
Proposal to relocate MSMS

From Gloria Harvey <gloriaghharvey@gmail.com>

Date Mon 3/3/2025 8:03 PM

To SecondaryEducation <secondaryeducation@mdek12.org>

External Email

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Dr. Donna Boone,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments on the proposals submitted by MSU and MUW regarding the possible relocation of MSMS.

Due to safety, cost, and curriculum concerns, I do not support the relocation of MSMS to MSU. Moreover, relocation is completely unnecessary, since MSMS is succeeding in fulfilling its mission right where it is in Columbus, MS. The school is annually recognized as one of the top ten schools in the country in academic excellence!

As the parent of a 1997 graduate of MSMS, I speak from a point of experience. When my daughter left home in fall of 1995 as a barely 16 year old (August birthday) to live on the campus of MUW in Columbus, MS, I had no angst regarding her safety or the potential social distractions facing her on that small college campus. The smaller community of Columbus can embrace and protect these students in a way that a larger city anywhere cannot. High school students do not need the social distractions, temptations, or even the traffic of a large college environment. They have had a driver's license, at best, for less than 2 years!

MSU's proposal is far more costly than investing in infrastructure improvements on the campus where MSMS has been located since its inception. As a resident of Hinds County and a taxpayer, using state funds to improve the Starkville Oktibbeha Consolidated School District is not a priority.

High school students need a balanced education that includes liberal arts, which includes communication and social skills that the current program provides. I see NO mention of such in the MSU proposal. It is only about STEM.

The interdisciplinary studies my daughter experienced at MSMS provided trips across the State of MS that included a conversation with someone who had personal interaction with Faulkner, classroom conversations about racial/cultural issues within our state, met students from other religious beliefs that challenged her beliefs, and many other non-STEAM related social issues which gave her an appreciation for our State and ultimately influenced her return to MS after completion of her college degree at the University of the South, where she graduated Phi Beta Kappa.

MSMS should NOT be relocated!

Sincerely,

Gloria Harcey
601.951.5530

MSMS Possible Move To MSU

From Sasha Harvey <harveys26@themsms.org>
Date Thu 2/27/2025 9:09 PM
To SecondaryEducation <secondaryeducation@mdek12.org>

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Dear Mrs. Boone,

As a student who has both been at Starkville High School and the Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science, I feel like I have a unique perspective on the MSMS move to MSU. Let me paint a picture; you have survived in a school that has lockdowns yearly, fights in every corner and hall, many students in high school who are illiterate, and a teacher turnover rate that is so high you don't recognize their faces after two years.

These are all my personal experiences at Starkville High School. While I appreciate the place that has formed me to be who I am today, I will not be quiet about the everyday experiences there. Another horrific event that happened to me there was one of my friends killing herself from Starkville High; that is not the sad part of the story. What breaks my heart is the lack of support for students affected by the suicide. Aside from not supporting our mental health or reaching out, it felt like they pushed the event under the rug.

I do not support MSMS moving to the MSU; I think that MSMS is thriving at the W, but at the very least they MUST have separate campuses for the MSMS students and Starkville High School students. I can only imagine the harassment MSMS students would face there as well as the downgrade in atmosphere overall. The last concern I have is MSMS becoming a school as an offshoot of Starkville High School. This was never and should never be MSMS's goal; we are a school to serve the state, not the top fifty students at SHS. As someone who came from that environment, I can only imagine the toll that would put on MSMS's culture.

Thank you so much for your consideration.

To end our my email to you, I will put my one poem I wrote two months ago about Starkville High School; Honestly, I wish I could say it is exaggerated.

Sincerely,
Sasha Harvey

longing for normality

i desire your bruising touch;
the way you've imprinted
crooked thoughts into me.

the desolate halls you created
devoid of decoration and bliss
that nurtured our destitution.

even now i miss your routine.
the weave strewn in the cafeteria,
spoiled milk dripping from purple cartons,
mace perfuming frail bodies,
cheating inked into syllabi,
and distant gunshots painting a symphony.

i laughed when I heard
the government appointed
Starkville High to Grade-A.
how quickly you went
from an F to an A?
how ironic that
we couldn't do the same.

out there they don't know do they?
what an A means in the South.
if they did,
surely something would be changing.
or maybe, they need
weed fueling our blood,
prison time written on our degrees,
and our bodies chained to cracked cement.

For Dr. Boone at MDE:

I have three social concerns about the proposal for moving the MSMS to SHS/MSU:

1. Putting two high schools on the same campus will create jealousies and rivalries. These will exist simply because they are high schools; they will be more intense because of proximity and the SHS inference of inferiority.

2. Once the high school empties for the day, MSMS will be isolated. The high school campus will be dead, and the MSMS students cannot walk smoothly onto the college campus. Bike lanes and SMART do not eliminate the isolation and risk, especially the Hwy. 182 risk.

3. But that geographical distance will not keep the residential children from inquiring into non-academic college life.

These reasons make me conclude that the MSMS should stay at Mississippi University for Women and be improved with the money needed to set up the Starkville campus.

Thank you,
George Hazard, Columbus

Response to MSMS Proposals from MSU and MUW

From Cynthia Henderson <chenderson@cypressei.com>

Date Sun 3/2/2025 1:24 PM

To SecondaryEducation <secondaryeducation@mdek12.org>

 1 attachment (89 KB)

20250302 CHenderson MDE Letter Response.pdf;

External Email

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Dear Dr. Boone,

Attached you will find my response to MDE's request for responses to the proposals from MSU and MUW for MSMS.

Sincerely,

Cindy Henderson, PE, PWS

President

Cypress Environment & Infrastructure

Phone: 228-596-2708

www.cypressei.com



CYNTHIA J HENDERSON



March 2, 2025

Cynthia J Henderson, PE, PWS
4003 Dunsinane St
Ocean Springs, MS 39564

Regarding: MSMS Proposals Provided by MSU and MUW

Dear Dr. Boone:

I want to express my appreciation for the Mississippi Department of Education's efforts to enhance the educational programs for the Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science (MSMS) students. Leadership changes in several organizations involved and funding challenges have created a pressing need for change at MSMS. The faculty, staff, and students at MSMS are exceptional, as they have been throughout MSMS's history; however, inadequate facilities and funding have resulted in less than optimal conditions for their educational experience.

My family has a long history with MSMS. My older brother, Mark Henderson, graduated in the Class of 1991. My sister-in-law, Leslie Hatcher Hendeson, graduated in the Class of 1994. I graduated in the Class of 1995, and my younger brother graduated in the Class of 1999. We were all lab instructors at MSMS at various times while we attended Mississippi State University for our degrees. Mark and Leslie have gone on to work as electrical and chemical engineers in Mississippi, respectively, and they founded and scaled Mississippi's first brewery, Lazy Magnolia Brewery. I have worked as an environmental engineer based in Mississippi with projects from coast to coast and have founded and scaled Cypress Environment & Infrastructure (Cypress) located in Biloxi, Mississippi. Cypress has been on the Inc 5000 list of the fastest-growing companies in the United States in 2022, 2023, and 2024. Our highest rankings to date are as the 897th fastest growing business in the United States, 8th fastest growing business in engineering nationwide, and 2nd fastest growing business in the State of Mississippi. Needless to say, MSMS has played a significant role in our personal and professional successes.

