



THE FUTURE OF LIMESTONE COMMUNITY SCHOOL

Withdrawing from the RSU

Our Mission

- Our mission is to organize a collaborative effort to withdraw Limestone Community School from Regional School Unit 39. This effort is to ensure that we, as a community, are doing our due diligence to provide the best educational opportunities for our children and aid in the economic stability of our community. It is our belief that regaining control of our local school is vital to the success of our students and community.

History

- September 2, 2015 - the RSU 39 School Board and Supt Doak met with the Limestone residents to advise they were considering closing Limestone High School
- November 17, 2015 - The Selectmen appointed the Limestone School Committee and the first meeting was held to review options, develop questions and determine issues to investigate
- The committee met multiple times, including a few times with Supt Doak and LCS Principal, Sue White. They made several adjustments to improve education at LCS for 2016-2017 and indicated they would **not** pursue closure until student count dropped to 40. The committee decided not to pursue withdrawal at this time due to those improvements and uncertainty about maintaining the school without the RSU.

Change of Plans

- **March 2017** - RSU 39 is experiencing about \$800,000 in budget cuts from state funding and an overall \$1.4 million shortfall that they're trying to reconcile
- A major cause for the cuts is a higher teacher to student ratio in the Caribou portion of the RSU than recommended by the state
- The Limestone School Committee had heard that the RSU 39 board was considering closure again so we met to discuss prior to the town meeting
- On **March 15, 2017** the RSU Board and Supt Doak met with Limestone citizens to present this information and “discuss options” but closure was the only proposal by the board

Closing Limestone High School

- After the town meeting with RSU 39, the Limestone School Committee met to discuss options and requested a meeting with the RSU board prior to their April 5th vote
- The RSU board declined to meet with the School Committee
- The Selectpeople and School Committee requested the RSU Board not vote to close the high school or at least delay it for 1 year.
- **April 5, 2017** - The RSU 39 School Board voted to close Limestone High School to save an estimated \$601,000. Limestone board members were opposed.

Closure vs. Transfer

- Normally, the RSU would be required to allow citizens in Limestone to vote on the closure of the high school but they have avoided this by using the terminology of “transferring grades”. The school building itself will remain open so they don’t believe they are closing the high school and the Maine Department of Education is supporting their interpretation of the law. The committee has explored this and believes we would need to engage in a costly and time consuming legal battle that we may not win. Therefore, we have decided to focus on withdrawal.

Current Situation

- **April 12, 2017** – a **Special Town Meeting** was held to allow the citizens to vote to approve funds to hire a consultant and attorney to assist with researching our options and the feasibility of withdrawing from the RSU.
- Immediately after the town approved hiring Dr. Mark Eastman and Dan Stockford, they reached out to Supt Tim Doak and Mark Bouchard to request information and ask questions.
- **April 27, 2017** – **First response from the RSU** with some answers to questions from Mark & Dan

Legal Counsel and Consultation

- Withdrawing from a RSU is a complicated and timely process in which legal representation is necessary.
 - **Dr. Mark Eastman**, a highly recommended and respected educational consultant has agreed to assist us through the process. He is a past superintendent and has assisted many schools in Maine through the withdrawal process and establishing a school system afterward.
 - **Attorney Dan Stockford** from Brann & Isaacson partners with Mark Eastman routinely and has represented 20+ schools through this process. He has extensive experience in education law and will be a valuable asset.
 - Their fees relating to the withdrawal process would be paid from the funds requested from the Limestone Community School reserve fund.

Why Withdraw from the RSU?

- Ability to protect Limestone Community School and prevent future closure attempts
- Better opportunity to establish and approve a transparent balanced budget
- Gain control of facilities, finances & curriculum
- Efficient use of school funding
- Ability to keep tax dollars in Limestone
- Potential to partner with other small schools to save on administrative costs
- Utilize local resources

Focal Points of Withdrawal

- It is important to note that the withdrawal from a Regional School Unit is not, nor should it be, focused on cost reductions or tax savings. The funding of our school has a direct correlation with the success of our students and the future success of our communities.
- We must invest in our children and their education.
- The committee is very mindful of the financial impact on the community when considering options.

