

MINUTES
ARKANSAS SCHOOL FOR MATHEMATICS, SCIENCES, AND THE ARTS
BOARD OF VISITORS REGULAR MEETING

March 8, 2021

5:00 p.m.

The Arkansas School for Mathematics, Sciences, and the Arts (ASMSA) Board of Visitors met virtually via a ZOOM meeting.

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Barnes convened the Board of Visitors regular meeting into open session at 5:04 p.m. and welcomed all Board members.

II. ESTABLISH QUORUM

Members Present

Mr. Timothy Barnes, Chair
 Mr. Brian Reed, Secretary
 Ms. Mary Alice Chambers
 Mr. Gary Dowdy
 Marlene Battle, Pharm.D.

Members Absent

Mr. Todd West, Vice Chair
 Mr. Steve Faris

Ex-Officio Members Present

Mrs. Krystal Nail, Program Director,
 Division of Elementary & Secondary
 Education Learning Services, Office
 Of Gifted & Talented Placement
 Mr. Patrick Ralston, Director, Arkansas
 Arts Council
 Mr. Tom Chilton, Director Technology
 Development at Arkansas Economic
 Development Commission
 Mrs. Pam Brady, Chair, Parents Advisory Council
 Mr. Jacob Holmes, President, Student Government Association

Ex-Officio Members Absent

Maria Markham, Ph.D., Director,
 Arkansas Division of Higher Education

Administrative Members Present

Mr. Corey Alderdice, Director
 Stuart Flynn, J.D., Dean of Academic Affairs
 Rheo Morris, Ph.D., Dean of Students
 Mx. Charlene Feick, Director of Admissions
 Mrs. Ashley Smith, Director of Finance
 Sara Brown, Ph.D., Director of Institutional Advancement
 Mrs. Lorraine Munroe, Administrative Assistant

Administrative Members Absent

III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Mr. Barnes called the meeting to order, stated that a quorum had been established, and asked for a motion be made to approve the minutes of the December 7, 2020, meeting. A motion was made by Mr. Dowdy and seconded by Mr. Reed to approve the minutes of December 7, 2020. Motion passed unanimously.

IV. CONSENT AGENDA

1. Director's Comments – Corey Alderdice

Director Alderdice stated amid the ongoing pandemic that he was pleased to report that to date that the institution has had only one active case of the virus on campus, which was among an employee. He reported that some students were placed in isolation and quarantined as a result of that, but after a seven-day window of isolation, the students were tested and there was no community spread. Director Alderdice stated that taking the basic necessary precautionary steps went a long way to ensuring the continued safety of the campus community.

Director Alderdice reported that the campus was able to hold a vaccine clinic. To date, 80% of employees have received the vaccine. He continued stating that spring break is coming up and the institution is committed to ensuring the safety of the students when they return. Director Alderdice stated that upon students' return from spring break, students will be doing a week of remote learning while they are largely confined to the dormitory. He reported that the students will be PCR tested on the Friday of spring break. Director Alderdice stated that he is hopeful that in the absence of community spread of the virus, the institution will resume regular operations the following Monday.

Director Alderdice stated that the institution is continuing to plan for Prom and Commencement. He continued saying that the administration feels that for the group of seniors, it is important to offer these two tokens of normalcy given how disrupted their two-year ASMSA experience has been.

Looking to the fall semester, Director Alderdice reported that he is hopeful that the vaccine will be available to ASMSA's students who are 16 and older and with the proper adoption by the majority of students, the institution will be able to lift many of the restrictions that are in place as the fall semester begins in August. Director Alderdice stated that one major challenge is pandemic fatigue. In many ways, the students and employees have been incredible in making the necessary adjustments to keep people safe especially as vaccines become more available as the institution keeps numbers practically non-existent. He reported that as overall state infections decrease, he is beginning to see more requests from families to eliminate some of the restrictions that are currently in place. Director Alderdice has communicated to the families that the steps ASMSA is taking is working, the institution has been transparent from the outset of the year of what the restrictions would be, and we intend to maintain those restrictions through the completion of this academic year.

Dr. Battle asked if Director Alderdice knew the reasons why some employees didn't get vaccinated?

Director Alderdice stated there are some employees that have allergy sensitivities and did receive advice from medical counsel that they may want to pass at the moment, and then there is the natural vaccine skepticism that has existed across the country.

