

The AMSA Way



Preamble

The goal of the AMSA Way document is nothing less than liberation. Liberation from the age-old questions of “why are we here” and “what is our purpose” and “what should we do.” The AMSA Way answers these questions and does so by holding ourselves accountable to our mission and our core values. It is our path forward. It is our way. It is the “special sauce” that makes us unique.

The AMSA Way is something we will see. We will place it on our walls, in our classrooms, and on our website to remind us of our core values and what we mean by them. The AMSA Way will guide us. It will influence our programs, policies, and procedures – our evaluation process, our mentoring program, our hiring process, our philosophy of teaching, and our discipline process. We will show it to others – to prospective and new parents, to new employees, and to new students. The AMSA Way will also always remind us, no matter what changes our school experiences, of what we are truly committed to¹. Most importantly, the AMSA Way will be inscribed in our hearts and minds. The AMSA Way is our telos². It is what we live, breathe, and do each and every day to make AMSA the best possible school.³

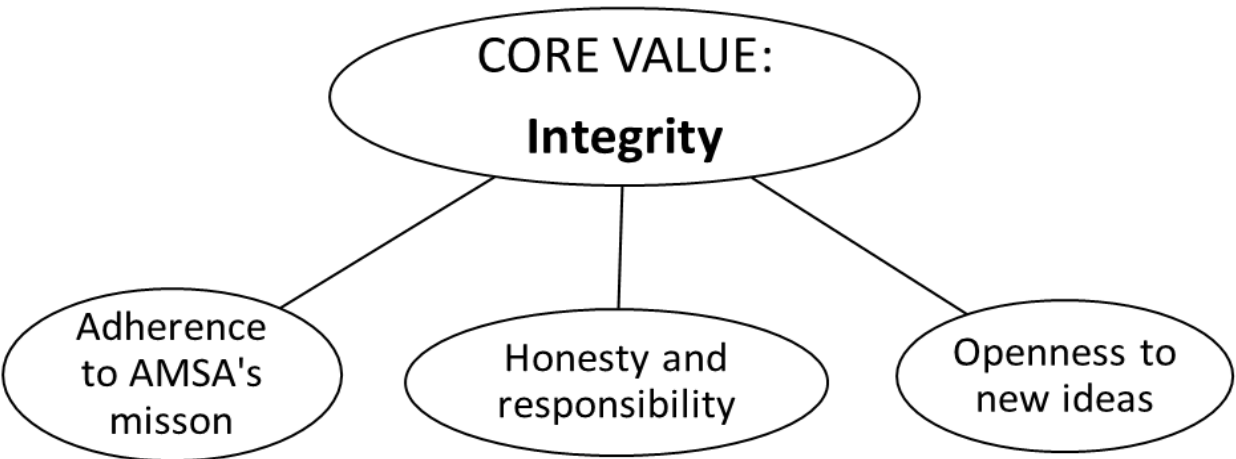
¹ The AMSA Way is a living document. In writing it, we do not wish to bind future generations of AMSA teachers, counselors and administrators from adapting to the world around us, learning new pedagogical methods, and new ways to build stronger relationships with our students. As professionals who deeply love our craft, we are always searching for new ideas and new ways to help each of our students excel.

² Telos is a word of Greek origins and means purpose or ultimate end.

³ How would we make the AMSA Way measurable and what might our next steps be? To make the AMSA Way measurable, we could employ a variety of tools, including: staff, student, and parent surveys; social, emotional, and behavioral assessments used by our Deans and Counseling Departments; standardized assessment scores and

The AMSA Way is centered around our three core values: integrity, excellence, and community. Each core value includes a chart with definitions of the value, followed by text that elaborates on the meaning of the value for our school, staff, and students.

Integrity



At AMSA integrity means faithfulness to our mission.

At AMSA, we strive to create a school climate where – as our mission declares – we “celebrate knowledge” and “children of all backgrounds and abilities excel in

participation rates (for exams such as the MCAS, AP, and SAT); the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education’s evaluation of AMSA (the charter renewal process and DESE site visits); club participation rates; college acceptance rates; and staff retention and turnover rates. As a community we would need to select specific measures for each core value. Once this is done, and in addition to publishing the results of staff, student, and family surveys, we could publish an annual *State of AMSA* document that would show the results of the measures we have selected (included with a published report, the ED could provide a video presentation). In addition to using *The AMSA Way* to publish an annual *State of AMSA* document, we could use it as the basis for a review, revision, and improvement of all our essential documents. Over time, *The AMSA Way* will become our self-regulating mechanism for success!

all subjects, especially in math, science and technology, empowering them to succeed in the workplace in our modern high-tech world.”

