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RSA NEWS

May 2015 Issue



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“Social Justice vs. Social Upheaval”



The Rural Schools Association has a message for state leaders: School funding is not just about the disparity between low and high wealth communities. It's about the future viability of the state and social justice.

The State of New York is creating the conditions of social unrest, like those found in Ferguson, Missouri and Baltimore, Maryland, according to David Little, the Executive Director of the Rural Schools Association of New York State. According to Little, police-community relations are just the most visible embodiment of the much larger issue of the loss of economic opportunity. At a presentation given to area school officials in Cuba, New York Little said that New York State's overreliance on local revenue to fund public schools has created longstanding pockets of hopelessness, where few students ever have the opportunity for meaningful employment. Socially, the middle class has been systematically eroded and with it, any chance to escape abject poverty. Said Little "Public education has always been the way out of poverty, but the state's approach to public education leaves success to the community. When that community is itself in need, students fail."

Little outlined three classes of educational opportunity in New York State; Suburban, where resources are more available locally and students have the most opportunities to pursue college or a meaningful career. Lesser resources flow to the second category of Rural Schools, where students succeed, but the lower level of resources limits educational opportunities. Fewer and more basic coursework limits students to lower tiered colleges. This creates a barrier between individual excellence and the opportunity to attend better colleges or find higher paying careers. Better colleges and universities simply won't admit rural students who have not had the benefit of a broad and rich curriculum. Most stressed are the Urban Schools, where social conditions cannot be overcome, even when the state provides significant resources. State spending may be higher in these areas, but insufficient to counteract the problems of student mobility, increased violence and lack of family resources to support learning. "Even providing an electronic tablet can't help a child learn when you're moving from apartment to apartment or the electricity is regularly turned off."

Little says it's not just the state that's to blame, however. "Political force is real. There are reasons why our educational funding system does not change despite the overwhelming evidence of need. The state has a political obligation to continue serving those with a com-

paratively lesser need and those with greater need are insufficiently powerful collectively to successfully demand more. To make matters worse, the educational community is guilty of folding its advocacy tents every year after the state budget is passed. Once we are assured of enough state aid to avert a crisis, we focus on making the best of what resources we have, rather than continuing to demand what we truly need.” The result according to Little, is a funding system that relies for two thirds of its revenue from communities and only a third from the state. This is the opposite of most states, which provide two thirds of educational funding.

“Our leaders claim that they’ve rescued local taxpayers by capping the property tax revenue that can be raised. What they fail to mention is that they’ve made the decision to educationally starve our kids in the process by ignoring their own obligation to provide sufficient revenue for those kids to be able to compete.” Until schools educate their business and other community leaders about the impact of deficient educational services to the future workers of their community, state leaders will remain unmoved, predicted Little. “As we speak, state leaders are responding to the overwhelming outcry over something as comparatively esoteric as whether student tests should be used to evaluate teachers. Meanwhile, we have allowed them to ignore the only real issue that matters in the state’s approach to public education; whether we are providing the money needed to adequately educate children in a competitive world. They are ignoring the constitutional rights of their residents.

If the state suspended free speech or freedom of the press, there would be a revolt. Yet every day, the State of New York is suspending our children’s constitutional right to an education that has actual value and we remain silent, as long as they send enough to keep the schools doors open.”

Little acknowledges that the state spends more per child than other states, but says “we have one foot in boiling water and the other in ice water and we claim that on average, we’re fine. We’re not. We distribute the money so poorly that we’ve negated the benefit of spending more than others.” Says Little, getting rid of the Gap Elimination Adjustment or GEA is only the precursor to the larger issue of revamping the state’s school funding formulas. “If we don’t recognize that our educated kids are leaving the state, that our high taxes and debt are preventing them from remaining at home and that our funding system is preventing those who remain from any real chance at success, we are in for social upheaval that would make Baltimore look like a sewing circle.” The solution, according to the Rural Schools Association, is simple: “Fix the funding formula, then fund it.”



