



RSA TODAY

News for New York State's Rural Schools

September 2016

Rural Schools Association of New York State



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

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David A Little, Esq. ,
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“WINDS OF CHANGE BUFFET RURAL SCHOOLS”



Well, I'd be among the many to welcome you back to school except that I realize that for so many of you, you never left. Whatever time you had to renew and rejuvenate yourself prior to the start of classes, I hope it truly helped invigorate you for the year ahead. We're entering a time unlike any other in my memory. Oh, some things are always in flux, like the leadership of the state senate, or the governor's approach to public education or the state's approach to student and staff accountability. But there is an added unease about where we are as a state and nation that sets you on edge and makes you want to dig deep to ensure the best for our rural students.

It's true that we've had a couple of years of state aid totals that are impressive (especially to other states that don't spend nearly what we do!) It's also true that the judicial branch is putting pressure on the state to uphold its constitutional obligation to kids. (Your RSA is a partner in the Campaign for Educational Equity litigation that just received an appellate level stamp of approval. The ruling makes it much easier to prove the fact that the state distributes that large total in a dramatically inequitable way; to the detriment of our rural schools. Several small cities are also in the process of suing the state for providing insufficient financial resources and the Alliance for Quality Education is suing them over their plan to reduce resources to chronically struggling schools.) Combined with the fact that the state isn't broke at the moment, all this would lead you to think we're likely to be back on track. As Lee Corso would say, "not so fast, my friend!"

State revenues are not coming in at levels that would make it easy to do a large aid increase. To accomplish the aid increases of recent years the state has had to "cannibalize" all other state spending except for Medicaid. While public education's been getting 5 and 6% raises, everyone else has been frozen or cut. That obviously can't last forever. By spending more in total per student than any other state (and 10% of all money spent on K-12 education in the United States) it's tough to continually demand ever increasing sums for our schools. Therein lies the rub, as they say. Our educational system, at least our rural educational system, doesn't need vast new additions to the state's total spending: It needs some common sense about who you give the new money to!

Now is actually the perfect time to recalibrate our aid distribution system to make sure our rural (and other low wealth districts) get their constitutionally protected share. Inflation is incredibly low (and while that's a problem for our local property tax caps) it also means it takes less money for the state to hold wealthy districts harmless while it allocates new resources to those districts that truly need it in order to provide a proper education for their kids. There's no more GEA to eliminate and so new resources can be directed to low wealth districts (as the Regents and SED recommended and state leaders carried out in the years immediately preceding the GEA.)

You'd hope that pressure from the courts, public opinion and actual need would rule the day, but it's not a sure thing by any stretch. This legislative session will take place in a year when neither the governor nor the legislature will be up for election. That's typically a "down" year for state aid. The public, much as they care about their schools, are paying more attention to the presidential election and perhaps to a lesser extent the state legislative elections than they are to school funding. We will enter the legislative session either with a new senate majority (with a new focus and priorities, as well as a very real problem with lack of experience in the mechanics of creating public policy) or with the same majority now more responsive to donors who helped keep them in power. Many of those donors would siphon off the new money needed to create equity in the distribution of state aid to our schools.

Meanwhile back at the ranch, the State Education Department is focused on new testing and accountability measures, trying to respond to the new federal ESSA requirements and is waiting for the governor to approve the dozens of staffing appointments it's been waiting months to fill. That's a pretty heavy hammer over their head and an incentive to stay within fiscal constraints. While all of this plays itself out, our rural school districts will do what they always do: Engage in wise stewardship of what they have and push for what their kids need.

Your Rural Schools Association will be at your side, calling for adequate resources and the freedom to operate efficiently and responsively to local conditions. Soon you'll receive your annual legislative priority survey (this year combined with a member survey to help us determine how to best meet your needs.) As we enter the year, I could not be more proud of who I represent. Please know that your staff and directors at RSA will do everything to make you proud as well.



RURAL SCHOOLS SUMMIT COMES TO NYSSBA CONVENTION!



