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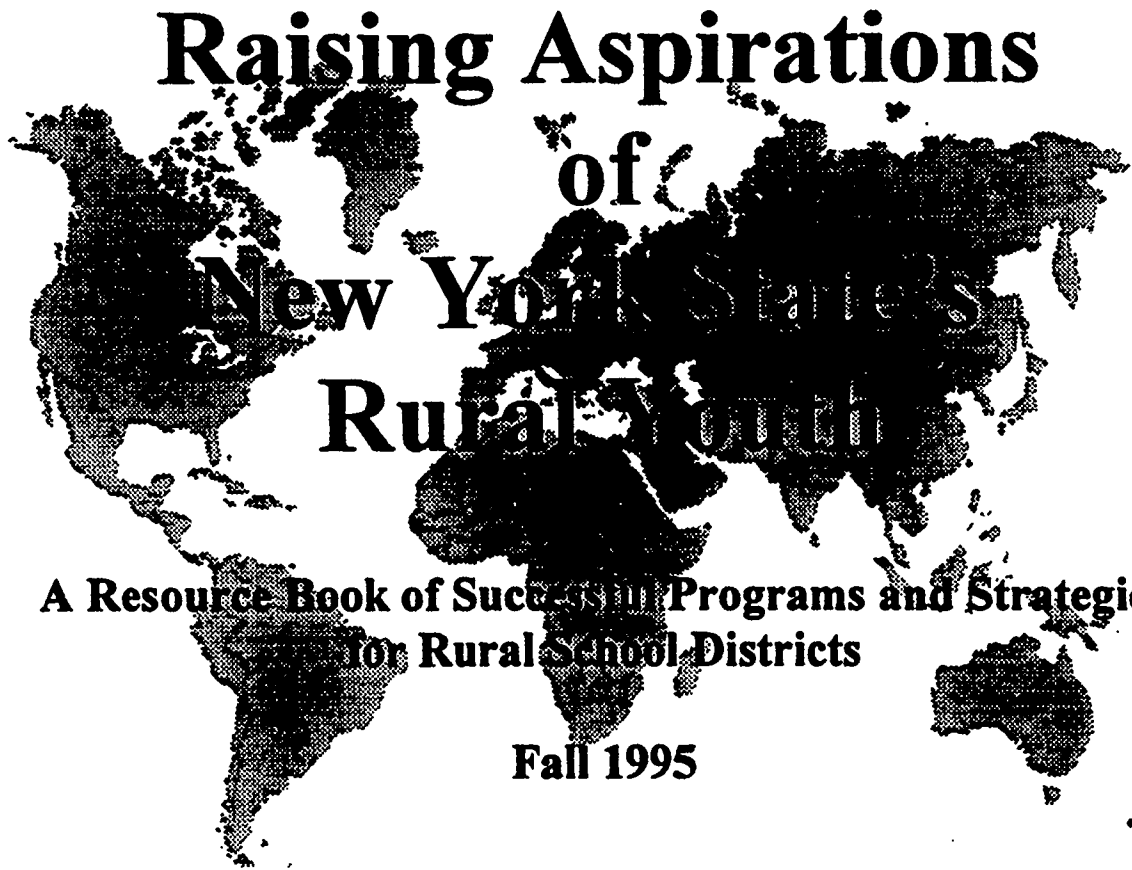
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## ABSTRACT

The Rural Education Advisory Committee, established in 1990 by the New York State Legislative Commission on Rural Resources, was asked to identify and disseminate information on raising the aspirations and increasing educational opportunities for rural students. An examination of effective rural New York school districts led to identification of indicators of high student aspiration: high annual attendance rate, low annual suspension rate, low annual dropout rate, high percentage of students receiving regents diplomas, high percentage of students planning to attend college, and high percentage of students taking advanced regents examinations. Indicators of low community resources included high percentage of children living in poverty, low expenditure per pupil, and low index of community wealth based on property value and income. Twenty-two New York rural school districts were identified as having a high number of student aspiration indicators, while at the same time being in the lowest quarter of community resources. Data from interviews revealed two broad categories of program initiatives: school-based and community-based. School-based initiatives included raising standards of achievement, setting sights on college, focusing on early reading, recognizing success and building self-esteem, innovative grouping of students, staff involvement, and use of computer technology. Community-based activities included business involvement, educational partnerships, working with community organizations, and engaging parents. Appendices include a list of participating school districts and contacts, examples of strategies and activities implemented by school districts, and descriptions of 16 promising programs. Each description includes school district, contact person, targeted students, description of program or strategy, brief history of program, and what is needed for program replication. (LP)



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Legislative Commission on Rural Resources

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## **Section 1. Introduction**

### ***Background***

New York State is largely rural by land use. By State statute there are 44 rural counties and a number of rural towns in metropolitan counties. According to the 1990 census, approximately 3.5 million New Yorkers live in these rural areas. Because rural areas comprise such an important segment of New York State, the state legislature created the New York State Legislative Commission on Rural Resources in 1982. In establishing this joint bi-partisan Commission, the legislature declared that "...the economic and social well-being of the people of the state is clearly related to the state's rural resources." At its inception, the Commission was given four primary areas of responsibility.

### ***Responsibilities of the Legislative Commission on Rural Resources***

- ▶ To examine the impact of rural resources upon the state's economy;
- ▶ To review existing laws and regulations as they pertain to rural resources;
- ▶ To assess the effectiveness of programs specifically addressed to rural resource needs and problems;
- ▶ To make such recommendations to the legislature for action as it determines necessary for the enhancement and protection of the state's rural resources.

In recognizing the key role that education can play in improving the State's rural communities, the Commission sponsored legislation in 1990 that established the Rural Education Advisory Committee. This Advisory Committee is a public/private collaborative body that includes school administrators, government officials, parents and program operators. It was

asked to identify and disseminate information on raising the aspirations and increasing opportunities for rural students, their families and communities. The Advisory Committee concentrates its efforts on the pursuit of excellence and equity for rural students.

To carry out this important task, the Rural Education Advisory Committee initiated a project on interagency collaboration and cooperation. The purpose of this project was to identify programs and strategies that are used by school districts which have been successful in raising the aspirations of their students, families and, if possible, communities in general. As part of this project, school districts in New York State and programs across the nation were examined to determine those programs and strategies which appear to have achieved better academic results with their students.

### *Defining "Raising Aspirations"*

The first task in undertaking this project was the development of a working definition of "raising aspirations". It was important to select some objective measures which would give a good picture of the overall success that a district was able to achieve with its students. This required two steps: first, identifying the appropriate data elements that could provide comparable information; and second, identifying a unit of analysis small enough to be meaningful in conducting this study.

A number of possible data sources were identified including: the New York State Education Department, the New York State Department of Labor, the New York State Department of Social Services, and the New York State Department of Economic Development. These agencies were selected for examination because each maintains data and information that deals with students, families, and communities. While the information compiled by each of these agencies has value, in most cases it was not useful to this study because, with the exception of the State Education Department, county level data and information is generally the lowest level of data aggregation available. The inability of these county-based data systems to assist in the examination of programmatic impacts at a district or school level made them unsuitable for this project. As a result, it was concluded that the Education Department's interrelated data bases -- available at the school building/school district level -- would be the most useful in creating a

working definition of raising aspirations.

A thorough review of the Education Department's files was undertaken to identify those data elements which in some way could be considered related to a community or school district which had high aspirations for itself and its students. Those indicators were then coupled with data elements which could indicate districts or communities where a lack of resources would be expected to limit the aspirations of students and families. The goal was to identify districts that are doing well and succeeding under difficult circumstances.

Two lists of indicators were developed, one for high aspirations and another for low community resources. Those lists were as follows:

***Indicators of High Student Aspirations***

- ▶ High Annual Attendance Rate
- ▶ Low Annual Suspension Rate
- ▶ Low Annual Dropout Rate
- ▶ High Percentage of Students Receiving Regents Diplomas
- ▶ High College Going Rate
- ▶ High Percentage of Students Taking Advanced Regents Examinations

***Indicators of Low Community Resources***

- ▶ High Percentage of Children Living in Poverty
- ▶ Low expenditure Per Pupil
- ▶ Low Index of Community Wealth Based on Property Value and Income

### *Identifying School Districts for Review*

Forty-four of New York State's sixty-two counties are defined in statute as being in whole or in part "rural." Accordingly, the selection of districts appropriate for this review was initially limited to those 44 counties. That initial pool was reduced to districts in 27 counties that fit a more restrictive definition of "rural," used by the State Education Department, i.e. those districts not located within a Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area (SMSA) or city school district.

With that as a base, further refinement was undertaken. It was decided that the most valuable information could be drawn from those districts that exhibit both the highest aspiration indicators and the lowest community resource indicators. To meet those criteria, calculations were made at the 75th percentile for each indicator. This meant that only those districts that were in the top one-quarter of performers (e.g. high Regents diploma rates, low dropout rates) among all districts, while at the same time being in the lowest one quarter of community resources (e.g. high poverty index, low expenditure per pupil) would be selected. Thirty-two districts met these criteria. Districts were then examined to get a geographical balance. The final result was that a total of twenty-two districts in New York State were selected for interviews.

Twenty-one of those twenty-two districts participated in extensive telephone interviews, with four also hosting on-site visits. While the schools selected via this methodology represented a feasible number to survey, it should be noted that undoubtedly there are districts falling just above the twenty-fifth percentile of community resources which may perform even better on aspirations indicators.

