

Lamoine's Educational Future: Is RSU 24 Serving Lamoine Well?

INFORMATION FOR VOTERS

May 7, 2012

On June 12, Lamoine voters will vote on whether to begin formal planning to withdraw from our new school district, RSU 24. The information below is to help us all cast informed votes. Keep in mind that we will not vote to actually withdraw from the RSU unless this plan is developed and approved first by the state. The town would take a final vote to withdraw at a later date. (see #2 below)

1. Why are we considering withdrawing from RSU24?

Some Lamoine citizens believe that the RSU is not serving our children or our taxpayers as well as other types of school district can. They started the "withdrawal process" by signing a petition, as required by law.

2. What is the "withdrawal process"?

Step 1: Submit a petition with enough signatures to the Select Board.

Step 2: Hold a vote to see if the town wants to develop a PLAN to withdraw (vote is scheduled for June 12)

Step 3: Develop a PLAN, including what sort of new district Lamoine would join.

Step 4: Submit PLAN to Commissioner of Education.

Step 5: Hold a second vote to see if the town approves the PLAN.

NOTE: Many questions submitted to the Town Office can be answered specifically **ONLY** during the planning period **after June 12** when the Withdrawal Committee has been formed. These include questions about negotiations with the RSU about the Lamoine School building, contracts, carry-over funds, the new district and what other towns will be in it.

3. Would this be helpful financially for the town?

This is hard to predict. State and national funding for schools is unreliable. Lamoine, as of last year, no longer gets any state subsidy for education. Lamoine will need the cooperation of the RSU 24 office and the State to study this during the planning phase.

Comparing "pre-RSU" (before 2009) and "under-the-RSU":

- a) Lamoine's education spending has been essentially level since 2005-6; it has declined 6.6% since joining the RSU (see Table A);

- b) Education has remained at 70 – 72% of Lamoine’s total town spending for over a decade (see Table A);
- c) Before joining the RSU, Lamoine *spent* less than the RSU towns’ average and the state average (6th highest out of 12 RSU towns). (Table B2)
- d) In 2011-12, our taxpayers were required to *raise* the second highest per-student amount among RSU towns. (Table B1)
- e) Lamoine’s 3-year average cost-per-student under the RSU is \$11,035, 4th highest in the RSU. The RSU-wide town average is \$9,156. (Table B1)
- f) Lamoine’s K-12 enrollment has declined 7.3% since joining the RSU. Our 3-year average enrollment is 189 students, 5th highest in the RSU.

4. What will be our costs going forward?

Lamoine is required to pay a share of the RSU budget as determined by state funding formulas that base our share on our “property wealth” and the number of students we have.

- We are a “non-receiver” town, meaning that we get no state subsidy and must raise whatever the RSU charges us.
- Our enrollment has declined 7.3% in 3 years.
- Our “bill” from the RSU has increased on a per-student basis: we are paying more because of our property wealth for fewer kids.

Anticipated future expenditures that are likely to affect us:

If we stay in the RSU:

- a. some *savings* from big-district “efficiencies”: system office, special education, technology services, curriculum services
- b. continued *cost increases to all RSU towns* due to state-aid cut-backs to other towns in the RSU
- c. new *increases in costs as the RSU “equalizes salaries”* across the RSU, as required by law

If we withdraw and form or join an AOS:

- d. we will join other towns in sharing joint costs, resulting in “efficiencies” similar to (a) above.
- e. the town would be responsible for all debt on the Lamoine School but would not be paying for debt on other RSU schools any more.
- f. these decisions will be made by Lamoine citizens, not the RSU.

5. What are the differences in the funding system – RSU vs. AOS?

Under the RSU, the RSU Board determines the budget and it is approved by an RSU meeting for all 12 towns. The RSU tells Lamoine their share and bills the town every month. Any additional funds, such as costs for high school students at MDI, are raised by the town.

Under an alternative district structure (AOS), a Lamoine School Committee and the Lamoine Budget Committee create the budget. It is voted on at Lamoine Town Meeting.

6. How will this affect the quality of education for our children?

Prior to the RSU, Lamoine spent 58% of its education dollars on “regular classroom instruction”.

The RSU has spent 35% of its dollars on “regular classroom instruction”, below the state average. (The RSU spent proportionally more than Lamoine used to spend for “facilities”, “staff and student support”, “other instruction”, “transportation”, “school administration”, and debt service.

