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**MSMS**

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**From** Henrietta Wilson <whenrietta76@yahoo.com>

**Date** Mon 3/3/2025 6:05 PM

**To** SecondaryEducation <secondaryeducation@mdek12.org>

**External Email**

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Dear Dr. Donna Boone,

I am writing to express my profound concern regarding the proposed relocation of the Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science (MSMS) from its current location on the Mississippi University for Women (MUW) campus. As the parent of a MSMS student, I have witnessed firsthand the transformative impact this unique institution has on its students.

My daughter's experience at MSMS was nothing short of remarkable. While she always excelled academically, the rigorous curriculum at MSMS challenged her in ways her previous high school never did. This resulted in significant academic growth, as evidenced by a substantial increase in her ACT score. Beyond academics, her time at MSMS fostered a remarkable personal development. She matured significantly, developing a level of independence and responsibility I hadn't anticipated seeing until much later in her life. This growth wasn't solely academic; it extended to her sense of community and belonging.

The close-knit community fostered at MSMS, situated on the MUW campus, is a crucial element of its success. My daughter built lasting friendships and developed meaningful relationships with faculty, staff, and members of the Columbus community. She describes a sense of integration and belonging, noting personal connections with local police officers and business owners—relationships unlikely to be replicated on a typical high school campus. This immersive experience, intertwined with the academic rigor, is what sets MSMS apart. A relocation would fundamentally alter this unique and highly successful environment.

The proposal to move MSMS to the Starkville/Oktibbeha School District campus seems counterintuitive, particularly considering MSMS's status as a public school. While parents contribute to room and board, tuition is not charged. The students are selected through a highly competitive application process, representing a significant investment in Mississippi's future. The state's Department of Education should prioritize funding for this exceptional institution, which brings considerable prestige and recognition to Mississippi. The benefits of maintaining MSMS at its present location greatly outweigh any perceived advantages of relocation. Investing in upgrades to existing classrooms and expanding dormitory capacity would be a more cost-effective and student-centered solution.

Ultimately, the decision regarding MSMS's future should prioritize the well-being and educational experience of its students. These young scholars, the future leaders and innovators of our state, deserve a voice in this critical matter. Their perspectives, along with those of their parents and the broader MSMS community, should be central to this decision-making process. The current location on the MUW campus has fostered a thriving and highly successful environment for nearly four decades; disrupting this established community would be a disservice to the students, the institution, and the state of Mississippi as a whole.

[Sent from Yahoo Mail for iPhone](#)

## Future of MSMS

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**From** Jane Ellen Wolf <janeellenwolf@icloud.com>

**Date** Tue 3/4/2025 10:59 AM

**To** SecondaryEducation <secondaryeducation@mdek12.org>; zsummers@house.ms.gov <zsummers@house.ms.gov>; crudup@house.ms.gov <crudup@house.ms.gov>; jmcmillan@house.ms.gov <jmcmillan@house.ms.gov>; wmicel@senate.ms.gov <>wmicel@senate.ms.gov>

### External Email

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Dr. Boone,

Thanks so much for allowing us as stakeholders to provide feedback concerning the future of the Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science (MSMS).

The academically gifted 11th and 12th graders who have attended MSMS over the last 38 years have been cared for and instructed by talented educators on the Mississippi University for Women (MUW, The "W") campus. As a result, for the second year in a row, the MSMS has been ranked among the top public high schools in the nation by Niche. MSMS was ranked the sixth Best Public High School in the U.S. out of 18,841 public schools AND faculty were ranked #1 for the second year in a row among 18,504 public high schools.

At MUW, the MSMS students get a tremendous amount of freedom and are sheltered from distractions and a large college campus as opposed to being relocated to a big college town. The "W" provides a safe and supportive environment and the MSMS students have full access to all facilities (library, labs, cafeteria, gym, etc.) on campus and all are within walking distance.

From my understanding, investing in renovating current facilities at MUW is estimated to cost \$60M instead of \$85M that Mississippi State University (MSU) proposed, saving taxpayers money. All expansions at MUW can be done with minimal disruption. Relocating MSMS would be costly and unnecessary.

Please keep MSMS on The "W" campus.

Sincerely,

Jane Ellen

Jane Ellen Wolf

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**Logan Wood: Comments on MSMS Proposals**

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**From** Logan Wood <woodl25@themsms.org>

**Date** Sun 3/2/2025 11:53 AM

**To** SecondaryEducation <secondaryeducation@mdek12.org>

**External Email**

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the MDE organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Hello. My name is Logan Wood, and I am a senior here at MSMS from Starkville, Mississippi. My previous education was from Starkville High School (SHS), so I know a thing or two about the district. My young brother is a current tenth grader at SHS, so I know what the district is like right now. I have lived in Starkville all of my life, so I know the town really well.

