Arkansas School for the Deaf and Blind

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Jacob Oliva
Secretary

K. Nicole Walsh
Superintendent

ARDB Superintendent Report
November 2026

Human Capital Update

1. Resignations/Terminations:
    a. Clayton Higgins, Interpreter
2. New Hires:
    a. Laurel Sloter, Teacher 1
    b. Chris Hill, Housekeeper
    c. Nicholas Pledger, Security Supervisor
    d. Marc Fonssagrives, Security Supervisor
    e. Ivan Rodriguez, Security Guard
    f. Denise Pickens, LPN
    g. Kimberli Hunt, Teacher II

Operations Update

Kurt Swartzlander, Division Fiscal Administrator & Director of Operations

Accomplishments

- Selected Candidate for open position in finance. Anticipated start date of November 9th.
- Campus safety conducted a monthly Fire Drill.
- Received approval to purchase two new vans for transportation pending bid procedures.
- Transportation bid completed and awarded to Village Travel. We will continue existing services under a new state contract, if approved on November 17.

Upcoming Projects/Priorities for the next 30-60 days

- Posted and interviewed for housekeeping vacancy.
- Scheduled 2 vans to go to M/R.
- Completed keying plans for new building.
- Worked with OSP to conduct RFP for HVAC services.

Education Update – Deaf Department

KaAnn Varner, Principal

Executive Summary

October was a busy and productive month for the Deaf Department. Staff and students participated in professional development, White Cane Day activities, Blind Awareness Day at the Capitol, Homecoming Parade, Tailgate lunch, Spike-Out Volleyball tournament, and Homecoming Football game vs Oklahoma School for the Deaf. Leopard and Lion Lower School Students attended a Fun Fall Day at Camp Aldersgate.

The Steps Reading Initiative was celebrated at the October Spirit Rally. Ava Cooper was Deaf Department Champion Reader for the first quarter. Ava was also crowned as the 2026-2027 Fall Student Ambassador after a successful campaign and a vote by 7-12th grade Leopard students.

The Deaf Department continued to focus on student learning, family engagement, staff development, and school culture. Two new students joined the Deaf Department. Board Member Cary Smith had lunch with the Leopard Student of the Month, Brayden Radtka. Board Member Jerry Belew was a frequent visitor to campus this month. He attended the Homecoming Parade, Tailgate Lunch, Trunk-or-Treat, and Saturday night football game on October 31st. It was great to see him interacting with staff, students, parents, and other members of the community.

Data Highlights

Attendance

- 73 total students: 41 Elementary students, 32 Secondary students
- Staff: Daily Attendance = 92.05%
- Student: Daily Attendance = 91.99%

Accomplishments

- Professional Development: Staff participated in STEM-focused professional development and Explicit Contextualized Vocabulary Instruction (ECVI) training. Leopard K-2 Grade teachers attended Specialized Science Professional development at the Arkansas Public School Resource Center. Science and Math teachers attended on campus PD relating to classroom STEM centers.
- White Cane Day: Students participated in White Cane Day educational activities and celebrations alongside the Blind Department.
- Health Screenings: Department-wide health screenings were completed during the month.
- Behavior Form Training – Staff received behavior form training to support consistent implementation of behavior documentation and interventions.

Upcoming Projects/Priorities for the next 30-60 days

- STEM Kit Implementation: Rollout of activities supported by the Arkansas State University STEM Kit project for students.
- Mid-Year Evaluations
- POP Observations for Teachers
- Ensure planning is ready for Winter Sports.
- Preparation for ARDB Christmas Program.

Education Update – Blind Department

Lori Cole, Principal

Executive Summary

- White Cane Day at the Capitol: The Deaf Department Principal spoke at the event, while ARDB students participated in several special presentations, including singing the National Anthem, sharing "What the White Cane Means to Me," and performing a Readers' Theater. White Cane Day activities continued on campus that afternoon, followed by a Cane Quest awards ceremony.
- Goalball: ARDB hosted a successful Goalball Invitational, followed by a competition in Tennessee. A highlight of the trip was an exciting win by the girls' team over Missouri. The new boys' team also gained valuable experience as they continue to develop.

Data Highlights:

- 52 total students: 25 Elementary students, 27 Secondary students
- Staff: Daily Attendance = 84%
- Student: Daily Attendance = 88.5%

Accomplishments:

- A successful Cane Quest and Goalball invitational.
- First quarter in the books with many students on honor roll and some with perfect attendance.
- Began teacher TESS POP cycles.
- A PD was provided to teachers on the abacus. Students will be learning the abacus in classes as a tool that is part of the Universal Design for Learning (UDL). Follow up surveys and data will be taken regarding student use of the abacus and if additional student or teacher training is needed.

