

Testimony in support of LD 1336, An Act to Establish the Maine-Aomori Sister-State Advisory Council.

Senator Curry and Representative Gere and esteemed members of the Committee on Housing and Economic Development, my name is Naoto Kobayashi, retired Japanese teacher and a resident of Manchester, ME and member of MASSAC for many years, having been duly appointed by Governors Baldacci, La Page, and Mills.

I taught Japanese at RSU-2 which is Hallowell, Farmingdale, Dresden, Monmouth and used to be with us Richmond schools for 30 years.

My school started HS students exchange program with Aomori in 1997. 378 people, 254 HS students and 93 adults came to RSU-2, and 171 people, my 140 HS students and 31 adults visited Aomori in 20 years.

We did Sports exchange for 6 years and Academic exchange for 20 years with Aomori. Each student was required to do a presentation in their language, so all students had great experiences.

When we visited Aomori, we went to ESs, MSs, Retirement homes, etc. as well as HSs, and when they came to Maine, they visited Hospice training facility, Homeless shelter, etc. as well as ESs, MSs, and HSs. This exchange program was not a sightseeing trip... we had super wonderful experiences and all students learn a lot from their real life, not from books and/or screens, etc. Both countries' students stayed at host families.

Aomori is definitely our family... I really appreciated all their hospitality and we would like to continue to show our hearts from Maine to our sister state, Aomori.

Now, Pineland Suzuki School students in this area started music exchange with Aomori!!!

We need to continue any kinds of exchange with our sister state Aomori!
Keep communicating with real person to learn real world.

To achieve this, MASSAC will have an important role, which leads warm person-to-person exchanges.

The internet is now overflowing with all kinds of information, including generative AI, so it is more important than ever to guide children in the right direction.

Heart-to-heart exchanges between Maine and Aomori will surely create a brighter future for us all.

Naoto Kobayashi
4/24/2025

**Aomori HSs and RSU2 HS Exchange program
started based on our sister states relationship between 1996 and 2016.**

1996	4 people from Aomori DOE came to Maine for researching.
August 1997	Boys Basketball team (12 students) came for one week and we invited several HSs to play games.
October 1997	Academic Exchange group (20 students) came to HD-HS for one week.
July 1998	23HD-HS students, boys basketball students and Japanese class students visited Aomori for 2 weeks. We introduced Maine at 4 HSs in Aomori.
August 1999	Aomori HS girls softball team (12 students) came.
October 1999	20 Academic Exchange students came in the fall.
July 2000	21 girls softball students and Japanese class students visited Aomori.
August 2001	10 Karate HS boys and girls came to HD-HS and we invited the community in greeting them and see their demonstrations.
September 2001	Academic Exchange 20 students were planning to visit HD but unfortunately it was cancelled because of the 9/11 tragedy.
July 2002	6 Karate HS students from this area and 13 Japanese class students visited Aomori.
Unfortunately, Japanese economy was not good so in 2003 there was no exchange program.	
Dember 2003	We invited 5 Adults to HD-MS/HS and we made Nebuta with all students. (5 days)
October 2004	20 Aomori students came to HD-HS.
July 2005	18 HD-HS students visited Aomori.
November 2006	20 Aomori students came to HD-HS.
July 2007	15 HD-HS students visited Aomori.
October 2008	20 Aomori students came.

July 2009	11 HD-HS students visited Aomori.
October 2010	20 Aomori students came.
July 2011	HD-HS students were planning to visit Aomori, but it was cancelled because earthquake, Tsunami and nuclear power plant accident.
July 2012	6 HD, 2 Monmouth and 1 Richmond, 9 HS students visited Aomori. (Hachinohe Higashi HS)
October 2013	20 Aomori students came.
July 2014	12 HD-HS students and 3 chaperones visited Aomori. (Aomori HS)
October 2015	20 Aomori students came.
July 2016	11 HD-HS students and 3 chaperones visited Aomori. (Misawa HS)

(We also hosted 5 times students and adult group from Hachinohe, Aomori. Mr. Kwaragi)

(We also invited Japanese traditional culture groups 4 times from Aomori: flower arrangement, tea ceremony, Tsugaru kites making, Calligraphy and Nebuta making.)

20 years between 1996 and 2016

From Aomori to Hall-Dale HS(RSU2) (We hosted) :

Students: 254 Chaperones: 34 Performers (mostly adults) : 59 = 378

From Hall-Dale HS (RSU2) (We visited) :

Students: 139 HD grad form 5 weeks: 1 Chaperons: 31 = 171