

**MINUTES**  
**ARKANSAS SCHOOL FOR MATHEMATICS, SCIENCES, AND THE ARTS**  
**BOARD OF VISITORS REGULAR MEETING**  
**March 3, 2025**  
**5:00 p.m.**

The Arkansas School for Mathematics, Sciences, and the Arts (ASMSA) Board of Visitors met in person and virtually via Zoom.

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

Vice Chair Mary Alice Chambers convened the Board of Visitors' regular meeting into open session at 5:05 p.m. and welcomed all Board members.

**II. ESTABLISH QUORUM**

**Members Present**

Dr. Marlene Battle ('97), Chair  
 Ms. Mary Alice Chambers, Vice Chair  
 Mrs. Mary Zunick, Secretary  
 Mr. Brian Reed

**Ex-Officio Members Present**

Ms. Chloe Cunningham, Community  
 Development Program Manager,  
 Arkansas Arts Council  
 Mrs. Krystal Nail, Program Director,  
 Education Learning Services,  
 Office of Gifted and Talented  
 Miss Karilynn Arellano ('25), President,  
 Student Government Association  
 Dr. Allyn Dodd, President,  
 Governing Council

**Ex-Officio Members Absent**

Mrs. Amy Stvartak ('11), Chair,  
 Association for Alumni and Friends  
 Ms. Jennifer Fowler (04'), Director  
 AR National Science Foundation  
 Dr. Alicia Cotabish, Chair,  
 Parents Advisory Council  
 Dr. Ken Warden, Commissioner,  
 ADHE

**Administrative Members Present**

Mr. Corey Alderdice, Executive Director  
 Mr. Stuart Flynn, Dean of Academic Affairs  
 Dr. Rheo Morris, Dean of Students  
 Mr. Jason Hudnell, Director of Admissions  
 Mr. Stephen Malec, Director of Finance  
 Ms. Brandi Brazil, Director of HR and Campus Culture  
 Mr. Phil Grace, Information Technology and Campus  
 Operations Manager  
 Ms. Mandy Patterson, Administrative Assistant

**Administrative Members Absent**

### **III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Ms. Chambers called the meeting to order at 5:05 p.m. and asked for a motion to approve the March 3, 2025, minutes. The motion was passed unanimously.

### **IV. SPECIAL PRESENTATION**

Director Alderdice welcomed the board and stated that Stuart Flynn, Dean of Academic Affairs, and Jason Hudnell, Director of Admissions, would be giving the special presentation about planning for the ASMSA Online Academy. He went on to describe the history ASMSA has had with distance learning, which dates back to 1998. For quite a long time ASMSA worked as part of a consortium model partnership with the Department of Education to serve thousands of students a year via Office of Distance Education.

Director Alderdice has spoken regularly with the group regarding the STEM Pathway Initiative, which is a hybrid online learning initiative. It serves close to 4,000 students and educators across the state each year. Even the residential program, which for many years had limited online facets to it, took on new depth and dimensions amid the pandemic when ASMSA needed to be ready to pivot at a moment's notice. In many ways, the last 25 years have led to this potential new avenue and opportunity that we first began discussing as part of the 2025 strategic plan.

Director Alderdice turned the presentation over to Dean Flynn and Mr. Hudnell.

Dean Flynn started with a brief history of the conversations regarding the online academy that he and Director Alderdice had during the pandemic. The opportunity for an online program was discussed, but then tabled, until a couple of years ago when the conversation was picked up again. Dean Flynn and Director Alderdice started to develop the initial curriculum, and Dean Flynn started sending teachers to Advanced Placement Summer Institutes (APSI) in the summers and discussed with instructors what the online program might look like. He and Director Alderdice started rounding out the vision of the program. With the LEARNS Act, renewed emphasis on school choice, and considering our history with distance education, who would be better to launch this than ASMSA?

