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## The MSMS Opinion on the MUW and MSU proposals

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**From** Zander Dennison <dennisonz26@themsms.org>

**Date** Tue 3/4/2025 4:49 PM

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

 2 attachments (89 KB)

Student feedback on the MSU and MUW proposals(1-63).xlsx; MSU VS MUW Paper.pdf;

### **External Email**

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Dear Mississippi Board of Education,

I'm Zander Dennison a current student at the Mississippi School for Math and Science (MSMS). I'm writing to express the opinion of MSMS regarding the recent proposals. Current students at MSMS are deeply concerned about the potential relocation from the MUW campus and do not wish to leave.

While we understand the MSU emphasizes enrollment, culture and academics there are many concerns about how the MSMS students will be treated by Starkville along with several safety concerns that remain unaddressed. MSU's proposal seems to advocate for a "normal high school experience" with an added focus on education. However, the reason many of us chose MSMS was to be part of a community of like-minded individuals who seek a non-traditional education, one that goes beyond what a "normal high school" offers.

I want the Board of Education to consider not only the effort and dedication we, as MSMS students, put into this, but also how the proposed changes could affect the MSMS community and enrollment. One of the core pillars of MSMS is community-something not emphasized in the typical high school. Relocating to Starkville could significantly impact this fundamental aspect of MSMS, as well as the overall student experience. I want you consider that we want to stay in "The Friendly City" not "Mississippi's College Town."

Attached, you will find data detailing MSMS students' responses to the proposals, as well as a short paper I have written outlining concerns. I appreciate your time and consideration of our perspective.

Best regards,  
Zander S. Dennison  
+1 (228) 281-4361  
zanderdennison2007@gmail.com

Zander Dennison

March 4, 2025

On February 26, 2025, the Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science (MSMS) location proposals were posted publicly. Since then, the public has had the opportunity to submit their comments on both the MUW and MSU proposals. As current students at MSMS, we strongly advocate for remaining on the MUW campus. While neither proposal is perfect, we believe that staying at MUW will allow the existing culture of MSMS to be preserved while guaranteeing continued safety for students.

The MSU proposal would require significantly more funding compared to the MUW proposal. The construction costs associated with the MSMS relocation to MSU would amount to \$85 million, while MUW would require nearly \$50 million. This discrepancy in funding is particularly concerning, given that MSMS is already facing financial challenges, including the need to hire a new English teacher and the retirement of a history teacher and an arts teacher. These staffing changes would result in increased costs across the board, further straining the budget.

Another major concern with the MSU proposal is the possibility of co-ed dorms. While precautions would likely be put in place to minimize the risks associated with co-ed dormitories, the risks remain higher than those associated with the single-gender dorms at MUW. Furthermore, the proximity of MSMS students to college students, combined with shared transportation systems and the closeness of sports facilities on the MSU campus, could lead to increased safety risks. The current arrangement at MUW, with separate dorms for MSMS students, offers a level of security and peace of mind that would be more difficult to replicate at MSU.

One of the key benefits of attending MSMS is the opportunity for students to gain real-world work experience outside of academics. However, under the MSU proposal, the ratio of students to work service areas would increase, limiting the opportunities for meaningful work experience. Currently, some work service areas at MSMS are already overstaffed, with too many students per area, which makes it difficult for students to meet the required quotas. Expanding the student body under the MSU proposal would only exacerbate this issue, forcing each student to gain less work experience.

In addition to the academic and logistical concerns, there are significant cultural and historical impacts to consider. Two nationally recognized programs, Tales from the Crypt and The 8th of May Emancipation Celebration, could be severely impacted by the proposed relocation. Tales from the Crypt is a major local event that has become ingrained in the heart of Columbus, Mississippi. Moving this tradition to Starkville, where it has no historical significance, would harm both the city of Columbus and MSMS traditions.

Similarly, The 8th of May Emancipation Celebration marks a crucial date in local history, commemorating the day when Union soldiers freed enslaved people in the area. This celebration holds deep meaning for the Columbus community. Moving it to Starkville would diminish its significance and disconnect it from the local history it honors.

Another issue is the strained relationship between MSMS and the Starkville School District. Several students who attended Starkville schools prior to MSMS have reported hearing negative opinions about the school, and some teachers even advised students against applying to MSMS. This negative perception could create a divisive atmosphere at MSU, which could harm the integration of MSMS students and Starkville High School students.

Student feedback on the proposals strongly favors staying at MUW. Out of sixty three students, only four students preferred the MSU proposal, and one of them stated they would not have attended MSMS had it been located on the MSU campus. Nearly 40% of students indicated they would not have come to MSMS if it were located at MSU. Many students are concerned that MSMS's culture and ideals will change significantly under the MSU proposal and are especially worried about the potential for shared spaces with Starkville High School students.

While we recognize that neither of the proposed locations for MSMS is perfect, we believe that staying at MUW offers the best solution for preserving the culture, safety, and unique educational experience that MSMS provides. The cultural and historical implications of the move are all important factors that the Board of Education should consider when making their final decision.





**Would you feel safer on if MSMS moves to MSU. How do you feel about: Why did you come to M How are the MSMS ideas How are the MSMS ideas**