EVENT PROVIDES "RURAL SPECIFIC" TRACK FOR BOARD MEMBERS AND SUPERINTENDENTS

Building on the success of the 2016 Summer Conference "Reimagining Rural Schools: Now or Never", your RSA is poised to present another top notch educational experience for rural school leaders. Partnering with the New York State School Boards Association, RSA will present a day long summit of innovative new educational programs and services that can easily be replicated in your district!

The **2016 Rural School Summit** will take place on Thursday, October 27th at the Buffalo Convention Center. Plan to arrive early to the NYSSBA Convention, as the summit occupies the jumping off point on the first day of the convention. There is no additional fee for the summit beyond your registration to the convention. The summit is being presented to all rural school officials (members and non-members alike) as a free RSA service.

The summit will begin mid-morning on Thursday, so plan to arrive early! Each of the three session times will consist of two separate presentations from which to choose. Each of the six presentations will focus on ways a rural school district or BOCES is currently providing innovative and highly efficient programs and services that improve student learning opportunities. One session (two presentations) will be held from mid to late morning, with two sessions (four presentations) being offered in the afternoon.

With recent NYSSBA conventions being held in New York City, some convention attendees expressed the concern that programs specifically aimed at rural districts were hard to come by. Now that the convention has moved to a venue that offers more program space, NYSSBA is able to partner with RSA to provide highly relevant and timely information on the "best practices" of New York's rural school districts. According to RSA Executive Director Dave Little, RSA's participation is intended to bring high quality information to rural schools, in a very accessible format. "The NYSSBA convention brings school leaders together from all over the state. We're very pleased to be able to provide such important, rural school-specific information to folks who will be at the convention looking for ways to improve opportunities for their rural students."

RURAL SCHOOL OFFICIALS TO HEAR THE LATEST OVER BREAKFAST

In addition to the Thursday summit, your Rural Schools Association will host a breakfast on Friday morning of the NYSSBA convention. To register for the breakfast, simply add it to your “cart” of activities when you register for the convention. Registering soon is recommended as current registration for the breakfast is already approaching 200 people. Make sure you have a seat for RSA Executive Director and education advocate Dave Little’s presentation on how 2017 must be the year to address school funding-and how we can make it happen!

School superintendents should also look for RSA at the NYSCOSS fall conference where Dr. John Sipple and Dave Little will present the most up to date information on the state or rural education in New York State.

RSA AT NYSSBA SUMMIT PRESENTATIONS

Here are some of the offerings you’ll discover at RSA Summit at the NYSSBA Convention in October!

1. **Our Community Reads:** Our Community Reads is an early literacy initiative that has been implemented by six rural districts in Wayne County. It features a partnership that has been in effect for over five years between school districts and Literacy Volunteers.
2. **Consolidating Strategies for Language Development in Pre-K Classroom in a Four County Region.** Madison-Oneida BOCES works with four rural school districts to provide high quality Pre-K programming aligned with school aged initiatives. Yearly data has been collected to determine areas requiring additional time, focus or enhancements.
3. **SOAR:** Successful opportunities for Academic and Behavior Results is an Alternative Education program for high school aged students. Operated by the Madison-Oneida BOCES, it is designed to address educational needs of students who have struggled with academic success in previous settings. The goal of the program is to increase academic success and transition these students back to existing alternative educational classrooms (and ultimately, back to their homes.)
4. **Systems Approach to District Wide Administrative Teams:** Operated by the Bainbridge-Guilford School district, the approach works to help building level teams in coming together as a district wide team whose purpose is to lead the four building level teams. These building teams work to focus on one goal at a time, with the idea that the structure, framework and purpose of each team is established to develop a shared mindset that will help enhance student growth and organizational development.
5. **The Impact of Economic Development on Schools:** The program highlights contributions by the Board of Education to local economic development. The Genesee Valley Educational Partnership will review an initiative that brings school board representation to economic development groups. This collaboration involves county and community leaders, working with school districts to attract residential and retail growth. The goal is to seek grant and planning initiatives that serve as models for other regions of the state.
6. **Partnering to Strengthen the Educational Leadership Pipeline in Rural Schools:** This session will review a unique partnership between the St. Lawrence-Lewis BOCES and St. Lawrence University, providing a model that can be replicated for rural areas of the state. It involves the establishment of a Principals Academy that has provided professional development and support for aspiring principals from across the rural counties of Northern New York for the past three years.

