

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

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 SOCSO?
  - Allowing SOCSO 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 SOCSO should be ranked on their own merit – pass or fail – let the chips fall where they may. SOCSO 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.

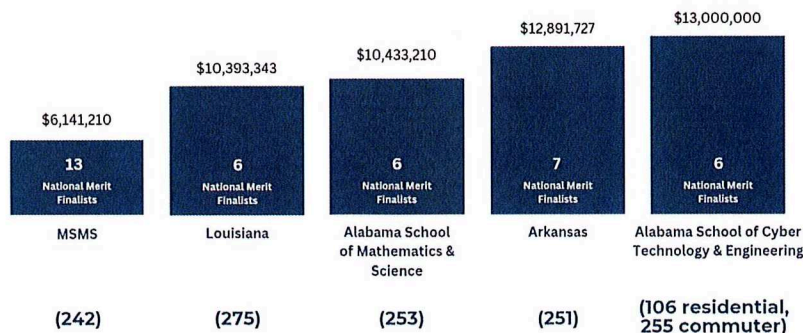
The Mississippi School of Mathematics and Science received \$725,000 from the state for FY 2024 Appropriations (Education Enhancement Fund) (\$0 from Capital Expense Fund HB1823 2024 RS), and spends roughly \$23,616 per student – which is significantly less than what its counterparts in other states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



## 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.
  - Boasting a student-teacher ratio of 11-to-1, the average ACT score of students at MSMS is 30, according to Niche. Each year, graduates are offered millions in scholarships. The Class of 2023 accepted \$8.2 million of more than \$25 million offered.
    - That is an "average ACT score" – many MSMS students achieve 35 or 36
  - To review Niche's ranking methodology, visit [www.niche.com/about/methodology/best-teachers-public-high-schools](http://www.niche.com/about/methodology/best-teachers-public-high-schools).
- February 20, 2025 – [Nina Weinstein Clinches First Place at MHSAA Wrestling State Championships](#)
- February 12, 2025 – [Two Students Awarded Gold Medals on the 2025 National German Exam](#)
  - My own nephew received the award on the National German Exam during his time at MSMS [2019-2021].
- February 10, 2025 – [Savannah Massey Receives 2025 YoungArts Award with Distinction in Writing](#), the highest honor of the organization. Massey's poetry, in particular, received significant recognition. "The judges' favorite piece of my work was a poem titled Eden, Mississippi," she said. "The poem was a winner of the Ephemera Prize of 2025 here on campus as well as other awards and publications." Her success at YoungArts included a cash prize of \$3000 for her outstanding work.

- September 11, 2024 – [13 MSMS Students Named Semifinalists in 2025 National Merit Scholarship Program](#)
  - 3 Seniors from Alabama School for Math and Science Named Semifinalists
  - 6 Students Named Semifinalists from Arkansas School for Math, Sciences, + The Arts
  - Other Mississippi Schools having at least 10 students named as National Merit Semifinalists:
    - 11 from Desoto Central High School (Southaven)
    - 14 from St. Andrew’s Episcopal School (Ridgeland)
    - 16 from Madison Central High School (Madison)
- September 14, 2023 – [14 MSMS Students Named Semifinalists in 2024 National Merit Scholarship Program](#)
  - 6 Seniors from Alabama School for Math and Science Named Semifinalists
  - 7 Students Named Semifinalists from Arkansas School for Math, Sciences, + The Arts
- March 10, 2023 – [MSMS Advances to the VEX Robotics World Championship 2023](#)
- September 15, 2022 – [15 MSMS Students Named Semifinalists in 2023 National Merit Scholarship Program](#)
  - 3 Seniors from Alabama School for Math and Science Named Semifinalists
  - 6 Students Named Semifinalists from Arkansas School for Math, Sciences, + The Arts
- December 17, 2020 – [The Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science Faculty Recognized as No. 1 in the Nation](#) by Niche, for the fourth year in a row. According to the organization’s website, “The Best Teachers Ranking is based on rigorous analysis of academic and teacher data from the U.S. Department of Education along with millions of reviews from students and parents.” With an A+ overall grade, MSMS was named No.1 out of 19,147 schools ranked.
- March 4, 2020 – [MSMS Student Named Mississippi High School Journalist of the Year](#) in the largest field of applicants that ever applied for the award – “Gina was absolutely the cream of the crop,” Mississippi Scholastic Press Association director said. “She’s a prime example of what a talented, 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: Public Comments on MSMS Expansion**