Taxes

- Taxes are going to go up, whether we remain in the RSU or not.
- Remaining in the RSU means Limestone is responsible for 18% of the cost to build the portion of the new Elementary/Middle school in Caribou that isn't covered by the state.
- Limestone citizens voted against having additional portions of the school built at the taxpayer's expense. However, because Caribou is a much larger town with more voters, Limestone was outvoted and will be required to contribute if we stay in the RSU.
- If we withdraw, we have control over tax increases because we will only be responsible for our own costs.

Favorable Points

- There are several positives about our situation
 - The Reserve account
 - Caswell tuition
 - MSSM rent and cost sharing
 - Operations support
 - A community that has operated its own school system before
 - Strong community support

Financial Variables

- During negotiations of the Withdrawal Agreement there are some unknown financial variables which make it difficult to determine final cost and tax impact of withdrawing from the RSU
 - Transition costs
 - Possible share of some lease costs
 - Reacquisition costs

Cost Saving Opportunities

- There are considerations to be made for establishing a new school district and making the best use of funds
 - Superintendent/Principal Combination
 - Part-Time Superintendent
 - A Special Education Director is required in each school district. Caswell has a part time Superintendent who is also their Special Ed Director.
 - No Assistant Principal
 - School Nurse – Caswell contracts with a nurse to do consults, hearing and vision tests. The same nurse services MSSM but she contracts with Caswell separately.

Maine School of Science and Math

- MSSM pays about \$550,000/year to the RSU
- We've had discussions with Luke Shorty at MSSM to keep them updated on our situation.
- The location of MSSM is written in Maine statute Title 20-A Chapter 312. At this time, there are no known plans to change that.
www.mainelegislature.org/legis/statutes/20-a/title20-ach312sec0.html
- There is an annual agreement with the RSU and MSSM relating to rental expenses and other details
- MSSM is considering options to continue athletics once LHS is closed
- MSSM is a neutral party

LCS Expenses vs Revenue

Expenses (2014-2016 Average for 1 year)

Guidance	Salary, secretary, benefits,	\$104,564.88
Improvement of Instruction	Curriculum coordinator stipends &	\$1,048.05
Staff Training		\$6,369.20
Library	Salary, books, supplies, technology,	\$39,217.28
Instruction Related Technology	Supplies	\$
Academic Student Assessment	Supplies	\$
School Administration	Principals, Secretary, Benefits,	\$187,000.00
Operation of Plant	Wages, benefits, etc	\$1,000,000.00
Operations & Maintenance - Custodial	Supplies, benefits, etc	\$1,100,000.00
Operations & Maintenance - Maintenance	Supplies, benefits, etc	\$1,635,000.00
Capital Projects - Renovation		\$1,176,000.00
Instructional - Elementary	Salaries, benefits, supplies, etc	\$5,507,810.00
Student Transportation - Elementary	Field trip salary, fuel	\$294.01
Instructional - Middle	Salaries, benefits, supplies, etc	\$1,176.45
Student Transportation - Middle	Field trip salary, fuel	\$22.00
Instructional - High	Salaries, benefits, supplies, etc	\$441,920.96
Student Transportation - High	Field trip salary, fuel	\$428.43
Instructional - Special Education	Salaries and benefits	\$1,326.88
Instructional - Co-Curricular	Stipends, benefits, travel, supplies,	\$12,332.79
Student Transportation - Co-Curricular	Salary, benefits, fuel	\$1,955.42
Instructional - Extra Curricular	Coaches stipends, benefits,	\$76,783.53
Support Services - Extra Curricular	Athletic Director salary & benefits	\$15,089.40
Student Transportation - Extra Curr	Salary, benefits, fuel	\$14,989.01
Operations & Maintenance Custodial - Sec Other?	Salary & benefits	\$1,119.40
GRAND TOTAL EXPENSES		\$1,942,039.72

Revenue

Required Local - Limestone		\$1,197.00
Additional Local - Limestone		\$36,835.00
Tuition - Elementary-Limestone		\$118,848.25
MSSM - Revenue		\$191,085.00
MSSM - Transportation		\$9,514.49
MSSM - Maintenance & Custodial		\$231,675.90
State Subsidy - Limestone	\$1,456,629.23 next	\$660,335.70
State Subsidy - Limestone	Waiting for details	
GRAND TOTAL REVENUE		\$2,839,491.34
Reserve	2 accounts (\$377,075.9	\$515,019.18

