



NEWS FOR NEW YORK STATE'S RURAL SCHOOLS

MARCH 2023 EDITION
RURAL SCHOOLS ASSOCIATION OF NEW YORK STATE



FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK

by Executive Director David Little, Esq.



It is said that triumphant Roman commanders returning from battle had a servant beside them in their chariot during their parade into Rome. The servant's job was to whisper in the ear of the commander that all glory is fleeting. History repeats itself in 21st century public education.

After years of underfunding, fluctuating funding and even decreased funding we are finally seeing significant resources devoted to this primary state responsibility. The state is on its last phase of fully funding Foundation Aid and Washington stepped up during the pandemic providing needed rescue funding.

Receiving the two simultaneously was a surprise to most everyone; even those of us who have lived through similar circumstances before. As we approach the end of that generous support and look forward to future funding, it may serve us well to remember the message of the Roman conquerors' servants.

Here's what more recent history tells us about our state's approach to school funding. First, there is a wavelike action that seems to take place every election cycle. Upon first being elected, governors tend to celebrate with large aid increases. This prevents local school budget discord in their first year and solidifies their honeymoon status with voters. In their second year, they decrease funding (often dramatically) as they seek to address other state needs like road and bridges, health care, etc. Reducing school aid in even one year recalibrates that base amount and limits the

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compounding costs in subsequent years. Aid is then slowly increased each year until they seek re-election, again in the hope of staving off local school cuts that might anger the electorate heading toward election day.

In other words, there is the initial wave, then the trough of lowered funding and finally the wave builds again. If you want to get even further into the weeds, you can add in the legislature's biennial approach that also coincides with their election every other year. Simply put, they historically increase aid in election years and restrain spending in the off years.

In addition to the ebbs and flows of the election cycle, we have historical trends that can provide insight into potential actions by the state. In the first years of the Great Recession, the feds also provided significant resources to keep the state and public education on track.

While it lasted, it did its job and our schools forged ahead...straight into the so called "funding cliff" once the federal rescue funding stopped and the state wasn't able to backfill the amount of federal funding that schools had by then worked into their budgets.

This is why you've heard me urge school leaders to spend federal funding on non-recurring expenses, out of fear that programs added back would soon have to be cancelled again.

Not only did the state fail to backfill the federal amounts, it reduced aid significantly through its Gap Elimination Adjustment or GEA. It took the state over a decade to return funding to pre-GEA levels; the length of a student's entire public educational career.

History can be a nag. You've heard me celebrate this current time as one of not only greater resources than we are used to, but an era where creativity is allowed, as we build back from years of pandemic related change. The problem of course, is that even as we search for ways to spend the remaining federal rescue

aid, pundits and state officials are cautioning us that there is gloom on the horizon.

No period of calm seems to come without predictions of looming recession. Maybe it's just human nature. "Oh sure you FEEL fine, but the thing that kills you may already be inside you!" Pessimism is always the safer bet, I guess.

But as we wait for the other proverbial shoe to drop again, let's consider this: State revenues are ahead of schedule and even the Division of the Budget has been forced to say that the state's "out years" are stable.

Importantly, right now New York State has a 16% fund balance in the bank. That's 16% of billions by the way and economists have recently proclaimed that the next recession is likely to be both brief and mild rather than catastrophic, like the Great Recession.

Whew! NYSCOSS' Bob Lowry is fond of saying that our worst fears (and greatest hopes by the way) are seldom realized. It's comforting that Bob is seldom off the mark.

But what provides us true assurance is the excellence of local school leadership. I see it all the time. Saw the creativity and devotion during the pandemic, despite the poor odds of no in person instruction and increased community responsibilities.

Saw the wisdom in the planning of rebuilding better than before, not just taking up where we were dumped but making up for lost time with innovation, collaboration and determination.

Saw it most recently at NYSCOSS' Winter Institute where we shared great ideas and practices. That's what gives me hope; not the severity of what we may face in the future, but our capacity to cope with whatever comes our way.

While events always give us pause, our capabilities give us confidence. What's the old saying? Nicely played my friends, nicely played indeed.



2023-24 National Signature Project Award: Now Accepting Applications!



The National Signature Project Award is awarded annually to an outstanding and innovative classroom project that exemplifies the very best in rural, place-based education.

It is open to any rural classroom teacher in the United States, and it is jointly funded by the Rural Schools Collaborative (RSC) and the National Rural Education Association (NREA).

