

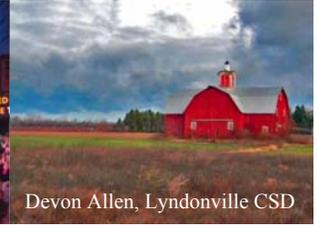


# RSA TODAY

News for New York State's Rural Schools

March 2017 Issue

Rural Schools Association of New York State



Devon Allen, Lyndonville CSD

I don't live in New York ,

I live In New York !

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David A. Little, Esq.  
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## E Pluribus Unum. Of Many, One. That's Us. That's U.S.



There is an army of dedicated professionals throughout our nation, engaged in the noble work of (depending on who you talk to) preserving the underpinnings of our democratic society or defending a status quo that deprives too many children of choices that might lead to a better life. In our rural schools, we're either helping to preserve a way of life and support the community or relegating our kids to a losing competition against more broadly educated suburban students. It's a question we'd best get a handle on and quick.

Things are moving...and fast! At the federal level we have an administrative approach that both wants to return public education to the states and siphon public funds off to provide private and parochial school alternatives. It looks like the president and education secretary want to forego \$20 billion in federal revenue to allow education tuition tax credits across the nation. Added to that is their budgetary plan to increase military spending by 10%. They'll do that (they say) by cutting non-military discretionary spending by that amount. That means cuts to Title 1, IDEA and other vital federal programs.

Back at home in New York State our own State Education Department is wrestling with how to accept this newfound return to state control over the schools. They're holding local forums across the state to get our thinking and we need to provide it. The alternative is to allow them one more chance to regulate without taking the impact on small and rural schools into account. In fact, if you need evidence that our leaders haven't gotten the message about the needs of our rural students equaling those of urban youth, just look at this week's release of the \$78 million awarded to support 21st Century Community Learning Centers. Not a penny for rural schools and their partners. We know that the result of that alternative is frequently financially costly and administratively burdensome requirements that often have little to do with student achievement. We need to be at those meetings. Please.

At the legislative level the Executive Budget proposes an insufficient amount of aid for next year, as well as failing to set an “up to date” Foundation Aid Formula that takes into account the effects of student poverty, English Language Learners and other societal changes. As a state, we are more polarized than ever before. We are richer at the top end and poorer at the other. Unlike my waistline, we are smaller in the middle than at any time in memory. The research tells us that pre-school and Community Schools are the answer. They address serious issues that prevent cognitive development, while creating an environment that promotes student achievement. Yet, these things are not strongly supported in the state budget proposal.

Instead, we see plans for making midyear budget cuts (the most devastating kind for educational programs) and allowing leaders to make up state education aid according to whim, rather than need. What we don’t see are a workable tax cap, a common sense approach to district reserve funds or (most importantly) the state living up to its constitutional school funding responsibility. That’s no way to take back authority for our schools’ success.

We’re not alone. Our sister states are going through the same thing. Fact is, no one’s figured out the panacea for educating every child in a nation as diverse as ours. Other countries skim off (and test) their academic finest and then claim educational superiority (but you’ll notice they still send those kids here for college.) When you exclude children in poverty, the good old USA is unmatched educationally. But since this is in fact the good old USA, we don’t abandon those impoverished kids. They count and so we count them! More importantly we strive mightily to educate them; educate all children in the hope of a better life and a better society.

Here’s the rub. In order to save this democracy, we need to educate our citizens. To do that, one would think we’d arrive at an approach that’s likely to succeed and then give it all we’ve got. Instead, because this is in fact a democracy, we rarely agree on that approach and so we throw a little of this over here and a little of that over there, all the time wondering why the needle never moves. I say, if the federal government wants to return the schools to the states, so be it. Given history (both recent and distant) I have little trust in their ability to direct the states into an effective, coherent effort anyway. Having retaken that responsibility, we in New York need to do a dramatically better job of deciding what should work and then directing resources to that approach. If that means dropping some of the things we currently do, that’s the price we pay. Because, you see, in New York we seldom stop doing things; we only add on new things, new laws, new regulations and new responsibilities. In our state we spend almost as much as the entire federal education budget on our schools. (Let that sink in!) Yet, we have kids coming to school with medical, mental health, vision, dental, internet access, parental involvement, social interaction, vocabulary and other deficiencies. That is our state in 2017...not 1917.

Less than 40 years ago our rural areas had an economy capable of bailing out New York City in its hour of need. Now, we’re hanging on for dear life. Friends, let’s get this right. Let’s get our kids into our care at three and four years of age; before their cognitive deficiencies are too severe to overcome. Let’s put our lower achievers back with our high achievers, so that we all benefit and we all understand each other again. Let’s take those renovated Excel Aided buildings of ours and find a way to provide health, mental health, substance abuse and other community services to our kids and their families. Let’s force a model of caring communities into our leaders’ consciousness.

You want to make this nation great again? Pay attention to what made it great in the first place. E Pluribus Unum. Out of many, one. That’s us. That’s U.S.

The 21<sup>st</sup> Century equivalent of “taking it to the streets” is for us to take it to SED’s regional forums, take it to your local legislators, take it to the governor’s office. Short of surrounding the Capitol with 10,000 tractors, this is our opportunity to impress on them the crucial importance of revitalizing our rural communities and the schools that build them. According to the political pundits, last November rural America demanded to be heard. What is it we want them to know? They will pass that state budget in two weeks, folks. As the Irish say, “What’s it to be?”



