



Arkansas School for the Blind & Visually Impaired

2600 W. Markham • Little Rock, Arkansas • 72205 • (501) 296-1810 • Fax (501) 296-1831

Jacob Oliva
Secretary of Education

Dr. Chris Barnes
Interim Superintendent



Board of Trustees Superintendent Report April 2025

Dr. Chris Barnes, Interim Superintendent

This month, Arkansas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (ASBVI) has been focused on student learning amidst many extracurricular activities. Below are some major points showcasing **ASBVI PRIDE** for the current month:

ASBVI Enrollment: 63 students

PreKindergarten-Grade 6 = 31 students

Grade 7-Grade 12 = 32 students

Overall attendance rate has improved for the month of March, as the numbers of illnesses have diminished.

Highlights and Activities

1. **Severe Weather and Flooding at ASBVI:** Like many areas across the state, ASBVI was significantly affected by severe weather in recent weeks. The school activated its tornado safety protocols on two separate occasions between March 31 and April 9 to ensure the safety of students and staff. In anticipation of another severe weather event, residential students were dismissed early on Friday, April 4, to allow families and transportation teams to navigate changing conditions safely. Following intense storms in the Little Rock area, the ASBVI campus—along with the surrounding Hillcrest neighborhood—experienced multiple days without power due to downed trees and utility disruptions. The storms also caused flooding on the lower level of the Helen Keller Building, located adjacent to the cafeteria. Storm drains clogged with debris led to water intrusion that damaged the floors and walls of that area. Thanks to the swift response and dedication of our maintenance and custodial staff, emergency cleanup efforts began immediately. Their hard work ensured the campus was



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made safe and accessible as quickly as possible. Arkansas Mold and Water was also on site to remove water and deploy fans and dehumidifiers to control moisture and prevent microbial growth. Despite these efforts, the flooring in the affected area sustained considerable damage and will require repairs, including asbestos remediation. The area has been securely cordoned off and will remain off-limits until all safety measures and repairs are completed. We extend heartfelt gratitude to our campus security team, who helped implement and enforce safety protocols during the storms and ensured that students remained calm and secure. Our transportation staff demonstrated flexibility and professionalism by adjusting routes and schedules to accommodate early dismissal and delayed returns. A special thank-you also goes out to our principals and instructional staff for their adaptability and leadership throughout this period. Their calm, responsive approach ensured that learning and student well-being remained a priority even amid unexpected challenges. The commitment and teamwork demonstrated by all involved reflect the very best of ASBVI. We are proud and grateful for the unwavering dedication of our staff as we continue to prioritize the safety and success of our students.

2. **ASBVI Art Show:** On Friday, April 11, ASBVI partnered with ASD to host its annual Art Show at the ASD Leopard Spot. This collaborative event celebrated creativity and self-expression, featuring a wide range of artistic pieces that students have developed throughout the school year. From vibrant paintings and sketches to mixed media and pottery, the show highlighted the diverse talents of our students. Their work reflected not only artistic skill but also personal growth, imagination, and perseverance. We are incredibly proud of all the students who participated, and we extend our heartfelt congratulations to this year's Art Show winners: (INSERT ART SHOW WINNERS). Special thanks to Ms. Elizabeth Spillman for her outstanding dedication and mentorship. Her guidance has helped students explore new techniques, build confidence, and discover the joy of artistic expression. We are grateful for her continued efforts in creating opportunities for our students to shine. Congratulations again to all of our talented artists!



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3. **Division of Services for the Blind (DSB) Transition Fair:** On Thursday, April 10, ASBVI students in grades 10–12 had the opportunity to participate in the annual Division of Services for the Blind (DSB) Transition Fair, held at the Hilton Garden Inn in Little Rock. This event is designed to connect blind and visually impaired students with a wide range of resources, services, and support systems to help them successfully navigate the transition from high school to college, career, and independent living. Students engaged with representatives from colleges, vocational programs, community organizations, and service providers who specialize in supporting individuals with visual impairments. They learned about postsecondary options, job readiness programs, assistive technologies, and self-advocacy skills—tools that are essential for life beyond graduation. Our students appreciated being able to participate in this valuable event.