At AMSA integrity means honesty and responsibility.

At AMSA, we value honesty and personal responsibility. We understand that being honest and responsible, and adhering to AMSA’s behavioral norms, helps establish structures and routines which are conducive to academic learning.

For *students*, responsibility is being respectful of AMSA’s staff and fellow students, being engaged with schoolwork, and wearing uniforms with pride. It is doing what is right when no one is looking, and no reward is expected. It is being honest and working on all assignments and tests according to the teacher’s instructions.

For *staff*, being honest and responsible means we follow through on our obligations to each other, to our students, and to our families. It means, in our relations with each other, that we assume the best of intentions. It means we fulfill our professional responsibilities⁴. It means we go the extra mile to help our students succeed.

At AMSA integrity means an openness to new ideas.

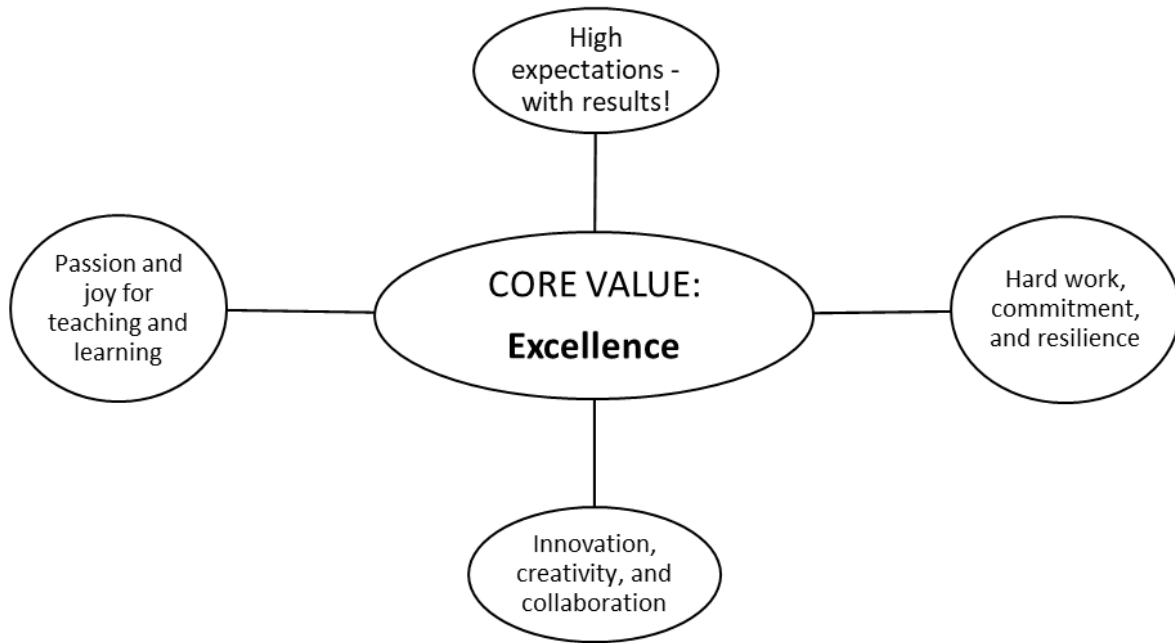
In keeping with AMSA’s mission, we value open intellectual discussion. Well-informed debate and the free, honest, and respectful exchange of ideas are hallmarks of our school.

At AMSA, we embrace the opportunity to learn about new topics and new ideas, new ways of studying, and new ways of teaching and learning⁵. As teachers we embrace the opportunity to learn new content and new pedagogical techniques. We refuse to rest on yesterday’s performance. Constantly, we reach for the stars!

⁴ For more specifics about professional expectations at AMSA please see: [AMSA Professionalism Document](#)

⁵ AMSA’s Challenge Success is an example of a program that has helped teachers learn new, research based techniques and approaches. Many AMSA teachers also use ideas inspired by Universal Design for Learning.