IMPORTANT, CONVENIENT AND FREE!

**Don’t Miss this Opportunity to Bring Home Useful Information in a
Time Efficient and Cost Effective Way!**



Dr. Gretchen Rymarchyk,
Deputy Director RSA

RESEARCH NEWS

There are few issues as pressing, or as polarizing in our country than the relationship between our marginalized communities and their government. We see it played out in police-race relations, in presidential politics and in a general feeling of uneasiness about where we are headed as a nation. In an attempt to help inform (and hopefully help) the national debate, your RSA will sponsor a national presentation. On Thursday, October 27, RSA Deputy Executive Director Dr. Gretchen Rymarchyk will present her research at the American Evaluation Association’s annual conference in Atlanta, GA. The title of her presentation is: **Creating Research Partnerships with Marginalized Communities: Lessons Learned.**

The promotion of social justice requires input from those who are oppressed. The very nature of oppression results in its victims avoiding contact with individuals and systems that do or could perpetrate further oppression. So, it’s difficult for evaluators to gain access to data directly from marginalized communities. However, those experiencing a problem have vital, first-hand information about possible solutions. As a result, it is critically important that solutions coming directly from marginalized communities be recognized and promoted.

In support of a larger Collective Impact effort, this project recruited members of low wealth communities of color as paid research partners. Gretchen (a professional evaluator) trained the partners in research ethics, informed consent, interviewing and data analysis. The partners then conducted interviews with friends and neighbors, analyzing and interpreting results. This paper presents lessons learned from this project regarding recruiting, engaging, and working collaboratively to produce a credible study with groups unfamiliar with evaluation methods.

Hopefully, making better use of information learned from those actually affected by the issues in question will lead to more effective programs and services. The new approach has broad implications: Can you imagine how productive we could be if state education policy for rural schools was actually based on information learned directly from our rural districts?

In hiring Dr. Rymarchyk as RSA’s new Deputy Executive Director, your Board of Directors recognized the need for us to generate new research and to synthesize and forward existing research that could help our rural school districts. This initial effort will not only affect the issue studied in the research project, but in how RSA informs its advocacy positions. If you have questions for Gretchen, please feel free to contact her at RSA’s Cornell office.

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Caring for the Young: The Capacity of Communities in New York State to Care for Young Children

John W. Sipple, Cornell University, U.S.

Hope G. Casto, Skidmore College, U.S.

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Rural Sociological Society

August 8, 2016

Abstract



As every family with young children knows, finding consistent, high-quality, and affordable child care can be a challenge. The supply of formal child care arrangements in rural communities appears to be particularly thin, perhaps due to demand based on parental values but more likely due to the sparse population (Beach, 1995; Choi, Johnson, Lake, & Robinson, 2009; Maher, Frestedt, & Grace, 2008). A family's ability to access child care for infants and toddlers is affected by their available financial resources, but also by their context. Geographical variation and the shifting demographics of New York State (NYS) position it as an important state within which to consider the capacity of families and communities to care for young children. The child care capacity of a community may be a strongly related to populations that are aging and shrinking though child care is essential for parents needing and wanting to (re)enter the workforce. In addition, high quality early educational experiences are beneficial for young children's cognitive, social, emotional, and even physical development.

The nation and state recognize the care and education of young children to be a public interest and often subsidize care for young children in communities through federal programs like Head Start, federal, state and county Child care subsidy policy, state initiated Universal Pre-Kindergarten policies, and of course public primary and secondary schools. Given the demographic shifts, the benefits of early child care, and the state interest through policy interventions, it is essential to understand the state of "caring for the young" across NYS. This paper assesses the capacity (i.e., spaces available for particular aged children in registered agencies) of communities across New York State to care for children from birth to age five.