**Emilie Robbins, Carthage CSD  
Country Farm, Deer River, NY**

## **IS THAT...COULD IT BE...OVER THERE ON THE HORIZON... MANDATE RELIEF?**

Your RSA has long had a collaborative relationship with the New York State Legislative Commission on Rural Resources. As you may recall, we honored their former chair (now Senate Finance Committee Chair) Cathy Young in 2015. The commission now has a new chair, Senator Pamela Helming (R-Canandaigua) and a new piece of meaningful legislation for rural school districts. The bill (Senate Bill 4538) would change the state's requirement of a set number of instructional days to an equivalent number of instructional hours, allowing rural districts to lengthen school days, shorten school weeks or

otherwise rearrange time to best meet their needs. The bill has passed through committee and is awaiting action by the full Senate.

The most likely impact of the bill, should it become law, would be to allow rural districts to move to a four day instructional week. If so, New York would be far from the first or only state providing the option to try this innovative approach. A number of states (mostly rural in nature) already have the option and within those states, there are a number of districts that operate within that structure. Why would a rural school in particular want to move to a four day week? Wouldn't that cause hardship for parents (who would have to find childcare on the fifth day) and wouldn't it cause chaos in scheduling extracurricular events with schools still using the traditional five day week? Perhaps, but that's not been the experience of states that currently have a four day week.

Sure, there are initial challenges. But parents like the idea that they don't have to worry about after school supervision four days per week. The schools still hold athletic and other school events on the afternoon or evening of the fifth day when needed and oh, the staff? They love it! The idea is based on the model used in hospitals, where nurses work longer shifts and have more days off. Staff there (and in the schools that already use it) report that the mental break does wonders in preventing burnout and is a real selling point in attracting teachers to rural districts. With three days off per week, prospective teachers who would otherwise be unwilling to work in a rural district are more inclined to work in a four day per week district. The commute becomes less onerous if they choose to live in a more heavily populated area and drive out to the rural district.

Then, there's the savings. Districts operating on a four day schedule report that their initial motivation was securing the financial benefits: one day less of running buses, being able to shut down heating and lighting an extra day, insurance savings. They came for the money, stayed for the program benefits. A four day week allows districts to be more flexible in their instructional models, allowing for fewer scheduling conflicts, more time for students to travel to BOCES programs without missing classes at their home district and providing additional time for innovative and collaborative programs that just take too long for traditional class time. And there's another aspect of the four day week that appeals to rural districts. When four day districts have had student hunger issues, the longer day gives them a reason to provide an additional meal, making student hunger less of an issue in the evenings and providing in school study time (eliminating broadband accessibility issues in remote areas.)

It's no panacea, but switching from instructional days to instructional hours is a tool that many rural districts could use. Your RSA will continue to work with Sen. Helming and the Legislative Commission on Rural Resources to provide this important option.



## RSA HELPS LEAD COMMUNITY SCHOOLS ADVOCACY

**Editor’s Note:** Your Rural Schools Association has been a leader in bringing the community school concept to our rural districts. With lower enrollment and refurbished facilities (thanks to Excel Aid some time ago) most rural districts have the capacity to house after-school, weekend and expanded programs and services to their students and families. Given the dearth of local partners, taking the reins in addressing issues of physical and mental health, as well as expanded learning opportunities is vital to rural schools. Last year RSA helped produce a ground breaking white paper on community schools. This led to the onset of state support. RSA now sits on the steering committee of the New York State Community Schools Network, helping to secure funding and other support for community schools in rural districts.

A community school is a strategy to create the conditions where learning and development can thrive. By coordinating partnerships with external resources or community programs and services, community schools promote and support student growth. Additionally, community schools increase access to medical and mental health care, expand learning opportunities such as after-school and summer programs, and boost parent/family engagement, all of which remove the barriers to learning that young people might face. With these essential elements housed in a community school, the work leads to expanded student achievement, stronger families, and ultimately a better New York State.

Behind the leadership of the Coalition for Community Schools, we have seen growing national interest in community schools. Housed at the Institute for Educational Leadership, the Coalition for Community Schools is an alliance of national, state, and local organizations in education, youth development, community planning and development, family support, health and human services, government, and philanthropy as well as national, state, and local community school networks.

The purpose of state networks (there are approximately 15 across the country) is to provide a means for local and state community schools stakeholders to connect, deepen their knowledge and skills, and advocate for supportive policies at the state level. State coalitions are especially important given the continued growth of local initiatives, the devolution of power to states through the Every Student Succeeds Act, and the rising interest from governors and state legislators in community schools. We are excited to share information on the emerging New York State Community Schools Network, a statewide coalition of community-based organizations, advocacy groups, educational technical assistance centers, and unions to support and advance the development of all local and statewide community school initiatives.

In the 2017-18 Executive Budget proposal, Governor Cuomo has included \$150 million in Foundation Aid Community School Set-Aside funding, but it falls short of existing funding for community schools to continue making progress and for new communities to develop community schools and support the children and families they serve. During the 2017-18 budget process, the New York State Community Schools Network has been hard at work to ensure additional community schools funding is included in the final enacted budget.

The New York State Community Schools Network’s goals for the 2017-18 budget process are:

1. to ensure adequate and sustainable funding exists for community schools to develop and strengthen their work in communities across the state;

2. to maximize the state’s investments by securing funding for technical assistance, as it is critical for school districts and schools to implement community schools and operationalize the strategy with fidelity; and
3. to safeguard existing funding streams that community schools leverage to provide essential programs and services for children and families.