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**From** Sue Freeman <suefreeman5254@gmail.com>

**Date** Mon 3/3/2025 6:34 PM

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

**Cc** rroberson@house.ms.gov <rroberson@house.ms.gov>

**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,

In regards to MDE's recent request for proposals to expand the Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science (MSMS) from both MUW (The W) and MSU, I am expressing my opinion as a Mississippi taxpayer that it makes more sense for MSMS to continue to be housed on The W's campus for the below reasons.

1) MSMS was established on The W's campus in 1987 and the partnership between The W and MSMS has fostered excellence in education, research, and dual-credit opportunities.

2) MSMS is nationally recognized as one of the top high schools in the entire country with 13 National Merit Scholarship winners along with the best public school faculty.

3) According to the MSMS Foundation, the top 3 career fields of MSMS alumni who remain in Miss. are education, medical, and business - all areas that The W excels and also retains graduates in the state in high numbers. I have heard the Governor and other state leaders emphasize that Mississippi must do a better job in retaining our graduates - convince them to stay in the state of Mississippi after graduation.

4) Currently The W offers 41 dual-credit courses to MSMS students - **all tuition-free.**

5) MSMS students have access to The W's six (6) advanced science labs and research opportunities with university faculty. The W is also facilitating partnerships with other Miss. research institutions (Ole Miss, Southern Miss, and Jackson State). **I did not see this partnership with the other universities mentioned**

**in MSU's proposal.**

6) MSMS students are within a short 5 - 10 minute walk of all buildings on The W's campus and have full access to any facility at The W's campus with no charge including The W's library and recreation buildings. The W's library is one of the most modern libraries in the state of Mississippi with a state-of-the art robot ("Athena"). The MSMS students can also walk the short distance to the Columbus city library as well. Based on MSU's proposal - the MSMS students will need to be **shuttled to reach MSU's buildings.**

7) MSMS students are able to further their education at The W through The Power of Six Scholarship. The first of its kind to be offered to MSMS's students from The W, the full tuition academic scholarship is inspired by six of MSMS's 12 inaugural faculty who were W graduates. I do not believe that I saw something similar in MSU's proposal.

**8) Investing in The W's existing infrastructure for MSMS is the most cost-effective and responsible choice for Mississippi taxpayers.** A new dorm that would house 400 students (which includes the expansion numbers) could be built for an estimated \$35 million. Existing MSMS academic facilities at The W could be renovated for an estimated \$25 million. This expansion can be done with minimal disruption to MSMS's operation. **That is a total of \$60 million as compared to the \$85 million in the MSU proposal. This would save taxpayers money.**

9) I am concerned that having the MSMS school co-located with the Oktibbeha Consolidated School District would not be in the best interest of the MSMS students. The MSMS students are thriving in a safe environment on The W's campus and experience no bullying in their current environment. Unfortunately statistics have shown that many academically gifted students are "bullied" by being labeled "nerds" or even worse by other high school students. If I were a parent of a high school student (a 15-, 16-, or 17-year old), I would want my academically gifted child to be on a smaller university campus that has a proven track-record of the students being treated well and with respect by The W's administration, faculty, and students over the years. Sometimes "bigger is not better". The MSMS students have thrived on The W's campus for 37 years. There is no need for changing that environment.

