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Rural students suffer under New York state aid losses

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Written by **Meaghan M. McDermott**
Staff writer

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Imagine a public school district that doesn't offer kindergarten or athletics and has so few elective classes that high school juniors and seniors only attend school for half a day.

Meanwhile, in a different district in the same state, elementary school students learn six foreign languages and high-schoolers have their pick of more than 200 elective courses — including 30 Advanced Placement courses — and can get in-school training from voice coaches for the Metropolitan Opera.

The scenario isn't far-fetched, and it's one New York school officials say inches closer every day that the state Legislature doesn't remedy disparities in education aid that hurt poorer school districts and their students in favor of their wealthier counterparts.

"I'm not arguing that we have to be able to offer all that wealthier districts can," said Mike Ford, superintendent of the Phelps Clifton-Springs Central School District in Ontario County. "But the state can't allow districts like mine to face the prospect next year of not having kindergarten, or not having electives or having our juniors and seniors going to school a half-day and only getting 22 credits for graduation and that's all."

Phelps-Clifton Springs, with 1,800 students, is one of the state's less-wealthy school systems highlighted in a recent Alliance for Quality Education report that shows underfunded, and often rural, school districts were disproportionately affected by recent state aid cuts.

Recognizing the problem, the state Board of Regents last week recommended the bulk of a proposed 4 percent increase in overall school aid next year be earmarked for poorer districts.

Those districts took funding cuts three times as large as those in wealthy districts on a per-pupil basis, according to AQE. That's largely because less-wealthy districts depend more heavily on state aid and districts with high property values and high resident incomes rely more on property taxes. Locally, that means districts



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such as Brockport lost more than \$2,000 in funding per student while Pittsford schools lost about \$700.

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