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TANGENT

SUMMER 2025



NEXT LEVEL

ASMSA propels grads to top colleges, elite scholarships



After more than 13 years of service, I will step down as Executive Director of ASMSA on December 31. With the completion of the first phase of our campus redevelopment, return of the former hospital complex to the City of Hot Springs, and culmination of the 2025 Strategic Plan, this is a natural and fitting moment for both me and the institution to begin new chapters.

ASMSA is more than a school—it is a community of learning that challenges, supports, and inspires. It has been one of the greatest honors of my career thus far to help shepherd this extraordinary place and work alongside dedicated faculty, staff, students, families, alumni, and other stakeholders who believe in the power of education to transform lives.

Together, we've achieved lasting progress. We have invested \$37.5 million to transform our campus, creating dynamic spaces for living, learning, and leading. We've deepened ASMSA's role as the early college high school of the University of Arkansas System, expanding access to university courses, and increasing the number of college credits earned by our students—all while dramatically reducing attrition through intentional student support systems.

We've also energized the school's long-dormant Arts mission, weaving creativity, performance, and expression more fully into the ASMSA experience. Programs like STEM Pathways, Coding Arkansas' Future, and ASMSA-TIP now reach nearly 6,000 students and educators each year. Through these and other institutional initiatives, ASMSA's impact stretches far beyond Hot Springs.

I often return to the vision I shared during my campus interview in 2012: "Local need. National prominence. Global vision." Today, our programs serve not only exceptional students from well-resourced schools but also immensely talented young people from rural communities, low-income families, and first-generation college pathways. ASMSA has earned recognition among the nation's top public high schools, and organizations like Study.com, Code.org, NCSSS, and the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation have honored or supported our work. Nearly 700 students and employees have traveled abroad through the Global Learning Program, fundamentally reshaping how they see themselves and their place in the world.

While there is much to celebrate, the road ahead is not without challenges. Expanded school choice, broader access to accelerated learning, and more early college opportunities signal a rapidly changing landscape. The inherent risks that students take in choosing ASMSA must continue to be matched by meaningful rewards. The future success of this school will depend on sustained innovation, continuous improvement, and responsible stewardship.

Even as I prepare for the next chapter in my own journey, I remain confident in ASMSA's future. I will always carry deep pride in what we've accomplished together—and even greater gratitude for the students and colleagues who made the work worth doing every day.

Corey Alderdice
Corey Alderdice
Executive Director



Executive Director
Corey Alderdice

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Questions? Call or text (501) 622-5235.

Writer and Graphic Design
Donnie Sewell

Photography
Mike Kemp and Aaron Brewer

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#ASMSA



Harmony Grove Gifted and Talented sixth- and seventh-graders participated in a chess tournament hosted by the ASMSA Talent Identification Program in December. (Photo courtesy of Harmony Grove GT)



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Rising to the Top

Winning a title in anything is a challenge. It's not easy, and there are always others with the same goal of claiming the victory for themselves. What it takes to win a particular championship can vary from competition to competition in many ways, but where they are all similar is the work, dedication, and talent that is required of the participants.

That's why the achievements of ASMSA students over the past couple of years stand out. The Quiz Bowl team won the 2025 Class 7A state title in a convincing fashion. ASMSA won the school trophy at the 2025 Arkansas State Science and Engineering Fair, where two students qualified for the Regeneron International Science and Engineering Fair. The ASMSA Wind Ensemble served as the Class 3A Honor Band at this year's state contest after winning the state title in 2024 and would have won a second state title in a row if not for a rule preventing consecutive titles.

These accolades combined with several other outstanding performances by individual students reveal the ability of ASMSA's dynamic competitors to apply the knowledge and practices they learn in the classroom to other activities.



The ASMSA Quiz Bowl team defeated Bryant High School in the final match after going undefeated in both the regional tournament and earlier rounds of the state tourney on its way to the state title. (Photo courtesy of Arkansas PBS)

Quiz Bowl team wins Class 7A state title

The ASMSA Quiz Bowl team won the Arkansas Governor's Quiz Bowl Association Class 7A state tournament, defeating Bryant High School in the final match on April 26.

It is the second state Quiz Bowl title the school has ever won, following a victory in 2012 in which ASMSA defeated Conway High School for the Class 7A state title. This year was the first time since 2013 that an ASMSA team has played for the state title.

Ridgely Bond ('26) was named the state tournament's MVP. He and Jacob Lewis ('26) also qualified for the All-State team, making them eligible to participate in an All-Stars tournament after the season was completed. The final round of the state tournament was held in the studio at Arkansas PBS in Conway and was broadcast live statewide.

ASMSA jumped out early for a 100-30 lead after the first quarter and 150-75 after the second. Bryant closed the gap with a perfect lightning round in the third quarter to 240 to 205 in favor of ASMSA, but a strong fourth quarter allowed ASMSA to secure the title game for a 340-245 victory.

Caleb Grisham, a mathematics Instructor of Excellence who serves as the team's coach, said he was nervous when Bryant earned a perfect score during their lightning round, answering all 10 questions. Bryant took the lead for a short time, 195-150, as they were afforded the right to choose their lightning round

topic first because they were trailing after the second quarter. They chose a topic called "Who's in charge now?," in which the team was provided the name of a head of state or government leader and they had to respond with the corresponding country.

ASMSA's lightning round was titled "Vampires," in which they answered questions about the legends, myths, and literary references about vampires. ASMSA answered nine of the 10 questions, and Bryant picked up the "bounce back" question to close out the third quarter scoring at 240-205.

"I was a little nervous when Bryant ran their lightning round category with a perfect score and took a lead, compounded by the uncertainty of what our lightning round category was to entail," Grisham said. "Nevertheless, we made it to the fourth quarter with a lead. As I was keeping score in the fourth quarter, I was also tabulating the number of questions remaining in the game. I will always remember the moment when we went ahead by more questions than were remaining in the game.

"I wasn't sure if the players on the stage were aware of it, but I leaned over to ASMSA chemistry instructor Burt Hollandsworth and whispered, 'That's the game; they just won the state title.' It was a surreal moment."

Bond was keeping track of the same information while on stage and realized the team had secured the title before the game ended. He said that he was

The ASMSA Quiz Bowl team would meet during lunch breaks for practices each week. The sessions provided the team a chance to find individual members' category strengths while also working on team strategies for competitions.



relieved that the team's hard work during the season had paid off. That hard work included winning the Class 7A West Regional Tournament by defeating host Fort Smith Southside by one question and defeating Little Rock Central in the state tournament after losing to Tigers in two previous tournaments earlier in the season.

Other team members on stage said they were unaware of their win until the end of the match. "I only realized we had actually won once it was declared a victory," said Jackson Whittaker ('25), who served as the team's captain. "I was more in shock once the decision was announced."

"It was a culmination of what we had all worked for all year, and it was like a weight being lifted off our shoulders and being replaced with joy that lifted them up," Lewis said. "Competing against bigger schools such as Little Rock Central and Fort Smith Southside was intimidating, but in the end, we managed to pull through."

The victory over Fort Smith Southside at the regional



Scan the QR code or visit asmsa.me/qbvideo25 to watch the team's match against Bryant High School in the state tournament final.

tournament stood out the most to Lewis. "This moment changed how the entire state saw ASMSA and made people start questioning if we could really win it all. It also proved to us that we had a real shot at winning in the finals as well," he said.

Both Whittaker and Violet Dailey ('26), who was on the team last year as a sophomore, said the team winning first place at the Friends of

Quiz Bowl Invitational Tournament that was held in December at Little Rock Southwest High School stood out the most to them. The team had a dominant performance, going undefeated to claim the first-place trophy.

"Winning the Friends of Quiz Bowl tournament stands out to me the most because it was our first win. I feel like it made us strive so much more to win at regionals and state," Dailey said.

Besides the Friends of Quiz Bowl tourney, the team finished second at the NAQT Invitational that was held at Harding University in October where their only loss was in the final game and third place out of 28 high school teams at Little Rock Central's Tiger Cup Invitational in November.

Aside from winning the state title, Grisham said his team's multiple matches with Little Rock Central stood out to him from this season. "(Central has) been dominant in the last couple of years, so we entered the year with immense respect for what they could do in a Quiz Bowl game," he said. "We played them

three times, and every game was close and had dramatic finishes. I was happy for our team that we were able to pull out the victory at the state tournament, which earned a spot in the final game.”

Throughout the season, Bond and Lewis often competed for top individual honors at the tournaments. Players are awarded points for each tossup question they answer with players recognized for their individual efforts. Bond was second in individual scoring with Lewis right behind in third at the NAQT Invitational. Bond was named the MVP of the Tiger Cup Invitational. Lewis was the second highest scorer at the Class 7A West Regional Tournament followed by Bond in third.

Having two strong players surrounded by a well-rounded team was important as well, Grisham said.

“In my experience, the best teams have a player with deep knowledge of fine arts (for example art and artists, composers and their works) and history. Luckily, our two strongest players were complemented by a group of players who were strong in science, religion and mythology, mathematics, and popular culture. This was a well-rounded team with the right combination of strengths and specialties to make us competitive in any game we played,” Grisham said.

Whittaker agreed with his coach, saying “The team this year has been truly amazing, both in Quiz Bowl ability and as team personalities.”

“It’s great to play on such a multitalented team,” Bond said. “At ASMSA, I get to play alongside many extremely talented fellow players.”

Lewis said he has been playing Quiz Bowl for around five years. This was a special team for him. “This has been an incredible season personally,” he said. “Being able to connect with the rest of my team has been wonderful, and being able to relax when certain topics come up has been a blessing.”



Ridgely Bond ('26) was named the MVP for the Arkansas Governor's Quiz Bowl Association Class 7A state final.

At the All-Stars tournament, Lewis placed fourth. Participants play as individuals instead of on teams, making for a different kind of challenge. Lewis said the competition is a way to measure how much he has grown and learned in Quiz Bowl.

