



Michael J. McQuarrie Headmaster
Jamie L. Soule Associate Headmaster
John W. Clark, Jr. Assistant Headmaster
Charles M. Karter Activities Administrator
Cheryl A. York Business Manager
Amy C. Rau Alumni Relations



Testimony in support of LD 414, *An Act To Create Parity Between Private Schools and Public Schools Regarding Career and Technical Education Tuition Rates*

Submitted March 17, 2021, by Michael McQuarrie, Headmaster, Erskine Academy

309 Windsor Road, South China, ME 04358

Contact: (207) 445-2962; mmcquarrie@erskine247.com

Senator Daughtry, Representative Brennan, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Educational and Cultural Affairs, I am Michael McQuarrie, Headmaster of Erskine Academy, and president of the Maine Association of Independent Schools (MAIS), whose members include 24 private schools in Maine, 10 of which are known as the town academies. In these capacities, I present testimony supporting LD 414, a bill that addresses an inequity between public high schools and private high schools when enrolling students in a regional Career and Technical Education Center (CTE).

The MAIS is a diverse group of schools with varied missions. Member schools are approved to accept and educate publicly-funded students. Most students educated at public expense generally reside in school choice communities that have not operated their own high school; many attend our schools by contractual agreements with municipalities to enroll all or a portion of its secondary students.

Erskine Academy, an independent secondary school, incorporated in 1883 and located in South China, Maine, has a heritage of providing secondary education to Central Maine residents with high school choice. Having no contracts with any town for the whole or a portion of its secondary students, Erskine's enrollment is entirely voluntary, with 98% of its current 530 students residing mainly in the Maine communities of China, Vassalboro, Palermo, Windsor, Somerville, Whitefield, Jefferson, and Chelsea.

Erskine Academy has an exclusive and longstanding association with the Capital Area Technical Center (CATC) in Augusta to provide technical education to its students. Of the eight sending schools to CATC, Erskine consistently enrolls the second largest number of students at the CTE, second only to its host, Cony High School.

Erskine is the only one of eight high schools affiliated with CATC to be subject to a one-third reduction in its state-set tuition for every student it enrolls at CATC for two hours of technical education daily. Erskine's sending school administrative units provide no direct or indirect educational services to these students—at all—but retain one-third of their tuition.



In actual numbers, in SY 2019-20, 84 Erskine students (15 percent of total enrollment) attended CATC at a revenue loss of \$3,757.00 per student for a total of \$315,588.00. Presently, 12 percent of Erskine's students attend CATC at a cost to our school of \$244,294.00. In comparison, sending communities to Erskine received considerable budgetary relief due to ss.5809 and incurred no costs to facilitate their students' CTE attendance.

There is a clear and definite disparity between the private-school and public-school affiliates of the regional CTE relative to funding. For example, an Erskine student bused 24 miles round trip to CATC is two-thirds an Erskine student from a financial perspective. In contrast, this student's Cony High School, fully-funded public school peer, who walks a hallway to his/her CTE classes, is a whole Cony High student in financial terms. Another illustration is the participating Marancook school system, a public unit in similar proximity to CATC as Erskine and whose students are fully-funded, receives no reduction in revenue for its CATC attendees.

The effect of ss.5809, Erskine Academy pays a premium for its students' attendance at CATC, and the sending school administrative units associated with Erskine are the beneficiaries of an annual budget windfall. Moreover, the funds available to provide programming for Erskine's regular education students are significantly reduced by their classmates' attendance at the CTE.

The town academy student who attends the CTE with our support, facilitation, and arguably, to our financial detriment, is not two-thirds of a student. Rather, they receive our full service and care and are afforded the use and enjoyment of our campuses and resources. This inequitable financing is patently unfair to Maine's CTE-supporting town academies and, ultimately, their fully-enrolled, publicly-funded students.

Our support for LD 414 does not seek to reduce CTE funding, nor does the bill; our support does not seek to increase the financial obligation of our local taxpayers or anyone else, nor does the bill. However, we do seek parity with the public units whose CTE-enrolled students are fully-funded. For these reasons, I ask that you resolve an obvious inequity and rectify its adverse effects on the private and public school receivers of publicly-funded CTE students by supporting LD 414, thereby eliminating ss.5809.

I thank the Joint Standing Committee on Educational and Cultural Affairs for its dedicated work on behalf of all Maine citizens, particularly the MAIS's primary constituents—the young people of Maine who are, and shall be, educated in the independent schools of our great state.