Upcoming Projects/Priorities for the next 30-60 days

- Conduct POPs (pre-observation/observation/post observation)
- Thanksgiving and Christmas activities and calendar events
- Supporting students and parents during the holidays
- Upcoming Turkey Trot - We welcome all board members that would like to volunteer.
- Meet regularly with staff on shared expectations and commitments for education and encourage strong partnerships.
- Be present in classrooms a minimum of 50% of the time and meet all deadlines regarding reporting.
- Meet with KaAnn Varner, Deaf Department principal, weekly to ensure that both departments are going in the same direction.

Interpreting Services Update

Cora Majan

Executive Summary

Clayton Higgins resigned as Interpreter Coordinator to pursue a degree in nursing. ARDB wishes him the best as he makes this career change and appreciates his contributions during his time at ARDB. Cora Majan transitioned into the Interpreter Coordinator role.

Data Highlights

Category	This month (Oct.)
Educational	41
Mental Health Sessions	19
Medical Assignments	0
IEP Related Meetings	2
Staff Meetings	36
After-Hours	3
Spoken Language	4
Other Events (PD, etc.)	28
TOTAL	133

Accomplishments

- Launched a Video Remote Interpreting (VRI) station in the Infirmary using Sorenson Express. Staff and patients now have immediate access to interpreting services, eliminating the need to dedicate an interpreter to the Infirmary for half-day blocks.

- Secured a reliable on-demand Marshallese interpreting provider. After a long search for a dependable vendor, we can now offer meaningful language access to families from the Marshall Islands.

Upcoming Projects/Priorities for the next 30-60 days

- Review and revise campus-wide scheduling and cancellation standards in partnership with other departments, to ensure requests are routed through the department, and cancellations are made in a timely manner, reducing wasted resources.

Development Department Update

Kevin Lentz, Director of Development

Executive Summary

The Development Department supported school spirit and community engagement through multiple October events. The focus now shifts to holiday activities and support for students and staff.

Accomplishments

- Coordinated the Homecoming Parade, including a police escort, Grand Marshal, and the Arkansas Baptist College marching band.
- Coordinated the annual Trunk-or-Treat event, welcoming twenty-three groups and organizations to participate.
- Ordered, picked up, and distributed shirts to staff and students in time for Homecoming.
- Helped coordinate ARDB participation in the White Cane event at the Capitol.
- Held four Ghost Tours.

Priorities for the Next 30–60 Days

- Angel Tree
- Holiday gifts for students
- Holiday staff party
- Tree lighting
- Supporting all holiday events at ARDB

ADCC Department Update

Mandy Akins, Director of ADCC

Executive Summary

In October, the Arkansas Deaf Career Center (ADCC) continued implementing new program policies. All clients began paid work on campus, and new intern Bri Gibson began providing ASL-fluent tutoring

to college students. Staff and student survey feedback guided production of new sticker designs at 1849 Press. Planning continues for a Deaf community mentorship program, with a January launch targeted.

Accomplishments

- Full On-Campus Client Employment: All ADCC clients have officially started working on-campus, allowing them to build valuable professional skills and earn extra income.
- ASL Academic Tutoring Support: Welcomed new intern Bri Gibson to the department. Finding tutors fluent in American Sign Language (ASL) with available scheduling has historically been a major challenge, and Bri's support with college student tutoring has already made a significant positive impact.
- Product Line Expansion at 1849 Press: Collected and analyzed staff and student survey feedback regarding high-demand sticker designs, leading to the active production and rollout of a new collection of stickers through the 1849 Press.

Upcoming Projects/Priorities for the next 30-60 days

- Deaf Community Mentorship Program Launch:
    - Objective: Establish a structured mentorship initiative pairing Deaf community members with ADCC clients to promote personal growth, career insights, and community connection.
    - Timeline: Finalize program structure and recruitment over the next 30–60 days, with an official program launch targeted for January.

Special Services Update

Teresa Doan, Director of Special Services
(Special Education, Mental Health & Counseling, Related Services, Statewide Services, Residential Life, Health Services, Child Nutrition, Gifted & Talented)

Related Services

Executive Summary

In October, Related Services focused on staffing, resources, scheduling, and caseload review as part of the transition to in-house therapy. The department continues to address Medicaid documentation and billing barriers while maintaining required student services. Financial reporting reflects first-quarter ASPYRE totals rather than preliminary October data.

Data Highlights

- ASPYRE Total Recorded: $50,781.06 (FY 2027 Q1 cumulative amount, July–September)
- ASPYRE Received: $17,559.98 (34.6% of the Q1 recorded amount)
- ASPYRE Remaining: $33,221.08 (Outstanding ASPYRE balance)
- Clinical Staffing:
    - In-house OT
    - SLP aide onboarded

Accomplishments

- Building the therapy team: Occupational therapist Meredith Wilson completed her first month, and Laurel Sloter joined October 12 to assist with speech services. The team identified needed tests and supplies.
- Supporting students: Staff helped students communicate, move safely, and participate in Cane Quest, Special Olympics bowling, Camp Aldersgate, Homecoming, and other fall events.

