

RREV School Snapshot – Old Town RSU #34

Background

In June 2020, the Maine Department of Education (MDOE) was awarded a \$16.9 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education's Rethink K–12 Education Models program to implement the Rethinking Responsive Education Ventures (RREV) program. The overarching purpose of RREV is to support Maine educators to create, implement, and disseminate responsive and innovative educational models that help all students learn and thrive.

Pilot Description

In September 2022, RSU #34 Old Town received an award from RREV to implement its *Coyote Online Opportunity (Co-Op)*. This pilot is in the Online Education category.

The goals of this pilot are to:

- Provide more options to students and families to learn from home full-time or in a hybrid environment, while also having opportunities for in-person engagement.
- Meet the social, emotional, and educational needs of all students in RSU #34.

Key activities of this pilot include:

- Hiring one teacher/case manager that is directly involved in the online program, monitoring participating students' high school progression, and collaborating with middle school teachers for the one middle school student that is enrolled in the program.
- Establishing systems and structures for the program, including student identification and enrollment policies. Currently, teachers and families refer students for participation, and there is a rolling admissions policy.
- Grade 6-8 use the same curriculum as their in-person learning peers. Google Classroom is used to assign and share work with students and teachers. Adjustments and accommodations are made when "lectures" are used in person learning. Videos and articles, as well as other media are used to fill those voids for students to be able to complete tasks and meet standards. Grades 9-12 use the online platform Edmentum for all remote coursework and credit recovery work. This is an online platform that has been in use at the high school level for a while. Using this same platform gives students consistency and eases transitions to Co-Op and then back to in person learning.

Exhibit: RREV Award Summary

Budget

Category	Year 1/Total
Personal Services – Salaries and Stipend	\$75,941.20
Employee Benefits	\$17,959.56
Purchased Professional Services	\$1,500
Online Subscriptions/Internet Connectivity	\$1,530
General Supplies	\$3,069.24
Total	\$100,000

- 6 students served during 2022-23
- Grade levels 8-11 participate; however, they are open for 6-12th graders.

Responsiveness of the pilot

Old Town RSU #34's pilot is responsive to local needs and/or assets because:

- **Students and families are referred by staff to participate but can now opt-in as well.** The Co-op program emerged out of a desire to offer the option of continuing to take virtual classes post-COVID, for students with a medical need. As the pilot has progressed, Old Town has expanded participation to other students whose families opt-in to the program.
- **Students receive individually tailored support for their academic, social, and emotional needs.** When developing the pilot, Old Town sought to meet the needs of students who may have had some medical roadblocks to their educational goals. In addition to students with a medical need for online learning, there was also a desire to meet the needs of students who wanted a more accelerated learning experience and opportunities to choose courses that fit with their educational goals.

Innovativeness of the pilot

Old Town RSU #34's pilot is innovative because:

- **Students can choose from a broad array of courses through the Edmentum platform and can take them at their own pace.** The Co-Op program expands students' choices about what courses student can take courses that are of interest to them. The online platform, coupled with the individual support of the administration, guidance counselors and co-op teacher, allows students to work through the material at their own pace, accelerated in some instances and this facilitates buy-in on their educational goals. The guidance provided by the co-op teacher/case manager ensures that students are taking the necessary courses along the way, while still having access to all staff at the high school. As one program stakeholder explained, "Students are no longer sitting in a class wondering "why do I need this? I'm never going to use it." Instead, they can pursue their own interests while reaching their larger educational goals.
- **Students build independence and self-advocacy through this program.** The program model gives students opportunities to learn their own strengths and weaknesses and reach out as needed. The case manager's role goes beyond a traditional teaching component and involves helping students learn to ask questions and reach out for additional support when needed. In so doing, the pilot will allow students to take greater ownership of their learning and build confidence and independence.

Sustainability of the pilot

Old Town RSU #34's Co-Op program intends to expand their model in the coming years by partnering with other schools who are using a similar model for joint field trips and special guest speakers for the students. The hope is that by doing this "kids get a sense of school and community, but in an environment that works for them" one administrator explained Future goals include matching the needs of students with local resources. For instance, if there is a desire to join a trade, the program would make those connections and create mentorship opportunities for the students. In other cases, Co-Op would be used as a springboard for a return to traditional learning or hybrid learning environment to finish out a student's education.

In an effort to gain as much knowledge and to maintain sustainability, the leadership at Old Town has joined a monthly meeting that includes other local districts and is led by the staff at Brewer, to share ideas and to increase buy-in across the state. The connections and shared knowledge that comes out of these meetings can solidify the Co-Op program and create stronger community bonds and resources that will keep the program going.

Additionally, Old Town plans to increase buy-in from families and other educators by expanding their communications and marketing about their program in the future. Currently, they are feeling some pushback from families and teachers who still feel that traditional in-person learning is best for all, when there are cases where students really thrive in an online or hybrid environment that is just as rigorous.