Looking at both proposals, I find that both fail to provide a sufficient plan. Firstly, MUW's proposal states all of the current things that the MUW provides MSMS but fails to introduce anything new to advance the partnership besides stating "There are also two vacant residential facilities that could be renovated and dedicated to MSMS, Fant and Peyton Halls. The approximate cost to renovate one of these buildings is \$22 million. A new residential facility that houses approximately 400 students is estimated at \$35 million" (MUW). Currently, the MSMS student body lives in Frazer and Goen, and we constantly have issues with temperature, CO2 leaks, and power outages, so I feel that it would be a great idea to renovate Fant and Payton. Only the words "could be" leave many questions like when can these dorms be renovated and whether this is feasible with the amount of black mold within both Fant and Payton. I want to see the W build a clear plan for the future rather than just restating what they are already doing.

As for MSU, I agree that their proposal is a complete no-go. Firstly, the MSU campus is a college campus with a student population of students that are 18+. The area that they are placing us, in is abysmal. I use that road, MS Hwy 182, to exit Starkville and come to MSMS, and I regularly see people

speeding well above the 45 mph posted speed limit. Adding to that, I know that driving through Starkville at 7:00 is a nightmare. Specifically, the area where Henderson Ward Stewart is located, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr Dr, becomes backed up on the weekdays due to the traffic from people dropping off their kids at school. Currently, Partnership drop-off traffic does not affect the traffic on MS Hwy 182 and only affects its drop-off traffic. My issue is, that the addition of Starkville High School's student population (1,400 students) the addition of the existing Partnership Middle School's student population (692 students), and the addition of MSMS's student population (241 students) cause drop off traffic on MS Hwy 182. This traffic would be substantially worse than Henderson Ward Stewart because their student population is only 1,061 compared to the combined student body on the proposed campus being 2,333 students (1,400 + 692 + 241). That is almost double the student population of Henderson Ward Stewart. Just imagine the amount of traffic that would build up on that Highway and how detrimental it would be to those attempting to exit onto Highway 82, the parents, students, teachers, and faculty driving to all three of the schools, and the people attending or working at MSU trying to enter campus at the intersection of Dr Martin Luther King Jr Dr E, Mississippi Blvd, MS-182, and George Perry St to get onto George Perry St.

It is also abysmal due to its proximity to the Davis Wade stadium. Regardless of what part of Starkville you are, you can hear the football game on MSU game nights. When a student stays over the weekend at MSMS, I can imagine that they won't be able to sleep at all due to the abundance of noise. Also, with SEC football games occurring not but a little under 4 thousand feet from your window, you invite the likes of crazy parking circumstances and drunk and angry football fans. Not only will parking become hectic, but you also run the risk of football fans walking onto the MSMS/SOCSD campus. Who is to say that while the students take their almost-mile walk to the library, a fraternity guy doesn't offer them a beer? MSU is not a safe and controllable environment for 11th and 12th graders.

Overall, MUW's and MSU's proposals lack MSMS's goals for the future. MUW doesn't have a clear plan for MSMS's future. MSU's plan fails to preserve MSMS's sovereignty and fails to address the

safety concerns of being on an SEC college campus. I think it's fair for both MSU and MUW to write a second proposal that answers all the criticism. One major flaw that would fix all the issues with both proposals is meeting with MSMS and understanding what we as a school would like to see. MSU has consolidated the SOCSO regarding these plans. Yet they failed to meet with MSMS regarding the proposal for MSMS. I feel that the best option is not to let this die out but to use this push to increase the funding for MUW. More funding would not only save an institution that has been around since 1884 but would allow MSMS to grow its community. As an MSMS student, I am disappointed in both proposals, but if I had to choose between the two, MUW's proposal would allow MSMS to continue being what it has always been, my home.

I do not allow MDE to use my statement in any way without consulting me and MSMS.

Sincerely,

*Logan Wood*

**Class of 2025**

**In-reach Officer of Engineering Club 24-25**

**MSMS Emissary 24-25**

**Smash B-Team Captain**

Lara Kati Woodard  
86 Olive Street North  
Meadville, MS 39653  
[lkatilewis@hotmail.com](mailto:lkatilewis@hotmail.com)

March 3, 2025

Mrs. Donna Boone, Chief Academic Officer  
MS Department of Education  
359 North West Street  
P.O. Box 771  
Jackson, MS 39205-0771  
[secondaryeducation@mdek12.org](mailto:secondaryeducation@mdek12.org)

Dear Mrs. Boone,

I am writing to submit my stakeholder feedback on the MSMS proposals submitted to MDE by MSU and MUW. I am an MSMS alumna and a current resident of Mississippi. I graduated from MSMS in 1994, MSU in 1998, UMMC in 2001, and am a small business owner of a private practice out-patient therapy clinic in Natchez, MS. I am a third generation graduate of MSU, and I have a son who will interview for the MSMS class of 2027 on March 22, 2025. As you can see, I have been a Mississippi resident my entire life, and I have given back to my state in many ways, both in service and business.

