboration.
In addition to the resources and tools at the SAMHSA site, two others with good information are:

- Resilience: The Biology of Stress & The Science of Hope. [https://kpjrfilms.co/resilience](https://kpjrfilms.co/resilience)
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’ information about Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs).

If you want more help finding information and programming specifically for schools, please contact me.

Another promising area is **multi-generational approaches**. These are exactly what they sound like: approaches to designs for housing, public space design, health care, education, etc. that include more than one generation. This is based on the knowledge that the well-being of children is closely tied to the well-being of their caretakers. I find this particularly compelling, because **families are a resource that exist in every community**, who, when functioning well, provide basic needs and then some for each of their members. If we can support families in stabilizing their roles, communities spend much less time and money on safety net services designed to help people in crisis.

**Family Impact Analysis** is a means to examine programs and policies for their intended and unintended impacts on multi-generational family functioning. The goal is to support, rather than replace, 4 main functions of families:

1. Family creation
2. Economic support
3. Child rearing
4. Family caregiving

While Family Impact Analysis was initially creating as a form of policy analysis, it can be applied to any institutional context. Thinking about schools, how do the hours of the school day vs hours of the work day impact families’ abilities to engage in these four functions?

Cornell University has been paying attention to this via [Project 2Gen](http://www.communityschools.org/aboutschools/what_is_a_community_school.aspx), geared mainly toward policy makers and researchers. Penn State has been paying attention to this with their [Intergenerational Program](http://www.communityschools.org/aboutschools/what_is_a_community_school.aspx), that has examined different ways to create intergenerational spaces and places.

However, the multigenerational initiative most relevant to NY’s rural schools is the Community School movement. According to the [Coalition for Community Schools](http://www.communityschools.org/aboutschools/what_is_a_community_school.aspx), “A community school is both a place and a set of partnerships between the school and other community resources. Its integrated focus on academics, health and social services, youth and community development and community engagement leads to improved student learning, stronger families and healthier communities. Community schools offer a personalized curriculum that emphasizes real-world learning and community problem-solving. Schools become centers of the community and are open to everyone – all day, every day, evenings and weekends. Using public schools as hubs, community schools bring together many partners to offer a range of supports and opportunities to children, youth, families and communities.”

I attended a Community Schools conference last month, and heard numerous examples of schools partnering with community organizations (law enforcement, public health, social services, churches, private businesses) to assess and provide experiences and spaces to benefit the most vulnerable community members. In addition to seeing increased attendance, test scores, and graduation rates, schools also benefit from community and parent involvement in many ways. Often, parents create new and meaningful ways to contribute to schools, with walking school buses, pushing local governments to allow enhanced safety initiatives, parents are getting GEDs and employment, etc.

I am very excited about the Community School idea, and I know Dave Little is on the NY State Steering Committee for Community Schools, and they are working hard to promote policy that supports the formation of Community Schools in NY.
Running a business always has its challenges, but rural businesses face unique and often increased challenges. Businesses in rural areas of the State tend to have limited legal resources available to them, since more than 96% of New York licensed attorneys gravitate towards urban centers. Sustaining and developing businesses is vital to the quality of life and well-being of our State’s rural communities, and the farm families and small business owners that work hard to provide goods and services for the public benefit deserve access to lawyers and legal support, too. Albany Law School’s Government Law Center, in response to this issue, formed The Rural Law Initiative. The RLI was created in order to bring legal assistance to rural New York, often underserved by the legal community. Rural businesses, including farms, are able to use the services provided by RLI’s staff attorney, Taier Perlman, in order to help mitigate this problem.

The program is funded in large part by a grant from the United States Department of Agriculture. It provides free legal education and assistance to qualifying businesses and individuals who are in need of legal consultation. Perlman rotates her time between their four satellite offices, located in Herkimer, Otsego, Schoharie, and Sullivan counties.

Each grant that RLI receives has certain deliverables for the target area they are serving. For example, the Schoharie County office is collaborating with SUNY Cobleskill to create publications and educational materials for their clients.

“The relationship is pretty fluid,” Perlman said of RLI’s partnership with SUNY Cobleskill. RLI is part of SUNY Cobleskill’s new Institute for Rural Vitality, which focuses on promoting businesses in rural New York.

“SUNY Cobleskill’s partnership with Albany Law’s Rural Law Initiative will facilitate much-needed legal consultation assistance for individuals and businesses in the region who often need only a little time with a legal professional to make more informed decisions. Increasingly, understanding of regulatory and other types of law are key to business start-up and expansion and so we believe that this endeavor is a timely one,” said Dr. Jason Evans, Director of The Institute for Rural Vitality at SUNY Cobleskill.

