RSA Board of Directors:
Edward Engel, Chair
Gordon Daniels, Vice-Chair
Janet Ahola
Robin Blakely-Armitage
Patrick Brady
Richard Calkins
Charles Chafee
John Evans
Robert Everett
Linda Gonyo-Horne
Gilbert Green
Darrell Griff
Doug Gustin
Charlene Harvey
Timothy Hayes
Thomas Huxtable
Rosemary Joy
Linda King
Douglas Ann Land
James Loomis
Kevin MacDonald
Patrick Michel
Thomas O’Brien
John O’Connor
Carolyn Ostrander
Joseph Rotella
Nicholas Savin
John Sipple
Leuene Smithling
Daniel Starr
Cheryl Steckly
Dan Tespleky
Mark Vivaqua
Donald Vredenburgh
Charles Walters
Michael Wendt

Outstanding Program Offered for RSA’s Annual Conference

Conference Chair Ms. Jacklin Starks and RSA Deputy Director Thomas Marzeski have worked very hard to develop an outstanding program for the RSA Annual Conference scheduled for July 13-15 at the Otesaga Resort in Cooperstown. The main speakers (pictured on this page) include:

- President NY Farm Bureau Mr. Dean Norton,
- Cornell Prof. and Chair of the NY Center for Rural Schools, Dr. John Sipple,
- Regent James Dawson,
- NY State Education Commissioner, Dr. John King, and
- Executive Director NYS School Finance Consortium, Dr. Rick Timbs.

The balance of the program features concurrent presentations designed to assure your district can efficiently focus available resources upon delivery of instruction for students, the full Conference Program is detailed beginning on the next page of this newsletter. Conference Registration Information is available from this link .http://education.cornell.edu/rsa/conference.html
2014 Rural Schools Conference Program

The Annual RSA Conference will convene on Sunday evening, July 13, 2014. Sunday’s schedule features a Welcome Reception at 5:45pm, followed by the Sunday Banquet, with a keynote address by Dean Norton, President of the New York Farm Bureau.

Our program on Monday July 14th begins with an “Early Bird” session featuring Dr. John Sipple, Associate Professor of Sociology at Cornell University and Director of the Community and Regional Development Institute (CARDI).

Following this general session, the conference will break into concurrent sessions as outlined.

“Early Bird Session”– Monday July 14, 2014 at 8:30am

Dr. John Sipple will provide an informative presentation on current items of interest affecting rural schools with statistical reference based on current research.

Concurrent Session 1 – Workshop Program
Monday at 10:30am to 11:45am

1. “Imagine, Inspire, Innovate: The Children and Youth Learning Initiative at Alfred University”
   Elizabeth Viszt, Alfred University
This initiative provides a program that ensures students of Allegany County have an opportunity for educational experiences at the Alfred University campus. CYLI serves as an interface between Alfred University’s resources and local school districts to provide students with the opportunity to develop their educational and career awareness. The partnership raises the consciousness of students from under-served, rural communities about the benefits and opportunities of college education and increases their understanding of the relationship between future careers and their academic preparation in middle and high school. The program also offers students the opportunity to explore STEM and learn about careers by bringing the students, their teachers and AU faculty members together for experimental learning activities on campus each semester. Other highlights include scholarships for select students to attend a week long residential STEM summer camp and participation in a day long Youth Summit on the AU campus.

2. “Pre-Tech/STEM Program” Sullivan County BOCES Career and Technical Education Center
The Pre-Tech program is a 9th and 10th grade credit-bearing career exploration program where students gain a foundation of basic skills in multiple vocational areas while also managing a student-run business. The STEM component offers an array of renewable energy practices as well as alternative food production projects. These activities mirror changes in the world and require students to take a different type of approach for responding to the problems of today. The program affords an opportunity for students to experience different trades and technologies to help them make an informed decision as to what trade and/or technology they want to pursue in their junior or senior year. It also educates students through project based learning focused on traditional and alternate energy technologies. For some students this program will help them choose an educational path to a career in the fields of renewable energy or alternative food production systems.