10) I am also concerned as a Mississippi taxpayer when I read the MSU proposal that it constantly mentions the Oktibbeha County Consolidated School district and co-locating and/or possibly merging the MSMS student body with that school district. That defeats

the whole purpose of MSMS as a unique high school for the academically gifted of our state. It will lead to a loss of autonomy and the MSMS student body will become "just another high school".

11) The state of Mississippi can best invest in MSMS's future by maintaining its presence on The W's campus. The financial investment is less costly to the taxpayers of the state of Mississippi. The W has been proud to be affiliated with MSMS and wants to continue that successful partnership.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the expansion and future of MSMS.

Sincerely,

Sue Simmons Freeman  
Hazlehurst, MS  
[suefreeman5254@gmail.com](mailto:suefreeman5254@gmail.com)

## Support of MSMS Staying at MUW

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**From** Brandt Galloway <brandt.galloway@gcm-insurance.com>

**Date** Tue 3/4/2025 1:53 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.

Please consider this email in support of keeping MSMS on the campus of MUW along with financial support that has long been withheld. The two proposals are significantly different in terms of cost and scope, along with funding what appears to be at least a portion of a public school that should not be receiving state dollars (Starkville/Okt Co). politically, this appears to be highly toxic. Thanks for the consideration! -brandt

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**Comments for the MSMS Relocation Proposal**

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**From** Taylor Galmiche <taylor.galmiche@gmail.com>

**Date** Tue 3/4/2025 4:15 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,

I'm Taylor Galmiche Sutton, an MSMS alumni from the class of 2012. I credit all of my success to MSMS's faculty and unique learning environment.

I am writing to share my thoughts on the MSMS relocation proposal. I believe this plan to be misguided and convoluted. Moving MSMS to a large university campus would dilute the academic experience that makes MSMS so special.

The intimate class size and residential nature of MSMS fosters a community built on trust and respect. Attending a magnet school in a small town on a smaller university campus allowed me and my fellow students to focus on our studies. There was no confusion as to why we were there: for a better education. There were limited distractions. We felt safe and nurtured. The facilities and access we were given allowed us to thrive.

I do not understand the need to move MSMS, especially at the proposed price point, and to a large university town. Why not grow MSMS where it is planted? I have a major appreciation for Columbus, MS and The W. I remember going on runs down to the River Walk, passing the homes of my professors, feeling embedded in my community. Uprooting MSMS and moving the school to Starkville will kill that joy and sense of autonomy. A larger university town will bring a slew of distractions. For instance:

- MSMS doesn't need more athletic opportunities—you can go to any highschool in the South for sports.
- MSMS brings a newly found freedom for many students. Why bring exposure to college parties and tailgating into the mix?

This move feels like a cash grab for SOCSO and an opportunity for MSU to recruit Mississippi's brightest. It doesn't seem to serve the students or faculty of MSMS.

I'll close with this: MSMS must continue to prioritize education. Don't muddy the water. Don't fix what isn't broken. Please consider investing in a community that already exists.

Thank you for your time.

Kind regards,  
Taylor Galmiche Sutton

**MAYOR**

KEITH GASKIN.

**CITY COUNCIL**ETHEL STEWART  
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RUSSELL GREENE  
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**FIRE CHIEF**

DUANE HUGHES

**HUMAN RESOURCES DIRECTOR**

PATRICIA S. MITCHELL

**PT DIRECTOR OF PLANNING &****COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

GEORGE IRBY

March 3, 2025

Dr. Donna Boone  
Chief Academic Officer  
Mississippi Department of Education

Dear Dr. Boone,

Thank you for allowing stakeholders to weigh in on this important decision. I write today to plead for you to reject any notion of relocating the Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science (MSMS) away from the MUW campus. The reason it must remain in Columbus is that the partnership between The W and MSMS has fostered excellence in education, research, and dual-credit opportunities for over 37 years. The figures are easily obtained to prove that, year after year, MSMS outperforms other schools and it does so with a much smaller budget than other states with comparable schools.