My history is even more intertwined with MSMS as I joined the MSMS Foundation's (Foundation) Board of Directors (Board) in 2009 after HB 513 passed, which instituted the \$500 per semester room and board fee for MSMS students. Knowing that my family members and I had been provided an incredible opportunity at no cost and that it would have been a hardship for many families I knew, I was concerned about the institution of the fee. Like many things, it wasn't exactly as it seemed on the surface and was, in fact, an attempt by the Mississippi Legislature to assist MSMS at a time when budget cuts were inevitable. I became President of the MSMS Foundation's Board of Directors in 2011 and have served the school in that capacity since then. The Foundation has successfully raised millions of dollars to support MSMS, thanks to generous donations from alumni, parents, and friends of the school. Other members of the Board and I have also walked the halls of

CYNTHIA J HENDERSON



Jackson to highlight MSMS's achievements and ensure that MSMS remains a priority during budget discussions.

I write today as an MSMS alumna and not on behalf of any other organization. However, I benefit from the knowledge I have gained in many conversations with MSMS faculty and staff. I know more than most people about the current shortcomings of the facilities and their situation. I have been concerned about them for some time, and walking the halls of Jackson was a response to those concerns.

I have reviewed the proposals from MUW and MSU. Ultimately, I found both proposals to be suboptimal for MSMS. As I considered what makes MSMS unique and fosters its environment of excellence, I realized that many stakeholders involved in the current discussion did not attend residential high schools and may not fully grasp the differences between that experience and a conventional high school. While many MSMS alums initially choose the school for its academic opportunities, most emphasize that the MSMS community was the most compelling aspect of their experience. This community includes faculty, staff, and their fellow students. The application process to attend MSMS, along with the decision to embrace its core values, creates a unique group.

Students at MSMS come from every corner of Mississippi, representing various socio-economic groups and demographics, yet they all share those core values. The residential aspect of MSMS ensures that students have numerous interactions throughout the day with peers who share those values. The academic excellence that is often celebrated is a result of these shared values, rather than solely a result of having exceptional faculty or courses. Students motivate one another to excel, support each other in learning and improvement, and faculty and staff provide mentorship and a framework that enhances the learning environment.

The MSU proposal does not adequately consider the MSMS community or how to improve and enhance it. Integrating the Starkville Oktibbeha Consolidated School District High School with MSMS in a hybrid campus, where the two high schools exist side by side and share facilities, would dilute and erode the culture of MSMS. This dilution would negatively impact the core values and sense of community at MSMS, ultimately undermining the celebrated academic achievements. The students at MSMS have chosen this specific experience; they had the option to attend a traditional high school along with all its athletics and other offerings close to home but opted for something different.

On the other hand, the MUW proposal includes few changes although it appropriately celebrates MUW's 37-year history of supporting MSMS. However, the MUW proposal lacks a funding solution to address the facility conditions.

If I were to vote today between these two options, I would choose for MSMS to remain at MUW. I would also recommend that the MDE work with MSMS and MUW to develop contracts or similar instruments that outline the expectations and responsibilities of all parties involved. Ultimately, MSMS needs capital funding to improve its facilities. Moving MSMS is unnecessary to achieve this goal and may disrupt its culture.

CYNTHIA J HENDERSON



As a Mississippi taxpayer and an MSMS alumna, I find it unfathomable that MSU is asking for \$85 million for their proposal, especially when we have worked hard to secure just \$6 million in annual funding for MSMS. While it is normal for capital projects to require significant funding, this request is particularly large. Even MUW's more modest requests exceed \$20 million.

I respectfully urge MDE to consider a third option and dedicate next year to developing alternatives, even if those alternatives are limited to the two proposed locations. The locations are reasonable choices, but I feel that there are better versions of the plans than the ones presented. Before endorsing any multi-million-dollar solution, it's essential to thoroughly explore all possibilities. As a professional engineer, I know that the first idea is rarely the best one and a more refined and productive solution is often available with further consideration.

I am always available to discuss MSMS and its future if you have any questions.

Very respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Cynthia J. Henderson', written in a cursive style.

Cynthia Henderson, PE, PWS
228-596-2708
chenderson@cypressei.com
www.cypressei.com

MSMS proposal

From Kacey Hill <kacey.hill@gmail.com>

Date Mon 3/3/2025 8:54 PM

To SecondaryEducation <secondaryeducation@mdek12.org>

External Email

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Dear Dr. Boone:

I am writing as a graduate of MSMS (c/o 97) to express my support for the MUW proposal. I believe that the best possible future for MSMS is in Columbus.

While MSMS students are given incredible academic opportunities, the school also allows them the chance take on life responsibilities in an environment with more of a safety net than the typical college campus. I felt much more prepared for college life having already had to navigate trying along with a roommate, paying certain bills, grocery shopping, budgeting and so many other soft skills I was able to practice at MSMS. But this experience was cradled in the unique atmosphere of MUW — a very different environment than the MSU campus without frat parties, game days or a significantly larger male population.

Also as a parent, I think back to the enormous trust my own parents put in the school. They were deeply opposed to sending their child into the world two years early. The academic opportunity afforded by MSMS won out over their concerns, but I am certain they would have made a different decision had the school not been on the MUW campus. I hate to think of the students who would miss out on the life changing experience of MSMS (and also of the talent that the school would miss out on!)

Additionally, I have reviewed the proposals and found the MUW proposal significantly more detailed and realistic regarding the budgeting and financial details involved in housing the school. The MUW leadership knows what it entails to have MSMS on campus because they have done it for all of these years. While there are clearly issues with the current facilities, I feel confident that this reset process will be positive for the future of MSMS (on the campus of MUW!)

Kacey Hill
Class of 1997
Sent from my iPhone

AGAINST MSMS moving to the campus of State

From Deborah Hodges <deborah@pdhpcas.com>

Date Mon 3/3/2025 7:11 PM

To SecondaryEducation <secondaryeducation@mdek12.org>

External Email

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Dear Dr. Boone -

Consolidating Mississippi's most successful high school, a beacon of excellence to the entire nation, into a larger county district is an effective closure of the Mississippi School for Math and Science. I am extremely disappointed that this is even a consideration. Moving the Mississippi School for Math and Science away from its home of nearly forty years to the campus of Mississippi State University is completely unnecessary, a waste of precious education funds and dangerous for the high school students who will be placed away from home the first time, before many of them can even drive, into a major college campus. There is no scenario where this move makes sense for the students of MSMS or the taxpayers of the State of Mississippi.

