

April 22, 2021

Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs
Maine State Legislature
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

Good afternoon Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and Distinguished Members of the Committee.

My name is Andrew Doak, I teach Humanities at the Maine Ocean School.

Last year I spoke about our academic programming, and I am happy to say that we continue striving for excellence in this area. A parent has recently described our program's rigor as "very much like my grad-school work", and we have had past students who have shared that their experience at MOS made them very well prepared for college. With our low teacher to pupil ratio, and exploring and meeting state and national standards through a different lens, we have created a culture at our school that promotes analytical thinking, synthesizing information, and above all growth in learning.

What we have done with limited resources, COVID, and the continuing uncertainty of our existence, has been a feat nothing short of extraordinary. Passing LD 1389 would allow us to ensure security to our staff and students so we can focus on creating a Magnet School model that is advantageous to all shareholders, and be a vital piece in the Public Education puzzle.

I have dedicated my life to Public Education and the idea that any student should be able to access a world-class education regardless of their zip-code. The function of Magnet schools, when they were created, was to alleviate the burden of providing certain programs in urban settings, and I think the intention should be applied to rural settings that struggled with the flight of middle class earners to the suburbs, as well. We have seen this pattern in our rural communities here. This puts more of a burden on these local units to provide educational funding, when these areas of low income typically have higher than normal rates of kids whose needs are not being met at home, and therefore need to be met at school. Because of these struggling budgets, districts have had to cut teachers and focus resources on behavior interventions, special education, and focus on using their revenues to better serve the greatest number of students. Programs that are typically cut or are underfunded tend to be in the arts, and advanced humanities, Science, Technology, and Math elective courses. Court cases started popping up, in a similar vein of *Brown v. Board of Ed* where you can't have separate but equal in theory if you can't have it in practice. So to alleviate the burden on local districts to ensure that schools provide LRE- or Least Restrictive Environment, one of those beautiful edu-speak acronyms, that basically means the environment that best fits a student's learning based on their needs- regional Magnet programs were set up with a cost-share system that split the expenses with the regional districts and the State. In our case, because our region is the entire state, the cost-share should in theory be spread state-wide, to alleviate pressure from local districts.

There is an issue we face with local districts, where the perception is that we take funds from public schools. This shouldn't be the case. Public schools should be incentivized to send their students to our school, if it is the best fit for that student. The same goes for students in Vocational or technical school programs, or a school for the blind and hard of hearing, or day-treatment...whatever the needs of the student may be.

Magnet schools are specialized programs, run and managed by the state, that provide those students with aptitude, access to a more intensive and specialized education that could not otherwise be provided in their local district.

I think it is important for kids around the state with these skill sets to gain public access to our program, regardless of where they come from, and our charge as educators from the school and legislators from the state, is to provide that access. I can't provide specific examples due to FERPA, our small student body, and the fact many wrote testimony for you to read, but I can tell you what I view as our ideal student based on the purpose of Magnet schools. You will read this in some of their testimony, but I think that students who come from rural, often but not exclusively coastal in our case, school districts where the traditional classroom simply doesn't fit their needs. Student leaders that need a more experiential learning experience that have an aptitude in the maritime fields, but do not otherwise have access in their high school. You all know the statistics in rural, low-income communities. With the recession in 2008, further exacerbated by the opioid epidemic, rural communities in particular, have had increased special education costs and a higher proportional burden on local taxes to fund schools. With that, the percentages of kids dropping out of high school or not attending college rise exponentially. This is low hanging fruit, in terms of return on investment in education. If we get these kids who require this intensive, experiential learning education, we can connect them to professionals and academics in their fields of interest. We can keep them here in the state. We can improve on those outcomes of their rural communities. They can access lucrative, sustainable careers in growing industries, increase the likelihood they will go to college, pay taxes and vote with a high level of civic engagement. To not find ways to make this happen is irresponsible.

So, in conclusion: let's make it happen. There are different viable models to explore in making us a success. There is the original intent, which is a standalone, residential model like MSSM. They obviously do a great job up there. I have seen other models that attach Magnets to local districts, community or state colleges, or are day programs accessed by a region. The beauty of state and local control of schools is that we have the ability to find a model that best fits Maine's needs. My suggestion as a taxpayer and public education advocate, is we find a way to cost-share so there is no extra burden on local districts. The one thing that can't change is the Magnet model of a program being run by and held accountable to the state, to provide an intensive, specialized program to kids with aptitude but no access. If we don't take charge and fill this need publicly, private institutions will take advantage and profit from this demand. If that is what you want, that's your prerogative as a committee and legislative body. As a public school advocate, and an employee of a magnet school, I think that the best bang for your proverbial buck lies in an institution that is held accountable to the state and this committee.

-And you can't tell me with multiple aquaculture farms, a history of fishing, sailing, boatbuilding, BIW, UNE, College of the Atlantic and UMaine Marine biology programs, Maine Maritime academy, and the Port Authority...that we can't muster a substantial number of kids in the state that have the specialized skill sets in these fields that requires a higher level of learning.- and if we don't, someone else will.

So let's create a sustainable and vibrant Magnet system that not only provides access to specialized programs for kids that need them, but also find a way to fund these programs in a way that helps alleviate the burden on public schools, not create contention.

Passing LD 1389 is crucial in order to enhance recruitment, raise funds in our foundation, and figure out the most sustainable and effective Magnet School model for the State.

Thank you.

Andrew Doak
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