Your Rural Schools Association was proud to participate in an education community forum at the Honeoye Central School District. Pictured here from left to right are Assembly Minority Leader Brian Kold, 4 County School Boards Association Executive Director Sharon Sweeney, Wayne-Finger Lakes District Supt. Scott Bischoping and RSA Executive Director David Little. Moderator was Julie Phillip.



David A. Little, RSA Executive Director

HAS THE BULL NOW DIGESTED THE “BALONEY”?

Commentary by RSA Executive Director, David Little

The old saying goes, “you can change the world, but if you don’t know what you’re doing, please don’t!” Seems to be where we are with public education these days. Remember when this all started? No one objected to the new standards. It made sense to broaden the curriculum, teach reasoning, collective problem solving and combine the ability to express yourself with something worth saying. It was a worthy goal for our students if they were going to succeed in an increasingly competitive and global marketplace. Then came the Great Recession and while the State Education Department had federal funds to carry out their end of the bargain, the state was broke and not only couldn’t provide the money schools needed to successfully implement the new standards, it withdrew billions from what schools already had. The result was a horrendous start to the most ambitious attempt to improve public education in a generation.

Then bad went to worse. Teachers became infuriated at the idea of this poorly implemented plan affecting their professional reputations. The very law that their leadership drafted in private cooperation with SED, the very law that they marched over to present to the legislature and governor in front of the media, the law that the governor forced schools to negotiate under threat of the loss of state aid is now called “baloney” by our executive. Why? Because school districts that were forced to negotiate an evaluation system in the midst of a flawed roll out of the underlying subject matter and new teaching methods and who faced a state aid Armageddon if their plan wasn’t submitted on time, sacrificed the store to get the agreement; because no one would legitimately rely on a system that (due to the lack of guidance, no professional development and tests given prior to teaching the subject matter) invited lawsuits by anyone rated ineffective. Baloney? No kidding.

All of which makes public education’s new directives all the more bizarre. Schools were directed to negotiate an agreement that involved student testing at “gunpoint” and nobody liked the result. So how in the world can our leaders’ new solution be to direct schools to negotiate an agreement involving student testing, at the point of that same “gun”? That my friends, is second generation baloney. Look, I’m not one who is philosophically opposed to the use of student performance in evaluating educators. What could be more relevant to how one teaches than whether students are learning? But teachers have a point in objecting to a system where some teachers teach subjects that use tests and others do not. Some teachers have cognitively challenged students; others do not. Some are teaching impoverished, homeless students and a mobile student population; others are not. And in the midst of it all, the state can’t figure out the correct mix of test scores and human evaluations; not to save its life. The state’s demanding timeline for implementation of its latest version of the moving evaluation target is so detached from educational practical workability that it highlights just how frantic politicians can be when facing their own (state budget) deadline and public pressure. Let’s hope schools do better.

Now both the Regents and the legislature are trying to revise the timeline, sadly with less emphasis on revising the underlying approach than the timing. Union opposition to the new evaluation system led to the opt out movement; **not** public education’s finest hour. Opting out begs the question of when students should be expected to opt back in? How will we tell them when a test matters and when it doesn’t? How do we avoid a general opposition to legitimate testing once the idea of choosing whether to take a test is firmly embedded in the minds of students and their parents? Now that educators have publicly declared that their intent is to preclude use of the new evaluation system by having students avoid the tests, how does the state proceed? We have now spent the better part of four years continuously changing public education from “on high” with little to show but public backlash and a more firmly entrenched sense of the status quo. And the status quo is something New York State can ill afford. And just to disturb tonight’s sleep, no one has ever had or now has a good “Plan B”.

One of the most myopic components of the new evaluation system is the mandate to use “independent evaluators.” School leaders have been told that they are to use administrators from other buildings within the district or use administrators from a neighboring district. Clearly no one at the state level was considering the implications for rural school

districts when they came up with this creative snafu. In rural school districts the other administrators within the district lead buildings at other grade levels. Elementary principals should not be called on to evaluate high school staff or vice versa. It's simply not a legitimate method. Neither can rural schools be expected to call on their neighboring district to swap administrative teams. "I'll evaluate yours if you evaluate mine!" The loss of effectiveness and time on task resulting from travelling long distances between rural districts- by already overburdened administrators would be catastrophic. Which leaves us exactly where we're always left: Paying for distant experts to be hired at exorbitant rates to come out from metropolitan areas to do the work (at a premium price, since the work is mandated.)