The past several years, I have been involved in the selection process at MSMS with conducting interviews for prospective students. My son has also attended MSMS summer camps, and he has been a short term resident of the current dorms. During my time back on campus at MUW and MSMS, it is apparent that the facilities have been neglected in many ways and are a deterrent for our students to apply for attendance to MSMS. The academic product of graduating classes has never been in question, as MSMS proves each year to be a huge asset of public education in our state.

After reading both proposals and having many conversations with others throughout the state, including educators, parents, and other alumni, I believe that my feedback is essential in the decision making process concerning the future of MSMS. The mission of MSMS is clear about enhancing the future of Mississippi "in the global society by meeting the individual needs of gifted and talented students through providing innovative learning experiences and leadership development in a residential environment." (MSMS Mission) The focus of my feedback is based on those individual needs in the residential setting, as the innovation and leadership development are being met exceptionally well.

I believe, as an alumna and parent of a prospective MSMS student, that the individual needs of the student body at MSMS does not fit within, or mix with, traditional high school students. These needs are from specific personalities and characteristics that are the reason that they seek to pursue education at MSMS. These students choose MSMS to be with like minded classmates in an environment where they are socially accepted and can become the best versions of themselves. MSMS also provides an opportunity for each student to participate in specific recreational areas of

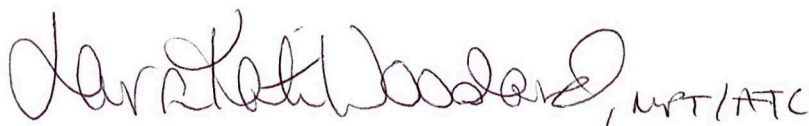
interest, including sports, chess teams, clubs, and other organizations that they often do not have access to in their traditional high schools. These needs are all being met at MUW.

The MSU proposal would make all of the areas that make MSMS special for its students very difficult to maintain. This proposal does include many benefits directly from MSU, but it indicates that SOCSO will be responsible for the overall management of the academics of MSMS. MSMS is a residential high school, and its students do not want to return to being included in a traditional high school. I believe that this is not in the best interest of our students to be in daily contact, including classes and athletics, with Starkville High School students. The application process is specific for a certain criteria of students, and allowing Starkville High School students to take classes negates the application process. Starkville High School gains a great STEM program, but MSMS loses its mission. MSMS students are also not usually your top athletes, and they would be very unlikely to participate in a sports team at one of the biggest public high schools in Mississippi known for their competitive athletic programs. As the wife of a football coach and as an athletic trainer in southwest Mississippi, we as parents know that our son and other students will find it very difficult and discouraging to try out for an athletic team at a school full of top tier athletes. This proposal doesn't ensure MSMS autonomy and appears to hinder the social, emotional, mental, and physical development of their students.

The MUW proposal meets all of these areas, and the success of MSMS at MUW shows this. The questions are will MDE and the Mississippi legislature properly fund MSMS at MUW not just academically but to also maintain facilities? This proposal indicates gross underfunding of facilities at \$0.60 per square foot, which is not just a lack of commitment to the success of MSMS, it is also negligence. And will MDE and the legislature foster the mission of MSMS to put staff and students into a safe residential and academic environment? I trust that you have toured these facilities and understand the challenges being faced.

I encourage all of our legislatures to go to Columbus to meet our fantastic students and faculty at MSMS, as well as tour the facilities. MSMS has proven to be successful and beneficial to our state. Before the MSU proposal could be accepted, it should be affirmed to MDE, MSMS, and the public that MSMS will not be interacting with SHS, particularly with academics and athletics. If we want MSMS to continue to be successful and beneficial to Mississippi, then I believe that it will be adequately funded and the MUW proposal will be accepted.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lara Kati Woodard", followed by the text "MPT/ATC" written in a smaller font.

Lara Kati Woodard, MPT/ATC

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**MSMS**

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**From** Laura Woodard <lauraanders@gmail.com>

**Date** Mon 3/3/2025 10:33 AM

**To** SecondaryEducation <secondaryeducation@mdek12.org>

**External Email**

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the MDE organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Good morning Dr. Boone,

I'm writing to you this morning regarding the Mississippi School for Math and Science and the two proposals to decide its future location.

While I could talk on the many pros of leaving MSMS on the MUW campus in Columbus, I thought I would give you a more personal perspective on the matter.

My son is in the process of applying to MSMS and hopes to be accepted and be included in their graduating class of 2027. As long as I can remember, he's been obsessed with numbers and patterns and how things worked. In kindergarten, he understood the concept of negative numbers. He grasped the theory of multiplication and division way ahead of his classmates in elementary school. In junior high, he finished all his IXL science work during his spring break vacation for the remainder of the year, just for fun. He's been the top of his class, bringing home awards for highest grades in math and science every single year. He made a perfect score on his Algebra I state test. All this to say, my son is a bright kid, and MSMS is without question the right path for him. I know without a doubt that he will do well and shine no matter if the school stays at the W, or is moved to Starkville.

