

Extraordinary Times



Sherry Johnson

Dear Members,

As I write this, it continues to be difficult for me to reflect on where we are currently, from where we were one short month ago. When I reread my column from March about the need to be lifelong readers and to use social media in a more thoughtful manner, I was shocked by the normalcy of the message and the lack of any concern about an impending health crisis.

Yet, here we are, under a disaster declaration, an emergency order to keep schools and nonessential businesses closed and the unprecedented plea to stay home. Social distancing, a phrase unheard of a month ago, is now the way we try to live our lives, with flattening the curve our new mission. The statistics continue to change almost hourly, but we know that those don't tell the full story and we may never know the full story. We only hope that what we are doing is the right thing, for the right reasons and that it will allow our current system to provide the support for the critical needs of those who have to use it.

What this crisis has revealed is how ill prepared we, as a nation, were for this pandemic. From our knowledge about its spread and the capacity to respond, to even the way important information was downplayed by some, our ability to navigate through this has been sorely tested. The richest and most powerful nation in the world has been brought to its knees by a virus and right now it is difficult to see the light at the end of the tunnel.

But, there is so much to be learned from this and, as from any crisis, there is also opportunity. For education leaders, this has highlighted the gaps of access and equity that we have long worked to narrow:

- The need for the Federal government to provide more e-rate discounts for broadband expansion and funding for school districts to build internet capability and hotspots for students to use at home;
- The need for affordable, quality child care for those in poverty who are working to feed and educate their children while also trying to keep a roof over their heads;
- A better reimbursement rate for school meals so that our districts can continue to provide life sustaining nutrition when a family cannot;
- Options for those families who qualify for reduced fee cell phones so that for those, whose only connection to their schools are with limited minutes, time does not run out.

These are the things we have advocated for previously and as Congress works to provide new stimulus packages, public education leaders should continue to drive these messages with the hope that this time, they are heard.

As all of you work to provide education in this new environment, we will continue to learn lessons about what works and what doesn't when instruction is required to move to an alternative platform. What we do know is that administrators and teachers are doing what they need to do with what they have in order to keep continuity of instruction from creating even greater gaps in access and equity. And, they are also reaching out to help with the social and emotional needs of kids and their families. Kids miss their teachers, they miss their friends, and they miss sports, music and other activities. Seniors are missing their final semester and culminating celebrations. As learning continues, the other big parts of what public education provides, is missing.

And we miss you. But, we want you to know that as you work to lead during these extraordinary times, we are still working to support you with information updates and advocacy. We are here for questions or just to talk through ideas or issues. This isn't any kind of normal, but for now, it is the way we step up and step in to give kids all that they deserve. Please stay safe, stay healthy and until we can be together again, stay home.

Sherry Johnson

News Scope

MONROE COUNTY SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION
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April 2020 INDEX

A message from our Executive Director	1
Raising Consciousness About Biases	3
Census 2020	3
MCSBA District Clerk Conference	4
RMSC STEM Awards	4
Position paper: Impact of Staff Shortages	5
Position paper: Bus Drivers Needed	6



From our president:

New Challenges

This time of isolation is proving to be challenging times for all of us. Watching the news can be very depressing at times. Lately I have been turning it off! Why? Because we are bombarded with stories that are both heartbreaking and frightening. While we certainly need to be aware of what is happening in our communities and the world around us, we should also take a moment to embrace many of the positive stories we see every day.

All of the staff in our school districts have come up with unique ways to keep in touch with our students and their families. We are all using new technology and embracing new apps to stay in touch with work, family and friends. We have created parades, on line classes, pantry recipes, signs for our seniors front yards, zoom athletic training, and homemade science experiments.

MCSBA is also continuing to work in new ways to support all of us. Although many of our meetings have been canceled, our work continues. We had an email vote for steering committee, and we are looking at ways to hold virtual meetings and trainings. Most importantly, advocacy on our behalf is continuing on a daily basis. Sherry continues to work with the Systems Integration Team, our local state and federal legislators, our Regents, COLSBA and NYSSBA, and with Association Officers and our Superintendents to ensure that our voices are heard. We are also working on plans for our “new normal.”

The next few months will be difficult as we all make tough decisions with our budgets, and with the mounting myriad of tasks that will require our attention. We are in uncharted territory.

Please remember, we are strong and resilient. We need to set the tone, remain calm, and keep the needs of our students and communities first and foremost. We are in this together and we have a strong association to support us as we move forward. Please stay home, stay healthy and keep in touch!



Kathleen Dillon

Kathleen Dillon

Raising consciousness about biases

At the March meeting of the Information Exchange Committee, Freelance speaker Sady Fischer facilitated an open, honest conversation related to unconscious bias, privilege, equity and inclusion.

Ms. Fischer reviewed how identity shapes our sense of self, discussed unconscious bias and privilege, and identified ways we can use this knowledge to create more inclusive school environments. Members participated in an exercise on unconscious bias with their self-selected,

trusted ten people in their lives. She also shared data on how racism affects minority students in public schools. She concluded the seminar with tips for making classrooms more inclusive.



TOP: Presenter Sady Fischer with Information Exchange Committee Co-Chairs Valerie Baum (Pit) and Nancy Pickering (Hil).

LEFT: Sady Fischer speaking to MCSBA members in March



United States Census 2020

Your response— and responses from ALL your community's members -- matters.

* Health clinics * Fire departments * Schools * Roads & Highways *

Census results help determine how billions of dollars in federal funding flow into states and communities each year.

The results determine how many seats in Congress each state gets.

In mid-March, households will begin receiving official Census Bureau mail with details on how to respond to the 2020 Census. By April 1, 2020, every home will receive an invitation with three ways to respond: Online, Phone, Mail.