“The competition itself is always super fun as well, and honestly, this year’s competition was the most fun it’s ever been. I was friends with many of my competitors before I even walked into the competition, and I met so many more people I will continue to talk to today,” he said.

At the same time, Lewis takes a measured approach to analyzing his fourth-place finish. Bond as well as some of the other top players weren’t able to make it to the tournament, he said.

“Overall, I placed fourth, technically making me the fourth best in the state. However, I know that many people could not attend, such as Ridgely, meaning that I still have a long way to go. This competition is not only a way of having fun or proving to myself that I am, in fact, learning but also a way

of showing to myself how much further I can go,” Lewis said.

This was Grisham’s ninth year serving as the school’s Quiz Bowl coach. ASMSA has qualified for the state tournament under Grisham’s leadership each year other than 2020 when no state tournament was held because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

He may have a good chance of adding to that streak next year as only two of the players who attended the finals were seniors — Whittaker and Leah Fouste ('25), who played two rounds of the final match. Bond, Lewis, and Dailey are all juniors as were Katelynn Cavin ('26), who played in the last quarter of the final, and Errol Nagy ('26). Jacob Clingan ('27) and Zoey Terry ('27) were sophomore team members. Clingan was a member of the state tourney’s starting five. Other players participated on the team throughout the season as well.

“I would like to thank all of the ASMSA Quiz Bowl players over the last nine years who worked hard and had success but came up short; a piece of this championship belongs to them. Their love for Quiz Bowl and drive to succeed has continued to inspire me as the team’s coach,” Grisham said.

Team members praised Grisham as well, calling out his support and ability to connect with them.

“Mr. Grisham is an extraordinary coach! He has been extremely helpful and supportive the whole way through, and his pep-talks do work. I could not ask for a better coach,” Bond said.

Lewis echoed those sentiments. “Mr. Grisham has been a phenomenal coach all year and genuinely interacts with us like his students and not just some kids he’s reading questions for. Practices are fun and enjoyable because he communicates with us and helps us where he can on these subjects but also because he always gives us pep talks and ensures we’ll be playing at the top of our game come tournaments.” ▲

ASMSA claims state science fair trophy

ASMSA won the school trophy and two students were recognized among the best projects in the state at the Arkansas State Science and Engineering Fair that was held in April. It was the second year in a row and the 11th time in the past 13 years since the current scoring system was adopted that ASMSA brought home the top school title.

Miranda Lee ('26) won second place in the Best in State Individual Awards while Anna Le ('26) finished third place. Their placements qualified them to compete at the Regeneron International Science and Engineering Fair, which was held in May in Columbus, Ohio.

The school trophy winner is determined by the number of points each school accumulates based on their place award winners divided by the total number of projects entered in the state science fair. The state competition was held in April at the University of Central Arkansas in Conway.

ASMSA students claimed five first-place category awards, or 29 percent of the fair's total first-place awards as well as eight second-place awards, or 47 percent of all second-place category awards. The school added four third-place and five honorable mention awards as well.

Dr. Brian Monson, who serves as the associate dean for STEM as well as the director for ASMSA's West Central Regional Science Fair at ASMSA, said the recognition confirms the high level of research the students are conducting.

"ASMSA students are clearly doing high quality research and are well-prepared for competition at the state and national levels," Monson said. "Our students go from no lab experience at all to experts in their fields who know advanced lab techniques. Many go on to earn Ph.D.s in STEM and become STEM professionals. It's very rewarding to be part of their journey."



Miranda Lee ('26) and Anna Le ('26) both qualified to compete at the Regeneron International Science and Engineering Fair at the Arkansas State Science and Engineering Fair.

Monson emphasized the importance of where the students are conducting their research for their projects. "The majority of ASMSA students do their research projects on campus with our faculty as their primary mentor and with our equipment. Our ASMSA-mentored projects are very competitive with the projects from other schools that are done at universities or government research labs. The research experience of our faculty and our investment in research-grade lab equipment makes this possible," he said.

Lee said it's important for students to have the opportunity to compete in events such as the state science fair and ISEF.

"Competitions give students the chance to apply what they've learned in a real-world context," she said. "It's one thing to learn concepts in a classroom, but it's another to design your own project, troubleshoot problems, and explain your ideas to others. That kind of hands-on experience builds confidence, communication, and problem-solving skills in a way that traditional learning can't."

Le said the competitions can be a good learning experience. "I learned

a lot from the state science fair. I gained experience in presenting my project not just to judges but to my peers who were also interested in math. I also learned so much from all the science research around me. There's truly exciting research being done; more than I could have imagined," Le said.

Lee said that events and competitions such as these also create a supportive network for the competitors.

"You meet peers who share your interests, mentors who guide you, and professionals who inspire you. That sense of belonging can be incredibly motivating, especially for students who might not otherwise see themselves as future professionals," she said.

Providing professional guidance to the students as they work on their projects can be rewarding for their advisers.

"Mentoring student research is the best part of my job," Monson said. "Like all the science faculty, I was trained as a research scientist and not as a teacher. Working here lets me combine the two things I am best at — teaching and doing real science, and it is one of the reasons I came to work at ASMSA." ▲



The ASMSA Wind Ensemble received Superior First Division ratings for both its Stage Performance and Sight Reading performances at the 2025 Arkansas School Band and Orchestra Association's Class 3A State Concert Assessment.

Wind Ensemble serves as honor band

The ASMSA Wind Ensemble served as the Honor Ensemble at this year's Arkansas School Band and Orchestra Association Class 3A State Concert Assessment while also receiving a Superior First Division rating in both the Stage Performance and Sight Reading events.

The Wind Ensemble earned the opportunity to serve as the Honor Ensemble that included an extended performance in addition to their contest pieces after winning the Class 3A state title at the 2024 State Concert Assessment. The group's scores at this year's state assessment in April were high enough to claim the state title again, but ASBOA rules preclude schools from claiming back-to-back titles.

"The ASMSA Wind Ensemble delivered an incredible performance at the state concert contest, taking on an advanced repertoire with precision, heart, and artistry," said Cody Ford, a music instructor who serves as one of the Wind Ensemble's directors. "The judges were thoroughly impressed, and the ensemble earned well-deserved Superior ratings across the board. Proud doesn't even begin to cover it. Bravo to these exceptional musicians!"

Dr. Thomas Dempster, the associate dean for arts and humanities who also serves as director of bands and a music instructor, said he was pleased with the thoughtfulness and work ethic of the Wind Ensemble's student musicians that has helped the school to continue to build a flagship performance group.

"I am proud of these students' work to carry on beyond the state title in 2024 to turn in a phenomenal performance as the honor band in 2025, and I have high hopes and high aspirations for this group going forward," Dempster said. "We perform music far

beyond, in terms of difficulty and sophistication, what is required of 3A groups, and we still do so largely taking students from all sorts of programs from across the state. This is a testament to their abilities and the innovative approaches we as faculty bring to these great kids' lives."

The ASMSA String Ensemble also competed at the 2025 state competition in April earning Excellent Second Division ratings and placing eighth overall in Class 3A. The String Ensemble placed 14th at the 2024 state contest.

Both the Wind Ensemble and String Ensemble earned Superior First Division ratings for Stage Performance and Sight Reading at their Region II assessments in March.

Student musicians also earned individual recognition throughout the year. Five students earned All-State Concert Band honors. Eighteen students earned Region II Senior High All-Region Concert Band recognition, 12 of whom were eligible to audition for the All-State band. Six members of the String Ensemble earned South All-Region Orchestra recognition in the fall.

Not all of the student musicians used physical instruments to earn special recognition, however. Three ASMSA choir ensembles earned Excellent Division 2 ratings for performance at the Arkansas Choral Directors Association Class 3A State Choral Festival held in April. The three groups include a mixed chorus, a tenor/bass ensemble and a soprano/alto treble group.

Seven choir members also earned individual Arkansas Choral Directors Association Region III Senior High All-Region Choir recognition in October, including two who qualified to audition for the All-State Honor Choir. 🏆

Hospital complex released back to City

ASMSA officially relinquished occupancy of the former St. Joseph's Hospital complex back to the City of Hot Springs on June 1.

The city had maintained official ownership of the main hospital building as well as the Pine Street and Cedar Street wings while deeding other buildings and parcels of land that comprised the complex to ASMSA for its own use over the past decade. That includes the former medical building that has served as the school's Academic Building since it opened, the former convent and chapel that have been restored as Selig Hall and Selig Auditorium, as well as the property on which the Student Center, the Creativity and Innovation Complex, and the new Campus Administration Building sit.

The city has already begun the preliminary environmental assessment of the complex. Once that assessment is completed, the city will begin the abatement process before the eventual demolition of the structures. Upon completion of the demolition process that will be completed using city funds, the property will be returned to ASMSA for redevelopment.

What is now known as CHI St. Vincent Hot Springs was formerly named St. Joseph's Hospital, among other iterations. After St. Joseph's moved to its current location on the southern end of Hot Springs in 1991, the city purchased the former hospital to use as a proposed location as part of its bidding proposal to land what was then the Arkansas School for Mathematics and Sciences, which was created by the State of Arkansas in 1991. The school used the main building as well as the Pine Street wing for student residential space and offices until 2012, when students were relocated to the new \$18.4 million ASMSA Student Center. The Pine Street wing continued to be



State Rep. Matt Brown ('00), left, and Michael Miller, mission leader at CHI St. Vincent Hot Springs hospital, examine items that were in a time capsule that was removed from the cornerstone of the former St. Joseph's Infirmary in 1927.

used for faculty and staff offices as well as classroom space until May 2024.

A \$5.5 million renovation of the hospital's former convent and chapel that converted the buildings into additional residential and meeting space was completed in September 2022. The buildings are named for Helen Selig, who helped lead Hot Springs' site selection efforts and later served as Hot Springs mayor.