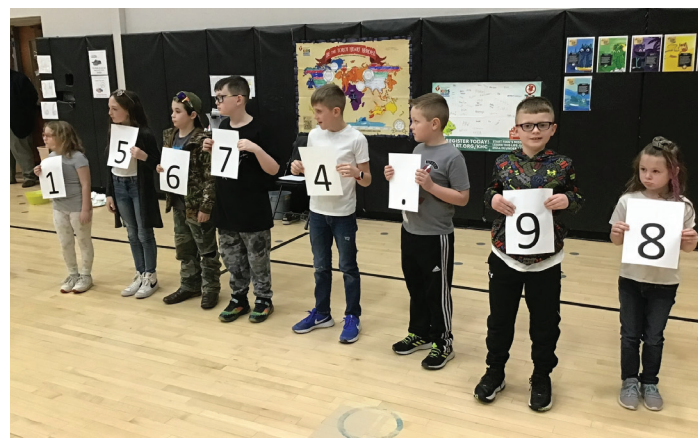
One rural teacher will receive \$2,500, and two runner-up teachers will receive \$1,500, toward their individual place-based education projects. In addition to the maximum award of \$2,500, awardees' travel and registration fees will be covered for attendance to The 2023 National Forum to Advance Rural Education. Applications are due April 30, 2023. You can learn more about the award, view previous winners' projects, and apply now by visiting <https://bit.ly/signature-project>.

Small Community, Big Heart: Bolivar-Richburg Joins Kids Heart Challenge

The Bolivar-Richburg Elementary School joined forces with the American Heart Association by taking part in the annual Kids Heart Challenge. The Kids Heart Challenge focuses on whole body wellness, helping students improve their own health and better their character while raising life-saving donations for the American Heart Association to help kids facing heart-health issues.

As part of the challenge, students learned different ways to check their heart rate and how physical activity keeps their hearts strong. All students watched videos on how to perform hands-only CPR and how to recognize the signs of a stroke. The students and families of Bolivar-Richburg Elementary raised a total of \$15,674.98 for the American Heart Association. Zoey Galayda was the top fundraiser at the school, bringing in a total of \$1,080. At a school-wide assembly, Zoey had the opportunity to slime her PE teacher and toss a pie in the face of another teacher. Six other top earning students had the chance to pie a teacher or staff member.

Amanda Auman, Physical Education Teacher at Bolivar-Richburg Elementary and the Kids Heart Challenge Coordinator, commented, "I am truly humbled by the outpouring of support that our school has received from the community, families and friends for this year's Kids Heart Challenge! It all started 6 years ago with a goal of \$1,000 and has grown into such a meaningful event for so many. Without the support of the community, this campaign would not be possible—thank you to all for spreading the word about the importance of keeping hearts healthy!"



RSA IN THE NEWS



Push For Free School Meals For All Kids Gains Traction

By JOE MAHONEY, CNHI State Reporter | Mar 9, 2023

ALBANY — As Kyle Belokopitsky sees it, no child should go hungry and no child should be stigmatized or subject to bullying because he or she qualifies for a benefit due to family income status.

Belokopitsky, executive director of the New York State Parent Teacher Association, is among the advocates urging state lawmakers to fund a program designed to provide free breakfast and lunch to more than 700,000 New York school children each day.

“Food insecurity continues to increase at each of our school districts across the state every day,” Belokopitsky told CNHI. A bipartisan initiative called the Healthy School Meals for All program has won support from more than 250 organizations, including the politically influential New York State United Teachers, the statewide teachers union.

CONTINUE READING AT: <https://bit.ly/free-student-meals>

OBSERVER-DISPATCH

This is why students in New York’s rural communities need free school meals | Opinion

By MARK BORDEAU, Special to the USA TODAY Network | Feb 28, 2023

It’s sadly ironic: kids growing up in rural communities that grow our food often do not have access to those local products. The good news is that every community has the infrastructure to connect kids to the food grown in their backyards — school meals.

School meals are one of the government’s most powerful tools for delivering good nutrition to children. However, in June 2022, federal waivers that ensured free school meals for all students expired. More than 726,000 students in New York lost access to free meals.

This loss impacted communities across the state, but it has hit rural communities the hardest. While many large, urban schools were able to continue providing free meals for all through the federal Community Eligibility Provision, many smaller rural and suburban schools cannot participate in this program.

CONTINUE READING AT: <https://bit.ly/why-free-school-meals>

Meet the Members of the Long Range Planning and Policy Committee



I'm proud to serve as chair for the Long Range Planning and Policy committee, remembering that I'm serving with four other members whom I believe to be among the most qualified and dedicated of our directors. My institutional knowledge as the longest serving board member, my age and life experience as a farmer and bank loan officer may contribute an additional rural perspective. Our names are listed below.

Let me share how we work. As a board committee, we focus on ends rather than means; outputs more than activities and programs. The latter is the purview of RSA officers and staff of two and a half people. For example, our committee charge in the 2021-2022 Membership Priority Survey was to tease out the meaningful threads, highlights and any challenges in the survey results and present our findings to the Executive Committee. Management was responsible for driving the process.

