

A quick update – for the People of Rome

Come to the school Board meeting, this Wednesday 7 PM at the Middle school. The assistant Chief State Fire Marshall Rich McCarthy will be speaking. Rich has a child in our school district and has personally done fire safety walk downs in each of our facilities, schools and buildings. What he has to say is significant. It is about our schools.

We had two school budget works shops last week. They went very well. Several people spoke up for ensuring a quality education for our students. In particular one requested an additional third grade teacher at Belgrade Central (the class sizes are in the low 20's right now). Another asked for more funding for teacher and teacher's aide training (an amount was not suggested but I suggested an additional \$100,000). A concern was raised that our special needs student teaching aids may not be getting the behavioral training that might help them in their duties. On the other hand one person spoke out about concern for those on fixed incomes and the impact of the school budget on them.

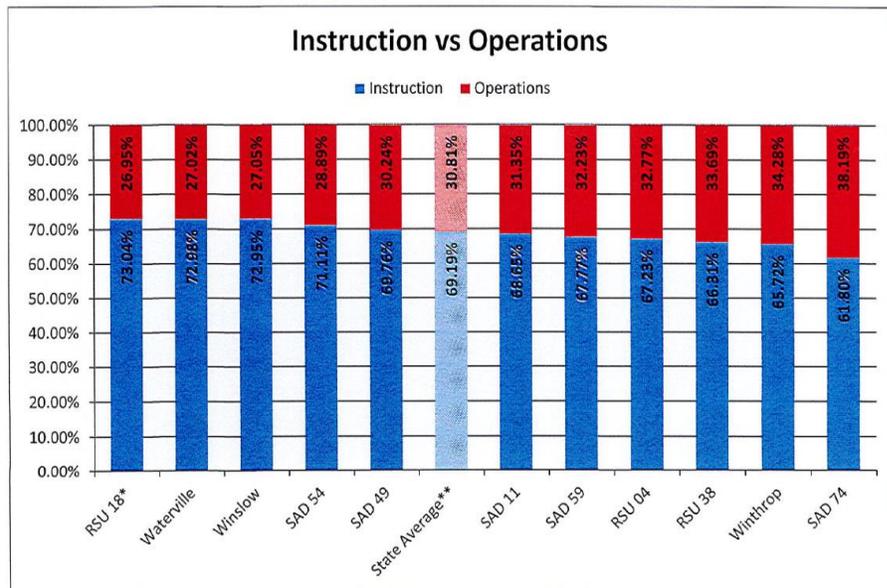
More people spoke up for achieving an excellent education for the young men and women under our stewardship than I have even heard in my three years on the board. I was impressed. The entire tone of the meetings was favorable and supporting. And this is in spite of the increases the budget shows and the decline in state support that we are expecting. I think people really are concerned about the future these young men and women will face. People really want to do the best we can afford to help them get a very good start in life. **I know we in Rome want to provide the very best education we can afford for these important young men and women from our town.**

Attached here are two interesting items the Superintendent sent. The first shows many of the school's successes. 70% of our graduates plan to go to a 4 year undergraduate school, a two year school or join the military. 126 of our 2016 graduates took collegiate advanced placement exams. Of those 69% got a 3 or better on a scale of 1 to 5. That means they can place out of one or two college semesters of the subject they took the exam in. And we have 273 students "dual enrolled" at Thomas College or KVCC. This means they are taking college level courses in high school, and getting credit for that! Further we have had graduates go to some very good colleges: Bates, Bowdoin, Colby, MIT, Northeastern, NYU, Tufts, the University of Rochester and Worcester Polytechnic Institute (and many more – see the attachment).

On the other hand our SAT scores are not where we want them. Our 2017 class had an average SAT score of 974 versus a Maine State average of 993. **We want to set the standard of academic excellence for public schools in Maine.** Clearly we are not there yet. Further Tom Burton, who is on the School Board and the head Swimming Coach at Colby, pointed out that as schools move to "proficiency based" scoring systems colleges lean more heavily on SAT scores to judge applicants. So SAT scores matter even more for our students– for us!

The other attachment shows some ratios for our district expenditures versus others. Most notable is the chart below. It shows that we are spending more on actual education as a percent of the budget than many of our neighbors (DOE means Department of Education). This is great!

FY 17-18 PROPOSED BOARD BUDGET INSTRUCTION VS. OPERATIONS COMPARISON TO FY 15-16 DOE DATA



*17-18 Proposed Budget

**15-16 DOE Data Warehouse Information

We are on a mission here. Our goal is to ensure that the young men and women from Rome (and the entire school district) get the best academic start in life we can collectively afford. Times are getting more demanding: we have imposed special education requirements, more special needs students, imposed “proficiency based learning” requirements, imposed food service requirements, and reductions in State funding. And our economy is demanding better educated graduates – educated however in things many of us don’t even know about (or didn’t even exist when we were young) – database management, use of tools like Excel, applied knowledge of statistics, hands on experience with real world things (wood working, metal forming, writing, programming, web page development, computer generated imagery, etc.). I am optimistic that – with your support and concern – we can truly have our school district set the standard for academic excellence for public schools in Maine.

And I can assure you, because of your support, **Rome is leading the charge!**

Please be in touch with your thoughts and concerns. And do sign up to be on our Academic Options Assessment Committee – it is well worth our time!

Rome - a great place to live and grow up!

Dr. Andrew Cook

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