This interactive presentation is based on a doctoral research project related to dropout prevention efforts, with a specific focus on rural school districts in New York State. This program will provide recommended dropout prevention strategies for rural schools and discuss the economic benefits of students who graduate from high school,
along with the personal and societal costs of students who drop out of high school. The results of the survey used for the study will be discussed, including a description of intervention strategies school districts employ. Participants in the presentation will be provided with an explanation of the connection between graduation rates and intervention strategies. A dropout prevention model will be shared that is based on action research completed in the Schoharie Central School District. Specific facets of the model and the impact the model has had on graduation rates in the district will be reviewed.

4. Follow-up presentation on “Virtual Advanced Placement Programs” Mary Dematteo, Virtual AP Coordinator, Madison-Oneida BOCES
At the 2013 RSA Conference, the Madison-Oneida BOCES provided a presentation on Virtual AP Programs. This follow-up presentation will provide information on progress made in year one of the implementation and an overview of the three AP Courses utilized by seven component school districts during the 2013-14 school year. Participants will be reacquainted with the Virtual Advanced Program grant goals and objectives. The presentation will provide updates on the grant’s progress and lessons learned through experience. The results of independent evaluation completed will be shared including the program’s impact on instructional strategies, student learning/achievement and availability of AP Courses in rural school districts. A demonstration of the AP U.S. History Course created will be provided, including an overview of experiences encountered in course development and implementation steps necessary for a blended technology learning environment.

Concurrent Session II – Workshop Programs
Monday at 1:30pm to 2:45pm

1. “The Influence of Wireless Devices on Student Engagement in the Rural School Classroom” Dr. Robert Pritchard, Superintendent, Mexico Academy and Central School
This program will demonstrate the use of wireless, mobile computing technology to improve or expand learning opportunities for students in school districts where resources are limited. In the 2010-11 school year, the Mexico Academy and Central School installed wireless “hotspots” in all five district school buildings. Each school in the district received mobile computing carts for students who do not own their own devices. In addition, teachers were offered professional development opportunities to incorporate teaching strategies for a wireless classroom. School staff assisted with the development of curriculum that reflected fewer, clearer and higher standards of student learning within the context of a wireless classroom. Mobile learning has the potential to influence educational development in a social context and may effectively supplement school programs, especially for rural communities where technological resources are limited.

2. “Sharon Springs Central School District IPad Project: Year One Summary” Patterson Green, Superintendent, Sharon Springs Central School
The Sharon Springs Central School District implemented an IPad Project during the 2012-13 school year. The goals of the project included: promoting equal opportunity to learning technology resources, involving students in active learning through technology, a focus on using computer technology as a tool to learn rather than learning about computers, providing professional development for teachers on the use and integration of learning technologies, and preparing students for college and jobs in the work place that require technological skills. The program presentation will review the scope of the project, funding sources utilized, continuing efforts toward project implementation and project evaluation.

3. “A Centralized Bus Maintenance Facility and Service- A case Study for Rural Schools” Frank Slawiak, Transportation Supervisor, Madison-Oneida BOCES
Madison-Oneida BOCES has operated a central bus maintenance program since 1980. With two sites and sixteen mechanics who service over 400 buses and other vehicles, participating school districts are provided with a one-stop, systematic maintenance and repair program for all district-owned school buses and support vehicles. The program has become a model for other schools and BOCES across the state. An overview of the
history of the centralized service and the challenges, benefits and efficiencies associated with the shared service will be reviewed.

Concurrent Session III – Workshop Programs

Monday at 3:15pm to 4:30pm

1. “Panel Discussion on Career and Technical Education Initiatives in NY State” David Arntsen, Director of CTE, Madison-Oneida BOCES

A panel of CTE Administrators from Central New York will provide information on current initiatives and emerging trends that are taking place across the state. Recent developments within the state impacting Career and Technical Education will be discussed including Career Pathways, CTE Program Approval, newly established CDOS Credential, the success of CTE related to the Perkin Indicators, Career and College Readiness Initiatives and the development of statewide APPR assessments. Rural Schools will face significant challenges due to fiscal constraints and having a plan that prepares students for their future careers is critical. Focused educational pathways to help develop a skilled workforce are critical to our nation’s economic growth. CTE Pathways help provide students with a planned approach to exploring career interests, a roadmap to a plan that is specific to their interest and the ability to be college and career ready.

