



Maine School of Science and Mathematics

A Residential Community of Academic Excellence

11 February 2019

Dear MSSM Community,

It is appropriate to provide an update on the meeting held by the Strategic Planning Steering Committee (SPSC) at the Bangor Challenger Learning Center on Friday 8th February. This committee, as you are all aware, is charged by the MSSM Board of Trustees, to take a cool and dispassionate look at MSSM's position in the educational landscape of Maine and make recommendations for the future in the form of a strategic plan to the full Board of Trustees for their detailed consideration. The SPSC meeting covered similar ground to that of the recent MSSM faculty and staff meeting on 4 February, 2019, and similarly discussed openly and freely questions of location, school size, facility, and program from a variety of different perspectives. Like the faculty and staff discussion, the SPSC also reviewed the findings of the recent Lisa Plimpton Maine STEM Landscape Report, and in this we were most fortunate to have Lisa join the meeting via video conference in order to answer clarifying questions around her findings and conclusions.

The topics discussed are at the heart of any future strategic plan and have, since this process began, continuously revealed numerous individual and group sensitivities as to the long-term viability of MSSM as Maine's STEM magnet secondary institution. Friday's meeting was no different, with different viewpoints articulated from different perspectives that collectively revealed the continued challenges surrounding any dialogue about the future of the school. Equally, the meeting revealed that creativity is a collaborative endeavor, innovation is a team effort, and modern problem solving in a complex world requires sustained organizational adaptability. In this vein, it was heartening to be part of a respectful and frank dialogue amongst people so deeply passionate about the steps necessary for a bright and relevant MSSM future in the service of Maine students for generations to come.

What ideas then did the SPSC coalesce around in terms of suggesting next steps for MSSM? Firstly, it seems clear from the Plimpton Landscape Report that there is a definite need for enhanced STEM education in Maine and that many institutions and organizations are facilitating increased access to, and focus on, this field. By implication, there are students that should be at MSSM, but who are not. This suggests a number of conclusions, but the first must be an examination of school size and enrollment, and the various factors linked to this key area of operations. Of particular note, the SPSC considered the issue of room and board which at \$9,300 is considered an impediment to our traditional clientele who increasingly, even with blind financial aid, consider this a major hurdle. A suggested next action, therefore, will be collection of data determining why potential students do not apply to MSSM. A linked factor is to reduce the room and board fee with a proposed route of justifying to the State greater funding in order to improve suitable student access to MSSM. A second considered step is to conduct a deep dive aimed at enhancing programmatic offerings through both internal teaching and external outreach, including increased collaboration with university and industry partnerships. That this objective include more than the mere bricks and mortar of our existing buildings is increasingly evident by analyzing Maine middle and high school math and science deficiencies, and is allied to what our NCSSS peer schools already undertake as a matter of course. The third step, that flows logically from the first two, is to examine needed infrastructure necessary to house and educate increased student enrollment,

establish meaningful collaborative university and industry relationships, while simultaneously engaging the Maine STEM community and other schools as an active and supportive partner. This three step overlapping approach is depicted below:



In summary, the SPSC from its deliberations, drew the inference that a phased approach to the future of MSSM is necessary in order to move forward with realistic measures of progress that through continuous analysis will inform subsequent actions. This was a consensus with agreement that there is no current basis for making a recommendation on location at this time, but that such a recommendation could emerge at some future point, contingent upon the needs of the school in providing an exemplary STEM centric education to enrolled students that continues to differentiate MSSM from all other Maine schools.

Very sincerely,

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