Director Alderdice reported that there are some campuses across the System that are hovering closer to 50% and stated that 80% is fairly encouraging. He hopes that as other iterations come out that there will be additional staff members that choose to receive it.

Gary Dowdy congratulated Director Alderdice on his decision for everyone to return to campus and working through the restrictions that were put in place.

Director Alderdice responded that it had been a collective effort to achieve the results and that ASMSA is the only public residential STEM school to be running at full operations for everyone who want to be here. He stated that 85% of ASMSA's student population is on campus for the spring semester.

Director Alderdice stated that the System's appropriation bill cleared the Senate and anticipated passage for the next year by the end of the week. He continued stating that House Bill 1472 did pass the House Education Committee and is currently in the Senate Education Committee. He reviewed the bill, adding that it does add ex-officio seats on the Board of Visitors for the faculty and staff Governing Council President, the Chair of the Association for Alumni and Friends (or the Chair's designee), and the Chair of the ASMSA Foundation Fund Board of Ambassadors (or their designee). In doing so, that means that all of our campus stakeholder groups have a seat at the table and an avenue to report back to their various constituencies.

Director Alderdice stated that he has been looking at some peer institutions, notably the Louisiana School for Math, Sciences, and the Arts and they have a valuable system for rewarding and reflecting longitudinal service for faculty as well as excellence in their work. After speaking to the System's General Counsel's office, the lawyers said that an adjustment to the legislation would need to be made to implement a faculty system of rank, though not of tenure. Director Alderdice stated that based on the work that the group has already been doing to put preliminary frameworks in place, he said that he believes that the earliest that the new system could be implemented would be FY23, or beginning July 1, 2022.

Director Alderdice reported in preparing for the current year, he knew that offering a remote learning option was going to be important for students and families who were not yet ready to resume the residential experience. He continued stating that based on some guidance, as well as other discussions that were seen across the state, he believes that many districts continue to see remote learning in their future. Director Alderdice reported that from the 2025 Strategic Plan there were planned discussions for alternative enrollment models. He stated that he does see a space for it to build on the school's experience in the field of distance learning that goes back to 1999. Director Alderdice reported, with that in mind, there has been a preliminary discussion with the Teaching and Learning Committee. He stated that based on some topics from that discussion, a white paper has been drafted as Project75, and a follow-up conversation will take place with the Teaching and Learning Committee this week. Director Alderdice reported that he would like some conversation and feedback from the Board on the white paper.

Ms. Chambers directed a question to Director Alderdice asking him how are the students managing doing their labs while they are taking courses such as biology and chemistry?

Director Alderdice stated that, interestingly enough, the biology and chemistry teachers are using a program called Labster - which is a digital lab program serving a variety of different subjects - and they have already been able to use it to good effect in their AP Biology courses. In some ways, it is not quite a replication of an in-person lab experience; however, the institution would look at something similar to what the North Carolina School of Science and Math does with their virtual program. The NCSSM Online program brings in their virtual students during their extended weekends when residential students leave and do some hands-on activities, particularly labs, to fill out those gaps. Director Alderdice stated that Ms. Chambers' comment highlights the major discussion that ASMSA will be looking to have with the Teaching and Learning Committee. He also stated that the considerable question on some minds is that the program is clearly differentiated from the residential experience and that there is a unique value proposition to the experience relative to what is offered in the residential program. Director Alderdice reported that the major difference is a fairly broad curriculum so the biggest factor that separates the residential experience is the hands-on, in-depth set of opportunities in both STEM and the Arts. He continued stating that the most cautionary lesson learned is the support and willingness of the faculty to ensure the students have had as much opportunity as possible.

2. Academic Affairs – Stuart Flynn

Mr. Flynn stated that he felt confident by how well the faculty has delivered their content in classes over the last two semesters. He stated that students actually have performed well in remote classes and teachers who are delivering the content are particularly well-suited for it and believe remote learning, in many ways, is a form of their professional development in terms of how it works and how it doesn't. Mr. Flynn stated that he is encouraged because he believes that ASMSA can expand its ability to offer students across the state alternative ways of experience at ASMSA.

Mr. Flynn stated that the quality and delivery of the courses that are offered remotely are versions of our current concurrent credit courses that have all been approved by University of Arkansas at Fort Smith. He stated that he was happy that they saw the quality of the delivery and syllabi that was prepared and have approved all of his requests.