Truly there was good reason why the founding fathers separated the role of public education from the legislative and executive branches of our state government. They apparently have little sense of the actual workings of a school district and no ability to synthesize new ideas into existing practices without throwing everyone into an uproar. The result of this maelstrom is likely to be a return to the days when your education was totally dependent on the luck of being given the right teachers. Knowing which teachers are effective will remain an underground parental activity and gaming the system to avoid those teachers who are ineffective will remain a local art form. Unfortunately, for thousands of children stranded in historically intractable, underperforming schools, life will be as bad as ever and our state will remain firmly in the middle of the road (not because our kids are average, but because some of our schools are outstanding and we allow others to remain horrific.)

Public education has become the immovable object; and the irresistible force of state government hasn't figured out that simply exerting more force doesn't work. You have to change the object you want to move. And that, my friends, takes the political fortitude to tackle the tough issue of funding distribution rather than do an end run around it by creating more charter schools, private tuition tax credits and giving local control to mayors. Yup, I'm all for changing the world, but if you don't know what you're doing...

John Sipple Awarded "Friend of the Council"

Award by NY Council of School Superintendents



On March 8th, John Sipple, Professor and co-Director of CaRDI, was awarded the "Friend of the Council Award" by the New York State Council of School Superintendents (NYSCOSS) at the NYSCOSS Winter Institute. This award goes annually to a non-member of The Council who has significantly contributed to the field of education and the work of the Council. Congratulations John!

NYSCOSS President Neil O'Brien, Professor and co-Director of CaRDI John Sipple, Superintendent of Port Byron CSD; Mike DiPerna, Construction Manager at Premier Diamond Partner C&S Companies; and Distinguished Service Member Hank Grishman, Superintendent of Jericho CSD.

2015 Rural Schools Conference Program

The Annual RSA Conference will convene on Sunday evening, July 12, 2015. Sunday's schedule features a Welcome Reception at 5:45pm, followed by the Sunday Banquet, Regent James Dawson will receive the inaugural James Dawson Lifetime of Service Award, Senator Cathy Young will receive the Appreciation Award and Charles Szuberla will receive the William H. Deming Award, followed with a keynote address by David A. Little, Executive Director of the Rural Schools Association of New York State

Our program on Monday July 13th begins with an "Early Bird" session featuring Dr. John Sipple, Associate Professor of Sociology at Cornell University and Co-Faculty Advisor of the Community and Regional Development Institute (CARDI) and Sean Brady, President of Prism Decision Systems.

Following the Sunday evening schedule, the conference will break into concurrent sessions as outlined.

"Early Bird Session"– Monday July 13, 2015 at 8:30am

Dr. John Sipple's Early Bird session will be "Effective Strategic Planning for School Districts". Sharing the Early Bird session will be Sean Brady, President of Prism Decision Systems, along with Sandy Sherwood, Superintendent of Dryden CSD and Perry Dewey, Superintendent of Madison CSD.

Concurrent Session I – Workshop Programs Monday at 10:30am to 11:45am

1. "Community School Model –Assuring Success through Connections"

This program will review the unique partnerships of the Promise Zone efforts in the Broome-Tioga-Delaware BOCES region. This is one of six New York State funded programs and the only Promise Zone connected to a countywide approach. The higher education connection to Binghamton University (School of Social Work) is a key component of the effort linking Broome County and the local school districts to build community-based connections through several grant opportunities.

2. "Small Town Technology: Connecting Parents to Classroom Learning"

Efforts in the Waterville Central School district will be presented that demonstrate how the use of technology can create real and immediate remedies to the challenge of keeping parents involved in the school environment. Select technology applications will be reviewed that help keep parents informed of what's taking place in the classroom, from behavior management to math strategies that may be new to them. The use of technology breaks down barriers created by the difficulty in setting times to meet with parents and helps provide better support for students.

