



**ALABAMA  
SCHOOL OF  
FINE ARTS**

# STRATEGIC PLAN

FEB 2023





## WHO WE ARE

The Alabama School of Fine Arts (ASFA) is a state-funded public school that provides an immersive specialty-focused education in the arts, math, and science to students with outstanding talent from across Alabama. After spending each morning on robust academic coursework that exceeds state high school diploma standards, students devote sustained hours every day to honing their craft, flexing their creativity, and developing their unique voice within their chosen discipline. Our graduates build on the creative habits of mind they develop at ASFA to establish successful careers in various fields, serving as innovative leaders, cultural champions, and role models for future generations.

From our campus in the heart of downtown Birmingham, ASFA serves as a boundary-pushing cultural convener, presenting student and professional performances in the state-of-the-art Dorothy Jemison Day Theater. We are proud advocates for specialty-driven education at the state and national levels, lending our expertise to policymakers and fellow educators. In keeping with our mission, we work to cultivate a diverse and inclusive environment where creative expression takes flight.

# WHAT WE DO

## DEEP DIVE

ASFA delivers an immersive, specialty-driven curriculum that challenges students and rewards their dedication. ASFA takes a deep-dive approach to specialty education in the arts, math, and science. With multiple hours each day devoted to their specialty, students not only have the time to elevate their skills and knowledge, but also the opportunity to reflect on the rewarding experience of focusing intensively on their passion. Under the guidance of distinguished faculty who are accomplished practitioners in their fields, ASFA students gain an essential understanding of themselves and their goals through the lens of their chosen discipline.

## SOLID FOUNDATION

With a unique academic curriculum that's informed by the arts, ASFA helps students develop the habits of mind to be innovative thinkers and lifelong learners. Faculty work in concert across disciplines to deliver a solid foundation in academic subjects that not only aligns with Alabama's high school diploma requirements but also encourages broad thinking and yields exciting, unexpected connections. Curiosity and intellectual exuberance are celebrated in every classroom, empowering students to bring the same spirit and dedication to their academic classes that they show in their specialty.

## SUPPORTIVE CULTURE

At ASFA, students are embraced and supported by faculty and fellow students alike within an environment that's inclusive and accepting of every individual. Passionate and engaged students find a home at ASFA alongside peers who share a singular focus on their disciplines. Our faculty and staff are attuned to the needs of young people pursuing such a rigorous course of study, and they help ensure each student has the support to own and express their creative identity.

## EXCEPTIONAL OUTCOMES

No matter where they end up, ASFA graduates bring zeal, curiosity, and an exceptional work ethic to every endeavor. Colleges and employers alike appreciate the dedication required to complete an intensive specialty education. ASFA students are frequently awarded substantial college scholarships in recognition of their outstanding achievements. Many graduates apply the habits cultivated at ASFA to careers in fields ranging from engineering, medicine, and law to education, research, and nonprofit management, while others go on to achieve success as artists, dancers, musicians, actors, and writers.





## THE STRATEGIC PLAN

# AN INCLUSIVE & DELIBERATIVE PROCESS

We used a deep-dive approach to planning so that our hopes and dreams for ASFA's future would have a solid foundation for authentic, strategic goals and actions.

The process was inclusive of all constituents of our school community. It was deliberative and transparent. We engaged our creativity through the charge to design ASFA's next steps towards our key objectives so that our needs and our potential are met with vision.

**I. Messaging and Positioning.** ASFA engaged messaging experts, Libretto, to research who we are and what we do and then express that in a comprehensive platform of descriptive language to meet a variety of audiences and purposes. Approximately 125 students, faculty, staff, parents, alumni, trustees and directors, and legislators participated in the research.

The messaging platform Libretto created for ASFA is much more than framing or positioning. It reveals the soul of our institution—and reflects it back in compelling language that's authentic and precise.

**II. Hopes and Dreams for ASFA's Future.** Over 150 faculty, staff, and students met over a series of meetings across a semester to express ASFA's needs and hopes for its future and to identify the key strategic planning topics that should be our top priorities.

**III. Faculty and Staff Retreats and Engagements.** Building on the topics identified by the Hopes and Dreams outcomes:

- A. All Faculty Survey
- B. Faculty and Staff Retreat Day
- C. Affinity meetings for faculty and staff of color, LGBTQ faculty and staff, and ASFA disability community faculty and staff.

