

RSU 18 Rome May update

Everyone,

A quick up date

New Assistant Superintendent: Our new Superintendent (to be) has selected Keith Morin to be our new Assistant Superintendent and Chief Academic officer. Most critically Keith will work with me and Educational Programming Committee on **helping RSU 18 set the standard for academic excellence amongst public schools in Maine**. I was not on the selection committee however I am told the committee was broad based and included students, members of the school board and others (I believe faculty members). Keith is currently the Principal at Winthrop High School. He has served as assistant principal and as a high school social studies teacher at Lawrence high school. He has a master degree in Educational Leadership and Administration from the University of Maine and is a graduate of U Maine Farmington. One of Keith's strengths is a knowledge of practical implementation of the proficiency based learning requirements. That is much needed!

Kathy Harris-Smedberg will return as principal of the Williams School from her sabbatical (to complete her PhD) on Monday, May 15. We just learned she is to become the assistant superintendent and chief academic officer in the Bangor Schools. We will miss her. I sincerely hope she will come back to help us some time in the future.

The 2017/18 Budget is now largely formulated. We have had several public working sessions and hearings. There has been an unusual amount of positive discussion about academics, academic excellence and helping the students under our stewardship succeed (!). I have been impressed. I have not heard a single voice that is opposed to the budget in any of the meetings (also a first for me!).

Budget and Rome: It is hard to tell what the impact maybe for Rome since the expense budget is only part of the story. The rest of the story is the split between the towns and also the State contribution (which appears to continue to drop). It appears both of those items may work to raise our net town tax. However, as I have pointed out earlier, given that so much of our school tax is paid by nonresidents, **RSU 18 education is a huge bargain for Rome residents**. Our per student tuition cost for our students as paid by Rome residents is extremely modest and for sure a bargain given the quality of the education.

Additional Local Funds: That being said, several of us remain concerned about the portion of the "RSU 18 additional local funds" that Rome has to pay. We have been successful in getting the "Cost Sharing Committee" to reconvene to reconsider this issue. It was a hard fought team effort to cause that to happen. Kudos to our Rome Selectmen, committee members in Belgrade and China, and even positive influence from some in Oakland! The School Board voted unanimously to reconvene the committee! Now we have to go the next step and help all five towns converge on the thought that **the best way to achieve an enduring, solution that draws the towns together as a team with a focus on our students' academic success, is to create an equitable form of financial team work amongst the five towns!**

Article on the State money: It appears the legislature may increase the amount of State support for public schools. This increase for RSU 18 could be between \$500,000 and \$750,000. It is all unclear and will not be resolved until after our budget and revenue plan is approved by the voters. So we, the School Board, have included a warrant article to allow these funds to be allocated if indeed they appear. The article would rebate 50% of the "new" money to the towns that get state funds, 25% to the students in

the form of additional K-3 educators, facilities upgrades and resolution of our large (\$750,000) nutrition program unresolved debt. The final 25% would go the “General Fund” which is a reserve fund for unexpected and emergent expenses. Regrettably Rome will receive none of the 50% rebate. On the other hand the other two allocations are for the good of our students. I support this warrant, because it is one that I think all five towns can support. I could have proposed to have 100% go for the students but it is unlikely that would have carried the day – so this is a reasonable compromise.

Academic excellence: I am heartened to hear, at every Board meeting, budget meeting and public interaction, an increased focus on helping the children under our stewardship achieve the very best academic start in life we can collectively afford. This is really great. This is what public education is all about. And we are starting to see results! **These wonderful young men and women of Rome**, who are under our stewardship, **deserve the very best start in life that we can afford to provide.** I don’t think we are there yet, but for sure I see things heading in the right direction.

Academic options exploratory committee: Our Selectmen are convening this committee. For sure there are good reasons for a group of impartial Rome resident’s to review the situation. If you are interested I hope you will apply with the Select Board. We really need a hard, independent look at the facts in order to help guide a town decision.

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

Dr. Andrew Cook
397-5332

p.s. If you want to talk or have thoughts, please call me or email me!
Dr.andrew.g.cook@gmail.com