The authors also recognize that the aspirations indicators of "college-going," "Regent's diploma rates," and "advanced regent's exam rates," tend to select schools doing well by college-bound students. It is equally important to recognize that many schools are making strides raising the aspirations and achievement levels of students planning to enter the working world immediately after graduation. However, for the purposes of this study it was necessary to select variables already available in State data bases.

### ***Summary of Information Obtained From Successful Districts***

The education of students in rural areas is too often characterized by stereotypes. Rural students are not expected to achieve as well academically, nor are they expected to take on the challenges of higher education. As the conversations with school personnel in the selected districts got underway, it became clear that they emphatically reject those stereotypes and have actively undertaken a broad scope of programs and strategies that provide opportunities for students to have academic success. Districts that have had success in raising the aspirations of their students and families are characterized by high levels of activity and an entrepreneurial spirit. Most striking was the fact that successful districts tend to undertake a wide range of activities that touch on virtually every aspect of school life.

For example, some projects were initiated to address the needs of students prior to entering kindergarten, while other projects were designed to smooth the transition for high school students to further education and the world of work. Efforts were made to reach out to members of the community to help develop broader support and participation in the education of all students. In addition, many successful districts sought out innovative activities involving telecommunications, new teaching methods and expanded partnerships.

In reviewing the wealth of material provided by the participating districts two broad categories of program initiatives began to emerge: School-Based Programs and Strategies; and Community-Based Programs and Strategies. The following sections of this Guidebook will list and describe some of the initiatives employed in each of these categories.



## **Section 2.** **School-Based Programs and Strategies**

Local school boards, administrators, teachers, counselors, and other school related personnel are most directly responsible for the success of students in their districts. While both the state and federal governments have roles to play in the areas of funding and the development of standards, the educational system has been designed to encourage and respect local control. Districts that have demonstrated success in raising the aspirations of their students recognize the positive impact they can have by utilizing their local control to implement programs and strategies that meet the needs of all students within their districts.

Most of the activities they have initiated take place within the school building or district. Many of the successful strategies that have been put in place require little or no additional funding. While a number of unique school-based approaches have been attempted, they share a common emphasis on expanding the horizons of students and staff, and focusing on the pursuit of excellence. In general these efforts help students to strive for higher levels of achievement by raising their sights, providing support, and using new approaches and technologies.

### *Categories of School-Based Initiatives*

- ▶ Raising Standards of Achievement
- ▶ Setting Sights on College
- ▶ Focus on Early Reading
- ▶ Recognizing Success and Building Self-Esteem
- ▶ Innovative Grouping of Students
- ▶ Staff Involvement
- ▶ Computers/Technology and Other Innovations

### ***Raising Standards of Achievement***

One of the most common perceptions in education is that there are some students who are capable of succeeding with challenging subject matter, while others should be given simpler courses that do not have high rigor, but are "good enough." This has resulted in programs being designed around the differing expectations that schools have for students. Minimal requirements are established for students to obtain course credit, and to graduate from high school. High achievers are expected to move well beyond the minimal requirements, but others are not challenged with more difficult requirements. The majority of schools that are successful in raising the aspirations of their students have rejected that concept. These successful schools have taken affirmative steps to raise standards and expectations for all students.

At the high school level in New York State there are two broad categories of courses. These courses are commonly known as *Regents Level* courses and *General Track* courses. The primary distinction is that students taking Regents courses are required to pass a statewide examination in order to obtain credit, while students engaged in general track course work take examinations that are developed locally. Generally speaking, the Regents level examinations are more rigorous and require a higher level of competency on the part of the student than do the examinations developed locally. In a typical school in New York State, some students are engaged in Regents level courses while others work in the general track.

However, many of the schools that have had success in raising aspirations have adopted a strategy known as **heterogeneous grouping**, which combines groups of students who previously would have been separated due to different levels of achievement. This insures that all students are engaged in course work with high standards and expectations. Schools using this approach have eliminated non-Regents courses and require all students to engage in Regents-level work. Most of the districts have eliminated (or are moving toward eliminating) all non-Regents courses, while others have retained separate non-Regents courses only for math or science. Administrators report that some initial resistance to this approach was overcome once students and their parents saw the results. In order to ensure that this approach did not generate inordinate fear of failure, many districts allowed students to take non-Regents examinations after completing the Regents-level courses. Administrators reported that providing this "safety net" to students greatly

alleviated their fears and led to many students taking the Regents exams, knowing that a different exam was still available as a backup.

Another approach utilized by some school districts was **raising the score for passing grades from 65 to 70**. Like the move toward heterogeneous grouping, this met with some initial resistance which was overcome by ongoing communications with students and parents. An individualized in-school tutoring program was put in place to help students meet the higher requirements.

In a similar vein, some districts have **raised the minimum requirements for high school graduation**. Currently, students in New York State are only required to obtain 18.5 credits in order to graduate from high school. Generally speaking, a high school credit is obtained by successfully completing a course that includes at least 180 minutes of instruction per week, or its equivalent. Districts that adopted a higher graduation requirement noted that most of the students already were achieving more than the minimal number of credits necessary for graduation. This was seen as ample proof that a higher requirement could be met. In these cases it was common to require up to an additional five credits before a student could graduate.

In a related approach to raising standards some of the districts reported **increasing the number of class periods in a day**. This was done to allow students to take advantage of a broader range of opportunities, and was seen as a good way of helping them to meet increased graduation requirements.

### ***Setting Sights on College***

Often students from rural districts are expected to end their formal education with a high school diploma. College-level education is sometimes seen as an unlikely path for students in rural communities. This lower expectation is the result of many factors. In many instances there are fewer role models for rural students because their parents and other members of their families did not attend college. In addition, as with the overall stereotypes about ability to participate in rigorous academic preparation, there is a general belief that college-level work may be too difficult for rural students.

Many of the school districts that have had success in raising aspirations have made the

connection with higher education a major emphasis of their work. These districts have raised their students' aspirations by demonstrating that college is an achievable, realistic option for their futures. The major strategies that have been employed to meet this goal are **advanced placement courses, and college visitation and counseling.**

The single most frequently cited initiative undertaken by the districts involved in this study was the use of advanced placement courses. Almost two-thirds of these successful districts said they have developed strong relationships with neighboring colleges and universities which allow their students to earn college credits through a national test while still in high school. One district reported that students have earned up to 24 credit hours while still in high school. Among other positive impact, this approach can result in a significant savings for students. For example, one district reported that 38 students earned over 300 college credits at an estimated savings of \$200,000 in tuition.

Another district established a program called the *3-1-3 program*. This program allows students to complete a high school diploma and obtain a four year degree within seven years of entering ninth grade. The Junior year in high school becomes a bridge to college. Students graduate from high school after the third year and go directly into a four year college.

Many districts have developed agreements under which their teachers are certified as adjunct professors at a local college and are able to teach courses to high school students right at the student's home school. In other cases school districts have made arrangements for the students to leave their home schools to attend classes on campus.

Some districts have also begun to experiment with technology, by using *distance learning* as a means of offering college courses to students. Distance learning allows students to participate in classes that are held in a different location and "beamed" into the school through video conferencing technology. Through this technology, instruction can be broadcast through the use of video cameras and satellite communications from one location to another.

Other initiatives in the area of raising students' sights toward college are designed to give students a greater awareness and understanding of college life. In some districts students take field trips to all of the colleges within their areas and meet with faculty and students. These trips are designed to overcome the student's concern that they are not "college material," brought on

by the fact that no one in their family has ever attended. One unique approach to overcoming this problem involved using high school teachers as educational role models. In this district, high school teachers took students on tours of the colleges or universities from which they had graduated. This program was cited as a good way to provide a role model for the students and was also a very strong morale booster for the teachers. Another frequently used strategy brings representatives of colleges into the high school on a regular basis to explain their programs and assist students in the application process.

### ***Focus on Early Reading***

The ability to read is one of the most critical foundation skills a student can attain. Success throughout a person's educational career is dependent on his or her capacity to understand written materials in various formats. As districts have undertaken steps to raise standards and expectations for all students, the importance of strong reading comprehension skills becomes more evident. Most of the districts that have had success in raising the aspirations of their students cited the need to start early in building a strong academic foundation. Focusing on reading achievement in the earliest years, K-2, was the most frequently mentioned approach.

In some districts the focus on reading was built around specific programs that have been tried and tested throughout the nation. Two of the programs currently in use are *the Reading Recovery Program*, and *Reading to Write/Writing to Read*. Reading Recovery provides students in the early grades who are reading at or below grade level with an individualized reading program. It provides temporary help through daily, 30-minute lessons over a period averaging 12 to 16 weeks in first grade. Students work one-on-one with a trained instructor. The program teaches life long reading strategies and skills which will prevent remediation later on. The Reading to Write/Writing to Read program is an effort that is targeted toward students in the earliest years. It focuses on providing students with an understanding of phonetics as a means of enhancing their abilities in the areas of reading and writing.

The focus on reading in the early years is seen as a key element in a long term strategy to raise aspirations. In one district, the school board, administration and faculty have decided that

kindergarten and first grade should have a stronger academic focus. They have established a goal to have all students reading prior to entering the first grade.