The W has invested in these MSMS students for nearly forty years. I was there when the first students came on campus. I saw the adjustments they went through. While they may be very smart, they are still children, many from sheltered families in small towns who have never had the freedom they enjoy at MSMS. It is good that The W is a small and gated campus with a community that watches out for each other. What is better is that The W has afforded the MSMS students to develop their own community and their own traditions. Having their own facilities along with access to W facilities has allowed these students to thrive both socially and academically. Moving MSMS into the Oktibbeha County School District will disintegrate that community. That is a loss to those students, but it's also a long-term loss to the State of Mississippi. With nothing special to return to, these students will graduate, go to college in another state and never return to use their talents and skills to better Mississippi.

The W also watches out for them academically. With access to The W's facilities for both the science and the arts, MSMS students on The W campus are becoming well-rounded adults. Not only has the relationship between MSMS and The W resulted in one of the top high schools in the country, it has also produced a large number of National Merit Finalists, many more than our neighboring states who also get tremendously more in funding. With dual-credit courses made available at no charge to MSMS students while attending high school, full tuition scholarships to The W when they graduate, and research opportunities on a wide range of topics in conjunction with a number of institutions, The W is providing more opportunity than will ever be afforded at any other institution.

My daughter attended Mississippi State, as did my son. For a decade, I've had students on that campus. State cannot handle the students it already has. From health services to parking to class schedules, it is failing its students in every measure because there are simply too many students on campus already. While State does a good job of keeping the news under wraps, its students are very aware. There are a number of crimes on campus each year, both reported and unreported. In fact, recent crime statistics show that The W is a much safer campus than State. My own daughter was the victim of a crime at State when she was a senior. I could relay to you any number of stories about drugs on campus, from my children's experiences on campus to just my own experience being around Starkville. This does not even begin to cover the ready access to alcohol, which is everywhere. These high school students in no way are ready for this type of exposure and there is no way to keep it from them on a campus as large as Mississippi State's. It is impossible to build these dorms far enough away from the main events on campus for these students to not only have ready access, but to even be

targeted for this type of activity. It's not just drugs, though. It's a number of situations that having high school students in close proximity with college students will face. They do not have the skills to recognize and prevent many of the things that will inevitably happen to some of them on such a large campus. They need to remain on the small, gated W campus where they have thrived for all these years.

While it is well-known that the MSMS dorms on the campus of The W need major renovations, The W was not responsible for funding those. MDE and MSMS were to have worked in partnership together on those large projects. This did not happen. That is not The W's fault. State's dorms are not in fabulous condition either, and that is fully State's responsibility. There have been live bats living in the walls of the dorms, problems with the water ranging from there being none, to no hot water, to many students and parents noticing that there are number of student skin problems that clear up when they go home. Things that don't work properly, fire alarms going off at all hours of the day and night, dirty carpets, unpainted walls, rooms not clean when students arrive, all of these are problems at State and every other multi-unit housing development in the nation. Moving these children to State won't stop these minor problems. If there are new facilities to be built, it makes much more economic (per published studies) and practical sense to build them on the campus of The W, where MSMS is already located.

This proposal reeks of back-room politics and underhandedness. With all the struggling school districts in this state, it is particularly egregious for MDE to award any funds to Oktibbeha County Schools for new facilities on State's campus or anywhere else. But when these facilities will cost substantially more at State than they would on the campus of The W, MSMS' home since 1987, it's particularly egregious. If the residents of Oktibbeha County cannot fund a new math and science school of their own, then they should not expect the State to award it to them, especially in such an under-handed fashion. There are a number of districts, including George County where I live who could also use new schools. What will you say to the George County teacher who got out on Saturday mornings and patched the roof of their portable school rooms with their own money? Or to the parent at Agricola Elementary who hosted barbecues and car shows to raise money to make repairs around the school? Or to the parents of the children in all the other districts in the state who go to school in buildings needing substantial repairs?

From science and technology to art, music and history, The W is allowing these students a wide range of experiences and opportunities to explore the world while still being nurtured and protected on their small campus. It's really the very best of both worlds and one that the large campus of Mississippi State and the large district of Oktibbeha County cannot provide. Leave MSMS where it is and properly fund it and the services The W has been providing it (and MDE) free of charge for decades.

Deborah Stockman Hodges
George County Mississippi



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MSMS

From Ann Huber <phy2chem@yahoo.com>
Date Tue 3/4/2025 4:47 PM
To SecondaryEducation <secondaryeducation@mdek12.org>

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Dr. Boone,

My children were privileged to attend MSMS, graduating in 2001, 2003, 2011 and 2013. My husband and I participated heavily both on campus and in our home.

We noted early that MSMS and the "W" were often overlooked when the state budgets were made. In 2001, straight line winds did major damage on campus and tornadoes struck in 2002 or 2003. Rather than make repairs, the students were relocated to other dorms.

All four built a foundation for furthering their education that could not have been accomplished at their home school. The "W" was the perfect size university to embrace the students. Columbus had plenty to do, but not so much as to overwhelm a young student.

Having lived in Starkville, I know that Starkville offers much more entertainment by way of MSU. As a parent, allowing my sons and daughter to go to MSMS was a difficult choice. On the "W" campus, I knew the instructors and professors. I had a sense of safety and well being for my children.

If my children had been incorporated into a local high school, I would have kept them at home. There is no point in leaving a local high school to go to MSMS if that is the situation. Also, I would not be in favor of my 16 year old students living on campus at MSU. If that happens, it will only be a matter of time until there is a major issue with the mixing of MSMS students with the population at MSU.

As a physics and chemistry teacher at a community college, I see what happens on our small campus, especially as we bring in high school students to take courses.

I see that Starkville High School is trying to benefit financially in this; I don't know why money can't be spent on MSMS students and their campus OR move them to Delta State--they have the smaller campus and dorms available.

For some reason, Mississippi legislature and the State Department of Education do not seem to understand what a marvelous benefit MSMS is for our students and how well they represent us as they go to college and make their way into the world.

MSMS is not for every student, and once again, this Starkville High/MSU plan is putting MSMS on the back burner, not focusing on their needs and what will benefit them most. It seems the plan is to destroy MSMS.

When my MSMS graduates encounter other MSMS graduates, there is an immediate comradery. There is pride in MSMS.

Students have to have a certain level of maturity to go to MSMS, managing school, laundry, time, money, and finding out that there are "other people like me" that want to learn for the sake of learning. Please do not destroy the opportunity for other students.

I know that some student say they like the idea of MSMS going to MSU--and then they say, they don't want to do anything jointly with Starkville High, because they know that MSMS would be watered down and the benefit of attending would be lost.

I'm sure every teen thinks living on a major college campus would be fun--but they do not understand the distraction that the social activities available at MSU would be.

I have major concerns for the safety of MSMS students on the MSU campus.

Choose to stand up for these students who need the MSMS experience.

