



Durham | Freeport | Pownal

STRATEGIC PLAN 2026-2031



Letter to the Community

Dear RSU 5 Community,

It is my pleasure to present the RSU 5 Strategic Plan, which stands as a reflection of our community's shared commitment to students and families, and of our belief in schools as enduring expressions of our values, hopes, and aspirations.

This Strategic Plan has been, from the very beginning, a collective effort—grounded in listening, reflection, and a shared belief in what our schools can and should be for the students of RSU 5. Over the past two years, students, staff, families, and community members from Durham, Freeport, and Pownal have come together to articulate what we value, but what we aspire to become.

At the center of this work is a simple but powerful question: What should it mean to graduate from RSU 5? The Portrait of a Graduate serves as our North Star, helping us align our programs, our practices, and our priorities with a clear vision of the knowledge, skills, and dispositions.

This plan reflects the character of our community. It is thoughtful, aspirational, and grounded in a deep commitment to students. It speaks to our shared belief that learning should be engaging and meaningful, that schools should be places of belonging and respect, and that every student should be prepared for meaningful participation in an increasingly complex world. These values build on a commitment to inspire and support every learner while fostering creativity, critical thinking, and responsible citizenship.

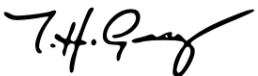
This plan is not simply a statement of ideals. It is a working document—one that connects vision to action. The strategies and priorities are designed to guide our decisions, inform resource allocation, and shape our future work. Importantly, this plan reflects an understanding that strong systems and long-term sustainability are essential to realizing our goals.

This plan is not a static document. Strategic planning, done well, is an ongoing process. As conditions change and new challenges and opportunities emerge, we will continue to revisit and refine this work. In that sense, this plan is both a destination and a starting point—a touchstone we will return to as we make decisions, evaluate progress, and adapt to the needs of our students and community over time.

I am grateful to the many individuals who contributed their time, perspectives, and care to this process. This plan belongs to the community, and it will only succeed through our continued shared commitment to bringing it to life.

The work ahead is significant, but so is the opportunity. Together, we have articulated a clear direction. Now, together, we will carry it forward.

In partnership,



Tom Gray
Superintendent, RSU 5



Strategic Plan Development Process



Laying the Foundation

RSU 5 launched the strategic planning process in January 2025 by forming a representative Strategic Planning Committee that included educators, students, families, community members, and district leaders.



Seeking Community Input

More than 800 participants contributed feedback through surveys and focus groups, including faculty and staff, students in grades 6–12, and community conversations across all three towns. This feedback helped identify community priorities, strengths, and hopes for the future of RSU 5 students.



Drafting the Portrait

Community feedback informed the development of the district's Portrait of a Graduate, vision, belief statements, and focus areas that reflect the knowledge, skills, and dispositions the community values for its learners.



Strategic Planning

Throughout the spring of 2026, the Strategic Planning Committee worked collaboratively to develop strategies, action steps, and indicators of progress. Drafts were reviewed by faculty and district leadership to refine priorities and support implementation planning.



INTELLECTUAL CURIOSITY

RSU 5 graduates are innovative, creative, and curious. They embrace challenge through critical thinking and problem solving to make responsible decisions and cultivate a lifelong passion for learning.



INTERPERSONAL COMPETENCE

RSU 5 graduates are kind, empathetic, and respectful. They have the communication and collaboration skills necessary to build and sustain healthy relationships. They advocate for themselves and others.



PERSONAL GROWTH

RSU 5 graduates know who they are and who they aspire to become. They engage in ongoing self reflection and goal setting that builds independence, resilience, perseverance, and adaptability.



COMMUNITY AND GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT

RSU 5 graduates have strong community and social connections that contribute to a sense of belonging. They act with care and responsibility toward their local community and the wider world. They value and seek out diverse experiences and perspectives.



FUTURE READINESS

RSU 5 graduates explore and see opportunities ahead and are prepared for life. They are flexible and responsive to the demands of both the present and the future. They possess the knowledge, skills, and habits needed for personal and professional success.

