

August 21, 2024

Dear members of the CCM 119K Commission on At-Risk and Disconnected Youth,

On behalf of Mystic Seaport Museum, I would like to thank you for all of your work to help reconnect our young people to viable education and career pathways. Mystic Seaport Museum has recently committed to making this work a priority as well through our Center for Experiential Education.

The Center for Experiential Education supports impactful educational redesign through the creation of youth programs that celebrate meaningful workforce development while we challenge students to discover their passion and future-promise. The signature program of our Center for Experiential Education is our Maritime Adventure Program (MAP), which engages under-resourced youth in experiential maritime education anchored in positive youth development. The Maritime Adventure Program serves high school students affiliated with New London Youth Affairs (NLYA), a Youth Service Bureau which promotes positive outcomes for children, youth, and families in New London, CT, where almost a quarter of the population lives at or below the poverty line.

The goals of the Maritime Adventure Program are to:

- increase students' social, emotional and leadership skills through mentoring and enrichment activities;
- increase students' career readiness and awareness of careers in the maritime field; and
- increase students' technical skills in maritime activities including boating and seamanship, museum studies, astronomy and navigation, and boatbuilding and carpentry.

The program is built on a Positive Youth Development and mentoring model that:

- prioritizes positive relationships with peers and adults;
- creates safe environments for youth to learn and practice healthy behaviors;
- builds confidence and competence through challenging and meaningful enrichment activities;
- fosters youth voice and leadership opportunities; and
- allows young people to be appreciated and recognized for their assets rather than their deficits.

We just received this past year's evaluation data from our evaluator, Partnerships in Education and Resilience (PEAR), an organization with a twenty-year history in youth development evaluation systems. The survey instrument they use, the Holistic Student Assessment (HSA), has been validated by outside universities and is widely used with over 200,000 students in 49 states and internationally by over 1500 programs, including by Outward Bound and the Massachusetts public school system. We are pleased to report that the evaluation data from this past year showed that a majority of students had a positive change in almost all of the items across the three domains of resiliencies, relationships, and learning and school engagement. The highest percentage of students had a positive change in assertiveness (84.6%), critical thinking (84.6%), perseverance (76.9%), learning interest (76.9%), and academic motivation (76.9%).

In addition to the Maritime Adventure Program, the Museum's Education Department, through our Center for Experiential Education, is a partner in alternative education models of local school districts that seek to keep students engaged in school and the workforce. These programs include the following:

- **Stonington High School Learning Annex Program**

The Stonington High School Learning Annex was established by Stonington Public Schools in 2019 to provide educational programming for students returning from outside placements as well as for secondary students not meeting with success in the traditional classroom setting. The goal for Mystic Seaport Museum's programming is to provide students with hands-on job experience, maritime content, and to provide mentorship. Students come to the Museum once a week during the school day and participate in a series of multi-week sessions across the Museum.

- **East Lyme High School's Coastal Connections Program**

The Coastal Connections Program at East Lyme High School offers students the chance to be involved in a nontraditional high school experience with a smaller, more supportive learning atmosphere that individualizes the learning experience while focusing on interest based learning opportunities. Mystic Seaport Museum collaborates with the Coastal Connections Program to provide experiential programming that enhances students' communication skills and personal qualities such as collaboration and critical thinking skills.

- **Wheeler High School (North Stonington) Alternative Education Program**

The purpose of Wheeler High School's Alternative Education program is to address the diverse needs of students who may not thrive in traditional educational settings. The goal for Mystic Seaport Museum's programming is to provide students with hands-on job experience, maritime content, and to provide mentorship. Students come to the Museum once a week during the school day and participate in a series of multi-week sessions across the Museum