

## **Advanced Math & Science Academy Charter School**

### **Minutes BOT Education Committee Meeting**

#### **Date and Time**

Monday April 27, 2026 at 6:00 PM

#### **Committee Members Present**

Cathy Schoenleber (remote), Dwayne Stanley (remote), Jessica Bowen (remote), Kristin Laird (remote), Maura Webster, Mike Nawrocki (remote), Padmaja Bandaru (remote), Stephan Richter (remote)

#### **Guests Present**

### **II. Discussions**

#### **A. Approve Proposed Changes to Student/Parent Handbook**

Mike Nawrocki introduced the proposed changes to the 2026–2027 Student/Parent Handbook, noting that the handbook is reviewed annually and is currently in good shape, with no major changes proposed. He clarified that the items presented were finalized proposals intended for a committee vote to advance to the full board, and not a forum for developing new proposals. He introduced Anthony Montesion, Dean of Students for the Lower School (grades 6–8), and James Fortier, Dean of Students for the Upper School, who presented the proposed revisions.

Anthony Montesion explained that handbook proposals are gathered throughout the year from teachers, parents, and changes in law, and that a key focus this year was removing outdated language that no longer reflects school practice. The proposed changes were presented in a three-column format showing current language, proposed language, and rationale. The changes presented included:

Graduation requirements. Language was updated to comply with the new state law regarding the MCAS. Students will earn graduation requirements by achieving a passing score on the 9th and 10th grade MCAS exams; students who do not pass will be required to pass a local assessment in the relevant subject. This brings the handbook into compliance with the ballot initiative passed two years ago.

Health office — sibling transportation. Wordy older language was simplified to describe the process for an older sibling to drive an ill younger student home, including the approval process and the expectation of prompt return, with referral to the Dean's office for noncompliance. This reflects long-standing practice.

Health office — arrival due to illness. Outdated language requiring any student arriving late due to illness to report automatically to the nurse's office was removed. Students who are ill may follow the normal process to visit the nurse, but the assumption is that a student who has come to school has been deemed well enough by their parents to attend.

Health office — head lice. Language was updated to comply with current Massachusetts DPH regulations. Students may return to school after being treated at home; parents must notify and document treatment with the health office, and cases are still expected to be reported, but the school can no longer refuse return.

Academic dishonesty — appeal to the Vice Principal. Families retain five days after teacher notification to appeal to the Vice Principal. The Vice Principal will now determine whether academic dishonesty occurred based on the "preponderance of the evidence" standard — the same legal standard the deans' offices already use in disciplinary decisions — providing a more concrete basis for decisions. The appeal process has also been moved to a fully digital format.

Jessica Bowen asked whether teachers, like students, may appeal a determination. Anthony Montesion explained that teachers are not impacted by the determination and that there is no teacher appeal; if the Vice Principal overturns a teacher's finding, the teacher has no further recourse.

Stephan Richter asked whether the appeals process is too onerous given the volume of cases, particularly with the increased use of AI. Anthony Montesion responded that appeals are handled by the Vice Principal rather than the deans, and that moving the process to a digital format with added structure has increased efficiency by clarifying what is being decided.

Academic dishonesty — appeal to the Principal. Families retain the ability to appeal the Vice Principal's decision to the Principal in writing within five days. The Principal's review will now be limited to whether the Vice Principal's decision was "arbitrary and capricious" and whether the handbook process was followed, rather than a full review of the evidence. This language was adapted from the appeals process for 37H hearings, narrowing the Principal's scope and streamlining the process.

Detentions, suspensions, and expulsions (p. 55). Language was clarified regarding administrative detentions for routine matters such as tardiness, uniform issues, and cell phones. In the Lower School, students will receive 24 hours' notice before serving a detention unless the family agrees otherwise. In the Upper School, James Fortier explained that routine detentions are issued in a streamlined manner consistent with current practice, with students expected to take responsibility and communicate with their families, and parents contacted as needed. These changes formalize existing practice rather than introducing new policy.

