

## Rome schools plan consolidation

• Interim Superintendent Lou Byars meets with Main and North Heights communities to discuss proposed changes.

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**Lou Byars**

Rome City Schools hope to get an ELOST approved in November that would allow them to consolidate two elementary schools and also create a sixth-grade academy.

During a parent and community meeting Thursday evening at Main Elementary School, interim Superintendent Lou Byars discussed the system's plans with a crowd of about 70, made up of parents, teachers and community members. The focus of the meeting was facility plans, which the system updates every five years, Byars said, sharing that the first move is to combine Main and North Heights elementary schools.

"We need to address the issue of how to split up Main as well," he said. "We have students moving between four different buildings now.

"If we look at our needs across the board, we see that many of our schools are tight on space."

The plan would be to move Main students to North Heights for two years. During those two years, the old Main school would be torn down and a new school would be built in its place, similar to Anna K. Davie, Byars said.

"When that school is completed, we are planning to move North Heights students and Main students back to the new school," he said. "The North Heights building would be completely gutted and revamped and remodeled into a sixth-grade academy."

The academy would house every sixth-grader in the system in a "state-of-the-art facility" that would offer a STEAM — science, technology, engineering, arts and math — driven curriculum. System officials want the school to house classrooms such as engineering labs, a maker academy, an improved gymnasium and a band room.

"This also would free up space at our elementary schools," Byars said. "If the plan we have been discussing is approved, this could alleviate the space issues and benefit our system in many other ways as well."

Byars said the plan — which has to be approved by the board of education — would be to have the new building at Main completed by 2019. The revamp of North Heights would be finished by fall of 2020.

The plan also includes some additions to Rome High School. Byars said there were plans to possibly add some classrooms to the main building, but to also build a new facility near the current tennis courts

that would house a practice field house and more Career, Technical and Agricultural Education classes.

"We want to add a culinary arts pathway, as well as medical fields and government services pathways," Byars said. "Moving CTAE to this new facility would mean more space in the main high school building."

The field house would be not only for football, but include batting cages for baseball and practice space for the band and ROTC.

System officials hope to start work on the Rome High additions in the fall. They also plan to move the Main students to North Heights during that time.

These projects do hinge on having an education local option sales tax pass. Byars said they will place ELOST 5 on the ballot in November of this year.

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Read this story online for a link to the Rome City Schools website and to see Google maps of the schools.

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