A Message to Our Community About the FY 2027 Budget
By Tom Gray, Superintendent of Schools, RSU 5

As RSU 5 works through development of the FY 2027 budget, I want to share a clear, big-picture view of where we are and what's guiding our thinking—and invite our community into the conversation.

Like families and businesses across our towns, our schools are feeling the effects of inflation. The rising costs you see in groceries, heating, insurance, and fuel are the same pressures affecting school budgets. Transportation, special education services, health insurance, and other core obligations all cost significantly more than they did just a few years ago.

What's important to understand is this: simply maintaining what we currently offer—no new programs, no expansion—would require a budget increase of close to 10 percent. That number doesn't reflect growth. It reflects the cost of standing still in today's economy.

At the same time, it's neither realistic nor responsible to ignore those pressures and push decisions off into the future. Doing so would almost certainly lead to larger, more disruptive cuts down the road. The challenge before us is finding a balance between what our schools need and what our community can reasonably sustain over time.

That balance is ultimately the responsibility of the RSU 5 Board of Directors. As superintendent, my role is to develop options and offer a recommendation. The Board—your elected representatives—will weigh those options, listen to public input, and decide which budget best reflects our shared priorities.

Throughout this process, our focus has remained on students. Across all budget scenarios, we have worked to preserve reasonable class sizes, protect supports for students with the greatest needs, maintain core programs, and continue fair, competitive compensation for staff. All of these represent long-term investments in the district. None of the options before the Board are painless, and all involve tradeoffs, but each has been built with care and intention.

I want to acknowledge the human side of this work. Budget decisions affect real people—educators and staff who care deeply about our students and our schools. I am grateful for the professionalism our staff have shown and for the advocacy we've heard from community members. That engagement reflects a community that values its schools.

The Board is currently considering three general budget approaches, ranging from a more conservative increase that would require deeper reductions, to a higher increase that preserves more in the short term but may limit flexibility later. I have recommended a middle path—one that makes some hard decisions now while positioning the district more sustainably for the years ahead—but the final decision rests with the Board.

A budget is more than a financial document. It is a reflection of values—what we prioritize, what we protect, and how we plan for the future. As this conversation continues, I encourage community members to stay engaged, ask questions, and share perspectives. These are important decisions, and they are best made with broad understanding and thoughtful dialogue.

We encourage all citizens to be involved in the budget process. The budget timeline and documents are available on the RSU5 website at the following link: www.rsu5.org/budget/FY27
If you are unable to attend the meetings in person, all Board meetings are livestreamed at the following link: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC97VXXLhRFRjSPv1wfo1ACA

Thank you for your continued support of RSU 5 and the students we serve.