2. “Central Early Childhood Direction Center Community Awareness Project” Susan Calandra, Project Coordinator, Central Early Childhood Direction Center

The project was designed to provide area health care providers with a comprehensive development surveillance toolkit and ensure that they have information about available programs and services for families of young children. Key elements of the Community Awareness Project will be presented, which include special education identification, referral and process overview, developmental monitoring and screening, screening and diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder and sample materials for physicians’ offices. The ECDC provides rural school districts with a link between the community, families and schools. Goals of the Community Awareness Project include helping to close the gap for young children from rural, lower socio-economic areas and helping health care providers shift their focus to prevention and developmentally-oriented directions. A final goal of ECDC is to foster partnerships between families, educational providers and community agencies and resources.

3. “Project SOAR: Successful Opportunity for Positive Academic and Behavioral Results” Renee Worn, Assistant Director for Alternative Education, Madison-Oneida BOCES

The Alternative Education Leadership Team from Madison-Oneida BOCES will share information about Project SOAR, a non-traditional model for high school students exhibiting challenging behaviors and limited social skills. Project SOAR goals focus on serving the most challenging, hard-to-reach students who are not successful in an established alternative education program. Unique features of the project include: instruction in social skill attainment; customized scheduling; participation in community service; the use of innovative technology to deliver instruction and encourage student engagement; and many in-kind external supports. Audience members will learn about the model, its challenges and potential outcomes, and be able to assess the potential for replicating the model in their schools.

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 Dr. Rick Timbs, Executive Director of the Statewide School Finance Consortium. RSA Annual Awards will be presented at this ceremony.
Concurrent Session IV – Presentation on “The State of Rural Schools”
Tuesday July 15, 2014 at 8:15am-9:45am

Presenters: Dr. John King, Commissioner of NYSED
Dr. James Dawson, Board of Regents, NYSED

Concurrent Session V – Workshop Programs
Tuesday July 15 at 10:00am to 11:15am

1. “Partnership for STEM Education: Creating Opportunities for Place-based, Interdisciplinary STEM Learning and Teaching Experiences Across the Generations” Mary Podsiedlik, TREP Director, Tully Central School District
A model for STEM learning partnerships will be presented which is designed to bring opportunities for hands-on, experimental, place-based STEM learning to children in rural communities. The partnership includes the Tully Regional Enrichment Program, SUNY Oneonta and Cornell University. The relationship between a yearly summertime place-based program for rural school teachers, outside of school time learning opportunities for youth and the rural schoolchildren’s interests and aspirations in STEM education will be discussed. Information provided will focus on the youth outcomes, spotlighting teaching strategies and learning activities developed by program facilitators. The information covered will include the framework of the programs, feedback received from program participants and how the partnership has led to greater collaboration between the groups involved for the benefit of all participants.

2. “Opening Doors to Global Awareness” Naomi Graham, French Teacher, Laurens Central School
Initiatives to promote global awareness will be presented including various exchange opportunities practiced by students and staff of the Laurens Central School over the last ten years. These include exchanges with multiple countries and activities ranging from email correspondence to students being hosted from overseas in the school district. Students participating in the program from overseas are provided housing in the district and attend school for classes and other events. Information provided will include the background and rationale for the importance of increasing global awareness among students, a history of the different types of initiatives tried at the school and a plan for overseas partners that provides support and encouragement to faculty to pursue these connections.

3. “Increasing Learning Modalities Through the Use of Commercial Wireless Internet” Mark Dupra, Superintendent, Charlotte Valley Central School
A critical “have and have not” issue for low wealth rural school districts continues to be access to the internet. Without internet access students’ development of higher level computer skills has been impaired. The program presentation will provide a “how to” synopsis with respect to the District’s implementing continuous internet access for secondary level students, as well as information relating to staff development measures needed to give teachers the ability to use iPads effectively for instruction and strategies teachers are currently using in core subjects including English, Science and Mathematics. Program content will include virtual learning strategies and specific information on instructional implementation in all three subject areas.

The New York State Rural Schools Association represents approximately one of every eight public school students enrolled in NY State. We believe every one of those students has a right to a sound basic education. We are committed to equitable funding for all students who attend New York school districts.
A Word From the Executive Director…Dr. Bruce Fraser

Spring Focus on Outreach: Plans to Visit Regions/Districts

With the NY State Budget adopted for 2014-15 we now move into a critical phase of the school year for local school districts. As an organization, the RSA will intentionally remain quiet as we do not want to create any controversy that might distract from your focus on accurately communicating information with voters regarding your proposed budget. One thing that I will be doing over the next several weeks is visiting school districts and regions of the state. My personal priority for visiting school districts includes:

1. **Visiting the ten school districts that did not renew their RSA membership for 2013-14.** Five of these school districts were working through Superintendent changes this past year. We hope our outreach will convince the new district leader of the value of rejoining the RSA.

