



NATIONAL RURAL EDUCATOR OF THE YEAR: TO LOVE YOUR WORK, LOVE YOUR KIDS!

Meet National Rural Educator of the Year Virginia Sautner at the 2017 RSA Summer Conference, July 9-11 in Cooperstown!

Virginia "Ginny" Sautner is the National Rural Teacher of the Year. She is a Nationally Board Certified Teacher from Lake Havasu, Arizona, where she teaches 9th Grade English Language Arts and Student Government. (You remember Lake Havasu...It's where London Bridge now lives!) For this nationally recognized educator, the most important advocacy is the advocacy we do on behalf of our students; not just about state and federal policy, it's about advancing the individual interests and needs of our students. It's about building a daily connection with kids and making sure they know you're on their side, working together to give them the life they want.

Carrying out that approach is often easier on a personal level, as opposed to a schoolwide basis, though. Despite having a manageable number of students, rural schools experience roadblocks to building the kind of relationships that really matter in a child's education. For instance, "Teacher turnover is financially and educationally harmful," according to Ginny. Low pay, lack of employment for spouses, lack of nearby health care facilities and depressed housing opportunities are all reasons rural schools fail to attract and retain teachers. So what makes them stay?



"Teachers stay because of mentorships and meaningful learning opportunities. Relationships and connections are the key to learning", says Sautner. Rural teachers need to feel valued, need a way to improve at their profession and be supported in that effort, particularly in the early years when turnover is highest. According to Ms. Sautner, extended mentoring is a proven method of focusing the kind of attention of professional development that shows a new teacher that their work is vital to the lives of children.

In rural settings, that mentoring might be done via Skype or Facetime with educators in similar positions in neighboring districts or even in districts with similar demographics across the state. A group of several science teachers in rural schools who are each responsible for teaching the entire science curriculum might share approaches, programs and lab work. Distance and isolation within the district doesn't necessarily mean the educator can't be connected to peers.



For Sautner, who embodies the best in rural education, the nature of rural education demands that a teacher simultaneously lead, follow and work as a team. "Be a leader, learner, collaborator. Teachers must be an advocate for their kids." A yoga instructor as well, Sautner encourages us to release the many distracting influences on our work and to focus in on those things that are essential to improving the lives of our students. In our rural schools it's often easy to become concerned over lack of employment opportunities, lack of contact with the world that our kids are well aware of due to television and social media, lack of educational opportunities, extracurricular activities, social and community events and projects.

For Virginia Sautner, the way to offset the effects of these influences is to build relationships within the community, within the school building and with professional colleagues. It's an approach that has made her "the best of the best".



Online Speech Therapy Made Simple

What is Online Speech Therapy?

Online speech therapy (otherwise known as telepractice) is when a speech language pathologist (SLP) **interacts with the client in a web-based venue. The SLP conducts the session much the same way as would be done face to face except instead of being physically in the same room, they communicate over the Internet in real-time.**

Equipment

Modern technology has kept the hardware requirements rather modest. The therapist needs only a laptop with at least a 15-inch screen accompanied by a webcam and a headset that has a microphone attached. The video communication is provided through video conferencing software or hardware that is HIPAA compliant (e.g. GoToMeeting).

Materials

The universe of original and useful materials is continuously expanding for clinicians. One of the initial drawbacks to teletherapy was the difficulty of sharing visual materials on the internet. However as the variety and availability of interactive materials and mobile apps grows this problem has largely disappeared.

In fact the process of selecting teletherapy materials is quite similar to that for onsite therapy now that there are many digital applications of the existing stock. But to compare face to face therapy with teletherapy regarding materials misses the point. The many creative digital apps are not only educationally and therapeutically innovative, but offer the child a very pleasurable experience besides. In this arena as well, teletherapy is exceeding the traditional face to face venue.

What's more, the wonders of modern technology offer therapists an entirely new dimension of expression for their creative talents. The growing popularity of digital photos provides a perfect opportunity for parents and therapists to collaborate in creating materials together. Children can now work with pictures of themselves and their family, developing critical skills while enjoying their loved ones.