Ann Huber
76 Shivers Drive
Cleveland, MS 38732
(662) 341-0858

Ann B. Huber
662 341 0858 cell

The Lord your God is in your midst,
a mighty one who will save;
he will rejoice over you with gladness;
he will quiet you by his love;
he will exult over you with loud singing.
Zephaniah 3:17

Stakeholder feedback MSMS

From Theo Hummer <theo.hummer.1977@gmail.com>

Date Mon 3/3/2025 11:27 PM

To SecondaryEducation <secondaryeducation@mdek12.org>

 1 attachment (65 KB)

Hummer MSMS letter - alumna faculty member.pdf;

External Email

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Dear Dr. Boone,

Please find, attached, my stakeholder feedback to the two proposals for MSMS's future.

Thank you for your time, attention, and support.

All the best,
Dr. Theo Hummer,
MSMS class of 1995
current MSMS English faculty

Dear Dr. Boone, MDE, and State Board of Education,

Thank you for this opportunity to respond to MUW's and MSU's proposals for future partnerships with MSMS. As an MSMS alumna (class of 1995) and current faculty member, I'm keenly aware of how vital the school's partnerships with both MUW and MSU have been; I also feel well positioned to offer insight into MSMS's existing identity, including strengths that any future plan would do well to preserve.

I'd also like to share just how important MSMS is to me. Its rigorous academics and dedicated college counseling program changed the trajectory of my life and made it possible for me eventually to earn an Ivy League PhD. The opportunity to educate the next generation of MSMSers is also what drew me and my fancy degree back home to live and work (and vote and pay taxes) in Mississippi. I love this school; it made me; it's in my heart and my blood. MSMS is Mississippi at its best.

In a recent letter to media outlets throughout the state, Cynthia Henderson and Lee Edmundson were right on the mark when they called MSMS "the shining jewel of Mississippi's educational" system, pointing to its overperformance compared with better-funded sister schools in neighboring states. MSMS's 37-year record of incredible academic success is a matter of public record. What's possibly harder to understand from outside is the alchemy that makes that success possible.

The MSMS experience is emphatically not your typical high school experience. Kids who apply to MSMS are odd ducks. They're looking for stiffer academic challenges, yes—but also for a path to a life less ordinary. Many of them feel alienated or isolated in their hometown high schools; they're considered nerdy or strange for their academic ambitions. Many have been bullied. My own experience in Meridian Public Schools was that my classmates seemed to like me fine—they were nice enough to me—but they and I didn't entirely "get" one another; they teased me good-naturedly about being a "walking dictionary" and seemed genuinely baffled by the things I read, the questions I asked, the possibilities I dreamt of. I thought of myself as strange and nerdy.

So imagine my surprise when, within two months of starting at MSMS, I already had a large circle of real friends who read and asked and dreamed about some of the same things I did, and who also read and asked and dreamed about things I'd never heard of! I was surrounded by people who were odd in the same way that I was odd. They were creative, well-read, passionately curious; they thought surprising, exciting, challenging thoughts. We reveled together in classrooms where everyone was too focused on finding out "why" and "how" to cause typical high school classroom disruptions. And outside of class, my new peers wanted to know me, and they wanted me to know them, in genuine and complex ways that went beyond the "nerd" or "smart kid" labels. I could be my weird self around them, and they made me feel popular.

Meanwhile, the academics at MSMS were like nothing I'd ever experienced. I was used to taking care of all my homework during down time during the school day. My classes had been easy; I'd rarely had to make much effort in order to get all As. My new MSMS friends had had similar experiences. But during our junior year, we were in for a rude awakening: at MSMS, our classes were hard! We had to develop study skills and time management skills we'd never needed before. I got to test my limits, to work all the way up to my capacity. For the first time, I had more opportunities to do interesting, worthwhile things with my time and energy than I had time and energy to do them—so for the first time, I had to make choices and figure out what my priorities were. And I discovered that my teachers were working as hard as I was. They took my intellectual life seriously, and they modeled what it looked like to live a life of the mind. They challenged me, taught me how to think flexibly, and let me see versions of what my own future might be like.

All of those experiences I treasured as an MSMS student—the close friendships, the challenges, the development of skills, the one-on-one mentoring by teachers—required vulnerability and trust. And as MSMS faculty, I see kids going through those same experiences and more. I see them forming friendships across political, ethnic, and religious boundaries; I see neurotypical and nonneurotypical kids figuring out how to communicate, work together, and come to like one another. Kids trust me with their anxieties, hopes, dreams, and challenges, and I trust them to make the best use they can of the opportunities and guidance I offer them. During all of the 32 years I've been acquainted with MSMS, it has consistently nurtured a culture of trust among its students, faculty, and staff. MSMS's culture of trust allows kids to accept challenges, to take intellectual risks, to try unfamiliar methods, to be academically honest even when they're not sure whether or not they've hit the mark. The culture of trust is the foundation on which the school's academic success is built.

MSMS's culture of trust involves kids taking responsibility, ownership, and real leadership in school clubs, activities, spaces, and events. Faculty and staff scaffold responsible habits, then eventually trust students to navigate campus spaces and to manage their time in productive ways. The practice of responsibility and leadership requires a degree of earned freedom that's unusual in regular high schools. I remember what a thrill that freedom and responsibility were for me as a student, and how determined I was to use them well and make the adults who had given them to me proud. And I see that same thrill and determination in my students in 2025.

I hope this background will help to explain how alarming I found MSU's proposal that MSMS share a campus with Starkville High School. MSMS students depend on the safety and freedom afforded by the MSMS culture of trust; they've actively chosen a high school experience that's different from the typical hometown high school experience. The freedoms necessary to that culture would likely disrupt the procedures of a regular high school; the safety of that culture would surely be threatened by regular high school social pressures. In order to retain the trust that nurtures its academic success, MSMS needs its autonomy, its own space, its identity separate from that of a local high school.

I'll add here that our students are not being deprived of extracurricular opportunities by going to MSMS. On the contrary, the school has always found ways to make sure that every kid who wants to play a sport has the opportunity to play that sport, that every kid who wants to play music has an ensemble to play in, that every kid who wants to be involved in theatre has a job to do either onstage or backstage. Our kids are resourceful, creative, and determined, and so are our faculty and staff on their behalf. If MSMS kids want an opportunity, we make it happen—and we've always done it while being excellent stewards of our resources.

What MSMS kids are being deprived of currently is adequate facilities. They deserve comfortable dorms, modern labs, and classrooms with reasonable climate control. They're our best and brightest, and MSMS has a 37-year track record of educating them brilliantly. Surely MSMS has more than earned the state's investment, and not at the cost of merging with any local high school.

Sincerely—and with gratitude for your support,

Theo Hummer, Ph.D.
MSMS % 1995
English faculty

MSMS

From todd hunt <gtodddhunt@gmail.com>

Date Fri 2/28/2025 11:46 AM

To SecondaryEducation <secondaryeducation@mdek12.org>

External Email

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To Whom It May Concern:

As a 1986 graduate of Starkville High School and the parent of a 2017 graduate of MSMS, I feel that I have a unique perspective into the current discussion related to the location of MSMS. I firmly believe that the MUW option is by far the best location for the school. Had MSMS shared a location with Starkville High School when our child was considering enrollment there, they would not have made the switch from their current high school. MSMS students thrive in the smaller setting that MUW provides - a large campus with lots of other high school students would only expose the MSMS students to more of the same bullying most of them already receive from their existing school situations.

