RSU 5 Begins Exploratory Planning for New Early Childhood Responsibilities

A Community Effort to Build a Thoughtful, Integrated System

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Across Maine, every school district is preparing for a major change: by July 1, 2028, districts—not Child Development Services (CDS)—will be responsible for identifying and providing a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) to children ages 3 to 5 with disabilities. This new responsibility brings both opportunity and complexity, and in RSU 5, we are approaching it as an open, exploratory process.

We are not simply adding preschool services onto the front end of our existing system. Our goal is to look deeply and creatively at how early childhood education can be integrated into the district in a way that is efficient, well-planned, and connected to long-term student success. If we build it thoughtfully, early investments will support smoother transitions and stronger outcomes for students all the way through grade 12.

To begin this exploration, I am forming an Early Childhood Transition Task Force. This group will not be asked to endorse a single model or move at a preset pace. Instead, their work will focus on examining possibilities—what might work well here, what challenges we need to anticipate, and what choices could set us up for long-term success. The state allows districts to begin earlier than 2028 and offers some financial support if we are ready. The Task Force will help determine if, when, and how that could make sense for RSU 5.

The group will explore key areas such as:

- **Facilities** – what types of spaces are needed, and where?
- **Staffing** – what expertise and capacity will be required?
- **Finances** – how do we plan sustainably and use available funding sources wisely?
- **Community Partnerships** – how do we collaborate respectfully with existing early childhood providers?

Rather than producing a single plan, the Task Force will develop a menu of options for the RSU 5 Board of Directors to consider. This approach allows us to weigh different pathways, timelines, and models before final decisions are made.

To ensure a wide range of perspectives, each of our three towns—Durham, Freeport, and Pownal—will be represented by:

- One parent or community member
- One private care provider serving 3-and 4-year-olds
- One Select Board or Town Council member

These participants will join district administrators, RSU 5 staff members, and members of the Board of Directors. The Task Force will meet from 5:30–7:30 p.m. on the following dates:

- **October 29** – Morse Street School, Freeport
- **November 12** – Pownal Elementary School
- **December 18** – Durham Community School
- **January 7** – Freeport Middle School

If you're interested in taking part in this exploratory work, please send a short letter of interest to me, c/o Ginny McManus, at **mcmanusg@rsu5.org** by **October 20 at 12:00 p.m.** We'll notify those selected by October 22.

In your letter, please include:

- Why you're interested in participating
- Your availability for all four meetings
- The role you wish to represent
- Any experience or perspective you would bring

This is a moment for us to listen, learn, and explore together. With thoughtful planning and broad community involvement, we can build an early childhood system that supports families, strengthens our schools, and benefits students far beyond their first years.