Maybe	MSU	5	7 More STEM classes ;More university classes;Independence;Opportunity to be with like-minded people;Leadership opportunities;
Maybe	They are equally "safe"	10	6 More STEM classes ;More university classes;Independence;
Yes	They are equally "safe"	8	8 Independence;
No	MUW	10	10 More STEM classes ;Residential setting;Independence;Opportunity to be with like-minded people;
Yes	They are equally "safe"	10	10 More STEM classes ;More university classes;Opportunity to be with like-minded people;Independence;Leadership opportunities;Scholarship opportunities;The location;Leadership opportunities ;
Maybe	MUW	9	10 Residential setting;Independence;Opportunity to be with like-minded people;Leadership opportunities;The Arts;
Yes	MUW	10	7 More STEM classes ;Residential setting;Independence;Opportunity to be with like-minded people;The location;Leadership opportunities;
No	MUW	10	10 More STEM classes ;Mor They aren't and if they a have so much more independence at MUW than we would at MSU. We have more access to the Columbus community at MUW and most of it is w
No	They are equally "safe"	7	10 More STEM classes ;Mor They are not. By continuing our partnership with MUW, we will be continuing these ideals like we have been doing for decades on the W's campus. I strongly believe
No	MUW	9	10 More STEM classes ;Resi n/a The MUW proposal basically has MSMS staying the way it is, so...
Maybe	MUW	10	10 Independence;Opportunity to be with like-minded people;More STEM classes ;More AP classes;Leadership opportunities;
Yes	They are equally "safe"	4	10 More STEM classes ;Mor I don't know. ; I don't know. ;
Maybe	MUW	9	8 More STEM classes ;More AP classes;Opportunity to be with like-minded people;Leadership opportunities;More university classes;
Yes	MSU	8	10 More STEM classes ;More university classes;Independence;Opportunity to be with like-minded people;How it looks on a transcript;
No	They are equally "safe"	10	10 More STEM classes ;Resi I don't really think they e I don't really think they are.
Yes	MSU	3	3 More university classes; At MSU, we will be able I feel like the community of msms would be drastically changed if we moved to msu, for example, we have gotten used to certain employees that we w
No	MUW	8	7 More university classes;Independence;Leadership; They have presented ideas to help predicate our ideals, but do I believe they will do what they promised? No.
Yes	MUW	8	4 More STEM classes ;Mor The current teachers wit Starkville would probably get a version of our current Tales of the Crypt which would benefit their community, I believe there would be more opportuni
No	They are equally "safe"	6	10 Opportunity to be with like-minded people;The location;Residential setting;Independence;
No	MUW	10	9 More STEM classes ;Mor I honestly don't see man I feel like MUW's proposal was lacking and it did not feel personal enough to its relationship with MSMS as it should have. Still, MUW's proposal does n
Maybe	They are equally "safe"	10	7 More STEM classes ;Resi They will allow opportun MUW allows students access to dual credit classes at no cost. MUW also allows students access to the library and study rooms and will work with MSM
Maybe	They are equally "safe"	8	10 More STEM classes ;Mor Their proposal is definite Community by giving us more access to their buildings.
Maybe	They are equally "safe"	7	10 More STEM classes ;More university classes;More AP classes;Residential setting;Independence;Opportunity to be with like-minded people;Leadership opportunities;
Yes	They are equally "safe"	7	2 Residential setting;Independence;Opportunity to be with like-minded people;The Arts;
No	MUW	10	8 More STEM classes ;The Arts;Opportunity to be with like-minded people;Independence;
Yes	They are equally "safe"	8	10 More STEM classes ;More university classes;Residential setting;Independence;Opportunity to be with like-minded people;Leadership opportunities;
No	MUW	6	10 Residential setting;Independence;Opportunity to be with like-minded people;The location;More university classes;
Maybe	MUW	5	1 Independence;Resident; The Mississippi State Un. The Mississippi University for Women (MUW) proposal aligns with the MSMS ideals by fostering a close-knit and inclusive community where students c
No	MUW	8	10 More STEM classes ;Resi.
Maybe	MUW	10	10 More STEM classes ;Mor I found that MSU does n I believe that MUW proposes a better set of ideals than MSU does in almost every way. This is, however, a low bar because of the funding MSMS and Iv
No	MUW	10	9 More university classes;More AP classes;Residential setting;Independence;Opportunity to be with like-minded people;The location;Leadership opportunities;More STEM classes ;
Maybe	MUW	7	7 More STEM classes ;More university classes;Residential setting;Independence;
Maybe	MUW	10	10 More STEM classes ;Residential setting;Independence;Opportunity to be with like-minded people;Leadership opportunities;
No	MUW	8	7 More STEM classes ;More university classes;Independence;Opportunity to be with like-minded people;More AP classes;
Yes	MUW	9	10 More STEM classes ;Mor The opportunity for new They're evident because they're already here at MUW.
Maybe	They are equally "safe"	9	9 More STEM classes ;Inde I can only recognize sch The MUW proposal contains the autonomy of the already existing MSMS and offers a similar expression of scholarship by taking university classes at M
Maybe	MUW	8	9 More STEM classes ;Inde it mainly appears that As noted previously, MUW has partnered with MSMS for a long time now and understands how to foster these values. MUW provides a number of gra
Yes	They are equally "safe"	8	10 Opportunity to be with ll They're not fostered--if Same as 12.
Yes	MSU	8	8 More STEM classes ;Mor There's not much merit. Of course, MUW will always promise us better facilities, etc. but who knows when that will eventually happen. Residential halls and other MSMS faciliti
Yes	They are equally "safe"	7	8 More STEM classes ;Opp MSU's proposal suggests: Scholarship is prioritized in the MUW proposal. Their proposal highlights advanced opportunities and facilities such as dual credit and enrollment in incr
Maybe	MUW	8	10 More STEM classes ;Inde I mean, you have better The MUW proposal doesn't directly address MSMS's ideals.
Maybe	MUW	10	4 Opportunity to be with like-minded people;More university classes;More STEM classes ;
Yes	MUW	8	10 More STEM classes ;Resi MSMS's ideals are not e Community- We remain at the W and with the buildings and faculty that has been here for 30+ years and we stay as one group of students (not combin
No	MUW	10	10 More STEM classes ;Mor The opportunity for new They're evident because they're already here at MUW.
No	MUW	8	10 More STEM classes ;Inde I mean, you have better The MUW proposal doesn't directly address MSMS's ideals.
No	MUW	10	10 More STEM classes ;Mor We'll have better and re There just adding on to what we already have, so I don't see how it doesn't already involve our ideals.
Maybe	They are equally "safe"	8	10 More STEM classes ;Mor We'll have better and re There just adding on to what we already have, so I don't see how it doesn't already involve our ideals.
Yes	They are equally "safe"	10	10 More STEM classes ;More university classes;More AP classes;Independence;Opportunity to be with like-minded people;Leadership opportunities;
Maybe	MUW	9	10 More university classes; They're not. We're allowed to maintain our community and the opportunities Columbus gives us (connection with alumni, Tales, mentorship, etc.)
No	MUW	10	10 More STEM classes ;Resi I honestly couldn't see h I've found such an amazing community with MUW that has had generations and generations of students built upon and for MUW to fight for our comm
No	They are equally "safe"	10	10 More STEM classes ;Mor Community is somewhat I am not sure.
No	MUW	10	10 More STEM classes ;More university classes;More AP classes;Residential setting;Independence;Opportunity to be with like-minded people;Leadership opportunities;
Yes	They are equally "safe"	8	10 More STEM classes ;Residential setting;Independence;Opportunity to be with like-minded people;
No	MUW	10	8 Residential setting;Inde For Scholarship; Both pr. The MUW proposal offers improved benefits compared to what we currently have. We would have more opportunities for research, although slightly fa
No	MUW	9	10 More STEM classes ;Opp Scholarship is slightly hig It preserves the community of MSMS but doesn't do much else.
Maybe	They are equally "safe"	8	9 More university classes; -- Don't Read --
Maybe	MUW	10	10 Opportunity to be with ll They really aren't. The cr Remaining at MUW would preserve the community MSMS has built throughout the years, maintain academic and creative integrity by retaining our ow
No	They are equally "safe"	9	9 More STEM classes ;More university classes;Residential setting;Independence;Opportunity to be with like-minded people;The Arts;Leadership opportunities;
Yes	They are equally "safe"	7	9 More university classes; The proposal for more re The idea of MSMS as an entity tied to its location and surrounding community is touched upon in the MUW proposal.
Maybe	MUW	7	8 More STEM classes ;Mor They are not evidenced very well in the MSU proposal
No	MUW	9	9 Residential setting;More university classes;Independence;More STEM classes ;Opportunity to be with like-minded people;Tales from the Crypt;

alkable distance. We can basically run our clubs and sports as students in service to each other. Our creativity here can flourish because our teachers understand that we need breaks and give us opportunities for us to develop creativity. As well as allowing us to think outside of the box without worrying about that with more financial support, MSMS will grow to be even better than it is now and that moving us is not the solution to our issues; rather, I believe that the move would create unforeseen and unforeseen horrors that could lead to MSMS not ever being the school it once was. MSMS's goal is not to be a normal

an thrive academically and socially. MUW places a strong emphasis on service, encouraging students to engage in service-learning opportunities that integrate academic knowledge with real-world impact. Creativity is reflected in the university's dedication to liberal arts and interdisciplinary education, which en

at academic and artistic opportunities for MSMS students already, and even more programs that intertwine with the local community in Columbus. These programs not only build community in MSMS, but they're often opportunities to service others as well. The MUW proposal, at the minimum, promises to m:  
eased course offerings, increased MSMS research opportunities through Jackson State University, the University of Mississippi, and the University of Southern Mississippi, a joint honors mentorship, certification, and more. MUW's plan is made with MSMS in mind.

ed with another school's students)Service - We retain our extracurriculars with more shared spaces to collaborate with other MSMS students.Creativity - We retain the students and creative environment that has flourished since MSMS's inception.Scholarship - We gain new academic buildings that are designate  
r much we try and give back to the community during events. There are many opportunities for students to express themselves here, with our Southern voices paper and other projects. And with the plans for MUW, our availability to resources for education and scholarship will only go up. Overall, MUW has help

rather from MSU, we would have MSU and MUW research. MUW gives us autonomy as a school, with gives us the chance to show these ideals as the school who idealizes them.I don't feel perfect about this proposal, but I spent 3 hours on the 12th question and cannot spend any more on this at this time.

courages students to think critically and innovatively. Additionally, scholarship is central to MUW's mission, as it provides a rigorous academic environment that promotes intellectual development, leadership, and research opportunities for students.

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## MSMS proposal

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**From** t.michael.dodson <t.michael.dodson@protonmail.com>

**Date** Tue 3/4/2025 3:11 PM

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

### External Email

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Dear Dr. Boone,

I wanted to give you some comments on the proposals for MSMS. I write this from my personal email to express my own opinion.

I have been an adjunct instructor with MSMS for the past 2 years as well as a an Assistant Professor at MUW. I am also very involved with these students as an mentor in their Mentorship program. I have mentored 4 students over the last few years (one continues with me right now) and currently mentor an additional three more. I am able to work with them to understand what is needed to enter the field of Biology as a medical student, researcher, or other parts of biology. The MUW biology department has a number of active and grant funded labs that have in the past, currently, and can continue to provide experiences to enrich the MSMS students. Our faculty also contains parents of precious and current MSMS students. We know these students.

My positions allow me to see just how the MSMS student situation is at MUW. They have a lot of freedom to walk downtown and get ou to do things. They have access to the RiverWalk and if they drive, Plymouth Bluff. They can use the local library downtown for its archives as well the state of the art MUW which also includes and archives. There is a bookstore and comic/game shop and restaurants and coffee shops within walking distance.

MUW also cares for MSMS. We have nurtured it through out Education department and collaborations which MSMS faculty can partake in. Dual enrollment is also successful.

One of my major concerns is that the special nurturing small environment will be lost moving to MSU. My MSMS students enjoy the ability to be intelligent and talk about nerdy things without having to interact with people who may bully them for being different. These students are special and combining the school with Starkville in anyway will diminish what it can achieve. It is doing so well at MUW so why change what is working? Let's make it work better at MUW.

Yes, we need better facilities at MSMS, but I implore you to ask the legislature to fund MSMS appropriately where it is. MUW has done more than what has been expected to help maintain the MSMS buildings. We have opened up so much space in many buildings. Our state was said to have a tax surplus, why not use it for a special school that provides opportunities that no other can in Mississippi.

Thank you for your time,  
Michael Dodson

March 4, 2025

Dr. Donna Boone  
Chief Academic Officer  
Mississippi Department of Education  
359 North West Street  
PO Box 771  
Jackson, MS 39205-0771

Dear Dr. Boone,

I am a proud graduate of the Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science, Class of 1999. A 5<sup>th</sup> generation Hattiesburger, I previously attended the Forrest County Agricultural High School. FCAHS was a wonderful school, but without MSMS, there is no way I would have subsequently been admitted to the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania. Moreover, when I arrived at PENN, MSMS had given me the confidence and the academic background to know that I was the equal of any student on that campus. This enabled me to excel, graduating magna cum laude with two bachelors in four years. I went on to have a successful career on Wall Street, where I did my best to represent my home state proudly.

