



Arkansas School for the Deaf

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Jacob Oliva
Secretary

K. Nicole Walsh
Superintendent

Superintendent's Report- March 2025

State of the School

Enrollment numbers: 109

- High School: 35
- Middle School: 20
- Lower School including ECC: 54

Celebrations/Events:

- Nicole and Chris have been working with the Crystal Bridges Education Team to develop a field trip experience for deaf and blind students across the state. This event will focus on career exploration in the field of art and museum management. They have done an amazing job helping us build a day of programming that will be accessible for our all of our students' diverse needs!
- Leadership at the schools began looking at the student handbook for the 25-26 school year. Our efforts are to pursue a common handbook for both schools that is user-friendly and can be provided to families before the start of the new school year. We have met twice and plan to meet again as it is quite the undertaking. We will provide the handbook to the Board for review as soon as it is available.
- We received \$ 998.80 from AR River Educational Coop for being a phone free school. This was a reimbursement grant for the phone lockers purchased at the beginning of the year.
- Nicole met with Representative Joey Carr regarding the draft of our merger bill. He is a 30-year education veteran and asked excellent questions about our students and school. We look forward to welcoming him and a few members of the education committee to tour our school in the next week or so.
- Nicole and our Director of Development attended the ArkaNSPRA School Communications Conference in Hot Springs. It was an excellent opportunity to network with other school communications teams and leadership while gaining valuable information and ideas on bettering our communication methods.
- The literacy specialist department at ADE completed classroom walkthroughs with both schools. Both schools will be undergoing directed reading support by this department due to our ATLAS performance. Literacy development for our students is so different from typical students that we needed to work as a team to find meaningful and impactful ways to support our teachers. This walkthrough was wildly successful. The literacy team at ASD/ASB and

ADE walked away from the time feeling heard, understood, and that we now have a larger network of support. This is such a huge step in a positive direction for our students.

Building Updates:

- The Nabholz team has worked tirelessly to get our construction fence set up and ready.
- The subcontractor for demolition has already begun removing exterior items like fencing, playground equipment, metal walkway covers around the buildings and metal found throughout the building that will be demolished.
- Garrett Excavation started demolition work Monday, March 3rd, at the playgrounds between Parks Elementary and Rasnick.
- Demo Day Celebration took place on March 12 to kick off demolition which started in full on March 13 and is to be completed by the end of April.

Human Capital Updates:

Termination/ Resignation:

- Leon Allen – Skilled Tradesman

New Hire:

- Madison Thomas – Paraprofessional
- Deana Shields- Nurse Supervisor

Transfers:

- Tiffany Lambert – Extra Help

Offers Provided:

- Carson Lamar Raper - Director of Transportation (set to start March 17th)

Positions Posted:

- Maintenance Tech
- RN
- Computer Support Analyst

Shout Outs:

- Teacher name: Tommy Varner
 - We want to give a massive shoutout to Tommy, our fabulous math teacher and athletic director! In February he organized an incredible tournament showcasing his leadership skills and his unwavering dedication to our students. Despite a few hiccups along the way, Tommy handled everything like a pro and pulled off the best tournament we've ever had! Thank you for your hard work and passion and for always inspiring us to be our best—both in the classroom and on the court. You rock, Tommy!
- Custodial Team: Sharon Smith
 - I would like to take this opportunity to recognize Sharon Smith for her outstanding efforts to provide top quality service. Sharon is a member of the custodial team. I have received several positive comments during the month of February from occupants of the buildings she is assigned to; staff frequently sing her praises and even “fight” to have her work in their respective spaces.

- Teacher name: Kris Miller
 - Kris's students are always engaged and enjoy class, no matter the subject. Kris is very tech-savvy, ensuring no instructional time is wasted. She has taken the initiative to partner with the ASBVI 2nd grade teacher for a unit on Charlotte's Web. Their first shared lesson took place on the ASD campus on February 27th. The ASBVI students arrived just in time for our monthly fire drill, learning that fire drills are another way our campuses are more alike than different.