2. **Visiting as many new Superintendents as possible.** When the RSA was founded in 1978 a major focus of the group was to assist new district leaders in handling the broader responsibilities of the Superintendent role. Spending a half hour with new district leaders hearing their biggest concerns can help build a supportive relationship.

3. **Finally, I will make an effort to reach out to a number of Small City School Districts.** This past year we contacted members of this group of school districts promoting the idea that by working with the RSA we can better advance regional interests. That outreach more than doubled our membership of Small City School Districts—we are pleased to welcome Oswego, Fulton, Canandaigua, Batavia, and Oneonta to the RSA. They join our longer term Small City members--Salamanca, Norwich, Ogdensburg, and Cortland. This Spring, I will focus upon visiting the five Small City Districts that NY State categorizes as Rural/High Need School Districts (Amsterdam, Geneva, Hornell, Gloversville, and Little Falls) but will also reach out to several other small cities in rural regions that are similar in character to current RSA member districts (Dunkirk, Olean, Oneida, Johnstown, and Sherrill).

While I have shared my personal priorities for visiting school districts, I would also appreciate an opportunity to visit current members to hear concerns—and determine how the RSA can be supportive of member needs! If you would like me to visit your district please do not hesitate to contact me by email btf27@cornell.edu or by phone (w-607-255-8056).

RSA Board Approves $1,000 Donations In support of Two Legal Challenges

At the April 25th meeting of the NY State Rural Schools Board of Directors a motion to donate $1,000 in support of the ongoing legal challenge brought on behalf of eight Small City school districts was strongly endorsed. The Small City School District case was initiated on the heels of the Campaign for Fiscal Equity Case as a means to pressure NY State to provide a settlement that would benefit all NY State School districts. Without this follow up legal challenge the CFE settlement may well have focused solely upon New York City (the CFE plaintiff). New York State’s response to the case has been to delay trial and drive the costs of litigation higher for the eight school districts that remain parties to this legal matter. The RSA Board recognizes that the court system may be the most direct means by which rural school districts can impact funding equity on behalf of our member school districts.

A second legal initiative which the Board of Directors chose to support is the legal action initiated by Michael Rebell on behalf of a group called New Yorkers for Student Educational Rights (NYSER). The NYSER legal action is supported by virtually every NY State Educational Advocacy organization. The Rural Schools Association assisted NYSER in identifying students and parents who were interested in becoming a party to this legal challenge. While most of the costs of this legal action are being provided on a pro bono basis we have requested that our organization’s $1,000 donation be directed to help our rural plaintiffs offset any travel costs related to this litigation.
**Glens Falls Post Star Editorial Merits Statewide Circulation**

Over the past three years we have sought permission to republish three editorials from the Glen Falls Post Star. In the pages that follow you will find another editorial from the Post Star that deserves broader publication. From the editorial it is clear that the Post Star “gets it” in regards to the damaging impact suffered in poor rural communities when the state continues to shift the burden of funding local education back onto property tax payers. While New York State collects significantly more revenue from taxpayers since 2008-09, and analysis of the 2014-15 budget indicates that our member school districts will be provided $64M less in state aid than they received six years ago. The quality of program provided in rural districts are being compromised and the burden on local property tax payers has soared. Rural communities will continue to lose businesses and population until NY State resumes its responsibility to fairly fund rural schools! We appreciate the editorial support of a high quality newspaper (as recently as 2009 the Post Star Editorial Team won a Pulitzer prize for their work) on this critical issue!

**Partnership with Farm Bureau**

We continue to value an expanding partnership with the NY State Farm Bureau. In early March, a number of RSA’s leaders attended the Farm Bureau’s Legislative Reception at the Capital. The event provided us a great opportunity to speak with legislators during an informal event. Like the RSA, the Farm Bureau is not a “tax and spend” organization. We trust this partnership will continue to grow as both organizations value the benefit of maintaining quality rural educational opportunities while recognizing that rural communities can only remain vital if the shift toward greater reliance on the local property tax is reversed!