I returned to Mississippi 10 years ago. Since then, I have started multiple businesses, become one of the largest investors in downtown Hattiesburg's revitalization, and enjoyed raising my own two children here. I believe I am the largest private donor in MSMS's history and have proudly served on the MSMS Foundation's Board for two decades. I do these things because 1) I am hyper aware of the debt I owe the school and state of Mississippi for my successes and 2) I hope one day one or both of my two children will follow in our family's tradition of attending MSMS. Side note – my brother and sister-in-law also attended MSMS.

Thank you for asking the question of what MSMS should be and where it should be located going forward. MSMS's operation budget has been cut to the bone since 2008, and its capital budget has been non-existent during that period. I have watched with dismay as the school has fallen into a state of disrepair. The facilities have been a barrier to recruiting students to the school despite the incredible academic performance MSMS continues to achieve. My hope is that this MDE process will bring some much-needed attention to how urgent a need the school has for an improved physical plant, and I read both proposals from MSU and MUW closely.

Let me say clearly – I believe MSMS should stay in Columbus on the MUW's campus.

MSU is a great university, and many of my classmates enjoyed the research opportunities they pursued there during high school. However, the proposal from MSU does not propose to put MSMS on MSU's campus. Isolating MSMSers on a new Starkville high school campus adjacent to MSU is the worst of both worlds. During the week, the culture and operations of Starkville Oktibbeha High School will inevitably degrade the high performance culture of MSMS. After

hours and on the weekends, MSMSers will be trapped in a remote location with no distractions, especially for the many students who do not have a means of transportation.

MUW has challenges. To the extent the Legislature intends to shut down its operations, I can understand the reluctance to invest the money that will be required for modern dormitories and academic buildings in Columbus. However, I believe that the most likely scenario is that MUW becomes a satellite campus of MSU eventually. Whether that happens or MUW remains independent, MSMS is already achieving the "opportunity for excellence" that its founders intended *despite* the substandard facilities it has been saddled with. MSMS does not need MSU's assistance, and it certainly does not need Starkville Oktibbeha High School's distractions, to improve what is already a top 10 high school in the country. I cannot for the life of me understand why you would risk destroying the kismet of MSMS's success by moving it and contaminating it with MSU or Starkville Oktibbeha High School DNA.

To be specific, there are at least three fundamental problems with MSU's proposal. 1) While a majority of the faculty will probably move to a new school 23 miles away, many will not. Losing just a small handful of these Hall of Fame educators would be devastating. 2) Students at MSMS can easily walk 10 minutes via sidewalk to quaint downtown Columbus for a coffee, a meal or shopping. This is a vital outlet for students under immense academic pressure. Equivalent amenities in Starkville will be two miles away via streets that are not designed for pedestrian access. I did not have a car at MSMS my junior year, and I doubt my mental health would have survived being trapped like this on campus over the weekend. 3) MSU's proposal estimates that the cost to build a new campus is \$85 million. MUW's proposal estimates that the cost to build a new residential facility would be \$35 million. Renovations to Fant and Peyton on MUW's campus should happen anyway, and I therefore think the budget for this approach should be considered even less than a "new build". Regardless, we have struggled for *years* to get an adequate operational budget even with our tremendous academic success. Where is the additional \$50 million in funding going to come from?

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on these proposals. I appreciate deeply the attention and focus MDE is placing on setting MSMS up for further success. If I can ever be of assistance, you can reach me at (917) 952-4262 or at [cedmonso@hotmail.com](mailto:cedmonso@hotmail.com).

Best,



Chad Edmonson  
Class of 1999

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## Concerning proposals for the future of MSMS

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**From** Ari Esters <aqesters@gmail.com>

**Date** Fri 2/28/2025 11:20 PM

**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.

To Donna Boone:

As an alumnus of MSMS and a Mississippi native, I'm very invested in its future. Concerning MSU's proposal, the collaborative ecosystem of MSU and SOCSO is very appealing, but the requested state funding of \$85M seems prohibitive and no line items are given for how the budget would be used. I prefer MSU's grand vision, but I'd be (pleasantly) surprised if this massive funding proposal were met. There are multiple funding levels implied in MUW's proposal, which I summarize below:

- (A) Up to \$2.4 million --> Offsetting the full cost of hosting MSMS on MUW campus
- (B) \$3.8 million additional funding --> Bringing MSMS funding to the level of schools in the states of AR, AL, and LA (\$16k per student, assuming 240 students)
- (C) \$35 million --> A new residential facility to house 400 students

### My thoughts

Realistically, I would like to see one of MUW's funding requests fulfilled, at least \$3.8 million (Option B above). If the state cannot directly meet any of the options listed above, there may be other ways to incentivize the state to provide more funding. Gov. Tate Reeves is interested in strengthening Mississippi's economy, infrastructure, and workforce, as shown by the government's \$110M statewide investment in 2024. Yet, some of our best talent leaves the state after graduating from MSMS, thus weakening our potential workforce. To increase talent retention, funding could be provided on the condition of establishing a pipeline program (e.g., piping students from MSMS to a MS college/university) or a similar initiative that tries to keep our brightest students in MS. Other public and private initiatives across the country have done similar things to incentivize workforce migration to rural areas like the Midwest. I am not an expert in education, and the details would have to be worked out. However, if this option is considered seriously, it could be a good way to persuade the state to provide more funding to MSMS in a way that's mutually beneficial for both MSMS and Mississippi.

Best,

Ari Esters

MSMS Class of 2011

Stanford University, Class of 2015

UIUC, Class of 2018

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**MSMS - Comments on Proposals**

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**From** Anna Evans <annamccollumevans@gmail.com>

**Date** Tue 3/4/2025 9:48 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,

I hold gratitude for anyone who attempts to help MSMS, an institution that has had innumerable positive trickle down effects on my life. By the same token, I implore your office to investigate the needs and desires of the school itself — of the faculty, staff, and students — and have an independent party draft a third proposal based upon those findings and the resources at hand.

I personally worry that the spirit of MSMS — specifically the intimacy that nurtures trust, learning, and the formation of lifelong friendships — will suffer from the sharing of resources implicated in MSU's proposal. This move does not appear to hold the best interests of MSMS, the state's crown-jewel high school, at heart. On the contrary, the MSU proposal likely benefits SOCSO at the expense of MSMS. It's for this reason that I favor MUW's proposal in the case a third option cannot be obtained.

Thank you for considering my thoughts, and please reach out if I can help you with this effort in any way.

Sincerely,

Anna McCollum Evans  
Class of 2012

**MSMS**

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**From** elaine evans <elainecpa1@yahoo.com>  
**Date** Fri 2/28/2025 5:00 PM  
**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,

As an alum of both MUW and MSU, I love both schools and their uniqueness!!! Each offer education for our students in a different setting and through different environments.

Many parents have told me that they would not want their high school student attending their junior and senior years on the campus of MSU! That is understandable given the size of the MSU campus compared to MUW, and the lack of control of students on the MSU campus.

I worked and taught on MUW campus for over forty years and have witnessed the operations of MSMS. The students have a much more "controlled" environment and that makes for a safer campus and a more conducive learning environment!

As the recent proposal stated, MUW has operated this school on a shoe string with only a fraction of the funding per student as compared to other states. Yes! A new dormitory and upgraded facilities are badly needed. Even with that, the MUW's proposal is about 50 millions less than relocating to MSU.

MUW has a tried and tested program that produces students who get into Ivy League colleges and become National Merit finalist! "If the wheel isn't broken, why fix it" so the saying goes!

Please give MUW the needed funding and leave the MSMS at MUW!

Sincerely,

Elaine L. Evans, CPA, Ed.D  
Retired Accounting Professor

Sent from my iPhone

# FINN LAW FIRM, PLLC

227 FIRST STREET • CLARKSDALE, MISSISSIPPI • 38614-0760  
TELEPHONE NUMBER (662) 820-6011

CHRISTOPHER M. FINN  
[chrismfinn.cf@gmail.com](mailto:chrismfinn.cf@gmail.com)

REPLY TO:  
227 FIRST STREET  
CLARKSDALE, MS 38614-0760

March 4, 2025

VIA EMAIL: [secondaryeducation@mdek12.org](mailto:secondaryeducation@mdek12.org)

Dr. Donna Boone  
Chief Academic Officer  
Mississippi Department of Education

*RE: Comments on the MUW and MSU proposals for the MSMS*

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am a 1995 graduate of the Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science. Subsequently, earned a B.A. and M.Ed. from Delta State University and J.D. from the University of Mississippi. Since then I have spent my entire career practicing law in the Mississippi Delta all while keeping apprised of the state of MSMS. During my time as a student at MSMS (during the early years of its existence), the campus and MSMS facilities were in good condition. The school primarily utilized Hooper Science Hall (academic building), Peyton and Fant Dormitories, and the Old Pohl Recreation Center as a student activities center. Various other facilities were shared with MUW such as the Student Union, cafeteria, library and Parkinson Auditorium.

Both the MUW and MSU plans address items such as parking, campus healthcare, human resources, fiscal officers, etc. While these are necessary, I'm sure each plan will adequately provide for these items. These are not the most important issues.

The academic aspect is of importance. But one must remember this is a high school. It is a high school that has created itself a top notch reputation based upon its own faculty teaching its students. The MSMS education must stand alone on teaching by its own outstanding faculty no matter where it is located. Even with advanced offerings MSMS students still have to spend a large portion of their classload meeting Mississippi's high school graduation requirements. Dual-enrollment and access to college classes may be nice but that is a small portion of what makes MSMS great.