The completion of the \$5.25 million Campus Administration Building in July 2024 allowed the school to shift faculty offices and classrooms from the hospital's Pine Street wing to other facilities, including the Academic Building and the Creativity and Innovation Complex.

During Alumni Weekend in October 2024, alumni had the opportunity for a final tour of the former hospital complex that had served as their residential space as well as classrooms. For some, it was

the first time they had seen some of the spaces because the halls were split by gender when it served as a residential space.

CHI St. Vincent Hot Springs held a special ceremony in December to open a time capsule that was placed in 1927 in the cornerstone of the former St. Joseph's Infirmary. The time capsule and the cornerstone in which it was held were removed earlier in the fall from the former hospital in preparation for its future demolition.

The treasures inside included a letter written in Latin, several coins and medallions, a 1923 \$1 silver certificate, a program from the cornerstone ceremony held in March 1927, a list of the Sisters of Mercy nuns who were then serving at the hospital, a list of the hospital's student nurses, a 1927 Hot Springs telephone book, two newspapers with articles about the hospital, a copy of the deed and mortgage for the hospital, a bill for the air ventilation system, a postcard



Scan the QR code or visit asmsa.me/timecapsule25 to watch the opening of the time capsule that was recovered from the former St. Joseph's Infirmary.

featuring the previous hospital, and other items.

State Rep. Matt Brown ('00), who attended the ceremony, was pleased that the time capsule and the items inside were in good shape. Brown wrote an extensive history of the hospital as a student project while at ASMSA that included basic information about the time capsule's existence.

"It was really cool," Brown said. "I was very glad that the time capsule was still intact. I was so afraid that maybe water had leaked in and destroyed everything inside. When it all came out, it looked like it had when it was put in 1927."

Among the time capsule items, Brown said the neatest things were items such as the invoice for the ventilation system, "something as mundane as that, \$108,000, \$1.9 million in today's dollars. That was a big chunk of change back then."

Brown also liked the symbolism of the \$1 silver certificate that was included that represented the \$1 that the Sisters of Mercy nuns brought with them from Little Rock to start the hospital in 1888. CHI St. Vincent Hot Springs planned to have all of the items preserved, translated from Latin and scanned so that may be shared with the public. Brown said he was excited to have the opportunity to examine the items then. 🔥

Online Academy provides families with new educational choice

Arkansas students and parents seeking choices for high-quality educational opportunities will have an exciting new option beginning this fall through the ASMSA Online Academy.

The ASMSA Online Academy is a full-time online program offered by the school that will provide a broad-based college-preparatory curriculum while meeting state graduation requirements. Students enrolled in the ASMSA Online Academy will complete a thoughtfully curated sequence of AP courses over two years, generally as high school juniors and seniors although younger students who demonstrate academic readiness may apply.

Students who complete the program are positioned to earn the AP Capstone Diploma and potentially be eligible for the AP Scholar designation based on performance.

The annual tuition for the ASMSA Online Academy is \$5,000. Families may use the state's Educational Freedom Accounts (EFA), which were established through the Arkansas LEARNS Act, to cover tuition, ensuring there is no net cost for enrollment in the program.

This approach ensures families have access to top-tier coursework while still preserving additional EFA funds to cover technology, enrichment programs, or other approved needs.

The program is open to all students in Arkansas, but they must have completed foundational math courses — including Algebra I, Algebra II, and Geometry — before enrolling in the ASMSA Online Academy. Students will also need access to a reliable computer or laptop with a stable internet connection.

"Though ASMSA has long been a remarkable example of what school

choice means for students and families, this fall begins an exciting new chapter for empowering parents to pursue options that best meet their students' and families' needs," said Executive Director Corey Alderdice. "As all Arkansas students now have access to the EFAs, we believe it is essential that ASMSA continues to provide new avenues that fulfill our statewide mission of educating talented and motivated students."

The ASMSA Online Academy builds upon the strong foundation of the institution's residential program, which serves as the early college campus of the University of Arkansas System that specializes in the education of academically and artistically motivated students of all backgrounds throughout the state. While the residential program will remain a cornerstone of the school's identity, the ASMSA Online Academy will expand access to students across the state who may not have access to advanced coursework in their local schools or be ready to live away from home.

Since 1999, ASMSA has been a driving force behind distance learning for students across the state's 75 counties. The ASMSA Online Academy will use that experience to offer a blend of asynchronous learning with live sessions that encourage real-time engagement.

Students also will benefit from personalized academic coaching, one-on-one college advising, and access to mental health resources. Structured mentoring sessions and community-building activities will help foster connections among students and with their instructors.

To learn more about the ASMSA Online Academy, visit asmsa.org/onlineacademy. Enrollment for the 2026-27 academic year will begin in Spring 2026. 🔥



Joseph Filipek ('17), fourth from left, visits with an ASMSA delegation at the 2025 World Expo in Osaka, Japan. Filipek is serving as a Sister Cities International Youth Ambassador representing the United States pavilion at the Expo.

Finding His Place in the World

Alumnus representing the U.S. at 2025 World Expo in Japan

When Joseph Filipek ('17) was a student at ASMSA, he had the opportunity to visit Japan twice as part of cultural and educational exchange programs.

The first trip was to the Mishima area for the Kakehashi Student Exchange Project organized by the Japan International Cooperation Center in July 2016. In September 2016, Filipek was part of the first ASMSA cohort to visit Kita High School in Hanamaki and Tennoji High School in Osaka as part of a delegation to sign agreements to establish formal relationships.

Eight years later and Filipek is back in Osaka, Japan. This time, he is serving as a Sister Cities In-

ternational Youth Ambassador representing the United States at the 2025 World Expo. The World Expo, sometimes known as a World's Fair in the U.S., is a global gathering of nations with a universal theme dedicated to finding solutions to pressing challenges the world currently faces through engaging and immersive activities.

"Those trips really solidified my love for Japan, and I was able to make many lasting relationships, which we have met back up and shared meals," Filipek said. "So when the opportunity to serve as a Youth Ambassador came up, it seemed like a natural next step."

Filipek is one of 88 Youth Am-

bassadors who were chosen from about 1,500 applicants to represent the U.S. at this year's expo, which opened in April and runs into October. Filipek was chosen for a full-event position, meaning he will be in Japan for the expo's duration. He left for Japan in March after spending a week in Dallas for training. He then had two more weeks of training in Japan before the expo opened.

"It's a great honor to be chosen from a grand pool, and I'm very proud to represent Arkansas," Filipek said. "Working alongside my coworkers has been a pleasure. There's so much talent from different states and backgrounds, which reminds me of how America really

is a huge melting pot. Day to day is always different with the nature of work, interacting with so many guests. Above all, I think the best part of being in this program is being surrounded by like-minded peers.”

Youth Ambassadors serve as the guides for the U.S. pavilion at the World Expo. Filipek said the U.S. pavilion welcomes about 10,000 visitors a day. The Youth Ambassadors will engage with the visitors, answer questions from guests, and serve as a tour guide for groups of 120-plus visitors at a time. The Youth Ambassadors shadow the U.S. pavilion’s events and protocol team to assist with higher profile guests from the U.S. and other countries.

Filipek was thrilled to be accepted for the extended term so he could have the full experience of living in Japan. The experience has been great so far, he said.

“I love being able to go to the *combin*i (also known as a *konbini*), which are very reliable convenience stores, and hopping on a train that comes every couple of minutes to commute to places. There is so much walkable space with structures that are built upon convenience for the community as a whole and respect for other people,” Filipek said.

Filipek thanked Mary Zunick, a member of ASMSA’s Board of Visitors who also serves as the cultural affairs manager for Visit Hot Springs as well as executive director of Hot Springs’ Sisters City Program, and Chiemi Shimizu, the cultural coordinator for the University of Central Arkansas and Hendrix College, for sharing information about the opportunity with him. The idea of being exposed to ideas and innovation that would be featured

at the World Expo excited him.

“I’m hoping this experience will aid my ultimate goal of helping save the planet and create a better environment for people around the world to live in,” Filipek said. “Something I learned from this program that has stuck with me is what Sister Cities calls ‘people-to-people’ diplomacy. Even when tensions may be high across the world, at the end of the day, it’s the interactions among people that remain in their hearts.

“If there are opportunities where you can work and study in a different country, I highly recommend taking it. There’s something about working together and interacting with people as to passing by people briefly as a tourist. Your interactions with different people allow you to see many perspectives and connect with the world.” 🌍

ASMSA, Tennoji begin expanded exchange program

For nearly 15 years, ASMSA and Tennoji High School in Osaka, Japan, have shared a relationship that has included both Japanese students and educators visiting the Hot Springs campus.

In 2016, ASMSA further solidified their connection by naming Tennoji a Global Learning Partner School. This included both schools committing to a reciprocal exchange of visitors, which is usually conducted in October.

During the spring 2025 semester, the schools expanded the partnership yet again. Three Tennoji students spent about 10 weeks at ASMSA — the first cohort students to participate in the enhanced exchange program. Three ASMSA students have been selected to participate in a reciprocal exchange beginning in spring 2026.

Tennoji students Momoka Matsumoto, Azumi Murakawa, and Hayu Takahashi arrived on campus in early January and stayed through mid-March. While at ASMSA, they attended classes, lived in Selig Hall, and joined in on residential activities. That included participating in the Mentees Club fashion show and the Dance Club’s annual showcase.

Matsumoto said both students and teachers in their classes made a point to try to help them adapt and work toward overcoming the language challenges. For example, the teacher in their English class provided a summary of the subject they were studying to make it



Three students from Tennoji High School in Osaka, Japan – Momoka Matsumoto, Azumi Murakawa, and Hayu Takahashi – spent about 10 weeks living at ASMSA and attending classes as part of an expanded exchange program between the two schools.

easier for the Tennoji students to understand.