**IV. Design Advisory Groups.** We formed a Strategic Planning Task Force with representation from the Board of Trustees, the ASFA Foundation, the specialty program chairs, and the faculty and staff (including members who are alumni and are current or former parents). We formed 5 Design Advisory Groups that each convened with a charge on an identified high-priority topic. The task force received and reviewed the reports from each design advisory group, including their vision statements and recommendations.





# STATE MISSION

## Vision and Objectives

There is an opportunity for ASFA to be a resource to students, faculty, and arts organizations from all across the state within the enabling legislation that formed the school. That legislation allows us to explore innovative programming beyond our campus that fits with being a public school for the public good. These opportunities should not conflict with our top priority of running an excellent school for ASFA students.

## Strategies and Recommendations:

- Adopt a mindset of engagement rather than outreach. Go beyond offering performances to offering learning experiences (e.g., workshops, classes, residencies, teacher training, shared time with guest artists, pathways to readiness for ASFA) on or off campus, live or virtual. Create a staff role for coordinating engagement.
- Explore revising summer camps into immersive programs, including residential opportunities. Design ASFA summer intensives on campus for non-ASFA students or for professionals.
- Build or contract a bus transportation system to support ASFA students coming to our campus and to our dormitory. Buses can make ASFA more accessible to families, support residential life programming, and support engagement opportunities. Create a staff role for coordinating and managing buses.
- Revise financial aid to include full equity of the ASFA experience for all ASFA students. Identify specific needs through best financial aid practices and support ancillary needs along with primary ones (e.g., food security, transportation, competition or performance fees, accompanists, trips, supplies, ASFA social events, and student experiences).
- Use the messaging and positioning platform to make the ASFA opportunity and its benefits (and available financial aid support) broadly known across the state.

The ASFA enabling legislation is at this link: <https://law.justia.com/codes/alabama/2016/title-16/chapter-26b/>



# RESIDENTIAL LIFE

## Vision and Objectives

We plan to shift from providing boarding on campus to building a comprehensive, supportive, and meaningful residential life program.

### Strategies and Recommendations (Program):

- ASFA staff will create a supportive culture of in loco parentis (in place of parents).
- Create a robust schedule of co-curricular activities.
- Create a series of offerings to teach life skills and independent living and study skills (e.g., cooking, safe use of technology, hygiene, and wellness, dealing with stress, personal finances, project planning, etc.).
- Provide mental health check-ins and support to dorm residents (e.g., coping and resilience skills, social and emotional learning, conflict resolution).
- Revise the meal offerings to include a system that includes all meals and meets weekend needs.
- Build or contract a bus transportation system to support access to the dorm and residential life programming. Create a staff role for coordinating and managing buses.
- Teach safe access to the city and green spaces.

### Strategies and Recommendations (Facilities):

- Build a new dorm when financially feasible to do so
- Off-campus, nearby
- Suites of 4 individual rooms with common area and shared bathroom
- Residential space for dorm parent adults
- Kitchen, dining hall, and commons areas (homelike atmosphere)
- Phase out 7th and 8th-grade student boarding unless they can have a separate space, separate bathrooms, and separate programming appropriate for their development and support.





# MIDDLE SCHOOL

## Vision and Objectives

The role of the middle school curriculum and program needs to be reviewed and adapted routinely to best serve the needs of the students in support of their specialty and academic success. It is also important regarding their social and emotional needs within a unique and complex secondary school environment that serves students ranging in age from 12 to 18 years old. We recognize the evolving needs of students during these impressionable formative and developmental stages of early adolescence and the integral role this stage plays as a solid foundation in students' continuing success in grades 9-12.

## Strategies and Recommendations:

- Continue to prepare students in 7th and 8th grades for our ASFA 9-12 program through a solid foundation in academics, social and emotional well-being, and the habits of mind and practices of their specialty focus disciplines.
- 7th Grade is being added to Math/Science (M/S) in the 2023-2024 school year. A new curriculum is being developed within the M/S specialty, and planning for new faculty, shared classroom spaces, and revised teaching loads is taking place.
  - Use this experience to understand all the ramifications, ripple effects, consequences, and needs associated with specialty growth across the program.
- Develop and implement non-specialty learning opportunities for grades 7 and 8 (e.g., consumer sciences, study skills, social and emotional learning, school culture, etc.).
- Explore adding preparatory weekend or summer opportunities at ASFA or potential partner organizations to reach out to gifted and talented students who need more help to be ready for the ASFA program.
  - Explore the opportunity of our enabling legislation to create satellite programs at the middle school level outside the ASFA campus region.



