

Planning for the Future of RSU 5

February 11, 2026

Tom Gray, Superintendent of Schools



	<i>Planning for the Future</i>	<i>RSU 5</i>	<i>Feb 2026</i>
→	<p>Balancing Programming, Community, and Sustainability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Several Converging Factors Require Deep, Long-Term Thinking...<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Ongoing Financial Pressures○ Educational Opportunities- what do our kids need in the future?○ Early Childhood Mandates- long-term expansion of our responsibility● This is an exploratory conversation- seeking Board guidance		
	<p><i>Next- Purpose and Priorities</i></p>		

	<i>Planning for the Future</i>	<i>RSU 5</i>	<i>Feb 2026</i>
→	Purpose and Priorities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary Focus: Enhancing Educational Opportunities for Students <u>The needs of students should always come first.</u> • Secondary Consideration: Financial Sustainability in an Inflationary Environment 		
	<i>Goal- Determine which ideas to explore further</i>		

	<i>Planning for the Future</i>	<i>RSU 5</i>	<i>Feb 2026</i>
→	Lenses Through Which to View All Scenarios <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early Childhood Programming: Requirement to serve all 3- and 4-year-olds with IEPs by July 2027 (we're committed to Cohort 3) • Middle School Equity and Expansion of Opportunities: ensuring consistency for all district students, and possibly expanding the vision for how we approach middle-level education • Financial Sustainability- Short-term v. Long-term costs in inflationary times • Community Identity- Town connections 		
	<i>Next- Early Childhood Considerations</i>		

	<i>Planning for the Future</i>	<i>RSU 5</i>	<i>Feb 2026</i>
→	<p>Considerations for Early Childhood Programming</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have space for the 4-year-olds, but where do we put the 3-year-olds in 2027? • Distribution of services across the district • Half-Day (currently have) v. Full-Day (should we offer in future?) <p><i>Cannot overstate the importance, and long-term benefits, of getting this right. The payoff will be immediate for families, and longitudinal for students.</i></p>		
	<i>Next- Middle School Considerations</i>		

	<i>Planning for the Future</i>	<i>RSU 5</i>	<i>Feb 2026</i>
→	<p>Considerations for Middle School Programming</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistency and congruence for academics, including robust MTSS • Equity for Athletics and Extracurriculars • Opportunity for all students to integrate Before high school • Possibilities for expanding our vision of Middle Level Education... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ STEM/CTE (possibility to embed a teacher from Region 10) ○ World Language- ensure access for all students grades 7 and 8 ○ Interdisciplinary models become easier with all district students in one location 		
	<i>Next- Financial Sustainability</i>		

<i>Planning for the Future</i>		<i>RSU 5</i>	<i>Feb 2026</i>
→	<p>Financial Sustainability Lens</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short-term investments v. long-term operational savings • Impact of inflation on deferred decisions • Efficiency of consolidated v. dislocated programming • Facility maintenance and utilization across the district <p><i>This lens should be a consideration, but not the primary impetus for decisions. Financial implications are always hard to predict precisely.</i></p>		
	<p><i>Next- The Importance of Community Identity</i></p>		

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→	<p>Importance of Community Identity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each school is an expression of community identity and history • Family and Neighborhood Connections • Historical Relationships to School Buildings • Feelings Must Be Considered Alongside Ideas <p><i>Community Identity Lives in Each RSU 5 School</i></p>		
	<p><i>Next- Details of Scenario 1: Current Configuration</i></p>		

	<i>Planning for the Future</i>	<i>RSU 5</i>	<i>Feb 2026</i>
→	<p>Scenario 1: Maintain Current District Configuration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● For Durham- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ PreK - Gr. 8: Durham Community School ○ Grades 9-12: Freeport High School ● For Freeport- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ PreK - Gr. 2: Morse Street School ○ Gr. 3 - Gr. 5: Mast Landing School ○ Gr. 6 - Gr. 8: Freeport Middle School ○ Gr. 9 - Gr. 12: Freeport High School ● For Pownal- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ PreK - Gr. 5: Pownal Elementary School ○ Gr. 6 - Gr. 8: Freeport Middle School ○ Gr. 9 - Gr. 12: Freeport High School 		
	<i>Next- What we preserve</i>		

