TWO REPORTS:

VIRTUAL COLSBA MEETING - FEB. 7TH
& RURAL SCHOOLS WEBINAR

THE VIRTUAL COLSBA MEETING was held on February 7th. There were approximately 5 NYSSBA staff members present and 14 COLSBA organizations represented. Director of Governmental Relations, Brian Fessler spoke about the upcoming Virtual and In Person Capital Conference. He also mentioned that the SED Budget hearing scheduled for February 8th would be live streamed. Director of Member Relations, Barry Entwistle and Business Development and Member Relations Manager, Zac Adams, discussed how they like to be in attendance at the various COLSBA annual meetings. They urged COLSBA directors to stay in touch with NYSSBA and let them know how NYSSBA and their organization could support one another. They also spoke about their new on-boarding program for new school board members around the state. Member Relations Manager, Patrick Longo provided an overview of the various recognition programs that NYSSBA has to recognize the work that School Board Members and School Districts are doing around the state. Heidi Longton, Director of Convention and Events indicated that registration for the Annual Convention would open on Tuesday, August 8th at 10:00 a.m. This year's convention will be held in Buffalo, New York. (While some local School Board members choose to commute to the convention, there are many that will stay downtown at the hotels so that they can take advantage of all the programs in the early morning and late night events. There are also other local school districts that will book a room as a "gathering place" for those local School Board Members that may be commuting during the day so they have a place to rest, relax, and connect during the long days).

After the meeting, like many of our ECASB committee meetings, there is a round table discussion. Directors from the various COLSBA organizations spoke about programs and events that their own organization sponsors that will be coming up or that they recently held. Some of the those events include:

- Pathways to Career Event in conjunction with their local BOCES

- Round Table Discussion - Let's Talk Budget with school board members and local school business officials.

- Information sessions with local energy/electrical providers to gain insight and information.

- Healthy School Meals Lobby Day and sustained advocacy efforts.

- Programs focused on communication. The programs explore all means of communication with communities, between Superintendent and the Board, between School District staff and the Board, and communication between School Board members.

- School Board Dinner hosted by an individual district. The district that is hosting the dinner picks the guest speaker for the dinner.

- Year end recognition recognizing 2 students and their parents from each of the component schools within their organization.

- An end of year/wrap up dinner with local Legislators.

The next COLSBA meeting will be held in early April.

RURAL SCHOOLS WEBINAR is a monthly webinar that will be held every month until the state budget is approved. The webinar will provide updates about the budget process and the impact on schools. In addition to the Director of Rural Schools Association of New York Dave Little, there were about 30 School Board Members and Superintendents that logged in to join the webinar. Various comments and observations made include:

- NYSSBA's Director of Governmental Relations, Brian Fessler; Deputy Director of New York State Council of School Superintendents, Bob Lowry; and Executive Director of Rural Schools Association of New York State, David Little all testified during the recent budget hearings.

- Foundation Aid: Some districts are receiving 3% increases, while others are receiving 13.9%.

- If all schools become Save Harmless, then there is in reality no foundation aid formula because districts will all receive the same amount.

- Although it appears that the Foundation Aid formula is fully funded, if you take away the categorical aid, then district truly are NOT fully funded. The problem with some of the categorial aids that are tied to programs is that school districts simply cannot find the staff to run and support the programs, thus loosing out on money that was on the table.

- SED should be responsible for the new Foundation Aid formula and NOT the New York State Legislature.

- All school districts in New York state will be facing the loss of Federal Funding.

- Districts should consider advocating for minor revisions in the Tax Cap as the Governor will most likely not be in favor of eliminating the Tax Cap.

- Schools should advocate for raising the allowable Fund Balance. School districts have the lowest available Fund Balance. Many municipalities and the state have much higher fund balances.

- Schools need to take the time to educate the community on the impact of a low fund balance. Schools should take the time to explain what a "comptrollers letter means". The New York State Comptroller, Tom DiNapoli is a former school board member who was NOT governing on a school board when there was a Tax Cap.

- In this years budget, Prior Aid to districts was not addressed.

- The BOCES reimbursable CTE salaries have not kept up with increases and reflects a salary that is over 30 years old.

- The electric bus issue needs to be addressed and local community members educated. There are few companies that is currently making electric buses. There are no ideas how to increase the number of buses available, no ideas on how to increase charging capacity, no ideas on where the money will come from, and districts will be faced with many challenging issues, charging stations being the main issue.

- What happens when district voters in a district do not support a proposition to purchase new school buses that may be electric?

- Sequential learning did not take place for students during pandemic. Gaps in learning took place, and students were socially isolated. Thus, now schools are dealing with many mental health issues of students and staff.

- Teacher recruitment needs to be addressed. There is a shortage of teachers and staff in school districts across the state. The situation is not getting any better.

- School Board Members are on the front line. School Board Members need to be better educated so that they can address issues with the community they represent.

The next Rural Schools Association of New York State's webinar will be held on March 2, 2023. For more details, contact Rural Schools Association of New York State.