

A parent's perspective on the value of our son's education at MSSM

We recognized early that our youngest child was intellectually curious and a quick learner. He was several years younger than his siblings through whom he was exposed to schoolwork and ideas ahead of his own grade level work. In effect, he became comfortable becoming an independent learner.

Lucky for us, at the same time, Jay was a helpful and entertaining younger sibling and a valuable, collaborative member of our household. We proudly admit to being a family that enjoyed discussing topics in science, history, current events, and culture and incorporated these into hands-on learning opportunities and travel.

Jay became aware of MSSM by noticing the flyers for summer camps posted at his school. He attended three summer camps and decided on his own to initiate the paperwork for admission for 9th grade. When we explained that he would need to take standardized tests, he countered that he had already done the search to locate the date and time most convenient for us! Impressed by the proactive and intentional efforts of our 8th grader, we used this opportunity to discuss the cautionary tales of trying and not always achieving. He was certainly ready to take on the challenges of being an MSSM student and we could not pose a barrier to such a clear demonstration of his self-awareness and positive motivation.

Only when Jay got letters of acceptance did we truly realize the tremendous learning opportunities and specialized curriculum he would have at MSSM. The fact that a boarding school offered him an environment where his fellow learners were equally curious and motivated created an immersive experience that Jay thrived on. Being "nerds" and motivated learners was celebrated at MSSM! He was truly among his peers. The smaller class size meant he had more individualized instruction and guidance than what we had experienced at our local school. The highly qualified teachers were able to evaluate Jay's learning style and abilities and were able to become mentors and guides, not merely classroom instructors. Students are also offered the opportunity to mentor younger learners, thus completing the circle of learning and teaching.

I appreciate MSSM's attempt to bring students from diverse backgrounds, including underrepresented groups, to create a broad, thriving learning community. The opportunity to live with people of backgrounds different than his own was unique and valuable to Jay. He became aware of the range of family dynamics, cultures, and personal experiences. This offered both commonalities as well as contrasts to his own world view. Combined with his learning in classes like history, economics, and government, as well as his experiences in clubs at MSSM like Student Senate and Youth In Government, his selection to the United States Senate Youth Program, and a summer spent in Washington, DC as a US Senate Page, I believe Jay became aware of

the role of good public policies in helping to create opportunities for healthy communities and societies. These were invaluable experiences, at a formative time of life, that are inherent to a boarding high school experience like MSSM. I'm not convinced Jay would have had these experiences had he not had teachers, guidance counselors, and caring adults around him who recognized and nurtured both his passions as well as his talents. This boarding school community enabled Jay to become the mature, self-aware, helpful member of society that he manifests today.

Today, as Jay finishes his undergraduate studies (outside our state) he continues to hold Maine in his heart. He has volunteered on a committee studying youth incarceration in Maine and twice has been an electoral college delegate for our great state. He has maintained close ties with many of the friends he made during his four years at MSSM and gathers with them as time allows in their busy young adult lives, either back home in Maine or wherever their paths cross. He certainly has manifested his love and appreciation for what Maine and MSSM have contributed to the opportunities that have revealed themselves to him.

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