

Newcomb Central School District's Effort to Reform Education in Rural New York

By

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Imagine in the spring of 2007, a school district losing two students! Not an issue, well, what if that represented almost 4% of the total population. This is where I was as a brand new superintendent. Our population declined from 57 students to 55 students in our K-12 district. Often we hear of consolidation, but Newcomb, located in the heart of the Adirondacks, is so isolated, this was next to impossible. We have worked diligently over the years to consolidate numerous services including the office, sports, summer school, transportation, distant learning and special education. I began to take a business look at the school, and soon understood that the answer was not to consolidate, but to grow. How do rural schools do this? Newcomb set out to reform our school through a growth model, but in fact, we have redefined our very district.

As a third generation "Adirondacker" with an adopted son of color, I know that our schools and communities lack racial, cultural and religious diversity. It is for this reason I first choose international students as our method of reform. When I began my research I was amazed to find that international students are the 3rd largest industry in Australia and in 2008 a \$6.5 billion dollar a year industry in Canada. I eventually realized that this is not only a Newcomb solution, but a promising one for all underutilized rural schools. For example, in our school district I have a building which once housed 300 plus students. We have desks, books and teachers! All I needed was students, and additional revenue would also be welcomed. In bringing F-1 Academic Visa students, we have brought diversity, academic stimulation and revenue to our district. Over the last 6 years we have brought 60 students from 25 different countries. This also drew neighboring students, and we have seen our district grow over 90% in just six years.

It is difficult to share in minutes the benefits of students from Iraq, Palestinian Israel, Russia, China, Vietnam, Bangladesh, Lebanon, etc. Our young lady from Iraq was able to share perspectives not possible in a book. Having a discussions on Vietnam with a student from Hanoi and a French student, brought alive our studies. Today, having a student from Zimbabwe, a country with an average life span of 40 years, and such hyper-inflation that money must be carried in bag, cannot happen in the North Country without our unique program. Newcomb Central School has grown numerically, matured socially, blossomed culturally, and been enriched academically. We would continue this program without financial remuneration, but it is wonderful to have host families reimbursed for their expenses, and the district to grow financially.

There is a hindrance that needs to be addressed. Current Federal law permits foreign student to enroll in public secondary schools for **only** one year. They can go to private schools as long as they would like, but we are restricted in public schools to one year. There is a bill on both the Senate and House side to correct this injustice. Senators Schumer, Collins, Kerry, and Leahy are co-sponsoring the bill in the

Senate. Congressmen Owens and Gibson are co-sponsoring the bill in the House. It is important for New York State to get behind this effort. This bill alone has the possibility of filling thousands and thousands of empty seats in New York State, and financially impacting our public school districts by tens of millions of dollars. It is also important to realize that if these students stay in public schools for multiple years, graduate from our high schools, then they will attend our New York State universities. Because of the improvement of their language skills, our universities will not need to pour the resources they currently must into English as a Second Language classes and support.

Newcomb is also at the forefront of post-secondary credit in high school. This reform is possible through a close collaboration with North Country Community College. All of our core teachers are adjunct professors of North Country, and the teachers meet the requirements of both the college and our district. We have raised the bar high, and students are responding. We have had numerous students go to college as second semester sophomores. While 55 college credits is a remarkable feat, I would love the support of the Governor, the Commissioner of Education, and this committee to become the first public school to issue to their seniors both Regent Diplomas and Associate of Science Degrees in Math and Science. This is possible and can happen within the next few years. Your support will make this possible!

Finally, my vision does not end with these two reforms. We have a state that has in urban places classrooms that are overcrowded and students that are not academically successful. While in rural areas, we have underutilized schools with thousands and thousands of empty seats. Their success is documented in our 3-8th Grades Assessment scores, our Regent scores, and our graduation rates. The state's answer to the problem is to go down the street and build a charter school. We are investing large amounts of money in the possibility of a solution. My vision is to see students from these schools come to rural New York. For the resources and monies used to send students to questionable charter schools, the students could have the opportunity to go to proven solutions- rural public schools. I would love to have 20-25 students come from urban areas. I have no doubt these students could be housed and educated for what is spent to educate in a charter school. Urban students are being placed in newly created classrooms, when we already have the classrooms. I would love to see a meaningful discussion on this topic that could mutually benefit students from both urban and rural areas.