Your Rural Schools Association needs a new look! We’re looking for a new logo that conveys our rural heritage, as well as our commitment to high quality public education for rural students. Because of this commitment, your Rural Schools Association and our partners at NYSIR are sponsoring a Student Logo Design Contest!

We will name five First Place Winners ($150 each) and one $500 Grand Prize Winner! We know our New York State students are creative and innovative and we want to encourage that, as well as the use of new technologies that assist the graphic artists of tomorrow.

Here are the specifics:

* We are a statewide association and our full name is the Rural Schools Association of New York State.

* We need your design to be in “Vector Art” so we’ll have a crisp, EPS file that will work well for our printers and other uses. To do that, you should create your logo design in “Illustrator” so that it can be 2 spot colors in the end (PMS Black and 186 Red are the colors traditionally associated with RSA).

* Please do not use “Photoshop” or “Publisher” for your design, as it doesn’t work well for printing.

* Student logo entries may be supported by a video of up to three minutes in length. All winning entries will have their design reviewed by judges and by a design professional, who will offer feedback.

* Please email your design to dal295@cornell.edu.

* Deadline for entry March 30, 2018

GOOD LUCK!
THE GREAT SOCIAL DIVIDE: RE-LEARNING CIVILITY

Doesn’t it seem that these days we talk at, not to each other? Everyone has opinions and we debate them, rather than discuss them. Ultimately, no one seems to change their minds. No matter where we all fall on the political spectrum, there’s little question that our society’s ability to engage in social discourse without rancor (or even the goal of reasoning to a mutual benefit) has deteriorated. Our rural communities seem particularly hard hit by the phenomenon, feeling politically abandoned and economically threatened. We seem to have hunkered down in an “us against the world” approach.

In this environment, we bombard our students with digital information, much of it generated by partisan political entities, rather than objective sources. Simultaneously, we are living in a unique time where people are civically motivated, with students acting out of a deep felt need to change their circumstances. How do we prepare our kids for that? How do we educate them to understand that there are others; different from us perhaps, but valuable and that we’re all in this grand democratic social experiment together? How do we return to E Pluribus Unum?

We all remember the Campaign for Fiscal Equity Court of Appeals decision of a decade ago. The state’s highest court upheld an agreement stating that New York wasn’t living up to its constitutional responsibility to fund public education. But while we all focused on the monetary aspect of that court decision, most of us overlooked another important aspect; why the underfunding was important. The Court of Appeals said the lack of funding was important because the goal of a “sound, basic education” was to prepare our students to be citizens capable of fully participating in our democratic society. We were, to use CFE lead attorney Michael Rebell’s words, “flunking democracy.”

Perhaps lost in NCLB’s focus on testing and the newfound push for STEAM subjects, civics education seems to have largely taken a back seat and as a result, so has our national ability to rationally and calmly debate substantive issues to a productive conclusion. If we are to return to civil discourse as a nation, the effort will as always, come from our schools. The successor to CFE, the Campaign for Educational Equity is launching a new initiative (perhaps a new national court case that would lead to a U.S. Supreme Court ruling) focusing on the need for civics education as a key component in a child’s right to a sound, basic education. To that end, your RSA recently met as part of a Steering Committee to explore how our state might integrate civics education into our curricula.

We’re not starting from scratch here. New York State’s new approved plan for ESSA compliance includes a goal of being “college, career and civic ready.” The framework is in place to rebuild civics education and (as they used to say on the Six Million Dollar Man) we have the technology! It won’t be easy of course. In New York State we tend to layer on new educational requirements without ever releasing schools of any outdated ones (and we don’t have a real good record of ponying up the money needed to carry out the mandate!) In this case, it’s too important an issue not to try though, since our kids are being increasingly challenged to find and identify factual, unbiased information and then communicate in a sincere and reasoned effort to address problems.

Last week saw the inaugural meeting of groups that will carry out this effort to reintroduce effective civic participation. Your RSA met with leaders from the Campaign for Educational Equity, the League of Women Voters, NYSSBA, the state’s library association, social studies curriculum directors, NYS Association of School Business Officials, PTA and others to build a coalition bent on exploring how our state can create a generation of civically prepared residents. It won’t be easy. The group identified several obstacles, such as including the kind of experiential learning that sticks with kids into an already full school schedule, or how to include groups across the political spectrum so as not to be immediately labeled as a left or right wing effort to indoctrinate students into any particular way of thinking. There is a need to be clear about the goal: How to think, not what to think. Finally, the age old issue of everyone loving good citizenship, but not being able to afford it.

