

RSU 18 Rome May update

VOTE June 13, 2017 8 AM to 8 PM

“Is this a budget, all things considered, we can and should support? Absolutely!”

Vote yes for the Budget and revolving renovation fund

If you cannot make it in person, get an Absentee ballot – your vote counts!

Everyone,

A quick up date

The 2017/18 Budget: Is ready for a vote.

Good things:

- Our school wide academic performance on standardized tests (NWEA, MEA etc.) are improving.
- We were approved for \$250,000 in State revolving renovation funding. Our old schools (and they are old) need the work – leaking roofs, failed pipes, failed plumbing, sidewalks, fire doors, disabilities act compliance!)
- Three of our principals have been recognized as being best in their field around the State; Jennifer McGee, Paula Callan and Melanie Smith. Karen Alley has been named secretary of the year, Donny Sheets was named custodian of the year, Lisette Bordes, one of our Messalonskee High School English Teachers, was named Kennebec Teacher of the Year. Good leaders means good education which means **good news for our students.**
- We are addressing the deficit our nutrition (lunch) program has been forced to accrue.
- Our regular education funding is 45% of the budget versus a State average of 41%. This means **we are spending more on our student’s education** (as a portion of the budget) **than the average district in the state**
- Our graduation rate (94%) is one of the highest in the state and nation. Our seniors are being accepted into some of the most rigorous colleges in our country. We have much improved from the 84% graduation rate in 2009.
- We are focusing on significantly improving our support of mathematics excellence. To that end look at our new faculty hires: Jamie Kriger (China primary) – strong in mathematics, Chelsey Oliver, Messalonskee Middle school – strong in mathematics, Joshua Schmidt – China Middle school – strong in mathematics. Judd Thompson – Messalonskee high school, strong in mathematics, Nathan Davis – Messalonskee High school – strong in mathematics. GOOD DEAL – for our children!
- Our extra-curricular programs continue to set the standard of excellence.

Areas for consideration:

- We are being asked (by the State) to pick up even more of the teacher retirement program funding (\$100,000)
- Despite excellent work on the “Wellness program” our health insurance premium went up by \$265,000 (we are still 30% lower than our neighboring districts).
- While we did reduce regular education staffing consistent with our declining student count, there is an increase in funding for special education staffing. We need this because our special needs student population has grown by 17% and we are obligated to meet state requirements for caseloads and provide reasonable class sizes. The good news is proper staffing in this area enables us to avoid placing these students out of district, which is far more expensive.
- The State has significantly reduced its support of our district (approximately a \$750,000 reduction).

Thoughts:

- Despite all these added costs (retirement, special needs, building remediation, health insurance, nutrition program) we held the budget increase to 3.6%. **THAT’S A BIG DEAL.**
- And despite the reduction in State funding we were able to hold the actual tax increase to Rome to only 5%. **NOT TOO BAD.**
- On the other hand over 50% of our actual school tax (for Rome) is paid by non-residents. That means we, the residents, are getting a **real deal** in terms of how much we pay for the education the young men and women under our care.
- My estimate is that for residents we are actually paying less than \$7000/yr. per student for the good education our children are getting. **THIS IS A REAL DEAL!** The State average is greater than \$11,000.

Andy Cook’s Conclusion:

- Are we there yet in helping our children get the very best educational start in life we can afford? **Not yet** – but things are improving and we are on the right track. I am dissatisfied, I hope you are dissatisfied – BUT – things are improving and actually are good.
- **But we can be excellent and set the standard academic excellence for the state. We can do it! For the good of our Rome children. And we will.**
- Is this a budget, all things considered, we can and should support? **Absolutely!**
- Do we need your vote and support? **For sure.** Not everyone sees the importance of education for our children (and all the district’s children) with the

care and concern we in Rome do. We need everyone to vote, **and vote yes**, in order to ensure our Rome children get the very best education we can afford.

Yours in helping our students by helping RSU 18 set the standard for academic excellence for public schools in Maine.

Rome – a great place to live, and a great place to grow up!

Dr. Andrew Cook
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p.s. If you want to talk or have thoughts, please call me or email me!
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