Dean Flynn went on to say that the ASMSA Online Academy is about providing opportunities for students throughout the state. We want to provide access to ASMSA's resources for students who might not be a good fit for our residential program. We know there is an online need since every year the admissions team finds out about students who are interested in ASMSA, but for various reasons they decide not to pursue the application. For some of those students, virtual learning is better for them. Some of them take advantage of Virtual Arkansas or other programs. In terms of what the state could offer, Dean Flynn and Director Alderdice felt ASMSA could bridge the gap.

Currently, ASMSA has 12 instructors who have AP endorsement to teach courses through the Online Academy. In the first cycle of the program the ASMSA Online Academy will be offering AP US History, AP English Language, AP Precalculus, AP Computer Science Principles, AP Seminar, and foreign language. In the second cycle, we have teachers

certified in AP World History, AP Biology, AP Physics, AP Calculus, and AP US Government, which would also satisfy the civics requirement. ASMSA has been matching these courses to Arkansas state requirements to make sure the students who enter this program can complete those requirements. There will be a meeting with the instructors within the week to continue discussing final preparations for next fall.

Dean Flynn recognized our STEM Pathways Director, Mrs. Lori Kagebein. Mrs. Kagebein teaches computer science on campus and has been instrumental in helping organize the online program. She has extensive AP experience through the STEM Pathways program and has been instrumental in identifying the aspects of implementation that aren't covered by online training or manuals.

Dean Flynn and the faculty will continue to have regular meetings over the next month and into the summer. Decisions must be made regarding admissions. The approach right now would be open enrollment. A mass email was sent out a few weeks ago to identify interest, and responses have been coming in from that email. There has been some internal interest from our residential students, but the decision has been made that allowing these students to join the cohort wouldn't be appropriate at this time. Dean Flynn stated that they would continue to weigh that option as the admissions requirements change. One challenge is balancing the online options with the campus offerings to avoid teacher overload. Dean Flynn thinks it will be possible to avoid overloads as the master schedule for Fall 2025 is built.

Mr. Hudnell explained that there are now two different pathways through the ASMSA experience. One is the online AP-focused curriculum, while the on-campus residential program is the concurrent piece where students are accumulating college hours from University of Arkansas—Fort Smith. This is important information Admissions will use to promote both experiences. He stated that the Admissions Department has sent out information to families about this potential pathway for students. An informational zoom session will be held this Thursday. Thus far, 15 interested families have registered for the Zoom session.

Mr. Hudnell stated that part of the ASMSA mission as an institution is to be the leader in accelerated learning. In this culture of school choice, ASMSA needs to be at the forefront of that effort. This online AP pathway is going to allow students to be a part of what ASMSA does as a community of learning—in a broader sense—than what they may be able to do in the residential program. Mr. Hudnell anticipates that as we move through our residential cycle, there will be some families who decide the residential program isn't going to be an option for them. The Online Academy may be something that interests those families.

Mr. Hudnell explained that families will be eligible for the Educational Freedom Accounts (EFAs). ASMSA will help families walk through that process and show how they can access those. These accounts are a good opportunity for both the institution and for families that might not be able to have this quality of education.

Director Alderdice stated that ASMSA has been looking at potential ideas for how this program would be revenue-generating for ASMSA. Potential legislation has been discussed that would give us a more direct, clear, and sustainable enrollment growth pathway. The language that was initially discussed was “enrollment agnostic.” If the student is full-time and pursuing a diploma from ASMSA, then it doesn’t matter if it was residential or online, they would be part of our full-time equivalency (FTE). An alternative proposal has been offered to ASMSA, where we pivot back to setting the tuition and families pay that tuition through the EFAs. Along with that, there could be potential opportunities for individuals who want to pursue supplemental one-off courses under Course Choice. Tentatively, ASMSA is looking at tuition of \$5,000 per year since families should still retain just under \$7,000 of the EFAs. ASMSA believes that the price is reasonable and competitive, relative to some groups like Virtual Arkansas, BYU Independent Learning, and Arkansas Online Academy. Not only is ASMSA offering instruction but also offering some of our supplemental services such as Student Success Coordinators, mental health professionals, and college advisors.