Excellence



At AMSA excellence means high expectations for all our students – with results!⁶

At AMSA, we strive for excellence. We recognize, as well, that excellence has a universal and an individual definition. We want our students to read and write well and to excel in all subjects. We hold ourselves accountable for our students' performance on the MCAS tests, AP tests, and SATs.

At the same time, we recognize that excellence has an individual definition. Excellence does not look entirely the same for all students. Each of us, and each of our students, has different interests and different strengths – academically,

⁶ One of the essential ways that the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education evaluates AMSA, and all charter schools, is our ability to consistently make progress in student academic achievement. See: <https://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/acct.html?section=criteria>

socially, and emotionally. At AMSA, we embrace and celebrate our differences. So, too, do we strive to create a nurturing culture that enables our students to explore and hopefully find their true interests.

At AMSA, excellence is having high expectations – the belief that, as our mission declares – “all students of all backgrounds and all abilities will excel in all subjects.”

At AMSA, excellence comes through teachers and staff letting students know we believe in each and every one of them - letting them know they can do difficult things and that we will support each of them academically, socially, and emotionally during every step of their journey through our school.

At AMSA, excellence is reflected in our school's rigorous curriculum; our students' academic performance; the strength and vibrancy of our ELL program; our Counseling and Special Education Departments; our social and emotional learning programs (such as our TRAILS program); our promotion of diversity, equity and inclusion; our arts and athletics program; our student's ability to gain acceptance into and succeed at colleges and universities;⁷ and our student's ability to be productive and purposeful citizens.

⁷ AMSA's Accountability Plan provides specific measures of academic progress and student success. They are centered on MCAS scores, AP participation rates and scores, academic club participation rates, and college acceptance rates. One objective is that each year, 85% of AMSA students will take at least one AP course during their high school career. Another objective is that each year, the number of AP exams taken by AMSA students earning at least a score of 3 will exceed the state average by 15% and the national average by 20%. Our accountability plan also states that “98% of seniors will apply to a college or university and 100% of seniors who apply to a college or university will be accepted.” Our MCAS measures are focused on improving the performance of those identified as lowest performing. A further measure if the, by 2025, “20% of students in grades 10, 11, and 12 will be enrolled and actively participating in AMSA's Science Research and/or Internship Program.”

At AMSA, excellence means passion and joy for teaching and learning

At AMSA, excellence means, as our mission states, that we “create an atmosphere of celebration of knowledge.” We celebrate the joy of learning and the growth of intellectual curiosity in our students.

At AMSA we believe that a key motivator of student engagement is rich content taught with great passion. We embrace our inner geek. Proudly, we broadcast the joy we have for the subjects we teach.

At AMSA, we embrace the magic and majesty of learning. We take pride in the subjects we teach and learn. At AMSA, we seek to ignite the light of learning. We embrace the never-ending quest to learn about the world – the wonders of science, the beauty of mathematics, the intricacies of language, the profound insights of literature, the great tales of history, and the grandeur of art.

At AMSA, excellence means hard work, commitment, and resilience

At AMSA, we understand that excellence is not the result of chance but of commitment and resilience. It is the result of true grit. At AMSA, we consistently seek to put forth our best effort. We persevere in the face of obstacles.

In our lives as students and staff we will all encounter difficulties. So too will we make mistakes. As students, we might struggle learning new content and our grades may not, at first, be what we would hope for. As teachers, we might struggle learning how best to teach a new unit or a new set of students who are very different from the ones we taught the previous year. At AMSA, we welcome such challenges and we believe mistakes are opportunities to learn and grow. At AMSA we embrace a growth mindset. We believe that our intellectual and social abilities, as well as our potential to be impactful teachers and counselors, are not set in stone. Instead, all of our abilities can be - with nurturing, practice, and commitment - developed over time.

At AMSA, we take the profession of teaching seriously. Continuously, we strive to improve our pedagogical methods. We stay updated on educational research and implement findings in a way that fits our context. We embrace professional development opportunities and we constantly analyze how we can best assist our students through many methods, including, but not limited to, summative and formative assessments."

