

GSA provides a comprehensive and challenging education for all students, for those who will build futures in surrounding communities and for those who will make lives elsewhere in the world. Our many academic and experiential programs foster a love of knowledge, inspire creativity, instill self-confidence, encourage good character, and prepare each graduate for a purposeful life in a changing world.

– from GSA’s Mission (2019)

GEORGE STEVENS ACADEMY

A Conversation About Town Tuitioning - Fall 2019

By law, Maine’s “town tuitioning policy” requires towns without public schools to provide tuition for their resident students to attend another town’s public school or an approved private school. “Publicly-funded private schools” (town academies) are private schools in which more than 60% of students are supported by tuitioning towns. Town tuition is set annually by the Department of Education; statutes also allow schools to charge towns more tuition than what the DOE sets. GSA has never requested additional tuition until now. (See Title-20A §2951 and §5806 at legislature.maine.gov/statutes/.)

- All numbers that follow are for fiscal year 2018-19 unless otherwise indicated. GSA numbers were confirmed by BerryDunn of Bangor.
- Only day students who are supported by town tuitioning are reflected in these numbers.
- This document only addresses tuition and GSA’s operating budget. The Academy also has major facilities issues that are not part of this presentation and that may not be paid for with public tuition dollars. These issues will need to be addressed soon.

I. Town tuition covers only 80% of a town student’s costs at GSA

- GSA enrolled **294** day students from eight tuitioning towns (Blue Hill, Brooklin, Brooksville, Castine, Orland, Penobscot, Sedgwick, and Surry).
- Tuitioning towns paid GSA **\$11,759** per town student = MAT (Tuition Rate + IVF) set by the DOE.*
- The actual per student cost was **\$14,646**.
- The gap between GSA’s actual cost and what a tuitioning town paid was **\$2,887** per student.
- For the year, the **total audited tuition gap was \$848,778**.

*DOE = Department of Education; IVF = Insured Value Factor

II. What GSA’s Tuitioning Towns Spent on Elementary Education

- On average, **our towns spent 81% more per elementary student** than DOE requires.

Blue Hill	Castine	Surry
\$11,299 = DOE cost per student	\$12,632 = DOE cost per student	\$10,698 = DOE cost per student
+\$5,426 = additional cost (+48%)	+\$12,436 = additional cost (+98%)	+\$5,780 = additional cost (+54%)
TOTAL \$16,725 per student	TOTAL \$25,068 per student	TOTAL \$16,479 per student
Brooklin	Penobscot	
\$11,517 = DOE cost per student	\$11,207 = DOE cost per student	
+\$13,249 = additional cost (+115%)	+\$5,633 = additional cost (+50%)	
TOTAL \$24,767 per student	TOTAL \$16,841 per student	
Brooksville	Sedgwick	
\$8,939 = DOE cost per student	\$11,522 = DOE cost per student	
+\$13,075 = additional cost (+146%)	+\$6,919 = additional cost (+60%)	
TOTAL \$22,014 per student	TOTAL \$18,440 per student	

These numbers were derived from 2018-2019 town budgets and enrollment.

III. Per-Student Costs at Select Maine Public High Schools

22 public high schools in Maine have enrollments similar to GSA’s = 220 to 400 students.

- These schools’ average cost per student in 2017-18* was **\$14,346.****
- GSA’s cost per student that same year was **\$14,493**.
- The cost per student at Ellsworth was **\$15,595**
- The cost per student at Bucksport was **\$12,901**
- The cost per student at MDI was **\$18,510**
- The cost per student at Deer Isle-Stonington was **\$21,426**.

*2017-18 is the most recent year for which we have this data

** State calculations are for purposes of determining subsidies, and the cost per student numbers above do not include all expenses. GSA’s cost per student in this section is calculated according to the state’s method.

Graduates from each town since 2015:

- Blue Hill 132
- Brooklin 26
- Brooksville 28
- Castine 13
- Orland 14
- Penobscot 35
- Sedgwick 39
- Surry 37

This year, tuitioning towns are supporting 300 GSA students.