Mr. Hudnell added that the pilot year is by design so they can identify any potential issues there may be. And use that in conjunction with the data share agreement that ASMSA has been able to get with ADE where we have access to the families’ home addresses. We’ll be able to do some mailouts in the early fall that talk about the different pathways that a student can take in our community of learning, whether it be the residential program or the online academy.

Mrs. Zunick asked if a student would have the same degree whether they pursued the online academy or the residential experience.

Director Alderdice explained that ASMSA doesn’t differentiate the credentials. A high school diploma simply reflects that students have met state graduation requirements.

Ms. Chambers indicated that preparation for teaching online lessons can be overwhelming for teachers.

Dean Flynn added that the faculty would meet regularly regarding the Online Academy as the summer approaches so the teachers will be fully prepared.

Director Alderdice explained that ASMSA paid for the AP Summer Institute for faculty to attend, and they also received a stipend for the week of the APSI and any preliminary work done assessing and translating the work they currently do to align with the AP curriculum and standards. In addition to the meetings that are ongoing this summer, ASMSA will be providing the launch faculty with a course-development grant this summer.

Dean Flynn reiterated that most of the planning of the courses is done on the front end. Teachers’ main concern is whether they have enough time to teach the courses. He reiterated that this is a pilot program, so we’re going to learn a lot about it over the next year, and Dean Flynn is confident that ASMSA will be able to refine the program as needed. He also added that it’s going to be much easier for teachers since the online class schedule is built to be synchronous with the master schedule.

Ms. Chambers asked if ASMSA was planning on a 2-year cohort.

Dean Flynn confirmed that it would be a 2-year cohort, and the students that the program is targeting are current sophomores.

Director Alderdice noted that the requirement is a student having the willingness to pursue a course at the AP level, not like concurrent credit where there are minimum ACT or Accuplacer scores. The evaluation process for Admissions is not necessary selectivity but understanding why the student wants to pursue this route of online learning. It's not for everyone, and part of the reason ASMSA paused on the Online Academy was that most students had poor experiences with online learning amid the pandemic. Much of the reason for that was that they were not intentionally-developed experiences. Students and teachers were just learning to use Zoom and some of the synchronous tools in 2020 and 2021. Some of these tools have improved, as has ASMSA's own comfort and competence with the online tools. ASMSA hopes students aspire to earn AP Scholar status. They will have the number of courses to get AP Scholar with Distinction. It also gives ASMSA a clear assessment to benchmarks to see if students mastered the content. ASMSA landed on AP as the model for this as a juxtaposition against the early college framework from the residential experience. If a student is on campus, we offer advanced STEM and applied Arts. The online program is an AP-based model that is more of a broad college preparatory experience.

Mr. Hudnell noted that from the admissions side, communication to families is what's important. It's more like communication than recruiting in many ways.

Dean Flynn added that ASMSA instructors who were comfortable with the online environment and enthusiastic about virtual learning were approached. The great challenge of the pandemic was ASMSA attempted hybrid-flexible instruction in which they taught both residential and virtual-learning students. The Online Academy is different from that.

## **V. CONSENT AGENDA**

### **Quarterly Report – Director Alderdice**

Director Alderdice explained to the Board that three weeks ago, UA System campus leaders and the government affairs team had the opportunity to meet with Governor Sanders, Secretary Oliva, Dr. Ken Warden, and Representative Shepherd about the ACCESS bill prior to its formal announcement. Leaders were provided with a one-pager that had the acronym of ACCESS spelled out, and just a few lines about each of those. "A" in ACCESS was acceleration. For those that were able to attend the meeting in December with Secretary Oliva, you'll recall him saying that often our state's most advanced students are some of our most underserved.

