



RSA MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

OK, so we're in a brand new environment! "Virtually" everything about how we provide public education has been turned on its ear. We're doing the impossible, overnight. To top it all off, money is going to be tight.

We at your Rural Schools Association are trying our best to provide you with very real benefits from your membership. Our advocacy on your behalf at both the state and federal levels has been continual and effective. Our research and resources are allowing you to make the best of a bad situation. More importantly, they will allow you to take advantage of this moment in history to come out on the other side as more efficient and more effective.

We like to think of membership in RSA as the best \$750 investment your district could make.

[Join or Renew
your membership](#)

We understand the fiscal pressure you're experiencing and so the RSA Board of Directors has determined that for the third year in a row, dues will remain at \$750. In the past we've done our very best to have increased revenues from outside sources offset any inflationary increases at your association. This year with the necessary cancellation of the Spring and Summer Conferences, that won't be possible. So, we're tightening our belts. Just like you, we'll be more efficient, work harder and make do with what we're provided.

To make your membership easier, we are moving up our membership drive to allow you to pay your dues in the current budget year. You'll be receiving your membership request soon. **Please support your RSA in supporting you!**

RSA TO GOVERNOR: ON SCHOOL VOTING- GO TO PLAN B!

RSA has transmitted the following letter to Governor Andrew Cuomo:

Cornell Office &
Rural School Program
Cornell University
Warren Hall 275 Flex
Ithaca, NY 14853
Office: 607-255-8709
Fax: 607-254-2896



Latham Office
24 Century Hill Drive,
Suite 200-A
Latham, NY 12110
dal295@cornell.edu
Tel: 518-250-5710
Cell: 518-888-4598

Dear Governor Cuomo,

First and foremost, I want to tell you how much everyone appreciates your guidance and leadership through all of this. You have provided not only the roadmap, but the moral compass to allow us to move forward through the crisis and we're grateful. Schools also appreciate your recognition of the health and logistical implications of opening school buildings. Despite the challenges, I believe that school leaders overwhelmingly support the decision to keep buildings closed for the remainder of the year. Reopening in the fall will pose monumental challenges, but we have been in this crisis for roughly two months and school reopening is four months away; factors will no doubt shift during the summer months.

I want to be certain that you understand the full array of obstacles to carrying out the directive to hold local school budget and school board elections in early June. For the past several days, I have been inundated with concerns from superintendents daunted by the implications of moving to an all absentee election. Here are just some of the issues expressed:

1. School election and budget voting is open to all residents of the district over the age of 18. Simply put, people arrive at the polls, show their proof of age and residency and vote. Moving to all absentee voting forces districts to (somehow) ascertain all residents over the age of 18. While obtaining voter registration lists from the county can help, it does not provide all potential school voters. Just as importantly, voter registration lists are arranged by municipality. School district boundaries are not. They overlap, they include more than one municipality, and they omit sections of others. They can overlap counties. Obtaining an accurate list of eligible voters will be beyond challenging and may well lead to lawsuits as to the legitimacy of the election.
2. Elimination of the petition requirement for school board candidates may lead to a chaotic list of potential candidates (many of whom may not be serious about serving, if elected.)
3. An all absentee election and budget vote will be a large and unbudgeted expense for school districts. Postage and purchase of envelopes to hold the absentee ballots will be \$2 per voter. Some districts have been unable to obtain the size of envelope needed.
4. Voter registration lists may well include old registrations for individuals no longer residing in the school district. College students who have moved away but have not changed their voting registration are such an example. The potential (for example) of four absentee ballots being sent to a household with only two residents is very real, with the resulting potential for voter fraud.



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5. The counting of thousands of ballots in large districts without the ability of election officials to be near each other during manual counting (and thus assure accuracy) also raises the possibility of fraudulent election results. Without question, the calculation of results will be a time consuming process.
6. Perhaps most importantly, school districts will be taking extraordinary measures to provide an election to obtain voter approval of a budget that is far from settled. The budget proposed by a school district (as you well know) may bear little resemblance to the budget the district is actually able to operate under next fall. School budget votes (as anomalous as they are among states) are intended to provide the public with oversight. This year's complete lack of certainty makes a mockery of that goal. Districts will establish a budget for voting purposes, the public will either approve or disapprove and then (in all likelihood) the programs and services represented will be changed and eliminated, based on decreases in state funding. Neither the programs, staffing or funding allocations will be accurate. In this instance, what is the goal of holding what amounts to an illegitimate exercise? The result will do a great deal to decrease the public's confidence in their school and state leaders.
7. Finally, the timeline for holding this election is compressed beyond the ability of districts to overcome the concerns listed above. School staffing is inconsistent, as administrative staff works remotely. The result of holding this vote may well be a lack of confidence in the state to meet the challenges of this crisis writ large, which would be unfortunate given the success experienced to date.