In New York State, 32 percent of districts are rural, and 18 percent of schools and 12 percent of students are in rural areas (Johnson, et al., 2014). Early childhood care and education in rural America relies more on home-based care and the informal child care sector than other geographic types of communities (Beach, 1995; Choi, Johnson, Lake, & Robinson, 2009).

Research Questions:

1. *What is the incidence of early childhood learning program slots for children under age 5 in New York State rural counties and school districts?*
2. *How do the numbers of early learning program slots relate to the number of age-eligible children in rural and non-rural settings?*
3. *What factors (e.g. geography, wealth, education level) may be related to patterns of early learning programs in rural versus non-rural communities in New York State?*

The data that form the basis for our analyses are drawn from three sources: 1) NY State Education Department; 2) NYS Office of Children and Family Services; and 3) the U.S. Census. By using multiple sources of data, we are the first to link data from more than 19,000 child care and preschool facilities, nearly 700 school districts, 62 counties, and census (and ACS) estimates at both the county and school district level across New York State. This study is also unique in its focus on the capacity of rural communities to serve their young children. In particular, this study emphasizes the 33 rural

counties rural in New York State. These counties have 50% or more of the population noted as "rural populations" by the 2000 US Census. Methods include descriptive, correlational and time-series regression models.

Key Findings:

- ◆ Over the 7 years of this study, we see growth in capacity of each modality - roughly one-tenth of a decade for each year. It would take over 20 years for rural capacity to increase to where suburbs are today.
- ◆ Location matters! Really bad for rural and typically positive for city – even after controlling for key independent variables.
- ◆ Communities with increasing levels of student poverty have less capacity for infant and toddler, but no effect for preschool. Poverty matters except for where public policy has successfully worked to eliminate the effect (preschool)
- ◆ Community wealth has a positive effect on infant, toddler and preschool capacity. Wealth always matters (except PreK).
- ◆ Enrollment matters to some degree. Larger is linked to greater capacity.
- ◆ Tax rate matters for infant and toddlers but not for preschool.
- ◆ We discuss the public policy mechanisms for infant and toddler capacities and how different from PreK mechanism.

Table 5 - Mean & Median Capacity (% of age-cohort) by Year and Type

	Mean			Median		
	2006	2011	2013	2006	2011	2013
<i>Large Cities</i>						
Infant	8%	9%	9%	10%	11%	11%
Toddler	16%	15%	15%	18%	18%	17%
PreSchool	69%	79%	76%	76%	81%	80%
<i>Small Cities</i>						
Infant	7%	6%	6%	6%	5%	4%
Toddler	12%	12%	11%	11%	9%	9%
PreSchool	84%	77%	72%	66%	69%	65%
<i>High Need Rural</i>						
Infant	3%	3%	3%	0%	0%	0%
Toddler	4%	4%	4%	0%	0%	0%
PreSchool	41%	44%	44%	28%	32%	32%
<i>Average Need</i>						
Infant	5%	6%	6%	3%	4%	4%
Toddler	9%	11%	11%	6%	8%	8%
PreSchool	44%	56%	59%	36%	47%	48%
<i>Low Need</i>						
Infant	7%	8%	8%	4%	5%	7%
Toddler	13%	17%	18%	9%	14%	16%
PreSchool	61%	83%	91%	46%	66%	69%
<i>Total</i>						
Infant	5%	6%	6%	2%	3%	3%
Toddler	9%	11%	11%	6%	7%	7%
PreSchool	50%	60%	63%	40%	49%	49%