That being said, I also think it's crucial that the state appropriate funds to improve the living conditions for MSMS students. These best and brightest children deserve better facilities than those currently available to them.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I hope that the Department will recommend to the Legislature that MSMS remain in Columbus on the campus of MUW.

Sincerely,

Todd Hunt
Starkville, MS

March 3, 2025

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

Re: Mississippi State Board of Education seeks stakeholder feedback on MSMS proposals

Dr. Donna Boone:

When people learn that I am from Mississippi, their first reaction is predictable:

“*You’re* from Mississippi? I didn’t know that.”

“You don’t *talk* like you’re from Mississippi.”

“You know, I’ve never actually *been* to Mississippi?”

I do not live in Mississippi today, but I represent the place I come from *every day*. And I could not be better prepared or more proud to do so than as a graduate of the Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science. **That’s why I’m writing to tell you how imperative it is that the Mississippi State Board of Education commit to fully funding MSMS today.**

As a 16-year-old, I chose MSMS for the academic opportunities it offered. However, my experience at MSMS gave me something much more important than National Merit Finalist status or scholarship money—it gave me a community unlike any I had known before.

Every teacher and administrator went the extra mile: from the biology teacher who quickly realized I had already learned the material in his class and helped me change my course schedule, to the math teacher who encouraged me to tutor others. I lived and learned with other talented and motivated students from all over the state, from all different backgrounds, many of whom would be the first person in their families to go to college. All of us had made the same choice and the same promise to each other—to uphold the ideals of Scholarship, Service, Creativity, and Community. MSMS shaped me into the person I am today, and I know that I would be a lesser person without it.

But MSMS didn’t just benefit me personally—it is also a vital investment in the future of our state. MSMS graduates in Mississippi go on to become educators, entrepreneurs, and doctors, contributing \$29-63 million annually to the Mississippi economy. MSMS graduates employ an estimated 2,250 people in 55 alumni-owned businesses across the state, providing a return on investment for the Mississippi Legislature of \$10 for each \$1 spent.*

This is why I urge you to *fully* fund MSMS, so it can continue to provide an Opportunity for Excellence to students from all over our state.

The MSU proposal suggests that governance of MSMS would include a seven-member team, with two representatives from the SOCSO and *only a single representative* of MSMS. This arrangement gives the SOCSO inappropriate license to control state funds appropriated by the legislature for MSMS and undermines the autonomy and future of the school. It is my opinion that an individual school district should not be included in MSMS' governance; any proposal for the future of MSMS must maintain the school's autonomy and status directly under the State Board of Education.

Additionally, the small, close-knit, and walkable community of MSMS on the MUW campus is a crucial aspect of the MSMS experience—from collaborating with the local community to research and create award-winning Tales from the Crypt performances, to walking to Cafe on Main for a hot chocolate on a Saturday morning. I do not believe that isolating MSMS students, many of whom do not have access to a personal vehicle, to a far corner of MSU's campus will create this kind of environment.

As work service for the betterment of their community, MSMS students sweep the same floors their classmates walk on. Meanwhile, the state legislature has dedicated a mere 69 cents per square foot annually to the maintenance of those facilities, an amount far below the \$6.00 per square foot recommended by the Association of Physical Plant Administrators standards. Now, as an alumna, I am still doing my part to care for those same dorms and classrooms. Donors and MSMS alumni like myself have contributed more than \$2,170,000 in support through the MSMS Foundation since 2015. I donate to MSMS because I know the value of the education I received, and I know that even one qualified young student's application passed over for mere lack of funds is too many. I hope that you will feel the same.

I appreciate the State Board of Education and the Mississippi Department of Education's initiative to address the challenges of MSMS's facilities and ensure their sustainability for the future. I hope that children in our state will continue to receive this opportunity to develop their academic potential and their character for many years to come. **I hope you will choose to fund MSMS on a level that will allow our state to be competitive with schools in Alabama, Louisiana, or Arkansas.**

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Kate Johnson
Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science, Class of 2015

622 3rd Street SW, Apt. A
Washington, DC 20024-3176

(601) 917-8965
skj2241@gmail.com

*Facts based on 2015 MSMS Alumni Economic and Social Impact Survey conducted by the MSMS Foundation.

March 3, 2025

Dr. Donna Boone
Chief Academic Officer
Mississippi Department of Education
secondaryeducation@mdek12.org

Subject: The Best Future for MSMS: Prioritizing Proven Success Over Uncertain Change

Dear Dr. Boone,

I am writing to express my serious concerns regarding the future of the Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science (MSMS) and the proposed relocation to Mississippi State University (MSU). As a parent of three MSMS graduates (2015, 2018, and 2023), a Mississippi taxpayer, and a citizen invested in the long-term success of education in our state, I find several aspects of the MSU proposal deeply troubling. Mississippi has a responsibility to fully fund MSMS so that every qualified student has the opportunity to attend. After reviewing both proposals, it is clear that keeping MSMS at MUW is in the best interest of the students, the school, and the state of Mississippi.

MSMS provides students with a unique and challenging academic environment, but as a residential school, its structure and day-to-day student experience must also be considered. One of the key advantages of its current location at MUW is its safe, compact, and walkable campus, where students can access all necessary resources—classrooms, dining, the library, and extracurricular spaces—within a five-minute walk from their dormitories. The MSU proposal introduces logistical and safety concerns by requiring MSMS students to use public transportation daily to access key resources like the library, which is essential for their academic success. This is not a minor inconvenience—it creates a fundamental shift in how students navigate their daily routines and exposes them to unnecessary risks. The claim that MSMS students would be housed in a separate and secure environment at MSU is undermined by the reality that they will need to leave it regularly to access critical academic resources.

MSMS students are high school students—not college students. The current MUW setting is intentionally designed to provide both independence and structure, ensuring that students are supported academically and socially without the distractions and challenges of a large university campus. Relocating the school to an environment where students must manage daily transportation and increased exposure to a college campus setting raises serious concerns about whether their needs will be fully met.

As a Mississippi taxpayer, I am alarmed by the financial implications of relocating MSMS to MSU. The \$85 million requested in the MSU proposal, even if used entirely for dormitories, raises questions about whether state tax dollars are being used to unfairly benefit one specific school district over all others. Even if this is not the intent, it is impossible to ignore the perception of preferential treatment, which is problematic and unacceptable. The MUW proposal offers a \$22 million renovation for the existing dormitory on the MSMS campus—a far more responsible investment than spending \$85 million to build dormitories in an untested setting. The MSU proposal does not address the continued funding of MSMS, instead focusing on recruitment. However, recruitment has never been a barrier to enrollment—MSMS has a waiting list of highly qualified students every year. Funding, not recruitment, is the real issue. Instead of moving the school, the state should focus on funding additional spots for students who are already eager to attend.

