FY27 Budget Message from Michelle Ritcheson, Board Chair

As Chair of the RSU 5 Board of Directors, I would like to take this opportunity to share some of the thinking and work that went into our adopted budget for next school year. This budget reflects months of careful consideration, thoughtful discussion, and a shared commitment to supporting our students while ensuring the long-term sustainability of our district.

Throughout this process, the RSU 5 Board of Directors has worked closely with the Superintendent to take a broad and deliberate view of our work—looking beyond a single budget cycle and focusing on the long-term health of RSU 5. We have examined our structures, staffing, and priorities with care, always with the goal of aligning our resources with what matters most for student learning.

Even within a challenging fiscal environment, we have made it a priority to preserve the core of our educational program. This includes maintaining strong supports for our youngest learners and for students with the highest levels of need, especially recognizing the importance of early learning, targeted intervention, and adequate services for students with special needs. We have also remained committed to our class size guidelines across the district, ensuring that students continue to benefit from strong relationships with their teachers and access to high-quality instruction.

At the same time, we acknowledge that this budget includes reductions that are difficult. Like many districts in Maine, we have had to make hard decisions in the face of a challenging fiscal climate. Our decisions were not made lightly, and they are not a reflection of the value of the individuals or programs affected. Rather, they reflect the reality that rising costs require us to make thoughtful choices about how we balance competitive compensation and benefits with the overall number of positions we can sustain. Our responsibility, as a Board, is to ensure that we are building a system that is both strong today and viable for the future.

The Board has adopted this budget because we believe it strikes the right balance between supporting students in the present and sustaining the district for the long term. From the outset of the budget process, we have welcomed stakeholder input and public comment. Staff input was critical in identifying essential programs that we needed to maintain. We remain committed to transparency and ongoing engagement with our communities and stakeholder groups, recognizing that trust is built through both our decisions and the way we make them.

We encourage all members of our communities to participate in this important process. The Annual Budget Meeting will be held in the Freeport High School gymnasium on Wednesday, May 13 at 6:30 pm, followed by the Budget Validation Referendum on Tuesday, June 9, at your local polling station. We respectfully ask for your participation in this process - in person at the Annual Budget Meeting, and at the polls for the Referendum.

Thank you for your engagement with our district. This budget is one step in an ongoing journey for RSU 5—one grounded in strong relationships, shared responsibility, and a commitment to providing the best possible experience for our students now and into the future.

If you would like further information on the budget, please visit our website at www.rsu5.org/budget/FY27. Paper copies of the FY27 Board of Directors' Adopted Budget Brochure are also available at all the schools and Town Halls.