



**We know you have questions.
We'll do our best to answer them here.**

Background

Towns without public high schools are required by law to pay tuition to approved high schools (public as well as non-sectarian private schools) that their resident students attend. The tuition that towns must pay is set annually by the Department of Education (DOE). In November, George Stevens Academy, a town academy, proposed to increase the tuition paid by tuitioning towns. While GSA's proposed tuition would exceed the minimum suggested by the DOE, it is within the range allowed by law.

What kind of school is George Stevens Academy?

GSA is a town academy—not a public school, but an independent school with a public mission. We are committed to serving all our town's high school students, mindful of their diverse aspirations and different career paths. Unlike most private high schools whose programs focus only on preparing students for college and university, GSA has developed programs and curriculum to benefit *every* student from our towns, whatever his or her next steps might be. Our mission is to provide edge-to-edge education that supports all our students' futures.

Why is GSA asking for a tuition increase?

The cost of educating a GSA student is 20% greater than the minimum tuition set by the DOE. This has been true for years. For example, the state-set tuition in 2018-19 was \$11,759, but the actual cost of educating a GSA student was \$14,646.

How do GSA's actual per student costs compare with those of public high schools?

According to Maine's DOE website, in 2017-18 the average per student cost of similar-sized public high schools in Maine was \$14,346. Ellsworth's was \$15,595; Bucksport's was \$12,901; MDI's was \$18,510; and Deer Isle-Stonington's was \$21,426. GSA's per student cost that year was \$14,493, while the DOE-set tuition was \$11,539 per student.

Why are annual DOE tuition rates for independent schools like GSA so low?

Good question. We don't have the answer to that one.

If a tuition gap has existed for years, why is GSA only now asking towns for an increase?

GSA has always worked hard to close the tuition gap by raising additional revenue. Sources of additional revenue include *annual fundraising; income from GSA's endowment; grants from foundations; special gifts; fundraising for facilities projects; and, since 2006, surplus revenue generated by our boarding program*. Since 2008 GSA has fundraised more than \$11.5 million dollars to close the tuition gap and support the programs and facilities needed to educate our towns' students.

Has tuition paid by towns been used to pay for GSA's boarding program?

No. GSA started the International Program in 2006 both to increase cultural diversity and to add revenue to the annual operating budget. Since its inception, the program has generated significant surplus revenues that have gone into the operating budget that serves all students. Unfortunately, for reasons beyond GSA's control, the international student admissions picture has changed dramatically in the past three years for schools everywhere, and we cannot expect a return to the robust admissions we enjoyed in the past.

Can't GSA just make budget cuts to close the tuition gap?

Over the past three years, GSA has cut more than \$300,000 from our operating budget. Some of these cuts (such as deferred maintenance) are not sustainable; others threaten to diminish student experience. Even after these cuts we face significant deficits.

What increase are we proposing for 2020-21?

We are requesting a \$300 increase per student over the state-set minimum tuition. In the coming months, we will be working with towns on a funding plan that helps close the 20% tuition gap going forward while acknowledging the fiscal constraints of our communities. Additionally, we intend for this collaborative effort to develop better ways of communicating and sharing information about GSA's financial operations with the towns.

What will happen if towns decide not to pay the tuition GSA is asking for?

We know that the decision the towns are facing—whether to approve the tuition increase we have proposed—has serious implications for town budgets and taxpayers. But if we don't have the resources to continue to serve all students' needs, we will be forced to make deep changes to our program, or possibly even to the mission itself.

How does town funding for GSA compare with town funding for elementary schools?

Maine's DOE sets a minimum cost per student for every town's public elementary school. Each town then appropriates additional money to meet what's necessary to deliver the education their students need.

How will the proposed tuition increase affect my taxes?

The impact on taxpayers will differ from town to town, because towns have different tax rates and different numbers of students attending GSA. To see some illustrations of possible impacts, visit our website.

How do GSA's staffing numbers and salaries compare with those of other high schools?

GSA's student-teacher ratio is 12:1. GSA's average class size is about 13 students. Most classes (80%) have 10 or more students. Our largest class has 24 students. Our smallest classes are for students who need extra academic support; for some advanced or honors level curriculums; some arts and music classes; and some vocational classes (such as Culinary Arts).

There are 34 students for every publicly-funded administrator or administrative staff. This student-to-administrator ratio matches that at Maine town academies and local public high schools. GSA's publicly-funded administrative staff has not grown in 20 years, although job titles and responsibilities may have changed.

- GSA's administrative salaries are all below the averages reported by town academies.
- GSA's teaching salaries range from \$35,261 to \$66,477, compared with \$40,550 to \$73,646 for town academies, and \$34,700 to \$62,600 for public schools (citing Maine Education Association 2019).