For example, the State of Mississippi funded MSMS at less than half of what the State of Arkansas has put into its public STEM program with a nearly identical number of students. On a per student basis, Arkansas spends approximately \$51,720 per student and produced 7 National Merit finalists. Compare that to Mississippi, who spends half that sum per student at MSMS and MSMS produced 13 National Merit Finalists. The W has long served as MSMS's fiscal agent (carrying the load for the state), handling administrative and financial services, but state funding has not kept pace with the costs. Investing in The W's existing infrastructure for MSMS is the most cost-effective and responsible choice for Mississippi taxpayers!

According to the NICHE report on MSMS, 80 percent of students feel safe at the school and 82% like the school and feel happy there. The evidence of student contentment on The W campus is easily proven by the fact that the Class of 2024 produced 24 National Merit Scholarship semifinalists. The MSMS Class of 2024 was offered \$32M in scholarships. MSMS is ranked the best school in the State by NICHE: (#1 of 235 public high schools in Mississippi; #1 of 230 Best public high school teachers in Mississippi; #1 of 227 Best college prep public high schools in Mississippi). MSMS has regularly been ranked as one of the best public high schools in the country by *Newsweek Magazine*.

Consolidating MSMS's student body with the Oktibbeha Consolidated School District is a terrible idea and will lead to loss of autonomy and distinguishing attributes that make MSMS's student body unique in a supportive environment where they are able to thrive academically and personally. MSMS has full access to The W's library and extensive academic resources. Additionally, MSMS has full use of any facility on The W's campus at no charge. The W offers 41 dual-credit courses to MSMS students, all tuition free. They also have access to The W's six advanced science labs and research opportunities with university faculty. The W is also facilitating partnerships with other research institutions in the IHL system (Jackson State University, University of Mississippi and University of Southern Mississippi.) Instead of building new facilities at MSU, the spaces on The W's campus could be renovated for an

estimated \$25M to bring them up to date and add a robotics laboratory. MUW has also identified two spaces that a new residential facility could be built for MSMS with 400 bed spaces for an estimated \$35M. Additional beds could be added for the needed professional staff as well. I strongly believe the majority of Mississippi tax payers would agree that investing in facilities at The W for \$60M instead of \$85M at MSU is the wiser choice.

In summary, MUW and MSMS belong together in their hometown of Columbus. 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 future college life. It is important to note that The W and MSMS have partnered for decades working on many longstanding and award winning programs and events that are central to the fabric of Columbus and Lowndes County, such as Tales from the Crypt, Eighth of May, MoreStory and Community Read. MUW was selected as the home for MSMS because MUW is a safe and secure site on a small fenced and gated college campus. The campus is also a short walk to our historic downtown area, where students can spend time visiting the Columbus Arts Council Center, the Tennessee Williams Home, shops and restaurants. There is no evidence that tinkering with the great relationship between The W and MSMS by severing their ties would bring about better performance. There are obvious risks of taking young high school girls and boys and placing them on an SEC campus with 23,000 young men and women.

As the mayor of the City of Columbus and a donor to the MSMS Foundation, I hope you will make the obvious right decision. That decision must be a two-fold one: (1) Leave MSMS at MUW; and (2) Increase funding to MSMS so that the facilities are on par with their record of success. I am also including a *Resolution of the Mayor and City Council of the City of Columbus Declaring Support for Keeping the Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science at the Mississippi University for Women*. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Keith Gaskin". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "K" and "G".

