

## **GSA is a Good Investment**

*Below is the text of a column by Head of School Tim Seeley that appeared in The Weekly Packet on Feb. 10, 2022.*

In recent weeks, the Maine Department of Education published 2020-21 data describing and measuring schools across the state. All data is accessible online at [www.maine.gov/doe/dashboard](http://www.maine.gov/doe/dashboard) and can be viewed statewide or by individual schools or school districts. I want to draw attention to data on the DOE dashboard which shows not only that GSA is an exceptional school, but an excellent investment.

First, “The High School Graduation Rate” shows that George Stevens Academy is significantly more successful at graduating students in four years than the average Maine high school. GSA students graduate at the end of four years at a rate of 93% compared to 86% across Maine. In Hancock County, the average rate is 88%.

Student success as measured by graduation doesn’t happen by chance. As a school, we work hard to support our students from the day they arrive as 9<sup>th</sup> graders until the day they receive their diplomas. Besides the attention and support of gifted and committed teachers, we provide many other ways to help our students succeed:

- Every student is assigned an advisor when they arrive at GSA and twice-weekly advisories continue until graduation. Thus, advisors know their students well and can advocate for and mentor them as they navigate through high school.
- Our block schedule means that students and teachers spend more time together in classes, allowing greater, more productive focus on teaching and learning.
- Weekly activities provide yet another opportunity for students to engage productively with a supportive adult.
- Our Learning Center is a resource for all students, not just those who receive special education services. We provide learning support to help our students learn study skills and advocate for themselves.
- Our Student Support Team, chaired by the Dean of Students and including the school nurse, counselors, and teachers, meets weekly. The team identifies and discusses students of concern —whether the concerns are emotional, behavioral, or academic— and makes recommendations and plans for how best to support these students.

Second, the “Per Pupil Spending” data shows that the average per student spending in Maine for 2020-21 was \$18,020, and the average per student spending in Hancock County public high schools was \$20,233. GSA spent \$14,721 per student, including special education and our transportation costs (which are also part of the Maine DOE public school data). The DOE does not publish financial data of independent schools, but GSA’s internal as well as independently audited financial documents are on our website for anyone to see.

Together, these facts highlight two complementary goods our towns can be proud of: exceptional student success as measured by our four-year graduation rate and the lowest cost per student in Hancock County.