In addition to fulfilling such charges, we are responsible for seeing that the Bylaws are relevant and properly aligned with our practice. We serve at the pleasure of the RSA Board Chair.

Our Members:

Tom Huxtable, Chair
Mount Markham Central School Board Member

Elissa Smith
Principal; Lyndonville Central School

Carolyn Ostrander, Vice Chair
New York State Grange Representative

William Crankshaw
Superintendent; Greater Johnstown Central School

Scott Payne
District Superintendent and CEO

RSA and the Friend of the Council Award

RSA Executive Director Dave Little was awarded the Friend of the Council Award by the New York State Council of School Superintendents at their recent Winter Institute. The award is annually bestowed on an individual who makes significant contributions to public education and seeks to collaborate with NYSCOSS in their efforts. Please look for Dave's monthly column on rural educational perspectives in the Councilgram, the NYSCOSS electronic newsletter.



Improvements to the Summer Conference

by Scott Bischooping

We look forward to seeing you at our summer conference at the Otesaga in Cooperstown, July 9-11. Your RSA is partnering with Otsego-Northern Catskills BOCES to put together a high quality experience at our summer conference once again. Catie Huber, ONC BOCES District Superintendent, and her team are working with us on the registration and program. This will not only enhance our program but also allow participants to register through ONC BOCES.

Instead of holding a separate pre-conference as we have in the past, we will begin our conference on Sunday afternoon at 2:30 with the "Conference Kickoff" for all attendees. The program for that session is being finalized now, but will likely include valuable legal and legislative updates.

Another change is that meals will be included in the registration fee for those participating in the conference. We wanted to simplify things as much as possible for attendees as well as the hotel staff so meals will be included in the participant registration fee instead of the hotel charge. There will be more detail at the time of registration and you will have contact information available if there are any questions.

Through the generosity of some of our vendor partners, our annual awards are being sponsored this year. With this, \$250 will be given to the school organization or charity of the recipient's choice. Awards Committee Chair, Tarkan Ceng, is working with his committee to honor our quality contributors to rural education.

Of the many submissions for breakout sessions, Scott Payne, District Superintendent of Cattaraugus-Allegany BOCES, and his committee worked with RSA staff to select those that would fit the theme of this year's conference the best. The program is shaping up to focus heavily on Career and Technical Education opportunities as well as attracting and retaining employees.

Registration information should be out in mid to late April. We hope that you have plans to attend!



In Memory of Mike Joseph...Former RSA Executive Director



Friends, RSA has lost one of its pioneers. Mike Joseph served as RSA Executive Director for 14 years, from 1990 to 2004. He passed earlier this month. Mike's work formed the foundation of our service to rural school districts. He helped build the relationships, set the standards and the early approach that has allowed us to blossom into the association that serves you today.

Last fall, when RSA announced that it would remain continue to collaborate with Cornell when appropriate but that it would otherwise become its own independent organization, Mike emailed RSA to say that he was proud that we were taking this final step in our development and that he and the other pioneers had always hoped that such a day would come. Mike Joseph was insightful, pragmatic, visionary and a fighter for kids. We at RSA mourn his loss and wish his family the very best of memories of their many years with such an extraordinary individual.

Here is the link to Mike's obituary: <https://bit.ly/michael-joseph>



RSA Holds Rural Issues Forum

RSA held its inaugural Rural Issues Forum at the NYSCOSS Winter Institute in Albany in early March. Participating local school leaders shared concerns about their schools and communities, as well as ideas for how to address those concerns. As at all of the similar coming forums, comments were transcribed and will be used to create a policy brief that will form the basis of an advocacy campaign.

A similar process was used in the creation of RSA's policy brief *The Forgotten Family Member* (which was instrumental in rural school aid increases and other recognition of the unique concerns of rural New York schools.) Please be on the lookout for a Rural Issues Forum in your area and plan to be a part of this powerful advocacy program!




Social-Emotional Learning Insight

As the world evolves into one where Artificial Intelligence will play an increasing role, where access to information will be instantaneous for even the youngest of learners, what role will our schools have in developing our citizens? Increasingly the experts point to Social-Emotional Learning as a need.

Rather than create graduates capable of knowing a universe of static facts and information, we will be responsible for developing individuals capable of processing, coping with, using and relaying information. How they collaborate, problem solve and adjust to ever changing circumstances will be more important than mastering dates and place lists and historical facts (so they say) and while we never want to rely on just a few persons to know what we will all assume to be true, we surely want our students to adjust to the new demands and succeed in the new environment.

Dr. Terry Dougherty, superintendent of Hancock CSD has provided us timely and insightful information on SEL, as the latest in his series addressing our most pressing issues. We hope you find it as useful as we have.