### ***Recognizing Success and Building Self-Esteem and Confidence***

One barrier that students face in attempting to achieve at higher levels is a lack of confidence in their own ability. At times, children are held back by their own belief that they are not good enough, or smart enough to succeed. Many of the districts that have had success in raising aspirations have recognized the need to **help students feel better about themselves and their abilities**. These districts have initiated programs designed to raise students' self-esteem, give them recognition for positive achievements, and prepare them to participate in public forums. These programs target students of all grade levels but often focus on esteem-building in the earlier years.

One such program that many districts cited is called the *Morning Program*. This program brings students in kindergarten through third grade together for a brief assembly at the beginning of the school day. The sessions are designed to be upbeat, fun-filled events that are often organized around themes. Students participate by singing or putting on short skits or performances. Parents, grandparents and neighbors are invited to attend whenever possible. The students are invited to introduce their guests to the entire assembly. Some districts hold the morning program every day, while others hold it once per week.

Another program that was cited is called *Catch-a Kid*. In this program, all school personnel are asked to identify students whose behavior is worthy of recognition. These students are "caught" doing something good. They are given a small award, such as a pin or a sticker, to wear during the day to acknowledge their good behavior. They also are invited to participate in a recognition event such as a special lunch or field trip, that is designed to be fun for the student.

Districts have developed many other strategies to build self-esteem. For example, one district sponsors an *Annual Learning Fair* that allows students to showcase their work. Each class takes on a science project and develops experiments or displays that demonstrate an understanding of the subject area. The event has been highly publicized and draws as many as 1000 parents and other members of the community each year.

Another district created a special initiative called *Personal Responsibility In Daily Efforts (PRIDE)*. PRIDE is a theme-oriented program that stresses individual behavior. Throughout the year all students are involved in a series of themes, such as "together we can make a difference", or "do your best." There is a theme kick-off at an assembly, and the theme is reinforced through newsletters, workshops, posters etc. The students and teachers establish individual goals in the form of a contract. One of the important elements of this program is the involvement of parents.

While these recognition and self-esteem building programs are designed to meet the needs of all students, many of the successful districts also recognize the need to have counseling programs in place that are targeted to students with special needs. One such initiative is the *Primary Mental Health Program* which focuses on students in K-2. This program involves a team approach that includes teachers, counselors, and specially trained teacher assistants. They meet regularly to discuss and respond to students who are facing various problems.

Another program that is designed to deal with students' unique needs is called *Banana Splits*. This program, which was cited by a number of districts, is a counseling effort that helps students deal with divorce, separation and death in the family. It is a program that is used with students throughout elementary school.

### *Innovative Grouping of Students*

Students in rural school districts, like students everywhere, learn at different rates. This poses a challenge for administrators and teachers in trying to keep all students engaged. At times this can be particularly difficult in small rural schools, where there are not large enough numbers of students at a particular grade level to allow for the creation of different groupings, geared toward the progress of each student.

To overcome this challenge, some of the successful districts have grouped their students together in innovative ways. The most common methods of grouping are **multi-age classrooms** and **multi-class projects**. The multi-age classroom approach was used primarily in the earliest years. In some schools, students were grouped together in first and second grade, in others students were grouped together in second and third grades. The advantage to this approach is

that it allows students to learn at different paces for different subject matter. It also allows two or more teachers to be involved with each group of children. Multi-age classrooms usually have a teacher's aide as well. As a result, within each multi-age class there are a number of different teams of students working together on various projects and tasks.

Some districts have also begun grouping students through the use of multi-class projects. In those cases, students from different classes work on special projects together. This allows students of different abilities to learn from each other. Often the projects will be multi-disciplinary in nature, combining various subjects such as history, science, creative writing and art.

One district cited another innovative program that matches students of different ages and abilities. This program is called *Big Brother or Big Sister*. It works by pairing an upper grade student with a lower grade student. The older student might help the younger student with specific homework assignments, or may just help the student by reading stories.

### ***Staff Involvement***

Many of the districts that have had great success in raising the aspirations of their students are constantly implementing new programs and initiatives. They also are characterized by efforts that try to focus on the needs and progress of individual students. These two approaches, constant change and individualization, have a great impact on school staff and can only be successful with their full involvement and support. Districts have achieved this by **taking a team approach and emphasizing staff development.**

Successful districts have used various teams for a number of different purposes. Teams have been established accomplish a number of different tasks including goal setting, curriculum development, and to address attitudinal problems. For example, one district has established Child Study Teams that involve teachers, social workers, psychologists and parents. The Child Study Team is responsible for developing curriculum and learning activities for students, particularly in elementary school.

Pupil Services Teams have also been developed to deal with attitudinal problems of individual middle school students. This Pupil Services approach brings together teachers and counselors to develop individualized plans for the student. These teams focus on devising



strategies to help students who are having problems in specific areas. Teachers who have had success with the particular student are key members of each Pupil Services Team.

In addition, many districts utilize teams to help set overall policy. At times, teachers, school personnel and parents are asked to help develop short and long range goals. The shared decision making model was cited as an important activity by many districts.

The reliance on staff is a key component in the effort to raise student's aspirations. As a result, the general topic of *staff development* was among the most frequently cited by successful districts. Virtually every administrator talked about the need to provide in-service training on a regular basis. Some districts have identified separate funding sources as a way of ensuring that training opportunities are available to all teachers. For example, one district is using a portion of an endowment to create a training fund. Another district encourages teachers and other staff to seek out training opportunities on their own by providing them with salary credits and other incentives.

### ***Computers/Technology and Other Innovations***

As the pace of change in the world quickens, the demands placed on the education system increase. Children need to be prepared to successfully compete in an economy that relies heavily on technology. They should also develop a stronger understanding of the world around them.

One area of activity that was frequently cited by the successful districts was an emphasis on computers and the use of technology. Most districts have found ways to provide access to computers for all students. Particular emphasis was placed on **developing computer proficiency** in the early grades. This is intended to help students acquire the ability to use computers as tools for writing, computation, and locating and using information. Wherever possible districts placed multiple computers in each classroom. Where that was not possible, *computer labs* were developed and put in place. All students were given access to these labs and were provided with specialized instruction in the use of computers.

Funding was cited as a significant barrier to developing and maintaining up-to-date computer and technology programs. Strategies that districts used to overcome this barrier included special budget appropriations, foundation funding and donations. One district floated a

separate technology bond issue that provided funds for a number of related initiatives.

Some districts have also begun to invest in other kinds of technology such as *satellite dishes and multi-media libraries*. Satellite dishes have enabled schools to take advantage of distance learning opportunities. They have been used to add additional courses that would not otherwise be available because there are not enough students to justify establishing a course. In some cases, the distance learning approach has been used to connect high school students with college-level courses. This innovative approach has allowed Advanced Placement credit to be accumulated with colleges that are not in the immediate geographic area.

Some other innovative approaches that are currently being employed include *Early Grade Foreign Languages*, in which elementary grade students begin work on a foreign language, and a special math program called *Math Their Way*. This math program emphasizes developing an understanding of math concepts. It uses a broad range of objects and materials that can be physically manipulated by the students to help them visualize and comprehend math concepts.

Another innovation cited by one district is called the *Homework Helpline*. This is a special telephone program that allows students and parents to call in and get information regarding homework assignments.

### **Section 3.**

## **Community-Based Programs and Strategies**

The great majority of educational activities still occur within traditional settings in school buildings. Students spend most of their time in classroom settings learning from teachers who specialize in a particular field or have experience working with a specific grade level. This has contributed to the development of an educational system that is somewhat isolated. Recently, educators have begun to see the value in expanding the concept of education beyond the confines of individual school buildings. New York State and other states and localities have used the proverb "it takes a whole village to raise a child" to express this new concept in education.

The idea of reaching beyond the confines of a single school building or district is especially relevant for rural school districts. Often, students in rural districts have more limited opportunities than their urban and suburban counterparts. This is because many smaller districts are unable to offer a wide range of experiences. To compensate for a lack of opportunity many successful districts have focused on reaching into their communities to obtain more resources and to expand the experiences available to their students. These community efforts allow districts to provide additional services, create additional educational options, and connect students' education with real life experiences.

#### *Categories of Community-Based Activities*

- ▶ Business Involvement
- ▶ Partnering With Other Educational Institutions
- ▶ Working With Community Organizations
- ▶ Engaging Parents
- ▶ Other Initiatives in the Community

### ***Business Involvement***

One of the greatest resources that a school can tap into is the local business community. The help and support of employers is important to school districts for many different reasons. The traditional view of business involvement with schools has been limited to the donation of funds, the purchase of equipment and uniforms, or the sponsorship of social events. However, districts that have had success in raising the aspirations of their students have begun to work with the business community through a broad range of activities.

A number of districts are using business people as teachers. The employers are asked to come into classrooms at all different levels to work directly with students. The business people are able to teach the students by emphasizing practical experiences. For example, two districts mentioned utilizing the CHOICES program. Under this program, business people work with at-risk students in middle school and high school. The focus of the program is employment opportunities and implications. Students receive instruction and advice regarding real life situations such as budgeting, cost of living changes, etc.

Another district has established a *Business in the Classroom Program*. This program attempts to create a longer term interaction between the students and the business by matching volunteers with classrooms for a period of six months. The business volunteer works with the class on a regular basis throughout the time period.

