



GSA BOARDING PROGRAM

History

GSA began the International Program (now the Boarding Program) in 2006 with 7 students. The purpose was twofold: to enhance the experience of all students by bringing a measure of cultural diversity to campus, and to generate additional revenue to help compensate for the low tuition rate set by Maine's Department of Education. For ten years boarding enrollments increased, and we were able to build two dormitories for our boarding students. In 2016 the Boarding Program was enrolling 49 boarding students and by that time had netted millions of dollars in revenue that went to support programs *for all GSA students*. It should be emphasized that *no public tuition dollars have ever been spent to support GSA's Boarding Program*.

In 2018, boarding programs across the U.S., including those at the other Maine town academies, began seeing sharp declines in international student enrollment. In 2019-20, GSA had 31 boarding students. We began the year with just 5 students. We have enrolled two more, so today we stand at 7.

Our experience is shared by other town academies:

- Every town academy in Maine has reduced numbers of international students, in most cases greatly reduced, especially from China, down to essentially zero new students from there in the last year or two. To cite *three* examples: one academy has only 20 boarding students this fall, down from 90 a few years ago. Another no longer has a boarding program, just empty dorms, and a few basketball players living with families. A third is at 50% of what it was three years ago.
- Only two town academies still have relatively large boarding programs; both of those schools are much larger than GSA and spend significantly more to recruit boarding students. (For example, both have five people in Admissions while GSA has just one full time equivalent.) Even so, those two schools have many fewer boarding students than they once did, and have not enrolled new students from China. (One school's boarding enrollment has dropped 30% and is generating \$2.5 million less revenue. The other school has seen its enrollment drop nearly 50% in recent years, and a similar drop in revenue.)

Responding to enrollment decline and revenue loss

Although we know the boarding program adds great value to the experience of all our students, we recognize that it must, at a minimum, fully pay for itself. Even better, of course, would be if it can again produce surplus revenue that benefits all GSA students, as it did for so many years in the past.

In 2019-2020, we had 31 boarding students. Last year we had 11. Today we have seven boarding students (all in one dorm). We continue to actively seek new students for this year.

1. Reduced expenses and added revenue sources

- We have reduced staffing and expenses in the amount of \$490,000 since the program's peak of 49 students.
- We have received gifts targeting the boarding program from people who see its value.
- We are exploring the possibility of seeking more private funding to support the program.

2. New strategies for finding and enrolling students

- We have contracted with a high quality and respected company who creates social-media-based campaigns.
- We have established relationships with new agents in China to help us enroll new students.
- We are actively enlisting past students and their families to connect us with prospective new students.
- We are revamping all our admissions and marketing materials and enhancing our website.

We hope these plans will enable the boarding program to grow once more, and continue to be an important part of GSA.

What about the dorms?

Currently, we are housing our seven boarding students in Hinckley House on Tenney Hill. We have repurposed the other two dorms. Hanley House now houses our Admissions and Advancement Offices, a location that better serves both our admissions and fundraising efforts. We are converting Wyandotte into an Airbnb, to generate revenue for the Academy. One of the two apartments no longer needed for residential staff is being rented out, also generating revenue, and the other will either be part of the Airbnb, or rented out as an apartment.