

Chairman Parsons and distinguished members of the Governor's Education Reform Commission

My name is **Dr. Michael Wendt** and I am serving my 10th year as a Superintendent in a small rural school District in Niagara County. This afternoon I will offer up to your **Committee 4 areas of concern** as well as solutions to these areas of concern.

*First I would like to Recognize and thank **Senator Flannagan for coming to my rural region, speaking at our rural schools conference and also making himself available to New York State superintendents at our last conference. Your willingness to meet us and gain a better understanding of our problem has been recognized by many of us working in the trenches.***

We understand the need to bring costs regarding education under control. Please start with the issues of **unfunded mandates**. With all the talk of mandate reform we have seen **many recent new mandates**. School accountability for **cyber-bullying, APPR, Dignity for All, 5th yr interscholastic sports competition-Eligibility for disabled students, Freedom of information** copies for all attendees at BOE mtg **staff development related to common core compliance to name only a few**. These ideas may be good ideas, but they come with little or no financial support.

My second area of concern is “**how the Commission will address the fact that schools in New York State are separate, but not equal.**” There is a wide disparity in the range of course offerings and money spent per pupil between **the Rural and Non-Rural** schools in New York State. Rural students are **put at a disadvantage when competing** for the same slots when applying to college.

My third area of concern is regarding the talk **about regional high schools to address this matter**. Will greater bureaucracy be the answer? Please do not structure us like the Big 5 unless you wish for our results to emulate the results you are seeing in the Big 5 City Schools. Greater bureaucracy has not served our Large-City schools well.

Fourth- Rural Schools are **being choked out of existence by the significant cuts in funding. Rather than choking us out of existence please consider using Rural schools as a model of “best practice” for the rest of the State.**

Rural Schools are efficient. Rural Schools account for **9.75 % of the student population** in N Y State, but we account for **only 8.25 % of the total student expenditures.**

Rural Schools are getting **great cohort graduation results**. Rural schools show **excellent performance for students in poverty** as well as **excellent performance with our minority population.... And Rural Schools are getting it done at an overall per student expenditure that is often less than the State average** per pupil expenditure.

We know the argument is that **downstate produces the lion's share of State revenue**, but be aware that **upstate rural communities contributes** fresh water, **raw materials for construction and building**, green power, and the **States number one industry-agriculture...** and we also bury and process downstate's **trash and toxic waste**.

Possible solutions

1. Use **rural schools as a model**
 - a. Our **average expenditures** per pupil are often less
 - b. We often **get excellent results with our minority students**
 - c. We often get **excellent results even though poverty is prevalent in our schools** and many of our families qualify for free and reduced lunch
 - d. We have a **great deal of transparency**. With our **small size we cannot sneeze** without people in our community knowing that it happened.
2. Cap **the per pupil expenditures** at the **State Rural School Average**
 - a. You capped the tax rates. **Capping per pupil expenditures** will offer my students the same opportunity for being accepted into universities that often give preference to students who **graduate from schools who are able to offer more (advanced) courses due to with greater wealth**.
3. Please reconsider **how you distribute STAR revenue** so that all students throughout the State equally benefit from the STAR program (in other words please consider not using a geographical factor in sending back revenue to specific areas) Albany, Columbia, duchess, Nassau, NYC, orange, Putnam, Rockland, Saratoga, suffix, ulster, Westchester all get a reimbursement factor of more than one. In Wilson we are reimbursed at a factor of 1
4. Take the **focus off of rural School consolidation** unless it can be shown that there is significant savings with no impact on academic performance after consolidation occurs.
5. **Please do not impose any further mandates on public schools**. In the past year I heard one of our law-makers say, "what if we gave you seven years of no changes in public education, what would that do." I say it would keep my teachers in the classroom and allow all of us to focus on what we are expected to do- educate children.

I am a product of **New York State Public schools**, I completed my undergraduate studies at **Cornell University** and my Doctorate at the **State University of New York at Buffalo**. I have been recognized **locally, regionally and nationally** for my work in education. I have served as the **Chair of the NY State Rural Schools Association** as well as the Section President for **the NY State Public High School Athletic Association**. I am **well-compensated** for my position, however I am one of the **lowest paid superintendents** in the area- even though I will begin my **11th yr of serving as Superintendent** in the same district. I have kept **my salary frozen** for the last three yrs.

I ask the Commission to charge our governor with the task of lobbying the legislature for equal educational opportunities for all NY State students. Please see to it that **Free and Appropriate Public Education** is **Fair and Appropriate** for all students attending **public schools in NY State?**

Thank you