Legislative Updates:

As of the writing of this report, our bill has not been filed. We are waiting eagerly as it should be up any day.

Bills that impact education in Arkansas:

- **"Bell to Bell, No Cell Act" (SB142):** This act mandates that public schools prohibit student use of personal electronic devices during school hours, with exceptions for emergencies and disabilities.
- **Free Breakfast Program (SB59):** This law ensures all public school students receive free breakfast starting in the 2025-2026 school year, funded by taxes on medical marijuana.
- **"Religious Rights at Public Schools Act of 2025" (SB223):** This act aims to protect and promote religious expression within public schools
- **"Teacher and Student Protection Act of 2025" (HB1062):** This legislation seeks to enhance the safety of both teachers and students in Arkansas schools by prohibiting the re-placement of certain individuals.
- **HB1731:** Introduced on March 10, 2025, this bill proposes increasing the income tax deduction available for teachers' classroom investments.
- **HB1060:** This legislation mandates the teaching of the perils of communism and autocracy in public schools.
- **HB1117:** This legislation mandates gun safety instruction in schools. It is unclear at what grades this begins or the full impact it will have. We will keep you apprised as information continues to be released.

School Operations Updates

Interpreting Services

- Our Interpreter Coordinator just completed the last on-site portion of his 100-hour training program on mental health interpreting for individuals who are d/Deaf. While there he learned and practiced proven strategies focused on working with individuals who are language dysfluent/deprived, and/or have mental illnesses and plans to bring these strategies to ASD!
- In February, our Interpreter Coordinator provided an introductory PD to members of both campuses on the use of ASL interpreters. He covered what interpreters do, best practices for working with them, and how everyone can do their part to ensure successful communication.

Facilities Department

Key Highlights

- Work on campus improvements continues in earnest, as the 'point of no return' is far behind us. February was a busy month due to all the preparations and logistics required to accommodate the necessary work for campus abatement, demolition, and utility projects that had to be completed before the start of construction on the new building.
- Progress continues to be
- made with the processing and removal of M&R/Surplus items and pickups have been made.
- According to OperationsHERO statics the team completed a total of 233 work requests February 1st through February 28th.
- Three interviews were recently conducted in an effort to fill our open Maintenance Tech position.

Maintenance and Repairs

- Routine Maintenance: Little Rock Filter Service will be changing out all HVAC filters at both campuses during the week of Spring Break.
- Emergency Repairs: The main 10" sanitary service for the ASD campus had to be cleared again the evening of February 5th, and morning of February 6th. Many wet wipes were pulled from the line.

Upcoming Projects:

The change over from tank to tankless domestic hot water begins early March at Shibley and over spring break in the dorms.

Classroom Updates

Primary

Key Highlights:

- Lower School Principal and teachers met with Nicole on February 13th to discuss curriculum choices and the importance of utilizing HQIM.
- They attended professional development on February 14th, covering topics such as using interpreters, ATLAS Test Training, and vertical curriculum alignment.
- Dr. Jay Powell, a local dentist, visited Lower School students to talk about dental health.

- Teachers had a refresher on CPI deescalating techniques taught by Adam Goyne.
- Lower School staff assisted during the GPSD tournament from February 6-8.

School Demographics:

Total number of students, breakdown by grade level, new students, and student attendance rates:

February 2025 Absenteeism % Rate					
Grade	# of Students	Absences	Number of Days		Absentism % Rate
ECC	9	29	162	grade level %	17.90
K	4	4	72	grade level %	5.56
1	7	12	126	grade level %	9.52
2	8	13	144	grade level %	9.03
3	9	14	162	grade level %	8.64
4	12	13	216	grade level %	6.02
5	5	6	90	grade level %	6.67
		91	972	overall percentage	9.36

Behavioral Data:

- Suspensions: Total number 2
- Minor conflicts among 3-5 grade girls is decreasing due to Social Emotional Learning classes where students are learning coping and listening skills.
- One student with aggressive and defiant behavior is being supported with a Behavior Intervention Plan. Special Shoutout to SueLyn Green for all her hardwork to build programming for this young man.
- Positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS): ROAR Store
 - The ROAR Store is a very good motivator for student behavior.

