

## RSU 18 Rome Director's 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.*

Update:

Our youngest daughter got married in September (she was our last one - they are all married now!) As result I was a little tied up. So I apologize for my delay in getting out my usual monthly update. The result is that there is a lot here this time.

**Positives:**

1. **Academics** - There is an ever increasing amount of time spent at the Board level on the district's academic performance. This is a big positive. At our Board "retreat" we had a speaker from the Maine School Management Association (Steven Bailey, Executive Director). He emphasized the important role of the board in setting the big picture vision. He encouraged the board to be "data savvy." He reinforced for us that **one of our key assignments is "monitoring, evaluating and reporting the results of the educational program."**
2. In that light **kudos are due to our Assistant Superintendent/Chief Academic officer Keith Morin** for the focused reports he is providing on academics at every board meeting. He is increasing our focus on metrics and their trends. He is helping us to become "data driven." This is a huge step forward from when I started on the board in 2015 when we rarely discussed academic performance.
3. **More academics** - In that light the State just released the results of the Maine Educational Assessment (MEA) test the Maine public school students took last year. The results for RSU 18 are a cautiously positive. That is, in **Reading** the district has successfully returned to (and is sustaining) performing at the State average level of proficiency. We were well above State average in 2010 but then suffered a decline for four years. We seem to have recovered at least to State average (more on this below).
4. **And more** - The situation is the same in mathematics. We were performing better than the State average in 2010 but then took a sustained dip for 6 years. This year have we recovered back to the State average and we are showing a track record of continuous improvement year by year.
5. So kudos to the current administration led by Carl Gartley and to the faculty for the recovery they have succeeded in implementing. We are not yet back to the good position we were in in 2010 but we seem to be on the upward track. The charts we were provided are shown at the end of this report.
6. Keith Morin, our Chief Academic Officer, is forming teams of faculty members, education coaches and administration members to address the MEA and NWEA (Northwest Evaluation Association) results to determine what we could do differently both programmatically and instructionally to cause continued improvement in our student's scores and hence their life success.
7. **MMTC and "trade" skills** - An academic, college bound education is not ideal for everyone. In fact, despite my many academic degrees (B.A., M.S. Ph.D., MBA and more) a key gap in my education was the basics of welding, metallurgy, wood work and basic electrical knowledge. This hurt me in my career as I moved into experimental physics and then on into nuclear

engineering. The Mid Maine Technical Center (MMTC) appears to be a premier opportunity for students to gain fundamental skills and knowledge in these “hands on” areas. We recently were shown the MMTC audio-visual-communications career area – it is nothing like we recall from our days. These students make first class, professional TV and radio news worth stories and videography. Some have gone on to take premier video story, news and movie creation positions in our State. I was impressed.

8. **MMTC participation** - Our high school has consistently had about 11.5% of its students attend MMTC. This year our participation jumped to 15%. Of the 91 of our students who attended MMTC last year 67 earned industry “Board “certifications. That means they earned a license (e.g. in nursing) or a certification (e.g. in welding). This is good. Curiously it is not common knowledge but several basic “trade” skills are much in demand. Traveling industrial pipe welders can earn salaries in the \$100k/yr range.
9. **Extracurricular** - We were also informed that of the 713 students in our high school 500 are involved in extracurricular clubs and sports – an impressive turnout. And we were advised by our staff that we appear to be meeting our “Title 9” responsibilities in terms of providing opportunities for all the students.
10. **CNA** - Chief Academic Officer Keith Morin and the faculty recently completed the mandated “comprehensive needs assessment (CNA).” They observed a continued need to focus on increasing our student’s achievement in English Language arts, mathematics and science. This observation and focus is great – they know what needs to be done. Curiously one of the key challenges (the #1 challenge) they identified in achieving this focus is student attendance.
11. **Attendance is important** - Yep – if the students are not in school it is hard for them to learn. It was surprising for me to learn that last year 20% of our students were “truant.” Truant is defined by the State to mean:
  - a. A student aged 7 or above who hadn’t completed 6th grade and had 5 or more consecutive unexcused absences
  - b. A student aged 7 or above who hadn’t completed 6th grade and had 7 or more cumulative unexcused absences.
  - c. A student who completed 6th grade but was not yet 17 and had 7 or more consecutive unexcused absences. Or
  - d. A student who had completed 6th grade but was not yet 17 and had 10 or more cumulative unexcused absences
12. So there is an effort (a good one) by the administration, school principals and faculty to help students and families ensure our students are getting to school. This is great!
13. The RSU 18 Comprehensive need assessment team has set four specific goals for the district. **The first is attendance, the second is on data informed instruction, the third is on “response to intervention” and the fourth is on “family engagement.”** I am very, very heartened by these goals and this analysis. Well done. If you would like a copy I have it as does Keith – it is well worth the read.