Below is a summary of the main budget requests:

- **Maintain \$255 million in existing community school funding, which includes one year of renewed funding for 32 Community School Grant Initiative (CSGI) schools**
- **Add \$50 million in new funding for a total of \$100 million in additional community school investments**
- **Reserve 5% up to \$5 million of new community school funding to provide technical assistance and capacity-building support for community schools**
- **In collaboration with the New York State Network for Youth Success, Winning Beginning New York, and the New York School-Based Health Alliance, the New York State Community Schools Network supports the following budget requests:**
  - ◊ To support the state’s after-school programs: increase Advantage After School funding to \$32.8 million, a \$10.5 million increase over the FY17 final budget and \$15.6 million over the governor’s FY18 proposal; and, maintain \$35 million in new afterschool funding for 22,000 additional students proposed in the governor’s executive budget.
  - ◊ Maintain all current funding for pre-K, including the \$22 million added in 2016, and add at least \$150 million to expand access to quality pre-K outside of New York City, with priority to high-needs districts.
  - ◊ Reject Governor Cuomo’s state budget proposal to consolidate and reduce public health funding and restore SBHC funding to last year’s level of \$21 million. These funds are used by centers for core services including primary and preventative health care, mental health services, and health education and promotion.

Community schools need time and sustained support to increase student learning and success. The New York State Community Schools Network is committed to advocacy to ensure that adequate and sustainable funding exists for community schools to develop and strengthen their work in communities across the state. For additional information on the New York State Community Schools Network, please contact Terry Kim at [tkim@childrensaidsociety.org](mailto:tkim@childrensaidsociety.org).



## **NYSER Argument in Court of Appeals**

Despite the state's attempt to delay oral argument in the NYSER appeal until the fall, the Court of Appeals has now issued a final schedule for spring briefing, and has stated that oral argument will take place on either May 30, 31 or June 1, allowing for a possible decision before the summer.

RSA sees this as a very positive development. The Court of Appeals clearly sees this as an important case and has expedited the schedule for briefing and argument to an extraordinary degree in response to the argument that it is important to have a decision before the next school year.



Jessica Smith, Lyndonville CSD  
Tree at Johnson's Creek

## NEW YORK STATE COMMUNITY SCHOOLS NETWORK BUDGET PRIORITIES FY 18

We are a **statewide network of key community school partners** representing community based organizations, advocacy groups, and unions to collaborate, influence community school policy, and formulate strategies to support all local and statewide community school initiatives.

**Community schools are schools that develop intentional partnerships with external resources or organizations to meet the documented needs of students and families.** Addressing the comprehensive needs of children and their families is an essential way to increase student achievement. To sustain, build capacity, and implement high quality community schools, we request additional statewide investments.

Addressing the comprehensive needs of children and their families is an essential way to increase student achievement. To sustain, build capacity, and implement high quality community schools, we request additional statewide investments.

**We request that the state consider the following budget priorities for FY 18 to support existing and new community schools:**

**1. Maintain \$255 million in existing community school funding and add \$100 million to adequately fund and sustain community schools statewide**

- ◆ **Continue to invest and sustain existing community schools in New York State:**
  - \* **Foundation Aid Community Schools Set Aside for high needs districts (\$100 million)**
    - **We request this funding as a Categorical Aid**
  - \* **School Receivership funding for persistently struggling schools (\$75 million)**
  - \* **Competitive one year grant funding for persistently struggling and struggling schools (\$75 million)**
  - \* **Community Schools Grant Initiative (CSGI) funding for 32 grantees (\$5 million)**
- ◆ **We request \$50 million in additional funding for a total of \$100 million (The Governor's Executive Budget added \$50 million) for school districts to expand and continue their community school initiatives. New funds will allow districts to develop quality community schools, to strengthen and enhance their work, and sustain successful community schools.**
  - **We request this funding as a Categorical Aid**

**2. Reserve 5% up to \$5 million of new community school funding to provide technical assistance and capacity building support for community schools**

- ◆ **Based on the successful efforts of 21st Century Community Learning Centers Technical Assistance Resource Centers, authorized services would be contracted out to community providers for targeted coaching and training for school-based teams to identify school needs and develop the strategies for organizing school and community resources around student success.**

- ◆ **School districts, school leaders, and non-profit community organizations with limited experience in leveraging various funding streams, engaging parents and community partners, and implementing fundamental elements of a community school requires support.**
- 3. The New York State Community Schools Network supports critical funding for the programs and services that community schools effectively leverage and coordinate in order to ensure that students and their families are supported and engaged. In collaboration with the New York State Network for Youth Success, Winning Beginning New York, and the New York School-Based Health Alliance, we support the following budget requests:**
- ◆ **To support the state’s afterschool programs: increase Advantage After School funding to \$32.8 million, a \$10.5 million increase over the FY17 Final Budget and \$15.6 million over the Governor’s FY18 proposal; and, maintain \$35 million in new afterschool funding for 22,000 additional students proposed in the Governor’s Executive Budget**
  - ◆ **Maintain all current funding for pre-K, including the \$22 million added in 2016, and add at least \$150 million to expand access to quality pre-K outside of New York City, with priority to high needs districts and neighborhoods.**
  - ◆ **Reject Governor Cuomo’s State Budget proposal to consolidate and reduce public health funding and restore SBHC funding to last year’s level of \$21 million. These funds are used by centers for core services including primary and preventative health care, mental health services, and health education and promotion.**



## DC.DIGEST: FEDERAL NEWS YOU CAN USE.!

effort.

The following federal education update is provided by the National Rural Education Advocacy Coalition, an RSA sponsored

**CAREER EDUCATION IS BACK ON THE HILL:** House lawmakers are making a new push to jumpstart efforts to reauthorize the main federal law governing career and technical education during this Congress. After years of talk about rewriting the Perkins Career and Technical Education Act, the House last summer passed an overhaul on a 405-8 vote. But the bill hit a snag in the Senate as Democrats and Republicans disagreed over provisions that would have curtailed the Education secretary's authority over how states spend money under the law. Rep. G.T. Thompson (R-Pa.), the main Republican sponsor of the bill, tells Morning Education that he plans to re-introduce the legislation in the coming week and hopes to have it before the House education committee "sometime in March." Thompson said he's open to some tweaks to the bill, but noted it was "really universally accepted" in the House just months ago. President Donald Trump talked on the campaign trail about expanding vocational and technical education. And Education Secretary Betsy DeVos recently told a group of community college leaders that she was looking forward to working with them on reauthorizing Perkins.