All that being said, when I asked him what his opinion was on the move, he immediately said "no." While my son is a brilliant student, he has never really met anyone on his level at his current school on a social level. One of the things he's most looking forward to at MSMS is getting to be among his peers. People who care about academics and can hold a conversation with him when he goes off on a tangent about some complicated mathematical theory that goes right over most people's, including my own, heads. With the proposal set forth by MSU, the MSMS students would be right back in a typical high school setting. The shared campus with Starkville High School would only be beneficial to their own students and the Oktibbeha School District. It would take away some of the honor and prestige the MSMS students have worked so hard to earn.

With its current partnership, MUW offers the MSMS students everything they need academically and socially, all while being on a smaller, secure campus. Please consider more than just the bottom line numbers when thinking about moving MSMS. Remember the individual children who don't want their futures disrupted.

Thank you for your time,

Laura Woodard

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Laura A. Woodard

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**Comment on Proposals for the Future Location of MSMS**

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**From** Rachel Wright <hotzewright@gmail.com>  
**Date** Tue 3/4/2025 8:51 AM  
**To** SecondaryEducation <secondaryeducation@mdek12.org>

External Email

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the MDE organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Dear Dr. Boone:

My son graduated from the Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science (MSMS) in 2021. We live in Hernando, Mississippi, Locally, Hernando's citizens enjoy one of the best public school districts in the State of Mississippi but our child needed academic challenges that our school district could not provide. He attended a summer camp at MSMS before he was old enough to attend and immediately started thinking of applying for entry to MSMS.

As a parent, I would not have been comfortable sending my child to a campus as large as Mississippi State. I do believe that my son was ready for an experience that would prepare him for the academic and practical rigors of college. He was ready to be surrounded by peers that were also academically minded and ready to strive for excellence. I do not believe he was ready for a typical college experience. The Mississippi State University proposal, moving MSMS to the middle of a large college campus and also integrating it with the non-residential Starkville High School, will completely change the school and the safe, small, "college-lite" experience that my son enjoyed and that gave me comfort in sending him to school so far away from home.

MSMS deserves the support of our legislature as a shining star in the Mississippi educational system. It deserves to be well funded and lauded for the way it serves the citizens of Mississippi and provides opportunities for children from the entire state of Mississippi. I am so proud to say my son went there and desire that same experience for other high achieving students within the state of Mississippi. Please support MSMS staying at MUW and support increasing its funding for capital improvements at MUW as well as its academic programming.

Thank you for supporting the children of Mississippi.

Rachel Hotze Wright  
Mother of Cameron Wright, Class of 2021.

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**MUW vs MSU proposal comments**

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From julie yang <julieyang195@yahoo.com>

Date Mon 3/3/2025 8:49 PM

To SecondaryEducation <secondaryeducation@mdek12.org>

**External Email**

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**Emma Bernard, Xin (Julie) Yang, and Claire Rhee**

These comments are based off of current MSMS students. The integration of SHS with MSMS in the MSU proposal calls for some concern for not only us, but many other MSMS students. This integration highlights SHS but also causes a dissolution of MSMS students. A kind of loophole gets created when MSMS students get mixed into SHS students; MSMS students have to apply and go through a rigorous process in order to get into school, while the others just have to live in the area. If both of these groups of students are treated the same, with the same access to facilities and classes, then there is virtually no difference between them. It will cause the prominent distinction between MSMS and public school students to cease. Aside from the students, many teachers will be affected as well. Some teachers live in Columbus and easily go to work every day because it's not a long drive. However, if the MSMS facility moves to Starkville, these teachers would have to drive early in the morning to work which is a relatively big inconvenience.

Coming from Claire, a Starkville student, I know what it's like to attend school with Starkville High students. There is a big difference between MSMS' environment and SHS' environment. SHS students do not have the same motivation and work ethic as many MSMS students causing a big disparity if the two schools were to be combined. Overall, the environment of MSU would be vastly different since it is a SEC school where it may not be the most suitable place for young highschoolers that are away from home. Especially the many crimes that occur more so at MSU than at MUW that may affect minors that attend MSMS. This accounts for the safety of the students as well since the MSU campus is much larger to be more secure than being at the MUW campus where the police are able to reach you on campus within minutes. In addition to the environment, the location is not the best idea. The alleged location for this new building/integration is right behind the current Partnership Middle School. Two schools full of high school students should not be that close to a school filled with middle school students. The middle school students are all minors while some high school students are becoming adults which may cause controversial incidents. Overall, MUW is the better option in location and proposal than MSU from current MSMS students.

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## Feedback for MSMS proposals

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**From** Chuck Yarborough <cyarborough@themsms.org>  
**Date** Mon 3/3/2025 5:32 PM  
**To** SecondaryEducation <secondaryeducation@mdek12.org>

### **External Email**

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Dear Dr. Boone,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input regarding the best place and path for Mississippi's gifted students and the Mississippi School for Mathematics & Science. To this point, conversations seem to have been underway without hearing from those of us with the most experience and insight regarding not only the school but its service to our students and the state. While we are not necessarily of one mind, long-time faculty are most aware of not only what has made MSMS such an amazing success. We are also aware of what will continue enabling MSMS to set the standard for opportunities like ours across the South.