Secretary Oliva reiterated that statement when Director Alderdice visited with him in January. He again spoke to that point in his remarks to System leadership, even giving mention of ASMSA for our leadership in that work. The bill clocks in at 122 pages, covers a variety of topics, and in some ways is more of a LEARNS 2.0 than exclusively a higher education bill. The good news is that the bill and accelerated learning is expanded beyond what—at least for the last



three decades—has been the State’s primary interest in advanced placement coursework. Accelerated learning is now defined as AP or International Baccalaureate, Cambridge exams, and anything else that the Education Department might determine would be at that level.

There are lots of changes to concurrent credit in this bill such as the standardization of cost for concurrent credit, ending of the Concurrent Challenge Scholarship, the shift to a per-hour rather than a per-course amount, and that the districts are now responsible for all costs associated with accelerated learning. All of that means that ASMSA is probably looking at somewhere around a \$300,000 cost increase for our core academic program next year.

In ASMSA’s discussions with the Department, they were not aware that these changes would have that kind of outsized impact. When ASMSA ran numbers last week in FY24, despite only being a relatively small campus of 250 students, we accounted for about 3% of all the State’s expenditures under the Concurrent Challenge Scholarship. The bill will have some significant fiscal impacts for ASMSA. On the positive side, districts ought to be paying for AP, IB, or concurrent credit. There are a few programs out there that are doing things in this space that have completely outsourced their instruction to the local community college and are still probably coming out on with \$1,000 a year per pupil from the State. ASMSA and other districts ought to be doing this but this will mean that these resources cannot be directed elsewhere as we go into the budgeting process this month.

Another positive is that when the fiscal impact statement was released by BLR last week, one of the new additions to the bill is the expansion of the Governor’s Scholars Program. Most of us are probably familiar with the Governor’s Distinguished Scholarship. Students who are in the 32 ACT superscore and have a 3.5 GPA—instead of receiving roughly \$14,000 (soon to be \$15,000) in total for the Lottery Scholarship—will instead receive \$10,000 a year. So, a total \$40,000 award. In counties where a student is not GDS eligible, then the top achiever in that county is given a Governor’s Scholarship, which is \$5,000 on top of the existing award, so it clocks in at about \$34,000 compared to the \$40,000 for the GDS.

One of the things that ACCESS does is expand any student who is awarded the new Diploma of Distinction or earns an Associate’s degree in high school will be automatically eligible for that.

The question is what it would look like to integrate the Associate degree requirement, which has been a big vision for Secretary Oliva, into ASMSA’s 3-year pathways. That technically means 3 courses per semester, which is what our students average anyway on concurrent credit, and can be done in the background without necessarily pulling away from some of the other courses and unique electives in the residential experience. We also believe, at a minimum, that the option could be very transformative for our HELIX students (Helping Elevate Low-Income Students to Excellence cohort) since they are often rural, low income, and first generation. These households typically earn less than \$40,000 a year, so financially, both earning the higher ed credential while in high school and then being well-positioned—without having to get to that 32 ACT score—is a net benefit. The bill is expected to start moving through the committee work beginning this week.

Director Alderdice referred the Board to copies of legislation in their packet. One is the cell phone bill, and one is the breakfast bill. The UA System appropriation bill has been filed and has passed now.

ASMSA is continuing to work on the 2033 Facilities Plan and will look forward to bringing that plan to a meeting in the future. It's nice to see how the big picture is shaping over the next decade.

It doesn't appear that ASMSA will be pursuing the enrollment growth legislation. The Governor's team told us that it would be more productive to pursue direct per pupil. After going back and forth with the Department of Education, they offered a counter proposal which would be line item some annual capital funding for the school, potentially up to \$1M in a year. We talked with Secretary Oliva in December about both enrollment growth and facilities needs. If it does come to pass, it looks like it would be through special language in ADE's appropriation bill as opposed to a standalone bill. If that bill comes to fruition, that will mean ASMSA is setting aside at least \$2M a year for facilities. We're looking at the capacity for around \$16M to \$20M in facilities' needs between now and the completion of the 2033 cycle.

