

MT. BLUE REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

CHESTERVILLE – FARMINGTON – INDUSTRY – NEW SHARON – NEW VINEYARD – STARKS – TEMPLE – VIENNA – WELD – WILTON

129 SEAMON ROAD, SUITE 2, FARMINGTON, ME 04938

Phone (207) 778-6571 | Fax (207) 778-4160

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TO: RSU 9 Parents & Guardians

FROM: Christian M. Elkington, Superintendent

RE: RSU 9 2023-2024 Budget

DATE: 5-3-2023

The RSU 9 2023-2024 budget ([RSU 9 Budget Page](#)), passed by the School Board on Tuesday, April 25th, was developed with four objectives in mind, shared below. These objectives support student-focused goals from our strategic plan. We are aware of the financial pressures faced by our families and communities and, therefore, worked hard to minimize the increases that are included. In many situations increased costs for salaries, insurance, supplies, gas/oil/electricity, etc. made larger than we would like increases impossible to avoid for the coming year. Our success in filling long standing staff openings, which allows us to strengthen our existing programs, also played a role in the increases being requested.

Objective 1: Continue supporting student academic and student-family-community needs.

RSU 9 Strategic Plan Vision Statements:

- **OUR LEARNING ENVIRONMENT:** All students, staff, and families feel safe, welcome, and included in our schools. We listen to our students, staff, and families, provide resources to help them thrive, and support multiple pathways for learning.
- **OUR INSTRUCTION:** Students are engaged in meaningful, hands-on, challenging learning experiences. Staff encourage each student to actively engage in their education and guide them to be successful members of their communities.
- **OUR CONTENT:** The district designs and delivers a varied and comprehensive curriculum which is crafted to develop skills to communicate effectively, collaborate successfully, think creatively, and apply knowledge gained to new situations.

We are maintaining current programming because it has been strengthened by our success this past school year in filling job openings - over 40 going into the 2022-2023 school year. We continue our strong focus on each student's academic progress by also supporting our students, families, and communities with counseling, social work services and specialized behavior interventions. A variety of art and music offerings, library services and afterschool programming are all maintained as is support for athletics, health services and food support. Helping our students successfully transition to life

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after high school is a priority and takes a variety of forms supporting our students wishing to go directly into the workforce as well as those interested in college or other post-secondary training opportunities.

Objective 2: Meeting negotiated wage and benefit increases and dealing with the overall effects of the current economy.

RSU 9 Strategic Plan Vision Statements:

OUR STAFF: Staff are a dedicated and passionate group of individuals who are supported by the community and each other. Staff are highly skilled and well equipped to support learning and use best practices.

OUR PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT: District facilities maximize student learning by investing in modern, comfortable, flexible spaces that support innovation. Students and staff are supported by scheduling that fosters learning, greater access to community learning spaces, and equitable access to technology.

As mentioned, increased costs associated with appropriately supporting our staff as well as those associated with class size, fuel, maintenance, repairs, equipment, and delayed maintenance cannot be avoided and are included in this budget.

Objective 3: Reduce recent dependency on RSU 9 Balance-Forward funds.

RSU 9 Strategic Plan Vision Statement:

OUR DISTRICT: The district prioritizes communication, building relationships, engaging community, and sharing resources that enrich learning in and out of the classroom. The district promotes strong partnerships with families as they are critical to student success.

Balance-Forward funds come from unused tax (local & state) and some limited grant funds that were not expended in previous budget years. School districts, under Maine Law, are expected to keep a Balance Forward to deal with unanticipated emergencies that can't be covered by their present budget. In the past few years our balance forward funds have grown because of reduced services under COVID, many unfilled positions, and the influx of COVID-related funding. Unusually large portions of those increased balances (2.5 million) were applied to reduce the tax increases to our communities the last two years. The Balance-Forward has become much smaller and so we can no longer count on a large amount of these funds being available to be used and therefore we must reduce dependency on using Balance Forward funds to reduce the tax impact to our towns. \$800,000 of our Balance Forward is being used in the 23-24 proposed budget. In the future we need to return to using \$400,000 - \$600,000, which was the norm in budgets pre-COVID.

Objective 4: New district program in special education

RSU 9 Strategic Plan Vision Statement:

- **OUR LEARNING ENVIRONMENT:** All students, staff, and families feel safe, welcome, and included in our schools. We listen to our students, staff, and families, provide resources to help them thrive, and support multiple pathways for learning.

RSU 9 has an increasing number of students joining our district identified with more “resource-required” Autism needs. To better support these students’ needs, our plan is to create an RSU 9 District Autism Program for Grades K-2, which will be more cost effective than outsourcing to an out-of-district agency. Creating our own program with multiple service supports enables us to provide this support in RSU 9 and to also get reimbursed for up to 2/3 of the potential new costs.

Thanks for listening and please be on the lookout for more budget information in the coming weeks! Thanks!