Our school has *lost portions of staff positions* (classroom teacher, principal, Physical Education, Music, Library, Nurse) and has gained some staff positions (Guidance). (See Table C) Some cuts occurred before the RSU.

Experienced Lamoine teachers have left Lamoine to take positions in other RSU schools where the salary is higher and there appears to be less chance of cut-backs or closing schools.

Lamoine students’ *performance on state achievement tests was higher* than the RSU-schools’ average *before joining* the RSU and *it remains higher* than that average since joining (keeping in mind fluctuations from year to year). (See RSU Website)

Some staff and citizens contend that the *bureaucratic procedures* of the RSU make it more difficult for teachers, principal, and parents to take immediate action to address learning needs. The RSU board and administration are *out of touch* with our community.

Some contend that the *uniform curriculum and policies* of the RSU will improve learning by “getting everybody on the same page” from grade to grade and school to school; students should enter RSU high schools “at the same place”.

Curriculum services and professional development for teachers have *continued as they were* under our former district, Union 92. When asked if Lamoine

students and teachers received any new programs or opportunities because of the RSU, teachers at the April 2 meeting reported one thing (assistance from a “technology integrator” this year).

7. Will withdrawal change high school choice?

No. The law protects Lamoine families’ choice of high schools whether we are in an RSU or not.

8. How does Lamoine have a voice in RSU decisions? In an AOS?

Under the RSU, Lamoine has one representative on the RSU Board of 14 people. Lamoine’s one vote is given a weight in proportion to Lamoine’s percentage of the whole RSU’s population. Currently, our vote is worth 8.7%.

The RSU Board makes all decisions about education in the 12 towns and governs the work of the administration, teachers, and other employees.

Under an AOS structure, Lamoine would again have its own School Committee that would make all decisions about the Lamoine school.

The School Committee would join with the committees of other towns to hire *district personnel* for purposes of administration, cost-savings, and coordination. The AOS personnel would be governed by an AOS Board consisting of members of the town boards. (See AOS draft “sketch” on the Town Website)

9. If the Town votes “Yes” on June 12, a committee will work with the RSU and state to make a Withdrawal Plan and work with other communities to make a plan for a new district.

The law requires that a Withdrawal Committee be formed to prepare a Withdrawal Plan that states how the town would separate from the RSU (finances; building ownership; employee contracts; etc.). It will also include developing a plan for a new school district administration (an Alternative Organizational Structure) that spells out all the details of the new arrangement.

We will need professional legal, financial, and educational assistance in this process. The Lamoine Local School Advisory Committee estimates a *maximum cost* of \$15,000 to Lamoine to accomplish this planning (Steps 2 & 3 in the process). (This would be our share of the total cost that we anticipate sharing with other municipalities engaged in the withdrawal process.)

10. If the state and the Town approve the Withdrawal Plan, what happens next?

The Commissioner of Education must approve our plan (step 4) and Lamoine voters must approve the plan (Step 5) in a second Town vote. If that is successful, we expect that Lamoine will re-establish its School Committee, a new AOS will be formed, and a school district office will be established. Our goal is to be “up and running” by July 1, 2013.

The Committee expects additional costs to develop a plan for a new district and to set up the new administrative offices. These will be shared with any other towns we will be partnering with. Forming a new AOS would probably cost more than joining an existing AOS such as MDI or Blue Hill.

PLEASE CONTINUE TO SUBMIT YOUR QUESTIONS TO THE TOWN OFFICE

Call 667 2202 or Email: town@lamoine-me.gov

Or contact a member of the Lamoine School Advisory Committee directly:

Brett Jones, Chair 610 2322
Nate Mason 667 5652
Gordon Donaldson 667 2382
Dale Macurdy 667 4441
Tammy Dickey

For more information, see the town’s website: Lamoine-me.gov

THE BOARD OF SELECTMEN WILL HOLD A PUBLIC HEARING

MAY 30 AT 6:30 AT THE LAMOINE SCHOOL

Ballot Language for June 12 Vote:

Do you favor filing a petition for withdrawal with the board of directors of regional school unit 24 and with the Commissioner of Education, authorizing the withdrawal committee to expend \$ 15,000.00 and authorizing the Board of Selectmen to issue notes in the name of the Town of Lamoine or otherwise pledge the credit of the Town of Lamoine in an amount not to exceed \$15,000.00 for this purpose? (Yes No)