There is a better way. Virtually all school budget votes where the tax levy increase is below the state's tax levy limit are approved by the public. Those that are not within that limit rarely obtain the necessary supermajority. For districts that propose budgets within the tax levy limit, the state should allow the approval of the elected school board members to suffice during this emergency. Given that all other municipal entities, the state and the federal government all vote on annual budgets in this manner should suffice as evidence of the legitimacy of this construct.

School board elections could be held separately. School board terms do not begin until July 1. Incumbent board members could be appointed to fill unfilled terms until an election could be safely and efficiently held. Given that other public voting has been either postponed or cancelled, these revisions to the current order seem prudent and necessary to the public safety, confidence in government and operation of the school district.

On behalf of the nearly one half of all of the school districts in our state, I urgently request that you revise the current plan to hold an all absentee election in early June. Again, please accept our heartfelt gratitude for your devotion to the residents of our great state and for your leadership during this critical time in our state's history.

Very truly yours,

David Little

David A. Little, Esq.
Executive Director



HELP US HONOR YOUR GREAT WORK!

RSA is creating a video to thank school leaders and educators for their heroic work during the crisis. To do it right, we need your photos and video clips! Send us photos of kids doing work over the internet, kids working with their teacher, examples of unique things staff has done to connect with kids, whatever your district has done to rise to this challenge, we'd like to include! Please send your photos and video clips to mzellers2001@gmail.com.

IS YOUR DISTRICT ELIGIBLE FOR UNRESTRICTED FEDERAL FUNDS?

Federal funding under the Rural and Low-Income School (RLIS) program is important to many of our districts, particularly given that the funding is unrestricted as to its use. Earlier this year you may remember that the US Department of Education tried to stop funding for schools it determined were not using the appropriate measure of poverty. Political backlash in Congress has forced them to allow all of the school districts formerly receiving funding to continue their eligibility this year. The letter from the Assistant Secretary to chief state school officers outlining the specifics is below, as well as a link to a list of all eligible districts. If you appear on the list but do not apply for this funding, please know that the funding is based simply on the number of students and that the funds can be used for any legitimate school purpose.

Dear Chief State School Officer:

I write to share how the U.S. Department of Education (Department) will determine eligibility of local educational agencies (LEAs) for fiscal year (FY) 2020 funds under the Rural and Low-Income School (RLIS) program. This determination relates to an issue Department staff uncovered in late FY 2019 regarding the use of alternative poverty data to determine LEA eligibility. More specifically, as part of a review of our processes for awarding Rural Education Achievement Program (REAP) funds through the Small, Rural School Achievement (SRSA) and RLIS programs,¹ we discovered that some LEAs had been erroneously determined to be eligible for RLIS funding on the basis of alternative poverty measures instead of data from the U.S. Census Bureau's Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates (SAIPE), as required in section 5221(b)(1)(A)(i) of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965*, as amended (ESEA).

The Department subsequently took action to notify States of the data required to determine future RLIS eligibility and indicated that only SAIPE data would be used to determine eligibility for RLIS in FY 2020. Nevertheless, given seven States in FY 2019 relied on the Department's past acceptance of alternative poverty data in place of SAIPE data, we have concluded that the Department has a reasoned basis not to make changes to the Department's processes for determining RLIS eligibility for FY 2020 funds. As such, the Department will allow States and LEAs to transition to the RLIS SAIPE data requirements. Accordingly, any LEA that the Department determined was eligible for FY 2019 RLIS funding (either on the basis of SAIPE data or alternative poverty data) will be considered eligible for FY 2020 funds.² In addition,

LEAs that were not eligible for FY 2019 RLIS funding that meet RLIS rural requirements and have FY 2020 SAIPE poverty levels of 20 percent or above will also be eligible for FY 2020 RLIS funds. Rural non-geographic LEAs for which SAIPE data are not available that are eligible based on the same State-derived equivalent of SAIPE data that the State uses to make allocations under Part A of Title I of the ESEA, consistent with 34 C.F.R. § 200.72, will also be eligible for FY 2020 RLIS funds.

I have attached a list of all LEAs that are eligible for FY 2020 RLIS funds, including those that are eligible on the basis of FY 2019 data and those that are eligible on the basis of FY 2020 data. The Department will also update the Master Eligibility Spreadsheet (available at <https://oese.ed.gov/offices/office-of-formula-grants/rural-insular-native-achievement-programs/rural-education-achievement-program/rural-and-low-income-school-program/eligibility/>) to reflect these changes and will notify any LEA that is now eligible for both RLIS and SRSA, so that it can make an informed decision about whether to apply for SRSA (or withdraw its SRSA application) in light of its RLIS eligibility.

If you have any questions about RLIS or SRSA eligibility, please contact Patrick Carr at 202-708-8196 or by email at patrick.carr@ed.gov.

Sincerely,
Frank T. Brogan
Assistant Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education