RSU 5 Mission & We Believe Statements

Mission:

Empower and equip every learner with skills, curiosity, character, and purpose to thrive and live fulfilling lives in an ever-changing world.



Strategic Plan



Cognitive Growth

We believe learning requires deep thinking, meaningful challenge, and the ability to reflect on and adjust one's approach to reach goals.

Indicators of Success:

- Improvement in student growth and proficiency across content areas and grade levels.
- Increased student perception of academic challenge, engagement, and relevance.
- Increased educator collaboration focused on curriculum, assessment, and instructional practices.
- Increased graduation rates and postsecondary readiness indicators.

Strategies	Action Steps
1A: Design and utilize curriculum that is rigorous, interdisciplinary, and iterative.	1A.1: Design and utilize challenging curriculum that provides entry points and effective scaffolds for all students. 1A.2: Provide professional learning and collaborative planning structures that support responsive, inclusive, evidence-based instruction. 1A.3: Use formative assessments to inform unit planning and anticipate scaffolds. 1A.4: Design and implement grade-level specific interdisciplinary opportunities that encourage innovation and creativity among staff and students. 1A.5: Identify guiding questions that integrate concepts across units and disciplines to foster connections and deeper thinking. 1A.6: Review instructional materials regularly to ensure they are rooted in research, data, and relevance. 1A.7: Provide regular professional development on the science of learning.
1B: Foster student agency through reflection, collaboration, goal setting, and self-advocacy in learning.	1B.1: Provide regular opportunities for collaborative learning, feedback, and academic discourse. 1B.2: Teach and support effective communication, discourse, and self-advocacy skills across learning environments.

Strategies	Action Steps
	1B.3: Support students in setting goals, monitoring progress, reflecting on learning, and adjusting strategies to promote growth and independence.



School Culture and Connection

We believe schools are welcoming, joyful, and hopeful communities where relationships, belonging, and engagement support every learner.

Indicators of Success:

- Increased attendance rates.
- Increased participation in extracurricular and community-based activities.
- Improved sense of belonging as measured through district and climate surveys for students, families, and faculty.
- Increased family and community participation in school-sponsored events and activities.

Strategies	Action Steps
2A: Develop and enhance systems and processes to ensure strong relationships and sense of belonging for all students within the school and broader community.	2A.1 Expand peer mentorship programs that connect students across grade levels. 2A.2 Cultivate a school environment where faculty, students, and families actively appreciate, support, and respect one another. 2A.3 Connect students with adults in the broader community in order to build relationships. 2A.4 Provide opportunities for students to support and know their community.
2B: Cultivate a culture where every student is known, valued, and supported.	2B.1 Ensure that every student can identify at least one adult in the school who provides personal support. 2B.2 Implement practices and structures that foster diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging.

Strategies	Action Steps
	2B.3 Prioritize time and structures to support student and staff well-being. 2B.4 Recruit, hire, and retain staff whose identities and lived experiences reflect those of the student population. 2B.5 Implement developmentally appropriate reflection and feedback structures (e.g., surveys, advisory forums, student panels) at every grade level to ensure consistent student input on school practices and policies. 2B.6 Establish regular systems for reviewing and responding to student feedback.
2C: Cultivate opportunities for students to explore their identities, discover their passions, and develop meaningful connections.	2C. 1 Expand opportunities, courses, and experiences that reflect the varied interests, strengths, and identities of learners. 2C.2 Design learning experiences that allow students to explore interests, discover passions, and develop new skills. 2C.3 Offer clubs and extracurricular activities that are inclusive, accessible, and diverse in purpose, ensuring every student can find a meaningful way to participate.
2D: Strengthen inclusive engagement systems that empower families, students, and community members as active partners in learning.	2D.1 Foster family involvement in learning by soliciting feedback and implementing strategies that best support families' needs and interests. 2D.2 Provide regular opportunities for families to engage meaningfully in the school community and contribute to school culture. 2D.3 Implement meaningful open-houses, learning showcases, and community nights of various types.



Real-World Relevance

We believe in creating opportunities for students to practice essential life skills, explore practical knowledge, consider diverse perspectives and engage in community-based experiences that develop skills needed for life beyond school.