**Reminder: NEIREL “Rural Poverty Webinar”-Wednesday—May 7—3 to 5PM**

We want to provide a second reminder on the upcoming program titled “Students and Families Living in Rural Poverty: Research and Strategies for Educators.” The program is offered free of charge by the Northeast and Islands Regional Education Lab. The featured presenter for this program is Dr. Thomas Hirschl, from Cornell’s Department of Development Sociology. Also featured in the Webinar will be Lynn Macan, Superintendent of the Cobleskill-Richmondville CSD. For more information, and to register to benefit from this opportunity please utilize the following link reneiinfo@edc.org.

**Update on Plans for Selection of New RSA Executive Director**

During the April 25th Board of Directors meeting a discussion was held concerning plans to move forward with selection of a new Executive Director. The Board wisely determined to post the vacancy in a manner that provided the greatest flexibility in selecting a new leader. A number of other issues that had been introduced (including merger with the NY State Center for Rural Schools and expanding use of regional representatives) will be placed upon the back burner until a new Executive Director has been hired. The Board of Directors want “to cast the widest net possible” to hire an outstanding leader so they are not including a requirement for residency in Ithaca in the posting. The Board also indicated they wished to be flexible on the commitment expected from a new Executive Director posting the position as between .6 to .8 Full Time Equivalency. The timeline for filling the vacancy will be dictated by the Cornell hiring process. The RSA’s Draft of the posting can be found at this link. http://education.cornell.edu/rsa/rsa/RSA%20Exec%20Director%20%20Document%205-1-14.pdf

Bruce Fraser, Dean Norton, Ed Engel, and Mike Wendt
Gov. Andrew Cuomo’s ambition for higher office is leading the state’s poor, rural school districts toward destruction.

His insistence on building a reputation as a tax-cutter and his reliance on the gap elimination adjustment to balance the state budget have driven districts that were already poor and struggling to the brink of educational and financial bankruptcy.

The gap elimination adjustment was supposed to be an emergency mechanism to balance the state budget in 2010, when New York had sunk into the swamp of a financial crisis. Now, even though the state is enjoying a budget surplus, the gap elimination adjustment has been made permanent.

This funding mechanism, which pulls back state aid money from school districts across New York, hits poor districts harder than wealthier ones, because poor districts like Glens Falls are more reliant on state aid.

In the lean years since 2010, poor districts have already cut any fat they may have had in their budgets. Surplus funds have been depleted. Class sizes have increased. In Glens Falls, the district closed one of its elementary schools.

Now, Glens Falls will have to lay off numerous teachers, cut some sports programs, eliminate middle school band, scrap language classes for fifth- and sixth-graders and pull out of the alternative education program that helps struggling students. After all that, the district will still be about $1 million short.

But the state is taking $2.4 million from Glens Falls through the gap elimination adjustment. If the school district had
that money, its situation would be far less dire.

Gov. Cuomo is not just balancing New York’s budget on the backs of its poorest schoolchildren; he is standing on them to reach for the presidency.

When he goes on the road, he gets to brag about the budget surplus New York recorded this year. That surplus comprises the pain of students and their parents statewide. It was realized through teacher layoffs, extracurricular program cuts and the scaling back of academics.

Over the past four years, the state has taken more than $2 billion a year away from school districts through the gap elimination adjustment.

What Gov. Cuomo is calling a budget surplus is really a school district funding deficit. But because of Gov. Cuomo’s ambitions for higher office, the illusion of a surplus must be maintained.

The governor insists on capping local property taxes at a low rate, and we endorse property tax relief in principle. But the governor has fashioned a set of pincers, with school districts in the middle, by combining deep reductions in school aid — accomplished through the gap elimination adjustment — with a property tax cap.

School districts have fixed costs that have been rising, such as health care coverage and public employee pension contributions. With state aid falling and tax increases capped, districts have no option left but slashing programs.

Students suffer and places like Glens Falls, where the school is the community’s cultural and social focus, suffer, too, because of the governor’s ambitions.

The suffering would be easier to bear if it were distributed equally across the state, but it isn’t. The very communities least able to absorb blows to their public institutions — places like Glens Falls and Hudson Falls and the small rural districts throughout Washington County — are taking the hardest hits.

