

Dear Education and Cultural Affairs Committee Members,

My name is Nathaniel Ferguson and I am a graduate of the Maine School of Science and Mathematics. I am asking for your support for LD1458 - An Act to Increase Funding for the Maine School of Science and Mathematics.

MSSM's funding has been flat since 2017, the year I graduated. As a result, the school has had to eliminate positions and reduce services that were critical to my thriving as a student. In 2019, based on the data from my senior class, MSSM was ranked the #2 best public high school in the country by US News & World Reports. This bill provides much needed funding to MSSM that it has gone without for too long. MSSM should be the pride and joy of our state. It provides much needed opportunities to bright students who would exhaust the opportunities in their local school district. MSSM changed my life and shaped me into the person I am today.

As a child, I always excelled in school. I could tell that my teachers didn't really know what to do with me, as I'd devour any content or curriculum they put in front of me. The Gifted and Talented program was very thin in my school district—one teacher rotated between the four elementary schools and the middle school, with hardly enough time to spend with each student. By eighth grade, school had become a little boring. I wasn't being challenged, and it seemed like there was no way for me to get that challenge. I wanted a change.

Luckily, MSSM was there to provide that challenge. I had attended a summer camp for middle school students, and I excitedly told my parents when they came to pick me up "Did you guys know there's a school here?" It was clear to all of us that MSSM was the right fit. At MSSM, I found a wonderful community of peers and teachers that agreed on one thing: learning is *cool*. I had so many opportunities that I would not have had at my sending school—advanced math classes, yes, but also lessons from my peers about how to be a good community member and extracurriculars like Maine Youth in Government and Boffer (a "sport" where we did battle with foam medieval weapons).

MSSM is a big reason why I want to stay in Maine. After MSSM, I went to Colby, and found that I was more than prepared for a college education. I got a degree in Mathematics and Statistics, opening up a vast ocean of career opportunities to me—I could go anywhere in the country I pleased. But when I thought about it, I felt most at home in Maine. MSSM introduced me to students from all over the state, and it was there that I met my closest friends (including my wife!). I couldn't go anywhere else. Now, I work at a Portland nonprofit, and I hope to use the skills MSSM taught me to make the world, and Maine, a better place.

Thank you. I hope I can count on your support for LD1458. MSSM makes a huge difference in the lives of its students, and it must be strengthened to serve our state for generations to come.

Nathaniel Ferguson  
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