Businesses are also frequently asked to help schools or districts by providing recognition and awards to individual students. Prizes have been donated for various academic and non-academic achievements. As an example, in one district a local resort offers a special day for any student who achieves a certain level of academic success. These students spend the day at the resort and are honored at an awards banquet that evening. This program has been operating for a number of years and is highly valued by the students who look forward to participating each year. In a similar vein, a project sponsored by the New York State Department of Labor called *Report Card Pride*, enlists a wide range of businesses in the community to provide incentives to students through donated awards.

Businesses are also helping students to gain a better understanding of the career

opportunities that may be available to them. In some cases, districts ask businesses to participate in career day events. These events bring businesses into schools to talk about job opportunities and educational or skill requirements. Other programs such as the School and Business Alliance provide a complete range of business related activities. These activities include mentoring, job shadowing, internships and work experiences.

Another way that successful districts have involved businesses is by asking them to provide technical expertise. Businesses have volunteered to assist schools in developing long range plans and in modernizing administrative structures. One particular area of expertise that businesses have provided to some rural districts is in the area of technology. A few districts cited the critical role played by local businesses in developing technology plans and serving on technology committees.

#### ***Partnering With Other Educational Institutions***

One of the problems faced by rural school districts is the inability to provide a large variety of course offerings or educational opportunities. In situations where only a few high school students are interested in pursuing a specialized or advanced course, small districts are usually unable to accommodate them. The advent of distance learning has helped districts to overcome this disadvantage. By partnering with other school districts through distance learning, students are able to access virtually any course. One school acts as the host school for a particular course, while other schools are able to enroll students who will attend the course through video conferencing. A number of successful districts have begun using this kind of distance learning strategy, particularly in the high school grades.

Higher educational institutions have also emerged as key partners for school districts in rural areas across the State. Many districts have developed relationships with community colleges and other institutions through the development of advanced placement programs. As discussed earlier, these programs allow high school students to obtain college credits. This has helped students to see that they can succeed at college-level work.

Because so many students from rural areas are unfamiliar with the realities of college life, another way that partnerships with higher education institutions have been valuable is by

providing high school students with an awareness of college opportunities. For example, in one such program, students in their junior year of high school visit six major colleges. This exposure has been seen as invaluable in raising students aspirations to include higher education. Many other successful districts regularly schedule visits and tours of colleges or universities within their immediate geographic area.

In a similar effort to provide students with an awareness of college opportunities, one district has worked with a local college to develop an *Upward Bound Program*. This program is unique because it begins involving students prior to their entry into high school. It targets eighth and ninth grade students from families with no college experience. Those students work with college representatives two or three days each week. They receive tutoring, instruction in study skills, and information on possible careers. The students then participate in a four week summer experience. That experience is patterned after outward-bound programs and includes outdoor activities such as backpacking.

Some districts have also entered into partnerships with higher education institutions as a means of providing new staff development opportunities for their teachers. One such partnership is called *Project Seed*. Under this project, elementary school teachers work with University personnel in the area of science. The elementary teachers receive training in new methods of teaching science through "hands on" techniques.

### ***Working With Community Organizations***

Some students in rural schools could benefit from a wide range of services or interventions. Often, the schools are unable to provide the needed services on their own. To help meet the needs of those students, some of the successful rural districts have developed strong partnerships with community-based organizations.

One of the most commonly used partners is the *County Youth Bureau*. Youth bureaus were cited as providing resources and programs for teen parenting centers, recreation programs and special initiatives for at-risk students. In one district the youth bureau helped the district create a teen parenting center that had on-site day care. This program provided courses on parenting to both the mother and father of the child. Parents could only take advantage of the day

care service if they were attending school.

In another district the *YWCA* assisted the district in establishing a latch-key program. This program provided a safe, healthy environment for children of working parents after normal school hours. Substance abuse was another area where school districts sought help from other organizations in the community. Local drug and alcohol abuse programs were enlisted to provide preventative services as well as counseling and treatment for students in need of these specialized interventions.

### ***Engaging Parents***

The most important support system an individual student can have is his or her family. When parents are interested and engaged in their child's education, the student inevitably achieves at a higher level. Parents may take on many roles in their children's education. They can act as role models, coaches, resources and helpers. While the commitment may often be there on the part of the parents, in some cases parents' lack of personal educational experience may inhibit their ability to fully help their children.

Some districts have recognized the critical role individual parents can play in the progress of their children. In addition, many of these districts have also come to see parents in general as a valuable resource in helping the district move forward. Many of these districts have begun to develop strategies that bring parents into closer contact with the schools and give them a significant role in planning and activities.

One of the ways districts have involved parents is through the creation of parental advisory councils, Parent Teacher Associations (PTA) and Parent Teacher Organizations (PTO). These groups can be established to deal with a broad range of topics impacting all students in the school district or they can be established around a particular issue or grade level. For example, in one district an advisory council was formed for the middle school. This council includes parents and school personnel. They meet regularly to discuss and try to solve middle school problems related to curriculum, climate and discipline. It helps increase common expectations between school and parent.

In another district parents, through the PTO, have been involved in sponsoring a large

number of activities. A *Back-to-School Night* is held annually to bring parents and the community into the school buildings to see the facilities first hand and to gain a better understanding of the work being undertaken. Ninety-seven percent of the parents in the district have attended this event. They have also sponsored a grandparents luncheon which is well attended. This same parents group has been responsible for developing summer recreation and computer camp programs.

### ***Other Initiatives in the Community***

Districts have been able to find resources, both financial and programmatic, in a number of different places. At times they may develop a specialized program with a single agency in the community, while at other times they may receive resources from a philanthropist or community-spirited business. Some districts are adept at taking typical activities and turning them into something that has a greater value for their students. Each of these approaches and strategies can help raise the aspirations of rural students and their families.

One of the best ways of providing incentives for students to succeed is through the award of scholarships. Some of the successful districts have been fortunate enough to have significant sums of money left to them upon the death of a community leader or school alumnus. Districts have used these funds to provide scholarships to their graduates. In one of the most well financed cases, any high school graduate will receive a minimum of \$1000 if he or she goes on to college. While few districts have access to that level of funding, some have been able to find a local person or business to provide funds for a small scholarship that could help defray the cost of tuition or books.

Another innovative approach undertaken by some districts is developing community partnerships that provide hands on experiences for students. In one such program a district worked with the local cable television company and some local businesses to create T.V. production opportunities for students. The students develop and produce various programs that are shown on the local public access channel. These shows include local interest and sporting events. Students learn about television production from employees of the cable company.

*Project Appeal* is another example of a program that provides hands-on experiences for



students. In this program at-risk students learn through their involvement in housing rehabilitation. They spend their mornings in academic classes, and their afternoons on a job site restoring old dilapidated housing in low income areas. When the reconstruction or renovation is complete, the house is sold for a profit. This program is designed to give students a sense of accomplishment and motivate them to continue their studies. Project Appeal was initiated with a foundation grant, but has now moved toward self sufficiency with the profits from house sales.

In keeping with the importance of reaching all students and beginning with the earliest years, some districts have developed partnerships targeted specifically to the need of kindergarten and pre-kindergarten students. *Comprehensive Pre-K* programs have been established by some districts. These programs involve the county health department and others. Parents are involved in the effort to ensure that their children are prepared for kindergarten. Visits to the home establish links between parents, school personnel and community resources. A similar program called *Jump Start* focuses on the needs of students who are considered at-risk upon entering kindergarten. The program is co-sponsored with Head Start. It provides the students and their families with a three week extended orientation to kindergarten.

Another approach taken by many districts was to enhance the value of existing initiatives. The most commonly cited example of this approach was in the area of field trips. Most of the interviewees stressed that students in rural areas do not have the same level of exposure to different experiences as do their urban and suburban counterparts. This lack of exposure can be in the area of career opportunities, higher education, or cultural and civic affairs. To address this lack of opportunity, districts use field trips as an integral part of their educational strategy. **Field trips are not seen as an add-on activity, but rather are designed to provide specific exposure in areas where students would not otherwise be able to obtain information.**

Many of these other activities which occur in the community are designed to enrich the experiences of students and provide them with a stronger foundation for educational achievement. Developing community contacts and organizing a broad range of programs and activities is a major challenge for any school district, particularly in areas where resources are not as readily available. One district has met this challenge by hiring an *Enrichment Coordinator*. This district attributes much of its success to the work of the coordinator. The administrator believes that this

was the single most important thing the district has done. The coordinator is responsible for developing programs and community linkages for all grade levels, kindergarten through twelve. By focusing exclusively on enrichment activities the coordinator is able to maintain strong connections with businesses and other community partners, and is able to investigate and secure funding through grants and foundations.

## Section 4. Conclusions

The project that led to the creation of this guidebook was not intended to be a traditional research project. While it is safe to assume that the broad array of programs and strategies briefly described in this guidebook have had some relationship to the success enjoyed in the school districts interviewed, there was no effort to delineate individual cause and effect relationships that could meet the test of statistical significance. Instead this project was simply intended to ask for information and ideas from the people who should know best -- the administrators and staff in districts with above average student performance. It is hoped that this information will stimulate other districts to undertake similar initiatives that can be tailored to meet their unique local needs.