First, I feel I should offer some context for the feedback below. My knowledge of and experience with the MSMS "Opportunity for Excellence" as well as our school's contributions to Mississippi extends back to 1995. I am in my 30th year as an award-winning teacher and community leader at MSMS, and I was mentored by most of the founding faculty members here. Additionally, I am the parent of two MSMS alumni (Classes of '15 & '17 - both *MSMS Hall of Fame* students ... Yes, I am proud!). Additionally, I have developed nationally-recognized research/performance/community-service projects here and served in just about every capacity associated with MSMS – from class sponsor, to soccer coach, to faculty council chair, to search committee member, to event spokesperson, to PLUS parent, to club sponsor, to MSMS representative on community committees, to...well, you get the picture. My experience and insights regarding the school are deep and wide.

I have read both proposals and given them in-depth consideration. **I evaluated them on how each university reveals their understanding & valuation of 1) our MSMS culture both of academic achievement and of unlocking the potential of Gifted young people; 2) our close-knit community of support and safety for Mississippi's gifted high school students; and 3) our MSMS Ideals of Scholarship, Community, Creativity and Service.**

Many MSMS alumni say "MSMS Changed My Life". In fact, Captain Cortez Thomas, Mississippi Army National Guard, proclaimed as much to our students just last Thursday night. That life-changing impact stems from our close-knit community culture where students have been able to embody the MSMS Ideals. The lessons learned – both in classrooms and beyond classroom walls - in this close-knit community are also the reason so many MSMS alumni have remained in Mississippi – or returned to Mississippi after completing their education. MSMS alumni are physicians, lawyers, teachers, entrepreneurs, nurses, financial advisors, engineers, accountants, professors, and every other possible profession across Mississippi.

Our alumni are leaders and community contributors across our state in part because our close-knit MSMS community so successfully fosters a sense of community participation that develops into an ethic of community leadership. The lessons learned in this close-knit community are also the reason so many MSMS alumni outside of our state continue to be among the greatest advocates for Mississippi's potential. MSMS has been an investment by the state legislature that has paid off!

### **MSU/SOCSD Proposal Feedback**

Given the "rubric" above, I was disappointed to see that the \$85 million Mississippi State/Starkville-Oktibbeha County School District proposal neither recognizes nor values key elements which have made MSMS extraordinarily successful and which will continue to offer extraordinary opportunities for Mississippi's gifted and talented students.

The MSU/SOCSD proposal merges MSMS with the proposed Starkville High School Partnership School in ways that will compromise the successful & impactful culture of MSMS.

Taking courses with SOCSD students would certainly benefit Starkville High students. However, the culture of a "regular" high school will not only likely hinder the success of many MSMS students, but MSMS students would tell you leaving the culture of a "regular" high school is exactly why they chose to apply to and attend MSMS. Just last week, one parent expressed concerns of "bullying" of her son in the lunchroom at a new combined/shared school.

Sharing AP courses with Starkville High students might sound "advanced". However, in many MSMS courses, students are not only doing advanced/accelerated scholarly work but they are also nurturing their creativity in pursuit of community and service. Projects at MSMS go beyond the AP curriculum to develop leadership and collaborative skills that gifted students struggle to develop in other settings. Taking AP courses with SHS would be a limitation, not an improvement for MSMS students.

The MSU/SOCSD proposal suggests merging MSMS extracurricular activities with Starkville High would be a plus. However, the SHS extracurricular schedule will not likely fit the accelerated academic schedules of the gifted students at MSMS. Furthermore, most MSMS students will not make the athletic teams of a 6A or 7A program, nor will they likely have the time to devote to marching band or large dramatic or musical productions at SHS. Gifted students at MSMS grow as community leaders through the lessons of athletics and other extracurriculars in our small close-knit community at MSMS. Our extracurricular programs are tailored to the specific needs of gifted high school children. In our extracurricular programs, MSMS students have the time and space to learn the two great lessons of team sports or performance: "If you work hard you can improve yourself, and if you work together, you can improve your team or community." Many would end up being denied these lessons in the combined MSMS/SHS.

The MSU/SOCSD proposal also celebrates an isolated joint-MSMS/SOCSD Partnership campus as a plus. But, the Partnership School campus' isolation is a negative as we try to develop a valuation of community among Mississippi's gifted students. MSMS students gain a sense of community that not only empowers them but also helps them value Mississippi's small towns more completely. The most walkable locales near the Partnership School are on the MSU campus. A Shuttle will be available, but current & former MSMS parents, alumns, and others knowledgeable about MSMS & our students have questioned the appropriateness of having our residential high school on a major university campus (even on the fringe as proposed). I share those concerns.