If you are familiar with the MUW campus, Hooper, Peyton, Fant and the Old Pohl Recreation Center occupy the heart of the campus. The buildings are situated among beautiful green lawns that provided a great campus life experience. The Old Pohl gym was utilized solely by MSMS students and was a center of social life. At that time, Peyton and Fant dorms were very nice older dorms with large rooms, high ceilings and large windows. They had very adequate common space for socialization. First Peyton was lost as a result of a severe storm. Later, Fant was closed due to maintenance issues. I don't know when but the Old Pohl Recreation Center was closed. The

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students were moved to the less adequate dorms of Frazer and Goen Halls. The residential life aspects of MSMS were not adequately funded and that part of the school has suffered. However, Hooper Science Hall remains an adequate space and has even had some renovations over the years. Other campus buildings have been renovated to add additional classroom space. The current inadequacies at MSMS revolve completely around the dormitories and residential life.

The MUW proposal for the future of MSMS recognizes the need for upgraded dorms. While I am certain the faculty could provide a wish list in regard to the academic facilities, the dormitory situation is of dire importance. MUW has proposed that Peyton and Fant could be available for renovations or other space could be provided for new construction. Those details can be worked out, but whatever solution is chosen; there will need to be a large sum of money from the Legislature. I would personally lean toward renovation of Peyton and Fant. They are great old buildings centrally located on campus that would serve the purpose well with an adequate renovation. However, they do have limitations in their size for future proposed expansion of the student body of MSMS. I would personally add a restoration of the Old Pohl Recreation Center as an MSMS only facility as a great need for the future.

The MUW campus, as a relatively small and enclosed space, has provided an excellent location for MSMS. MSMS students have adequate space to roam freely while still in a safe controlled environment. Taking a blanket out onto the campus lawns to read, study and socialize or games of frisbee were common during my time as a student. Leaving campus and access to the City of Columbus is limited for the safety of students. MSMS students spend a tremendous amount of time together on campus. Unlike regular day schools, MSMS must take into consideration the 24/7 needs of its students. The quality of residential life cannot be ignored in considering student morale and the future success of MSMS.

The MSU proposal while impressive upon first glance has many deficiencies. First, in no way is it a plan for a partnership with MSU. It is a plan to give the MSMS to SOCS. MSMS should absolutely continue as a stand alone school and to attach it to a regular high school would water down what has made it a great institution. Second, the location and renderings for the campus layout are absolutely inadequate for MSMS. I have been to the location and familiarized myself with the lay of the land. It is an isolated location that is too far from the actual MSU campus. It is largely cut off from the MSU campus by a residential neighborhood. The proximity is not close enough for MSMS students to actually gain any daily benefit from MSU facilities. No competent and reasonable MSMS administration is going to allow its teenage high school students to roam freely that distance to the MSU campus or into the City of Starkville. MSMS students will be limited to their actual campus with little access to MSU or the City of Starkville. The campus proposal while adequate for a regular

# **FINN LAW FIRM**

A PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION

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day school would be a nightmare for a residential school. The proposed campus layout is very cramped for space and provides limited greenspace. MSMS students do not go home at the end of the day and enjoy their lawn at home or the amenities of the town. All of their needs must be provided for on this campus. The students would be isolated to a much smaller and inadequate space. This campus is planned by a school district that may be great at operating regular day schools, but it does not operate 24/7 residential schools. This campus proposal would be disastrous for residential life and result in low student morale. This is not a plan for success for a residential high school.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter.

Very truly yours,

**FINN LAW FIRM, PLLC**

**/s/ Christopher M. Finn**

Christopher M. Finn

cc: Nora Miller, MUW President

VIA EMAIL: [nrmiller@muw.edu](mailto:nrmiller@muw.edu)

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## Comments on Recommendation for Location of MSMS

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**From** Jay Fisher <jfisher@lowndescountymms.com>

**Date** Tue 3/4/2025 11:31 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.

Dr. Boone,

I wanted to provide my input to the public comment on the potential future location of the Mississippi School for Math and Science (MSMS).

Bottom Line: Failure of the Ms. Department of Education (MDE) to properly fund adequate facilities and to provide sustained funding levels allowing for the maximum number of students over the past 20-plus years is no justification for moving the school from its present location.

How the MDE could possibly fault MUW or the local community that supports MSMS for failure to provide a good environment and facilities for MSMS is regrettable and unfortunate.

All other public school districts in the state need only to appeal to their local ad-valorem tax-paying citizens for capital improvements and increased funding to support those districts.

MSMS doesn't have the ability to locally fund upgrades to facilities; they rely on the oversight and fiscal responsibility of MDE and their advocacy to the Legislature to appropriately fund the school and its facilities. While other school districts annually are allowed to ask for up to 7% increases without any approval, MSMS has not been the beneficiary of those same annual increases from MDE and to my knowledge, there have been no major capital expenditures or new facilities added to MSM since its founding.

If there is any fault in the failure to provide adequate and modern upgrades and new facilities to MSMS, MDE has nobody to blame but itself for not providing the current award-winning, and highly-successful school with that advocacy and funding levels from the Legislature.

Using a potential state-provided infusion of capital to the SOCS D and potential source of funds for a new high school while for years ignoring pleas from multiple MSMS leaders and stakeholders to upgrade facilities is at minimum bad-faith.

Additionally, the proposals from both institutions clearly show that the best use of funds would be to keep the school in its current location and spend less capital to create new housing and classroom instruction areas.

Finally, while there are no points assigned to the value of co-housing the school with a smaller, more intimate campus setting, from the depictions that I saw of the MSU proposal would co-locate the school with the current partnership school and the proposed new SOCS D high-school and geographically separated from the main MSU campus. I believe there is value in keeping MSMS co-located within the heart of MUW and interacting with other college students and not having them co-located with another high-school where they won't be seen as a distinct separate student, but just another high-school student who happens to live on campus and takes special classes.

As a former Air Force senior leader and retired Colonel at Columbus Air Force Base, I saw first-hand multiple senior leaders at the base who took advantage of the opportunity to send their children to MSMS for the award-winning educational experience that their children would be exposed to. Moving the school away from Columbus could damage the relationship with Columbus Air Force Base and prevent some otherwise outstanding students from possibly enrolling in the school.

I look forward to your recommendation to keep MSMS in Columbus and to finally commit to the capital investments required and the annual funding levels to bring it up to the standard that all agree is long overdue and vital to continue the outstanding performance of this school.

James L. Fisher, Colonel (retired)



**James L. Fisher**  
Lowndes County Administrator  
1121 Main Street  
P.O. Box 1364  
Columbus, MS 39703  
662-329-5896  
662-251-1269 Cell

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## Feedback on MSMS proposals

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From Fitts, Lacey <Lfitts@colled.msstate.edu>

Date Thu 2/27/2025 12:39 PM

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.

Dr. Boone,

Hello. My name is Lacey Fitts and I am a faculty member in the Department of Teacher Education and Leadership at MSU. Everything that I do professionally is out of a love for the students of MS and a desire for all Mississippi students to have the best possible education, especially in the STEM fields. As a current MSU faculty member and former student of MSMS (many years ago), I wanted to weigh in on the proposals for moving or keeping MSMS where it is. I love Mississippi State University; my husband and I are class of '98 graduates (him in Agronomy, me in Chemistry). My grandfather earned his Ag Ed degree from MSU in 1950 after returning from WWII on the GI bill. All three of my daughters are MSU bulldogs as well. I know that MSU would do a great job with this as they do with everything else. **Even so, let me be very clear that I am a firm proponent of keeping MSMS on the campus of MUW.**

That said, here are some of the reasons you should absolutely not move MSMS to the MSU campus. The first is a **liability issue** of housing minors. The campus of MUW is calm and quiet with few people. It is also completely surrounded by a gate with access extremely limited. There is no way that students can interact with the outside world except by leaving campus, a process that is regulated. Housing minors on the campus of MSU would be detrimental to their safety, introduce a wide range of distractions, and I know several families of bright students who would not have sent their children to MSMS if it had been at State. There is very little trouble that 16-year-olds can get into on the campus of the W. There is no depth to the opportunities for potentially illegal and dangerous activities if they were housed at MSU with adult students engaging in adult activities. I know that the supervision rules would remain in place, but supervising students on a huge public university campus is very different from supervising them in a place like the W.

Second, **the MSU proposal is expensive.** It requires the input of \$85 million from the state of Mississippi's resources to fund. It is my understanding that the beautiful, but currently unsafe, residential facilities of Fant and Peyton Hall on the MUW campus would require far less than that to restore to their original glory. Those buildings should be restored simply for their historical significance, but it also makes sense to do so in light of the influx of money that would be needed to move and establish a new campus.

Third, **MSMS has a character of its own** that would be completely lost by lumping it in with Starkville high school, a school that would be sharing resources with and overpowering the character of MSMS. Starkville high is a large public school with very different traditions, student population, coursework, interests, mottos, logos, etc. The proposal to house MSMS on a shared campus with a new Starkville high feels like an artificial attempt to wrangle funds for a new Starkville high school. They may very well need a new building, but that's a completely separate issue from the future of MSMS. I am concerned

that the identity of MSMS would be completely lost in the new combined campus. MSMS doesn't need any of the things in the MSU proposal. It **just needs money** to repair the existing facilities. Reading through the way that so many services would be combined with Starkville high school just makes no sense. Changing the name to MSMS:E is also strange, unlike every other state's math and science schools, and diminishes the character.