Challenges and Struggles:

- Academic challenges due to language deprivation.
- Behavioral challenges
- Resource challenges, such as finding effective recess activities and facility issues.

Action Plan for Improvement:

Goals:

- Academic:
 - Gauge utilization of HQIM materials
- Behavioral:
 - Continue encouraging teachers/staff to utilize more de-escalating techniques to redirect problem behaviors.
 - Continue to support VB-MAPP by providing time for the behavior specialist to work individually with teachers and paras.
 - Consider frequency of ROAR Store as it seems it would be more effective if it occurred more than once a month. We are also considering other motivators that can be earned on a weekly basis.

- Further analyze classroom data through observations to determine more behavior factors such as proximity to teacher, proximity to other students, and environmental factors that bother specific students.
- School Culture: Encourage Group II students to take more responsibility and ownership of their own academic progress by collaborating with the SEL team to develop new positive supports and ideas.

Secondary

Key Highlights

- The Youth Leadership Camp is welcoming new students for the upcoming session.
- We are collaborating with Northwestern Mutual financial advisors to provide essential financial planning insights to our students.
- Holocaust Week was commemorated with events to raise awareness of this significant historical period.
- The school community has faced a high number of absences among students and staff due to a wave of illness.
- Track and Field season is underway with our first meet having occurred last week.

Attendance Rates:

- Overall attendance rate
 - Middle School – 84%
 - High School- 85%

Behavioral Data:

Suspensions: Total number 2

Challenges and Struggles:

- Resource: Staffing shortages
 - Art Teacher
 - Science Teacher for High School – mid interview process
 - Staff absences due to illness

Special Services Department

Key Highlights

- Dr. Mary Martha Henry has proposed new leadership, promoting Beth Helms, SLP, to therapy supervisor. This change has enhanced services for the deaf-blind population, with 15% of students identified as deaf-blind. The audiology department is busy across both campuses. There are currently 22 students with bilateral CI processors and 23 wearing hearing aids.
- Congratulations to Beth Helms for being featured in UCA magazine "Change Makers."
- The SLP team is collaborating with a BCBA and implementing modified interventions for students with diverse needs.
- The elementary speech-pathology team is collaborating with the BCBA to support students with multiple disabilities by modifying environments, schedules, and tasks while implementing behavior intervention plans.

- Several interns from UAMS and Harding University are participating in therapy sessions.
- Elementary school SLPs and the school counselor have implemented weekly Social-Emotional Learning SEL activities for grades K-5, using a modified SEL curriculum based on "Inside Out." All primaries have completed movie-related activities and are preparing for a group viewing party of "Inside Out 2" before spring break.
- MS SLP Derenda Alexander and school counselor Anna Snare introduced a thematic unit for Black History Month featuring storybook readings and structured discussions on civil rights, including "Let the Children March" and "The Youngest Marcher" for grades K-8, across nine sessions in February.
- The OT and PT at ASD's Lower School have advocated for students with mobility and sensory needs during recess, ensuring a safe environment. They are collaborating with ADCC and High School volunteers to enhance the playground.
- An elementary-wide vote on preferred ball games and play equipment is being launched, with support from Mrs. Walsh.

Food Services

- February Meals Served
 - Breakfast 1007 (with GPSD 1887), Lunch 1104 (with GPSD 1984)
- Days Served – 14
- Eligibility Numbers as of February 28th - Free 53, Reduced 16, and Paid 41
- ASD had around 220 students and staff visit for GPSD on February 4th – 8th

Nursing and Health Services

- Nurse Deanna Shields is back on staff!
- Number of times Students were seen by a nurse or duties performed by a nurse on a student behalf:
 - ASD: 146 Medication Administration: 1,310 medications provided
 - ASB: 77 Medication Administration: 1,443 medications provided
- Combined nurse visits: 223
- Combined Medication Administration: 2,753 medications provided