3. Admissions and Outreach – Charlie Feick

Mx. Feick stated that there have been many families who are interested in ASMSA, but moving to Hot Springs was not something they were willing to consider. She continued stating that being able to reach students via remote learning who are at a distance, particularly in rural schools, is exciting because access and equity can be expanded through the program.

Director Alderdice stated that there was an article in the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* noting the differences in outcomes on remote vs. on-campus students in the North Little Rock School District and he had looked at the differences in performance of students who were remote and residential. It is interesting that the residential students fared slightly better in the regular GPA and slightly less in the weighted GPA. Director Alderdice stated that based on the data there was no statistical significance between the two groups, and he believes that both groups of students received a comparable experience.

4. Student Government – Mr. Holmes

Mr. Holmes stated that the Student Government has started the semester with their new legislative session. He reported that in the previous year, the SGA changed it to be held semi-annually. Mr. Holmes stated that in January and February the SGA went through the process of electing new representatives and is now conducting the General Assembly with all of the students.

Mr. Barnes asked if anyone had anything additional they wanted to add. Director Alderdice stated that the institution is now officially underway on the review stage of the admission cycle with numbers being comparable to the previous year. He reported that having conversations with ASMSA's peer institutions, they are either having their best year or their worst year for applicants. Director Alderdice stated that to hold the numbers steady amid the challenges of recruitment is encouraging.

5. Finance Report – Ashley Smith (given by Director Alderdice)

Director Alderdice stated that Mrs. Smith's report did note that ASMSA is making headway in several areas noting that the school has contracted with Harris Architects as the institution's on-call architectural services provider. He also reported that he is cautiously optimistic about the EETF numbers for the next year. Mrs. Smith's report noted that in January, sales and use tax collections year-to-date were up 7.5% that has actually gone back up to a little over 8% with the February report, which would amount to over \$700,000 in new funding next year. Director Alderdice stated that as he explores the budgetary process, he is looking at 3% as an expectation, which is a little over a \$250,000. He reported that compared to where the school was last year - worrying about a 10% budget cut - the institution is going in the right direction.

Mr. Barnes asked for a motion to adopt the Consent Agenda. A motion was made by Mr. Dowdy and a seconded by Dr. Battle. Motion passed unanimously.

V. OLD BUSINESS

There was no old business to report.

VI. NEW BUSINESS

Mr. Barnes brought up protocol and procedure referring to a staff member who had an issue who instead of going through the proper resolution process addressing it at the school level, the employee contacted a Board member who encouraged that person to first contact a legislator. Mr. Barnes continued stating that the Board needs to make sure that there is consistency with the Board. From time to time, there are going to be some concerns that individuals have and needs to be addressed at the most local level at the institution, instead of going outside in trying to get something accomplished. Mr. Barnes stated that the best way to get issues resolved is to work within the institution.

Director Alderdice stated that he wanted to be clear that he wants to engage with members of the campus community and if there are things that, for whatever reason, people are not comfortable going through the institutional channels, that he welcomes the Board to be an advocate and an intermediary for those things as well. He also said that with spending significant time as a group in discussing the established dispute resolution channels for situations like this, that it is disconcerting to hear that a member of the Board had encouraged an employee to circumvent all of the institutional channels and going directly to a legislator about an item that would have been able to provide immediate context on. Director Alderdice reiterated to the Board that they take seriously their opportunity to be advocates for the students and employees but to appreciate the mindfulness of the channels that are in place for the institution.

In an unrelated comment, Ms. Chambers congratulated the three students who made All-State band this past year and one who made alternate.

Dr. Oatsvall also commented that band director, Tom Dempster, has been going through some unprecedented times with Covid, and that he is doing a tremendous job with the students.

On a congratulatory note, Mr. Flynn recognized the SGA President, Jacob Holmes, as being a National Merit Finalist, who also qualified for State FBLA competition. Director Alderdice also stated that Mr. Holmes is one of the two ASMSA nominees for the *Arkansas Times* Academic All-Star list as well.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

With no further business to conduct, a motion was made by Dr. Battle and seconded by Mr. Dowdy to adjourn the meeting. Motion passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 6:05 p.m.

Approved as written _____ ✓

Approved as amended _____

Brian Reed

Mr. Brian Reed, Secretary

5-13-2021

(Date)