

# RSU5 Community Newsletter

To inspire and support every learner by challenging minds, building character, sparking creativity, and nurturing passions.

## Happenings in RSU5

By Jean Skorapa, Superintendent

I want to express my sincere gratitude to members of the RSU 5 community for partnering with us to ensure a positive start to the school year for all our students. Although we have made huge strides in filling open positions, like all districts in Maine, we struggle to find additional custodians, bus drivers, and substitutes. We encourage you to reach out to our Human Resource Office if you are interested in joining the RSU 5 Team.

This fall marks the fourth year of working to achieve the goals outlined in the district's articulated strategic plan. We believe this work supports the district's mission, "to inspire and support every learner by challenging minds, building character, sparking creativity, and nurturing passions." This year our work will focus on the following action steps:

- Continue to implement and evaluate the effectiveness of practices and structures that support the social/emotional needs of all students.
- Evaluate and adjust opportunities for student voice in our classroom, school, and district.
- Identify and assess the effectiveness of opportunities for movement/breaks at the classroom and school levels and explore other effective practices.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of implementation from the recommendation of the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Audit conducted by the Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium
- Identify areas of staff and student interest regarding courses, mini-courses, activities, clubs, and extracurricular choices and explore options for adoption.
- Ensure comprehensive communication with all stakeholders regarding student growth.
- Develop and implement a plan to improve parent and community communication, including feedback from all stakeholders.
- Identify additional school-based and community-based learning opportunities that align with the curriculum and spark student interest.
- Explore strategies to improve, expand, and strengthen school-parent partnerships and develop a plan of action.
- Evaluate staff attrition rate and other relative data in order to retain highly effective staff.
- Inventory and evaluate major equipment and the facilities of the School Nutrition Program to prioritize repairs and replacement and develop an annual maintenance schedule.
- Complete an energy audit in order to identify needed improvements in all RSU 5 facilities.

A healthy relationship with our families and community results in positive outcomes for all students. We look forward to working with you collaboratively to achieve that goal.

## Upcoming Dates

**November 23  
Professional  
Compensation  
Day - No School**

**November 24-25  
Thanksgiving  
Break - No  
School**

**December 23-  
January 2  
December  
Vacation - No  
School**

## District Evening Events

The district evening events calendar is located at the following link:  
[https://  
www.rsu5.org/  
calendar/  
district-  
evening-events](https://www.rsu5.org/calendar/district-evening-events)

## Instructional Support Updates

By Dr. June Sellers, Director of Instructional Support

Tragic events throughout our nation and recent events in our community have renewed RSU5's commitment to educate and empower staff to work better together to save the lives of students in crisis. With multiple stressors facing school-aged children and their families - such as the pandemic and beyond - it has become clear that many of our learners are experiencing stress at high levels, including anxiety and depression.

In response to this need - to prioritize connection and wellness for our students, and develop a multi-tiered system of supports that involve interdisciplinary, collaborative partnerships focusing on prevention - RSU5 has assembled district and school-based teams who will be trained and empowered with knowledge and skills to identify, assess and support students before they enter the pathway to self-harm or violence.

The Office of Instructional Support is pleased to announce that this staff training opportunity is funded through a U.S. Bureau of Justice Assistance Grant, provided in partnership with the Maine Department of Education, Navigate360 and WestEd Justice and Research Prevention Center, and includes access to Behavioral Threat Assessment Management (BTAM) and Suicide Awareness and Prevention Training.

Behavioral threat assessment and management (BTAM) is a fact-based, systematic process designed to proactively identify, assess, and manage potentially dangerous or violent situations. School safety experts, law enforcement officials, and the United States Departments of Education, Justice, Secret Service, and Federal Bureau of Education (2017, 2018) have cited research indicating that before a student commits an act of violence on a school campus, or engages in a dangerous and/or fatal act of self-harm, warning signs are usually evident. Research and best practice guidelines provided by these entities also indicate that a collaborative, multidisciplinary approach to behavioral threat assessment and management can identify effective interventions and supports that mitigate a potential threat to self or others, and help the person(s) toward a more positive pathway (National Association of School Psychologists, School Safety and Crisis, 2021).

RSU5's multidisciplinary, district and school-based teams will integrate the strengths and capabilities of school social workers, school counselors, school psychologists, school nurses, teachers, school-based and district administrators, and our school resource officer. This evidence-based approach, informed by research and practice, facilitates collaboration and coordination among individuals who know our students, and can implement a wide range of possible responses to ensure a fact-based process that avoids overreacting or underreacting to situations of concern. Training will include competencies in: determining which behaviors are transient (i.e., an expression of anger or frustration that can be quickly or easily resolved) or substantive (i.e., serious intent to harm self or others that involves a detailed plan and means); gathering data using multi-methods, multi-sources; parent engagement and partnership; processes that uphold civil rights and address disproportionality, such as assessing the context of the threat, historical and acute trauma, biases, cultural identity and experiences, equity, equality and privilege, history with systems and trust, and impact of disability.

RSU5 School Threat Assessment Teams (STAT) will learn to implement the evidence-based *CSTAG Model*, using the *Comprehensive School Threat Assessment Guidelines (CSTAG)*, in a two-part training series. CSTAG Level 1 training includes an in-depth presentation of the CSTAG Model that will enable teams to build, strengthen, and maintain knowledge and skills in behavioral threat assessment management and suicide prevention, and prepare them for CSTAG Level 2 training. CSTAG Level 2 training is a workshop format that will allow teams to work together to apply what they learned through a series of guided, scenario-based exercises that require careful analysis and teamwork. Level 2 training will enable teams to apply the CSTAG model to a variety of situations with a high degree of classification accuracy and efficiency. At the conclusion of Level 2, teams will be prepared to use CSTAG in their schools.

*(Instructional Support con't)*

We've learned from research and evidence that there is NO profile of a student, nor an easy formula of risk factors that accurately determines whether a student is going to commit an act of violence or self-harm. We've learned that profiles can unjustly stigmatize students. We've learned that there is a difference between making a threat and posing a threat. We've learned that a threat to harm others can be transient (i.e., expression of anger or frustration that can be quickly or easily resolved) or substantive (i.e., serious intent to harm others that involves a detailed plan and means). We've learned that most students who pose a substantive threat indicate their intentions in some way, including statements to friends, ideas in written work, drawings, and postings on social media. We've learned that threat assessment procedures are a viable, compassionate, and caring alternative to zero tolerance policies, which have been proven ineffective and counterproductive. Importantly, we know that threat assessment procedures must be clearly communicated to staff and families.

Ultimately, our objective is to integrate this effort as a component of RSU5's comprehensive approach to maintaining safe schools, which includes addressing our students' physical and psychological safety.

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## Curriculum Updates

By Cynthia Alexander, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment

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In January of 2022 we began the process of examining our Social Studies curriculum as a district. Our work began with an immersion into Maine's revised and restructured social studies standards. The next step is to ensure that our curriculum is aligned with these standards.

In addition to alignment, our goal is to have a curriculum and instruction that ensures equitable access for students, equitable representation in our resources and instructional materials, and the development of perspective taking skills. To assist in this process, the Social Studies Committee and subsequently all Social Studies teachers utilized a tool to screen for biased content in instructional materials. This was a very informative process that helped enhance our awareness of potential biases.

The RSU5 vision statement for our students states that learners become healthy, empathetic and responsible citizens who contribute to their local and global communities. We want our students to be creative problem solvers and critical thinkers who communicate effectively in an evolving world. It is our goal as we continue this important work to foster that vision through our curriculum and instruction.