While MSU campus is relatively safe, the fact remains that MSU had 38 rapes reported on its main campus over the three most recent reporting years [ <https://data.tennessean.com/crimes-on->

[campus/detail/mississippi-state-university/main-campus/176080001/](https://campus/detail/mississippi-state-university/main-campus/176080001/) ]. Rep. Dana McLean (Columbus), my wife & I (all parents of female alumns), and several current parents have said they would not likely have sent their 16 year old daughters to the MSU campus. I've seen in the MSMS Parents Facebook PLUS group multiple parents express the same sentiment. I've even seen parents of male students say the same. They clearly understand what the MSU/SOCSD proposal seems to miss: **MSMS students are gifted children in a high school. They are not younger-aged college students.**

One great MSMS achievement with Mississippi's gifted students that has really contributed to workforce development in Mississippi and beyond is the number of female MSMS students who excel in STEM fields during and after their MSMS experience. Given the data from MSU and the anecdotal evidence from parents, it's likely fewer females (as well as other students whose parents feel they may be vulnerable) will apply and attend MSMS at the proposed MSU-adjacent location. And, one has to believe the cost of security and staff to ensure safety of up to 400 gifted high school students 24 hours a day would increase at an MSU location.

Critics of the MSU/SOCSD proposal have pointed out that Rep. Roberson (Starkville; House Education Chair) has indicated he is looking for state funding to grow the SOCSD schools by moving MSMS over there, and he has been interviewed by area reporters on the subject. I'm sure Rep. Roberson meant well when he recently said, "I think that it would give those kids that go to MSMS more opportunities to have the picture perfect high school life and career that we want for all our kids." However, MSMS was never intended to be a "picture perfect high school life" for "all our kids". The state legislature created MSMS to be...and MSMS has been...an exceptional educational and leadership opportunity for some of our most talented Mississippi students.

Given the MSU/SOCSD proposal's apparent lack of understanding about what has made MSMS so impactful and successful, I feel there is plenty of reason to worry the Starkville High "Partnership School" will end up being the priority and the MSMS "Opportunity for Excellence" will be compromised (despite assurances to the contrary).

Practically speaking, the thought that building new academic buildings, new dormitories, and new cafeteria facilities at MSU will be cheaper than building a new dorm in Columbus and committing to academic facilities upgrades here also seems implausible. The MSU/SOCSD \$85 million price tag is much higher than the MUW proposal (which I address below).

## **MUW Proposal Feedback**

The MUW proposal suggests a clear understanding of those things which have made MSMS so successful and impactful for Mississippi's gifted students and which will continue to foster success into the future.

The MUW proposal reveals an understanding & valuation of 1) our MSMS culture both of academic achievement and of unlocking the potential of Gifted young people; 2) our close-knit community of support and safety for Mississippi's gifted high school students; and 3) our MSMS Ideals of Scholarship, Community, Creativity and Service.

Additionally, the MUW proposal (while not perfect) clarifies the essential point that MSMS will grow and maximize its impact on Mississippi students – and do so more cost-effectively – with adequate investment in new and updated facilities on the current campus, along with an appropriate budget for maintenance.

I'm not sure legislators, and perhaps State Board of Education members, know exactly how much better MSMS's students and faculty have done with state funds than similar schools from other states in the South. On a shoestring budget, MSMS is producing at least twice as many National Merit Finalists as regional competitors. Evidence like this led *NYTimes* best-selling author Deb Fallows to write, "MSMS is a gift from Mississippi to the country, and a lesson and model for secondary education."

Some – including the recently fired Executive Director of MSMS – have blamed MUW for not increasing MSMS funding and renovating residential and academic spaces for the school. The W has never been legislatively or financially empowered or responsible for MSMS renovations or expansion. In fact, the W has not been adequately compensated for maintenance needs at MSMS, and the MUW proposal clearly indicates that reality.

In spite of that funding shortfall, MUW has proven to be the ideal location for our school and an excellent partner & host for MSMS for nearly 40 years. The MUW proposal suggests that impactful partnership would continue and grow with the necessary facilities investment from the state legislature – supported by MDE.

The MUW proposal essentially allows us to imagine how much more MSMS could achieve for our gifted children and our state with new facilities and a more competitive operating budget on our current campus – where our MSMS culture has been developed!

The new residence halls proposed by MUW will meet the needs of expanding enrollment while also maintaining MSMS student access to college lectures and public events, a university library, and a university recreational facility in a small, safe environment...all within steps of their dorms and our academic buildings. The W cafeteria and all campus performance venues MSMS students use are within the gated community of the W campus and less than 5 minutes walking distance. Not only is there no need for a shuttle, but there is a health benefit and community benefit to being on a pedestrian campus.