“So, like that class, every teacher took care of us. It was really difficult for us, but they prepared for us and taught us with simple English. It was very nice, and I

2009 alumna produces film nominated for Oscar

The 97th Academy Awards in March had an ASMSA connection. A film produced by Tara Sheffer ('09) was nominated for Best Live Action Short Film.

Sheffer was the producer of "A Lien," a short film about a family that finds itself in a dire situation that develops when a couple along with their daughter ar-



Sheffer

rives at a federal immigration office. An American woman's husband is there to begin the interview process to obtain a green card, but the situation devolves as he visits with the immigration officer. The film was directed by brothers Sam and David Cutler-Kreutz.

Sheffer has served as producer for 29 short films and written and directed four other films. Films she has been associated have been nominated for awards or selected to appear in the SXSW, Clermont Ferrand, New Orleans Film Festival, Rhode Island International Flickers Film Festival, and NYU Tisch King festivals and competitions.

Sheffer served as a line producer for the 2020 film "The Letter Room," which was also nominated for an Academy Award.

She began seriously thinking about filmmaking in a documentary film class taught by James Katoich, a Humanities Instructor of Excellence at ASMSA. Her family was also in the filmmaking business. She later took classes at Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y., and then earned a master of fine arts degree from the New York University Tisch School of the Arts.

The film may be viewed at alienshortfilm.com. 🏠

was so happy. When they did that, maybe I could do the assignment like I was taking the class," Matsumoto said.

Murakawa said this program allowed her to do more than the usual study abroad experience, which may focus heavily on sightseeing, or only learning English in class in Japan.

She wanted to study abroad before college after a student on a trip to Osaka spent time at her home. This opportunity allowed her to be more immersed in the language and culture.

Takahashi said it was a new experience living in a residential space while at ASMSA and taking classes in English. "I was worried about that. The students and teachers and staff were very kind and helpful for me," she said.

Matsumoto said everyone was very helpful, even more so than what she expected. Murakawa was surprised by how nice the facilities were, providing good places for studying. Takahashi echoed those sentiments commenting about the number of computers available for students to use in the library as well as the availability of a photography class.

They also spent time in ASMSA's Japanese language courses. It made them happy to hear the students speaking Japanese to them. They found the games and assignments designed to help ASMSA students learn the language to be fun.

One of the major differences for the students was that they lived on campus full time unlike at their home school in Osaka. While it took some getting used to, they found the opportunity to make new connections with ASMSA students.

"I really liked spending time with my friends," Takahashi said. "I could study with my friends, and we could watch a movie. We could go downtown."

Matsumoto said it was a fun experience spending time with her new friends and allowed her to make lots of memories with them.

Murakawa said being able to visit with friends in free time until 10 or 10:30 at night allowed her to spend more time with them.

During their visit, ASMSA also hosted students from Kita High School, ASMSA's Sister School in Hanamaki, Japan, for a few days. Hanamaki is Hot Springs' Sister City in Japan, and the two schools have a long-term cultural exchange relationship.

As part of Kita's visit to campus, their students presented a presentation about their school and home. The Tennoji students attended the presentation.

"I have never been to Hanamaki, so it was really interesting even for me," Matsumoto said about the presentation. "It was really good, and I learned more about them."

The Osaka students went with both ASMSA and Hanamaki students to a nearby crystal mine allowing them to interact with each other more. "It was a new experience and I made a new friend in Japan," Matsumoto said.

While shorter trips give students from both cultures the opportunity to get a taste of each country's cuisine, spending 10 weeks there will give you a different perspective.

A couple of the Tennoji students said that the Mexican food they had here was their favorite but that there were some items they didn't particularly like. The sweetness of many foods was too sugary, they said. One drink stood out for them, mainly because of its color — most likely Mountain Dew which is green and very sweet.

Toward the end of their stay, the Tennoji students said they would miss their new friends, the teachers and the overall experience. While they missed their family and friends at home, the experience at ASMSA made them wish for it to last a bit longer.

"I miss my family. I miss my friends, and of course my school. But I want to stay here. Look at my face," said Matsumoto, as she appeared to tear up a bit. 🏠

Alumna selected for two prestigious scholarships

Claire Green ('22) has been recognized with two prestigious national scholarships. Green, a junior at Mississippi State University, has been selected as a Harry S. Truman Scholarship awardee as well as a Morris K. Udall and Stewart L. Udall Foundation Scholar.

The Truman Scholarship, which honors the nation's 33rd president, is the premier graduate scholarship for aspiring public service leaders in the United States. This year, the foundation selected 54 recipients from 49 colleges and universities from a pool of 743 candidates nominated by 288 colleges and universities, according to a press release from the Truman Foundation. Truman Scholars receive funding for graduate studies, leadership training, career counseling, as well as special internship and fellowship opportunities within the federal government. Green may receive up to \$30,000 in graduate-study expenses as part of the award, according to a press release from Mississippi State.

Green is a Louis A. Hurst Jr. Presidential Endowed Scholar in Mississippi State's Judy and Bobby Shackouls Honors College. Among her campus activities, Green serves as vice president of the university's Speech and Debate Council, which represents Mississippi State in intercollegiate forensics competitions. Mississippi State won the national collegiate debate championship for a second time in a row at the International Public Debate Association National Tournament in April.

Green is a biochemistry major concentrating in entomology and works in Mississippi State's Pollinator Health Lab researching honeybees. According to a press



release from Mississippi State, Green plans to continue her entomology research in graduate school at the University of York's Stockholm Environment Institute in the United Kingdom.

"It is a huge honor, and I'm very grateful to represent Mississippi State," Green said. "I definitely couldn't have done it without all the wonderful resources and offices here at MSU. The Truman Scholarship will help support me toward a career in public service. I'm grateful for the resources to do that and hopefully give back to the communities around me."

The Udall Undergraduate Scholarship Program identifies future leaders in environmental, Tribal public policy and Native health care fields. This year, 55 students from 45 colleges and universities were selected as Udall Scholars from 381 candidates nominated by 175 colleges and universities. Each scholarship provides up to \$7,000 for eligible academic expenses during the student's junior or senior year of academic study. 🏠

Music POD adds new pathway for students in Fall '25

ASMSA is offering a music-focused pathway for students beginning in Fall 2025 that builds on the school's existing music curriculum to offer a focused experience for students' talents.

The Music Program of Distinction (POD) will allow students with a deep passion for music to explore fundamental principles while also focusing on studio time, private lessons and performances that reflect their own personal interests. Music POD students will spend approximately half their time and coursework on music-related activities while still meeting all ASMSA and state requirements.

The creation of the Music POD comes a year after ASMSA's Wind Ensemble and choir earned top honors in Class 3A state competitions as well as the String Ensemble earning state honors for the first time in its history. It also follows the school's introduction of the Visual Arts and Design Program of Distinction (POD) in 2022. The Art POD provides students with opportunities to take immersive courses in 2D, 3D, and other traditional arts topics. The Music POD will follow a similar track of core and elective courses.

"Our experienced and highly credentialed faculty coupled with a well-trained and innovative Student Life staff provide the resources and support needed to prepare all students for success," said Jason Hudnell, director of admissions. "The expansion of the arts to include our new Music POD that complements our commitment to STEM education opens even more opportunities for students to thrive in our community of learning." 🏠

DREAMING BIG

Support systems, mentors provide transformational opportunities

Hailey Judkins ('25) was a member of the first cohort of students in the HELIX Prep Academy, a pilot program that provides a small group of students from low-to-moderate income households the opportunity to enroll at ASMSA as sophomores. HELIX Prep Academy is designed to bring students experiencing opportunity gaps to campus as sophomores and prepare them to excel in their junior year and beyond.

When Judkins applied for ASMSA, she was attending a school district where the graduating classes included several hundred students. As a ninth-grader, she was focused more on what was for lunch that day than what her future might look like. That changed once she started at ASMSA.

"My sophomore year at ASMSA immersed me in a community of like-minded individuals, and for the first time, I wasn't the smartest person in the room," Judkins said. "ASMSA helped me see myself as someone who could go to college and thrive. Even though I didn't know what college that would be at the time, I'm now graduating with a strong sense of self and a patience with others that I didn't have before."

Judkins will be attending College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Mass., on a QuestBridge National College Match Program scholarship. QuestBridge is a nonprofit organization that works with top universities across the country to offer four-year, full scholarships to deserving students who may otherwise be unable to afford to attend those institutions. The organization partnered this year with 52 colleges and universities to offer scholarships at schools such as Duke University, Columbia University, Yale and others.

Judkins was one of six ASMSA students who received QuestBridge matches this year, the most since the school began working with students to apply for the program. Other students matched with Brown University, the University of Pennsylvania, Johns Hopkins University, Wesleyan University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).

Four of the six ASMSA students who received scholarship matches with QuestBridge were members

of that first HELIX cohort. Another member of the HELIX cohort was selected as a Coca-Cola Scholars Foundation awardee, receiving a \$20,000 scholarship. Another member of the Class of 2025 was one of 70 students nationwide who were named Jack Kent Cooke Scholars by the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation. The scholarship provides last-dollar funding up to \$55,000 per year after all institutional aid to pursue a bachelor's degree at any

*'Sometimes
the biggest
breakthrough isn't
just getting into
a great school;
it's realizing they
belong there in the
first place.'*

**Bret Vallun, associate dean
for college counseling,
speaking about helping first-
generation and low-income
students understand the
opportunities available to
them after ASMSA**

'I believe I would have never heard of QuestBridge had I not attended (ASMSA), and beyond that, I would be missing so many of the qualities that now define who I am.'

Hailey Judkins ('25), speaking about her growth at ASMSA and earning a scholarship to College of the Holy Cross through the QuestBridge National College Match program



accredited undergraduate institution.