Table 8– Stepwise Random-effects GLS regression Table for Toddler Capacity

	1		2		3				
	Coef.	Std. Err.	Coef.	Std. Err.	Coef.	Std. Err.	Coef.	Std. Err.	
Year (centered at 2011)	0.053	0.010	***	0.048	0.012	***	0.120	0.018	***
City~	0.775	0.607		1.149	0.604		0.700	0.611	
Town~	-1.323	0.316	***	-0.672	0.320	***	-0.118	0.331	
Rural~	-3.742	0.239	***	-2.808	0.271	***	-2.024	0.291	***
% Poor Students^				-0.132	0.032	***	-0.089	0.033	**
% Minority Students^				0.169	0.033	***	0.137	0.034	***
Tax Rate							0.059	0.013	***
Expenditures Per Pupil (100s)							-0.071	0.018	***
Community Wealth^							0.197	0.042	***
K12 District Enrollment (1000s)							0.015	0.004	***
constant	6.748	0.176	***	5.985	0.314	***	5.178	0.331	***
sigma_u	2.613			2.473			2.389		
sigma_e	1.335			1.336			1.335		
rho	79.3%			77.4%			76.2%		
R ² within	0.02			0.01			0.02		
R ² between	0.30			0.35			0.40		
R ² overall	0.26			0.31			0.35		

1,912 Observations in 657 School Districts (groups), *** p≤ .001, ** p≤ .01, * p≤ .05

^ decile units

~Locale comparison group is Suburban Districts



Data Tools



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TOOL



RESEARCH &
PUBLICATIONS

Announcing an enhanced website (<http://NYEducationData.org>) building on the success of the Data Tools section of the NYS Center for Rural Schools website. As you may remember, from 2010 thru 2016 the New York State Center for Rural Schools with the support of the Rural Schools Association made a concerted effort to develop, publicize, and support a set of data tools (fiscal, demographic, and performance) that were useful to school and community leaders across NYS. We invested many, many days between 2010 to 2014 speaking to JMTs, BOCES, School Board Associations and the Rural Schools Association about the tools and seeking feedback for how we can enhance them be more timely and useful for practicing school district leaders. During the past six years, the site (nyruralschools.org) averaged about 3500 visitors, 20,000 visits, 50,000 pages viewed, and 90,000 hits PER MONTH.

After six years of learning, we would like to share our new work on data visualization, new data, new research, new relationships, and enhanced tools with you and the communities you serve. These data tools are free and open to the public. We are committed to making data use quicker, easier, and more beneficial for school district and community leaders. Please share your thoughts, obstacles, and successes with John Sipple at jsipple@cornell.edu or 607-255-3005.




Office of P-12

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To: Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Stakeholders

From: Ira Schwartz, Assistant Commissioner 

Subject: Phase II of Public Comment Period on Draft Guiding Principles and Characteristics of Highly Effective Schools for School Accountability

Date: August 30, 2016

The New York State Education Department (NYSED or “the Department”) is currently accepting public comments on a revised version of the draft guiding principles and characteristics of highly effective schools that prepare students for post-secondary education, careers and life. After seeking input from a variety of stakeholders, NYSED developed the initial draft characteristics for highly effective schools and guiding principles for a public school accountability system to meet the requirements of the federal ESSA. During Phase I of the public comment period, which occurred from July 11 through August 26, NYSED received over 300 public comments on both draft documents.

The Department extends its thanks for the public’s participation in this process and the meaningful comments received to date. As a follow up to Phase I of the public comment period, the Department has made revisions to the draft documents and is now beginning Phase II of the public comment period. We encourage all, including those who submitted comments during Phase I of the process, to provide comments on the revised draft guiding principles and characteristics of highly effective schools, as stakeholder engagement is essential to moving forward with the development of the state’s ESSA accountability plan.

Public comments on the Phase II document may be submitted through Friday, September 16, 2016 at: https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/ESSA_Request_for_Public_Comment. The Department will carefully review all comments as it develops the final draft characteristics for highly effective schools and guiding principles for a public school accountability system. The Department anticipates presenting the final draft of these documents to the Board of Regents for consideration at its October 2016 meeting.

These documents will serve as guidelines for NYSED as it develops New York State’s plan to meet ESSA requirements. The Department will provide multiple opportunities for stakeholder and public input before submitting the plan to U.S. Department of Education next year.

cc: Angelica Infante Green
Lisa Long

School lunch subsidy could boost local farms, economies

By: Krishna Ramanujan



If New York state lawmakers were to provide a subsidy of 5 cents per school lunch just one day per week for the purchase of local fruits and vegetables, it would likely provide a financial boost for New York farmers and local economies.