GSA’s Jazz Band has won state championships 19 times in the last 30 years.

GSA offers more than 140 courses in English, Social Studies, Languages, Math, Science, Fine Arts, Industrial Technology, Computer Technology, and Physical Education.

We offer programs in Culinary Arts, Ocean Studies, and Outdoor Leadership.

In a typical year, 80% of our students participate in one or more sports.

GSA student athletes play on 29 teams in 12 sports.

Since 2000 GSA teams have won 53 State and Regional Championships.

Since 2000, 20 GSA teams have received Sportsmanship awards.

GSA has strong programs in visual and performance arts. This fall, 26 students participated in Haystack’s Studio Based Learning Program, and every spring all students take part in Arts Fest.

"George Stevens Academy has accomplished what many schools only dream of: authentic community that unites all members sincerely in a single purpose: student success."

—NEASC accreditation report

GSA's core curriculum ensures that students graduate with a well-rounded education in the language arts, social studies, mathematics, sciences, and fine and industrial arts.

GSA students also explore their own interests by taking elective classes, like Forensics, Philosophy, Maine Writers, Outdoor Leadership, Culinary Arts, Earthworks, and Ocean Studies, and by creating personalized learning experiences through Independent Study & Internship Program and Alternative Course Contracts.

Every spring GSA juniors and seniors design and carry out 2-week Independent Study & Internship projects.

Two-thirds of ISIP projects take place within forty miles of GSA: students make lasting personal connections with professionals right here in our community. Moreover, one in five ISIP mentors is a GSA alum.

GSA Trustees
2019-2020

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IV. How GSA Has Worked to Cover the Tuition Gap

GSA has employed several measures to close the gap between what towns pay and actual costs

1. Additional revenue (2018-2019)

• Annual Fund, added to operating budget	=	\$189,000
• Income from GSA's endowment	=	\$195,000
• Surplus boarding program revenue	=	\$397,211 (see 2 below)
TOTAL		\$781,211

Between 2016 and 2019, GSA raised **\$2,023,000** from these three revenue sources to meet education expenses not covered by tuitioning towns.

2. Boarding Program Revenue

- Since 2005, GSA's boarding program has generated surplus revenue annually.
- Added to the school's operating budget, this surplus has benefitted **all** students.
- **However, changes in international admissions mean dramatically reduced surplus revenue going forward.**

3. We have been frugal stewards of our financial resources

- GSA's budget is mission-driven, designed to achieve and sustain the school's educational goals.
- Budget reductions that improve efficiency in carrying out programs are desirable, but cuts that impair or diminish programs are unsustainable beyond short-term emergencies.

Budget efficiencies and reductions **totalling more than \$200,000** over 2 years have included:

- Eliminated and consolidated some administrative positions (e.g. Dean of Students Office).
- Provided used instead of new computers to students.
- Redefined custodial staff schedules and services, cutting one staff position.

Other budget cuts over 2 years, **totalling more than \$100,000**, are not sustainable.

- Cut several small classes from the curriculum.
- Raised employee salaries by an average of only 1.5%, less than we wished.
- Reduced planned and deferred maintenance budgets.
- Eliminated some professional development funding for teachers.
- Reduced departmental budgets (impacting instructional materials, supplies).

V. How GSA Could Change If We Cannot Close the Gap

Beginning in 2020-2021, unless we receive more town tuition, GSA will face annual shortfalls of \$600,000 to \$700,000 or more despite our internal efforts to "close the gap."

We could respond in one of two ways:

- Continue to embrace our mission of serving all tuitioning town students, but serving them less well, reducing programs, curricular variety, and extracurricular offerings.
- Alternatively, revise our mission to serve a smaller, more homogeneous, population of students, for example, becoming a college prep school for college-bound students, enrolling students selectively and competitively, and reducing courses and extracurricular activities.

Whatever direction we take, less revenue will mean fewer teachers, a smaller, less flexible curriculum, larger class sizes, and a thinner student-teacher ratio, resulting in a significantly diminished student experience.