Raising the aspirations of students and families is a challenging and rewarding goal for any district to undertake. Rural school districts in New York State are demonstrating great success in achieving that goal. However, many of the districts that are among the most successful did not set out to "raise aspirations." Instead, the administrators, staff, and families were simply looking for new or better ways to improve performance, reduce dropouts or address some other identified problem. Often, their efforts in these areas appear to have an impact beyond the original intentions. **The positive effects of many individual programs and strategies has served to raise the aspirations of all students and families in the district.**

In reviewing the materials and information provided by the successful districts a few overarching themes emerged that are worthy of consideration. First, **many of the programs and initiatives identified are neither costly, nor difficult to put in place.** Very few of the strategies required significant additional resources or extensive planning. Districts usually did not have to seek new or additional funding from their local school budgets. Often, the projects that were put in place drew upon existing resources within the district or the community. The projects generally did not require a great deal of lead time prior to implementation. In fact a significant number of the strategies that were highlighted could be implemented in other districts during the

next school year.

Second, there was no single program or strategy that was identified as the "silver bullet" that could address all of the needs and concerns in rural districts. Rather, every district interviewed was engaged in a number of different activities simultaneously. **The programmatic efforts in these districts were multi-dimensional.** For example, one district talked about early grade reading programs, middle school advisory council, eighth grade science projects, teacher training, elimination of non-Regents courses and the establishment of Advanced Placement courses. In many cases, the message conveyed was that all of this activity created a whole greater than the sum of its parts. Administrators felt that willingness to try new approaches, and the heightened level of activity that followed, generated interest and excitement on the part of the staff, students and parents. This created an overall atmosphere that was conducive to higher expectations and aspirations on the part of the entire community.

The third major theme that came through in the interviews was that **relationship building is an important effort** to undertake. Successful districts have developed strong ties with other districts, other educational institutions, parents, businesses, community leaders and other service providers in their communities. These relationships allow them to draw upon a much larger resource base. At times those additional resources took the form of new funds, while at other times it was in the form of additional services or volunteers. In any event, successful districts have found that expanding the circle of people engaged in the educational enterprise has paid dividends for their students.

The fourth key theme that emerged during the interview process was the importance of staff. In virtually every interview that took place, the role of staff was raised by the administrator. Some of the administrators talked about **staff selection and staff development as the single most important element** in the district's success. Other administrators talked about the need to bring staff into the change process early on to ensure that they felt a direct stake in the outcomes. These districts have come to recognize that new approaches and strategies cannot be implemented effectively without careful attention paid to the training and development of all staff who will be involved in putting initiatives in place.

The effort by the Rural Education Advisory Committee to identify promising practices has

demonstrated that many schools in rural areas of New York State are having success in raising the aspirations of students and their families. It has also demonstrated that there is a wealth of innovation and creativity taking place in large and small districts across the state. Other districts should be able to tap into this valuable experience in order to gain new insights and perspectives. If additional districts are able to learn from and adapt some of these promising approaches, every citizen of New York will be the ultimate beneficiary of the educational excellence that is being displayed in these pace-setting districts.

**Appendix A.  
Identified Districts and Contact Names**

<b>District</b>	<b>Contact</b>	<b>Phone Number</b>
<b>Alfred Almond</b>	<b>Richard Gloss</b>	<b>607-276-2981</b>
<b>Allegheny</b>	<b>Stephen Troskosky</b>	<b>716-373-0060</b>
<b>Angelica</b>	<b>Joseph Barker</b>	<b>716-466-7601</b>
<b>Arkport</b>	<b>Dr. Ralph Kerr</b>	<b>607-295-7471</b>
<b>Bainbridge Guilford</b>	<b>Robert Murphy</b>	<b>607-967-6321</b>
<b>Bolivar</b>	<b>Robert Mountain</b>	<b>716-928-2561</b>
<b>Caledonia-Mumford</b>	<b>Thomas Moran</b>	<b>716-538-6811</b>
<b>Carthage</b>	<b>Kenn Rishel</b>	<b>315-493-0510</b>
<b>Cooperstown</b>	<b>Dr. Douglas Bradshaw</b>	<b>607-547-5364</b>
<b>Delaware Valley</b>	<b>Dr. Charles Grottenthaler</b>	<b>914-887-5301</b>
<b>Delhi</b>	<b>Richard Zajak</b>	<b>607-746-2101</b>
<b>Forestville</b>	<b>J. Richard Rodriguez</b>	<b>716-965-2742</b>
<b>Gorham-Middlesex</b>	<b>Charles Wiltse</b>	<b>716-554-4848</b>
<b>Hamilton</b>	<b>Edmund Backus</b>	<b>315-824-3300</b>
<b>Lisbon</b>	<b>Wayne Chesbrough</b>	<b>315-393-4951</b>
<b>Lowville</b>	<b>William Wormouth</b>	<b>315-376-3544</b>
<b>Norwich</b>	<b>James Walter</b>	<b>607-334-3211</b>
<b>Ogdensburg</b>	<b>James Kelly</b>	<b>315-393-0900</b>
<b>Sharon Springs</b>	<b>Richard Mahar</b>	<b>518-284-2266</b>
<b>Weedsport</b>	<b>Gary Gilchrist</b>	<b>315-834-6637</b>
<b>West Canada Valley</b>	<b>Richard Steet</b>	<b>315-845-8802</b>

**Appendix B.**  
**Examples of Strategies and Activities by District**

District	Strategies and Activities
Alfred Almond	Eliminated Non-Regents, Early Foreign Language, Advanced Placement Classes, Catch-a-Kid, Distance Learning
Allegany	Banana Splits, Self-Esteem Builders, Increased Graduation Requirements, Business Partnerships, SABA, GATEWAY, Substance Abuse, Parental Involvement
Angelica	Computer Classes, field trips, Eliminated Non-Regents
Arkport	Raised Passing Grade to 70, Eliminated Non-Regents, Advanced Placement, College Visits, Heavy Investment in Computers, Whole Language, Staff Commitment, Distance Learning,
Bainbridge Guilford	Reading recovery, Multi-Age Classrooms, Math their Way, Advanced Placement, Satellite Dish, Homework Helpline, CHOICES Program, STEP Program
Bolivar	Reading to Write/Writing to Read, Advance Placement, Project Appeal, Upward Bound, Comprehensive Pre-K
Caledonia-Mumford	Computer Technology Committee, Career Day, College Visitation,
Carthage	Annual Learning Fair, Venture Program, Teen Parenting Center, Public Access TV, YWCA Latch Key Program
Cooperstown	PRIDE Program, Goal Setting, College Visits, Advanced Placement Courses, Caring and Sharing Week
Delaware Valley	Advanced Placement, Heavy Use of Computers, Scholarship Program, Business Support, Villa Roma Day
Delhi	Scholarship Program, Emphasize staff development, Advanced Placement
Forestville	Shared decision making, Math Their Way, Whole Language, Staff Development Plan, Technology Committee, Eliminated Non-Regents, 3-1-3 Program,
Gorham-Middlesex	Emphasis on Staff Training, Whole Language, Eliminated Non-Regents, Advanced Placement,

District	Strategies and Activities
Hamilton	Enrichment Coordinator, Reading Recovery, Primary Mental Health, Eliminated Non-Regents, Advanced Placement, Project Seed, Middle School Advisory Council
Lisbon	K-1 Academic Focus, Eliminated Non-Regents, Field Trips, Library and Media Center, Advanced Placement, Increased to 8 Period Day
Lowville	Focus on Community Involvement, Summer Computer Camp, Jump Start, Back-to-School Night, Grandparents Luncheon, Business Support, Eliminated Non-Regents
Norwich	Multi Age Classrooms/Projects, Eliminated Non-Regents, Advanced Placement, Mind Extension University for Staff Development, Morning Program, World of Work Program, CHOICES Program,
Ogdensburg	Special Education Inclusion, Advanced Placement, Committed Staff, Various Awards and Recognition, Business in the Classroom, Report Card Pride Program, Scholarships, Parental Involvement
Sharon Springs	Field Trips, Morning Program, Writing to read, Recognition for Success, Advanced Placement, Distance Learning, Big Brother/Big Sister Program
Weedsport	Business Partnerships, Intensive teacher recruitment and Hiring, Child Study Teams, Pupil Services teams, Field trips, Computer Labs, Eliminated Non-Regents
West Canada Valley	Morning Program, Banana Splits, Staff Development, Primary Mental Health Project, Advanced Placement, Eliminated Non-Regents, Emphasis on Computers K-12



**Appendix C.**  
**Descriptions of**  
**Promising Programs and Strategies**

**Name of Program/ Strategy:** Catch Kids Being Good

**Name of School District:** Alfred-Almond Central School

**Contact Person for Program/Strategy:** Marcia Lichtman  
**Address:** 6795 Rt. 21 Almond, NY 14804  
**Phone:** (607) 276-2171

**Targeted Students:** Grades Kdg. - 4th grade

**Description of Program/Strategy:** The program seeks to increase the frequency of appropriate school behavior by recognizing and rewarding students who exhibit it regularly. All teachers are equipped with a supply of laminated paper faces stating, "I was caught!" In grades K-2, these are strung on yarn "necklaces," while the third and fourth graders prefer not to wear theirs. When teachers observe instances of behaviors they are trying to increase, they simply award the student a face and thank them for the behavior noted. Primary students wear their necklaces for the remainder of the day and show them off proudly to all; older students write their name on the back and deposit them in a jar. At the end of the week, the jar is emptied and the frequency of being "caught" is recorded on a class checklist. Primary teachers collect the necklaces at the end of each day and record the names of those caught. At the end of each week, a "Citizen of the Week" is named by the teacher based roughly on frequency of observed appropriate behavior. (There is always room for teacher discretion.) These citizens are announced over the public address system each Monday morning, wear a special button signifying their achievement all week, and take home a certificate to their parents proclaiming their selection.