The finding is according to a recent report, “The Economic Implications of Using New York State Farm Products in School Lunches,” from the Community and Regional Development Institute in Cornell’s College of Agriculture and Life Sciences.

For example, a hypothetical “Thursday is Eat NY Day” program will cost taxpayers \$2.8 million per year, but if it increased the purchase of local fruits and vegetables by 50 percent one day a week, it could generate up to \$9.2 million in new revenue for vegetable farmers and up to \$5.3 million for fruit producers and businesses that support

these industries. Such a program would also generate between 80 and 150 new jobs in the state, according to the report.

“Our analysis considers a range of potential outcomes that might result from a program that provides incentives to increase offerings of New York state fruits and vegetables in school lunches, and the most likely scenarios indicate that the economic benefits that would accrue to farms and related businesses would outweigh the costs of funding and administering the program,” said Brad Rickard, the Ruth and William Morgan Associate Professor of Applied Economics and Management, and co-author of the report. Other co-authors included Todd Schmit, associate professor in the Dyson School of Applied Economics and Management, and Pamela Weisberg-Shapiro, a lecturer in the Division of Nutritional Sciences.

All the food for school lunches in New York state costs more than \$366 million for 281.6 million lunches per year, or about \$1.30 to \$1.40 per meal. The cost of the program at 5 cents per lunch would be \$2.8 million per year.

Food service directors are increasingly encouraged to buy locally produced foods but are not required or given incentives to do so, according to the report. At the same time, food service directors operate on tight budgets, and locating and buying local foods can cost more than foods shipped from elsewhere and centrally distributed.

The researchers note these directors may be encouraged to buy more local foods if they are financially reimbursed to offset the added costs.

In the report, the researchers focused their analysis on fruits and vegetables because one fruit or vegetable is required to be served with each lunch; a large portion of dairy used in lunches is already locally sourced, so adding an incentive for purchasing local dairy probably would not add to local purchases; and when it comes to local protein and whole grains in school lunches, New York state produces small quantities of these products, making it challenging for food service directors to locally source these products once a week.

The researchers calculated benefit-to-cost ratios for five scenarios based on the amount of new demand for local products potentially created by the incentive program. They found that in each of the scenarios where demand increased by at least 25 percent, there was a net benefit to local farms and economies under the incentive program.

Credit: Cornell Chronicle



Worcester Central School District

Rural schools and Special Education: Exploring New Partnerships and Possibilities

At the most recent Rural Schools Association (RSA) conference held this past July at the Otesaga Hotel in Cooperstown New York, a number of concerns were raised by regional rural school districts that spanned from issues relating to the two-percent tax cap, state testing, staffing, regional drug epidemics, and notable demographic changes, among others, all of which are impacting districts in varying capacities. These concerns mirror what is taking place in rural

school districts nationwide. According to Johnson, Showalter, & Klein (2014),

"Growth in rural school enrollment continues to outpace non-rural enrollment growth in the United States and rural schools continue to grow more complex with increasing rates of poverty, diversity, and students with special needs. Almost 50 percent of these rural students live in poverty, more than 25 percent of these children is a child of color, almost 13 percent of these rural children qualify for special education services, and approximately 13 percent of these rural children has changed residence in the previous year...It is becoming impossible to ignore the national relevance of these students, families, schools and communities" (p. 28).

Rural schools simultaneously find themselves held to state and national policies that make local schools accountable for supporting all students, including those with disabilities, to increased academic standards.

At this RSA conference, one issue in particular caught our attention -- special education and the seemingly increasing numbers of students with special needs -- because we have been working with a local rural school district that is exploring new ways to serve their students with special needs populations, by incorporating job embedded professional development into their special education programs. According to the National Staff Development Council (2010), job embedded professional development differs from traditional professional development in that teachers and other professionals collaborate on the specific strategies being developed while working in the classroom with their students, this allows teachers to implement elements of the professional development into their classrooms in real time. This not only saves time but also provides a more authentic professional development experience.

