

GSA OpEd for Penobscot Bay Press
April 7, 2025

GSA IS AND MUST REMAIN THE HEARTBEAT OF OUR PENINSULA

Recent enrollment projections for GSA are very disappointing – as of today, they are anticipated to be down roughly 10 percent for the coming school year.

Enrollment decline is a direct function of two things: fewer school-aged children on the peninsula and school choice, which allows parents to direct local tax dollars to pay for tuition at other schools. This is today's reality.

There can be no question that GSA is at an inflection point. The board recognizes this is a critical moment for GSA. We—faculty and staff, parents, students, area towns and businesses, and this board—must chart a new path forward.

This is why, at a meeting last week, the board voted to balance the school budget for next year with endowment funds if needed to retain our exceptional faculty and staff and continue to provide an exemplary high school education for all students.

This buys us crucial time to come up with a plan, a sustainable way forward, designed in close partnership with the community we serve, that acknowledges the likelihood of smaller enrollment numbers, reflects the feedback and needs of our sending towns, and creates a shared vision for a smaller, community high school that offers the flexibility of a town academy and is dedicated to preparing our youth for the futures they choose.

To do this, we will spend the next several months designing a new strategy in concert with GSA's stakeholders. With an outstanding head of school and a motivated board, we are in a strong position to begin this work and are looking forward to a highly public process. We have scheduled a board working session next month to nail down the next steps.

One thing that is important for the peninsula to understand: If GSA fails, there is no guarantee that the state will build a public high school in its place. With other public options 20 minutes away for most students, this is not a realistic expectation. GSA is and must remain the heartbeat of our peninsula.

This moment, while challenging, offers us an exciting opportunity. Town academies allow for more local control and flexibility than any other model; GSA can be whatever our community needs it to be. Now is the time for us to come together to think differently, plan thoughtfully, and redesign the school to meet our peninsula's needs.

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