Benefits

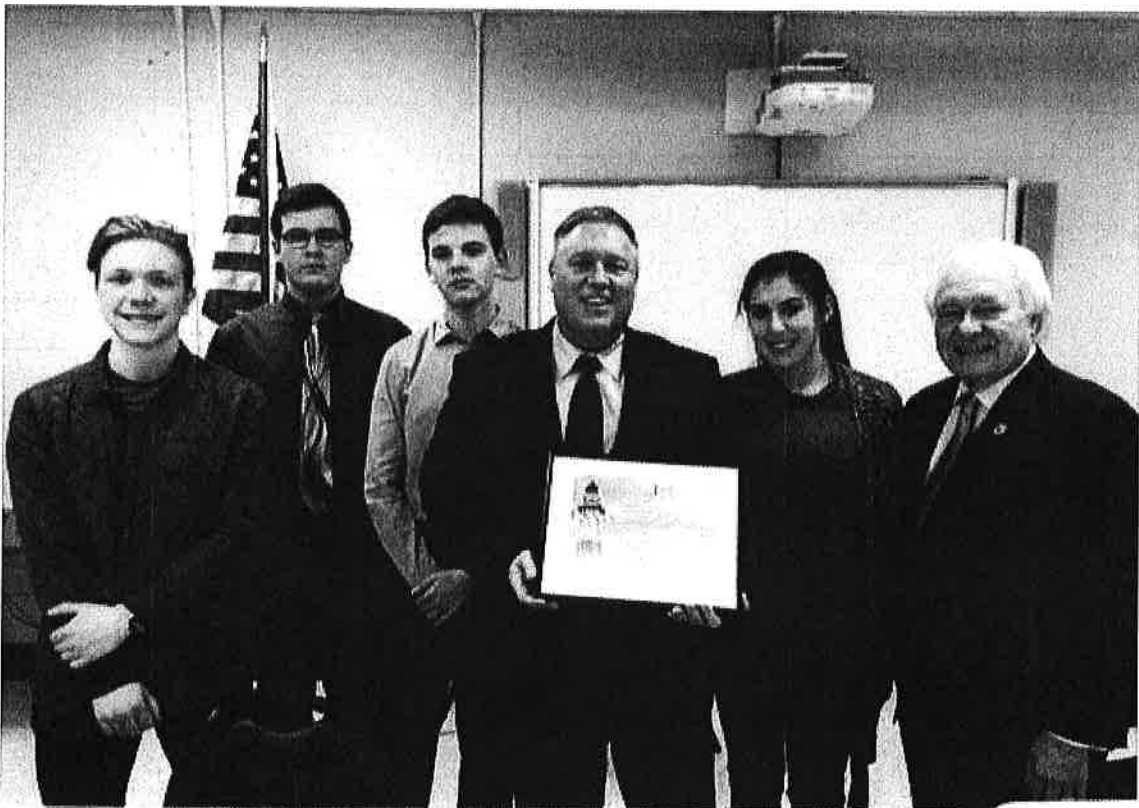
The benefits of Telepractice are numerous and varied for both the districts and their administrators. It provides viable, evidence-based, cost-effective therapy by eliminating transportation expenses and staffing agency premiums to find therapists. Also, by alleviating recruiting, training, and managing SLPs, the administrator's time is freed up for other critical educational priorities

Since telepractice is IDEA compliant, it reduces complaints, mediation, and due process hearings. It streamlines administrative functions and tasks through the digital services provided. Online speech therapy provides maximum flexibility regarding the scheduling of session. And it ensures continuous therapy even when SLPs are absent or move.

New York

The acceptance and popularity of telepractice continue to grow and expand steadily. To better assist districts in New York that are facing SLP shortages, Global Teletherapy is excited to offer their services to rural communities throughout the state. They currently serve districts and schools here in New York as well as in Nebraska. Global Teletherapy will tailor their services to district needs and work out a contract for services with the district.

Editor's Note: Your RSA is a proud partner with Global Teletherapy in serving the needs of rural school districts. Finding good therapists without paying for extensive travel time has been difficult for our districts and teletherapy provides effective services at tremendous cost savings. Contact RSA for referrals from districts already using teletherapy or to schedule a demonstration. We were very impressed and we think you will be too!



RSA Executive Director Dave Little is presented with a certificate of appreciation from students of the Community Legislative Committee of Eastern Suffolk BOCES. Appearing at far right is William Miller, Vice President of Eastern Suffolk BOCES Board of Education.