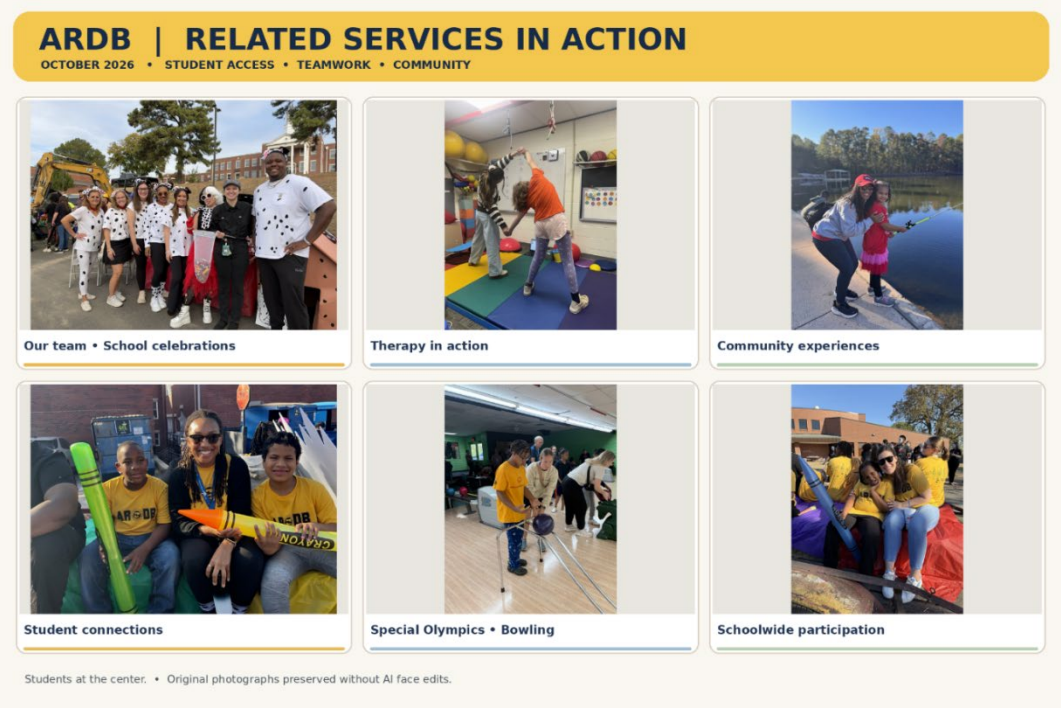
Upcoming Projects/Priorities for the next 30–60 days

Next 30 days (November)

- Review occupational therapy needs and adjust services as needed.
- Buy priority tests and supplies and improve therapy schedules.

Next 30–60 days (November–December)

- Track student therapy needs, services, attendance, and records.
- Continue staff training and teamwork.
- Explore university partnerships



Food Services

The Goalball and Leopard Spike Out tournament weekends were a great success. Visiting teams had many positive comments about ARDB's cafeteria food and staff. The tailgate lunch following the parade was also a fun addition, with lunch served from the concession stand for all involved.

Upcoming Projects/Priorities for the next 30-60 days

- 30 day: Thanksgiving lunch on November 19
- 60 day: Christmas lunch on December 17

Health Services

Executive Summary

October planning focused on mandated student health screenings, development of the school-based personal care program, measurable staff performance goals, and preparation for the 2027 infirmary license renewal. Health Services also supported preventive health outreach and campus wellness planning. Priorities for November include screening follow-up, personal care implementation, and finalizing department goals.

Accomplishments

- Coordinated required Deaf Department health screenings on October 26.
- Began planning personal care services and requested referrals for students needing daily care assistance.
- Drafted staff goals and tracking tools for records, medication safety, personal care, and Medicaid billing.
- Prepared infirmary information updates for the 2027 license renewal and asked about the process and fees.
- Prepared flu clinic materials; the Wellness Committee addressed school health planning, approved the November menu, and planned the November 19 Turkey Trot and Gobble Wobble.

Upcoming Priorities for the Next 30 to 60 Days

- Verify screening completion and arrange needed rechecks and family notifications.
- Continue personal care assessments and documentation planning.
- Finalize staff goals for the November 6 goal-setting deadline.
- Support final preparations for the November 19 wellness event.

SPED

Executive Summary

As a department we have and will continue to work diligently to address identified concerns, strengthen practices, and train staff to ensure compliance with IDEA, the AR Learns Act, and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education requirements.

Accomplishments

- We are working and following our Admission Policy and have admitted 7 students so far this school year (5 Deaf Department and 2 Blind Department).
- Continue ensuring compliance with timelines.
- We have attended LEA Academy, Transition Summit, and AR CASE conferences.

Upcoming Projects/Priorities for the next 30-60 days

- We are participating in the Trainer of Trainer training this semester that will include a virtual check-in on November 30, 2026, and on-site days at Arch Ford Co-Op and December 8-9, 2026.
- Annual trip to NWA on Nov. 2-3, 2026.
- Future Goal - To begin training Co-Ops and districts on ARDB's admission process.