Indicators of Success:

- Increase in the number and diversity of active community partnerships that support student learning through mentorships, guest speakers, internships, field experiences, and project collaborations.
- Increase in the percentage of students completing financial literacy coursework or comparable programming focused on practical financial and life skills.
- Improvement in student survey data indicating that learning experiences feel relevant to their lives and prepare them for postsecondary pathways (career, college, or other pursuits).
- Increase in the percentage of core courses or learning experiences that include authentic real-world applications, place-based connections, or interdisciplinary problem-solving tied to local contexts.

Strategies	Action Steps
3A: Provide authentic, experiential, and place-based learning opportunities for all grade levels.	3A.1: Embed place-based and outdoor learning across all grade levels by designing curriculum that consistently connects to local environments, community, and regional identity. 3A.2: Prioritize authentic, community-connected learning experiences through projects, fieldwork, and interdisciplinary problem-solving. 3A.3: Expand equitable access to experiential learning pathways including fieldwork, service learning, internships, independent studies, and cultural/travel opportunities. 3A.4: Position students as active contributors to their community through meaningful projects that build awareness, appreciation, and impact within local and regional contexts. 3A.5: Provide dedicated collaborative time for educators to design, implement, and refine authentic, place-based learning experiences. 3A.6: Establish systems and coordination structures to sustain partnerships, support experiential opportunities, and ensure access for all students.
3B: Create opportunities for students to develop and apply essential life skills.	3B.1: Ensure all students participate in financial literacy programming focused on practical financial planning and decision-making skills.

Strategies	Action Steps
	3B.2: Integrate real world applications into the curriculum such as economics, data analysis, and statistics using authentic scenarios so students understand how these concepts apply beyond the classroom. 3B.3: Provide student-centered learning experiences that empower students to take ownership of their learning through presenting, thoughtful discourse, collaboration, and problem-solving, building communication, confidence, and critical thinking skills. 3B.4: Integrate life-skills development across coursework to reinforce essential life skills such as decision-making, collaboration, financial responsibility, and professional communication.
3C: Develop flexible and personalized pathways that prepare students for diverse postsecondary opportunities, careers, and life experiences.	3C.1: Ensure all students participate in structured career exploration experiences such as internships, mentorships, job shadowing, or community partnerships. 3C.2: Expand and diversify career-ready pathways by broadening access to high-quality, career-connected learning opportunities beyond existing regional programs (e.g., Region 10 Technical High School), including new pathways aligned to emerging industries, student interests, and workforce needs. 3C.3: Ensure there are staff to coordinate and support structured career exploration experiences. 3C.4: Ensure all students have access to personalized, flexible pathways (academic, technical, experiential) aligned to their interests, strengths, and postsecondary goals.
3D: Increase representation and integrate diverse perspectives across learning experiences.	3D.1: Integrate historically underrepresented voices, cultures, and viewpoints into curriculum design, instructional materials, and assessments across all subject areas. 3D.2: Establish ongoing opportunities for students to engage with guest speakers, community leaders, and thought partners from diverse backgrounds to deepen real-world understanding. 3D.3: Create inclusive classroom environments where diverse perspectives are actively valued, explored, and respected through structured dialogue and inclusive teaching practices. 3D.4: Teach and practice skills for civil discourse, critical thinking, and respectful engagement across differing viewpoints. 3D.5: Design learning experiences that engage students regularly with diverse perspectives and experiences.



Emotional Intelligence and Character Building

We believe in fostering emotionally intelligent, flexible, and resilient learners who act with integrity, use strategies for emotional regulation, and embrace productive struggle as growth.

Indicators of Success:

- Improvement in student self-regulation and emotional safety measures.
- Improvement in student self-reported emotional safety, resilience, belonging, and well-being.
- Increased educator confidence and consistency in implementing SEL practices.
- Increased caregiver understanding of SEL curriculum in end of year survey.