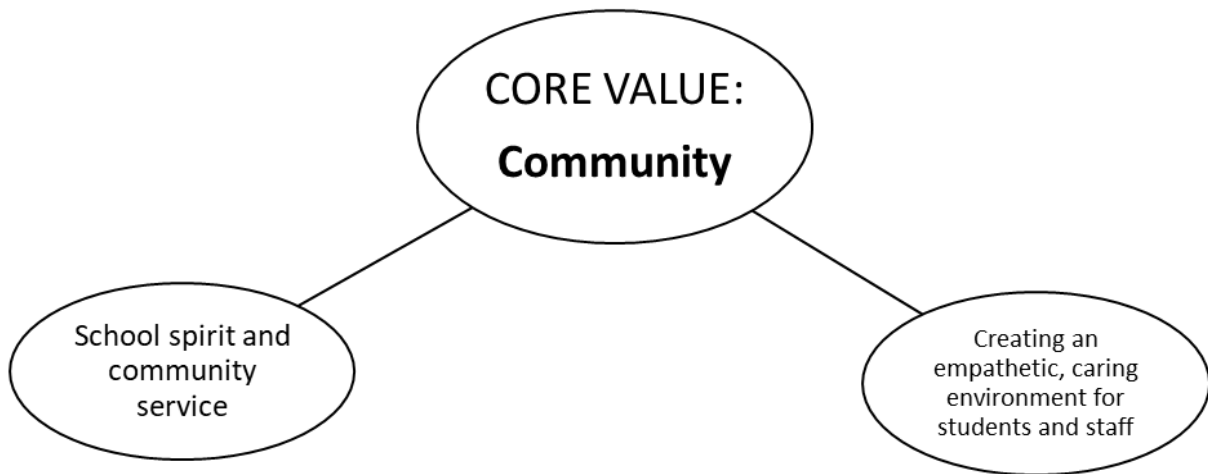
At AMSA, excellence means innovation, collaboration, and creativity

At AMSA, we understand that excellence comes from taking risks, being innovative, and collaborating with our fellow students and colleagues.

We innovate with our unique curriculum, assessments, projects, and with the lessons we design. We embrace the use of technology in our lessons and our assignments. At AMSA we promote "thinking outside of the box" amongst our staff and our students.

As teachers, we collaborate across disciplines and share our pedagogical ideas. We learn from and teach each other. So, too, do we share ways of connecting to students and ways to build strong, encouraging relationships.

Community



At AMSA community means creating a respectful, empathetic environment for students and staff

At AMSA, we know that our goals are premised on the ways we treat each other. Respect, empathy, trust, and support are essential to our success. At AMSA, we have the courage to believe in ourselves and to believe in and support each other.

At AMSA, we strive to create a community of students and parents, teachers and staff, alumni and Board members, where everyone feels welcome⁸ – where everyone feels AMSA is their home away from home.

At AMSA, we strive to create a community where everyone's perspectives are considered: students in our classrooms; staff with our administration; and families with our staff. At AMSA, we strive to create a community free from intimidation

⁸ This can be measured, in part, through our student surveys.

and bullying,⁹ a community where differences of background and ideas are viewed as a source of strength and vibrancy. At AMSA we also strive to create a community where we can respectfully challenge each other's ideas.

At AMSA, we value the retention and development of our staff and our students. At AMSA we uplift others when they are down or need help. We invest ourselves in each other's success. We strive to know all of our students as individuals. We value their social and emotional needs, and we understand that well-balanced lives¹⁰ are essential to academic success.

At AMSA, we understand the importance of consistent communication¹¹. Responding promptly to emails, providing quick feedback on student work, and consistently updating grades are essential to student success and to building strong, supportive student, teacher, and parent relationships.

At AMSA community means school spirit and community service

At AMSA, we consistently strive to be good citizens within our school and within our larger community¹². We participate and support our athletics program, our after-school clubs, and our community nights. We volunteer in our local communities to spread our AMSA values. We raise money for charity. We volunteer at our local hospitals and soup kitchens. We view each day as an opportunity to uplift and encourage each other.

⁹ As part of our efforts against bullying we are aware of and abide by AMSA's Bullying Prevention Plan. See: <https://www.amsacs.org/school-life/policies-details/~board/policies-forms/post/bullying-prevention-and-intervention-plan-english>.

¹⁰ AMSA's homework policy emphasizes the need for a well-rounded work-life balance.

¹¹ For more details on our communication guidelines please see: [AMSA Communication Protocol 2018 \(Short form\)](#)

¹² Our community is expansive and worldwide! It is wherever our board members, staff, students (including our wonderful alumni), and families are.