**Brief History of Program:** The program grew out of the need to reduce the frequency of disciplinary referrals to the principal over relatively minor infractions. There was a need to focus more attention on what students were doing right than on what they were doing wrong, and we have found that the students desire to be in the limelight for doing right things has dramatically reduced discipline problems as well as instilling and underlining such desired

**What is needed for replication by another district:** values as respect, responsibility, care of the building, school spirit, etc.

**Materials/Equipment:**

**Training of Staff:**

**Funding:** The cost and personnel time needed to replicate this program are minimal. We run the program with a volunteer committee and a budget of approximately \$50 annually which is locally funded.

**Other:**

**Name of Program/ Strategy:** Natural Helpers

**Name of School District:** Allegany-Limestone Central School District

**Contact Person for Program/Strategy:** Jill M. Bogart

**Address:** Allegany-Limestone CSD North 4th Street Allegany, NY 14706

**Phone:** (716) 373-0060

**Targeted Students:** Trained to be Natural Helpers - 5 adult staff and 25 students grades 8-12 every other year.  
Program to reach out to entire student population grades 7-12.

**Description of Program/Strategy:**

The Natural Helpers program is based on a simple premise: within every school, an informal "helping network" exists. Students with problems naturally seek out other students, teachers, or staff whom they trust. They seek advice, for assistance, or for a sympathetic ear. The Natural Helpers program uses this existing network.

Students and adults to be trained are selected via an anonymous survey given to all students in grades 7-12 in the fall of the school year. Individuals selected go through one more selection process, in which a faculty committee chooses students to represent a cross section of all social groups in the school. It is vital that each segment of the school population have someone they can relate to in order for the program to be truly successful.

They are trained a minimum 30 hours in a retreat setting to improve their helping skills and to learn how to help others make their own decisions. Natural Helpers are not professionally trained counselors. They are clearly told this and are instructed in how to make referrals to helping resources when problems exceed their limits. They are also taught valuable lessons on how to take better care of themselves.

**Brief History of Program:**

Natural Helpers started in Seattle, Washington as a result of a school's response to a teen suicide. After this crisis, the school established a need for more prevention based programs. The school that developed Natural Helpers felt their program could be successful for other schools as well. This led to CHEF packaging and selling the "kits" so that schools across the country could benefit. Allegany purchased the kit/program in June of 1993 and have had an active Natural Helpers program ever since. Our first training took place in October of 1993.

**What is needed for replication by another district:**

**Materials/Equipment:** Natural Helpers kit: \$1500

Food & Supplies: \$300

**Training of Staff:** Staff and students are trained together. Two trainers cost: \$1200

Retreat site rental: \$625 (3 days & two nights at Camp Allegany in the Allegany State Park)

**Funding:** Money needed for kit, trainers, retreat site, food & supplies is funded by the grant money received for drug free programming. Cost of transportation and substitutes for teachers has been paid for out of the district budget. Every effort is made to have food items donated in order to defer costs.

**Other:** Due to the size of our school and expense of the program, a retreat training (recommended at least once a year) is planned for every other year. The retreat training is key because it is through this training that additional Natural Helpers are added.

**Name of Program/ Strategy:** Raised passing grade to 70

**Name of School District:** Arkport Central School

**Contact Person for Program/Strategy:** Dr. Ralph P. Kerr

**Address:** 35 East Avenue, Arkport, NY 14807

**Phone:** (607) 295-7471

**Targeted Students:** All students K-12

**Description of Program/Strategy:**

As one strategy to increase student expectations and achievement the Arkport Board of Education increased the minimum passing grade from 65 to 70. No credit for any quiz, examination or course is awarded unless the student receives a minimum grade of 70.

**Brief History of Program:**

The increase in passing grade to 70 was instituted two years ago. Our research has clearly demonstrated that most of the students who in the past achieved 65 to 70 are well able to achieve a minimum grade of 70.

**What is needed for replication by another district:**

**Materials/Equipment:** None

**Training of Staff:** Support of change, monitoring of grades so grades are not simply inflated.

**Funding:** None

**Other:** Board of Education approval to set 70 as the level at which credit will be given for courses.

Name of Program/ Strategy: Reading Recovery / Benefits to ALL

Name of School District: Bainbridge - Guilford School

Contact Person for Program/Strategy: Chris Flack  
Address: School Street  
Phone: Guilford NY 13780  
607-895-6700

Targeted Students: K-1 and then beyond

Description of Program/Strategy:

Four years ago, Reading Recovery and Title One Reading were implemented simultaneously in our school district. Both programs strive to help the lower achieving reader. Reading Recovery is an intense one on one half hour lesson involving one student and the RR teacher. Title One involves the Reading Teacher working with groups of children in the classroom. In our district the Reading Recovery Teacher is also our Title One Teacher.

Once RR students were identified in early Sept., the RR strategies proved to accelerate the very lowest readers so quickly that the same teacher started to use RR strategies in the classroom with her Title One students. By the end of October, first grade teachers were asking about how to implement those same strategies with their "average" children because the "lower" children were reading better than the earlier identified "average" children. At that point, we began to take a careful look at how we could use our grade level meetings to teach teachers how to use the same strategies that proved to be so successful in RR. Since that first year, we have gradually aligned our assessments so that we test the same objectives we teach, and our teachers all talk to parents and children using the same language and emphasize the same strategies.

First year, one classroom/reading teacher was trained in RR. First grade teachers received mini strategy lessons.

Second year, second classroom/administrator was trained in RR. First grade teachers began to request parent workshops to familiarize them with strategies to help their children at home. We began to see a need for standard miscues and used them in each first grade.

Third year, we saw a need to familiarize second grade teachers with the same strategies, mini lessons were held. We concentrated on how to help all children become better self correctors of their reading.

Fourth year, this year we are continuing to refine our reading program. We are working on introducing more critical thinking into our reading and continuing to better align our objectives and assessments.

Reading Recovery materials include a set of leveled books, a group of five subtests that when analyzed provide information used to select RR students, and two texts written by Marie Clay for the RR Teacher.

Training of RR Teacher involved a two week summer program and classes once a week for an entire school year. A continuing contact involved meeting several times a year to be updated on new information.

The cost to our district for training a RR teacher and for providing that same teacher with college credit or a stipend was \$8200.00.

Other: Continuing contact for same teacher in subsequent years is \$1,000/yr.

## Raising Aspirations Promising Programs and Strategies

**Name of Program/ Strategy:** PROJECT APPEAL (A Progressive Program to Energize Adolescents to Learn).

**Name of School District:** Bolivar-Richburg Central School

**Contact Person for Program/Strategy:** Robert M. Mountain, Superintendent

**Address:** 100 School Street, Bolivar, NY 14715

**Phone:** 716-928-2561

**Targeted Students:** At Risk, in grades 8 -10.

**Description of Program/Strategy:** At Risk, in grades 8 -10.

This alternative education program offers a hands-on project along with an academic component. Capable students in grades 8 - 10 who are experiencing difficulty, failure and frustration with the usual academic program are eligible. If accepted, they will receive their academic component at the main campus in a self-contained environment. In the afternoons, they move to their worksite. The site is an old, run down home which the students are renovating. The work component is not designed to teach them a skill but if that happens so be it. It is presented to put meaningful experiences into their school day. The renovations are tied into the academic program whenever possible. For example, the electrical wiring at the house may be tied into science classes.

Once the houses are completed they are sold, with profits going back into the program. We are presently about to begin our third housing project. When it comes time to assess end of year retention for these young adolescents, we are pleased to offer an alternative which at least offers the student a chance for success.

### Brief History of Program:

The opportunity arose in 1986 to apply through the Appalachian Region Commission for dropout prevention funds. The funds were very competitive. This was a one time grant, supplying seed money only. The grant was approved. After much persistence and perseverance, the program began in 1987. It has received state and federal recognition and is still going strong.

### What is needed for replication by another district:

#### *Materials/Equipment:*

The program has much need in the area of materials and equipment, mostly carpentry related. We obtained much help through community businesses and organizations who became "partners" in our program.

#### *Training of Staff:*

Need to train an educator with carpentry skills.

#### *Funding:*

Can be expensive to start up. Grant funds would help. The resale of homes help to finance the program once the project is under way.

#### *Other:*

**Name of Program/ Strategy**    Goal Setting Initiative

**Name of School District:** Cooperstown Central School District, Cooperstown, NY

**Contact Person for Program/Strategy:** Barry Gould, Principal

**Address:** 38 Linden Ave., Cooperstown, NY 13326

**Phone:** 607-547-5512

**Targeted Students:** All students in grades 10-12

**Description of Program/Strategy:**

Every High School student in grades 10-12 meets individually with the High School principal to set two achievement goals for each year of high school. These goals are put into a personal performance contract and the student, principal, parents, and core subject teachers sign the contract and agree to help and support the student to achieve his/her goals. In addition, each class (Sophomore, Junior & Senior) sets a series of high standard achievement goals that each class would like to meet by graduation. The high school principal serves as a facilitator, motivator, counselor, friend and cheerleader to meet with students, parents and faculty to insure the entire activity is successful.

**Brief History of Program:**

Program started in Summer of 1992 as a result of declining regents diploma rates. The graduating class of 1996 will be the first class to have been involved all 4 years of high school. These 95 seniors have individually developed and been working on 2 personal goals for each of their 4 years of High School. The class as a whole has also set a series of high graduation standards that will be met by June 1996.

