

# Voters defeat Otter Valley school district budget, 522-462

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BRANDON — In a surprise outcome, the Otter Valley Unified Union School District budget was defeated, 522-462, by voters in the Brandon-area district on Tuesday. The district's proposed budget presented a 7.8% jump in spending with per pupil spending increasing by 9.72%. Taxes throughout district towns, however, were not expected to rise nearly as much, with Brandon's taxes rising only 1.69% compared to the prior year.

The defeat comes as a surprise only because very little public comment against the budget had been noticeable ahead of the Town Meeting Day vote.

The Barstow Unified Union School District budget passed, 346-226, and Susannah Loffredo won a seat on the BUSD school board as a write-in candidate for the director at large seat; she got 22 votes, just one more than needed to meet the 1% threshold.

One possible reason for the OVUUSD defeat was very low voter turnout because ballots were not mailed out, said RNESU Superintendent Jeanne Collins.

"It is unfortunate in the Otter Valley budget that the two larger towns (Brandon and Pittsford) voted to mail municipal ballots, but the school district could not unless all six towns agreed to. Thus, voter turnout was very low."

Votes in Brandon for the selectboard race, for example, yielded a total of 877 votes, while the total vote for the OVUUSD budget — among all six towns — was only 984.

Collins said voter turnout for the school budget question was less than 30% of last year's turnout.

The superintendent said the OVUUSD board reorganizes on March 16 and will discuss next steps then.

"The two school boards worked hard on a budget that met the needs of the student in a post-pandemic world," Collins said. "I would like to thank those who voted to support the budget in all six towns and am thrilled the Barstow budget was approved. The OV board will need to dive deep into where to invest their funds for next year and what budget to bring back to the voters. It is unfortunate that the schools could not do the mail-in ballot that the two largest towns did and that the voter turnout was so low."