

Byars Addresses RCS Enrollment Numbers Spike

Rome City Schools has seen a spike in the enrollment numbers for the entire system. Since the 2017-18 school year, Rome has seen a bump of 182 students across all schools. All elementary schools, the middle school and the high school will serve an average of 25 new faces in their classrooms, further making the case for additional facilities and educators.

"We have tried to anticipate the growth we are seeing this year," said Superintendent of Rome City Schools Louis Byars. "We knew the high school was at above capacity, so we have added the learning cottages which are portable classrooms on our high school campus. There are eight classrooms being installed as we speak and should be finished in a week or so. This will help to relieve some of the pressure inside of the rooms and we can lower our class sizes."

Byars went on to say that Rome Middle is at capacity as well, but they have been able to find the space needed to better serve the children. "We have even taken a look at some of our computer labs and we are using them as extra classrooms. Since we have our Chromebooks in use most of the time, we have found that the students can get the same instruction and lessons while they are in their regular classrooms. We do still have a computer lab in each school, and in some of our schools there are more than one, but we have tried to utilize the space we have to better accommodate learning," he said.

The new Main Elementary School, the addition of the College and Career Academy and the future plans for the sixth grade academy are long-term goals the system has set to alleviate some of the growth of the RCS student population.

"We are even considering the numbers if we continue to grow at this current pace, and how much longer can we use the facilities we have. So one of the things we did was add 10-15,000 additional square feet to our College and Career Academy that will not be finished, but can later be used for additional classrooms. So, as we continue to grow, we have the extra space we need to keep our classroom sizes down," Byars explained.

"Our next biggest challenge is our Middle School and we are talking about plans for it after we complete the current projects we are working on, like Main Elementary and our Sixth Grade Academy."

Byars said that while working for the department of education he studied the trend of city systems starting to grow during the financial crisis. Many people were moving back into the city, but he says that is not the case statewide.

"I've focused more on our area when looking at the reasons for the growth in our population. We have done well in the area of providing opportunities for students here in Rome that you would find in an area like Metro Atlanta. We have become more attractive due to our programs, we are seeing tuition students who may have gone to school elsewhere come back into the system and our athletics programs have taken off. So, when the system begins to move in a more positive direction, we tend to see an increase in our students," said Byars.

With a heavy focus on academics, athletic and the arts, Rome City Schools continues to provide opportunities outside of the standard curriculum.

"Some people, because of the wonderful community we share with them," Byars said, "may not work here. But, they live here and raise their children here because of what the system and the area offers. If we continue to make improvements like we have worked on recently, we project that we will see more growth in the future."