3. "Getting Students Prepared for Their Own Personal Future"

After the merger of the New Berlin and South New Berlin School Districts in the mid 1990's, one of the main purposes for the Unadilla Valley School District was to provide more opportunities for their students from a high need rural area. After being awarded a School Improvement Grant in the 2012-13 school year, the district implemented changes that would enable students to graduate from both high school and Tompkins Cortland Community College with an A.S. degree in four years. Adult mentors monitor student progress and assist with transitions between grade levels and from school to work or higher education. Mentors utilize a unique research based curriculum that has modules in life skills, college/career readiness, asset building and a component that addresses bullying.

Concurrent Session II – Workshop Programs

Monday at 1:30pm to 2:45pm

1. “Rondout Valley Central School District’s Successful Farm-to-School Collaborative”

The district will present its Farm-to-School program highlighting efforts with the Rondout Valley Growers Association, SUNY Ulster, Cornell University and local non-profit organizations. They will share and discuss best practices utilized to develop and expand opportunities for students, staff and the community to engage in Farm-to-School activities. Several highly successful interdisciplinary initiatives will be described for science, home and careers, art and technology. The district will also share strategies to incorporate local produce into cafeteria offerings.

2. “School Community Connections Enhance Seneca Falls CSD School Program”

The Seneca Falls School District will provide information on an action plan implemented that is focused on ways to promote partnerships and increase communication efforts to benefit academic programs, extra-curricular opportunities and student achievement rates. District representatives will share its School Community Connections initiative including action plan highlights, the process for the development of a Community Partnership Newsletter, Business Education and Marketing class projects designed to work with local businesses and a campaign to assist with fund raising for the National Women’s Hall of Fame.

3. “The ABCs of Early Literacy and Preschool/School Readiness Strategies for Rural Children”

The Dolgeville Central District Elementary School will provide a presentation on a program designed to increase whole-child readiness for school. This program includes experiences and interventions that help prepare children for PK/Kindergarten. Highlights include: work with the Literacy Coalition of Herkimer and Oneida Counties, employment of a Preschool Home-School Liaison, data collection to determine the effects of PK on kindergarten readiness and plans for nurturing relationships with families of children from birth through school entry.

Concurrent Session III – Workshop Programs

Monday at 3:15pm to 4:30pm

1. “High Need Rural School District Success Indicators: A Study of Economic Factors in New York State”

Results of a study done to determine if high need/rural school districts in New York classified as Reward school districts by NYSED receive more than expected financial support in the form of the local tax levy and apply a significantly different level of their financial resources to administrative functions, when compared to non-Reward districts, will be reviewed. The study attempted to determine if communities with schools that earn Reward status provide more local financial resources through proportionally larger tax levies. The study also sought to determine if High Need/Rural Reward school districts spend a significantly different proportion of their overall budgets on administrative functions than school districts that do not earn Reward status

2. “One2One Summer Melt Program”

The One2One Program has been implemented in the McGraw Central School District to help increase the graduation rate and to help ensure students who graduate are college and career ready. The program involves a partnership with Tompkins Cortland Community College and neighboring school districts to administer a diagnostic assessment each January to current seniors. This assessment provides results that place students into a “Math and ELA Boot Camp”. This experience results in a plan for students to enroll in college courses their first year that are deemed appropriate for them. The Summer Melt program provides students assistance with some of the steps necessary for them to be enrolled in college in the fall semester, so student don’t experience “summer melt” and become overwhelmed by barriers that prevent them from attending. Results from this year’s programs will be shared during the presentation.

3. *“The Tuition Option – A Tale of Financial Savings and Program Presentation”*

This presentation will feature a unique partnership between the Chautauqua Lake Central school District and the Ripley Central School District to provide a high school program in the Chautauqua District for Ripley Central students, through a tuition agreement. An overview of the process from the initial discussions, public vote, steps in the planning for the program to start and lessons learned from the experience in areas such as staffing, space allocation, transportation, student/parent concerns and finances, will be included.

