



National Association of
School Superintendents
United in Common Purpose: Each Other's Success

Gretchen Rosales
Superintendent of Elba Central Schools
Elba, New York

INTRODUCTION

Education:

MS Ed. Educational Leadership and Administration, the State University of New York at Stony Brook

MS Ed. Higher Education Administration, the State University of New York at Stony Brook

MS Ed. Spanish and Secondary Education, the State University of New York at Geneseo

BA Spanish and Education, the State University of New York at Geneseo

Experience

Gretchen Rosales is an educational leader dedicated to fostering academic excellence, student success, and providing life-changing educational opportunities for students. Currently serving as the Superintendent of Schools at Elba Central School since 2021, she has spearheaded initiatives that enhance curriculum development, strengthen community partnerships, and promote a culture of inclusivity and achievement.

Prior to this role, Gretchen served as the Jr./Sr. High School Principal at Elba Central School, where she played a pivotal role in improving student outcomes and implementing strategic programs that supported both faculty and students. Her leadership journey also includes serving as the Middle/High School Assistant Principal at Alexander Central School District where she focused on fostering a positive school climate and enhancing instructional practices.

Before transitioning into administrative leadership, Gretchen served at Kendall Central School District as an Instructional Support Specialist and Middle School Department Chairperson. In these roles, she mentored educators, developed innovative instructional strategies, and contributed to curriculum advancement. Her commitment to professional growth extended to serving as a teacher mentor, supporting new educators in refining their craft and fostering student engagement. Her transition to educational leadership followed a successful teaching career in Spanish and English as a Second Language, during which she taught students across all grade levels in both New York and Texas.

Outstanding Achievements as Superintendent

Academic:

Under the leadership of Gretchen Rosales, Elba Central School District has transformed into a hub of academic innovation, equity, and opportunity—offering students an enriched, future-ready education rooted in excellence and real-world application. Her commitment to expanding access and achievement is reflected in the district’s exceptional accomplishments:

- **Pioneering academic pathways:** Elba proudly offers the New York State Seal of Biliteracy and the Seal of Civic Readiness, having served as a pilot school during the state’s initial rollout. Additionally, the district is a pilot site for the NYS Individual Arts Performance Pathway, which includes a cohesive performance-based graduation project.
- **Commitment to excellence and access:** The district boasts a 100% graduation rate, including for English Language Learners, following a strategic reform of the ELL instructional model to better support diverse learners.
- **Recognition for innovation in nutrition and wellness education:** Elba received the USDA Innovation in Nutrition Education Award for its creative approach to nutrition programming, which includes student-run farmer’s markets, community gardens, a greenhouse, and even free-range chickens—providing students with hands-on, interdisciplinary learning experiences.
- **Full day UPK programming:** Elba Central now offers full day UPK programming to better prepare the district’s youngest learners in a nurturing environment.
- **UPK-12 program development:** Elba now offers comprehensive agriculture education and a vertically aligned STEM program for students in all grades, along with elementary world language instruction, preparing students from the earliest years for a global, tech-driven future.
- **Digital literacy and global citizenship:** A Digital Citizenship curriculum was introduced at the middle school level, promoting safe, responsible technology use. Students also benefit from international travel opportunities to countries such as Spain, Italy, and Greece, broadening their horizons beyond the classroom.
- **Expanded access to college-level courses:** The district has significantly increased its dual enrollment offerings, ensuring all students—including English Language Learners and those with disabilities—have equitable access to advanced academic opportunities.
- **Strategic planning for future-ready learning:** Gretchen spearheaded the development and implementation of Elba’s first-ever, five-year Strategic Plan, a guiding document focused on innovation, equity, and preparing students for the challenges and opportunities of tomorrow, based on empirically-proven strategies for instructional excellence.
- **National Recognition for Academic Excellence:** Under Rosales’ leadership, Elba Central School has consistently been named among U.S. News & World Report’s “Best High Schools,” reflecting the district’s commitment to academic rigor and student success.
- **Implementation of the District’s first Future Farmers of America program;** under the direction of their advisor, the group has won numerous state and national awards in its young inception.

Fiscal:

Elba Central School District has been recognized for its forward-thinking financial strategies and commitment to expanding educational opportunities through community partnerships and competitive grant acquisition. Highlights of the district’s recent accomplishments include:

- Establishment of a senior scholarship fund: In a meaningful collaboration with community members, the district launched a scholarship fund to support graduating seniors, fostering a culture of generosity and long-term investment in student success.
- Securing competitive grant funding: Elba has demonstrated grant-writing excellence, earning substantial awards that directly benefit students and staff, including:
 - \$650,000 from the U.S. Department of Justice – Stop School Violence Program
 - \$150,000 from the USDA Healthy Meals Incentive Initiative
 - \$125,000 from the New York State Farm to School Grant
 - \$247,000 in Universal Pre-K Expansion Grants over two years
- Passage of a landmark Capital Improvement Project: Voters approved one of the most ambitious capital projects in district history, designed to create modern, future-ready learning spaces and shared community learning environments that reflect 21st-century educational goals.
- STEM enrichment through community-backed grants: With the support of local farmers, Elba secured a \$10,000 grant from the America’s Farmers Grow Rural Education Program (Bayer Fund). The grant is being used to enhance the school’s STEM curriculum, including the development of student-led video announcements that promote digital literacy and creativity.
- Regional collaboration for efficiency and equity: Elba works extensively with surrounding districts to implement a customized, regionalized approach to educational programming—maximizing financial efficiency while expanding opportunities for students across the region.