**COLLEGE FOR EVERY STUDENT:** As part of our commitment to help one million low-income students attain college degrees by 2025, College For Every Student (CFES) is launching a nationwide search for additional rural schools to participate for three years in our high impact college and career readiness program. CFES will select one rural school to receive a full program grant for three years. Additional schools will be selected to receive a partial program grant covering half of the program costs (\$15,000 per year for three years). Schools in this category will be asked to find matching support from other sources. Interested schools should apply by April 21, 2017. Schools that become part of the CFES Program will join a network of partner schools, colleges, and businesses, committed to supporting each other and to helping students become college and career ready. In its 25-year history, CFES has helped 100,000 low-income young people get to college. On average, 99% graduate from high school and 95% go on to college. We invite you to peruse the CFES website, as well as view their Virtual Brochure for more detailed information about the CFES Program. If you have any questions, please be in touch at [info@collegefes.org](mailto:info@collegefes.org).

**SCHOOL CHOICE:** It's unclear how President Trump's effort to expand "school choice" policies, like charter schools and vouchers, fits into the budget picture. Trump's budget chief, Mick Mulvaney, said earlier this week that "school choice" will be a budget priority for the administration. Trump called on Congress "to pass an education bill that funds school choice for disadvantaged youth," but he's offered no details on how such a measure would be written. POLITICO reported last month that the Trump administration is considering a first-of-its-kind federal tax credit scholarship program that would channel billions of dollars to working-class families to enable their children to attend private schools, including religious schools. That plan likely wouldn't increase the federal budget. Education Secretary Betsy DeVos told the New York Post there isn't a specific policy proposal yet, but she's "sure" she "will be working on that with him and the administration in the coming the days."

**RSA ON ACROSS THE BOARD AID CUTS:** The new administration has suggested an increase in military spending of 10% (\$54 billion.) This would require a cut to non-military discretionary spending (public education among them) of an equal amount, as the president has indicated he will not raise the budget to accomplish the military spending increase. It's estimated that this would amount to roughly \$9 billion for public educational programs like Title 1 and IDEA.

**SUNNY SPOT:** Year-round Pell is not off the table, Budget Subcommittee Chair Cole said. "I'm not ruling it out, I'm not taking a hard stand," he said. "I just want to close out the '17 bill, and it will be like a box of candy - you won't know what you'll get, but I'm telling you it will be good stuff." House Speaker Paul Ryan said Tuesday that he also supports expanding Pell Grant eligibility to low-income students attending classes all year. "I like year-round Pell," Ryan told leaders of historically black colleges and universities who gathered at a summit on Capitol Hill on Tuesday. "I think that makes a lot of sense."



**Suffolk County school leaders recently met with their legislators at the state's largest school legislative breakfast. RSA was proud to participate.**



Dr. Gretchen Rymarchyk,  
Deputy Director RSA

## **DEPUTY DIRECTOR'S CORNER**

### **RESEARCH NEWS FROM CORNELL**

#### **Lessons from Research Partnerships with Community Groups**

On December 6, 2016 the Bronfenbrenner Center for Translational Research (BCTR) hosted a panel titled How to **Build Research Relationships with Non-Academic Partners** with Dr. Jane Powers (Director, ACT for Youth Center for Excellence), Ms. Martha Holden (Director, Residential Child Care Project), and Dr. Elaine Wethington (Professor of Human Ecology, Sociology, and Gerontology in Medicine at Weill Cornell Medicine, and Director, Pilot Study Core for the Roybal Center for the Translation of the Behavioral and Social Sciences of Aging, The Translational Institute on Pain in Later Life).

Located within the College of Human Ecology, BCTR has many projects that bridge the divide between academia and direct practice by focusing on solving problems across the lifespan. More about BCTR can be found here: <https://www.bctr.cornell.edu/>

Each researcher presented specific examples of projects that required a mutually beneficial collaboration between practice contexts and researchers, and the lessons they learned about what is required to lay the foundations of a successful partnership. Some lessons included:

- Bringing together diverse perspectives like this leads to original thinking that likely would not have happened within either audience separately.
- Rather than washing out academic details for a lay audience, researchers explain concepts and non-researchers in the group praise this because now they understand and get interested and excited about each other's work.
- Partners have to trust that researchers will not publish information that makes them look bad; that researchers will help them fix problems that emerge from the project (e.g. What if data says we are not doing as well as we thought?)
- More and more policy makers want evidence behind recommendations
- "Typical" research involves experimental and control groups, but out in the real world it is not always wise. For example, we have not used experimental vs control groups to test parachutes, or flossing, but we should still use both!
- Research cannot disrupt what partners do; find ways to capture data that are not burdensome or intrusive.

As an organization working with members on applied projects, RSA often works with non-research audiences. Many of these lessons validated our approach, and others helped inform it.

#### **Support for Migrant Farm Families**

On January 27, 2017 Cornell University hosted The People's School, which included a presentation titled **Immigrants' Rights – Ideas for How to Best Interact with Law Enforcement**: by Mary Jo Dudley, Senior

Extension Associate and Director of the Cornell Farm Workers Program. New York's rural schools serve many of our migrant farm workers' children, which is complicated for many reasons, not the least of which is the Federal Government's new approach to immigration.

Ms. Dudley spoke about how even undocumented immigrants have Constitutional rights (e.g., to remain silent, to have a lawyer, to due process, to be free of unreasonable searches & seizure), and that the best preparation is for immigrants to know their rights. Almost anything can trigger law enforcement to check documentation status, especially for people with brown skin – even though racial profiling is illegal, it is still common. A car accident, a farm accident, or simply riding the public transit system could trigger the authorities to ask for documents. All of NY state is considered border territory, so law enforcement officers are considered border agents, and border agents are considered law enforcement.