Keith Gaskin  
Mayor

**RESOLUTION OF THE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF  
COLUMBUS  
DECLARING THEIR SUPPORT FOR KEEPING  
THE MISSISSIPPI SCHOOL FOR MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE  
AT THE MISSISSIPPI UNIVERSITY FOR WOMEN**

**WHEREAS**, in 1987 the Mississippi Legislature passed into law a bill that created the Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science to be situated at the campus of MUW; and

**WHEREAS**, thirty-eight years later, MSMS continues to outperform expectations at MUW, with the MSMS Class of 2024 being offered \$32M in scholarships and being ranked by NICHE as the best school in the State with 80 percent of MSMS students feeling safe at the school and 82% being happy there and with the graduating class of 2024 turning out 24 National Merit Scholarship semifinalists.; and

**WHEREAS**, MSMS has regularly been ranked as one of the best public high schools in the country by Newsweek Magazine and MSMS students consistently outpace every other public & private school or learning system in Mississippi for awards in national competitions; and

**WHEREAS**, MSMS students and parents consistently credit the success of MSMS to the close, supportive mentorship they receive working with faculty focused on MSMS Ideals of scholarship, community, creativity and service; and

**WHEREAS**, MSMS students regularly acknowledge that the academic opportunities they receive at MSMS are not available at home schools and that the small close-knit community at MSMS is more supportive of their success than their home schools; and

**WHEREAS**, MSMS has outperformed in competitions at the International Science and Engineering Fair, the Louisiana/Mississippi Mathematical Association of America College competition, beating out MSU and others; and

**WHEREAS**, MSMS was awarded the Mississippi Governor's award for Excellence in the Arts for the Tales from the Crypt research/performance project; and regularly wins competitions for Student Teacher Achievement Recognition known as the STAR teacher award; and

**WHEREAS**, MSMS has won numerous awards for History projects, including the MS Historical Society Award of Merit, in 2024, has won numerous scholastic writing awards including three National Scholastic Medal winners in 2024, the YoungArts award in 2025 and two Scholastic Art medal winners in 2025, and in World languages has won the Young Orator prize at the International Olympiada of Spoken Russian in Moscow, Russia; and

**WHEREAS**, with MSMS having such a consistent and ever improving record of success at its current location on the campus of MUW, the risks of jeopardizing such success by relocation far outweigh any small chance that moving MSMS to the campus a SEC campus with 24,000 students would generate any small increase in performance;

**NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED**, that the Mayor and City Council of the City of Columbus hereby emphatically call upon the Mississippi Legislature to reject any proposed legislation that would attempt to relocate MSMS to MSU or any other location other than where it is outperforming expectations on a limited budget;

**RESOLVED FURTHER**, that the Mayor and City Council call upon the Mississippi Department of Education and/or the Legislature, to provide sufficient funding to fully support the most significant educational creations in Mississippi history and further that the Mayor be directed to deliver the Proclamation to The Mississippi Board of Education, Members of the Mississippi Legislature Education and Colleges and Universities Committees, the Governor, House Speaker, the Lieutenant Governor, and that all Columbus citizens and MSMS students and alumni are encouraged to likewise petition the Government to leave MSMS where it is – on the campus of the Mississippi University for Women.

Council Member Mickens after reading the Resolution, in whole and in part moved for adoption of the Resolution. Said motion was seconded by Council Member Jones, and, after a thorough discussion and deliberation, the Mayor called for a vote of the Council Members then and there voting and recorded the votes as follows:

Council Member Stewart	<u>yes</u>
Council Member Mickens	<u>yes</u>
Council Member Greene	<u>yes</u>
Council Member Beard	<u>absent</u>
Council Member Jones	<u>yes</u>
Council Member DiCicco	<u>yes</u>

The Mayor then stated that the motion was passed, pronounced the Resolution duly adopted with a copy to be spread upon the Minutes of the Mayor and City Council.

WITNESS THE SIGNATURE OF THE UNDERSIGNED OFFICERS, on this the 18<sup>th</sup> day of February, 2025.