Saturday detention. Language requiring students on Saturday detention to engage in general maintenance activities was removed, as the school does not compel students to perform physical labor. Community service may still be performed as a disciplinary intervention with parent consent.

Summer school, retention, and academic support. Outdated language regarding summer school placement was removed and replaced with clarified language. Students in grades 6–12 remain subject to repeating a failed course, and students failing multiple subjects remain subject to retention. Promotion decisions for the Upper School will be based on final credits earned, along with numerical averages, teacher feedback, and counselor input. Language was added to reflect the new Academic Support course: students who fail a course but earn a 50 or above are eligible for summer school credit recovery and/or enrollment in the Academic Support class the following year.

Padmaja Bandaru asked how skill readiness is ensured given that summer school does not include an end-of-course assessment, and how subjects other than math and English are addressed. Mike Nawrocki explained that high school students who fail a course within roughly 10 points of passing may attend summer school (typically a 30-hour minimum of

instruction, hosted at Assabet Valley), where they must earn 70% or higher to receive AMSA credit, with the summer school grade reflected on the transcript. Students below a 50% do not qualify for summer school and must repeat the course. For middle school students in the 50–59% range, the Academic Support Center — running for the first time this year in math and English — is used in place of summer school. Mike noted that retention decisions for students failing multiple courses are made case by case in consultation with department chairs, and that summer school options exist for most high school subjects, though specialized courses such as computer science can be more difficult to accommodate and may require an online program.

Jessica Bowen raised a concern about the "and/or" language regarding the Academic Support course, asking whether the choice between summer school and the Academic Support class rests with the school or the family, and whether it needed clarification. Mike Nawrocki explained that families may technically opt out, though doing so generally results in the student being held back at grade level in the affected subject. Following discussion, and with input from Cathy Schoenleber, who noted the same concern as a parent, the committee agreed to amend the language to specify that placement is "as determined by AMSA." Anthony Montesion flagged this item for revision before the board vote.

Financial assistance policy. The new financial assistance policy, previously adopted by the board as a separate vote, is being incorporated into the handbook.

Following the presentation, Stephan Richter asked the deans for a general assessment of the school year from a disciplinary standpoint. Anthony Montesion reported that the Lower School had a notably successful year, with far fewer incidents resulting in suspension, only one fight, and stronger student attention to being in class. He credited the success to the full team of teachers, staff, students, and parents. James Fortier reported similar positive trends in the Upper School, with administrative detentions down month over month, fewer severe cases, only one fight, and suspension data significantly down. He noted that discipline is currently weighted more toward upperclassmen and observed an emerging trend possibly related to the "COVID generation" moving through the grades.

Mike Nawrocki added that suspensions are drastically down compared to prior years, and that he has held only one long-term suspension hearing this school year, compared to a

hearing roughly every few weeks in the years following the return from COVID. He noted that one year saw 75 suspensions, against a historical norm closer to 15–20, and that combined in-school and out-of-school suspensions currently stand at 14, most of them minor. He attributed the improvement to a vigilant teaching staff and deans and to the school's structured environment.

Stephan Richter requested that a disciplinary action review be added to the Education Committee Outlook Calendar as a recurring item for a future year. Mike Nawrocki agreed to add it.

Dwayne Stanley made a motion to approve the changes to the Student/Parent Handbook as presented.

Jessica Bowen seconded the motion.

The committee VOTED to approve the motion.

#### Roll Call

|                   |        |
|-------------------|--------|
| Stephan Richter   | Aye    |
| Jessica Bowen     | Aye    |
| Cathy Schoenleber | Aye    |
| Maura Webster     | Absent |
| Dwayne Stanley    | Aye    |
| Kristin Laird     | Aye    |
| Padmaja Bandaru   | Aye    |
| Mike Nawrocki     | Aye    |