A Cocktail Reception is scheduled starting at 6pm in the Exhibitors’ Area, followed by the Monday evening Banquet at 7pm, featuring a keynote address by Regent Beverly Ouderkirk and invited guest speaker Senate Majority Leader John Flanagan providing his assessment of rural education and state priorities.

Concurrent Session IV – Panel Presentation - “NYS Education Leaders”

Tuesday July 14, 2015 at 8:15am-9:45am

Presenters: TBD

Concurrent Session V – Workshop Programs

Tuesday July 14 at 10:00am to 11:15am

1. *“Information Technology Academy Students Earn 29 Transferrable College Credits”*

A strong collaboration between the Herkimer-Fulton-Hamilton-Otsego BOCES and Herkimer Community College affords students the opportunity to earn up to 29 transferrable College Now credits. The credits are earned through concentrating in Computer Networking or Business Management classes while enrolled in the Information Technology Academy (ITA) program. The ITA program features a blended learning environment utilizing traditional classroom strategies as well as online (virtual) instructional strategies. Industry certifications and work-based learning are integral components of the program.

2. *“Creating Flipped Classrooms at a Career and Technical Education (CTE) Center”*

This presentation will describe the concept of a flipped classroom being utilized at the Otsego Northern Catskills BOCES CTE Center and describe how it benefits students. It will provide an overview of steps to be taken in starting a flipped classroom and review costs involved. Various apps that assist with a flipped classroom environment will be showcased and a review of data available on student results from utilizing a flipped classroom will be provided. Possible future trends involving this instructional technique will also be discussed.

3. *“Engaging the Whole Community to Improve Student Outcomes: Launching a Community School”*

This program will provide an overview of the establishment of a community school by the Fulton City School District. The community school was established at the Fulton Junior High School with resources and programming available for the whole community, as well targeted programs to promote school engagement, academic growth, enrichment and leadership skills in at-risk students in grades 5-8. A partnership between Oswego County Opportunities (a local community based non-profit), the Oswego County Department of Social Services and the Fulton City School district successfully secured a state grant to establish the community school. The presentation will allow participants to explore best practices in community engagement and collaboration, while also discussing potential barriers such as sustainability funding, transportation and parent participation.

Registration for the July 12-14, 2015 RSA Conference in Cooperstown, NY at the Otesaga Resort is open. Forms can be accessed at this link.

<http://cardi.cals.cornell.edu/programs/rsa/activities/conference>

Hard at Work Supporting the Small and Rural Schools of New York State

West Seneca Community Forum and Rally



Along with the Erie County Association of School Boards, RSA co-sponsored a community forum and rally for public education in West Seneca. Here the community listens to RSA Executive Director David Little talk on the impact of funding inequality on New York State's future.

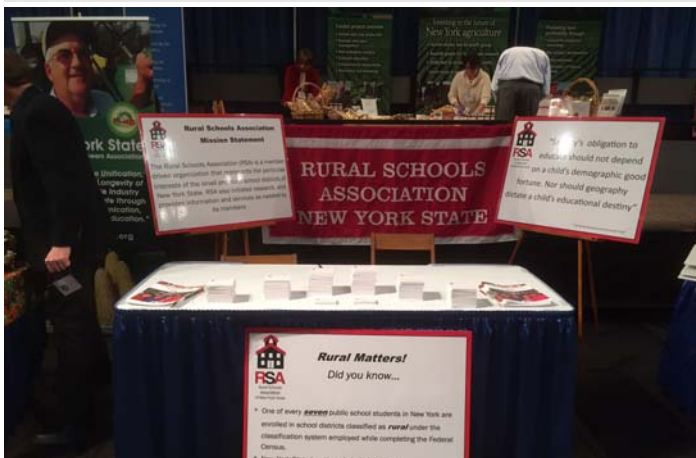
2015 Farm Bureau's Taste of NY Reception



Senate Finance Committee Chair John DeFrancisco and RSA Executive Director David Little at the Farm Bureau's Taste of NY Reception



Attendees at the Farm Bureau Reception



Rural Schools Association Booth Display



Vendor Booths at the Farm Bureau Reception



Senators, including (now) Senate Majority Leader John Flanagan, hold a press conference to call for total GEA elimination.