Strategies	Action Steps
4A: Refine ongoing implementation of SEL curriculum across all grade levels.	4A.1: Conduct a district audit and SEL curriculum review. 4A.2: Assess and identify opportunities to prioritize time for SEL practice/learning in the classroom spaces. 4A.3: Provide recommendations based on findings for future action steps for improvement. 4A.4: Develop and implement instructional practices to support curiosity, perspective-taking, self-awareness, self-regulation, resilience, motivation, empathy, flexibility, and social skills. 4A.5: Create pathways for families to engage with SEL language and learning.
4B: Strengthen systems of academic, social-emotional, and behavioral support to ensure equitable access for all students.	4B.1: Implement an effective, comprehensive counseling framework in order to maximize access and services for all students. 4B.2: Review utilization of counselor and social worker resources to ensure equitable access for all students. 4B.3: Ensure that school counselors and social workers are utilizing current research and knowledge of best practices.
4C: Cultivate resilience, perseverance, and a growth mindset through supportive learning environments that normalize challenge and reflection.	4C.1: Develop instructional practices that normalize productive struggle, reflection, revision, and persistence as essential parts of learning and growth. 4C.2: Review policies, procedures, and frameworks for managing student behavior with an eye toward supporting learning and growth.

Strategies	Action Steps
	4C.3: Provide opportunities for students to develop personal well-being goals and reflect on strategies that promote emotional health, balance, and resilience.



Systems and Sustainability

We believe in careful, responsible, forward-thinking stewardship of district resources that meet the changing needs of learners.

Indicators of Success:

- Facilities, demographic, and operational data are regularly analyzed to support long-term planning and equitable resource allocation.
- Increased participation, with a representative cross-section of the community, engaging in feedback gathering opportunities focused on facilities and resource sustainability.
- 100% of critical maintenance items are addressed annually using Facility Condition Index to identify items.

Strategies	Action Steps
5A: Ensure that school infrastructure and equipment adequately and equitably support the instructional and extracurricular programming offered by the district.	5A.1: Conduct Systems and Sustainability Study to analyze and suggest program efficiencies and effectiveness, organizational structure, and alignment of staff. 5A.2: Utilize the Systems and Sustainability Study analysis and recommendations to inform the decision-making process that considers equitable programming and resources across the district. 5A.3: Use Systems and Sustainability Study recommendations to optimize resources and organizational structures to ensure equitable, high-quality learning experiences for all students. 5A.4: Engage the community in conversations around school configuration. 5A.5: Maintain and update infrastructure to ensure equitable access to educational and extra-curricular resources and practices. 5A.6: Renovate and update infrastructure in a fiscally responsible manner to ensure equitable educational experiences.

Strategies	Action Steps
	5A.7: Develop a framework to continually evaluate and assess the long-term sustainability of operations.
5B: Maintain fiscally responsible practices that support long-term sustainability and equitable opportunities for students.	5B.1: Review and update long-range budgeting plans. 5B.2: Anticipate and evaluate the long-term financial impact of district decisions and initiatives. 5B.3: Align financial decisions with district priorities and strategic goals. 5B.4: Monitor enrollment, staffing, programming, and operational trends to support proactive planning.

Strategic Planning Committee

Thank you to this dedicated group of educators, students, and community members. They spent countless hours soliciting community input and synthesizing community perspectives to create a Portrait of a Graduate and Strategic Plan that reflects our hopes and dreams for all RSU 5 students. Their thoughtful insights and collaborative work resulted in a strategic plan that will guide us for many years to come.

Maria Abbatemarco, Student

Allison Barrett, Teacher, Mast Landing School

Liz Dolci, Community Member

Isabella George, Student

Halie Goodspeed, Teacher, Freeport High School

Tom Gray, Superintendent

Emily Grimm, Principal, Mast Landing School

David Jensen, Parent

Kara Kaikini, Board of Directors

Renee LaRoche, Teacher, Durham Community School

Caitlin Loveitt, Parent

Melissa Luetje, Teacher, Freeport High School

Erica Mazzeo, Assistant Superintendent

Julie Nickerson, Principal, Morse Street School

Kate Parkin, Teacher, Durham Community School

Kelly Sink, Board of Directors

Jennifer Winkler, Teacher, Pownal Elementary School