**What is needed for replication by another district:**

**Materials/Equipment:**

Paper supplies and secretarial and parental help.

**Training of Staff:**

Train all guidance staff and High School principal in group dynamics and motivational speaking skills.

**Funding:**

A small instructional budget \$500-\$1000 and funds from Title VI and Title II.

**Other:**

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**Name of Program/ Strategy:** Eighth Grade Exhibit Project

**Name of School District:** Hamilton Central School'

**Contact Person for Program/Strategy:** Edmund P. Backus

**Address:** West Kendrick Avenue, Hamilton, NY 13346

**Phone:** (315)824-3300

**Targeted Students:** Eighth Grade

**Description of Program/Strategy:**

Research supports the notion that a useful form of assessing student work is through portfolio - a selected sampling of a student's work. There are several portfolio projects occurring in our school. This project is unique in two respects: (1) the student portfolio is interdisciplinary. Samples of work to display can come from any curriculum area, (2) the audience for the exhibit is a three member panel (teacher and representatives from the community). It is a way for the community to see and provide feedback into the quality of work produced by our students.

For about three years we, as a community, have developed student outcomes. These outcomes describe what our students ought to be able to do. The exhibit samples are derived from the outcomes.

- \* agenda or time management system
- \* a notebook
- \* a piece of research
- \* a creative piece
- \* a collaborative project

**Brief History of Program:**

These topics were selected by the eighth grade team. Each student selected samples of work and stored them in a portfolio. Each student was assigned a teacher mentor to help with selection and storage. Community volunteers were teamed into a panel of three. Each panel reviewed a cluster of student portfolios. On an assigned day and time, the panel will meet with each student, allowing the student to present the portfolio.

**Materials/Equipment:** Portfolio folders

**Training of Staff:** Orientation of panel to purpose of exhibit and use of Rubrics and Scoring Guide

**Funding:** None

**Other:**



## Raising Aspirations Promising Programs and Strategies

Name of Program/Strategy: - Jump Start Program

Name of School District: - Lowville Central School District

Contact person for Program/Strategy - Ms. Gale F. Swiecki

Address/Phone: Lowville Central School  
7668 State Street  
Lowville, NY 13367  
315:376-3544

Targeted Students: - Identified Pre-School Students Who are Entering Kindergarten

Description of Program/Strategy: - Jump Start provides early exposure to the expectations of kindergarten for children classified "at risk" during kindergarten screening in June. The children attend a small class of ten to twelve students for twelve mornings in mid-summer. The Jump Start class simulates a kindergarten program. However, it does not attempt to teach skills and concepts. Instead Jump Start addresses comfort level and repetition of typical successful behaviors. The children participate in a variety of typical learning activities including circle time, story time, cooperative group activities, and individual projects. They become familiar with the school building and experience unique aspects of school life such as recess, a fire drill, and "walking in a line." The children also have the opportunity to meet other members of the faculty and staff.

Our kindergarten teachers have noted that the Jump Start children tend to come to Kindergarten with a confident manner and, initially, lead their class as models of expected behavior. We find that these children are ready to benefit from instruction more quickly than if they had not attended Jump Start.

Brief History of Program: Students enter kindergarten with different educational backgrounds some with pre-school experience, others with no pre-school. The Jump Start program was initiated to offer attention and instruction to those students who scored at the "at risk" level during spring Kindergarten screening. The program aides students in their transition to school and help make the children's school beginning a success.

What is Needed for Replication by another district:

Materials/Equipment: Big books for theme development, art supplies, snack items.

Training of Staff: Experienced early primary grade teachers

Funding: District supported - \$2,000.

Other: Parent component - (1) one hour meeting each week with speakers, i.e., speech therapist, home-school coordinator, elementary principal.

## Raising Aspirations Promising Programs and Strategies

Name of Program/Strategy: - Regents Science Foundation Program Requirement

Name of School District: - Lowville Central School District

Contact person for Program/Strategy - Kenneth J. McAuliffe - Secondary Principal  
- Dale Crossman - Science Department - Chairperson

Address/Phone: Lowville Central School  
7668 State Street  
Lowville, NY 13367  
315:376-3544

Targeted Students: - All 9th and 10th Grade Students

### Description of Program/Strategy:

All ninth and tenth grade students are required to take Regents Earth Science and Biology. These classes meet daily with two additional periods per week for lab activities. The end result in terms of time and educational experience, is nearly a three year science program when measured in terms of units of study. The addition of the lab component (only for Regents level prior to this program) is a key step in raising academic expectations. With 100% of the students in these two grade levels enrolled in a two year Regents curriculum, the school's subsequent Regents diploma rate has steadily increased to approximately 60% of a graduating class. This program has been a key factor in this increase. In addition, the higher than expected rates of enrollment in Regents Chemistry and Physics result in an average of 35% of a given class graduating with a four year Regents Science sequence. For example, in the 1995-96 school year, 50% of the Class of 1996 is enrolled in Regents physics. This high level of participation would not have occurred with non-regents options in the first two years of high school. The higher expectations demanded by this program has had a positive and sustained influence on the science education of Lowville Academy students.

### Brief History of Program:

The two year Regents Science requirement went into affect with the Class of 1995. During the fall of 1991, (the seniors who graduated in June of 1995) the freshman class were grouped heterogeneously in Earth Science Regents. They followed this with a second year of Regents Biology in 1992-93. Each class thereafter has been organized similarly.

What is Needed for Replication by another district: Low cost implementation using existing staff.

Materials/Equipment: Small cost increase for additional lab materials and science equipment to accommodate all students taking a lab science at the Regents level.

Training of Staff: Done via Department Meetings/Staff in-service days and similar programs.

Funding: Essentially the same cost as a "tracked" program. The only dollar increase associated with this change would be a school's ability to add lab time (if not in this schedule), and to purchase additional lab materials.

Other: There needs to be a strong philosophical belief all students can be successful in a Regents level course. This program has typically resulted in approximately 70% of a Junior Class entering 11th grade with a two year Regents science sequence. Those students unable to pass the Regents (approximately 30%) still benefit from the higher level of instruction offered by this program.

**Raising Aspirations  
Promising Programs and Strategies**

**Name of Program/Strategy:** Extracurricular/Extra help late bus

**Name of School District:** Sharon Springs Central School

**Contact Person:** Jane Roth, Principal  
**Address:** P.O. Box 218, Sharon Springs, New York 13459  
**Phone:** (518) 284-2267

**Targeted Students:** Grades 4-12

**Description of Program/Strategy:**

A late bus run is scheduled for Tuesdays and Thursdays at 4:30 p.m. The regular after school run is at 3:00 p.m. Students have the opportunity to stay after school for extra help in their academic subjects. Also, clubs, band, and chorus can meet for practice. The school play can be operated. The library is also opened up as requested along with the computer labs. Some teachers demand students to stay for extra help on Tuesdays and Thursdays because the transportation home for students is available. Detention is also held on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Records on attendance and feedback from teachers indicate that the convenience of the transportation allows for more success in both academic and extracurricular activities. There is a higher level of participation in activities and extra help because of the late buses.

**Brief History of Program:**

This program started in the 1993-1994 school year. Teachers, staff, and administration all agreed that there was a need for a late bus run. It was implemented and evaluated. All agreed that it is worth continuing because of the opportunities it allows for.

**What is needed for replication by another district:**

**Materials/Equipment:** Two (2) buses and two (2) drivers.

**Training of Staff:**

**Funding:** \$3,000.00

**Other:**

**Raising Aspirations  
Promising Programs and Strategies**

**Name of Program/Strategy:** Sharon Springs School/Liberty Partnership Learning Center

**Name of School District:** Sharon Springs Central School

**Contact Person:** Richard D. Mahar, Superintendent  
**Address:** P.O. Box 218, Sharon Springs, New York 13459  
**Phone:** (518) 284-2266

**Targeted Students:** Middle and High School (Grades 6-12)

**Description of Program/Strategy:**

The key element of the Liberty Partnership Program is to give support and guidance to student that are from a low socioeconomic environment and at risk of failing or dropping out of school. Tutors are available for the students in the program to aid them in developing better study habits and to do better in school. There are events that are planned at school and away to get the LPP students together to do activities that build self-esteem and interest in being successful. Working cooperatively with others is emphasized. Careers are explored by visitation to sites as well as by inviting people to LPP meetings to discuss job opportunities. The Sharon Springs School Board agreed to purchase additional tutor time from LPP for the 1995-1996 school year. This will allow more help LPP student that don't meet the criteria to be included in the LPP. Most all LPP student go on to post secondary training.

**Brief History of Program:**

The Liberty Partnership Program has been in place at Sharon Springs for many years and has targeted at risk children in grades 9-12. The coordinators and tutors have involved parents very heavily. The program expanded to Middle School in 1994-1995. In 1995-1996 the Sharon Springs District will extend the tutor hours by contracting with the LPP working out of SUNY Cobleskill. The tutor will work more with LPP students as well as other students that wouldn't qualify for LPP because of their financial status, etc. Field trips, cooperative learning exercises and career investigation will remain as focused. Social functions involving parents/guardians will continue.