We are here for you . Always feel free to contact us at either office listed below or at our email addresses listed on the front page.

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300 local school officials meet with Suffolk County Legislators at Longwood’s Legislative Breakfast. RSA’s David Little informed those assembled of the implications of the Executive Budget proposal on public education.

“Communities Committed to Educational Excellence”



Seneca Falls Central School District

Seneca Falls CSD Board of Education Received NYS School Boards' Association Advocacy Award

I am pleased and proud to report that the Seneca Falls CSD Board of Education has received the annual New York State School Boards' Association Board Advocacy Award. This state-wide award and recognition took place at the annual New York State School Boards' Association Capital Conference/Lobby Day Dinner on Sunday, March 15th in Albany.

The Seneca Falls CSD BOE members take great pride in representing the Seneca Falls CSD and work hard to strive for the very best for the Seneca Falls Central School District.

The following details regarding the Seneca Falls CSD BOE participation and advocacy efforts led to the recognition and award:

Over the past seven years, the Seneca Falls Central School District Board of Education has become actively involved with state and regional advocacy efforts. While the Seneca Falls Central School District Board of Education has been a long-standing member of the New York State School Boards Association, the District has recently become members and active participants in the Four County School Boards Association (serving the Wayne-Finger Lakes BOCES region) and New York State Rural Schools Association.

Seneca Falls Central School District Board of Education members benefit from and utilize the wide variety of resources offered by the New York State School Boards' Association. Along with current web site information and daily e-clips from media outlets, the Seneca Falls Central School District Board of Education members have attended the 2012, 2013, and 2014 NYSSBA Conventions in Rochester and New York City, have attended and participated in regional workshops (e.g. Board Officers' Academy, seasonal Law Conferences, APPR), and have participated in School Board U webinars. Mr. McNamara, Mrs. Baxter, and Mrs. Zellers have received NYSSBA recognition for their participation in School Board U webinars. The Seneca Falls Central School District Board of Education President has been selected twice to participate in Commissioner of Education Round Table meetings with other select Board of Education members from New York State.

The Seneca Falls Central School District Board of Education values and utilizes the legislative platforms and positions put forth by the New York State School Boards Association. Annual resolutions are reviewed and discussed by the entire Board of Education before the voting delegate casts votes at the annual meeting. The Seneca Falls Central School District Board of Education also makes use of the New York State School Boards' Association annual legislative platforms to frame regional and local advocacy efforts. During the 2013 – 2014 budget development season, the Seneca Falls Central School District Board of Education promoted restoration of the Gap Elimination Adjustment and Foundation Aid, as well as STAR inequity, impacts of PILOTS and the Tax Cap, and adequate Universal Pre-Kindergarten funding. The legislative priorities were also shared with Senator Michael Nozzolio and Assemblyman Brian Kolb during multiple meetings that took place locally in the Finger Lakes region and in Albany (as part of the Capital Conference and Lobby Day). The local priorities were also shared with school district employees and school community members. The Seneca Falls Central School District Board of Education advocacy efforts allowed representative constituents to be aware of inadequate and inequitable state aid funding, which impact the District's ability to maintain and grow educational programs.

The Seneca Falls Central School District Board of Education also actively participates in the regional Four

County School Boards' Association. Two to three members regularly attend Saturday workshops during the Fall and Winter to develop position papers and legislative advocacy talking points that can be used with legislators and school community members. The regional and local positions are developed based on priorities set forth by the New York State School Boards' Association.

The Seneca Falls Central School District Board of Education is also an active member of the NYS Rural Schools Association. Members attend state and regional workshops, utilize prepared resolutions to support educational priorities, and receive information from monthly newsletters. Shared Services (between school districts and communities) to meet the Tax Freeze mandate has been a focal point of workshops, conferences, and advocacy efforts this Fall.

The Seneca Falls Central School District Board of Education has also communicated and met with its federal legislator, Congressman Tom Reed. Inadequate IDEA funding, impacts of sequester, and non-payment of taxes are three areas that the Seneca Falls Central School District Board of Education has advocated for with Congressman Reed and the federal government.