In the midst of this painful winnowing of our educational offerings, it’s astonishing the education issue taking up most of Gov. Cuomo’s time is funding for prekindergarten. Something is askew when the state’s leaders are debating how many hundreds of millions they should spend on pre-K, while the state is at the same time eviscerating elementary and high school programs through reductions in aid.

The dysfunctional upstate-downstate dynamic is playing a part in this crisis as well.

The governor’s newfound interest in pre-K is a reaction to the push by newly elected New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio for pre-K programs in the city. Mayor de Blasio wanted to tax wealthy New Yorkers to raise money for the program, which sounds better to us than using scarce state education dollars.

But to avoid the tax-and-spend label that could hurt him in a national election, Cuomo has insisted on incorporating the pre-K spending without raising extra money to pay for it. Meanwhile, teachers have been laid off by the busful.

Everything our governor does can be understood through the lens of presidential ambition. Sometimes, as with his efforts to promote and support New York’s farmers, his ambitions benefit our region.

But sometimes, as with his neglect of the needs of New York’s schools — particularly its poorer schools — the consequences of his ambition are locally devastating.

Cuomo may be able to walk away from New York and onto the national stage on the strength of characterizations such as “tax-capper” and “budget-cutter.” Rural New Yorkers will not be able to walk away but will have to endure the legacy of his ambitions in failing schools and poorly educated children.

Local editorials represent the opinion of the Post-Star editorial board, which consists of Publisher Rick Emanuel, Editor Ken Tingley, Projects Editor Will Doolittle and citizen representative Karen Stites. Post Star - reprinted with permission.
New York, you have done your part ... with a great bill, S5525C, passed August 1, 2012, that gives school districts and municipalities greater purchasing flexibility. A new bill, S3766A, was passed November 13, 2013, which makes it even easier to take advantage of the savings available by using national cooperative contracts.

The Cooperative Purchasing Network (TCPN) is pleased to be a part of it too, with purchasing strength that helps New York government organizations save time, cut costs, and avoid compliance worries. TCPN’s contracts leverage the purchasing power of over 37,000 actively engaged government entities. All contracts are competitively bid and awarded by a single government entity – Region 4 Education Service Center. TCPN monitors contracts through third-party audits and regular reviews to ensure vendor accountability. You can rely on the ISO certified process of TCPN’s lead agency, 100+ combined years of government purchasing experience, and 50+ combined years of auditing experience.

It’s up to you, New York. Learn how you can use TCPN contracts in New York by visiting us online at www.tcpn.org/pages/new-york.aspx.
We are very disappointed in the 2014-15 State Budget enacted in late May. The Association’s 2014 Legislative Position Paper, which placed a heavy emphasis upon Gap Elimination Adjustment restorations, was developed last November based upon significant input from member school districts. When we reflect back to last November, rumors were just emerging that the Governor would be pushing for a range of tax cuts in advance of an election year. That fact contributed to a sense of optimism that we could make significant progress through a focused effort on ending regressive GEAs. Our Board members reasoned that the Governor and Legislature could not politically get away with declaring a surplus and enacting state tax cuts while continuing a Gap Elimination Adjustment mechanism instituted to help the state address a structural budget deficit that no longer existed!

We are appreciative of the extensive advocacy efforts made by member school districts that placed pressure upon their legislators to end GEA’s. In the last several weeks before the budget was finalized we felt positive. Almost every legislator we met with acknowledged, “they had heard community concerns regarding GEA’s,” and, “were intent on finding every dollar they possibly could identify in the budget to address GEA reductions.” While we understood that the Assembly would push for Foundation Aid reductions that more directly addressed the needs of large city school districts, we were tremendously disappointed when the Senate made it a priority to provide $300 million in funding to support UPK programs in NYC ahead of further GEA reductions!

A Few Positives: While we are disappointed in the final budget we can point to the following facts and take some slight satisfaction:

- The adopted budget increased support for education by $1.12B. This amount slightly exceeded last year’s aid increase.
- While the total statewide aid increase was calculated to be 5.3% members of the RSA obtained a 6.0% increase in state aid (calculated based upon un-weighted average of district percent increases).
- The enacted reduction to Gap Elimination Adjustments statewide was just over $600M—well above the figure proposed in Governor’s Cuomo’s executive budget ($323M.).
- Pressure applied at the very end of the budget process resulted in the adopted budget providing significantly more aid to districts than called for in either of the one house resolutions.