#### **Areas for consideration:**

1. **MEA** - We should not be heartened by our overall MEA test scores. The State average for reading (we were told) is that 47% of the students in the State (and RSU18) are performing at a level that the State considers to “meet or exceed” proficiency. That means over half of the

students in the State and the RSU **are not** “proficient” in reading as defined by the State Department of Education.

2. **Even less heartening** - In mathematics the situation is of greater concern. The State and RSU average proficiency is 38%. This means that 62% of the RSU 18 students are considered to be below the proficiency standard in mathematics set by the State.
3. Needless to say these scores (the relatively low RSU and State performance against “proficiency”) are a concern for us all. We for sure want to be sure our students get the very best start in life we can afford. And for sure basic capability in reading and mathematics form a foundation for all their life’s work going forward. At one time RSU 18 was one of the academically leading school districts in the State. That is a place we in Rome aspire to see the RSU return to. **We seem to be on the road but we still have quite a distance to go.**

#### **Other topics:**

1. **Scholarship funds** - We continue to pursue how our “scholarship” funds are being invested. There is a substantial amount of scholarship funds people have donated over the years (on the order of \$500,000). Regrettably those funds have been allowed to earn at a low rate of interest (on the order of 1%.) This low return on investment means the earned return available for scholarships and donated funds work (the dental effort) are modest.
2. When this became visible the Administration undertook an effort to determine how we invest these funds, according to what criteria and should we reconsider our investment strategy. We look forward to a report soon. Hopefully we can gain agreement to earn a better return on these funds and hence provide more substantial scholarship awards (and more dental care) to our students.

**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

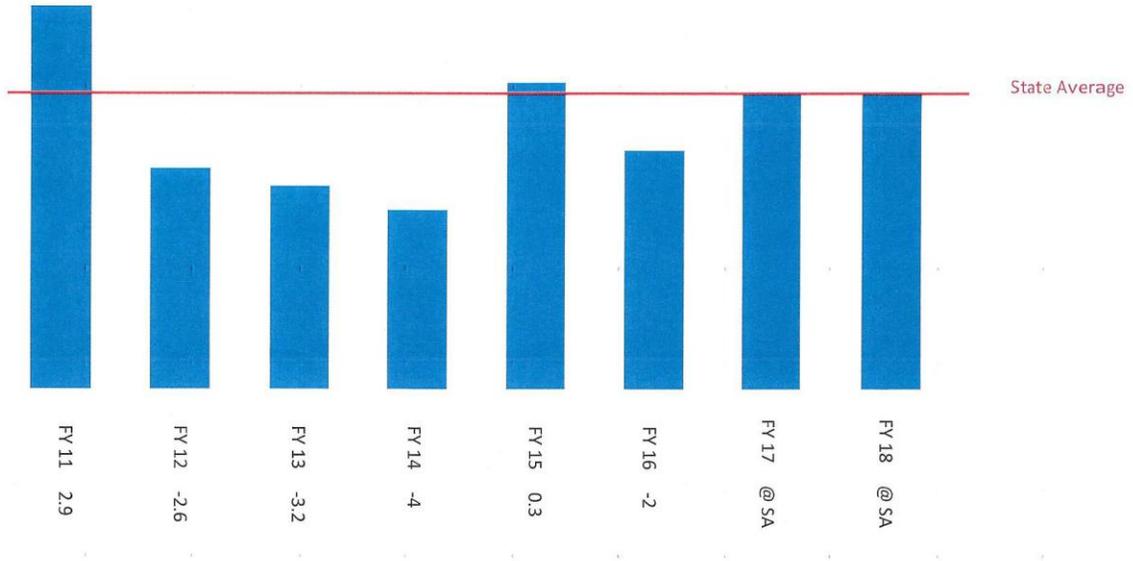
p.s. If you want to talk or have thoughts, please call me or email me!  
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# RSU 18 MEA Reading Scores by year relative to the State Average

## MEA Reading

FY 11 - FY 18

Comparison to State



School Year

# RSU 18 MEA Mathematics Scores by year relative to the State Average