	<i>Planning for the Future</i>	<i>RSU 5</i>	<i>Feb 2026</i>
→	<p>Scenario 1: What We Preserve With Current District Configuration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Community Schools and Town Identity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Neighborhood Schools Remain Sources of Town Pride and Identity ○ Family Traditions and Local Engagement Continue ● Early Childhood in Each Town <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Each Town has Public PreK ○ Current configuration provides a soft entry to public school in each town; eliminates an early transition ● The Least Change in the Short Term <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Our facilities are presently used in this configuration ○ Staffing configurations are adapted to this model <p><i>We cannot ignore the intangibles- community sentiment is a legitimate, important consideration.</i></p>		
	<i>Next- Limitations of Current District Configuration</i>		

	<i>Planning for the Future</i>	<i>RSU 5</i>	<i>Feb 2026</i>
→	<p>Scenario 1: Limitations of Current District Configuration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Early Childhood Inefficiencies and Space Concerns <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Services and staffing across multiple locations is inefficient ○ More Limited Ability to Offer Full Day Programming ○ Commitment to serve 3-yos with IEPs by July 2027- with no viable space solution ● Middle School Inconsistency and Inequity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Academic Offerings are inconsistent between FMS and DCS ○ Inequities for extracurriculars and athletics between FMS and DCS ○ Students enter high school without benefits of a full-district integration experience (especially for DCS students) ● Overall Financial Sustainability- What is the Long-Term Trajectory? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Operating multi-purpose facilities in an inflationary environment ○ Duplicating staff and resources in multiple locations, sometimes paying mileage reimbursements ○ Inefficiencies of current model 		
	<i>Next- The Fundamental Question</i>		

	<i>Planning for the Future</i>	<i>RSU 5</i>	<i>Feb 2026</i>
→	<p>Scenario 1: The Fundamental Question</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Can we address the Early Childhood mandate, middle school inequities, and financial pressures while maintaining the status quo?</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Or does preserving what we value most require us to consider change?</p>		
	<i>Next- Alternative Considerations</i>		

<i>Planning for the Future</i>		<i>RSU 5</i>	<i>Feb 2026</i>
→	<p>Why Consider Alternatives (when this proposal is likely to cause concern for some)?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Early Childhood Mandate requires us to take some level of action regardless. • Middle School programming gaps are real, and force us to reckon with inequities • Budgetary Pressures in an Inflationary Environment Demand a Responsible Conversation, Even If it is Hard • Having This Conversation Now Coincides with Strategic Planning • No Matter Where the Conversation Starts, Who Knows What Ideas Will Emerge? 		
	<p><i>Next- Scenario #2 The Pownal Early Childhood Center</i></p>		

<i>Planning for the Future</i>		<i>RSU 5</i>	<i>Feb 2026</i>
→	<p>Scenario 2: The Pownal Early Childhood Center</p> <p>A new configuration involving modest facilities investment, some change in each town, and strong focus on Early Childhood and Middle Level Education.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PES → District-wide PreK/Preschool Center • Pownal K-6 → DCS • DCS 7-8 → FMS • FMS → District-wide 7-8 Middle School • MLS → Transition to Freeport Grades 4-6 • MSS → Transition to Freeport Grades K-3 (PreK to Pownal) • FHS → No change (district-wide Gr. 9-12) 		
	<p><i>Next- Scenario #2 Programming Benefits</i></p>		

