



March 4, 2015

The Hon. Brian Langley, Senate Chair  
The Hon. Victoria Kornfield, House Chair  
and Members of the Joint Select Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs:

Senator Langley, Representative Kornfield and members of the Education Committee. My Name is Matthew Reynolds. I am from Farmington, and I am here today to testify in favor of LD215, An Act to Improve Student Retention in Maine's Postsecondary Institutions. I want to share with you my thoughts on this bill from my perspective as the Jobs for Maine's Graduate College Retention Specialist at Thomas College.

As a retention specialist, I have learned that two critical components for retention are relationships and trust. When these two components are utilized together it allows the students to be more successful and positive outcomes to be achieved.

As a JMG specialist, I bring a unique set of skills, resources and services that are hard to duplicate. As you may know, JMG has over 78 sites throughout Maine. These sites each have a specialist that creates and fosters a relationship with each student that extends beyond the parameters of the normal classroom. JMG specialists are basically "on call" 24 hours a day. Students know that if they need to reach out to someone, their JMG specialist is there. This commitment leads to a unique relationship based on trust. Each one the 56 JMG students on the Thomas College campus has a relationship like this with their former high school Specialist. These relationships are as individualized and as complex as the students involved.

This structure of trusting relationships within JMG can be seen when students apply to Thomas College. Post-secondary education can be a scary time for students. It's the first time away from home, out of their comfort zones, and, independence, while very liberating can also be overwhelming. When a JMG student walks onto the Thomas College campus, they might be overwhelmed or nervous, but they have one constant in their life, a Jobs for Maine's Graduate Specialist whose sole purpose is to watch out for them and help guide them through the college experience. The relationship that was fostered with JMG while in high school then continues through their college career. The high school specialist becomes a resource that is hard to duplicate. A resource that is instrumental in student success that I utilize on a daily basis.

Previously I stated there are 56 students on campus. I have created a relationship with these students that is difficult to describe. The support that I provide is personalized for each one, ranging from academic, financial, social or campus life (day to day life with roommates etc.) It is because of the previous relationship with JMG that the students have, that allows me to accelerate the trusting and positive relationship. Students know what a specialist from JMG stands for, believes in, and what their support services look and feel like. This can take months or years, if at, all on a traditional college campus. My students know and are familiar with the program from day one.



It is because of these trusting relationships that the JMG program at Thomas College has been able to successfully retain 88% of the incoming class of students from the first semester. (As a side note, I would like to mention that the other 12% are still involved in postsecondary education either by transferring to another school due to major or enlisting in the military). All positive outcomes for the students.

*The national retention average is estimated to be 64% at public schools and 69% at private schools for first year students according ACT.*

*Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2014*

As you can see, the work that Jobs for Maine's Graduates started at the high school level has continued onto the post-secondary level. This proven method of support and trust can be seen every day on the Thomas College campus. JMG students across the state are applying to post-secondary school right now. Wouldn't it be great to know that these graduating high school seniors could experience that same support that my 56 students currently have? It starts with one school, but JMG students can be found on campuses' throughout the state

I would encourage you to spend time at Thomas College to view the many positive success stories that our students are experiences. I would like to thank you for your time today for listening to why I support LD215. I am happy to answer any questions that you may have.

Thank you.

**Matt Reynolds**

JMG College Retention Specialist

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