The increased active participation in advocacy efforts by the Seneca Falls Central School District Board of Education has been done with interests of providing Seneca Falls CSD students with increased and equitable opportunities leading to successful achievement and readiness for continued education. The Seneca Falls CSD Board of Education's efforts also support a statewide effort to value public education in New York State. The advocacy efforts during the recent past makes the Seneca Falls CSD Board of Education a worthy candidate for the New York State School Boards' Association Board Advocacy Award.

Congratulations to SFCSD Board of Education members on this special and well-deserved recognition and award.

Seneca Falls CSD Board of Education Members

Joseph McNamara, President (member since 2008)

Melissa Baxter, Vice-President (member since 2008)

Peter Wormuth (member since 2004)

Christina Ganzon (member since 2009)

Jeffrey Hartwell (member since 2010)

Gregory Walsh (member since 2010)

Joell Murney-Karsten (member since 2012)

William Reigel (member since 2013)

Heather Zellers (member since 2013)

Bob McKeveny, SFCSD Superintendent

CNY School One of Nine in State Recognized for Character Education



Bridgeport Elementary School in the Chittenango school district (*Provided photo*)

Bridgeport Elementary School in the Chittenango school district is the only Central New York school to be named a 2015 New York State School of Character.

In all, nine schools in New York, including three elementary schools, made Character Education Partnership's 2015 list. The national nonprofit, now known as character.org, advocates for character education.

Bridgeport Elementary now becomes a national finalist, with the winners announced in early May. About 80 schools nationwide are in the running.

Criteria for the designation are based on 11 principles which include providing students with opportunities for moral action, and engaging families and the community as partners in character-building efforts.

Mary Farber, principal at Bridgeport Elementary, said the school has adopted "We Know, We Do, We Feel" as the school's motto.

"This is what every student, staff member and parent practices each day as they walk through our doors," she said. "We know what it means to be a good citizen, we take action by making choices that show kindness, respect, responsibility, courage and perseverance and as a result we feel proud and make others feel good too."

For example, each classroom takes a different need in the community such as Wanderer's Rest and Golisano Children's Hospital and supports it with activities and fundraising, Farber said.

Character.org was founded in 1993, and works with schools and districts on character education.

By Elizabeth Doran | edoran@syracuse.com

Email the author | Follow on Twitter

on March 04, 2015 at 2:42 PM, updated March 04, 2015 at 3:13 PM



S-VE Senior Gets Opportunity at National Culinary Competition

MyKenzie Wemmer

MyKenzie Wemmer's culinary team from GST BOCES won the New York State 2015 Pro-Start Culinary Competition.

MyKenzie's team went to San Diego in April to compete in the national contest for scholarships and job offers. I am always so pleased when I can highlight accomplishments of teens who are doing positive things. MyKenzie Wemmer, a senior at Spencer-Van Etten High School, went down in March to the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, N.Y., as part of a culinary team from GST BOCES, Bush campus. She and her two teammates, Horseheads High students Samantha Olcott and Hannah Merrill, competed in the 2015 Pro-Start Culinary Competition.



Spencer - Van Etten CSD

For two days they performed various cooking tasks and were critiqued by top chefs and judges. MyKenzie and her team won the competition!

According to MyKenzie's proud parents, Yurgen and Sondra Wemmer, "These young ladies were amazing to watch as they performed under extreme pressure. The skills they learned and used in this competition were unbelievable. In the end they prepared an appetizer, entree and dessert that not only took first place but was praised by all the judges and chefs."

Each girl received a trophy, more than \$30,000 dollars in scholarships, job offers after college and externships. Best of all, now the girls will now be going to San Diego next month to represent New York State at the national competition. They received a \$5000 check from United Health Care to help the team with expenses.

This speaks well for the hard work of these culinary students in learning their skills, but it also does for their teachers at BOCES, who clearly prepared them well. The support staff at BOCES has been helping them to practice since October, preparing for this competition.

SALLY MARX, Correspondent 12:58 p.m. EDT March 24, 2015, Stargazette.com