Special Education and Admissions

Tours and Admissions:

- One ASD tour was held for a 4th grade student
- No new ASD admissions in February

IEP (Individualized Education Program) Updates:

- IEP meetings held: 3 at ASBVI and 12 at ASD
- Existing Data Reviews (EDRs): 4 at ASBVI and 5 at ASD
- Evaluation Programming Conferences with IEP development: 2 at ASBVI and 3 at ASD
- No Manifestation Determination Reviews (MDRs) were conducted

Significant Change:

- Case Managers are now responsible for contacting parents and team members to schedule all Special Education meetings. Calendar invites remain an issue, and a Calendar/Scheduling training is scheduled for March 7th for all Case Managers and Related Service Providers

Professional Development/Training:

- SOP Training (re-train) for the ASD HS Transition Team
- LEA Job Alike Meeting at ARESC (bi-monthly in 2024-2025)
- Evaluation Discussion Group (monthly meeting)
- LEA Call by DESE (monthly)
- Related Services Collaboration 1:1 with Beth – 2 meetings

Challenges:

- Civil Rights Data Collection requires assistance
- Attendance policy not being followed by LS and possibly MS/HS, impacting FAPE provision
- A Lower School student is missing multiple Fridays and transportation set up for Fridays
- Change in Assistant has been challenging for teachers and staff
- Meeting scheduling and thoroughness of IEP meetings need improvement
- CAP - Unfortunately, ASD received a Letter of Long-Standing Non-Compliance as a result of our corrective action plan. This was most likely the result of missed deadlines prior to July 1st. Nicole met with Jeff Adams, Director of Special Education, to review the feedback we received and create an action plan to have this letter resolved.

Successes:

- Corrective Actions assigned to ASD as part of the C-25-17 complaint filed against Lakeside have been completed and sent to the Lakeside LEA Supervisor
- SOP Training for the HS Transition Team
- More paperwork is ready prior to meetings, though some need follow-up
- Kara Siemens is holding successful "New Transition Meetings" for 8th-9th grade and Transition reviews
- Our LS teachers are holding successful IEP meetings
- Related service providers have been very helpful in the IEP process/meetings at their campuses
- Interpreters assigned by our Interpreter Coordinator have been great in meetings, and the request process is helping

Family and Student Support Services Parent Communication

Dorms

- The Dorm supervisors have been performing exceptionally well with the students, even during staff shortages due to sickness. Their dedication and hard work are commendable.
- This past weekend, with GPSD on campus, they did an outstanding job accommodating the other seven Schools for the Deaf that came to participate in the basketball tournaments.
- Despite a few challenges, the GPSD event was ultimately a success.
- There were two RAVE calls this month, and everything turned out fine.
- The dorm staff also stepped in to assist the nurses when needed.

Mental Health and Counseling:

- The mental health counselor from RPI in Russellville works with students every Wednesday.
- The on-campus counselor meets with 10 students weekly and works with students across the entire campus.
- The counselor collaborates with the SLP to conduct Social Emotional Learning (SEL) sessions for Lower and Middle School students, with nine sessions for Kindergarten through Seventh grade.
- Most afternoons are dedicated to working with special needs students in Lower School, ensuring they have the necessary support for their learning environment.

Dean of Students:

The dean is actively involved in addressing student issues throughout the day, including answering calls for assistance and transporting students to the nurse's office. The dean is a reliable and helpful resource for various needs during the day.

Related Services (e.g. Occupational Therapy, Speech Therapy, Audiology)

- Collaboration is key to the approach with Related Services. They are working closely with the new campus-wide Social Worker, Katie Runder, benefiting 12 elementary and 10 middle/high school students.
- They are awaiting approval to partner with the University of Arkansas' Partners on the SPICE program, which aims to improve early identification and diagnosis of neurodevelopmental disorders in Arkansas. The SPICE team will provide resources for confirming diagnoses and developing accommodations. The initiative aims to improve access to appropriate diagnoses and interventions for students with neurodevelopmental disorders and sensory loss.