OUR ROADMAP FOR GROWING TOGETHER

Foundational Capacity Building	Social Emotional Learning		
	Year One: 2021-22	Year Two: 2022-23	Year Three: 2023-24
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Building Better Futures for Parents as Partners webinars ■ K-8 Implementation of Second Step SEL curriculum ■ SEL/CASEL Overview virtual series, Solution Tree staff in-service program ■ DCMO BOCES SEL Capacity Building, staff in-service program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Implement Building Better Futures for Parents as Partners webinar series ■ Complete and report comprehensive SEL student survey ■ Crosswalk and align instructional program architecture with NYSED SEL policy framework 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Implement SEL student survey report recommendations ■ Implement SEL parent engagement program ■ Study and pilot restorative Discipline/PBIS initiatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Engage higher education institutions to build SEL capacity ■ Implement restorative discipline/PBIS models ■ Extend SEL beyond the classroom
<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <div style="width: 45%;"> <p style="font-size: small;">FOR MORE INFORMATION</p> <p style="font-size: x-small;">NYSED "Social Emotional Learning: A Guide to Systemic Whole School Implementation"</p>  </div> <div style="width: 45%; text-align: right;"> <p style="font-size: x-small;">HCS D SEL Blue print</p>  </div> </div>			

—Terrance P. Dougherty, Ph.D.

Building the 5 Competencies of SEL

Self-Awareness

The ability to understand one's emotions, assess one's strengths and limitations, and establish goals with a growth mindset and sense of self-efficacy. Competence may be demonstrated by answering questions like:

- What are my thoughts and feelings, and what causes them?
- How can I express my thoughts and feelings respectfully?

Decision-Making

Making constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on ethical standards, safety and well-being of oneself and others, and social norms. Competence may be demonstrated by answering questions like:

- What consequences will my actions have on myself and others?
- How do my choices align with my values?
- How can I solve problems creatively?

Self-Management

Regulating emotions and behaviors necessary to achieve goals (e.g., self-motivation, personal organization, delay gratification, manage stress, control impulses, persevere through challenges, etc.). Competence may be demonstrated by answering questions like:

- What different responses can I have to an event?
- How can I respond to an event as constructively as possible?

Social Awareness

The ability to understand the perspectives of others, respect the social and cultural norms of those from diverse backgrounds, and empathize and feel compassion. Competence may be demonstrated by answering questions like:

- How can I better understand other people's thoughts and feelings?
- How can I better understand why people feel and think the way they do?

Relationship Skills

The ability to communicate effectively, actively listen, cooperate with others, resist inappropriate social pressure, negotiate conflict constructively, and seek and offer help when needed. Competence may be demonstrated by answering questions like:

- How can I adjust my actions so that my interactions with different people turn out well?
- How can I communicate my expectations to other people?

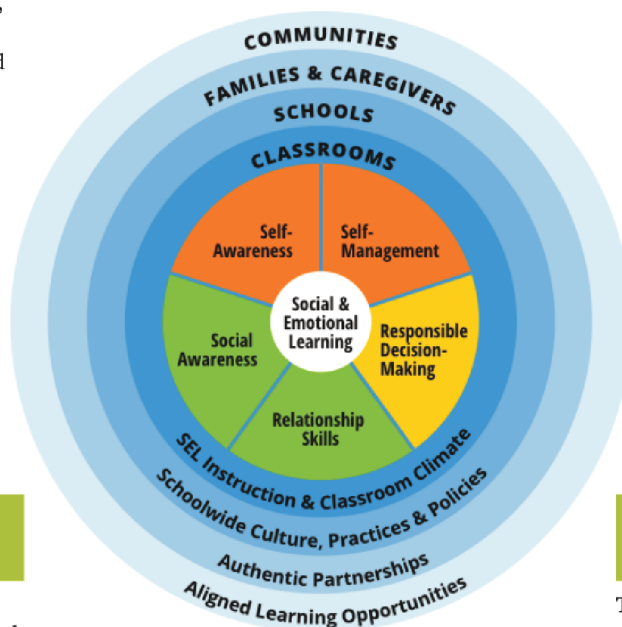


Image from CASEL, January 2023

For more information on SEL or to read Dr. Terry Dougherty's report, visit <https://rsany.org/sel>

otesaga resort



cooperstown, ny

2023 RSA SUMMER CONFERENCE JULY 9-11, 2023

Hear from State and National leaders as they share successful and easily replicable programs you can implement, along with student presentations, motivating speakers, and networking opportunities. Join us as we return to Cooperstown's premier resort, the Otesaga!

SUBSCRIBE TO CONFERENCE UPDATES!
www.RSANY.org/summer2023



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