My last concerns are minor, but not completely insignificant points. The proposed location has no parking. There is designated parking in the plan, it's just not adjacent to the campus. In a 7A school with hundreds of drivers, it looks like we would be asking them to park off site, maybe at the research park? Then take the shuttle bus? Someone pointed out to me, and I can't unsee it, that the proposed Starkville high school is laid out in the shape of a swastika, an unfortunate design decision that cannot be laid down in stone for posterity.

***Make the financially sound decision to keep MSMS where it is. Make the wise decision to keep our brightest young people safe on a smaller, isolated campus. Make the reasonable decision to keep doing what's working at MSMS to make it one of the top high schools in the nation. Make the decision that honors the history of one of our smaller state universities and invest in their facilities rather than brashly building new ones.***

These are my thoughts and opinions and do not reflect those of my department, my employer, or anyone else except me.

Thank you,

**Lacey S. Fitts**

*Assistant Professor of Science Education*

349 Allen Hall

P.O. Box 9705

Mississippi State, MS 39762

P: 662.325.2587

**teal.msstate.edu**

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Comments regarding MDE's RFP to MUW & MSU to address the future of MSMS

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From Stephanie Floyd <stephanie.floyd.39208@gmail.com>

Date Tue 3/4/2025 3:55 PM

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.

TO: Dr. Donna Boone, Chief Academic Officer, Mississippi Department of Education  
[secondaryeducation@mdek12.org](mailto:secondaryeducation@mdek12.org)

DATE: March 4, 2025

RE: Comments regarding MDE's RFP to MUW & MSU to address the future of MSMS

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I am writing to provide comment regarding the RFPs issued to Mississippi University for Women (MUW or The W) and Mississippi State University (MSU) regarding the future of the Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science (MSMS), and I want to thank MDE for the opportunity for me and others to do so. I hope you will read and reflect on what all of the comments submitted have to convey.

Susan Elizabeth Phillips said "Anything worth having is worth fighting for" – and that's what I want to convey to you – MSMS is worth having and The W is fighting in order to keep MSMS on its campus, where it has lived and thrived for the last 38 years. A fight which many think is unnecessary. The President of the Lowndes County Board of Supervisors (Trip Hairston) keeps repeating this phrase: "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." That's so true. There is nothing wrong with MSMS. I do not believe there is any sound reason for MSMS to move to Starkville or any other location in order to survive and thrive.

**I firmly believe that MDE should leave MSMS on The W campus, and:**

- Adequately address MSMS's needs for funding – for residential housing, staffing, academic offerings, etc., including its fair share of Mississippi's Education Enhancement Funds
- Be fiscally responsible. With adequate, reasonable funding and intentional planning, the State of Mississippi will save money by investing in the current infrastructure of MSMS on The W campus. Both institutions are positioned well for growth and have an excellent track record of producing high-quality, exceptionally educated Mississippi students.
- Recognize that the "workforce development" hot-topic issue to be addressed by schools at all levels is already being addressed at MSMS
- Recognize the opportunities that MSMS students have to get a leg up to obtain college credits at no cost from The W
  - MSMS students have the opportunity to attend dual credit classes at The W for college credit at no cost while attending MSMS, and
  - MSMS students have the opportunity to remain at The W and obtain a college degree at no cost following their graduation from MSMS – this is a win/win for Mississippi and the enrollment cliff issue the nation is facing
- Recognize this independent school for what it is – a high performing high school, which happens to be a residential school that bridges the student's experience from their home school throughout their time at MSMS, and that prepares Mississippi's brightest for both their college experience and their professional future

**I want to be clear and sum this up succinctly, I do not believe that MSMS should be relocated at all, nor should it be closed.** The needs of MSMS should be met by MDE and the legislature so that they can continue to provide top notch education for Mississippi's brightest and most promising students. I believe that the response submitted by MUW to MDE's RFP regarding the future of MSMS more than adequately demonstrates the many reasons that MSMS is an integral part of The W and should be allowed to remain at its current location.

I have included below information which I believe is beneficial that the SBE subcommittee should consider along with my comments during its review of the RFP responses and various comments it will receive.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Floyd, MUW Class of 1980

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Dr. Boone, I implore you to reflect on your background as an educator and all the many roles you have served during your 30+ years in the education field. It is because of your many years of experience that I believe you and the members of the SBE subcommittee, as well as the full SBE board, should be asking yourselves these questions, among others:

- How/why are we here?
- What did MSMS do wrong, if anything?
- Is this situation politically motivated?
- Why were The W and MSU the only universities asked to submit a response to MDE's RFP? If MDE's intent and purpose has not already been decided to move MSMS – why weren't all universities invited to respond in order to at least give the appearance of a fair and impartial process?
- Did this all become a problem for MDE when MSMS was asked to submit its "wish list" of what it needed in preparation of the appropriations "ask" to the 2024 Mississippi Legislature?
  - Why was it a surprise that the figure that MSMS submitted was so high?
    - Well, ask yourself, was it unreasonable?
    - Has MSMS been receiving its fair share as compared to the other specialty schools under the MDE oversight - the Mississippi School for the Arts, or the Mississippi Schools for the Blind and Deaf (non-specialized equipment needs aside)?
- Why does anyone think that MSMS being located on The W campus is stifling their academic offerings or physical campus growth?
- Why does anyone think that MSMS students don't have opportunities to participate in sports (or other interscholastic extracurricular activities)? That statement is blatantly false and obviously has been made by people that don't have a clue what student life at MSMS has to offer.
- Why does MSMS have to be more focused on "workforce development?"
- Why is relocating MSMS to Starkville necessary in order for "many more students to experience innovative basic and applied research in the fields of mathematics, science, engineering, social sciences and more?" There is already a long-standing partnership between MSMS and MSU since 2020.
- Why is MSU involved this process? What is their role with MSMS going forward? Looking at MSU's response to the RFP, isn't it really the Oktibbeha County School District that will be receiving MSMS on its campus and putting it under its district umbrella (removing it from direct supervision by MDE), while consolidating with Starkville School District?
- Why does MSMS need to be relocated and/or merged with SOCS D?
  - Allowing SOCS D students to participate in classes that should only be solely for MSMS students – wouldn't that somehow affect the status of MSMS – wouldn't that cause the statistics to show a decline in student scores and rankings?
  - I believe that SOCS D should be ranked on their own merit – pass or fail – let the chips fall where they may. SOCS D should not be allowed to "absorb" MSMS into its fold in order to

better themselves or to make the expense of new facilities to their district more palatable to them, to MDE, to the state legislature, or even to the Oktibbeha County taxpayers.

## **HOW DID WE GET TO WHERE WE ARE NOW? WHAT IS PROMPTING A MSMS MOVE?**

In a March 13, 2024, [article](#) in *Mississippi Today*, Senator Dennis DeBar said his 2024 bill (SB2715) was originally meant to “address concerns about MSMS.” Senator DeBar went on to say “MSMS is dealing with deteriorating infrastructure and has requested about \$90 million to renovate the dorms and other facilities. A grant agreement between MUW and the Mississippi Department of Education stipulates that MSMS is to ‘provide the major repair and renovation funds’ for its facilities, not MUW. But the university also plays a role in ‘routine’ maintenance of MSMS.”

- MSMS should not have to be moved/relocated to any other site in order to rectify any budgetary issues and/or concerns.
- These are concerns that should have been addressed previously; but, now must be addressed by MDE and the legislature in the annual appropriations process, and provide adequate funding for MSMS which is long overdue.
- Moving or relocating MSMS would not come without a cost to the state of Mississippi and the taxpayers – doing so would not be the most cost-effective solution to any issues.

Let’s reflect back on SB2715 in 2024, which called for MSMS to be relocated to MSU, and stated, in pertinent part, as follows:

### **Section 1: . . .**

**\* \* \***

(3) Beginning July 1, 2024, the State Board of Education shall develop a plan relating to the closing of the school’s campus located at the Mississippi University for Women, and the reopening, the operation and the funding of the school as it is moved to the campus of Mississippi State University. Such plan shall be presented to the Legislature during the 2025 Regular Session and shall include an equitable and reasonable plan for student recruitment without regard to race, creed or color. **By the 2026-2027 school year, the Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science shall be established on the campus of Mississippi State University.** The State Board of Education shall collaborate with the Board of Trustees of the Institutions of Higher Learning to facilitate the provisions of this subsection.

(4) The purpose of the school shall be to educate the gifted and talented students of the state, and its curriculum and admissions policies shall reflect such purpose.

(5) The State Board of Education shall prepare the annual budget for the school.

(emphasis added) **THAT BILL DIED IN THE SENATE ON MARCH 15, 2024, and rightly so!** There is no “need” to relocate MSMS – it “needs” no oversight or resources that can’t be offered and provided to them at their current location.