In critically important efforts like this, as well as the transformative Community Schools and Farm to School coalitions, your Rural Schools Association will lead the way. Tell us what you think. Tell us if you want to lend a hand. Dialogue is what it’s all about.

Dave Little
RSA Executive Director
Take Action for Community Schools
March for Children and Youth Month

March 21 - Community Schools Call-in Day

THIS MONTH WE ARE STANDING TOGETHER FOR COMMUNITY SCHOOLS!

In partnership with the Coalition for Community Schools, the New York State Community Schools Network will continue to advocate for community schools funding during March for Children and Youth Month. The community school strategy is a long term strategy for school improvement. Schools need time and sustained support to increase student learning and success. New York State must provide adequate and sustainable funding for community schools to continue to develop and strengthen their work in communities across the state.

The New York State Community Schools Network would like your support in ensuring the New York State enacted budget includes:

* $300 million to sustain existing community schools
* $50 million increase for community schools (proposed by Governor Cuomo)
* $415,550 in additional funding for the Community Schools Regional Technical Assistance Centers (TACs) for a total of $1.615 million

We invite your advocacy during the New York State Community Schools Call-In Day this month:

New York State Community Schools Call-In Day: Wednesday March 21

Please join the New York State Community Schools Network Call-In Day on Wednesday March 21 by contacting your members to advocate for community schools funding in the FY19 final enacted budget.

More information and a sample script will be shared soon.

Here are additional ways to take action in March:

* Schedule an in-person meeting with your state legislators to discuss the importance of community school funding
* Host a community school site visit with state legislators and community stakeholders to showcase progress and successes.
* Write a letter from your organization to state legislators about your community school

You may find additional resources in the March for Children and Youth Month Playbook.

Please email Terry Kim at tkim@childrensaidnyc.org with your activities and if your Legislator(s) asked for additional information. If further information and/or advocacy support is needed, please contact Terry Kim.
Rural school leaders really are a remarkable lot. In the midst of budgeting season, in the aftermath of a massive snowstorm and giving up the only day off between the school week and the start of the NYSCOSS Winter Institute, hardy leaders nonetheless made the trek to Albany for the annual RSA Education Innovation Summit. They were not disappointed.

The program kicked off with Dr. Katrina Bratge’s discussion of how our schools can support music and other important “singletons” within our curricula. The interactive session featured table discussions and a lively dialogue about impediments to scheduling, beyond the finances needed to sustain the program. Are we scheduling music and other programs in competition with classes needed for a student’s sequence (so that they are forced to take one and not the other?) Can we share class time, alternative subjects in a period time slot? Can we use before and afterschool club time to supplement our programs and if so, can the school or parents provide the necessary transportation?

Leaders learned that the success of these programs are often reliant on the personality of the teacher. Even in a limited curriculum, students have a choice and will gravitate to an educator that inspires them. Is AIS undermining your students’ ability to participate in these experiences? If so, perhaps making AIS more available in the earlier grades can free up the schedule.

Most importantly, (and knowing that music programs in particular are often the districts best public relations tool after sports) how do you recruit students for these showcase subjects? Dr. Bratge suggests making a connection with area professional performers. Might they be willing to come to school the day of their performance? Can you get your students to that performance? According to Dr. Bratge, making them aware of the lifelong possibilities is a key to participation.

Participants offered that it’s important to offer things like a Concert Closet to assure all students have the clothes needed to participate in a performance. And schools should “punch at their weight class” by offering programs sized to your district’s population. Not enough kids for a concert or marching band? Start a jazz band or acapella performance ensemble! We know that the arts are the key to student engagement in many cases and a pathway to learning in all cases.

TRAUMA INFORMED SCHOOLS

Trauma isn’t an event; it’s the response to the event. Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) form a direct correlation to a student’s ability to maintain classroom decorum, respond appropriately and calm themselves after unsettling events and their ability to trust and engage in shared learning activities. Wayne County educators Dr. Joseph Fantigrossi and Jay Roscup are zealous in their mission to inform school leaders of the need to create an environment where every child is supported because (in many cases) we simply don’t know the trauma a child is responding to later in their life. We do know that 67% of our students have had a traumatic event during their lives (sometimes a number of such events) and we know that exposure to adverse events changes brain function-particularly developing brain function. We’re not talking about bad behavior here, but the longterm release of stress hormones activated over and over again, creating a toxic impact on the brain.
As schools, we are often initially sympathetic to a child’s trauma, but over time we expect them to rebound and adhere to normal classroom behavior. Puberty and other life events can trigger the stress responses, which disrupts a student’s ability to rationally determine “cause and effect.” We know that choices lead to results, but kids with several ACEs just don’t think that way. Their thinking mechanisms have been altered. When combined with poverty, this creates an uphill climb that needs a tiered response from our schools. First, a universal environment of trust for all students, then a targeted response for groups and finally, individual interventions when required. For more information on informing your school about the effects of childhood trauma, go to http://bit.ly/2tsiZdl.