Social-Emotional:

Elba Central School District continues to set a powerful example in cultivating a safe, inclusive, and emotionally supportive learning environment for all students. Through a holistic and proactive approach, the district has launched several groundbreaking initiatives that prioritize student well-being and equity:

- Launch of the district’s first responsive inclusion and equity committee: Elba established a dedicated committee to examine and address achievement gaps, ensure equitable access to opportunities, and proactively shape district policy through the lens of inclusion and responsiveness.
- District-wide implementation of social-emotional learning (SEL): Elba adopted a comprehensive SEL framework that includes tiered supports at all levels—Tier I (universal), Tier II (targeted), and Tier III (intensive)—ensuring that every student receives the social and emotional guidance they need to thrive.
- Expansion of student support services: Recognizing the evolving needs of its student population, the district created a full-time social worker position and welcomed its first-ever

School Resource Officer, enhancing both the emotional and physical safety of the school environment.

- Introduction of a therapy dog program: Elba launched their first-ever therapy dog initiative, further reinforcing its commitment to student mental health and wellness by providing a calming, supportive presence in the school community.

OTHER PROFESSIONAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Committee and Community Work,

Genesee Valley Chief School Officers' Association (GVCSOA) Executive Committee;
Genesee Valley Chief School Officers' Association (GVCOSA) Treasurer (at large)
Genesee Valley Chief School Officers' Association (GVCSOA) *Superintendent Instructional Subcommittee*, Chair
Genesee Valley Women's Leadership Committee
New York State Council of School Superintendents (NYSCOSS) Curriculum & Instruction Committee
New York State Council of School Superintendents (NYSCOSS) Federal Advocacy Committee (GVCOSA) Legislative Committee
Agricultural Advisory Board, Elba CSD
Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee, Chair Elba CSD
NYS Education Department *Statewide DEI Leaders Network* member
Founder - Genesee Women Leaders in Education
Executive Board *UConnectCare* (formerly the Genesee Council on Alcoholism and Substance Abuse)
Executive Board (Vice President) of the Business Education Alliance,
Member Elba Betterment Committee
Genesee/Livingston/Orleans/Wyoming (GLOW) Region Veterans Auxiliary Support Team

Honors and Awards

- Nominated for Superintendent of the Year by peers for New York State (NYSCOSS)
- GVSBA Student Services Award - community programming and agriculture instruction
- Commendation, Genesee Co. Legislature for leadership during Winter Storm Elliott (Elba warming shelter)
- Twice selected as Teacher of the Year, Kendall Jr./Sr. High School
- Panelist Mentor, "Surviving and Thriving as a Teacher" at SUNY Geneseo
- Guest Lecturer at SUNY Geneseo's Forum on Immigration
- Central Western Retired Teacher Association's *Active Educator Award & Scholarship* for excellence in teaching
- HEB Excellence in Education Award, State of Texas

Publications and Speaking Opportunities

- Rural Schools Association Conference, slated co-presenter, Agriculture Instruction in Rural Schools, July 2025

- EdSpaces Conference Presenter (Houston, TX) “Engaging All Stakeholders in the Capital Improvement Design Process”, November 2024
- Sciandra, K. "Celebrating Women's History: GLOW region female superintendents weigh in on leadership," The Batavia Daily News; 2024
- SAANY’s Conference Presenter (Albany, New York) “Bringing Back Rural Schools: Post COVID”
- Vanguard: Bouncing Back Better “Implementing Positive Change During COVID” 2021
- Vanguard: Exploring Educational Leadership “Serving Our English Language Learners Making Connections that Count” 2019
- Association for Middle Level Education National Conference Presenter (Orlando, Florida) “Holistic Assessment and Student Goal-Setting” 2019

AN INTERVIEW

Tell us about how you see today’s superintendent.

Today’s superintendent must be more than simply a manager of systems—they must be a servant leader, a listener, a bridge-builder, a creative visionary, and a relentless advocate for students, families, and educators.

The role has evolved. Today’s superintendent must navigate complex issues: the aftermath of a global pandemic, the growing mental health needs of students and staff, shifting political landscapes, teacher shortages, and the heartbreak of families torn apart by immigration policies, violence, or poverty. At the same time, we’re called to lead with clarity, compassion, and courage—to hold space for grief and healing while also pushing forward bold, innovative visions of equity and excellence.