Aggregate State Aid for RSA Members Remains $64M Below 2008-09: RSA Member school districts had $89.9M of their Gap Elimination Adjustments restored through the 2014-15 State Budget. Despite that restoration, our 272 member school districts still have $157.9M of their GEA remaining in place. The aggregate reductions to RSA member school districts state aid represented by GEA’s has now climbed to $1.409B (five year total). As our colleague, Dr. Rick Timbs of the Statewide School Finance Consortium notes those GEA pull backs impact (1) district programming, (2) district staffing levels, and (3) district fund balances, and (4) district local property tax rates (to the extent allowed under the Levy Cap). **Every voter in NY should be astute enough to understand that any State Tax Cuts that Governor Cuomo and the Legislature enacted this year are the result of the state shifting tax burden back onto local property tax payers!**

We trust that the RSA’s focus upon GEA restorations is helping the public grasp that the annual increases that Governor Cuomo emphasizes in his media efforts still have not restored state aid to 2008-09 levels. Enacted 2014-15 State Aid (without building aid) for our 272 member school districts continues to be $64M below 2008-09 State Aid received by the same districts. A full two thirds of our member districts (182/272 districts or 66% of members) will be provided State Aid at lower levels in 2014-15 than they received in 2008-09.

Wide Disparity in GEA Restorations For RSA Member School Districts: It is troubling to note the wide disparity in the size of 2014-15 GEA restorations—and the remaining per pupil GEA’s for RSA member districts. The average per-pupil GEA restoration for our member school districts was $305. That leaves the average remaining GEA at $535 per
pupil for RSA member school districts. Sixty of our member districts had 70% of their remaining GEA restored (seventy percent was the maximum restoration allowed under the GEA reduction formulas put in place this year). Overall, our member district average GEA reduction (%-unweighted) was calculated to be 36.7%. That figure closely parallels the Statewide percentage reduction for the GEA (36.6%). Unfortunately, nine of our member school districts received the minimum GEA restoration (14.1%) allowed under the GEA restoration formulas. On a per pupil basis the restorations provided in the 2014-15 budget ranged from $852 per pupil (Averill Park) to $78 per pupil (Lake George).

On a per pupil basis, remaining GEA amounts range from $2,043 (again, Averill Park) to $67 (Tuckahoe Common).

**Ten Separate Formulas Drive GEA Restorations - Political Targeting Apparent:** The wide disparity in GEA’s that remain in place after the adoption of the 2014-15 State Budget are an outcome of the ten distinct Tiers (or, separate formulas used to allocate pools of GEA restoration funding) that were used to calculate each district’s GEA restoration. While several of the tiers impact a wide range of school districts and appear to be constructed to address legitimate measures of student need and community wealth, a number of the Tiers are clearly politically targeted. Over the course of the next three newsletters we will examine several of these politically targeted Tiers - giving them the close attention needed to expose the political considerations behind them. We hope that our detailed examination of these Tiers will allow our member school districts to ask their local legislators, “How could you support this travesty?”

**Three Sevens Equals Jackpot:** One example of the targeting that the RSA finds offensive is the Tier in the GEA Restoration Formula that drives money to school districts that:
1. Average more than 800 student per square mile (this eliminates all RSA members from consideration for funding under this Tier),
2. Have a Tax Effort Ratio greater than 4.0 (many RSA members exceed this criteria—actually having some of the highest Tax Effort Ratios found in the state), and
3. Have experienced enrollment increases since 2010-11 (districts with large enrollment increases probably deserve consideration given that Foundation Aid has been frozen since 2008-09).

The blatant political targeting reflected in several Tiers needs to be exposed—and utilized by RSA member school districts to support our call for state aid allocation to become, “depoliticized.” The RSA maintains we need a Berger Commission to assure that the large amounts of money New Yorkers provide for State Aid is allocated rationally to insure equal educational opportunities for students and balanced local tax burdens across the state! New York State residents deserve sound school funding formulas—and the Legislature has proven itself incapable of providing fair funding formulas!

**Shares Agreement Continues Despite Incompatibility With Tax Cap Legislation:** In a recent newsletter we noted that Governor Cuomo appears to have given up on any deviation from the “Shares Agreement” that for too long has directed annual state aid allocations. Both the Governor, and the legislature must recognize that the tax cap they enacted necessitates an end of the “Shares Agreement.” When a 2% levy increase in the poorest 10% of school districts raises $52 per pupil—and the same 2% levy increase raises over $450 in the wealthiest 10% of school districts per pupil spending disparities that were unacceptable in 2010-11 widen annually. Efforts to maintain the “Shares Agreement” deprives student in many regions of the state of a sound basic education.

