

RSU 18 Rome update

9/25/17

Everyone,

It's been an intriguing and mystifying month for Rome and the RSU. The really good news is that school has restarted uneventfully (except for the rain induced flood in one of the China schools).

As always I hope you will reach out to me by phone, in person or email to share your thoughts and perspectives. (397-5332 acook@rsu18.org)

The September pluses:

- The new Chief Academic officer (and Assistant Superintendent) Keith Morin went over the most recent MEA test score results with the Academic Programs committee, the Board and also with our own Town Academic Options Exploratory Committee. I have been impressed with his interest in and understanding of the data and his sensitivity to what it all means.
- While almost all scores in all RSU 18 schools showed significant improvement over last year (!!!), and many are above the state average, many rank below the state expectations for "meets or exceeds standards."
- Interestingly Belgrade Central School scored head and shoulders (it is amazing) above all the other schools in the district at any grade level! And in fact their scores would be considered to be outstanding for any school in the state. The message to me is – **our district can be great**. For sure The Belgrade team is showing the way! Hooray! Kudos to the Belgrade students, parents, teachers and administration.
- And kudos to our Academic Options Exploratory committee for inviting Keith Morin over to share facts and data with them, and kudos to Keith for making the trip and time! Well done

Other considerations:

- After much effort on the part of Rome, the five town RSU 18 Cost Sharing Committee reconvened to reconsider the "additional local funds" and bond indebtedness tax allocation decision they made late last year.
- The China delegation, much to their credit, proposed that the formula be changed from today's 75% valuation 25% student count allocation to a 70% valuation, 30% student count allocation. This motion, if passed, would have saved Rome roughly \$18,000/yr. in taxes (or about \$400,000 over 20 years). It would also have saved Rome >\$57,000 in indebtedness in the proposed \$13.9M bond.
- These are significant numbers. This is enough to start our own K-3 academic excellence program summer school at town hall, or dramatically upgrade our town beach, or just plain old put money back in our tax payers' pockets.
- Again – kudos to the China delegation – they are team players and they were great. We owe them – wonderful people.
- Bizarrely – when it came to a vote, it was voted down 7-8. China (3 votes) and Rome (3 votes) voted for it as did Rebecca Seel, the School Board member from Belgrade.

- However, for reasons I cannot understand, the Selectman from Belgrade (Gary Mahler) and the Belgrade Town Manager (Dennis Keschl) voted against it. Had Gary and Dennis voted for this motion, it would have won 9-6.
- I could not (then) and cannot now fathom why Gary and Dennis voted as they did. The proposed motion would have saved Belgrade roughly \$20,000 a year in taxes and >\$63,000 on the \$13.9M bond indebtedness. It's just amazing that they voted as they did. Further they offered no other ideas or motions.
- Success was in our hands, and the two members of the Belgrade delegation let it slip through our (and their) fingers.
- I am sorry to report that I think the consequence of their votes will stay with us for at least 20 years if not the rest of our participation in the RSU. It means that now – three times – the five towns have voted for the 75%/25% formula: once when the RSU was formed, once last year and then again last week.
- The opportunity was right now. For sure in the next revisit of the formula (five years from now) the three precedents will prevail. So Rome (and Belgrade) will continue to pay a disproportionate share of the “additional local funds” and bond costs for many, many years.
- I am so sorry. I apologize to you all. I could not have imagined that Gary and Dennis would vote as they did. I have no idea what I should have or could have done differently.

Oh well, so it goes. The good news is the Belgrade academic scores. Academics and a great education for our students is what it is all about. If we keep the pressure on I am sure we can once again make RSU 18 one of the best districts (if not the best) in the State. And that will be wonderful (and our goal) for the important young men and women from Rome!

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
397-5332

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

acook@rsu18.org