Turns out, there are a LOT of things that people can do to stay safe and minimize disruption and expense to their families, communities, and the farms they serve, and several of these things take some advanced planning. For example, they should know the name and number of an immigration lawyer, they should have a plan and paperwork ready in case they need to transfer custody of their children to someone s as to avoid foster care placement (and this should be shared with the school), they should have a plan for bail money with someone who is a US citizen whom they trust, etc. During the workshops Ms. Dudley conducts with migrant farm workers, they also role play what to do in case they are stopped by law enforcement or immigration authorities.

Ms. Dudley is bilingual and works with bilingual students to facilitate Know Your Rights workshops across the state for migrant farm workers.

There are many reasons you might think about having her come to your community:

- She talks about how to keep children safe and cared for (avoiding foster care placement),
- Children do best in school when parents are supported,
- Schools are designated safe places,
- You are supporting local farms and farmers – your community - by hosting this.

If you are interested in learning more about Ms. Dudley's work or organizing a workshop in your area, you can read about her work and reach her yourself at <https://cardi.cals.cornell.edu/programs/farmworker> , or contact Rural Schools Association Cornell offices to help you get in touch with her.

An extra tidbit: transporting families to schools for this workshop *via school bus* is a safe and cheap means to provide this service that is invaluable to families, and likely to help minimize disruption if parents' status is questioned or jeopardized.

## **Digital Agriculture Discussion at Cornell**

On February 1, 2017, Cornell University held a session titled “Digital Agriculture Discussions Across Cornell University.” This session was moderated by Dr. Jan Nyrop, Director of CU Agricultural Experiment Station, Dean of College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. There were two other speakers: Dr. Harold van Es from the

School of Integrative Plant Sciences, and Dr. Joshua Woodard from the Dyson School of Applied Economics and Management.

Last year, the NYS Legislature commissioned a study on the gap between the level of technology and data we have, and our capacity to use it. Drs. Van Es and Woodard were the principal investigators and discussed their findings. Their full report can be found here

<https://blogs.cornell.edu/ccefieldcropnews/files/2016/11/StateonPrecisionAgFinalReport110716-1o99jgm.pdf>

Among other things, they found that fewer than 6% of NY farms are using the amazing new technology available, but ten years from now 100% of NY farms will be using it. We have yet to imagine all the ways this technology can help farming, but essentially, it allows precision farming to happen: instead of monitoring the herd, you're monitoring individual animals, taking weight and body temperature several times a day to look at feeding, fertility, milk quality and quantity, etc. Or, instead of using huge tractors driven by paid workers to plant seeds, smaller robotic equipment can independently and more precisely sow seed so that margins of crop damage from larger machinery can be eliminated. More precision due to better technology means taking the guess work out of farming, increasing crop yield and maximizing efficiency.

Cornell recognizes the opportunity this creates - they are considering starting a department, or school or institute for digital agriculture to train NY's citizens to be pioneers in this field.

From the perspective of NY's rural schools, we are uniquely positioned to feed students into these programs, creating a new workforce that will revitalize agriculture in NY. Scientists and mathematicians will be needed on farms, as well as record keepers, business and marketing professionals, perhaps HR agencies that farms contract out to, IT staff, etc. Today's second graders should be prepared to go from graduation to the farm, or off to college and back to the farm. Making sure OUR students are able to access these opportunities means our children can return to our community agriculture, capitalizing while preserving the context, culture, and geography as it has been throughout centuries.

This begs for STEM, Special Education, BOCES, FFA, and others to work together to create curricula that serves our home communities, utilizing local farms as laboratories, and sources of problems to solve in the classroom. It also means the Governor will need to step up broadband access across the state so we can fully function in this system and become a leader in the field of Digital Agriculture. New York's Rural Schools are foundational to this becoming a reality, and there are some obviously beneficial implications for teacher recruitment and retention in some of the toughest positions to fill.

You can access the entire presentation here:

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/digital-agriculture-discussions-across-cornell-university-registration-31025709733>

At this link you can also see when further discussions will be taking place so that you – or your teaching staff – may join in either in-person or virtually to learn more about this new field and the actions being planned at Cornell.

... And since that occurred, this story came out on a new way that Digital Agriculture is being used to maximize crop production in NY: <http://www.news.cornell.edu/stories/2017/02/new-tool-gives-apple-farms-hope-fight-against-spring-freezes>

## Teacher Recruitment and Retention in Rural NY

In January, RSA completed a report on the results of a RSA survey and recent research findings regarding the cause and potential solutions to the rural teacher recruitment and retention struggle in NY. This report was designed to help policymakers make informed decisions about what might have the best impact on this ongoing problem. The report is summarized below, but you can access the full report on the webpage at Teacher Recruitment and Retention in Rural NY's Public Schools. [hyperlink]

Problem - While there is no overall teacher shortage at this time – meaning there are more teachers seeking work than there are open positions – many of NY's rural districts are three to four times more likely to have 5 or fewer qualified candidates to choose from for STEM, Special Education, and specials positions than schools in suburban or rural areas. In other words, geography and these three key topical areas are where the biggest shortages lie.

Causes – There are a couple forces working together against these contexts and content areas. One of the biggest factors is that, on average, **rural schools pay significantly less** – starting at over \$15k less – than their closest neighbors: suburban districts. And as teachers advance in their professions, this discrepancy only grows – it's more than \$32k greater by the time they have 20 years in the profession. This, unfortunately, means that teachers who prefer to live in rural areas, often do so and still have a reasonable commute to a suburban school for work.

Another compensation-related cause specific to STEM teachers is that, because they have specialized backgrounds in the sciences, they have the **option to take industry jobs** in urban areas that will pay significantly more.