The MSU proposal repeatedly emphasizes brain drain and implies that MSMS should do more to keep students in Mississippi. While some MSMS graduates do leave the state, this should not be viewed as a problem. MSMS alumni are Mississippi's best ambassadors—they demonstrate the excellence of our state at the highest levels. When they return, they bring back leadership, innovation, and experience that directly benefit Mississippi. The true success of MSMS should not be measured by how many students stay in-state but by the level of achievement they reach and the impact they bring back. Mississippi should be proud of what MSMS students accomplish—not try to restrict their potential for the sake of workforce placement.

Perhaps the most concerning aspect of the MSU proposal is its fundamental misunderstanding of what MSMS is and who it serves. MSMS was created to challenge and support the brightest students from every county in the state, not to be a workforce training pipeline. Gifted students are not machines to be placed in specific industries—they are future scientists, educators, leaders, and innovators. Any proposal that fails to acknowledge the importance of intellectual development beyond immediate economic needs is flawed from the start.

MSMS is a nationally recognized success story, and its partnership with MUW has been a proven success for decades. Relocating the school to MSU—at a higher cost, in an unproven setting, and with greater risks—is not in the best interest of students, taxpayers, or the future of gifted education in Mississippi. Beyond the financial and logistical concerns, the true strength of MSMS lies in its teachers, staff, and academic culture. These cannot simply be moved to a new location and expected to thrive.

I urge you to consider the long-term impact of this decision and to prioritize what is best for the students, the school, and the state. More importantly than remaining at MUW, Mississippi must commit to fully funding MSMS so that every qualified student has the opportunity to attend—regardless of location. The state must invest in what works, not gamble on what is untested.

Sincerely,

Paul Johnson
2241 Poplar Springs Drive
Meridian, Mississippi 39301
wpaul.johnson@gmail.com

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 writing this letter to provide feedback on the proposals submitted by Mississippi State University (MSU) and the Mississippi University for Women (MUW) regarding the future of the Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science (MSMS). I am a MSMS alumna, graduating in 2003. I am also a graduate of the University of Southern Mississippi (USM) and Purdue University. I currently reside in Florence, AL where I am an Associate Professor of Chemistry in the Department of Chemistry and Physics at the University of North Alabama (UNA). In addition to my roles as teacher and researcher at UNA, I am a chemistry education researcher. I'm listed as author/co-author on four peer-reviewed papers and book chapters and PI/Co-PI on over \$1 million in grant funding, including a collaborative grant with researchers at MSU. Finally, I serve as a grant reviewer for agencies like the National Science Foundation, whose review format I have modified for the purposes of this letter.

Mississippi University for Women Proposal

Strengths

1. The proposal provides a detailed and transparent financial break down, demonstrating a strong awareness of the financial responsibilities of housing and operating MSMS. These details make it clear how the proposed plans would be implemented and what the cost to the state and MSMS would be.
2. The proposal acknowledges MSMS students' mental health needs and provides details about how the university can support these needs. This reflects a clear understanding of the importance of such services to the success of MSMS and its students.
3. The proposal builds on an established relationship with MSMS which includes dual-credit courses, research opportunities, dedicated spaces, and shared spaces on a small, enclosed campus.
4. The proposal offers to expand the existing relationship with MSMS with the inclusion of joint honors experiences, access to an Artificial Intelligence Lab, opportunities to earn Academic Certificates, a monthly enrichment program (MSMS Saturday Institute), expanded access to fine and performing arts events, and access to Plymouth Bluff Environment Center.

Weaknesses

The key weakness of this proposal is the financial constraints of the campus. MUW does not have funding sources for MSMS outside of legislative sources and funding through the State Department of Education. The proposal makes it clear that the proposed building modifications and new hires would be contingent on securing additional funding.

Mississippi State University Proposal

Strengths

1. The proposed collaboration between MSU, Starkville Oktibbeha Consolidated School District, and MSMS has the potential to broaden the impact of MSMS on the state of Mississippi, its teachers, and students.
2. The proposal builds on an established relationship of providing research experiences to MSMS students.
3. The proposal offers to expand the existing relationship with MSMS to include dual-credit courses, research opportunities, modern dedicated spaces, and shared spaces in a committed location, removed from the center of campus.

Weaknesses

1. The proposal lacks a detailed financial break down of how MSU would support MSMS, making it unclear how the plan would be implemented and what the cost to the state and MSMS would be.
2. The proposal lacks details regarding how the university would support the social and psychological needs of MSMS students, raising concerns about whether they fully recognize the importance of mental health support for these students. This concern is further heightened by the proposal to expand the school to include 10th grade students who may be as young as 14 when they move away from home!
3. The proposal lacks details on how the university will support the unique challenges of MSMS being relocated to an R1 SEC campus. For example, there is no mention of a plan for managing football weekends when the population increases by up to 60,000, posing significant additional safety concerns for students.

Summary

MUW's proposal stands out due to the level of detail provided, indicating an awareness of the various challenges posed by housing high school students on a college campus. Their proposal provides financial transparency which allows for an estimate of cost to the state and school. The level of detail they have provided regarding the mental health support of students also indicates that they are aware and able to provide the significant social and psychological support MSMS students need as they acclimate to living away from home on a college campus. While MSU's proposal offers broader collaborative potential, it lacks sufficient details in key areas such as financial plans, student support, and challenges associated with housing MSMS on an R1 SEC campus. Without these details, it is not possible to estimate the cost to the state or school. However, based on the estimates provided by MUW, it is reasonable to predict the costs would be significantly higher to the state. MSMS is already underfunded by Mississippi, when compared to similar schools in Alabama, Louisiana, and Arkansas. Without an explicit financial plan, including a large financial commitment by MSU and the state of Mississippi, I believe the school would be best served by remaining at MUW.

To conclude, I would like to share my perspective as an alumna of MSMS and USM, as well as a faculty member at a nearby university. Historically, many MSMS students have chosen to attend MSU due to its proximity to MSMS. In doing so, they have often missed out on better academic and financial opportunities. For example, I was one of two students in the class of 2003 that chose to attend USM. Most students in my class did not apply. While MSU offered me limited scholarships, USM awarded me one of ten Presidential Scholarships—a scholarship that covered tuition, room, and board for four years. While I cannot predict the exact impact of moving MSMS to MSU, I am concerned that this shift could strengthen the pipeline of MSMS students into MSU at the expense of other opportunities for the students.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Sara L. Johnson, Ph.D.

March 3, 2025

Dr. Donna Boone
Chief Academic Officer
Mississippi Department of Education
secondaryeducation@mdek12.org

Subject: Concerns Regarding the Future of the Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science

Dear Dr. Boone;

I am writing to express my deep concern regarding the future of the Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science (MSMS) and the proposed relocation to Mississippi State University (MSU). As a parent of three MSMS graduates (2015, 2018, and 2023), a Mississippi taxpayer, and a citizen invested in the state's educational future, I find several aspects of the proposed move deeply troubling.