At MUW, safety concerns about 16 & 17 year old gifted children on a major college campus are lessened, and prospective gifted Mississippi students and their parents are more likely to apply. MUW reported 0 rapes on campus in the 3 most recent reporting years [ <https://data.tennessean.com/crimes-on-campus/detail/criminal-offenses/mississippi-university-for-women/main-campus/176035001/> ], so one doubts sexual violence, alcohol/drug use, or other issues presented by a major college campus would be deterrents for gifted students to apply.

Additionally, the W has been accommodating for dual-enrollment and college credit classes and has been incredibly supportive of MSMS research/community-service projects that have gained national awards and attention. The MUW proposal offers new dual-enrollment and college credit opportunities with the other major state universities. That flexibility and expansion speaks directly to the needs of the gifted students at MSMS. The successful partnerships for research that currently exist with MSU can continue and possibly grow alongside the growth in partnerships with other state universities.

The W proposal also addresses the need to continue to provide access to gifted students from rural areas and disadvantaged backgrounds – another success of MSMS.

My experience prompts concern that a move to the 10x-larger MSU campus (and being combined with 1,400 Starkville High students in some way) would decrease the likelihood that gifted Mississippi students from rural areas and disadvantaged backgrounds will apply - particularly first-generation students. The combined MSU-Starkville population makes it one of the largest cities in the state. The fact is, the smaller environment of our campus at the W in Columbus feels less threatening and allows MSMS to nurture gifted students who need it and increases students' likelihood of academic success as well as community leadership.

**In conclusion, the request for proposal from MSU and MUW emphasized “expansion.” The obstacles to growing the MSMS “Opportunity for Excellence” are not problems of location.**

**The expansion of MSMS will follow from financially supporting 1) our MSMS culture both of academic achievement and of unlocking the potential of Gifted young people; 2) our close-knit community of support and safety for Mississippi’s gifted high school students; and 3) our MSMS Ideals of Scholarship, Community, Creativity and Service.**

**A review of both proposals leads me to recognize that the MUW campus continues to be the ideal place to do that.**

Sincerely,

Chuck Yarborough

Charles M. Yarborough, MA  
History Instructor  
2019 Organization of American Historians *Tachau Teacher of the Year*  
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(662) 329-7670

March 4, 2025

Mississippi Department of Education  
359 N West St  
Jackson, MS 39201

Dear Dr. Donna Boone,

I am writing to express my unwavering support for the Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science (MSMS) to remain in its rightful home in Columbus, Mississippi. MSMS has flourished in its current location at Mississippi University for Women (MUW) and moving it elsewhere would not only undermine its mission but also risk losing the very essence of what makes this school exceptional.

### **Choosing MSMS**

Students choose MSMS for its unparalleled academic excellence, not for residence halls or athletic opportunities. This institution is a haven for the intellectually gifted students whose passions lie in the sciences, mathematics, and humanities rather than on the athletic field. MSMS fosters a rigorous academic environment that allows students to reach their full potential, and its current location supports this mission seamlessly.

MSMS was established in Columbus for a reason. The origins of this school and its programs were meticulously designed with this area in mind by professors at Mississippi University for Women (MUW). Over the years, the institution has developed a unique academic culture that thrives within the close-knit community of MUW. The location provides an ideal balance—students are supported in a safe, structured environment while benefiting from university-level resources and faculty collaboration. The school's integration with MUW has been instrumental in creating an atmosphere conducive to academic achievement and personal growth.

### **Academic Excellence and Safety Are the Priorities**

Despite recent discussions regarding residence halls, it is crucial to note that neither students nor parents are complaining. The primary concern of MSMS families has always been academic excellence, and MUW provides a secure, well-monitored, and gated campus that fosters student safety. Parents send their children here knowing they are in a protected environment where they can move about freely without constant concerns over security. Furthermore, this past summer, MUW has made several changes and upgrades to the residence halls, demonstrating their commitment to providing a comfortable and supportive environment for MSMS students.

### **Threats to MSMS Recruitment and Prestige**

Recruiting new students under such circumstances would be a significant hurdle. Many families who currently value the independence and identity of MSMS would hesitate to send their children to a setting that is either attached to a traditional high school or lacks the structure and safety of its current location. Why should MSMS, an elite academic institution, be forced to merge with another high school? Such a move would dilute its identity and prestige, making it far less appealing to prospective students and their families.

### **Unfair Use of State Funds and Threat to MSMS's Identity**

Additionally, the idea of using state funds to benefit Starkville High School by essentially gifting them a new school is fundamentally unfair. Other school districts are required to pass bonds for such projects—why should Starkville be an exception at the expense of MSMS? If MSMS were to be relocated to Starkville High School, it would lose its distinct academic culture and risk being absorbed into the identity of SHS. MSMS has cultivated its own rich heritage of academic achievement and innovation, one that is not shared with any other school. This identity is exemplified by the fact that MSMS has produced 13 National Merit Scholars, a distinction not mirrored at Starkville High.