**What is needed for replication by another district:**

**Materials/Equipment:**

**Training of Staff:**

**Funding:** Funds to contract with LPP.

**Other:** Space to allow tutor to meet with students.

**Raising Aspirations  
Promising Programs and Strategies**

**Name of Program/ Strategy:** Elimination of Non-Regents Track for all High School students.

**Name of School District:** Weedsport Central Schools

**Contact Person for Program/Strategy:** Nelson Bauersfeld, High School Principal

**Address:** 2821 E. Brutus St., Weedsport, NY 13166

**Phone:** 315-834-6652

**Targeted Students:** All students grades 9 - 12

**Description of Program/Strategy:** Weedsport High School has eliminated the Non-Regents Track in grades 9-12 and has gone to complete heterogeneous grouping. All 9th, 10th, and 11th grade students take Regents level courses in Science, Social Studies, English, as well as all other subject areas except for Math where General and Occupational Math are offered in addition to Sequential Math. Seniors are also heterogeneously grouped, however, several College Credit Courses and Advanced Placement Courses are offered to any senior who wishes to attempt them.

**Brief History of Program:** This is the second year of the program. During the first year we kept previously identified Non-Regents students in small classes in small classes to assist in the transition. This year all students are mixed. We have witnessed increased academic performances by both former Non-Regents students and Regents students.

**What is needed for replication by another district:**

**Materials/Equipment:** Sufficient textbooks and materials to meet student needs.

**Training of Staff:** Inservice training for teachers on strategies to use with heterogeneous groups.

**Funding:** Local.

**Other:**

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## Raising Aspirations Promising Programs and Strategies

**Name of Program/ Strategy:** Implementing Middle School in 7-12 Building

**Name of School District:** West Canada Valley Central School District

**Contact Person for Program/Strategy:** Frank C. Sutliff, Middle/Sr. High Principal  
**Address:** West Canada Valley Middle/Sr. High School, Rt. 28, Newport, NY 13416  
**Phone:** (315)845-8802

**Targeted Students:** Grade 7 and 8

### **Description of Program/Strategy:**

The main elements of this transition to middle level education are common planning periods for seventh and eighth grade teachers, common heterogeneous groups for core subjects enabling interdisciplinary and extended instruction, and a daily time for home base or advisor-advisee groups.

A smoother transition from elementary to a high school atmosphere is provided by this middle level structure. The number of course failures at grades 7 and 8 has been lessened due to the ability of teachers to provide interdisciplinary instruction, adjust test schedules, and meet with individual students/parents during the team planning period.

### **Brief History of Program:**

The middle school within a grade 7-12 building approach began its full implementation during the 1994-95 school year. Two teachers, one at each grade level, were designated as team leaders. The 1993-94 school year was used for planning including release time for grade level meetings and visitations to districts. Parent awareness sessions were scheduled and students in both grade seven and eight were included in informational meetings.

**What is needed for replication by another district:**

#### **Materials/Equipment:**

teachers/staff should be provided with materials on middle level education and given materials/ideas to use with home base groups

#### **Training of Staff:**

teachers/staff must be given release time to meet with colleagues (both grade level and department) in order to assess impact of change on education 7-12.

#### **Funding:**

Utilizing teachers/staff as home base instructors in lieu of a study hall/supervising assignment mandated the hiring of a half time monitor to provide for supervision of these assignments.

**RAISING ASPIRATIONS  
PROMISING PROGRAMS LAND STRATEGIES**

**NAME OF PROGRAM/STRATEGY:** Morning Program

**NAME OF SCHOOL DISTRICT:** West Canada Valley Elementary School

**CONTACT PERSON FOR PROGRAM:** William Van Patten, Music Teacher  
West Canada Valley Elementary School  
Route 28 Box 360  
Newport, NY 13416  
315-845-8074

**TARGETED STUDENTS:** Primary (grades k-3)

**DESCRIPTION OF PROGRAM:** Morning Program has been a significant and successful addition to the West Canada School. Morning Program is a daily assembly for students and staff from Kindergarten through Grade 3. Its purpose is to instill and support positive feelings in the students and staff. Patriotic, health and safety concepts are reinforced through presentations and song. It is an opportunity to highlight accomplishments and special activities. Talents of individual students, staff and community are celebrated. Outstanding students and athletes from high school often present demonstrations to their younger peers. Rules and good behavior are acknowledged through Manners and Good Citizen Awards. Individual importance are recognized with Birthday Certificates and birth announcements. Morning Program is an excellent opportunity for parents and community members to be involved in a very positive way with the school. The program enhances the whole climate of the school.

**BRIEF HISTORY OF PROGRAM:** Replicated in 1989 under a New York State grant, a core group of 5 teachers outlined the first year's activities. Subsequently, a group of (7-14 teachers) meet for one day in the summer to plan themes and develop a skeletal calendar. The principal acts as MC, while the music teacher teaches fun, meaningful and patriotic songs. Each teacher has some responsibility toward the program whether it is sending out the monthly newsletter or keeping the bulletin board current.

**WHAT IS NEEDED FOR REPLICATION BY ANOTHER DISTRICT:**

**MATERIALS/EQUIPMENT:** \$1,000 for certificates awards and music overhead projector and screen for songs

**TRAINING OF STAFF:** Initial training: Contact South New Berlin CS  
\$500-1000 for summer meeting depending on #'s

**FUNDING:** Initial funding through NYS Programs That Work Grant  
Local funds support materials and training

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**RAISING ASPIRATIONS  
PROMISING PROGRAMS AND STRATEGIES**

**NAME OF PROGRAM:** Youth-At-Risk Services

**NAME OF SCHOOL DISTRICT:** West Canada Valley Central School

**CONTACT PERSON FOR PROGRAM:** Mary C. Rommel, Elementary Principal  
West Canada Elementary School  
Route 28, Box 360  
Newport, NY 13416  
315-845-8074

**TARGETED STUDENTS:** Students with Academic and Social Problems

**DESCRIPTION OF PROGRAM:** Our Youth-at-Risk services have several components that collectively impact the academic achievement of students. At the primary level, Primary Project serves those students who are having adjustment problems. Child associates work 1-1 with students who exhibit shy, withdrawn or acting out behaviors. Short term intervention for students in crisis is also available. At the intermediate level, a youth advisor meets with individual and small groups of students. He supports efforts to take individual responsibility for one's behavior and actions. Banana Splits lunch time meetings help those students from split homes deal with their situations. These programs are supervised by the principal, social worker and/or psychologist. Over the past several years teachers have also made a concerted effort to help students organized themselves for learning. Assignment notebooks, a folder system and record keeping between home and school has been implemented in grades 3-6. After school computer and esteem clubs have been introduced to help identified students improve achievement.

**BRIEF HISTORY OF PROGRAM:** Each of these supports were developed to address ever emerging needs. Teachers and administration work together to recognize needs and develop solutions. Some components have sustained effects over more than 10 years while others are more recent additions.

**WHAT IS NEEDED FOR REPLICATION BY ANOTHER DISTRICT:**

**Materials/Equipment:** Over the years each component has accumulated related materials. For example, Primary Project has a play room with a good number of toys and games. The computer club used networked computers for some reinforcement activities.

**Training of Staff:** Y-A-R staff meeting regularly (bi-weekly) and as needed with supervisors and teachers. These personnel participate in BOCES and local training. Primary Project offers regular staff development through its Rochester office.

**Funding:** Most staff are paid at the Teacher Assistant Level and work from 9-16 hours per week. Chapter 2 provides some of the funding.



**RAISING ASPIRATIONS  
PROMISING PROGRAMS AND STRATEGIES**

**NAME OF PROGRAM:** INCLUSION OF STUDENTS AND STAFF

**NAME OF SCHOOL DISTRICT:** WEST CANADA VALLEY CENTRAL SCHOOL

**CONTACT PERSON FOR PROGRAM:** Mary C. Rommel  
West Canada Elementary School  
Route 28 box 360  
Newport, NY 13416  
315-845-8074

**TARGETED STUDENTS:** Elementary K-6

**DESCRIPTION OF PROGRAM:** We have worked to insure the inclusion and success of all students. We have organized our remedial and special education teachers and paraprofessional staff into a support personnel pool. Grade level teams are formed consisting of four teachers, a support teacher and a paraprofessional. These teams meet regularly to discuss and plan for all students' needs. The integration of special and remedial services into the regular program has eliminated most pull-out services. Teams have the flexibility to organize their day and instruction to best meet the needs of all students. Thematic units, cooperative projects and innovative grouping strategies become the mode of operation. Team meetings are built into the school day, although many teams also meet before and after school. Skills instruction, reinforcement, homework help and alternative testing are arranged among the team members. Homework parties, quiet time instead of recess and review classes have resulted. Staffing &/or parent conferences often involve other team members as well as the student. Cooperation among team members is essential, but readily develops as people work together to accomplish common goals.

**BRIEF HISTORY OF PROGRAM:** Our program grew from a frustration teachers (remedial, special and regular) had with trying to accommodate students in disjointed, pull-out programs. Further impetus came from parents wanting a more inclusive setting for their children. Visitations to other schools, attendance at workshops, a two year pilot with Syracuse University and considerable staff development and energy has resulted in our current format. A district wide task force has helped with project development and on-going plans.

**WHAT IS NEEDED FOR REPLICATION BY ANOTHER DISTRICT:**  
Recognized need and a desire to be more inclusive.

Materials/Equipment: nothing unique;

Training of Staff: Visitations

Workshops, mentoring

TIME, TIME, TIME

Funding: depends on number of staff, readiness and willingness