

Heather Merriman
Harpwell

Subject: LD2118: Act to Provide Funding to the Maine School of Science and Mathematics

Dear Members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,

MSSM has been part of Maine's educational landscape for nearly 30 years. Creating educational diversity affords every child the chance to find their best-fit path for success. This school is a gem of an asset to the State of Maine, and has been ranked in the top 10 best high schools in America. Many thanks to our legislative body for creating this school back in 1995.

I see two significant reasons why this funding is essential: 1) to provide equity of resources for operations and employment of MSSM staff and faculty, with the goal of keeping pace with the trajectory of financial support afforded to Maine's public schools; and, 2) to create equity of financial access to all Maine families whose children find MSSM to be the best fit for their educational path.

1) Provide equitable funds to staff and operate the school.

MSSM has been making staffing cuts and delaying upgrades to balance their budget in recent years. Operating under this stress is not a healthy model. The next strategic plan (now underway) will build on the school's successful track record and funding will ensure the school can create goals and actionable steps to maintain strong leadership, academic excellence, equitable access and enrollment, positive student experiences and financial sustainability.

2) Create (financial) application/enrollment equity.

The families of all accepted students should be able to access MSSM. Public education can and should offer options, sufficient that we create a best-fit for every child. MSSM has proven it can be the best fit for kids from every corner of the state, please work to ensure that adequate financial aid dollars are available for a growing enrollment.

MSSM created a path for me. I was a teenager at a large SAD. I could have graduated from there and likely had options for college, but looking back 25 years, I feel enrolling at MSSM is the choice that can be most attributed to where I am today. I found my passion for engineering at MSSM and have become an advocate for access to STEM educational opportunities for children in Maine through my volunteering on local school boards, as well as on MSSM's Foundation board. MSSM put into motion a series of events in my life of benefit to the State of Maine: I went on to graduate from UMaine's College of Engineering, accept my first job in Maine, raise my family here, and eventually run my own engineering practice.

I want to see this high school opportunity remain an excellent option for future generations. Supporting LD2118, will ensure that MSSM can live its mission and values and provide access for every Maine student that finds MSSM to be their best educational fit. This *is* your magnet school. Please continue to be our champions. It's a place that sparks *Dirigo* in its graduates.

In appreciation of your support,

Heather Merriman
Harpwell
MSSM Class of 1998, Foundation Board Chair