

RSU 18 Rome update

The Budget passed – THANK YOU!

Everyone,

Some RSU 18 related items of interest.

1. **The budget and revolving renovation fund articles passed** – The budget vote was 68.46% “yes” and the fund vote was 74.42% “yes.” Rome voted strongly for both items (68.66% and 72.39%). This is the biggest vote of support by Rome for our students in the last four years!
2. **Turnout – 134 Rome citizens voted!** This is the biggest turn out in 8 years. In May of 2009 twenty-one Rome citizens voted. Our turnout has been continually rising since then! This is the really good news, more and more of us are expressing, at the ballot box, our interest in the future of the young men and women in Rome who are under our collective stewardship. Regardless of how you voted, your interest and concern is everything – and will make all the difference in the life success of these young men and women. THANK YOU ALL – WELL DONE!
3. **Values** – The new Superintendent, Carl Gartley, met with our Selectmen on June 12. Malcolm Charles urged that we start all School Board meetings, budget discussions, cost sharing meetings and so on with the pledge of allegiance. Given the divisiveness that sometimes develops this is a wonderful way to remind ourselves that we are really all in this together – a bunch of everyday people trying together to govern ourselves. I strongly endorse this thought and will encourage it at the next school board meeting and work to make it happen.
4. **Curriculum** – The Selectmen also urged the Superintendent to include cursive writing in the student’s training. Curiously this is not and never has been a formal part of the curriculum. As far as I can tell it is not required by Common Core or the State. There are several on the Board who think this should be done. I will also urge this when then Educational Programs Committee reconvenes next fall. Curiously not everything is uniform between schools and teachers. For example the children are expected to learn reading by using phonics, however the phonics approach used seems to be at the teacher’s discretion. As a result students move up a grade with a spectrum of experiences and knowledge.
5. **Mathematics**- and again Third Selectman Malcolm Charles emphasized the crucial aspect of our young students having a strong basic grasp of arithmetic. He urged that they at least be able to make change mentally (i.e. without a calculator). This is an issue too. We need to focus – HARD – on the fundamentals in the K-3 grades and especially in mathematics. I am pushing on this but we are not there yet and need more focus and improvement.
6. **Fire safety** – we all owe a big debt to Rich McCarthy, Assistant State Fire Marshall and also the parent of an RSU 18 student. His follow up and involvement in the resolution of the fire safety topics that came up in the Facilities Committee work is yielding a positive result. His efforts, and the great response by the district administration, will result in ever safer buildings for our students. THANK YOU RICH!
7. **Enrollment** – as you consider the cost of education it is interesting to note that our total school population is expected to drop by 99 students next year (to a total of 2833) but our special education student population will increase by 47 (to 506).
8. **Cost sharing and costs** – One of the Selectmen feels we are not getting value commensurate to the price we pay. Indeed Rome pays substantially more, out of property taxes, per student than

any of the other five towns (China, Oakland, Belgrade or Sidney). In fact we pay (\$15,717/student all in) almost double compared to three of the towns (they receive a substantial subsidy from the state). This is because of how the State school funding formula works. In the “Additional Local Funds” cost sharing formula we pay almost double per student what some other towns pay! There is a choice – improve the value (make our district and our students the best in the State! – Wonderful) or reduce our costs (!). One or the other – somehow things are out of whack for Rome! The Cost Sharing Committee is reconvening and we (Tammy Lyons, Lois Stratton, Malcolm Charles and I) will work diligently with the 5 town committee to try to impact this!

9. Our goal is to **create an enduring** cost/value solution that is enduring and will **draw the towns together as a team** focused on helping the young men and women under our stewardship **achieve academic excellence.**
10. **Can our children, our Rome students be great** – YOU BET! Mainers have the basic values and traits employers want – dependability, steadfastness, resilience in the face of adversity, integrity, honesty, resourcefulness and the willingness and ability to work hard. Who could ask for more? They can ask for one thing more – a solid academic foundation. If we can give our Rome students that solid academic grounding they can be some of the best (and wealthiest) and most successful citizens in the US. That is our goal – **to help them to be the best** – they have the most important thing – the core values, let’s give them that last piece, the mental tools to be leaders – dirigo!
11. **Once again THANK YOU!** – It is well established that a student’s success is based on two things – parental involvement and the quality of the schools. Our great voter turnout shows us that we, as a community, are involved and care! And the push by our Academic Options Exploratory Committee, and the support and comments you provide me and the Superintendent, will help to drive us to be the state leader. **We can do it!**
12. **Expect, ask for and demand excellence** – one of my favorite learnings is that people who demand excellence very often get it. Let’s demand excellence for our student’s – demand it of ourselves, of our school district and of our school board director (me!).

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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P.p.s When one of my immigrant friends (I am one too!) was sworn in as a US citizen the judge asked all the brand new citizens in the room, “Please help us to govern ourselves. This is a great experiment. Can a group of people govern themselves? Prior to the American Revolution no one thought it could happen. People thought you needed a king, or royalty, a privileged class, or a dictator to run things properly. But

we in America are trying to prove them wrong. We struggle, we make mistakes, we disagree with each other - but we are trying to work together to govern ourselves. As new citizens please join us and help us to make this thing work!"

I agree. **Thank you all again for helping to make this democracy thing work!**