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→	<p>Scenario 2: Programming Benefits</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Real Investment in Early Childhood, with Potential for Expansive Programming <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Consolidated services and expertise at dedicated facility ○ Full-day PreK/Preschool possibilities ○ Expanded outdoor/play-based programming potential ○ Solves 3-year-old space requirement (2027 commitment for Cohort 3) ○ Enhanced developmental supports through co-location ● Middle School Integration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ All 7-8 students together with consistent offerings ○ Full extracurricular/athletic integration ○ Equal access to consistent academic program ○ Preparation for high school transition as unified cohort 		
	<p><i>Next- Scenario #2 Financial Considerations and Community Impact</i></p>		

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→	<p>Financial Considerations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Single early childhood facility v. multiple sites ● Long-term operational efficiencies possible ● Consolidated middle school programming ● Reduced duplication of resources and staffing <p>Community Impact</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Significant change to Pownal identity — loss of K-5 neighborhood school ● District-wide middle school creates new shared identity ● Freeport primary grade adjustments needed ● Early childhood center becomes district-wide resource, with potential to magnetize 		
	<p><i>Next- Scenario #3 Districtwide Grade 6 at Pownal Elementary</i></p>		

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→	<p>Scenario 3: District-Wide 6th Grade at Pownal Elementary School</p> <p>This scenario focuses on middle level consolidation and extends to integration of all students to sixth grade, while leaving all earlier grades, including early childhood, as they are.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● PES → Becomes a sixth grade school, focusing on experiential learning, for the entire district. ● Pownal PreK-5 → DCS ● DCS 6 → PES, 7-8 → FMS ● FMS → District-wide 7-8 Middle School, Present Freeport Gr 6 → PES ● MLS → Freeport Gr. 3-5 (no change) ● MSS → Freeport PreK. - Gr. 2 (no change) ● FHS → No change (district-wide Gr. 9-12) 		
	<p><i>Next- Scenario #3 Programming Benefits</i></p>		

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→	<p>Scenario 3: Programming Benefits</p> <p>Unique Grade 6 Experience</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Potential for experiential/outdoor education focus ● Project-based learning opportunities ● Bridge year between elementary and middle school <p>Middle School Integration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Unified 7-8 programming with full consistency ● Earlier district integration starting at grade 6 ● Equal access to athletics, extracurriculars, and academics ● Strong peer cohort for high school transition 		
	<p><i>Next- Scenario #3 Shortcomings and Considerations</i></p>		

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→	Scenario 3: Possible Shortcomings and Considerations		
	Financial Considerations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Middle school efficiencies achieved • Grade 6 program may require specialized resources, and requires ALL programs at PES (Art, Music, WL, FLS, Special Education, PE, etc.) • Early childhood inefficiencies remain, and offers no solution for 3 yos. Community Impact <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Still represents disproportionate change for Pownal • New shared identity for grades 6-8 • Does not fully solve early childhood challenges 		
	<i>Next- Trade offs and Tension</i>		

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→	Trade-offs and Tensions- This presentation is intended to acknowledge complexities. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programming opportunities v. community tradition • Short-term costs v. long-term sustainability • Centralized services v. distributed access • Mandated requirements v. local preferences • Student equity v. familiar structures <p><i>A true dilemma is never a "right v. wrong," it is always a "right v. right."</i></p>		
	<i>Next- Questions - Board Guidance</i>		

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→	<p>Questions for Board Guidance...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Which factors are most important in your decision-making? ● Do the potential benefits of change justify exploring new models? ● How do we balance the 2027 Early Childhood commitment with community values, needs, and preferences? ● Which option(s) warrant deeper operational analysis? ● Where would you like to go from here? 		
	<i>Next- Considerations for the Short Term</i>		

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→	<p>Considerations for the Short Term (starting this school year)...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Board discussion and initial guidance tonight ● Fleshing out ideas takes time, effort, and investment (e.g., Early Childhood). Do we invest in fleshing out concepts? ● If yes... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Which ideas shall we pursue? ○ How shall we engage the community- ALL communities? ○ Timeline for decision-making? (considering the July 2027 commitment)? ● Ongoing communication with stakeholders 		
	<i>Each Scenario Requires Community Engagement</i>		