As many rural school administrators, faculty, staff and families are already aware, special education in rural schools presents a set of challenges. For example, numerous educators have witnessed the benefits of inclusive education and these have been well documented (Hehir & Katzman, 2012). In addition, although educators see the positive outcomes of inclusive classrooms, rural schools still face a particular challenge in meeting the diverse needs of the special education student. The challenges these schools face include shortages in trained teachers, materials, capacity, needed supports (Avery, 2013), and an increasing number of students who are eligible to receive special education services. Some districts are observing marked increases in enrollment in just a few short years (Hoppey, 2016). The reasons for the increase vary, but the strain placed on smaller districts is real.

In this article, we introduce to the broader rural school community, a newly formed partnership between the Worcester Central School District and SUNY Oneonta that aims to explore and pilot new ways to engage in innovative programming for special education students. Employing an assets-based approach that focuses on the strengths, knowledge, and expertise of its staff, administrators, and community, this partnership explores what is possible locally via a synergistic approach, which aims to serve the diverse needs of rural families. The purpose of this project is to provide rural schools with a workable method to move students from resource rooms and enclosed programs, into less restrictive environments, when the Individualized Education Program (IEP) committee decides this is in the best interest for the student. Cole, Waldron, & Majd (2004) suggest that when students receiving special education services are placed in inclusive environments, the entire class improves academically and socially. They have found that the extra support provided in the classroom for students with IEP's also helps other students succeed. We believe that by working with classroom teachers, administrators, parents, and related service professionals, this project can create a model of inclusion embraced by all and which does not place an undue burden on a potentially stressful situation. We aim to illuminate the ways in which a partnership between administrators, teachers and other professionals -- using embedded professional development strategies -- can be an efficient, effective method to increase teachers' skills improving academic outcomes for exceptional children.

The Worcester Central School District administrators and teachers have committed to reimagine the practice of inclusion. They

are moving with intention to improve the academic, functional, and social outcomes for their students by providing an embedded professional experience where the teachers are sharing strategies and methods with their peers. We believe that this will show that not only is inclusion (when appropriate) in the best interest of the child, but is also in the best interest of the school by improving academic outcomes for all students. As we move forward with this embedded approach to find new ways of serving children in our local schools, we invite the rural school community to join in this conversation. By developing this roadmap, in collaboration with all stakeholders, we hope to help ensure the very best services possible to all students.

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## Bio

Frank Thornton, Ed.D., earned his Doctorate in Special Education for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Exceptional Children at the University of Northern Arizona, while working as a special educator in a rural school district near the Navajo Nation. He is the current Vice President of the New York State Council for Exceptional Children. His research interests include rural schools' teacher preparation, School wide positive behavior support, and inclusive practices in community schools.

Leanne M. Avery is an Associate Professor in Science Education in the Department of Elementary Education and Reading at SUNY Oneonta. Her research focuses on science and engineering photodocumentation work with rural children. Her research provides key insights into how these children learn, where they learn, and from whom they learn. Via place-based teacher development in collaboration with other university faculty, teachers, students and families, she also works to promote ways in which to value this knowledge base in the classroom. By anchoring student learning to the local rural context as well as connecting this knowledge to global science and 21st century skills, her work enables rural children to navigate and succeed in a rapidly changing world. She has published broadly in academic journals, practitioner newsletters, and presented at numerous regional, national, and international conferences. She earned her Ph.D. from Cornell University. Leanne's newest project entails exploring the role intergenerational knowledge plays in school science.

Jessie Westfall is the Worcester Central School District Elementary Principal and Elementary CSE Chair. She previously worked at the NYS Department of Education in the Office of Higher Education under Race to the Top, working with Colleges and Universities with teacher preparation programs. She also worked at Duanesburg Elementary School as a 1<sup>st</sup> Grade teacher, where she co-taught with a Special Education teacher in an inclusive classroom setting.

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