"More often than not, students (at her sending school) fall through the cracks when it comes to learning about scholarship opportunities. I believe I would have never heard of QuestBridge had I not attended (ASMSA), and beyond that, I would be missing so many of the qualities that now define who I am," Judkins said.

Without that kind of knowledge, students' pathways to higher education opportunities will be more difficult. Many come from families where they would be the first person to attend college. ASMSA has a longstanding commitment to providing support for low-income students and is a leader among its peer institutions regarding access for such populations. About 40 percent of ASMSA's 2024-25 enrollment were low-income students.

"Most (first-generation or low-income) students and their families simply aren't aware of the kinds of opportunities that exist," said Bret Vallun, the school's associate dean for college counseling who works with students to seek out various programs and scholarships that would be beneficial to them. "Honestly, even families with better educational or financial backgrounds often don't know about them either. These programs can be life-changing, but without someone highlighting

them, students might never apply."

It's not only about knowing that the scholarships exist that matters, Vallun said. It's also about believing that something larger is a possibility.

"First-generation students often arrive with a narrow, and sometimes misinformed, view of what's possible," Vallun said. "I know because I was one of them. Many believe that college, especially a prestigious one, is simply out of reach due to the high costs. However, that perspective shifts quickly at ASMSA. Through our support and the spotlight we give to student successes, students begin to see what's actually available to them.

"We introduce them to scholarships, programs, and even opportunities right here in Arkansas that make college far more affordable than they ever could have imagined. Sometimes the biggest breakthrough isn't just getting into a great school; it's realizing they belong there in the first place."

Finding the place that you feel you belong — both academically and socially — can be a key to success at ASMSA. When the HELIX Prep Academy was announced in 2022, Executive Director Corey Alderdice said the purpose of the program as a way for what he described as "transformational" students to have access to opportunities they may not have had otherwise as compared to "transitional"



'I was scared but confident that I would end up where I was meant to be at the end of the day because I got help at every step of the way.'

**Katherine Quintanilla ('25),
speaking about the support
she received from ASMSA's
Office of Student Success**

students who often come from school districts where they have had more advanced learning opportunities that enables them to immediately begin focusing on ASMSA's rigorous coursework.

Transformational students often have faced gaps in learning opportunities — whether they are based on family income, limited available courses or lack of academic counseling among other reasons. They often are some of the best, brightest and most motivated students; however, they may lack the solid foundation available to other students.

In addition to introducing HELIX students to college-level courses and to living away from home, cohort members participated in a course called Transitions that helps the students adapt to both the academic and residential sides of campus life. HELIX students participate in the Transitions course with the Early Entrance Program sophomores, giving them the opportunity to learn that they belong at ASMSA.

Katherine Quintanilla ('25), who was a member of that first HELIX cohort, said her ASMSA experience did that. She will be attending the University of Pennsylvania in the fall on a QuestBridge National College Match scholarship. As a high school freshman, she had an ambition to become a brain surgeon after watching many episodes of "Grey's Anatomy," a television drama. She now plans to major in political science with a minor in psychology and East Asian Studies in Japanese instead after her experience at ASMSA.

"ASMSA has given me the opportunity to strive for what I want," Quintanilla said. "Even if it was competitive and hard, I still tried and gave it my all. I have learned to be a critical thinker and multitasker at ASMSA. I have also found friends of a lifetime and wouldn't trade this experience for anything.

"Being at ASMSA prepared me in the best way possible for college, and I'm very grateful to go to college on a full-ride scholarship. ASMSA made higher education so much more attainable, and I would do it all over again for the same ending."

Quintanilla's experience is reflective of one of the advantages ASMSA students have thanks to the academic counseling they receive. There are two Student Success Coordinators and a Coordinator for Scholar Development who serve on the Student Success team alongside Vallun. The Student Success Coordinators provide students with academic advising and intervention. The scholar development coordinator seeks out as internships and other external educational opportunities for students.

Vallun said that having a team of individuals who

are focused on setting students up for future success is vital. For him, the process starts with listening to the students, hearing their ambitions, goals, and concerns directly from them.

“Before anything else, I try to be supportive and take the time to understand each student,” he said. “I want to know what drives them, what worries them, and what they’re curious about. Once we build that foundation, we start aligning their interests, strengths, and personality with possible education and career paths. We create an academic plan that mirrors what their college experience might look like.”

That may include enrolling in rigorous courses as well as seeking out tangible experiences such as lab opportunities, job shadowing, internships, or summer programs. These opportunities help students “test drive” their interests and gain a deeper understanding of what a degree or career actually involves, Vallun said.

“It’s one thing to say you want to be a doctor or an engineer, but it’s another to study like one or experience the day-to-day and realize if it’s really for you,” Vallun said.

Sarah Pham ('25) said she didn't truly find

her passion until she started classes at ASMSA. When she first started high school, Pham thought she wanted to be a neurosurgeon or an anesthesiologist. After being influenced by her brother, she then thought she would major in computer science.

Once she was at ASMSA, Pham discovered a love for mathematics. She credits Tracy Watson, a former mathematics instructor at ASMSA, for having a large impact on her.

“Her passion for math and the way she taught made me look forward to every class, and that’s when I realized how much I genuinely love math. As I took more math classes and met even more amazing teachers, I became inspired to pursue a career in math,” Pham said.

This fall, Pham will attend MIT to study mathematics on a QuestBridge National College Match scholarship. She plans to one day work in the actuarial industry after discovering the field through ASMSA’s Future Business Leaders of America club when one of her friends, Karilynn Arrellano ('25), convinced her to join the club. The club helped her discover that, along with math, that she loved finance and business as well.

Students mentioned several faculty



Kelvin Orduna ('25) was named a Coca-Cola Scholar. The organization provided \$20,000 scholarships to 150 students nationwide from a pool of more than 105,000 applications this year. Orduna attended a Scholars Weekend in Atlanta, Ga., in February. (Photo courtesy of Kelvin Orduna)

members who offered important support and mentorship both inside and outside of the classroom including Japanese Instructor of Excellence Elizabeth Brown, Mathematics Instructor of Excellence Walt Levisse, Humanities Instructor Ernestine Ross, Music Instructor Dr. Nathan Groot, Mathematics Instructor Rachel Elia, and Mathematics Instructor of Excellence Caleb Grisham among others.

Pham said that as a first-generation student having the support to find both her passion and the best way to fund her education to follow that passion would have been a different experience without ASMSA.

"When it came to college, I originally just wanted to go wherever gave me the best aid. I didn't really have a dream school. But ASMSA helped me realize I could aim higher, that it was OK to dream big and shoot my shot," Pham said.

Pham's example supports a belief that Vallun has about the importance of mentors at ASMSA, both within and outside of the classroom. In the classroom, mentors help students develop academically by teaching them essential skills such as time management, adaptability, curiosity and critical thinking. Mentors outside of the classroom help students develop soft skills

they'll need in college and beyond, including how to make a strong first impression, how to ask for help and how to effectively handle conflict or failure.

"Research indicates that having just one supportive adult in a student's life can have a significantly positive impact on their success and well-being. I wholeheartedly believe that research. Every student needs someone to model what success looks like, someone to cheer them on and someone who's there when they fall so that we can pick them up, dust them off, help them reflect, regroup and keep going," Vallun said.

ASMSA's own data reflecting student connections reenforces Vallun's assertion. ASMSA participates annually in the Challenge Success Survey of Adolescent Student Experiences, which is conducted by Challenge Success, a nonprofit research organization that focuses on partnering with schools and families to create healthy and authentic paths to success for adolescents. Recent surveys have pegged deep student connections to at least one adult on ASMSA's campus at 85 percent, higher than national figures in the 70s.

ASMSA students not only connect to faculty. The highest percentage group that students identify are those with the staff

Damian Biggs ('25) had a moment to visit with Giuseppe 'Seppy' Basili, executive director of the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation, at the Class of 2025 Commencement. Biggs was selected as a recipient of a Cooke Foundation Scholarship, which will provide him the opportunity to attend the University of Tulsa to study electrical engineering with a scholarship worth up to \$55,000 a year. Basili was the featured speaker at this year's graduation ceremony.





'When it came to college, I originally just wanted to go wherever gave me the best aid. But ASMSA helped me realize I could aim higher, that it was OK to dream big.'

Sarah Pham ('25), who will be attending MIT on a QuestBridge scholarship

members in the Office of Student Success. For many students, that person is Vallun. Damian Biggs ('25), one of 70 high school students nationwide who were selected as a 2025 Cooke Scholar, is among them.

"(Vallun was) the most influential and supportive person I have had in my circle at ASMSA," said Biggs, who plans to attend the University of Tulsa this fall to study electrical engineering with a minor in innovation and entrepreneurship. "This is exactly what many students would say, but that doesn't make it any less true. I am confident that I would not be where I am right now, with a Jack Kent Cooke Scholarship going to my dream school, if it weren't for Bret's help.

"He's been an amazing mentor, and I love how involved he is with us as students and how much he cares about our success. I will always be grateful for his support this last year, and I hope to help students in the future as much as he's helped me."

Kelvin Orduna ('25), who was a member of the first HELIX cohort, will be attending Yale this fall to major in ethics, politics and economics. Orduna is one of 150 high school students who will receive a \$20,000 scholarship after being recognized as a Coca-Cola Scholar this year. He cited the academic mentorship he received from many educators including Dr. Brian Monson, associate dean

for STEM and a physics instructor; Dr. Dan Kostopulos, a humanities Instructor of Excellence; and James Katowich, a humanities Instructor of Excellence, as being important to his success at ASMSA.

"One of the biggest things I've learned at ASMSA is that getting a 4.0 GPA isn't the goal. It's a whole different mindset from my sending school where so many valedictorians go off to college expecting it to be easy. ASMSA instructors challenge students and prepare them for college coursework because we've been doing that level of work for two or even three years," Orduna said.