A cause specific to Special Education positions is that, in rural areas there still tends to be a diversity of student needs in this area, but budget for only 1-2 educators. This means Special Educators have enormous professional development needs that are hard to meet, especially if there is no access to broadband, or an institute of higher education nearby. It is also very taxing for these teachers to be **“jack-of-all-trades” for the special education student population** in a district. These teachers often see the benefit of working in larger schools where they can still serve the same number of children, but specialize, and thus serve them better.

The rural context is often cited as undesirable by young teachers, due to **proximity from cultural, social, and retail opportunities**. Teacher preparation programs do not tend to “prepare” students for how to flourish in rural settings, so those unfamiliar, often will leave within their first few years to a location with higher population density. Grow-your-own programs that incentivize locals to become teachers and stay in the district are a popular strategy, however this often precludes the educational benefits of diversity. Rural schools need a means to attract teachers from other communities.

Finally, the **school context** is often cited by new teachers as their reason for leaving – regardless of geographic context or topical area – due to a common **“sink or swim” experience** in schools that do not have collegial, professional atmospheres or administrative support for productive student behavior. But rural schools in particular – due to lack of funding – subject teachers to **fewer classroom resources, higher student loads, and higher likelihood of teaching outside of one's field**, among other things, than suburban or urban schools.

Implications – When these positions do get filled in rural areas, they are often filled by new, inexperienced

teachers who continue their job search for a position with better pay and more opportunities, in a community they see as better able to meet their lifestyle needs. This has negative impacts in several ways – some of which create a loop that works to progressively decrease rural schools’ ability to attract and retain teachers:

- Rural school students are taught by a merry-go-round of inexperienced teachers;
- Rural school students have to manage many more teacher transitions than suburban or urban students, and as we know, transitions are often difficult for children;
- Rural schools spend more time and money orienting and developing new teachers than their suburban and urban counterparts, simply because rural schools are less likely to attract experienced teachers AND rural schools have higher turnover;
  - ◊ This has negative budget implications,
  - ◊ This also makes it difficult to create and maintain productive school culture – one of the factors new teachers cite for leaving.

Solutions – Four policy suggestions emerged from this, keeping a focus on what efforts would give the biggest impact.

1. What was most clear when reviewing the recent research was that there was not much to review. The few articles that exist tend to focus on defining the problem. There is a smattering of articles describing attempts to address this. There were no articles that showed the outcomes of these attempts – were they successful? This was a critique cited among the other researchers as well – there is not enough research out there to know **what solutions are effective**. So, the first policy recommendation is to **fund and encourage this research**.
2. It seems obvious that **pay** needs to be addressed in at least two ways: a) **ensure pay equity** across geographic regions, thus removing a rural disincentive, and b) provide **competitive or incentive compensation for the hard-to-fill context areas** of STEM, Special Education, and specials. This needs to be more than a sign-on bonus, as research does suggest that teachers take the bonus, stay for a little while, then leave anyway. The incentive needs to be permanent.
3. **Promote mentoring programs** to support new teachers in a) navigating systems (school, staff, community), and b) developing their content area.
4. **Promote district-wide and community-wide internet access**. As stated in the report, “Fully functional technology can help address many of the issues driving teachers away from geographically isolated areas: access to professional development, certification, collaboration, mentoring support, as well as personal interests such as hobbies, movies, and shopping.”
5. **Promote leadership development** that promotes professionalism, inclusion, and participatory management so that new and returning teachers can experience support in their professional development and work together to optimize school functioning and curricula.

This report will be used to create a policy brief that Dave will take to Albany to help promote rural-friendly policy development.

**SAVE THE DATE!**  
**“Your Role in Addressing the Growing  
Mental Health Crisis Among Students”**  
**May 20, 2017**  
**Holiday Inn Express, Latham, NY**

Your Rural Schools Association is partnering with the New York State School Boards Association, the Council of School Superintendents, NYSPTA and the School Administrators Association of NYS to bring you this hands on summit on one of the most pressing issues for our rural schools.

The keynote presentation “Building on Strengths, Fostering Resilience, and Expanding the Boundaries of School Improvement for Whole Child Development” will be made by Dr. Katherine Briar-Lawson <http://www.albany.edu/ssw/katharine-briar-lawson.php> and Dr. Hal Lawson [http://www.albany.edu/epl/faculty\\_hal\\_lawson.php](http://www.albany.edu/epl/faculty_hal_lawson.php).

Their insightful presentation will be followed by large and small group discussions led by mental health experts, designed to tailor information to your district’s specific circumstances. Topics include: **Getting Help**

- A. Everyday Challenges: Why Parents, Educators, and Student Support Professionals must work together.**
- B. Children and youths who fall through the cracks: The Basics of Building School-based, Early Detection and Rapid Response Systems**
- C. Getting Started: What School Boards, Superintendents, and Principals Need to Prioritize Now (**
- D. Mapping Resources, Bridging School and Community Boundaries, and Identifying Roles, Relationships, and Responsibilities.**
- E. Getting Started: Building School, Family, Community and Higher Education Partnerships**

Then in the afternoon, choose from facilitated discussions like:

- A. Professional Development Needs & Strategies**
- B. Place-based Partnership Development Strategies**
- C. Policy Advocacy Strategies**

Then wrap up the day with a Full Group Discussion on

- D. Next Steps in the New Agenda for Promoting Children’s Mental Health and Social/Emotional Wellbeing**

How will we capitalize on today’s contacts, collaborations and energy? How do we now act upon today’s deliberations when interacting with students, families, local educators and practitioners, policymakers, organizations and agencies?