I see the modern superintendent as someone who walks between the pain and the promise—carrying the weight of heartbreaking realities, but also lifting up the everyday victories: a student learning to read, a family finally feeling seen and heard, a new program launched that meets the needs of a changing community, a senior who is graduating and heading out into the world with hope. I want my students to have eternal hope; it is this hope that will change the world.

We must be community-centered, culturally responsive, and visionary—willing to reimagine what schools can be while staying grounded in what students need. That requires creativity, collaboration, and a willingness to lead differently, especially when the old ways no longer serve our children. It also requires a sense of humor and perspective—because there will be hard days, and the ability to laugh, reflect, and reconnect with your “why” is essential for sustaining this work.

We must be instructional leaders who grow great teachers, empower school leaders, and protect both academic progress and emotional well-being. And above all, we must remain anchored in the belief that public education is one of the most powerful tools for social change. There is no better place than our schools to do this profoundly deep and important work.

The work is hard—but it is good. And today’s superintendent must be willing to lead with a strong mind, a creative spirit, and an open heart.

What new understandings did you acquire after two or three years on the job?

After two or three years in the role of superintendent, one of the most profound understandings I’ve gained is how deeply the joy and heartbreak of this work live side by side. This position gives you a front-row seat to both the challenges that burden our communities and the moments of transformation that remind us why we lead.

The heartbreak is real. I’ve sat with families torn apart by immigration struggles, supporting children who come to school carrying the emotional weight of fear, uncertainty, and separation. I’ve walked the halls of schools still grappling with the trauma left in the wake of COVID—where the gaps in learning are matched only by the growing mental health needs of students and staff. I’ve stood beside principals and teachers mourning student losses, navigating burnout, and doing everything they can to hold space for their communities while holding themselves together.

But in the midst of that, I’ve also seen the goodness and power of our work—every single day. I’ve watched children learn to read for the first time, their faces lighting up with pride. I’ve seen teachers grow into instructional leaders, reshaping their practice to better meet the needs of multilingual learners, students with disabilities, and those from underrepresented backgrounds. I’ve helped expand dual language programs, SEL supports, and equity-centered professional development that begins to close opportunity gaps and open new doors for our students.

What I’ve learned is that the job of a superintendent is not just to manage systems—it’s to hold hope steady, even when it feels heavy. It’s about showing up with humility, listening deeply to students and families, especially those most often left out, and keeping the moral clarity that every decision should serve our learners first.

This role is demanding and often lonely, but it is also a gift. Because at the end of the day, despite the heartbreak, we are building something better—for our students, our educators, and the communities we serve. And that is always worth it.

Share an idea to use or something you’ve learned with your colleagues.

One idea I’ve shared with colleagues is the development of a Culturally Responsive Engagement Framework that centers student and community voice in shaping districtwide engagement and inclusion efforts. Through this lens, we’ve created space for community-informed system change—especially in areas like social-emotional learning (SEL), culturally responsive events, and relationship-building with historically underserved populations. Our #OneElba motto isn’t just a hashtag, but rather a movement. We want everyone to feel welcome and included in our Lancer Family – whether you’ve been in the community for decades or just visiting within our walls for a day.

I've learned that when schools intentionally create platforms for students and families to share their lived experiences, we not only build stronger relationships—we also design programs that are more relevant, affirming, and sustainable. For example, we've hosted cultural celebration nights co-led by Hispanic families, where food, storytelling, and traditions are centered. This not only builds community pride but deepens cross-cultural understanding across our district.

To ensure authentic incorporation of student and community voice in this work, I recommend:

- **Student stakeholder councils/the Principal's Cabinet:** These provide spaces where students can reflect on their experiences with identity, belonging, and school climate—then bring actionable recommendations to school and district leadership. As principal, I began a cabinet of student advisors; they assisted me with changes that were important to their education. After all, they are the most impacted by our work.
- **Community listening circles:** Especially small, rural communities, partnering with stakeholders, local organizations and even bilingual facilitators helps ensure all voices are heard, even those who may not traditionally attend school meetings or district events.
- **Collaborative planning of social events:** Invite families and students to co-plan culturally responsive events, SEL nights, or wellness fairs that reflect their values, traditions, and priorities.
- **Family advisory boards:** Including parents from underrepresented groups—such as members from our Spanish-speaking families, parents of students with disabilities, the farm-working/agriculture community—ensures that decisions are grounded in real needs and lived experience.
- **Transparent feedback cycles:** Always share how input was used and recognize community contributions. This builds long-term trust and ownership.

System change in schools must be co-created. When we embrace the strengths, stories, and knowledge of our diverse students and families, we build a school system that truly reflects and honors the communities we serve.

Submitted by:

Gretchen Rosales



April 6, 2025

Name/Signature

Date