## **LOCAL LEADERS SUPPORT MSMS REMAINING IN COLUMBUS**

In a February 15 [article](#) in *The Dispatch*, the City of Columbus and the Lowndes County Board of Supervisors stand behind and support The W’s fight to keep MSMS in Columbus, for all the right reasons. “The Lowndes County Board of Supervisors donated [over] \$1 million to that campus to help get these buildings ready for these kids,” said Columbus Mayor Keith Gaskin. Gaskin said MSMS has become a part of MUW and Columbus. “I can’t even imagine an MUW or MSMS not existing in Columbus,” Gaskin said. “It is hard as I try to think about MUW merging or MSMS being relocated to another area. I can’t I can’t [*sic?*] wrap my brain around that. That’s how important both of those institutions are to this city. It makes no sense.”

- Area legislators stand behind and support keeping MSMS at its current location, and to adequately fund it, per a [March 1 article](#) in *The Dispatch*:

- "I think that it's a money grab for the (Starkville-Oktibbeha Consolidated School District)," **District 39 Rep. Dana McLean, R-Columbus**, told *The Dispatch* on Friday. "They're saying it's for MSMS, but really it's to make a bigger and better school district for them in Starkville." McLean is hopeful the House has no appetite for a relocation, especially due to the plan of using state funds for facilities used by SOCSO. MSMS is funded by the legislature through the Mississippi Department of Education rather than by ad valorem tax revenue like SOCSO and every other school district in the state. "I'm very hopeful that my colleagues would be good stewards of taxpayer money and see that their constituents all over the state would be indirectly contributing toward a school district that is not in their district," she said. "It would be like the taxpayers in Lowndes or Columbus sending money to a Gulf Coast school district."

- **District 37 Rep. Andy Boyd, R-Columbus** said, after years of underfunding MSMS, the state has a responsibility to address the school's needs, especially when it has been so successful. The MSMS Class of 2023 accepted \$8.2 million in scholarships and included 15 National Merit semifinalists. "We should be talking about MSMS and their funding, which has not been enough forever. ... The school itself ... is not broken," he said. "I think we're responsible for taking care of what we've got instead of leaving it vacant or moving on to something new."

- **District 41 Rep. Kabir Karriem, D-Columbus**, told *The Dispatch* he is disappointed relocating MSMS is even a conversation. "How are you just going to take an asset out of one community and put it in another community for the benefit of that community?" he said. "We don't do stuff like that, especially when we're supposed to be partners in economic development. We have a regional approach in economic development, and you don't start doing that because that can infringe on other partnerships." "We need to send a clear message to these committee chairs – to the leadership at the capitol – that Columbus and Lowndes County are united," he said. "We want The W to stay put, and we want MSMS to stay put on The W's campus. Don't go infringing on our assets. Respect our request when we ask for the resources that they need to be vibrant institutions in our community."

- **District 17 Sen. Chuck Younger, R-Lowndes County**, said there doesn't seem to be any appetite for relocation on the Senate side. But he agreed funding for MSMS from MDE is an ongoing concern. "MSMS has never been funded correctly, nor has MUW, and what little bit of funding that MUW has been getting, they have been sharing and trying to help out MSMS as much as possible," he said. Younger suggested transferring property on The W campus to MSMS as a way to ensure the school remains a permanent part of the community. "If they're going to do that dorm for them, they ought to give them the property," he said. "Put some property in their name so it will be an anchor in Columbus and on the MUW campus."

## **MISSISSIPPI UNIVERSITY FOR WOMEN SUPPORTS MSMS REMAINING IN COLUMBUS**

- We all know the history that established MSMS on The W's campus in 1987 as a residential school for eleventh and twelfth grade high school students and that, like all other public schools in Mississippi, it is

governed under the umbrella of MDE. MSMS is a member of the National Consortium for Secondary STEM schools (NCSSSS), and, at its founding, became the fourth such school to exist in the nation.

The authors of that legislation purposely placed this residence school on the campus of The W. While the committee identified The W in Columbus as a practical location for the school, the size of The W and the City of Columbus have been lauded as the perfect fit for MSMS students to acclimate to living away from home and adjusting to college life.

The W was selected based on their commitment to gifted education, their passion for the project, and their success in partnering with Governor's School. On September 6, 1988, 136 young Mississippians from across the state became the inaugural class at MSMS. Darick Gayden, a member of the class stated, "Here we won't be following the future—the future will be following us." From that point forward, MSMS has remained a pioneer in the field of gifted education and STEM curriculum.

The W has and continues to help to nurture and foster MSMS in all the years since inception.

- The W has always worked with MSMS and supported the students with exclusive use of six facilities for housing, academics, and administration for MSMS students. All MSMS and W students share the cafeteria, library, health center, and post office, and MSMS student athletes use the same facilities used by W student athletes.
- The W has also provided support via their own personnel – having long served MSMS by handling administrative and financial services and investing in The W's infrastructure for MSMS.

However, The W should not have to bear the weight of the responsibility to provide funds to MSMS to do what they should be responsible for (and would be held to be responsible for if they fell under any specific "school district" in Mississippi).

In its RFP response, The W identified spaces on its campus which could offer additional residential and classroom space for MSMS, for which the cost of renovations/construction would be significantly less (anywhere from \$25M to \$50M less) than proposed new facilities at any other location. In a March 3 article in *The Dispatch*, quoting from a letter MUW President wrote to alums, "Both institutions are positioned well for growth and have an excellent track record of producing high-quality, exceptionally educated Mississippi students," Miller wrote. "Funding for MSMS ultimately comes from the Mississippi Legislature. We are advocating through every available channel for funding to support their growth on our campus." And Mayor Keith Gaskin, told *The Dispatch* he "can't even imagine" MSMS being located anywhere other than The W. "My concern about that thinking is that The W already has buildings that need to be refurbished and repurposed. I stand by my strong opinion and endorsement of The W," he said. "It is the only university in Mississippi that is in the best position to house and continue to nurture MSMS."

Who let MSMS down when it comes to taking care of their needs over the last 37 years? I'd bet the blame could equally be placed on the shoulders of MDE and the legislature, and The W has done what it could to help support the school out of its own pockets – The W does what it always does with its legislative appropriations – The W does more while being given less – and, although being given less, it has continued to share what it was given in order to help provide for MSMS. As stated in the RFP response submitted by The W: "The partnership between MSMS and MUW is a proven success. The decision to keep MSMS at MUW rather than start over in another location is both fiscally responsible and academically sound."

It should be noted that while there has been a long-standing partnership between MSMS and MSU for "research" – it is not the only research university in Mississippi. The W has been working with Ole Miss (which likely includes the medical school at UMMC in Jackson), Jackson State University, and the

University of Southern Mississippi for future partnerships with MSMS to expand research opportunities and offer additional mentorships.

The Mississippi School of Mathematics and Science received \$725,000 from the state for FY 2024 Appropriations (Education Enhancement Fund) (\$0 from Capital Expense Fund HB1823 2024 RS), and spends roughly \$23,616 per student – which is significantly less than what its counterparts in other states received through the legislature in 2024:

- The Alabama School for Math and Science, received \$9.9 million from the state and spends roughly \$38,500 per student.
- The Arkansas School for Mathematics, Sciences and the Arts received \$13.2 million or about \$53,041 per student.
- The Louisiana School for Math, Science and the Arts received \$9.9 million payable for general obligation bonds in 2024

MSMS is projected to receive approximately \$1,131,000 for FY 2025 appropriations, an amount which is likely nowhere near the amount that was requested. In fiscal year 2025, the base student funding amount in Mississippi is \$6,695. If you multiply that number by the 250 students at MSMS, the resulting total is \$1,673.750 – is MSMS receiving their full allotted share of the “base student funding” state money like all other state-supported schools in Mississippi?

Here are recent budget comparisons between MSMS and like schools in the surrounding states:



### **MSMS HAS PROVEN ITS VALUE TO MISSISSIPPI YEAR AFTER YEAR**

- **Enhances collective prosperity.** MSMS provides innovative residential learning experiences and leadership development, so that gifted and talented students reach their potential and overall state prosperity is expanded.
- **Ensures the future economy.** Through forward-thinking STEM programs, such as its Engineering and Entrepreneurship Programs, MSMS is building a pipeline for the state’s top students to meet the workforce needs of tomorrow.
- **Promotes opportunity regardless of zip code.** By generating high-quality teacher development and outreach programs, MSMS improves STEM interest among elementary, middle, and high school students across the state.
- **A history of success.** Successes like the national recognitions, record numbers of students scoring in the top 2% nationally on the ACT, and several students annually named National Merit Semifinalists inspire us to advocate for this special school that is impacting the future of our great state.

The many accolades that MSMS and its students have received and continue to receive are evidence of their success, and here are some of the reported accolades:

- For decades MSMS has consistently ranked as one of the nation’s best public schools by Niche. (To compile the rankings, Niche looks at data from the U.S. Department of Education as well as test scores, teacher-student ratio, graduation rates, college data and ratings collected from Niche users.)
  - For the second year in a row, MSMS has been ranked among the top public high schools in the nation by Niche - ranked the sixth Best Public School in the United States out of 18,841 public schools and the MSMS faculty were ranked No. 1 for the second year in a row among 18,504 public high schools. It is the second year in a row for MSMS to be named among the top 10.
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curious student can accomplish when they are truly challenged by a real-world learning environment. I'm excited to have her as our state's standard-bearer in the national contest."