# DIGITAL MEDIA

## Vision and Objectives

Digital Media integration is a school-wide mindset that needs to be continuously explored and adapted. We see digital media as an Integrative art that encompasses any digital manipulation of sound, text, and images in order to express, create, and collaborate.

We will approach digital media as an additional medium that enhances and supports our current curriculum. It can be used to dive deeper, explore, and express oneself in an additional dimension. Being adept with digital tools is an essential skill for students.

## Strategies and Recommendations:

- Establish an Integrative Arts elective that is collaborative / project-based; that speaks to the role of digital media in all our specialty disciplines; that asks students to interrogate the ethics and aesthetics of digital (and collaborative) forms; that introduces students from all specialties to several basic digital tools for manipulating sound, text, and images to create and collaborate. In time this may require adding a dedicated faculty member.
- Create a scope and sequence of digital media integrative arts classes (mostly from existing classes).
- Establish a practice of counseling students on their schedules so they can follow a pathway through the scope and sequence of courses.
- Establish a yearly elective faculty summit to discuss integrative digital media and share plans and information.
- Establish short courses (less instructional time than semester courses) using the model of short courses in Creative Writing.
- Establish an interdisciplinary film minor.
- Provide professional development to faculty, specifically in digital media (starting with Creative Cloud, which is available now).





# PURPOSE-BUILT FACILITIES

## Vision and Objectives

We need purpose-built facilities to thrive. The main campus was built in 1993, with additions for Creative Writing and Math/Science in 1996 and 1997. The addition of the Dorothy Jemison Day Theater in 2012 provided an excellent performance space. However, we have identified how the nearly 30-year-old campus has not kept pace with our intensive specialty programs and is now blocking the programs from modernizing curriculum and instruction and achieving desired growth.

The campus also includes an outdated dormitory located on the third floor of the main building. Typically, 20% of the students reside in the dormitory. A new dormitory would allow us to attract students from more counties in Alabama.

## Recommended priorities (extensive details exist for each):

- A. Purpose-Built dedicated facilities for the arts, math, and science
- B. Classroom spaces to support program and enrollment growth
- C. New ASFA dormitory

## Additional Considerations:

- Student Life Spaces
- Storage
- Commons
- Parking
- Green Spaces
- Kitchen and Dining Hall (Cafeteria)
- The Dorothy Jemison Day Theater continued renovations and upgrades
- Health, Wellness, and Exercise rooms

## Next Step:

- A campus master building plan (with on and off-campus options for meeting the priorities)

*Please note that the timeline for purpose-built facilities depends upon receiving public and private funding support.*



# MEASURING OUR SUCCESS

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The ASFA Strategic Plan is meant to be nimble and responsive to new circumstances, challenges, and opportunities. Rather than focus on these recommendations as a checklist to revisit in 5 years' time, we are looking at this as a flexible and resilient plan and a guide to our priorities. The vision statements are the most strategic part of this plan. The recommendations are our solid foundation to move into the future.

Each year the leading senior administrators will meet following the end of school to reflect on our strategic initiatives, plan our next steps and actions, and adjust our goals to meet the moment. We will be partnering with our Board of Trustees every step of the way.

We are looking forward to the exceptional outcomes of this plan.





# EXCEPTIONAL OUTCOMES

The Alabama School of Fine Arts is an example of a world-class education in the arts and math/science available in Alabama. We can strengthen our position to be an attractor to the state and be a resource and thought leader in education.

ASFA has a long track record of exceptional outcomes:

- 91 percent of graduating seniors receive offers of merit scholarships for study at colleges, universities, or pre-professional conservatories. (a five-year average)
- 48.57 million dollars of merit scholarships have been offered to ASFA seniors over the past 5 years.
- 90% of the merit offers are for multiple years of study (up to 4 years). (a new metric from 2022)
- 50% of ASFA graduates attend Alabama colleges and universities. UAB and the University of Alabama share a freshmen report card with us, and our graduates are always at the top of the class.



# MISSION

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The mission of the Alabama School of Fine Arts, a diverse community of explorers, is to nurture impassioned students by guiding and inspiring them to discover their individual and creative abilities in an atmosphere distinguished by the fusion of fact and feeling, risk and reward, art and science, school and society.  
(adopted 2014)