### **The Importance of Keeping MSMS in Columbus**

MSMS is more than just a school; it is a beacon of academic excellence, intellectual curiosity, and scholarly ambition. Moving it from Columbus would not only threaten its integrity but also erode the very culture that has made it a success. The students of Mississippi deserve a school that remains independent, academically driven, and dedicated to its founding principles. I urge you to protect the legacy of MSMS and keep it where it belongs—at Mississippi University for Women in Columbus, Mississippi.

### **MSMS's History & Success**

MSMS was founded in 1987 on the campus of Mississippi University for Women (MUW) to serve the state's most academically gifted students, following the model of the North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics. The long-standing partnership between MSMS and MUW has fostered excellence in education, research, and dual-credit opportunities, enriching both institutions. Nationally recognized for its academic achievements, MSMS has produced 13 National Merit Scholars and is home to some of the country's best public high school educators. Relocating MSMS and merging it with the Oktibbeha Consolidated School District would strip it of its independence, eroding the unique environment that allows its students to excel both academically and personally. Moreover, data from the MSMS Foundation highlights that among alumni who remain in Mississippi, the top three career fields—education, medicine, and business—align closely with MUW's areas of strength, further solidifying the benefits of keeping MSMS in its current location.

### **The W's Proposal for MSMS Expansion**

Concerns have arisen regarding the rushed nature of the proposal process, including the lack of a clear evaluation rubric, a potentially biased Request for Proposals (RFP), and the extremely limited timeframe for public feedback. In response, The W has submitted a proposal to expand MSMS on its current campus, emphasizing its established experience, strong academic support, and research-driven opportunities. The proposed expansion includes plans for new residential facilities and renovations to existing halls, requiring state investment to further enhance the MSMS experience.

### **Academic & Research Opportunities**

The W provides MSMS students with 41 tuition-free dual-credit courses, enhancing their academic opportunities at no additional cost. Students also benefit from access to The W's six advanced science laboratories and research collaborations with university faculty. Additionally, The W is actively working to establish partnerships with other research institutions within the IHL system, including Jackson State University, the University of Mississippi, and the University of Southern Mississippi. MSMS students have full access to The W's library and extensive academic resources, along with the ability to utilize any campus facility free of charge. Furthermore, The Power of Six Scholarship offers MSMS graduates a full-tuition academic scholarship to The W—an initiative inspired by six of the school's original 12 faculty members who were alumni of The W.

### **Financial & Logistical Considerations**

The W has played a crucial role as MSMS's fiscal agent, managing administrative and financial services for the state, yet state funding has failed to keep up with rising costs. Investing in The W's existing infrastructure for MSMS is the most practical and cost-effective option for Mississippi taxpayers. MUW has identified two potential sites for a new residential facility that could accommodate 400 students at an estimated cost of \$35 million, with room for expansion to house necessary professional staff. Rather than constructing entirely new facilities at MSU, The W's existing spaces—such as Hooper Science Building, Shackelford, and Mary Wilson—could be modernized for approximately \$25 million, including the addition of a robotics lab. This plan would result in a total investment of about \$60 million, significantly lower than the \$85 million proposed for MSU, ultimately saving taxpayer dollars while ensuring minimal disruption to MSMS's operations.

### **Legislative Oversight and Misinformation: The Case for Keeping MSMS in Columbus**

It is truly disappointing that many citizens of Mississippi believe that legislators have not thoroughly researched this matter and are in agreement with relocating MSMS. In reality, it appears that no comprehensive research has been conducted, and legislators have failed to engage with the current student body, parents, or faculty

members. Many have not even visited the MSMS campus to witness firsthand the thriving academic community that exists within MUW. The situation has been undermined without due consideration of the purpose and intent of the program. The decision to relocate appears to be driven by assumptions rather than informed dialogue with those who are directly affected.

In contrast, Mississippi State University presents a vastly different landscape. It is a sprawling, high-traffic campus that lacks the intimate setting necessary for MSMS students to thrive. The dispersed nature of MSU's campus and the challenges of 24-hour student tracking make it an unsuitable choice for a school that prides itself on structure, safety, and academic focus. Moving MSMS to such an environment would put students at risk, making monitoring difficult and potentially disrupting the very foundation of what makes MSMS unique. Will the Mississippi legislative body be held accountable for any harm, misconduct, or negligence that may arise from placing minor children at a university environment of this scale?

### **Opposition to Relocation to Starkville**

While political pressure exists to relocate MSMS to Starkville, The W remains firmly committed to its long-standing and successful partnership with MSMS. Moving MSMS would be an unnecessary and costly endeavor, especially when The W already provides a secure, supportive environment tailored to students' academic and personal growth. At The W, MSMS students enjoy a walkable campus where classrooms, the library, dining hall, health center, recreation facilities, and residences are all within a five-minute walk, with campus police ensuring their safety. It is essential for the state to invest in MSMS's future while preserving its strong and effective partnership with The W.

Thank you to the Mississippi Department of Education for the opportunity to provide feedback.

Sincerely,

*Telisa Young*

Telisa Young  
MSMS Parent  
Class of 2026