Ultimately, I believe the state should **fully fund MSMS** to ensure that every qualified student has the opportunity to attend. Based on the two proposals I have reviewed, it is clear that keeping MSMS at MUW is in the best interest of the school, its students, and the state of Mississippi.

Concerns as a Parent: Safety and Accessibility

When my daughter was accepted to MSMS in 2013, the decision to allow her to attend at sixteen was not an easy one. My primary concerns were safety and the overall environment, both of which were well addressed by the structured, secure, and walkable campus at Mississippi University for Women (MUW). At MUW, no resource—classrooms, dining facilities, the library, or extracurricular spaces—is more than a five-minute walk from the dormitories, ensuring students' well-being at all times.

By contrast, the MSU proposal acknowledges that MSMS students will need to use public transportation daily to access key university resources, including the library, which students use every single day. This contradicts the claim that MSMS students would be in a separate and secure environment. Requiring students to leave their designated school area and navigate a university transit system raises serious concerns about safety, time management, and exposure to an unfamiliar setting—concerns that simply do not exist at MUW.

Concerns as a Taxpayer: Fiscal Responsibility

As a Mississippi taxpayer, I am troubled by the financial implications of relocating MSMS to MSU. Two primary issues stand out:

Preferential Treatment for One School District

- The \$85 million requested in the MSU proposal, even if used entirely for dormitories, raises serious questions about whether state funds are being used to unfairly benefit one specific school district over all others.
- Even the appearance of favoritism in funding allocations is unacceptable and should be avoided at all costs.

Cost Efficiency: Proven vs. Unproven Investment

- The MUW proposal outlines a \$22 million renovation to improve an existing dorm—a far more responsible financial decision than spending \$85 million to build a dormitory in an unproven partnership at MSU.
- The MSU proposal does not address the continued funding of MSMS, instead focusing on recruitment. However, recruitment has never been the limiting factor in MSMS enrollment.

- Every year, MSMS has a waiting list of highly qualified students who would gladly attend if there were sufficient funding. The real issue is funding, not recruitment.

A Broader Perspective on MSMS' Impact and Mission

The MSU proposal repeatedly emphasizes “brain drain,” suggesting that MSMS should do more to keep students in Mississippi. However, many MSMS graduates attend the nation’s top universities and pursue careers nationwide and internationally—as a testament to their excellence. These alumni serve as exceptional ambassadors for Mississippi, enhancing our state’s reputation, opening vital networking channels, and countering negative stereotypes about our state. Importantly, many eventually return with invaluable experience, leadership, and innovation that contribute to Mississippi’s long-term prosperity.

At its core, MSMS is not intended solely as a mechanism to retain students for local industry; it is a school that cultivates scholars, leaders, and future innovators. A proposal that focuses narrowly on economic utility fails to recognize that the true success of MSMS is measured by the excellence its students achieve and the positive impact they have over the course of their careers. In other words, the mission of MSMS is to nurture passion, curiosity, and lifelong learning, thereby empowering students to make meaningful contributions both within Mississippi and beyond.

Conclusion: The Right Path Forward

MSMS is a nationally recognized success story, and its partnership with MUW is well-established, efficient, and effective. Relocating the school to an unproven setting at MSU—at a significantly higher cost and with greater risks—is not in the best interest of students, taxpayers, or the future of gifted education in Mississippi.

There are many other factors that contribute to MSMS’ success—the extraordinary teachers who are the heart and soul of the school, the dedicated staff who provide essential support, and the culture of academic excellence that has been nurtured for decades. These elements cannot simply be relocated or recreated in a new, uncertain environment.

I urge you to consider the long-term impact of this decision and to prioritize the well-being of students, fiscal responsibility, and the proven success of MSMS at MUW.

More importantly than remaining at MUW, Mississippi must **commit to fully funding MSMS** so that every qualified student has the opportunity to attend.

Mississippi’s gifted students deserve more than an experiment. They deserve stability, excellence, and a future built on proven success.

Sincerely,

Sarah S. Seltzer Johnson
2241 Poplar Springs Drive
Meridian, Mississippi 39301
nerosarah@gmail.com

Keep MSMS on the MUW campus

From Susan Jones <susan323jones@gmail.com>
Date Sun 3/2/2025 7:04 PM
To SecondaryEducation <secondaryeducation@mdek12.org>

External Email

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Ms. Boone:

I am writing concerning the future of MSMS. I am sure that you are receiving many emails so I shall try to be brief.

1. Facilities are the issue with the present location. This is a problem created in Jackson because adequate funds are not sent to MSMS to improve or maintain what is there. I feel sure that the taxpayers of Mississippi are not in favor of spending the amount of money necessary to build from the ground up at MSU. And to have our dollars spent building a new high school for Starkville is unfair.

2. Safety is a big concern. How many parents will want to send their 16 year old child to a campus of 23,000+ students and expose them to campus life: game day weekends, fraternities, sororities, parties, etc. I don't think it is possible to lock the MSMS students in their dorm to prevent them from being exposed to "college campus life".

Academic excellence has never been an issue at MSMS. Thirteen, yes 13, National Merit Scholarship winners is a testimony to the education these students receive. PLEASE keep MSMS on the W campus with the appropriate funding needed.

Respectfully submitted,
Susan Jones

Support for MSMS

From Christina Jordan <mrscj@me.com>

Date Tue 3/4/2025 2:22 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.

Hello,

After reviewing both proposals from MSU and MUW, it goes without saying that MSU's proposal is more aesthetically appealing. Putting optics aside, MUW has been MSMS's home since its establishment in 1987.

MUW is the home of MSMS. And my alma mater's home is in dire need of a renovation and rejuvenation that can only happen if MSMS stays.

I know this is a large undertaking, but MUW needs this. And so do MSMS students.

If MSMS moves to MSU, it will be merged with an already existing school. In short, MSMS will no longer be a specialized school. Students will no longer have the MSMS experience, as it will be plucked from its strong network of Columbus-based businesses and community partners who support MSMS.

MSMS will no longer exist.

Please save the MSMS experience and don't relocate my alma mater to MSU.

Instead, invest in the unearthed gem that is MUW.

Sincerely,

Christina D. Jordan, Ph.D.

Stakeholder feedback regarding MSMS proposals

From Heath Kasselmann <hckasselmann@gmail.com>

Date Tue 3/4/2025 9:24 AM

To SecondaryEducation <secondaryeducation@mdek12.org>

Cc tsmith@house.ms.gov <tsmith@house.ms.gov>; JTate@senate.ms.gov <JTate@senate.ms.gov>;
ddebar@senate.ms.gov <ddebar@senate.ms.gov>; dblount@senate.ms.gov <dblount@senate.ms.gov>;
rroberson@house.ms.gov <rroberson@house.ms.gov>; kmccarty@house.ms.gov <kmccarty@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,

My name is Heath Kasselmann and I'm from Enterprise, Mississippi. I am writing this email in response to your request for stakeholder feedback regarding the future of the Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science (MSMS). I would definitely consider myself as a stakeholder because my daughter is currently a junior at MSMS. She is the youngest of my three children. Her older sister is finishing her junior year as a Presidential Scholar at Mississippi State University and will study at Oxford University in England this summer. Her older brother is finishing his sophomore year on a full academic scholarship at the University of Southern Mississippi, studying Polymer Science and Engineering. Both of her siblings were STAR students. I am no stranger to the needs of academically gifted children who are succeeding and thriving in the state of Mississippi.