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22 Steps to Withdraw

- State law: Title 20-A Section 1466
 - 22-Step Process - entire process detailed on www.maine.gov/education/Withdrawal_Procedures_RSU_SAD
 - **Petition** begins the process
 - **Public Hearing** (May 3, 2017) held to explain this process and the following article to be voted on May 16th.
 - **Referendum to Proceed with Withdrawal from RSU 39 – Secret Ballot (May 16, 2017)** - No minimum voters needed but a majority of those voting must approve:
 - “Do you favor filing a petition for withdrawal with the Board of Directors of Regional School Unit 39 and with the Commissioner of Education, authorizing the withdrawal committee to expend \$40,000 and authorizing the Selectpersons to request funds from the Limestone School Reserve and to issue notes if needed in the name of the Town of Limestone or otherwise pledge the credit of the Town of Limestone in an amount not to exceed \$40,000 for this purpose? Yes No”

22 Steps to Withdraw (continued)

- **Withdrawal Committee** - If the vote is favorable a four person withdrawal committee is formed:
 - (select person, community member, school committee member, and RSU 39 board member in our municipality)
- **Negotiate with RSU 39** on Withdrawal Agreement to determine what the RSU will keep and what will go to Limestone
- The Maine Department of Education is involved throughout the process to approve Withdrawal Agreement
- Once negotiations are complete, the Department of Education Commissioner calls an election to approve/disapprove of the final withdrawal plan

22 Steps - Important Facts on Second Vote

- **Vote to Approve Withdrawal Agreement** - At least half of the people that voted in the last gubernatorial election must vote for the election to be valid. A majority of those voting need to approve for it to pass.
- It is very important that Limestone residents vote in both elections - we **NEED** to hear your voice.
- Absentee ballots will be available.
- If the vote is favorable, a Limestone School Board will be elected to establish a new school district

Timeline

- As posted on the maine.gov website:

Withdrawal Referendum Timeline

November 7, 2017 Ballot

The withdrawal statute allows the Commissioner to take up to 60 days to review a withdrawal plan for conditional approval – while the Commissioner’s office will do their best to review these plans in a timely manner, this does not indicate we can turn this around immediately, especially if revisions are necessary.

Please consider submitting a draft version(s) to the Commissioner prior to the request for conditional approval so that concerns may be addressed prior to the official submission. This will expedite the conditional approval process once the agreement has been signed by both parties.

Deadline for Withdrawal Plan submission to Commissioner for *Conditional Approval*

(Commissioner has 60 days by law from submission date to approve or request changes – this date *significantly* reduces that timeline for approval to 30 days)

Friday, June 30, 2017

(Withdrawal Agreement must be Signed by Both the Withdrawal Committee and the RSU Board)

Deadline for Commissioner to Provide Conditional Approval of Withdrawal Agreement to SAU and Town with Date for First Public Hearing

Monday, July 31, 2017

(Minimum of 20 days prior to first public hearing date – assumes first public hearing date of August 21, 2017 at the latest)

Public Posting of First Public Hearing Date, Location & Time for SAU and all Member Municipalities to discuss Merits of the proposed Withdrawal Agreement

Thursday, August 10, 2017

(Minimum of 10 days prior to first public hearing date – assumes first public hearing date of August 21, 2017 at the latest)

Absolute Latest Date for First Public Hearing of SAU and Member Municipalities to discuss the merits of the proposed Withdrawal Agreement and recommend changes

Monday, August 21, 2017

(Statute allows 30 days to report results of First Public Hearing to Commissioner)

SAU and/or Withdrawal Committee Submit Results of First Public Hearing and Final Agreement to Commissioner for Approval or Possible Changes

Saturday, September 9, 2017

(At least 2 weeks prior to Deadline for Commissioner to provide Date of Referendum by deadline)

Absolute Deadline to Provide Date of Referendum for Withdrawal Agreement to SAU and Town/City Clerk if no changes result from Public Hearing

Saturday, September 23, 2017

(Statutory Minimum of 45 days prior to referendum in order to be on absentee ballot)

Final Public Hearing Date to Discuss the Withdrawal Question on the Ballot

Saturday, October 28, 2017

(At least 10 days prior to Date of Referendum Vote)

Withdrawal Referendum Date

November 7, 2017

(Check local Municipal requirements for Referendum Vote)