**This summit is intended for superintendents, administrators, school board members and educational and school healthcare staff. See you May 20<sup>th</sup>!**

# WASHINGTON WATCH

## The President's Budget

The President's budget slashes Department of Education funding by \$9 billion (13 percent) below the 2017 level, to a total of \$59 billion. The budget specifies less than \$5 billion of its cuts plus another \$3.9 billion from rescinding previously appropriated Pell Grant funding that isn't new 2018 funding. (That shouldn't be the \$9 billion cut the budget references, so there may be an additional \$4 billion in 2018 cuts.) Below is a list of what the budget does specify.

### Increases:

- \$1.4 billion for school choice, with plans to ramp up to \$20 billion over time. The new funding is comprised of the following increases:
- \$1 billion for Title I to allow funding to follow a student to the public school of his or her choice, not necessarily a school that receives Title I
- \$250 million for a new private school choice program
- \$168 million for charter schools

### Program Eliminations:

- \$2.3 billion for teacher training – eliminates the supporting effective instruction teacher training state grant program
- \$1.2 billion for after school – eliminates the 21<sup>st</sup> century community learning centers program
- \$732 million for student grant aid – eliminates the Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants for low-income college students

### Cuts:

- \$3.9 billion from Pell Grants – rescinding \$3.9 billion of the Pell Grant surplus while keeping new 2018 funding at last year's level
- \$92 million cut to TRIO – a 10% cut
- \$104 million cut to GEAR UP student aid – a 32% cut, funding only continuation grants
- Unspecified cut to Work Study student aid
- Eliminates or reduces funding for a total of 20 categorical programs including:
  - ◊ Striving Readers (\$190 million)
  - ◊ Teacher Quality Partnerships (\$43 million)
  - ◊ Impact Aid Support Payments for Federal Property (\$66 million)
  - ◊ International Education programs (\$72 million)

### Funding Freezes:

- IDEA – maintained at the 2017 level of almost \$13 billion
- Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Minority-Serving Institutions - the budget says it maintains funding at \$492 million, but that level is a cut of \$87 million from the current level.



Just 29 percent of 18- to 24-year-olds in rural areas are enrolled in college. John Dunn is one of them. Read his and other student stories at [“Voices From Rural America on Why \(or Why Not\) to Go to College.”](#)

Credit Jeremy M. Lange for The New York

## Colleges Discover the Rural Student

By LAURA PAPPANOJAN. 31, 2017

On a late-autumn Sunday, a bus pulled out of El Paso at 3 a.m. carrying 52 sleepy students and parents from western Texas and New Mexico. A few had already driven several hours to get to El Paso. The bus arrived at Texas A&M 12 hours later, in time for a walking tour and dinner. After “Aggieland” information sessions, including a student panel and classroom visits, a stop at the Bonfire Memorial and an all-night drive, they arrived back in El Paso at 8 a.m. Tuesday.

“People don’t realize that Texas is a huge state,” said Scott McDonald, director of admissions at Texas A&M who came up with the idea of bus trips upon realizing that students from remote areas would not visit on their own. “Sometimes colleges say, ‘We don’t get many of those students; it’s not worth our time.’” He disagrees. Rural students bring “a unique perspective” to campus, he said. “In terms of diversity, geography is just as important as racial and ethnic.”

### Student Stories

Mr. McDonald proved prescient. Given election results that turned up the volume on the concerns of rural Americans, who voted their discontent over lost jobs and economic disparities, higher education leaders are now talking about how to reach the hard-to-get-to.

“All of a sudden, rural is on everyone’s mind,” said Kai A. Schafft, director of the Center on Rural Education and Communities at Penn State, adding that November’s vote amplified the plight of people who had heretofore been “pretty systematically ignored, dismissed or passed over.” That’s partly because, while the federal government labels 72 percent of the nation’s land area “rural,” it is home to only 14 percent of the population, and rural schools educate just 18 percent of the nation’s public school students. Locales designated as rural have higher poverty rates and lower education levels than those labeled urban, suburban or town.

To college administrators, rural students, many of them the first in their families to attend college, have become the new underrepresented minority. In their aim to shape leaders and provide access to the disadvantaged, higher education experts have been recognizing that these students bring valuable experiences and viewpoints to campuses that don’t typically attract agriculture majors. Rural students, said Adam Sapp, admissions director at Pomona College, have “a different understanding of complicated political and social issues,” offering “one more lens through which to see a problem.”

Drexel University College of Medicine even includes rural students among those served through its diversity office. Clemson University last fall began offering them special scholarships through its Emerging Scholars Program. And nonprofit organizations that once focused on urban dwellers are now sending counselors into remote high schools to guide them in the application process.

These students face specific challenges. They attend schools so small that some teachers double as guidance counselors and bus drivers. In western Texas, the sports teams of Alpine High School can travel five hours each way to face opponents. In one removed Kentucky town, Irvine, students gather in a McDonald’s parking lot for internet access, when it’s working. Rural schools also often have less access to Advanced Placement courses.

There’s an achievement paradox here, too: While students in rural high schools graduate at rates second only to suburban students (80 percent, compared with 81 percent), and perform at or above other students on the National Assessment for Educational Progress, they enroll in four-year degree programs and pursue advanced degrees at lower rates.

Just 29 percent of 18- to 24-year-olds in rural areas are enrolled in college, compared with 47 percent of their urban peers. Research also shows that they “under-match,” attending less competitive colleges than their school performance suggests, often favoring community colleges.

The simple question — What is college for? — gets more complicated depending on where you ask it. Rural America has been slow to see the net value in higher education. For regions in pain, do university degrees help?

Higher education is a fraught subject in rural communities. “It is not simply deciding to get a college degree,” Dr. Schafft said, “but deciding you will probably not be able to come back.”