Vallun said that while the ASMSA experience may seem intimidating at times students should realize that they don't have to do it alone. That is something that is built into the HELIX Prep Academy as well as throughout the whole program. There are many resources designed to support the students, and the challenges can be manageable when worked on together.

"Students should keep an open mind and recognize that there are plenty of us out there who want to help them succeed. I am one of many. We love having the opportunity to work with students, and it brings great joy and meaning to any educator when we see our students succeed and see their education goals validated and fulfilled," Vallun said. 🙌

2 student musicians attend Sewanee program

Faith Wesley ('26) and Giea de los Reyes ('26) were selected to participate in this year's prestigious Sewanee Summer Music Festival.

The Sewanee Summer Music Festival is a six-week artistic training program that helps student musicians develop various aspects of musicianship, including musical technique, professional development and other personal skills in an artistic incubator where they work closely with professionals from around the world in an intense yet supportive environment.

Student musicians are chosen for one of four programs: Orchestral and Chamber Music, Composition, Operafest, and String Academy. It is held annually at Sewanee: The University of the South in Sewanee, Tenn. Participants are selected through a rigorous and highly selective application and audition process. This year's festival was held June 15-July 23.

Wesley participated in the Composition Program, which included the opportunity to study with composers Jorge Variego and Ingrid Stölzel among others, compose for a wide variety of instruments and ensembles, attend masterclasses, study in applied lessons, and have their music performed by skilled musicians.

De los Reyes, who is a percussionist in ASMSA's Wind Ensemble, focused on instrumental performance at the program, having the opportunity to perform with professional-level symphony conductors from around the world, study in applied lessons with renowned percussion pedagogues, perform chamber music and study solo repertoire.

Both students said they chose to apply for the program because they are passionate about music and are considering future musical pursuits in both college and their careers.

"I really hope to get more experience with writing for more



Faith Wesley ('26) and Giea de los Reyes ('26) had the opportunity to spend six weeks at the Sewanee Summer Music Festival. Wesley studied music composition while de los Reyes focused on percussion.

unique ensembles, and I hope to continue finding my voice as a composer," said Wesley, who plays clarinet and also is a member of ASMSA's choir.

"Being selected to participate in this program is very important to me because I plan on pursuing a musical career," de los Reyes said. "Most of my performance skills are secluded to local gigs and band, but this festival will further my experience in other musical fields! There's not a lot of opportunities to perform in orchestras in Hot Springs, but the two times I've had the pleasure of performing in one, I've always returned a better musician than before."

Dr. Thomas Dempster, associate dean for arts and humanities, said that the festival accepts a low number of high schoolers overall and only five high school-level composers from around the world each year.

Dr. Nathan Groot, an ASMSA music instructor, was a student musician at the 2016 festival.

"I was pushed to my limit at Sewanee as a musician and grew immensely as a musician," Groot said. "Much of what I now play with professional symphonies were pieces



that I first studied at SSMF. Many of the students and faculty I worked with then are important professional connections that I rely on now.

"It directly opened opportunities to graduate assistantships and fellowships in my master's and doctoral programs, and I can point to major parts of my teaching and playing that I can trace back to my time there. I am very excited for Giea and Faith and think this educational experience will open many opportunities for them in their future careers."

Wesley earned a scholarship from the Sewanee program to pay for tuition as well as the Summer Music Fellowship from the ASMSA Foundation Fund to apply toward other costs. De los Reyes received a scholarship from the ASMSA Foundation Fund to pay for the program's tuition.

De los Reyes said she was "extremely thankful for the ASMSA Foundation for funding my tuition for the Sewanee Summer Music Festival! None of this would be possible without their generosity. ASMSA really strives to support its students in their pursuits, and I'm so glad I can contribute to this school's passionate student body." 🙌



Maya Allen ('25), right, works in a lab at The Jackson Laboratory Summer Student Program with her mentor, Samantha Spellacy who is a Research Assistant II at the organization. The program provides students an the opportunity to participate in hands-on research. (Photo printed with permission ©2025 The Jackson Laboratory)

In the Summertime

Programs provide students with real-world research opportunities

Real-world summer research opportunities can be hard to come by. They are often created to give undergraduate and graduate students an opportunity to expand on their experiences in labs at colleges and universities. They are competitive and require a willingness to spend weeks of summer in a working laboratory setting instead of enjoying a break with family and friends. Some accept very few high school students.

This summer, however, three members of the Class of 2025 were selected to participate in prestigious research programs in Arkansas and other states. Maya Allen ('25), Carmella Lewis ('25), and Sindia Michael ('25) are each spending a significant portion of their summer break conducting research before their first year of college.

Allen was set to spend about 10 weeks in the prestigious The Jackson Laboratory Summer Student Program. Each year, about 40 undergraduate and high school students from across the United States are chosen to participate in the program where they conduct genetics and genomics research. Studying with an experienced scientific mentor, participants develop

an independent project, implement their plan, analyze data, and report results. They present their findings to researchers, other students and parents at the end of the summer.

Allen was set to participate in the laboratory's site in Bar Harbor, Maine, from May 31 through August 8. She planned to research the genetics behind kidney disease in the context of aging.

Allen is the first ASMSA student to be selected to participate in the program. Dr. Patrycja Krakowiak, chair of ASMSA's Science Department and a Life Sciences Instructor of Excellence, wrote a recommendation for Allen as part of the application process. She has written many letters for students and ASMSA alumni in the past and said Allen's selection "was an overwhelming surprise" since it is rare for high school students to be selected for the program.

"She is the kind of student who defines what it means to go above and beyond," Krakowiak said of Allen. "She spent countless hours right here on our ASMSA campus as a junior and senior collecting, amplifying, and visualizing DNA samples to study how genetic background

affects our likelihood to develop cavities. The independent research that students conduct at ASMSA is priceless as it develops their ability to think critically and opens so many new, innovative pathways to future success.”

Allen said being the first ASMSA student to be selected for the program “is a huge honor, and considering that last year they only accepted one high school student, I’m still a little bit in shock.”

Allen wasn’t the only one with an ASMSA connection at the summer program, however. Sydney Hammond (’23) was also selected to participate in this year’s cohort. Krakowiak also wrote her recommendation.

Lewis was selected for the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences Summer Research Undergraduate Fellowship (SURF). She was set to participate in a 10-week research program in UAMS’ Department of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology. She planned to continue her research on enzymes that help replicate DNA and contribute to cancer growth which she began during a summer research program at UAMS in summer 2024. Midway through the program, Lewis had an opportunity to present her research as well as compete in the Arkansas Undergraduate Summer Research Symposium at the end of the program. The day Lewis found out was an exciting one as she was also notified that she had also been selected for another honor.

“I found out about my acceptance about three hours before I learned I was selected to be a University of Arkansas Honors College Fellow, so needless to say it was quite the evening,” Lewis said. “I am the first high school student to ever be selected for this program, and I

was only considered because of the college credit hours I have received as a result of attending ASMSA.”

Krakowiak said Lewis was considered an undergraduate because of the 64 hours of college credit she had earned through the University of Arkansas at Fort Smith in classes at ASMSA. Krakowiak was excited for Lewis’ acceptance into the program.

“Finding out Carmella earned the SURF fellowship was an incredible surprise because this is not something a high school student has ever received,” said Krakowiak, who served as one of her project mentors. “There were 82 applicants for

tion over the past two years to her research has been exceptional. This opportunity will open new doors for her growth and discovery as she works toward a career in biomedical research.”

Michael was selected to attend the National Youth Science Camp, one of the nation’s premier programs in secondary science education and is sponsored by the National Youth Science Academy. The summer program offers educational forums and recreational activities that encourage the development of thoughtful scientific leadership. Two students from each state are chosen as delegates to the camp each year.

The residential STEAM camp was set for July 10 through August 2 at Camp Pocahontas in the Monongahela National Forest near Bartow, W.Va. Participants were also going to visit Washington, D.C., to meet with congressional members and attend a panel discussion to be held at the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

“Through ASMSA, I learned how transformative a living and learning community is,” Michael said. “At

NYS Camp, I get to expand on this experience by engaging with other motivated and curious students from across the nation and the world.

“I’ve always been inspired to make an impact in the spaces I am part of, to diversify these spaces, and to prepare for a lifetime of contributions to healthcare, a field I aspire to pursue,” Michael said. “Meeting professionals across academia, government, and STEAM is a privilege I plan to nourish. It’s also an opportunity for me to learn about innovation and leadership in different parts of the world.” ▲

‘I’ve always been inspired to make an impact in the spaces I am part of, to diversify these spaces, and to prepare for a lifetime of contributions to healthcare, a field I aspire to pursue.’



Sindia Michael (’25), speaking about the opportunity to participate in the National Youth Science Camp summer program

SURF this year from 20 states, and only six students were awarded the fellowship. We need more people as motivated, devoted, and driven as Carmella; she is truly on her path to changing the world.”

Dr. Whitney Holden, who is also a Life Sciences Instructor of Excellence at ASMSA and served as a mentor for Lewis, has personal experience in the fellowship program. Holden participated in the same fellowship while attending the University of Arkansas.

“I’m incredibly proud of Carmella for earning this prestigious internship,” Holden said. “Her dedica-

Krakowiak earns PAEMST recognition

Dr. Patrycja Krakowiak, a life sciences Instructor of Excellence, has been named a Presidential Awards for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching (PAEMST) recipient.

The award recognizes outstanding science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) teachers who have demonstrated a commitment to professional development, innovative teaching techniques, and technology in their classroom. The program is conducted by the National Science Foundation on behalf of The White House Office of Science and Technology Policy.

A national committee of scientists, mathematicians, and educators review the applications and recommend teachers to receive the award. Winners are chosen from each state, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the U.S. territories, and schools operated in the United States and overseas by the Department of Defense Education Activity.