!! Encourage your parents and other community members to participate !!



MCSBA Conference for District Clerks

Thirty district clerks from Monroe and surrounding counties attended MCSBA's March 12 Spring Clerks' Conference to learn more about the following:

- * Legal Up-Dates, including new regulations on voting and subpoenas, by Laura Purcell, Esq., of Harris Beach;
- * Stress Reactivity Resilience, with strategies for stress relief, by Marla Pelletier, President of Inward Office;
- * Circle time, during which participants identify and discuss topics of interest.

ABOVE: Presenters Marla Pelletier and Laura Purcell.
BELOW RIGHT: Some of the district clerks at the conference.

The District Clerks Conference Planning Committee included: Kristen Adler (ER), Cindy Cushman (Web), Connie Nenni (Hol), Rhonda Schaefer (H FL), Mary Torcello (C-C), and Sarah Williams (Mt. Morris).



Brockport teacher wins 2020 RMSC STEM Award



ABOVE: Interim Superintendent Jim Fallon (Bro); BOE member Kathleen Robertson (Bro), BOE Vice President Jeffrey Harradine (Bro), BOE President Terry Ann Carbone (Bro), RMSC President Hillary Olson, Fred W. Hill School Enrichment Specialist Blaine Broughton (Bro); RMSC VP for Institutional Advancement Lisa Ireland; Assistant to the Superintendent for Elementary Instruction Susan Hasenauer-Curtis (Bro), and Fred W. Hill School Principal Brandon Broughton (Bro).

LEFT: STEM Award recipient Blaine Broughton during the award ceremony.

At the annual RMSC STEM Awards celebration on February 28, 2020, Brockport School Enrichment Specialist Blaine Broughton received the 2020 RMSC STEM Education Award: PreK-6. In addition, among area educators nominated for the six RMSC STEM awards were educators from several MCSBA districts: Churchville-Chili, Fairport, Hilton, Pittsford, and West Irondequoit.



Impact of Staff Shortages on School Districts

Nationally, growing student population needs, and school accountability combined with declining enrollments in teacher preparation programs are threatening to undermine the quality of schools.

	Current Issues	Support needed
Teaching Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased certification requirements in NYS have impacted teacher candidates who successfully complete their academic program but are unable to complete the credentialing requirements. The number of available substitute teachers, has declined significantly. Schools districts are competing for substitute teachers needed for teacher release time required by mandate compliance and training. The tax levy cap contributes to constraints on competitive starting salaries for teaching staff. After years of negative messaging about public education as a failing institution and multiple misguided reform measures, teachers are looking to leave the profession at higher rates and students are indicating that they do not wish to enter the field of teaching. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Foundation Aid needs to be fully funded so that schools have the necessary operation aid in order to recruit and retain teaching and support staff. ✓ Federal Title II needs to be fully funded to ensure educators receive the tools to be successful from their teacher preparation programs. ✓ The Federal Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program and TEACH Grant program need to be implemented as designed with funding released according to statute and transparent, consistent guidance on loan consolidations options. ✓ New funding is needed for training that has proven to generate higher student outcomes (i.e. culturally sensitive classroom practices, mental health needs and restorative behavioral initiatives). ✓ Perception of teaching as a noble and highly skilled profession needs to be reset so that schools can recruit and retain teachers.
Support Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recent data shows one in five children may suffer from a mental health related issue. On-site mental health clinics are underfunded by NYS and rely primarily on insurance based funding not all families can access. Para professionals are instrumental in providing student support for school age children needs. The tax levy cap and minimum wage increases have added to the complexity of filling positions. The financial viability of early intervention (EI) and preschool service providers has been limited by low reimbursement rates and slow payouts from Monroe County and NYS. Growing wait lists exist for children eligible for these services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Dedicated funding is needed for mental health, teacher training and coordination of services to families in crisis so districts are not forced to choose between academic programing and meeting student’s needs. ✓ NYS should create a sufficient, long-term viable funding source for Community Schools, and make it available at the school building level for districts where the building demographics meet the poverty criteria. ✓ NYS and Monroe County should increase funding for EI and preschool service programs so providers can afford to hire and retain staff. ✓ Research has documented that early intervention services are significant factors in the education success of children once they enter school.

MCSBA urges Federal and State and County legislators to help school districts remediate staff shortages to better serve students.

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Bus Drivers Needed!

The critical shortage of bus drivers affects a school district's ability to provide safe and timely transportation for students and results in higher costs and can impact student learning.

	Current Issues	Support needed
Job Perception	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The job is demanding, the responsibility for students' safety is high, and the schedule is unique. Average bus driver vacancy rates in Monroe County are 8% but range across the County from 0-20%. Vacancies drive down productivity and increase costs for transportation that districts can ill afford. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ NYS must maintain expense based transportation aid at levels that permit districts to cover wages, and offer benefits needed to hire and retain drivers. The tax levy cap limits a districts ability to fund this without proper support from the state.
Licensing and Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The training is intensive; it can take as long as 3-4 months to complete, and is mostly unpaid. CDL road tests typically take 2-6 weeks to schedule after training is completed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ NYS needs to set up more CDL testing locations regionally across the state. ✓ The federal government and NYS should consider separate licensing requirements for bus drivers.
Mandates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Over the past 10 years, demands on districts transportation systems increased substantially. Transportation under the McKinney-Vento regulations and for charter school students have significantly contributed to this demand. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ NYS must consider the impact on district transportation systems when adding new mandates. There is no mechanism for districts to absorb additional costs under the tax levy cap.

MCSBA asks for State and Federal assistance to ensure district transportation systems can provide for students safe and timely arrival to school and back home.

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