I have examined the two competing proposals submitted by Mississippi State University and the Mississippi University for Women. I am familiar with the geography, buildings, and amenities of both campuses, and their surrounding areas. Most importantly, I asked my daughter what she and her classmates at MSMS think about the differing proposals. The overwhelming conclusion that I have reached is that moving MSMS to the campus of Mississippi State University will negatively impact the lives and education of future students at MSMS. Ultimately, that is and should be the chief concern for the Mississippi Department of Education. I did not speak with any MSMS, MSU, or MUW faculty or staff prior to writing this letter.

All of the students at MSMS made a choice to attend there. The students undergo a competitive selection process that includes a lengthy application packet, written essays, tests, and personal interviews. Many of those students come from well-funded school districts that have buildings and facilities that are more elaborate than those at MSMS. So, why exactly did each student at MSMS volunteer to undergo such a tough selection process, take rigorous classes, and live in a residential setting away from home? It's because they were seeking something different from traditional high school. In the case of my daughter, and most of her MSMS friends, she didn't feel like she fit in with traditional high school students. My daughter struggled to stay engaged at her home high school because they couldn't offer her classes that were academically challenging. Her home high school had no theater program and only offered one art class. Both of her siblings were dismissed early

their entire senior years because there were no more classes for them to take. There were instances of bullying because many of the other students considered her a "nerd". Her story is echoed by many of her MSMS classmates. The MSU plan would co-locate MSMS with a new high school for the Starkville Oktibbeha Consolidated School District (SOCSD). There would be shared cafeteria, library, arena, art, and band spaces. This is exactly what those kids don't want...a return to the same type of high schools and high school situations that they wanted to escape from.

The location and the physical layout of the proposed new buildings is not advantageous for MSMS students. Currently, the students at MSMS are less than a 5-minute walk from most of the MUW facilities, including the library, bookstore, recreation center, and dining cafeteria. MSMS is solidly integrated within the campus and culture of the MUW. This partnership has existed, relatively trouble free, since 1988. Conversely, the proposed site of the new MSMS is in feeling and fact, not a part of the MSU campus. While it is located on campus grounds, the proposed location is isolated on the far north side of the main campus. MSU states in its own proposal that "The (MSMS) residence hall will be completely separate from the MSU campus and residence halls by a residential neighborhood serving as a buffer." The proposed library, cafeteria, arena, and art spaces indicate that the MSMS students are not expected to use existing MSU facilities. They are instead to share them with the SOCSD high school students. Once again, this is exactly the situation many of the MSMS students want to avoid. In the event that an MSMS student needs to use the Mitchell Memorial Library, it's almost 2 miles away on foot.

It should be remembered that MSMS students are minors for the most part. The school has a duty to supervise them and know where they are at all times. Students use a card system to notify MSMS staff of their location, whether it be in class, at the library, extracurricular practice, or in their dorm room. Students are allowed to walk off campus, at specified times, but only in groups. Only permitted locations are allowed to be visited. Most students do not have cars, and a student cannot ride in a vehicle with any other individual without written parent permission. The current location of MSMS is adjacent to the historic downtown area of Columbus, Mississippi. The area has a number of thriving small businesses such as coffee shops, cafes, bookstores, and retail boutiques. These businesses are located within a 10-15 minute walk from the MSMS dorms and have sidewalks and marked pedestrian crossings the entire way. This gives the MSMS students a chance to eat, shop, and integrate with the local community in a safe manner. There is no similar outlet anywhere near the proposed location of MSMS at MSU, nor is there any possibility of replicating that experience.

I am currently an elected alderman for the Town of Enterprise and Chairman of the Board of Aldermen. I do understand political undercurrents and the realities of funding and budgets. The MSU plan calls for an investment from the state of at least \$85 million for the construction of the new MSMS facilities. That is in addition to a bonding capacity of \$86 million that is committed to the SOCSD facility. It should be noted that I wasn't able to locate a detailed spending plan on exactly what SOCSD would build and spend independently of any MSMS construction needs. The State of Mississippi should not be asked to fund any capital expenditures for the SOCSD under the guise of spending it on MSMS. MUW estimates that a new residence hall, capable of housing 400 students, can be constructed for \$35 million. The other academic, administrative, and associated support buildings already exist and therefore don't need to be built from the ground up. There are other costs associated with both plans, but overall, the plan presented by MUW is much more budget conscious. Consequently, the MUW plan is more likely to be funded by the legislature. That is a political reality, regardless of which plan the Mississippi Department of Education favors.

In addition to concerns over the dollar cost, I'm concerned about a more important trend that I noticed in the MSU plan. Overall, the thrust of the MSU plan seems to be in integration of MSMS with the SOCSO. The MSU plan states MSMS students "will also have an opportunity to be dual enrolled in the SOCSO, which will allow MSMS:E students to take Advanced Placement and other specialized courses with SOCSO students, experience extracurricular activities with SOCSO, and build relationships and comradery with SOCSO students and faculty." This doesn't make any sense to me. MSMS students don't need to be dual enrolled in a second high school, they are already enrolled at MSMS. Also, MSMS students are already taking and have access to a large number of Advanced Placement (AP) classes. Another statement from the MSU plan is: "SOCSO students could take an advanced academic course at MSMS:E." These are just a few statements that I've picked out of the very preliminary plan that was made public. This is against the core mission and purpose for which MSMS was originally founded. MSMS should not be affiliated with one specific school district and used for their benefit. MSMS was founded to give the entire state a resource for academically gifted students. All of the taxpayers in Mississippi pay for the funding for MSMS. No part of that should be used to the advantage of one individual school district. The current plan as proposed by MSU definitely gives the SOCSO an unfair advantage over other school districts. To add insult to injury, citizens in all of those other school districts will have the privilege of paying for it.

Overall, the current MSMS location at the MUW welcomes these kids and provides an early entrance to college type of program. The students are academically challenged in an environment that they feel safe and comfortable in. Students have access to numerous AP and dual credit college courses offered through both MUW and MSU. Students are involved in research projects at both MSU and MUW. Almost as important, MSMS students are not quarantined in a small corner of campus, expected to live in a bubble. Instead, they are a long established and integral part of a small college and town. We call it "college with training wheels." The existing dorms are in need of upgrading, but that is entirely up to the legislature. MSMS has submitted funding requests for this throughout the years, but the legislature hasn't been able to fulfill those requests. MSMS needs to present a picture of fairness and equity to all Mississippians. Building a "partnership" with one specific school district does not present that picture. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Heath Kasselmann