

# Among the best

## New director seeks national reputation for ASMSA students

By [Wayne Bryan](#)

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TRI-LAKES AREA — The new director of the Arkansas School for Mathematics, Sciences and the Arts said the school's students are among the nation's best, and he wants the rest of the country to know about them.

"I want the school to have national prominence," said Corey Alderdice, who took over July 2 as director of ASMSA, the state-supported high school for juniors and senior who excel in math and science.

"The students here can stand shoulder to shoulder with any other students in the country."

The school in Hot Springs is a campus of the University of Arkansas System and offers advanced academic challenges to some of the state's best students.

"The courses here can go beyond even the [undergraduate] college level," Alderdice said. "Some of the teachers here teach the same classes they have used for graduate seminars. Students here have moved beyond the [Advanced Placement] level already, and they are going forward. This school offers opportunities that are wildly advanced."

When Alderdice was selected as the director of ASMSA earlier this year, he was already a veteran of advanced training of elite students in STEM, the subjects of science, technology, engineering and mathematics. He was assistant director for admissions and public relations at the Gatton Academy of Mathematics and Science in Bowling Green - Kentucky's version of the advanced Arkansas school he now directs in Hot Springs.

Alderdice was the second staff member of the Gatton Academy, which is on the Western Kentucky University campus and uses the university's facility for the high school.

"I did a little bit of everything," he said. "I was the planning coordinator and helped with some of the curriculum and recruitment in year zero as we launched the program."

His experience and leadership were major factors in Alderdice's selection by Donald Bobbitt, president of the university system in Arkansas, for the job. He said Alderdice's background in mathematics and science-education administration made him "the right fit" for ASMSA.

As head of the school, Alderdice said, he is looking for the school to meet local needs and have national recognition, while developing a global vision.

"Our educational needs are also our economic needs" he said. "We need to offer education that meets the needs of the state's business and industry, but this is not a short-term investment. We want to develop talent that will be leaders in the long-term that will improve the economy and the quality of life in the state."

As for the national recognition, Alderdice said, the students' success will bring high national ranking for the school, and students will be the ambassadors for ASMSA.

"In the two decades since the school opened, the school has produced around 2,000 alumni who can show the school is a leader in STEM education. They will lead the conversation on the regional and national stage," he said.

A global vision for the students can be created by developing opportunities for the students to carry their studies abroad and learn about the growing global economy in greater detail, Alderdice said.

At Gatton, about 75 percent of the students graduated with a global learning experience, compared with about 15 percent of high school graduates statewide in Kentucky, Alderdice said.

“It is already being done on a small scale with faculty working with partners outside the school,” he said. “We need to build additional programs for faculty members to lead our students.”

Alderdice said programs will come in the future because the costs for international travel by student classes are outside the current budget of the school.

“We can partner with peer institutions to develop globalresearch learning experiences,” he said.

While the core of the school’s study remains science and math, the new director of the school said the arts have a role in the education of the students.

“When the Legislature gave the school the mission to include the arts, it was an unfunded mandate,” Alderdice said. “There are now courses in the humanities, and an arts program was studied in 2006. I have promised to revisit that program plan this year.”

He said the arts are offered now and can be incorporated into the core studies with programs such as the course Folk Music and the Physics of Acoustics.

“We can do more,” Alderdice said.

The new ASMSA director has just moved to Hot Springs with his wife, Stephanie, and their 2-year-old son, Elliott.

His wife runs the family’s Web-based company that provides support materials for speech and debate teams. Alderdice is busy finishing his doctoral dissertation on admission practices and other indicators on assessing the changes of student success at school’s like ASMSA around the country.

A new job, a dissertation and a young child keep Alderdice busy, he said, but the family has been able to see and enjoysome of the attractions of Hot Springs.

“We have enjoyed the Art Walk,” he said. “There is a great variety of talent here.”

Alderdice also said he has been touched by the welcome he and his family have received from the community.

“The folks and the city fought to get the school placed here,” he said. “Hot Springs gets the value of the school to the community.”

Staff writer Wayne Bryan can be reached at (501) 244-4460 or [wbryan@arkansasonline.com](mailto:wbryan@arkansasonline.com).  
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