Krakowiak was named a state finalist in the science category for grades 7-12 in both 2021 and 2023. She was named a recipient for the 2021 award on Jan. 13, 2025, after the announcement for those awards had been delayed. Krakowiak said she was excited to finally receive news about the award.

"Though it has been four years since I submitted my original application, the news that I was selected from all of the Arkansas science teachers who applied was a wonderful surprise," Krakowiak said. "It is a culmination of so much effort and time spent in and out of the classroom that it feels truly significant and worthwhile."

In a statement that was included with her bio on the PAEMST awards website, Krakowiak compared the PAEMST award to a Nobel Prize for STEM teachers.

"It is the highest honor I can imagine for the work I am so passionate about: exciting, engaging, motivating and empowering my students," she said. "The Presidential Award validates my persistent efforts of trying new pedagogical approaches and differentiating instruction for students from diverse

teaching a class on the topic using all the engagement tools and student discussions that she would normally implement to enhance student learning.

In addition to serving as a classroom instructor and chair for ASMSA's Science Department, Krakowiak is as an instructor and mentor for the school's Advanced Biology Plus cohorts in the STEM Pathways program. The initiative provides instruction for biology students as well as curriculum and professional development for educators.

"As a teacher of other educators enrolled in our Advanced Biology Plus program across the state, I think that it is very important we continue to elevate and highlight the incredibly important and difficult work that all teachers do in helping students become critical thinkers that choose STEM fields for their career paths," Krakowiak said. "It is absolutely essential for the future of our world that young minds are prepared to solve complex problems by applying their analytical reasoning skills and trusting their innovative approaches. It is the teachers of these students who cultivate and help grow the creative and aspirational abilities of the

next generation."

Krakowiak was officially recognized as one of Arkansas' 2021 PAEMST recipients at the May 8 State Board of Education meeting. As part of the recognition, each awardee will receive a certificate signed by the President and a \$10,000 award from NSF. The educators also will travel to Washington, D.C., for a ceremony at a future date. 🏆



Dr. Patrycja Krakowiak was recognized by the Arkansas Board of Education as the 2021 Presidential Awards for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching recipient.

backgrounds to enrich their journey into STEM because, especially today, our world needs critical thinkers and problem solvers."

Krakowiak previously described the application process for the award as very intensive but quite rewarding as well. She had to pick a topic for which she had to develop several lesson plans, hands-on activities, and extensive studies. She also had to record herself

Class of 2025 celebrates Commencement; Cooke Foundation leader featured speaker

ASMSA held its 31st annual Commencement celebrating the graduation of the Class of 2025 at the Oaklawn Event Center on May 17.

The ceremony honored 95 graduates from 36 counties. The graduates earned \$25.2 million in scholarship offers, pushing the overall total to \$353.7 million over the school's history. Giuseppe "Seppy" Basili, the executive director of the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation, served as Commencement speaker. Karilynn Arellano ('25) and Hailey Judkins ('25) were student speakers.

Basili encouraged the graduates to keep a simple credo in mind: "To imbue and exhibit confident humility in all that you do." He said confident humility is the balance of knowing your strengths while being open to learning, growth and the possibility of being wrong as well as recognizing what "you're good at without becoming arrogant" while staying grounded and teachable even after success.

Confidence includes trusting your abilities and judgment; be willing to speak up, lead, and take risks; and to not shrink from challenges while humility is realizing you don't have all the answers, are open to feedback and other perspectives, and are willing to admit mistakes and keep learning, Basili said. Combining the two will allow you to believe in your abilities enough to take initiatives while being self-aware enough to listen, adapt, and grow, he said.

"In short, confident humility is strength without arrogance and humility without self-doubt. Your time at ASMSA has prepared you well. You can and already do exhibit these qualities. If you keep them in mind, you will thrive," Basili said.

Basili thanked the graduates "for having the guts, ambition and willingness to do something different" by attending a residential school where they "would be challenged academically while also developing and growing as a person." Basili said he spoke from the place of knowing the challenge personally after attending a residential high school himself.

Basili praised the State of Arkansas as well as the University of Arkansas System for believing in and investing in a school like ASMSA. The Jack Kent Cooke Foundation also invested in ASMSA, providing a \$61,000 grant for an ASMSA summer program called Project HELIX: Helping Elevate Low-Income Students to Excellence in 2015 that served as the inspiration for the school's HELIX Prep Academy, which allows a small cohort of students who may have faced gaps in learning opportunities to enroll at the school as sophomores.

"Thirty-plus years into its history, these leaders believe providing a unique educational option to students



Karilynn Arellano ('25) encouraged her fellow graduates push through the challenges they will face and to keep moving forward.

who demonstrate exceptional promise is a priority. Most states do not have opportunities like the ones that you experienced available. It is commendable, and I believe it also will continue to pay dividends for the state writ large," he said.

Judkins shared that when she first received an invitation in the mail to visit ASMSA, she was hesitant. "It felt like one of those moments where you knew something big was about to change, so I ran to tell my dad," she said. Her father immediately said "no way" to letting her move to a residential school which eventually turned into "Well, we can just look," and eventually to "Do you need help packing the car?"

"I found a community that didn't ask me to forget where I came from. They asked me to honor it, to build on it and to grow," Judkins said. "ASMSA didn't just prepare us for college or careers. It gave us something deeper. It gave us the tools to understand ourselves, the bravery to change and the strength to keep going even when the path ahead isn't clear."

Arellano spoke to her classmates about the challenges they have faced during their time at ASMSA, acknowledging that it isn't just the good times that define them as people. Experiencing these kinds of challenges were important for her and her classmates, she said.

"The life lesson I hope to share with you today is this: as we begin our college journeys, we're going to face challenges. Real ones. There will be moments where giving up seems easier than going on, but even in those moments, remember life keeps moving. So, when something goes wrong, don't dwell on it. All you can do is move forward and make the most of what comes next," Arellano said. 🌟

High-Achieving Art

Young artists earn recognition in state, national contests

Several students in ASMSA's arts and humanities programs garnered both state and national recognition throughout the 2024-25 school year. Thirty-seven students earned at least one recognition for their visual, literary, film and music pieces in competitions, including 10 earning multiple awards.

Olivia Busby ('25) was one of those students who earned recognition in multiple contests, including a \$3,000 scholarship in the 2024/2025 Thea Foundation Scholarship Competition, an honorable mention in the Portfolio Category (Art) in the Heartland Region Art Awards division of the 2025 Scholastic Art and Writing Awards, and as a finalist in the Visual Arts category of the Arts Across Arkansas competition.

But perhaps the most prestigious recognition she earned this year was being selected as the winner of the 2025 Fourth District Congressional Art Competition sponsored by U.S. Rep. Bruce Westerman. Busby earned recognition for her piece called "County Fair". She also earned fourth place for a piece called "Lined Bricks".

The competition is held annually, and each member of the U.S. House of Representatives may host a competition for their district. Top pieces are displayed in Washington, D.C., while other award winners may be displayed in each representative's offices, both in D.C. and in their home state.

Busby said she found out she had won this year's competition in an email from Lola Warren, an ASMSA art instructor. "When I got that email saying I'd won, the only thing I could reply back was a big fat, 'WHAT DOES THAT MEAN,' caps and all," she said.

"County Fair" is an acrylic on canvas that is the third part of a series of paintings which aimed to show Southern American nostalgia and culture, she said. "I've always been naturally inclined to observe and record what I see through art, and I had always been the 'art kid' in elementary school due to winning a duck-stamp art contest in third grade," Busby said.



Above, Olivia Busby ('25) was recognized as the winner of the 2025 Fourth District Congressional Art Competition for her piece called 'County Fair'. The contest was sponsored by U.S. Rep. Bruce Westerman, who honored the winners at an event this spring.

She plans to attend the Kansas City Art Institute this fall to major illustration with the desire to work on video game design and creating comics with other creators, calling them her dream jobs. Busby said she was inspired to follow her passion for art by a family member.

"What really solidified this path for me was finding out that my passed-on dad had his own collection of sketchbooks which he worked on despite battling poverty with a family of three," she said. "It told me that my little habits of doodling that just felt natural should be something that is livable. So, I do my best to put my art out into the world and enjoy it as I see just how skilled I can get. Also, achievements like these are a justice to those like my dad whose art hides due to poor circumstance."

Scholastic Art and Writing Awards

Twenty-two students earned recognition in the 2025 Scholastic Art and Writing Awards regional competition. Micaela Collver ('26), Priya James ('26), Lola Tate ('25), Andy Kneebone ('27), and Preston Lowe ('25) each earned Gold Keys and advanced to the national competition for their writing and

art awards. Collver, James and Tate earned their Gold Keys in the Southern Region Writing Awards, which covers literary categories.

Lowe and Kneebone received a Gold Key in the Heartland Region Art Awards, which includes visual, digital and film arts. Lowe also received a Silver Key in the Southern

Region Writing Awards. Three other students earned Silver Keys: April Adams ('26) in the Southern Region Writing Awards as well as Laney Caldwell ('25) and Jaime Hernandez Perez ('25) in the Heartland Region Art Awards. The contests are sponsored by the Alliance for Young Artists and Writers.

Thea Foundation Scholarship Competition



Hannah Dalencourt-King ('25) won seventh-place in the 2025 Thea Foundation Scholarship Competition for a 3D art piece. She was one of four students who earned recognition in the contest.

Four ASMSA students earned a \$3,000 scholarship in the 2024/25 Thea Foundation Scholarship Competition — Olivia Busby ('25), AB Maness ('25), Hannah Dalencourt-King ('25), and Jaime Hernandez Perez ('25).

More than 300 students from across Arkansas entered the competition for a chance at part of \$219,000 in schol-

arships, according to the foundation's website. Thirty-six students in five different categories were awarded scholarships. ASMSA's students were recognized in the Visual Arts category with Dalencourt-King placing seventh, Busby placing eighth, Maness taking ninth-place, and Hernandez Perez placing 10th.

Arts Across Arkansas

Eight students placed with 22 earning recognition as finalists in the Arts Across Arkansas 2025 competition in March. Jaime Hernandez Perez ('25) won third place in the Film category and was named a finalist in the Visual Arts and Literary Arts categories.

Arts Across Arkansas is sponsored by the Arkansas Arts Council, an agency of the Division of Arkansas Heritage. The competi-

tion features six categories: Visual Arts, Dance Choreography, Film, Music Composition, Literary Arts, and Photography. ASMSA students were selected as finalists in the Visual Arts, Film, Music Composition, Literary Arts, and Photography. Hernandez Perez was a finalist in the Visual Arts, Film and Literary Arts categories.

Three students earned awards in the Music Composition category:

Faith Wesley ('26), first place; Bryce Jackson ('26), second place; and Matthew Carter ('26), third place. Two students placed in the Literary Arts category: Halie Cook ('26), first place, and Saylor Ross ('25), third place.

Makenna Kutzschebauch ('26) won second place in the Film category. Coley Rogers ('26) earned second place in the Visual Arts category.

CelebratingArt Contest



Preston Lowe ('25) was one of three students to have pieces selected for recognition in the CelebratingArt Contest during the past year. Lowe had two pieces selected, including 'Young Amber Nichole,' a reimagining of his mother, which is pictured above.

The artwork of three students was selected to for recognition in the CelebratingArt Contest sponsored by CelebratingArt and Blick Art Materials. Leah Fouste ('25), Preston Lowe ('25) and AB Maness ('25) had works selected for the Fall 2024 CelebratingArt hardcover book edition. Lowe also had a piece selected to be included Spring 2025 edition of the book.

Fouste's piece selected for the book is an oil painting named "Caravaggio-ish." Fouste said the piece was inspired by the work of the artist Caravaggio and his "interesting use of light in his paintings." Fouste earned a "High Merit" award for her submission.

"I was quite enthusiastic about being chosen to be published in the book," Fouste said. "I think the publication means a lot to me because it is a step towards my future career in the arts."

Lowe submitted "Young Amber Nichole," an acrylic and collage magazine on canvas with palette knife texture. "I wanted to create something bold and experimental," Lowe said. "The painting is a reimagining of my mother in her youth. I accentuated her dress with a striking collage element, allowing it to stand out, while the colors I chose were ones I had fallen in love with."

Lowe said having a piece selected for recognition "means so much to me because it feels like a recognition of the emotion and intricacy I poured into the piece. It reassures me that I'm on the right path with my art, motivating me to keep making what feels right. I was in complete shock to find that I've accomplished something as huge as this."

Lowe's "A Moment in Painting" was selected for the spring edition of the CelebratingArt book. He also had an art piece and writing submission included in the "Our Voices Scholarship" magazine as well as being included in the "Imagining Black Futures: Young Artists Envision Afrofuturism" exhibition sponsored by the Central Arkansas Library System. He said that opportunities such as these fuel his hunger for creating more art with the hope of making work that speaks to others.

Maness' piece that was accepted is an acrylic paint on canvas called "Master Copy of Skull of a Skeleton with Burning Cigarette" inspired by a Vincent Van Gogh painting called "Skull of a Skeleton with Burning Cigarette." Maness said she was "honored to be considered for publication. Being able to see my art published means that the hard work I've put into my art for the past six years has been for something."

Barnett ('07) inspired by childhood experience to seek public office

When the 95th General Assembly opened session in January, Lincoln Barnett ('07) was sworn in to represent District 63 in the Arkansas House of Representatives, marking the next step in a political journey that began as a young child in Blackfish Lake, a small community near Interstate 40 located between Forrest City and West Memphis.

Growing up, Barnett attended school in Hughes. After riding the school bus home one day during his kindergarten year, he recalls asking his mother a question: "Mom, what's wrong with Hughes?"

"To which she replied, 'Baby, there's a lot wrong with Hughes,'" Barnett said. "To which I thought, 'Well, what are we going to do about it?'"

The conversation left an impression on Barnett. An encounter in sixth grade with the then-mayor of Hughes sparked an interest in one day becoming the mayor of Hughes himself. He would do so in 2018 when at the age of 29 he was elected as the youngest mayor in the town's history as well as the second African American to hold the position.

Prior to serving as Hughes' mayor, Barnett served as a member of the Hughes School District school board from 2012-2015, representing rural areas of the district including his home communities of Blackfish Lake and Heth. Declining enrollment forced the school district to consolidate with the West Memphis School District in 2015 in accordance with Act 60 of 2003.

"Many in the city of Hughes began to lose hope because they saw the school as the heart of the community," Barnett said. "I initially felt that way also, but after engaging in community activism, preparing our community for the forced merger, and advocating for students, parents and families, that childhood thought of 'Well, what are we going to do about it?' led me to seeing no other option than offering myself to and for the service of the city of Hughes in the capacity of mayor."

Barnett said his goal was to restore hope to and empower the people of Hughes by reminding them that it was the people who were the heart of the community and not the school. After his first term as mayor, he decided to seek the House District 63 seat, but he lost to the incumbent in the primary by 258 votes. He was soon back in the mayor's office, however, when the Hughes City Council asked him to return as mayor in January 2023 after his successor abruptly resigned two days into their term of office.

"So that makes me both the 17th and 19th mayor of Hughes," Barnett said.

In 2024, Barnett again decided to seek the District



State Rep. Lincoln Barnett ('07) recently finished his first session of the Arkansas General Assembly in the House of Representatives serving his hometown district.

63 seat. In the March 2024 primary, he earned a spot in an April 2024 runoff for the Democratic nomination and was then elected in the November 2024 General Election.

"I wanted better for my regional community, and I'm willing to do more than just complain. I ran because I was willing to step up and try to make a difference," Barnett said. "Our part of the state has many challenges, and it will take engaged leaders with the support of engaged citizens to collectively bring about and advocate for the progression of Eastern Arkansas and the overall state in general."

Barnett said his service as both a school board member and a mayor in a small rural area has given him first-hand experience of direct citizen engagement to learn about and address from a ground level the challenges and obstacles people in the region and state face.

While a student at ASMSA, Barnett was involved in student governance, served as a Community Leader in the residence hall, served as president of the Rotary Interact Club, and in other student organizations. He said that as a student he was challenged "to lead

as a scholar among my peers in a rigorous setting which helped me sharpen my skills of critical thinking and thinking outside the box. As a student at ASMSA, I enjoyed the challenges each day brought.”

Barnett said he fondly remembers the time spent with his friends and peers during free time at ASMSA as well as mentoring his fellow students as a Community Leader. He also praised the wisdom he gained from his favorite teachers — Dr. Carolyn Hunter and Ernestine Ross. “They along with my mother helped keep me focused and challenged me daily to be my best in whatever I pursued and within whatever space I occupied.”

The freshman representative served on the House of Representatives Education Committee; the Aging, Children & Youth, Legislative and Military Affairs Committee; and as an alternate on the Joint Budget Committee. He wants to use his time in the Legislature in a way that will most benefit his constituents, he said.

“My goals include giving voice to my constituents by supporting and proposing policies that will improve their quality of life and actively speaking against policies that will negatively impact their life. Also, I am looking forward to working across the political spectrum to bring about progressive change that will move the state of Arkansas forward and improve our state’s standing in the areas of public and affordable higher education, public and mental health, jobs and business growth, and food security.”

Barnett served as the primary sponsor for three new acts during the 2025 session, including Act 914 of 2025 that allows smaller incorporated towns and cities of to petition the State Board of Education to establish a local public elementary school or satellite school.

Barnett is the second ASMSA alumnus to be elected to serve in the state House of Representatives. Matt Brown (’00) is in his second term representing District 55. 🏆



University of Arkansas System President Lt. Gen. (Ret.) Jay Silveria visits with a group of students in the 'Dan Lab' in the Creativity and Innovation Complex. It was Silveria's first time on campus since his appointment as system president.

New UA System President visits ASMSA

ASMSA Arts welcomed University of Arkansas System President Lt. Gen. (Ret.) Jay Silveria to campus for his first visit the Hot Springs campus in February.

Silveria was chosen to lead the UA System in November after longtime President Donald R. Bobbitt announced his retirement last summer. Silveria began his tenure in January after most recently serving as associate vice president and executive director of Texas A&M University and the Bush School of Government and Public Service in Washington, D.C. He is a former superintendent of the U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colo.

During his time at ASMSA, Silveria visited with Executive Director Corey Alderdice as well as a group of constituents that included faculty and staff members, parents, and members of the ASMSA Board of Visitors. He also participated in a campus tour led by a group of Student Ambassadors.

In the time since, Silveria has visited each of the UA System's 21 campuses and units. ASMSA was the first stop of his tour. During his

visit with campus constituents, Silveria touted the System's focus on two most important aspects — student access and success.

“If we're not involved in creating student success and creating student access, then what is our role? What are we doing?” Silveria said. “The fact that those two are priorities for the System is really the major reason that drew me here. I'm privileged to be a part of it.”

Silveria said it is important to find ways to better integrate ASMSA into the System. While that will take ASMSA sharing ideas with him on how to do that, it is also important for the other System members to better understand what the school and its students have to offer.

After his visit, Silveria said that it was obvious how deeply the ASMSA's faculty and staff care for the institution.

“That is evidenced by the students I spent time with how much they could talk about how the faculty and staff care about them. It was story after story about so-and-so did this for me and so-and-so did that for me. It's so obvious that everyone really cares,” Silveria said. 🏆



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Final Frame



Prospective students and their families often ask whether there are opportunities to participate in traditional high school activities such as Prom. With the addition of the Oaklawn Foundation Community Center in the Creativity and Innovation Complex, Selig Auditorium, and other shared community spaces, students engage in events on campus that provide a thriving residential program. ASMSA has built a dynamic community of living to complement its community of learning.