

RSU 34

2025 - 2026 District Newsletter & Budget Update

April 17, 2025

VRS School Closure Update:

As you are aware, at their March 19, 2025 meeting, the RSU 34 School Board unanimously voted to close the Viola Rand School and begin the statutory closure process in collaboration with the Maine Department of Education and the Town of Bradley. Since then, the Bradley Town Council has also signed a resolution in support of the closure. Referendum and Public Hearing Warrants were signed and posted last week, and absentee ballots became available on Friday, April 11. Informational postcards outlining key steps in the process were mailed to all Bradley residents. There are two remaining steps in the statutory process for the closure of Viola Rand School:

1. Public Hearing –The RSU 34 School Board will hold a Public Hearing on Wednesday, April 30, 2025 at 6:30 p.m. in the LMS Cafeteria. The hearing will begin with a brief presentation from the Board explaining the rationale for the closure and outlining what a YES or NO vote would mean, including the projected cost of keeping the school open. The remainder of the meeting is an opportunity for the public to be heard on the school closure referendum question.
 - a. A “NO” vote opposes the closure. If the referendum fails, Bradley taxpayers would bear the **FULL** \$315,345.66 of estimated cost savings, in addition to their portion of the 2025 - 2026 RSU 34 budget.
 - b. A “YES” vote supports the closure. If the referendum passes, the estimated cost savings would be shared among all three RSU 34 communities: Alton, Bradley, Old Town.
2. Referendum Vote – Bradley residents only will vote on the Viola Rand School Closure Referendum on Monday, May 12, 2025, from 3:00 - 8:00 p.m. at the Bradley Fire Station.

2025 - 2026 Draft Budget Update (4th Draft)

At last night's regular meeting, the RSU 34 School Board reviewed a 4th draft of the FY26 budget using both a cost-center approach and a detailed line-by-line analysis. In summary, the 4th draft yielded an additional \$40,000 in savings (when compared to our 3rd draft), further reducing the proposed FY26 budget to a 3.68% increase over last year's budget. Details of the additional reductions included in this 4th draft budget are below:

Declining enrollment due to lower birth rates, and rising valuations in our communities played a significant role in shaping several difficult decisions throughout the FY26 budget development process. The closure of the Viola Rand School results in the elimination of the following positions: 1 Custodian, 1.4 Elementary Teacher(s), 1 Elementary Secretary, & 2 federally-funded Elementary Ed. Techs. In addition, to further reduce community taxation, the following district-wide positions are proposed for elimination: 1 High School Teacher, 1 PreK Teacher, 1 PreK Ed. Tech., 0.5 Speech/Language Teacher, 1 Credit Recovery Ed. Tech., 1 Special Ed. Ed. Tech., 0.25 Music Ed. Tech., and Administrative reductions at the high school and elementary school. Additionally, an intervention/coaching teacher role was eliminated, which was funded by a combination of federal and consortium funds.

These staffing changes, though difficult, are part of a broader effort to responsibly manage resources while maintaining high-quality educational opportunities for all RSU 34 students. It is also important to note that 17 positions were eliminated across the previous two school budgets (FY24 & FY25), underscoring the district's ongoing efforts to adapt to changing enrollment and financial conditions.

Frequently Asked Budget Questions:

Q: How much has the RSU 34 budget increased in recent years?

A: Over the past six years, the RSU 34 budget has increased by an average of 3.49% annually. This includes the currently proposed 3.68% increase for next year. These increases have occurred during a time of high inflation, a growing number of students with special needs, and intense competition to attract and retain qualified staff.

Q: If the RSU 34 budget is increasing 3.68%, why would some of our communities see a greater tax increase?

A: The state subsidy formula has community valuation, as determined by Maine Revenue Services, as a major factor. In the past three years Alton's valuation has increased 19.38%, Bradley's valuation has increased 22.55%, and Old Town's valuation has increased 47.18%. With such significant changes in valuation, the funding formula includes expectation of a greater local share.

Q: Were eliminated positions "real", or were they made-up?

A: We have been consistently transparent about the difference between proposed changes and actual cuts to existing roles. Whenever possible, we've made reductions through attrition—by not filling positions after retirements or resignations. However, that hasn't always been enough. We are saying goodbye to some talented people as we cut more than a dozen roles this spring (in addition to the 17 roles cut over the previous two budget cycles).

Next Steps in the Budget Process:

- May 14: Board vote on the FY26 budget
- May 28: Annual RSU 34 Budget Meeting (6:30 p.m., OTHS Cafeteria)
- June 10: RSU 34 School Budget Referendum

District Spirit Day Friday, April 18, 2025:

This month's Spirit day (Friday, April 18) is **Unity Day**, and we're excited that the **RandMay Foundation** has been chosen as the recipient of this month's district fundraiser!

The RandMay Foundation is a local nonprofit dedicated to supporting children and families in our community — and the people they help are exclusively students and families from the greater Old Town/RSU34 area.

The RandMay Foundation has covered youth sports and extracurricular fees, helped with equipment costs, camp registrations, scholarships for JROTC students, and even offered support in times of hardship.

We encourage you to check-out their [Facebook page](#) for more information. All RSU 34 Spirit Day donations received on April 18 will be donated to the RandMay Foundation!

Important Upcoming Dates:

- April 30-VRS School Closure Public Hearing (6:30 p.m., LMS Cafeteria)
- May 12-VRS School Closure Referendum (Bradley Fire Station 3-8 p.m.)--BRADLEY RESIDENTS ONLY
- May 14-RSU 34 School Board Meeting-Voting on FY26 Budget
- May 28-Annual RSU 34 Budget Meeting (6:30 p.m. OTHS Cafeteria)
- NO SCHOOL-Monday, May 26 (Memorial Day)
- June 6-OTHS Graduation
- LAST DAY OF SCHOOL-Monday, June 16 (This will be a half-day/early release)

I hope all of our students, staff, and families are able to relax and enjoy time with others during next week's school vacation.

Respectfully,

Matt Cyr, RSU 34 Superintendent