**OPIOIDS IN OUR COMMUNITIES, HOMES AND SCHOOLS**

Is there any question that one of the most traumatic events in the life of your district is the loss of a student or former student to an opioid overdose? Finding answers and an effective approach to protecting our students and their families has been elusive, largely because it’s a moving target. The issue used to be overly available narcotic pain medication. Far from simply being a recreational drug outlet, these pain medications became pervasive as a treatment option for many adults who never anticipated struggling with addiction. When state and federal regulators made it much more difficult to receive these opioid based pain medications, those who found themselves addicted often turned to a heroin alternative. Addictive in its own right, heroin is now often laced with even more addictive drugs. Addiction escalates rapidly, leading to unexpectedly deadly doses.

People we never would have dreamed were involved with drugs simply turn up in a community’s obituary column and lives are turned upside down; often forever. It’s tragic, it’s maddening and for now, it’s winning. Our leaders seem to be flailing at outmoded and ineffective strategies, but for better or worse appear to be waking up now that the problem pervades all social tiers. Into this mix, rural school leaders met with RSA Deputy Director Dr. Gretchen Rymarchyk to discuss her research of opioids in our rural schools and communities. The interactive session quickly evolved into the sharing of local tragedies and responses. Suggestions included partnerships with local health care providers, greater availability of Narcan and Narcan training, increased community programs, etc. but the biggest “take away” was the need for programs and services to prevent our young people from turning to opioids from the outset.

For more information or to relay how your district is addressing the crisis, contact RSA Dep. Dir. Gretchen Rymarchyk through the RSA website www.RSANY.org.

**RSA PROGRAMS NOW AVAILABLE STATEWIDE AND YEAR ROUND**

In addition to the annual Summer Conference in Cooperstown, this year your RSA added high level, rural-specific programs in Lake Placid (in conjunction with the NYSSBA Convention) in the fall, in Central New York at our Winter Conference last December (with the Four County Schools Boards Assn.) and at the RSA March Education Innovation Summit (in conjunction with the NYSCOSS Winter Institute) in Albany. Please let us know if you have a topic you feel should be addressed or a location you feel needs to be served.
RSA Working Daily to Improve New York State Schools

The Genesee Valley School Board Association recently held its annual Legislative Breakfast. RSA Executive Director Dave Little is shown here with fellow Wittenberg University alum and Member of Assembly David DiPietro from the 147th District.

Local legislators, school leaders, your Rural Schools Association and education students recently met at SUNY Oneonta for the annual Teacher's Center Legislative forum. Seated at the right of the panel of legislators is Senator Jim Seward.

RSA recently presented information on bringing innovative educational programs and services to rural communities at SUNY’s conference on STEAM education. Here New York State Lt. Governor Kathy Hochul addresses the summit.

Several local schools districts recently met with RSA to discuss ways to collaborate on programs and services. The meeting included a tour of Mohanasen CSD's Career and Technical Center. Superintendent Dr. Kathleen Spring is seen here showing folks their digitally connected music center. The CAT Center also includes a Nanotech "Clean Room" to familiarize students with practices in that expanding field.
NYS Lt Governor Kathy Hochul showing her support for rural schools at the Taste of New York reception. Shown with RSA Executive Director Dave Little.

Students from the Albion CSD visit the RSA booth at the Taste of New York Legislative Reception in Albany. The maple syrup given out at the booth comes from student maple production in school agricultural programs around the state.

Royalty stops by the RSA booth.
In light of recent events at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, it behooves us now more than ever to understand the mental health issues affecting our children. Students’ lives are filled with experiences that can be traumatic or mentally exhausting. Addressing mental health issues affecting our children will lead to safe and secure learning environments. Change is possible but action must be taken.

Please join us at our mental health summit in Woodbury where you will:

* Share everyday challenges with educators, parents, school staff and mental health professionals.
* Discuss what improvements can be made to identify and treat mental health issues.
* Learn what you can do to create solutions through training, partnerships and advocacy strategies
* Learn how to create an environment where students feel safe to share their feelings

Together we can make a difference in our students lives.

**Thursday, March 15**
8:00 a.m. – 3:30 p.m.
The Fox Hollow
7755 Jericho Turnpike, Woodbury, NY 11797
Cost: $175

Information available at: http://www.nyssba.org/events/2018/03/15/summit/mental-health-summit/2507/

Guest speakers: