

RSU 18 Rome Director's December 2018 update

This note reflects exclusively my personal perspective as your Rome Town RSU 18 School Director. It in no way or manner represents the perspective of the Superintendent or the School Board. I am speaking strictly for myself in order to provide you with information. You are encouraged to access the RSU 18 web site and to contact the Superintendent for information.

Merry Christmas and happy holidays to everyone. We have a little time off from school. A key goal is to bring our students back to school in January in the same good shape they are in now.

So have fun and be vigilant as regards safety.

Positives:

1. **Academics** – The Chief Academic officer, Keith Morin, and our Superintendent, Carl Gartley, continue a high level of focus on the district's students' academic performance. This is a big positive. We are spending at least 15 minutes, sometimes ½ an hour, at board meetings on academics, academic issues, metrics and successes. One of the board's key assignments is monitoring, evaluating and reporting the results of the educational program. We are doing that with ever increasing vigor. I am hoping we will see metrics reported at every board meeting.
2. **Attendance** – a key topic for our school to improve our students' success is getting them to school. All the schools are closely monitoring attendance and "truancy." If students are truant parents are being advised and asked to assist. This will ensure their children get a first class RSU 18 education.
 - a. Our absences and truanies are much below where we were last year and in the past.
 - b. The educators tell us that a key indicator of education and life success – is attendance – at school. So we are making progress on this key indicator.
 - c. And it is being reported as a metric by school at every board meeting. One area of challenge is our high school students, especially seniors. That for sure is no time for anyone to drop the ball. If you have run the football 99 yards, it is that last yard that makes a touchdown. Let's get every Rome student over the graduation touchdown line.
3. **Mathematics** – we have a mathematics team extracurricular activity under the leadership of faculty members Nick Hart and Stacy Hart. In a recent "meet" they took first with a score of 256 points. The next closet district was Waterville with 213 points and then Skowhegan with 112. There were seven neighboring school in the meet. So this is a very impressive success.
4. **Bond issue, safety, energy efficiency and the new athletic fields** - The Superintendent reported that of the \$13.9M bond issue (that we all voted on and approved) 34% has been spent. The balance (~\$9M) is literally in the bank. Here is the good report:
 - a. **60 of the 80 "fire safety" improvements identified by the State Fire Marshall's office have been resolved.** This is excellent work by the RSU leadership (Carl and his team). The remaining 20 projects are planned to be done in 2019 (i.e. replacing one of the China schools sheet rock with a more fire retardant version). This whole effort is a big deal. The fire safety topics were identified by the facilities committee (co-chaired by our First Selectman Richard LaBelle) which convened in 2015. The fact that the upgrades are being done may never be fully appreciated by us since it is all about preventing fires and preventing the children, faculty and staff from experiencing injury or death. But the

improvements are worthwhile for that very reason. These improvements are wonderful – and it is all because of the bond!

- b. **The \$2.9M Energy efficiency contract has been awarded and 46% of the work has been done.** This is also positive. We have better lighting, more flexible lighting options, and better heating and lower electric power and fuel bills. Good deal. Again, it is all because of the bond.
- c. **Facilities improvement projects** – there are many improvement projects yet to go (i.e. upgrading the Belgrade Central School drop off and pick up area). These projects need increased attention. The RSU leadership is committed to completing them. About 10% of this work has been done. We have asked the Superintendent to get us a list of the planned projects' expected completion dates.
- d. **Athletic fields** – The Superintendent has committed (and recommitted) that this project will come in on the \$3.9M budget. Substantial work has been completed. The contractor will install the final surfaces when warm weather returns. Good progress – again all a result of the bond.

Areas for consideration:

1. **The 2019/2020 budget** - We are in that cycle again. **You can impact the budget by getting involved up front.**
 - a. Join us for the budget works shops on March 26 march 27 (6 pm) at the Middle school. Be heard.
 - b. Sometimes I feel like a lone voice in the wilderness. We need more of us to speak up for educational quality. And that means having enough money in the budget to keep the children safe, and to hire the very best faculty we can get and retain them.
 - c. It's all about academic excellence. Excellent schools mean people and businesses will move to our area. If they come here our tax base will broaden and more jobs will be created. So academically excellent school drive economic and tax base success for all our towns.
2. **Even if you don't have children in the schools – come.** Your life experience and knowledge are invaluable in the budget setting process.
3. **Come on down** – I hope to see you there and more importantly hear you speak! If you want help or facts to prepare for your words, give me a call.

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