#### **Student Government Association – Karilynn Arellano**

Miss Arellano reported that this semester, ASMSA had 21 candidates running for SGA representative positions. In voter participation, the numbers went down from 147 last semester to 109 voters this semester. SGA Executive Board elections are coming up soon.

During finals week, the SGA passed out goodie bags with each board member writing a personalized note to help motivate and encourage the students during their week of finals.

Financially, SGA has used around half of their fund towards other clubs who requested money for their own events. SGA currently has \$3,500 in the SGA fund, which is an increase since the fund started at \$1,200. This money will be used to help SGA with upcoming events like Culture Fest which is planned for April 27<sup>th</sup> when the Tennoji students will be here to participate. SGA also has Dolphin Stock in the works for this semester.

#### **Parents Association Committee – Dr. Alicia Cotabish**

Dr. Cotabish was not in attendance to give her report.

#### **Governing Council – Dr. Allyn Dodd**

Dr. Dodd was not in attendance to give her report.

#### **Association for Alumni and Friends of ASMSA – Mrs. Amy Stvartak**

Mrs. Stvartak wasn't in attendance to give her report.

### **VI. OLD BUSINESS**

Ms. Chambers asked if military recruiters were able to come to ASMSA and speak to students during the College Fair.

Dean Flynn replied that he was going to ask Mr. Bret Vallun for updates about military visits during the College Fair.

Dean Morris reported that there have been some military information sessions this year.

Director Alderdice reported that military recruiters have mostly moved to online sessions rather than in-person visits.

## **VII. NEW BUSINESS**

Director Alderdice explained that the piece of legislation we're still looking to file and pursue this session is in Section ACA 6-42-304(c). He referred the Board to the supplemental packet, where they will find a copy of this legislation.

General Counsel's office believes that, based on current framing in our enabling legislation, that residential students shall not pay tuition fees and room and board, and that if we are to charge for online or supplemental learning then we do need this change. We've landed on a version of this which categorizes the residential program is one piece, and the potential international student enrollment that we pursued in 2015 is another piece. Then we will have the online cost of tuition and fees which can be paid by EFAs (Educational Freedom Accounts) that we are planning to adopt with the Online Academy or be paid by the different school districts if a student would like to take an online course with ASMSA through Course Choice. This is a piece of legislation that we are looking to file this month. Representative Brown, our alumnus and first ASMSA member of the Legislature, is going to sponsor this on the House side and the System is still working to determine what the best option for a sponsor is on the Senate side.

ASMSA is still working to get the local legislators to co-sponsor the bill as well. This bill is a small technical cleanup at its base. It is ensuring that ASMSA has the same footing and access that any other online provider in the State does, as well as any other program looking to provide supplemental instruction. It is also a potential new revenue stream for the school.

Director Alderdice also referred the members to a draft resolution that is included in their supplemental packet. He asked that the Board members consider signing it so that we can share the resolution with the System, our legislative delegation, and 2 alumni legislative members so that they could help shepherd the bill at the appropriate time. Director Alderdice suggested we send the resolution digitally to any members who were on Zoom or not present.

A motion was made to allow the resolution to be sent to Board members for signature digitally, as well as members that are present sign before they leave the meeting. It passed unanimously.

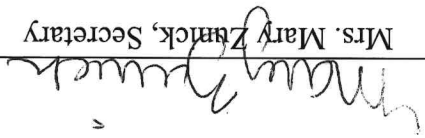
Ms. Chambers asked if there were any more questions from the group.

## **VIII. ADJOURNMENT**



With no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned at 6:15 p.m.

Approved as written

  
Mrs. Mary Zimick, Secretary

Approved as amended

5/5/2025  
(Date)