

# RSU 34 2025 - 2026 Budget Update

March 20, 2025

## Viola Rand School Closure (Bradley)

At last night's meeting, the RSU 34 School Board unanimously voted to close the Viola Rand School in Bradley at the conclusion of this school year. This decision followed careful consideration of public feedback and ongoing budget challenges. While the closure is met with sadness, the majority of our community understands and supports this strategic step in response to declining birth rates, rising property valuations, and their impact on local taxation. We sincerely thank everyone who provided input throughout this process.

## VRS School Closure Timeline shared at last night's meeting:

- School Board Votes to Close Viola Rand School (3/19/25)
- School Closure Plan submitted to Maine Dept. of Ed. (3/20/25) and Town of Bradley
- Town of Bradley has 10 days to comment on calculated cost savings
- Maine Dept. of Ed. determines if any comments warrant changes to the cost savings amount.
  - If so, asks RSU 34 for corrections.
  - If no changes are needed, approves final amounts and provides an approval letter to move forward with the referendum process.
- Meeting of the School Board to sign the school closure referendum warrant and Notice of Public Hearing. (estimated date of Board meeting: 4/9/25)
- RSU resident delivers Board-signed warrant to Bradley Town Clerk (4/10/25)
- RSU resident posts Notice of Public Hearing in Town of Bradley (4/10/25)
- Board holds Public Hearing on the school closure referendum and to explain the school closure process, and what a yes or no vote means to the community of Bradley (estimated date of Public Hearing: 4/30/25)
- Town of Bradley School Closure Referendum (estimated date: Monday, May 12, 2025)
- If referendum passes (and Bradley agrees to close the school) the RSU will hand over VRS and its surrounding property to the Town of Bradley on August 31, 2025

As noted, many of these dates are estimates, based on the assumption that no changes are required to our 3/20/25 submitted School Closure Plan. However, we have been working closely with our school attorney, the Department of Education, and Bradley municipal officials to ensure minimal or no deviations from the timeline. **We will provide updates as each date is confirmed.**

## Important VRS Closure Notes:

- **School Closure Referendum:** Under state statute, only the Town of Bradley will hold a School Closure Referendum
- **Cost Savings:** Using the Maine Dept. of Ed. formula, closing Viola Rand School is projected to save \$315,348.66, which is incorporated into the current 3rd draft of the 2025 - 2026 budget.
- **Referendum Voting:**
  - A "Yes" vote supports closing the school, and the '25-'26 draft budget's taxation distribution among Alton, Bradley, and Old Town remains as presented to the Board (details below)
  - A "No" vote opposes the closure, meaning Bradley residents would bear the full \$315,348.66 cost savings, in addition to any other school budget assessments for '25-'26. This would significantly raise taxes in Bradley.

**2025 - 2026 3rd Draft Budget Update** At last night's meeting, the RSU 34 School Board expressed general support for the current level of budget reductions, aiming to sustain excellent schools while responsibly addressing financial challenges. Over the past two budget years, we have eliminated 17 positions to balance lower enrollment and rising community valuations. As noted in the March 6 budget update, the Board

requested that administration identify \$600,000 in total reductions (including the closure of VRS). To achieve this, the following positions would be eliminated through school closure: 1 Custodian, 1.4 Elementary Teacher(s), 1 Elementary Secretary, & 2 federally-funded Elementary Ed. Techs. Additionally, to further reduce community taxation, these positions would also be eliminated: 1 High School Teacher, 1 PreK Teacher, 1 PreK Ed. Tech., 1 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.

**Program Enhancements:** Despite these difficult reductions, we have been able to add new programs without increasing budget expenditures, including: a new Chorus Class at OTHS, and additional PE time at OTES. For the first time in RSU 34's history, all district grade spans will be housed within the same respective buildings: PreK, K-5, 6-8, 9-12.

**3rd Draft Budget Overview:** Below are details of the 3rd draft budget, which totals \$25,110,000, reflecting a 3.85% increase:

- Tax Impact before applying the State EPS Funding Formula which takes into account community valuations
  - Alton: \$7,646.19 (1.27% increase)
  - Bradley: \$63,971.23 (4.49% increase)
  - Old Town: \$641,807.86 (10.27% increase)
  - Total: \$713,425.28 (8.62% increase)

It is important to note that \$320,805.01 of Old Town's increase is directly due to a significant rise in its town valuation. The State funding formula considers a community's valuation when determining its required school funding contribution. When a community is worth more, they are collecting more taxes; and therefore, responsible for a greater share of school funding. Below are averaged valuation increases within each community over the past three years (as documented on the ED279 State funding report):

- Old Town's +47.18%
- Bradley's +22.55%
- Alton's +19.38%

**Next Steps in the Budget Process:**

- April 16: Board review of line-by-line budget changes
- 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