KEITH GASKIN, MAYOR

Keith Gaskin  
SIGNATURE



## Proposed MSMS Relocation

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**From** Fran Gatewood <frangatewoodhometown@gmail.com>

**Date** Mon 3/3/2025 10:39 PM

**To** SecondaryEducation <secondaryeducation@mdek12.org>; rroberson@house.ms.gov  
<rroberson@house.ms.gov>

### **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 and Representative Roberson:

I am writing to address the proposed relocation of MSMS from Columbus, MS to Starkville, MS. As a lifelong Mississippian, I am very much against taxpayer dollars being invested in this manner. This high school for academically gifted students has produced 13 National Merit Scholars. These students are allowed access to all of MUW's facilities and resources. An \$85 million taxpayer-funded investment to move a successful school 20 miles down the road is not good stewardship.

I strongly urge you to examine this entire process and stick with what has proven successful for the MSMS.

Sincerely,

Fran Gatewood

1416 Belle Glade St, Jackson, MS 39211

601-214-3765

## MSMS

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**From** Frank Goodlett <frankgoodlett4@gmail.com>  
**Date** Mon 3/3/2025 8:20 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.

Sent from my iPhone

I want MSMS to stay on the W campus. I believe that the money and effort will be better for these gifted students to prepare them for college. We love the beautiful campus and the separation the students have on campus. The existing campus gives the student more of a college experience than the proposed MS plan. The MS plan seems like a separate wing at the high school and students will start to resent and make them feel like their better than them. The MSMS is totally separate and gives the students the opportunity to strive and not worry about bullying since the students are all gifted. It just makes more sense to make renovations to the campus so both the W and MSMS can thrive. Thank you!

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## Future of MSMS

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**From** Paige Goodlett <jpgoodlett@gmail.com>

**Date** Mon 3/3/2025 10:28 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.

Hi Dr. Boone,

I have many concerns regarding the potential to integrate MSMS with SOCSO. In the MSMS:E proposal, I'm not seeing faculty from the current MSMS school addressed. Will they move with the school because I only see mention of the opportunity for MSMS students to build camaraderie & relationships with SOCSO students & faculty as well as sharing classes such as AP courses with the Starkville HS students? MSMS students already have the opportunity to take AP courses, dual credit courses, etc, so allowing students who just happen to live in the district take classes with students who went through a lot to qualify for & pass through all the selection stages of getting into this school only affords an advantage to the Starkville students & frankly seems unfair & possibly unwise. This unknown/undefined amount of integration of the 2 entirely different schools which possibly includes extracurriculars like sports would dilute & therefore degrade the unique MSMS culture, practically eliminating school spirit & pride. Just as worrying, it would introduce a large number of students that don't have a shared experience of living away from home & the unique drive that propels such young people to achieve that into an adolescent population that can easily be fraught with jealousy, bullying, etc. I also don't think it's wise to add a 10th grade class even though the academic opportunity would be a plus, ignoring the emotional readiness of the average gifted 14yo to handle the transition might lead to a high drop out rate from MSMS. The cafeteria situation is admittedly still not fleshed out, but when your child is suddenly having 3 meals a day that are out of your control, the prospect of them not being meals tailored for college life but high school lunches sounds way less than ideal. If this integration meant increasing the standard of the meals for MSMS by way of SOCSO, then once again, it appears this is more for the school district's benefit & not truly for just MSMS. The atmosphere of the current MSMS at MUW gives these students college preparatory training in a college campus feel while still being mostly segregated from MUW which has the safety benefit of being mostly women, a smaller campus, & not a big Greek party school. The proposed MSMS:E scenario of being in very close proximity to the high school buildings next to a highway & at greater cost though greater benefit to SOCSO, just doesn't look like it will have the same appeal. The downtown of Columbus within walking distance of campus along with the river walk provide cultural & entertainment opportunities for MSMS that I think would be absent from being on a HS campus. Please preserve the culture and identity of MSMS 🌊, & look for the ample opportunities for growth in renovations, etc

Thanks,

Paige Goodlett, mother of a class of '26 student

Sent from Paige's iPhone