

December 16, 2019

Dear GSA Community Member,

I want to update you on the conversations we've had so far with our towns regarding our proposed tuition increase.

Before Thanksgiving, several trustees and I met with Union 76 towns, and with Union 93 towns, in joint meetings, to share the tuition initiative information sheet and other information about our financial situation, and to begin conversations with the towns to request higher tuition from them. I also reached out to the superintendents of other school districts who send us students, to keep them informed.

Since Thanksgiving, we have met with the school boards of Brooksville, Surry, Brooklin, Castine, and Penobscot, with the select boards of Sedgwick, Penobscot, and with Blue Hill school and select boards. On Wednesday, December 18, we will attend another joint meeting of the Union 93 school boards, where we will bring additional information, including a specific plan for increasing tuition, and proposals for how better to share information about GSA going forward. Two GSA committees, focused on finances and relationships with towns, are working on material in preparation for that meeting.

The press coverage to date has been mixed: a couple early pieces contained some errors. We worked with reporters to make corrections both online and in print, and the more recent articles have represented our situation more accurately. Additionally, Penobscot Bay Press (*Weekly Packet*, *Island Ad-Vantages*, and *Castine Patriot*) published a column I wrote on this subject in the November 27 issues; I hope you were able to read it. As I mentioned in my previous letter to you, we have posted the information handout that describes the essentials of our predicament on our website at www.georgesteveacademy.org/TownTuition2019.

This is a difficult process for everyone, and reactions so far are not surprising. I want to emphasize that there is much good will and appreciation for GSA in our communities, but historically we have not always been as transparent as we should have been, and going forward we must do better. Some of the reactions I have heard in meetings so far:

- Most people understand why our revenue is not sufficient to pay the costs of educating our towns' students.
- Many people feel it is already late in the game for towns to make adjustments to next year's budgets.
- Many feel that the total increase we are asking for is too high to do in a single year. We recognize that it will need to be phased in over multiple years (perhaps three), with the smallest increase for next year to give towns time to adjust.
- As noted, many people want more transparency around GSA's finances, and have asked to see our audit, our current budget, and the finances of the boarding program

corroborating our assertion that it pays for itself and generates additional revenue that goes into the operating budget.

- Many people want to be better informed about all aspects of GSA. This includes a desire for more public board meetings, designated meetings that include representatives from each school board, and possibly the ability to contribute to the agendas of those meetings.
- There is considerable emotion, in some cases anger, connected to the perceived lack of transparency in past years and the lack of sharing of information.

I believe we are where we need to be at this point: our story is out there, we are getting our message across in a way that people understand, and we are hearing back from our communities about what they think and want. In that sense, it is a genuine conversation. We don't know yet how it will turn out, but today I read signs as more positive than negative.

I know that many of you have already found ways to voice your support for our school, and for that I am deeply grateful. I encourage all of you to become part of these difficult conversations with the good representatives in our towns, all of whom want the best schooling for their towns' children, but who also have fiscal responsibilities that make our proposed tuition increase understandably challenging. Please consider attending school board and select board meetings to share your thoughts about the situation.

Finally, for those of you who are current parents, I am working to schedule an all-parent meeting in January to address your questions and concerns. Stay tuned for an exact date and time.

In the meantime, don't hesitate to write me with any questions you may have.

Respectfully,

Tim Seeley

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