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**Re: Comments regarding MDE's RFP to MUW & MSU to address the future of MSMS**

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**From** Stephanie Floyd <stephanie.floyd.39208@gmail.com>

**Date** Tue 3/4/2025 4:19 PM

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

 1 attachment (666 KB)

MSMS RFP Proposal - comments submitted to Dr Boone 03-04-25.docx;

**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.

Dr. Boone,

-  
I apologize that the entirety of my email message to you appears in underline – it was not that way before I hit SEND.

-  
For your convenience, I have attached my WORD document where I created my response before emailing it to you.

-  
Sincerely,

-  
Stephanie Floyd

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**From:** Stephanie Floyd <stephanie.floyd.39208@gmail.com>

**Date:** Tuesday, March 4, 2025 at 3:55 PM

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

**Subject:** Comments regarding MDE's RFP to MUW & MSU to address the future of MSMS

**TO:** Dr. Donna Boone, Chief Academic Officer, Mississippi Department of Education  
[secondaryeducation@mdek12.org](mailto:secondaryeducation@mdek12.org)

**DATE:** March 4, 2025

**RE:** Comments regarding MDE's RFP to MUW & MSU to address the future of MSMS

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-  
I am writing to provide comment regarding the RFPs issued to Mississippi University for Women (MUW or The W) and Mississippi State University (MSU) regarding the future of the Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science (MSMS), and I want to thank MDE for the opportunity for me and others to do so. I hope you will read and reflect on what all of the comments submitted have to convey.

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Susan Elizabeth Phillips said "Anything worth having is worth fighting for" – and that's what I want to convey to you – MSMS is worth having and The W is fighting in order to keep MSMS on its campus, where it has lived and thrived for the last 38 years. A fight which many think is unnecessary. The President of the Lowndes County Board of Supervisors (Trip Hairston) keeps repeating this phrase: "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." That's so true.

There is nothing wrong with MSMS. I do not believe there is any sound reason for MSMS to move to Starkville or any other location in order to survive and thrive.

**I firmly believe that MDE should leave MSMS on The W campus, and:**

- Adequately address MSMS's needs for funding – for residential housing, staffing, academic offerings, etc., including its fair share of Mississippi's Education Enhancement Funds
- Be fiscally responsible. With adequate, reasonable funding and intentional planning, the State of Mississippi will save money by investing in the current infrastructure of MSMS on The W campus. Both institutions are positioned well for growth and have an excellent track record of producing high-quality, exceptionally educated Mississippi students.
- Recognize that the "workforce development" hot-topic issue to be addressed by schools at all levels is already being addressed at MSMS
- Recognize the opportunities that MSMS students have to get a leg up to obtain college credits at no cost from The W
  - MSMS students have the opportunity to attend dual credit classes at The W for college credit at no cost while attending MSMS, and
  - MSMS students have the opportunity to remain at The W and obtain a college degree at no cost following their graduation from MSMS – this is a win/win for Mississippi and the enrollment cliff issue the nation is facing
- Recognize this independent school for what it is – a high performing high school, which happens to be a residential school that bridges the student's experience from their home school throughout their time at MSMS, and that prepares Mississippi's brightest for both their college experience and their professional future

**I want to be clear and sum this up succinctly, I do not believe that MSMS should be relocated at all, nor should it be closed.** The needs of MSMS should be met by MDE and the legislature so that they can continue to provide top notch education for Mississippi's brightest and most promising students. I believe that the response submitted by MUW to MDE's RFP regarding the future of MSMS more than adequately demonstrates the many reasons that MSMS is an integral part of The W and should be allowed to remain at its current location.

I have included below information which I believe is beneficial that the SBE subcommittee should consider along with my comments during its review of the RFP responses and various comments it will receive.

Sincerely,  
Stephanie Floyd, MUW Class of 1980

Dr. Boone, I implore you to reflect on your background as an educator and all the many roles you have served during your 30+ years in the education field. It is because of your many years of experience that I believe you and the members of the SBE subcommittee, as well as the full SBE board, should be asking yourselves these questions, among others:

- How/why are we here?
- What did MSMS do wrong, if anything?
- Is this situation politically motivated?
- Why were The W and MSU the only universities asked to submit a response to MDE's RFP? If MDE's intent and purpose has not already been decided to move MSMS – why weren't all universities invited to respond in order to at least give the appearance of a fair and impartial process?
- Did this all become a problem for MDE when MSMS was asked to submit its "wish list" of what it needed in preparation of the appropriations "ask" to the 2024 Mississippi Legislature?
  - Why was it a surprise that the figure that MSMS submitted was so high?
    - Well, ask yourself, was it unreasonable?
    - Has MSMS been receiving its fair share as compared to the other specialty schools under the MDE oversight - the Mississippi School for the Arts, or the Mississippi

Schools for the Blind and Deaf (non-specialized equipment needs aside)?

- Why does anyone think that MSMS being located on The W campus is stifling their academic offerings or physical campus growth?
- Why does anyone think that MSMS students don't have opportunities to participate in sports (or other interscholastic extracurricular activities)? That statement is blatantly false and obviously has been made by people that don't have a clue what student life at MSMS has to offer.
- Why does MSMS have to be more focused on "workforce development?"
- Why is relocating MSMS to Starkville necessary in order for "many more students to experience innovative basic and applied research in the fields of mathematics, science, engineering, social sciences and more?" There is already a long-standing partnership between MSMS and MSU since 2020.
- Why is MSU involved this process? What is their role with MSMS going forward? Looking at MSU's response to the RFP, isn't it really the Oktibbeha County School District that will be receiving MSMS on its campus and putting it under its district umbrella (removing it from direct supervision by MDE), while consolidating with Starkville School District?
- Why does MSMS need to be relocated and/or merged with SOCSD?
  - Allowing SOCSD students to participate in classes that should only be solely for MSMS students – wouldn't that somehow affect the status of MSMS – wouldn't that cause the statistics to show a decline in student scores and rankings?
  - I believe that SOCSD should be ranked on their own merit – pass or fail – let the chips fall where they may. SOCSD should not be allowed to "absorb" MSMS into its fold in order to better themselves or to make the expense of new facilities to their district more palatable to them, to MDE, to the state legislature, or even to the Oktibbeha County taxpayers.

## **HOW DID WE GET TO WHERE WE ARE NOW? WHAT IS PROMPTING A MSMS MOVE?**

In a March 13, 2024, [article](#) in *Mississippi Today*, Senator Dennis DeBar said his 2024 bill (SB2715) was originally meant to "address concerns about MSMS." Senator DeBar went on to say "MSMS is dealing with deteriorating infrastructure and has requested about \$90 million to renovate the dorms and other facilities. A grant agreement between MUW and the Mississippi Department of Education stipulates that MSMS is to 'provide the major repair and renovation funds' for its facilities, not MUW. But the university also plays a role in 'routine' maintenance of MSMS."

- MSMS should not have to be moved/relocated to any other site in order to rectify any budgetary issues and/or concerns.
- These are concerns that should have been addressed previously; but, now must be addressed by MDE and the legislature in the annual appropriations process, and provide adequate funding for MSMS which is long overdue.
- Moving or relocating MSMS would not come without a cost to the state of Mississippi and the taxpayers – doing so would not be the most cost-effective solution to any issues.

Let's reflect back on SB2715 in 2024, which called for MSMS to be relocated to MSU, and stated, in pertinent part, as follows:

### **Section 1: . . .**

**\* \* \***

(3) Beginning July 1, 2024, the State Board of Education shall develop a plan relating to the closing of the school's campus located at the Mississippi University for Women, and the reopening, the operation and the funding of the school as it is moved to the campus of Mississippi State University. Such plan shall be presented to the Legislature during the 2025 Regular Session and shall include an equitable and reasonable plan for student recruitment without regard to race, creed or color. **By the 2026-2027 school year, the Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science shall be established on the campus**

of Mississippi State University. The State Board of Education shall collaborate with the Board of Trustees of the Institutions of Higher Learning to facilitate the provisions of this subsection.

(4) The purpose of the school shall be to educate the gifted and talented students of the state, and its curriculum and admissions policies shall reflect such purpose.

(5) The State Board of Education shall prepare the annual budget for the school.

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(emphasis added) THAT BILL DIED IN THE SENATE ON MARCH 15, 2024, and rightly so! There is no “need” to relocate MSMS – it “needs” no oversight or resources that can’t be offered and provided to them at their current location.

### LOCAL LEADERS SUPPORT MSMS REMAINING IN COLUMBUS

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In a February 15 article in *The Dispatch*, the City of Columbus and the Lowndes County Board of Supervisors stand behind and support The W’s fight to keep MSMS in Columbus, for all the right reasons. “The Lowndes County Board of Supervisors donated [over] \$1 million to that campus to help get these buildings ready for these kids,” said Columbus Mayor Keith Gaskin. Gaskin said MSMS has become a part of MUW and Columbus. “I can’t even imagine an MUW or MSMS not existing in Columbus,” Gaskin said. “It is hard as I try to think about MUW merging or MSMS being relocated to another area. I can’t I can’t [sic?] wrap my brain around that. That’s how important both of those institutions are to this city. It makes no sense.”

