

**Invitation to Present at the
2026 Rural Schools Association Annual Summer Conference
Our Roots, Our Rise
July 12-14 - Lake Placid Conference Center**

Dear Friends of Rural Schools,

The Rural Schools Association is excited to announce our 2026 annual conference, “**Our Roots, Our Rise**”, which will be held at the Lake Placid Convention Center from July 12-14, 2026. This year’s theme honors both the deep foundations that sustain rural communities and the innovative approaches that propel them toward a vibrant future.

The importance of rural communities and their schools has never been more evident. If our rural districts are to successfully build a new approach of educating this unique generation of learners and navigating the ever changing fiscal and educational environment, they’ll need the most insightful, successful and replicable programs and approaches.

We are seeking applications from school districts, BOCES districts, and P-12 partners that may include: higher education, research institutions, not-for-profit organizations, and economic development partners that have unique and successful programs currently in operation that include but are not limited to:

STRENGTHENING THE FOUNDATIONS OF RURAL EDUCATION

Sessions in this strand should highlight strategies that support strong instructional practices, sustainable systems, and resilient school cultures—while honoring the unique strengths and challenges of rural communities. Proposals may highlight how rural districts are navigating the impact of poverty, housing instability, and isolation, while building strong family, community, and cross-sector partnerships that improve student outcomes. We encourage presenters to share strategies that ensure equitable access to core academics, enrichment, and extracurricular opportunities—even in the face of scarcity.

INNOVATIVE TEACHING, LEARNING AND GRADUATION PATHWAYS

Whether through career and technical education, workforce development, apprenticeships, or partnerships with higher education and trade schools, these programs allow schools to be a shining light guiding students toward success beyond high school. Sessions in this strand can provide examples of technology-rich learning opportunities in small or resource-limited districts. Presentation partners could include: Higher Education, Trade Schools and other agencies serving the P-12 community.

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY THROUGH CREATIVE AND SHARED COLLABORATION

Sessions in this strand will focus on strengthening the operational effectiveness and leadership within rural school districts. This includes strategies for achieving fiscal efficiencies through shared services, regional collaboration, and leveraging community connections. It also covers topics such as innovative solutions for staff shortages, teacher recruitment, managing labor negotiations, and implementing successful strategies for supporting and retaining quality staff.

ROOTED LEADERSHIP

Leadership at the district, school, board and community level requires a strong sense of self and the collective. Sessions in this strand offer strategies and approaches to build and strengthen leaders through possible topics such as mindfulness, culturally responsive-sustaining practices, coaching, networking, work-life equilibrium, managing conflict styles, and more. The focus here is around building resilience in leadership roles, across rural schools.

We welcome proposals that offer:

- Practical strategies and tools
- Real-world examples and case studies
- Research-based insights
- Collaborative or interactive session formats
- Stories of resilience, creativity, and leadership that reflect rural experiences

Presentation proposals should be limited to 500 words or less and must be submitted electronically **by midnight February 23, 2026 by visiting <https://rsany.org/2026-proposal/>**. Feel free to share this link with others who you feel may be interested in participating.

The selected sessions will be scheduled for **Monday, July 13 and Tuesday morning, July 14**. Sessions are an hour in length, please plan for approximately 45 minutes of presentation time and 15 minutes for Q&A. Proposals will be reviewed by the Rural Schools Association Conference Planning Committee. The selected presenters will be notified by March 15th. Presenters will be asked to pay the registration fee appropriate to their conference participation.

If you are a vendor interested in presenting with a district, please contact [Scott Bischoping](mailto:sbischoping@rsany.org) at sbischoping@rsany.org.

Thank you very much for your continued support of the Rural Schools Association. If you have any questions concerning the proposal process, please contact Heather Zellers at [hzellers@rsany.org](mailto:hzell@rsany.org).

Sincerely,

The Rural Schools Association Conference Planning Committee
Heather Zellers, Director of Advocacy and Information Services