Perlman goes to her Cobleskill office about twice a month to provide legal services for Schoharie County clients. Her other offices are located in Mohawk, Liberty, and Oneonta. She will be providing legal services at an office in Utica also, starting in 2018. Although her satellite offices were created specifically to target areas of need and provide them with legal services, any businesses in the following counties can also qualify for free consultation services: Allegany, Cattaraugus, Cayuga, Chautauqua, Chemung, Chenango, Clinton, Cortland, Delaware, Essex, Franklin, Fulton, Genesee, Greene, Herkimer, Jefferson, Lewis, Montgomery, Orleans, Oswego, Otsego, Schoharie, Schuyler, Seneca, St. Lawrence, Steuben, and Sullivan.

“There is flexibility. We have permission to serve additional counties, but our grants specify deliverables in certain areas,” Taier said. “The nature of the work is helping businesses on a single issue. I don’t have the capacity for more, although I am building a network to refer clients to.”

So far, one of the most pressing needs that Perlman has seen is in farm succession planning, an especially important issue for local economies and the future viability of farms. She is actively working to build a network in the area, and plans to host workshops for local professionals and attorneys to learn more on these and other specific issues.

To see if you qualify for The Rural Law Initiative’s services, or to request a consultation, please visit http://www.albanylaw.edu/centers/government-law-center/programs/the-rural-law-initiative and click the box on the top right hand corner to register.
Important Rural Trends

Here are two stories that show important trends affecting our rural communities and their schools. The first deals with how rural students make the shift (or not) to college work and what colleges are doing (or not) to address their needs.

Serving rural students is tricky for colleges, as even those who attempt it face unique challenges (like the fact that jobs back home may not need a college degree or that the community doesn’t value a college education.) The second story illustrates how rural communities are attempting to cope with the loss of employment and the fact that rural Americans are less likely today to relocate based on economic opportunity. In the old days, when the jobs left you packed up and followed (think Dust Bowl migration to California, or the “Hillbilly Highway” from the east to the Midwest…even the early New Englanders who moved west to find a better life.) Today? Not so much. Take a dive into what’s happening in our rural communities and why.

SERVING RURAL STUDENTS May 01, 2018 | By Andrew Crain
http://www.naceweb.org/career-development/special-populations/serving-rural-students/?platform=hootsuite

NREA is excited to work with Dr. Joseph Goins from NS4ed. Please check out their new program going live this week.
http://pathway2careers.com/

Sasha from AASA shared via Twitter this week:
The U.S. Department of Education’s Investing in Innovation (i3) Program is pleased to announce an upcoming webinar discussion with three i3 grantees who will represent the Improving Rural Achievement Community in talking about their work to improve rural education outcomes across the United States. This webinar will highlight a guide to working in rural districts and schools – *Leading Education Innovations in Rural Schools: Reflections from i3 Grantees*, released in Fall 2017. The Guide is grounded in field-based experiences and is geared towards researchers, non-profit education leaders, and others interested in partnering with rural districts to develop and implement innovations in K–12 schools.

Participants will hear recommendations related to the following:

- Relationship-Building with Rural Districts,
- Establishing and Maintaining Partnerships,
- Sustaining the Innovation, and
- Scaling-Up the Innovation

Please join us on:

**Monday, June 18, 2018**

**3:30 – 4:30 pm EDT**

Participants will hear from representatives of three i3 grantees: the Building Assets, Reducing Risks (BARR) model of school improvement, the National Writing Project (NWP), and the Kentucky Valley Education Cooperative:

- BARR’s Susan Savell shares insights from their project, which works to increase student achievement by improving a school’s effectiveness at building relationships, leveraging real-time student data, and capitalizing on the strengths of each student.
- NWP’s Linda Friedrich shares experiences related to the College-Ready Writers Program (CRWP), which strengthens the teaching and learning of source-based argument writing in rural school districts and builds the capacity of regional teacher-leaders beyond those districts to facilitate CRWP professional learning.
- RAND’s Andrea Philips represents the evaluation of the Kentucky Valley Education Cooperative (KVEC) i3 grant, where RAND and KVEC developed and implemented a rigorous evaluation plan while concurrently building a lasting partnership.

Feel free to share this announcement with others.

To register for this event, please use this link: [https://app.smartsheet.com/b/form/3e58ce34608c4e86b6fa68e28b492bb](https://app.smartsheet.com/b/form/3e58ce34608c4e86b6fa68e28b492bb)