-  
Area legislators stand behind and support keeping MSMS at its current location, and to adequately fund it, per a March 1 article in *The Dispatch*:

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“I think that it’s a money grab for the (Starkville-Oktibbeha Consolidated School District),” District 39 Rep. Dana McLean, R-Columbus, told *The Dispatch* on Friday. “They’re saying it’s for MSMS, but really it’s to make a bigger and better school district for them in Starkville.” McLean is hopeful the House has no appetite for a relocation, especially due to the plan of using state funds for facilities used by SOCSO. MSMS is funded by the legislature through the Mississippi Department of Education rather than by ad valorem tax revenue like SOCSO and every other school district in the state. “I’m very hopeful that my colleagues would be good stewards of taxpayer money and see that their constituents all over the state would be indirectly contributing toward a school district that is not in their district,” she said. “It would be like the taxpayers in Lowndes or Columbus sending money to a Gulf Coast school district.”

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District 37 Rep. Andy Boyd, R-Columbus said, after years of underfunding MSMS, the state has a responsibility to address the school’s needs, especially when it has been so successful. The MSMS Class of 2023 accepted \$8.2 million in scholarships and included 15 National Merit semifinalists. “We should be talking about MSMS and their funding, which has not been enough forever. ... The school itself ... is not broken,” he said. “I think we’re responsible for taking care of what we’ve got instead of leaving it vacant or moving on to something new.”

-  
District 41 Rep. Kabir Karriem, D-Columbus, told *The Dispatch* he is disappointed relocating MSMS is even a conversation. “How are you just going to take an asset out of one community and put it in another community for the benefit of that community?” he said. “We don’t do stuff like that, especially when we’re supposed to be partners in economic development. We have a regional approach in economic development, and you don’t start doing that because that can infringe on other partnerships.” “We need to send

a clear message to these committee chairs – to the leadership at the capitol – that Columbus and Lowndes County are united,” he said. “We want The W to stay put, and we want MSMS to stay put on The W’s campus. Don’t go infringing on our assets. Respect our request when we ask for the resources that they need to be vibrant institutions in our community.”

District 17 Sen. Chuck Younger, R-Lowndes County, said there doesn’t seem to be any appetite for relocation on the Senate side. But he agreed funding for MSMS from MDE is an ongoing concern. “MSMS has never been funded correctly, nor has MUW, and what little bit of funding that MUW has been getting, they have been sharing and trying to help out MSMS as much as possible,” he said. Younger suggested transferring property on The W campus to MSMS as a way to ensure the school remains a permanent part of the community. “If they’re going to do that dorm for them, they ought to give them the property,” he said. “Put some property in their name so it will be an anchor in Columbus and on the MUW campus.”

### **MISSISSIPPI UNIVERSITY FOR WOMEN SUPPORTS MSMS REMAINING IN COLUMBUS**

We all know the history that established MSMS on The W’s campus in 1987 as a residential school for eleventh and twelfth grade high school students and that, like all other public schools in Mississippi, it is governed under the umbrella of MDE. MSMS is a member of the National Consortium for Secondary STEM schools (NCSST), and, at its founding, became the fourth such school to exist in the nation.

The authors of that legislation purposely placed this residence school on the campus of The W. While the committee identified The W in Columbus as a practical location for the school, the size of The W and the City of Columbus have been lauded as the perfect fit for MSMS students to acclimate to living away from home and adjusting to college life.

The W was selected based on their commitment to gifted education, their passion for the project, and their success in partnering with Governor’s School. On September 6, 1988, 136 young Mississippians from across the state became the inaugural class at MSMS. Darick Gayden, a member of the class stated, “Here we won’t be following the future—the future will be following us.” From that point forward, MSMS has remained a pioneer in the field of gifted education and STEM curriculum.

The W has and continues to help to nurture and foster MSMS in all the years since inception.

- The W has always worked with MSMS and supported the students with exclusive use of six facilities for housing, academics, and administration for MSMS students. All MSMS and W students share the cafeteria, library, health center, and post office, and MSMS student athletes use the same facilities used by W student athletes.
- The W has also provided support via their own personnel – having long served MSMS by handling administrative and financial services and investing in The W’s infrastructure for MSMS.

However, The W should not have to bear the weight of the responsibility to provide funds to MSMS to do what they should be responsible for (and would be held to be responsible for if they fell under any specific “school district” in Mississippi).

In its RFP response, The W identified spaces on its campus which could offer additional residential and classroom space for MSMS, for which the cost of renovations/construction would be significantly less (anywhere from \$25M to \$50M less) than proposed new facilities at any other location. In a March 3 [article](#) in *The Dispatch*, quoting from a letter MUW President wrote to alums, “Both institutions are positioned well for growth and have an excellent track record of producing high-quality, exceptionally educated Mississippi students,” Miller wrote. “Funding for MSMS ultimately comes from the Mississippi

Legislature. We are advocating through every available channel for funding to support their growth on our campus.” And Mayor Keith Gaskin, told *The Dispatch* he “can’t even imagine” MSMS being located anywhere other than The W. “My concern about that thinking is that The W already has buildings that need to be refurbished and repurposed. I stand by my strong opinion and endorsement of The W,” he said. “It is the only university in Mississippi that is in the best position to house and continue to nurture MSMS.”

- Who let MSMS down when it comes to taking care of their needs over the last 37 years? I’d bet the blame could equally be placed on the shoulders of MDE and the legislature, and The W has done what it could to help support the school out of its own pockets – The W does what it always does with its legislative appropriations – The W does more while being given less – and, although being given less, it has continued to share what it was given in order to help provide for MSMS. As stated in the RFP response submitted by The W: “The partnership between MSMS and MUW is a proven success. The decision to keep MSMS at MUW rather than start over in another location is both fiscally responsible and academically sound.”

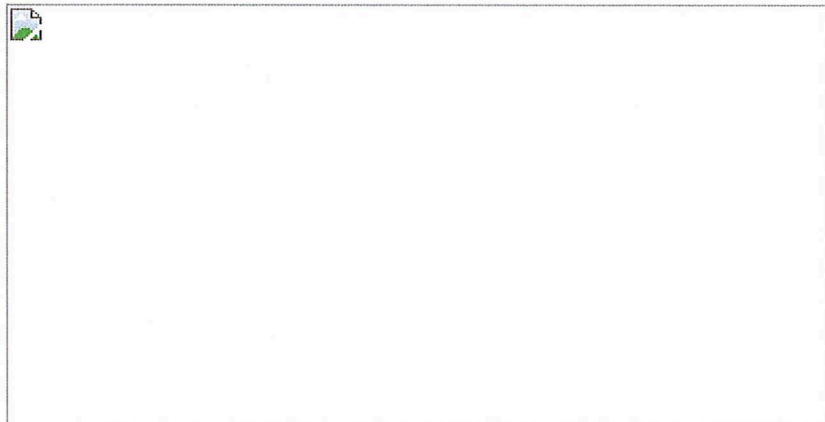
- It should be noted that while there has been a long-standing partnership between MSMS and MSU for “research” – it is not the only research university in Mississippi. The W has been working with Ole Miss (which likely includes the medical school at UMMC in Jackson), Jackson State University, and the University of Southern Mississippi for future partnerships with MSMS to expand research opportunities and offer additional mentorships.

- The Mississippi School of Mathematics and Science received \$725,000 from the state for FY 2024 Appropriations (Education Enhancement Fund) (\$0 from Capital Expense Fund HB1823 2024 RS), and spends roughly \$23,616 per student – which is significantly less than what its counterparts in other states received through the legislature in 2024:

- The Alabama School for Math and Science, received \$9.9 million from the state and spends roughly \$38,500 per student.
- The Arkansas School for Mathematics, Sciences and the Arts received \$13.2 million or about \$53,041 per student.
- The Louisiana School for Math, Science and the Arts received \$9.9 million payable for general obligation bonds in 2024

MSMS is projected to receive approximately \$1,131,000 for FY 2025 appropriations, an amount which is likely nowhere near the amount that was requested. In fiscal year 2025, the base student funding amount in Mississippi is \$6,695. If you multiply that number by the 250 students at MSMS, the resulting total is \$1,673.750 – is MSMS receiving their full allotted share of the “base student funding” state money like all other state-supported schools in Mississippi?

Here are recent budget comparisons between MSMS and like schools in the surrounding states:



## MSMS HAS PROVEN ITS VALUE TO MISSISSIPPI YEAR AFTER YEAR

- **Enhances collective prosperity.** MSMS provides innovative residential learning experiences and leadership development, so that gifted and talented students reach their potential and overall state prosperity is expanded.
- **Ensures the future economy.** Through forward-thinking STEM programs, such as its Engineering and Entrepreneurship Programs, MSMS is building a pipeline for the state's top students to meet the workforce needs of tomorrow.
- **Promotes opportunity regardless of zip code.** By generating high-quality teacher development and outreach programs, MSMS improves STEM interest among elementary, middle, and high school students across the state.
- **A history of success.** Successes like the national recognitions, record numbers of students scoring in the top 2% nationally on the ACT, and several students annually named National Merit Semifinalists inspire us to advocate for this special school that is impacting the future of our great state.

The many accolades that MSMS and its students have received and continue to receive are evidence of their success, and here are some of the reported accolades:

- For decades MSMS has consistently ranked as one of the nation's best public schools by Niche. (To compile the rankings, Niche looks at data from the U.S. Department of Education as well as test scores, teacher-student ratio, graduation rates, college data and ratings collected from Niche users.)
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