In regions suffering economically — in four years, Kentucky has lost 10,000 coal jobs paying \$60,000 to \$70,000 a year — residents are grappling with the loss of good unskilled jobs. “People who have grown up in our state, if they have grown up on a farm or a family connected to the coal mining industry, many of them believe erroneously that college may not be all that important,” said Robert L. King, president of the state’s Council on Postsecondary Education. An educated work force, he said, is needed to attract new industry.

With that goal in mind, a Kentucky working group on rural access to higher education made recommendations in 2013 now being carried out. They include extending the internet to isolated areas and offering Advanced Placement and college courses in high schools so that students realize they are capable of doing college work — countering, Mr. King said, “the natural concern that you may not be able to be competitive with kids who have grown up in suburban or larger communities.”

The belief that college is for other people, not country folk, is hard to break, said Sahar Mohammadzadeh, a high school junior and a leader of the Student Voice Team of the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence, a Kentucky education advocacy group. Team members recently interviewed high school students around the state, including rural students who, she said, are “being pushed down career pathways” even when they express academic interests.

“They are putting kids who want to be accountants into welding classes” instead of high-level math classes to ready them for college work, said Ms. Mohammadzadeh. “It is really powerful and heartbreaking to go around this state and see all this potential being thrown away.”

But there is also ample indifference on the students’ part, and not just in Appalachia. Jeanne Minton, dean of students at Union City High School in Oklahoma, said that only half of her 25 seniors are considering higher education. “In the small area where we are from, there are not always a lot of high expectations,” she said. “We are not striving to be valedictorian or have a C average or higher. We are striving to get graduated.

“Once they get out of high school, getting them to college is hard,” she said. Although she brings students to a college fair at a nearby community college, she said that “the last one we attended was worthless — my students walked around and they were ready to go.”

For urban and suburban students with college aspirations practically part of their DNA, such lack of interest can be hard to fathom. Yet even though college graduates earn on average 70 percent more than nondegree holders, daily experience in economically depressed areas may not argue for it. When a degree doesn’t guarantee higher pay, welding might seem a more desirable skill. Students are also reluctant to pursue study for jobs they don’t see around them.

Cameron Wright, a freshman at Yale, grew up in Fleming-Neon, Ky. (pop. 728), a onetime coal town with a median income of \$20,917. There is little else than fast-food work for his generation, he said. “Our parents and older people remember it as a bustling town,” and going away to college may be perceived as a rejection of small-town life. “People leaving can be almost like a death in the family,” he said.

The strengths and challenges of rural communities are little known outside of them, said Mr. Wright, and their concerns are often missing from the national debate. “Everyone is always talking about how policies affect urban people,” he said, and described a dining hall discussion about climate change with a friend from California. “He was talking about the need for people to use public transportation, and I was trying to say, ‘There are rural people who don’t have bus routes crisscrossing their towns.’”

Christopher Bush, a social work major at Portland State University, also experienced a cultural divide on campus. He grew up raising cattle, and struggles with the “Portlandia” fervor for vegetarian, vegan and organic. When friends say, “I don’t want to eat that stuff” and “eat cleaner,” it challenges his values. (As a freshman, he recalls being baffled by his first brunch invitation. “I was like, ‘I don’t know what brunch is.’”)

While Portland State is not one of the country’s land-grant universities, with an agriculture mission and major, it attracts its share of Oregon’s rural students “who want something radically different,” said Shannon Carr, director of admissions. With big agriculture buying up smaller farms, “everything is becoming more automated and competitive,” she said. “There is a sense that the more business acumen a family member can bring to the table, the better.” Still, there remain “proud families that have learned by doing” without college degrees.

The message that rural students need more guidance is not lost on college access organizations. Over the last few years, College Possible, College Advising Corps and College Forward have expanded their free counseling into remote areas.

In rural Texas, College Forward has added two high schools and is partnering with a state college and three community colleges. “College Forward used to be bachelor’s degree or bust,” said Austin Buchan, its executive director. With oil and gas prices down and energy companies shuttered — hurting manufacturing, steel and other industries — a two-year degree, he said, can help land or keep a job. And community college, he acknowledged, may be the best pathway for those helping to support families and for poor academic performers.

Selective four-year colleges are looking for strong low- and middle-income students, but finding them is hard. In September, with the ability to identify such students from its database, the College Board sent customized guides on applying to college and for financial aid to 30,000 students in rural schools. “Better reaching rural students has been a top priority since I joined four years ago,” said David Coleman, president and chief executive of the College Board.

A team is also in place exploring more tailored help, including virtual college advisers with local knowledge, a rural-specific college application guide, outreach to counselors in rural districts and more online help (100,000 rural students have signed up for personalized SAT practice on the Khan Academy site through the College Board). “Our higher ed partners are excited about that,” he said, adding that the election made clear “simmering needs that have been an issue for a long time.”

Some high schools are so distant from population centers that college representatives never visit. Nor are they getting the fancy pamphlets. “There is definitely a drive and understanding that these kids are out there,” said James G. Nondorf, dean of admissions and financial aid at the University of Chicago and an architect of the Coalition for Access, Affordability and Success, a new collective of public and private campuses. “They are just harder to reach.”

Last fall, coalition members divvied up a White House-generated list of underserved high schools to visit. Their representatives are supposed to pitch not just their own school but the whole group.

Mr. Sapp, the admissions director at Pomona, was assigned to rural North Carolina. On Sept. 15 he flew to Charlotte and then drove three hours to visit two high schools. He had impromptu meetings with just two students and two counselors, who introduced him to some local educators. “I had to explain where Pomona was” — that’s California — “and what Pomona was all about.”

As a one-time rural student himself, from Danville, Ohio (pop. 1,100), Mr. Sapp understood the value of his effort. Rural students “are not kids who will automatically fall in front of us,” he said. “We have to do the work.”

Laura Pappano is author of “Inside School Turnarounds: Urgent Hopes, Unfolding Stories.”

Story originally appeared in the NY Times.