**Where Do We Go From Here?** The two major positions the RSA advocated on behalf of during the past budget session remain critical for rural school districts and should remain our focus for next year! Sometimes you work hard and effectively communicate your concerns—and just do not get traction! Given frustration with legislative outcomes many may be tempted to alter priorities. Right now—I am convinced that we should stay the course! Ending GEA’s as soon
as possible—and broadly reforming educational funding formulas should remain our priority!

Data Analysis/Acknowledgement: We are most appreciative of our ability to utilize the data tools developed by Bob Lowry, Deputy Director of the NY State Council of School Superintendents. Bob provides an analysis for every school district in the state on how the adopted 2014-15 State Budget impacts their district. Bob’s data for each district includes a number of valuable charts and graphs. Bob’s data for our 272 RSA Member districts was entered by hand to permit a focused analysis to be developed for RSA districts. As such, any data inaccuracies that might be identified should be brought to the attention of Dr. Bruce Fraser—not Mr. Lowry. Two spreadsheets based upon RSA member data can be linked to below. Lacking official enrollments for the 2013-14 School Year the Estimated Enrollment figures from last Spring’s Local Property Tax Report Cards were utilized for calculating per pupil measures.

Analysis Change’08-09 to’14-15
GEA&FoundationAidTotals’14-15
http://education.cornell.edu/rsa/rsa/2014-15%20Analysis%20of%20State%20Aid%20Increases.xlsx

Third Annual Community Vitality Award Nominations Sought
This is the third year that our colleague, Dr. John Sipple has sought nominations for the NY State Center for Rural Schools’ Community Vitality Award. John should be commended for seeking to identify rural communities where the school district is engaging with the broader community in ways that enriches the quality of life in that community. Beyond offering quality learning opportunities well run rural school districts work closely with their communities to enhance the quality of life within a community. Partnerships that promote community vitality should be recognized and we hope that Dr. Sipple will have a solid response to his call for nominations!

Outreach from the Clinically Rich Teacher Training Program
I was pleasantly surprised to learn about the Clinically Rich Teacher Training Initiative when Melissa Greene reached out to me via phone. Melissa is our contact at NYSED’s Office of Higher Education and coordinates this initiative which is supported through Race to The Top funds. This program operates at a number of upstate SUNY Centers including Cortland, Oswego, Binghamton and Albany. Graduates of this program are provided significant incentives (loan forgiveness) when they work in High Need school districts making it attractive for them to consider working in High Need Rural School Districts. This program provides students significantly more clinical experience than traditional teacher prep programs and graduates have been exposed to working in challenging educational settings. As such, our High Need Rural School Districts are encouraged to reach out to Melissa to find out about the candidates who are completing this program and interested in career placement. Melissa noted that this initiative focuses upon training students to be certified in several of the highest demand areas where rural districts can have problems identifying a pool of applicants. Additionally, Melissa shared with me that the graduates of this program frequently obtain dual certification making them attractive candidates to small, rural school districts. For more information on this training initiative (including information on how to contact Melissa) please link to a written description of the program here http://education.cornell.edu/rsa/CR%20Program%20Descriptions-%201%20Document.pdf or directly to the programs web-site here. http://www.highered.nysed.gov/CRFaces.html
Award winning
Civics & Law-Related Education

40th Anniversary ★ 1974-2014
Law, Youth and Citizenship

- Mock Trial
- Mini-grants
- Law Day/Constitution Day assistance
- Lawyer in the Classroom
- Professional Development
- We the People


www.lycny.org
A statewide outreach program sponsored by the New York State Bar Association

“In two weeks the years of bullying behaviors stopped, but what is even more incredible is that 30 students worked together to reach out to the one hurting them.”

The time for character education that works is here! Visit WeR3C.org to see this revolutionary approach.

“The design of the We R 3C™ program’s approach to character education and development addresses the upper stages of Kohlberg’s ‘Stages of Moral Development’ in a way that many other programs do not.”

Richard Greene, Principal - Jefferson Ave. Elementary School