

To the honorable members of the Educational and Cultural Affairs Committee,

We are writing in support of LD1458 - An Act to Increase Funding for the Maine School of Science and Mathematics (MSSM).

The MSSM Alumni Association comprises over 1000 graduates of the school, from the pioneer classes of 1996 and 1997, through our most recent graduates. We hail from all 16 counties of the state of Maine, and have each looked northward to further our education and, in many cases, find community. MSSM's residential model and challenging curriculum provide an opportunity for gifted STEM students from across the state and from all backgrounds to thrive. Collectively, we have experienced the school's first years when we struggled to prove that the school could thrive, to years of resounding success, including 2019, when MSSM was ranked by the *US News and World Report* as the #2 high school in the country.

Many of our members have stayed in Maine and work in the areas of life sciences, education, non-profit, finance, software development, and engineering; those of us who didn't stay in Maine are returning as often and as fast as we can. MSSM is an important engine for economic growth in Maine and a tool to help develop a STEM workforce for 21st century industries.

Unfortunately, over the last several years, MSSM has been running an uphill race. MSSM has received flat funding since 2017 and, as a result, has had to eliminate positions, slow wage growth, and reduce student services. This bill helps to restore funding to sustainable levels and helps to keep MSSM thriving.

Additionally, unlike MSSM, our sister schools across the country do not charge their students for the full cost of room and board, the current cost of which puts MSSM out of reach for many qualified students in the state. Students who would benefit immensely from the challenging coursework and vibrant residential community that has been formed over more than 25 years.

As graduates, we are proud to say that we went to the Maine School of Science and Mathematics. We should, in turn, be proud of MSSM as a state. In the words of some of our members:

"MSSM has truly shaped the arc of my career and life. After studying electrical engineering at the University of Maine, I have been putting my skills to work here in the state developing power electronics for clean energy products. What began as a small startup company was acquired by Generac power systems and now employs 50+ people in South Portland alone (including a few MSSM and UMaine alumni). I'm fortunate to call Gray, Maine, home. I get to be close to my family and my fellow alumni who help push this state forward every day. You may find them at the Maine Department of Transportation, IDEXX labs, or BluShift Aerospace on Brunswick landing." - Tony Nuzzo, Class of 2009

"MSSM gave me the space to discover new interests, develop solid time management skills, and the courage to explore new fields of study, encouraged by world-class faculty who took a

leap of faith, just like the pioneer classes did. While at MSSM, I also found a community, many of whom I am still friends with more than 25 years later. The impact of the school on my life is immeasurable, and I can say with certainty that I would not be where I am today if not for MSSM.” - Gretchen Pineo, Class of 1997

“Attending the MSSM was the single most transformative decision of my life. More importantly, however, is that statement holds true for so many of its alumni. The school is actively creating a community of lifelong scholars, scientists, engineers, teachers, and other professionals, all with a deep love for and appreciation of Maine. This community is represented in every facet of Maine’s knowledge economy. It is imperative that the school’s funding is brought back in line with its mission and expanded to include room and board: many students, myself included, would not have been able to afford to attend the MSSM without generous private charity, and many more likely do not even apply because of this barrier.” - Dr. Jason Dark, Class of 2004

We urge you to support the future classes of MSSM and return the school to a sustainable level of funding.

Thank you very much for your attention to this important issue.

Gretchen Pineo, Alumni Association President, MSSM Class of 1997

Dr. Jason Dark, Alumni Association Vice President, MSSM Class of 2004

Gretchen Pineo
MSSM Alumni Association
LD 1458

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