4. **Update on ASBVI Nominations for Arkansas Governor's School:** As mentioned in February, ASBVI proudly nominated two outstanding rising seniors—Evan Pratt and Bryson Selby—for consideration to attend the prestigious Arkansas Governor's School (AGS) this summer. We are thrilled to announce that both students have been accepted into the program and will represent ASBVI on the Arkansas Tech University campus in Russellville this July. AGS is a highly selective, four-week residential summer program designed for gifted and talented students who are entering their senior year of high school. Funded by the Arkansas State Legislature through the Department of Education's appropriation for Gifted and Talented Programs, AGS provides students with full tuition, room and board, and instructional materials at no cost to the family. Participants are selected based on demonstrated aptitude and passion in one of eight specialized areas: Choral Music, Drama, English/Language Arts, Instrumental Music, Mathematics, Natural Science, Social Science, or Visual Arts. In addition to in-depth study in their selected discipline, all students engage in interdisciplinary coursework in General Conceptual Development and Personal and Social Development to broaden their thinking and leadership capacity. Evan and Bryson's acceptance into this competitive program underscores their academic excellence, creativity, and commitment to learning. We are incredibly proud of them and excited for the experiences, connections, and growth this



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opportunity will offer. Please join us in congratulating Evan Pratt and Bryson Selby on this outstanding achievement!

5. **March Students of the Month:** Xzavion Gaddy (Elementary) and Edith Francisco (Secondary)
6. **Staff Shout-Out:** Paraprofessional Appreciation Day was on Wednesday, April 2. We are incredibly fortunate to have a dedicated team of paraprofessionals who play a vital role in supporting our students and staff each day. Their commitment, compassion, and hard work does not go unnoticed. Remarkably, nearly half of our paraprofessionals are currently pursuing their teaching credentials, which is a testament to their passion for education and continued professional growth. Please join us in celebrating and thanking these outstanding individuals for all they do!
7. **Upcoming Events:**
 - ATLAS Summative Assessment Window Begins: Monday, April 14
 - Spring Easter Beeper Egg Hunt: Thursday, April 17
 - ASBVI Prom for Grades 9-12: Wednesday, April 23
 - Grades 10-12 Tour of Crystal Bridges and University of Arkansas: Tuesday-Wednesday, April 29-30—Overnight stay at Camp War Eagle
 - Spring Dance for K-8: Thursday, May 1

Human Capital Updates

ASBVI is presently looking to hiring staff for the upcoming school year in addition to some other. The following positions are currently open and advertised:

- Teacher—Special Education (interviewed prospective candidates; recommendation made for 2025-2026 school year)
- Teacher—Gifted and Talented / Special Education (shared with ASD)-- (interviewed prospective candidates; recommendation made for 2025-2026 school year)
- Teacher—Elementary (3)—we are moving some of our elementary staff to fill position vacancies—will be filled for the 2025-2026 school year



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- Nurse—Registered Nurse (1) and LPN (2)—for immediate hire
- Residential Advisors (4)—for immediate hire

Building Project Updates

Since returning from spring break, SCM Architects and Mackey Mitchell Architects have actively engaged with staff across the ASBVI and ASD to ensure that the design of our new facility reflects the needs and priorities of those who will use it every day. The architectural team held focused meetings with 11 different staff stakeholder groups, each representing a unique area or function within the school. During these sessions, staff had the opportunity to review and respond to proposed layouts for their designated spaces. Valuable feedback was gathered regarding functionality, accessibility, storage, traffic flow, and opportunities for enhanced collaboration and student engagement. The design teams were receptive and responsive, incorporating suggestions and adjustments where appropriate to better support both instruction and operations. This makes nearly 45 different stakeholder meetings that have been conducted to date.

In addition to staff input, the architectural and planning team met with Secretary Jacob Oliva and members of the Arkansas Department of Education's senior leadership to provide a comprehensive progress update on the building's development. Their continued support and involvement reinforce the importance of this project for the our school community.

On the construction front, demolition work remains on schedule, despite weather-related disruptions caused by recent severe storms. Crews have worked diligently to maintain momentum, and we remain on track to complete demolition by the time of graduation.

We appreciate the patience, flexibility, and continued collaboration of our staff, partners, and community as we move forward in the process.



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Legislative Information

Since the commencement of the 95th Arkansas General Assembly, the legislature has been busy with several new pieces of legislation. Here is a link to a document that provides key pieces of legislation related to education:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1pd6plUYjK6OABFbPMfYSs2IHE0HwKVL5-kEhjSJ56LQ/edit?usp=sharing>

House Bill 1810, the legislation to merge the Arkansas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (ASBVI) and the Arkansas School for the Deaf (ASD) under a unified governance structure, was formally introduced in the Arkansas Legislature on March 17. The bill progressed swiftly through the legislative process. It received a Do Pass recommendation from the House Education Committee and was approved on the House Floor with bipartisan support, passing by a vote of 81–7. Upon reaching the Senate, the Senate Education Committee issued a Do Pass recommendation following the adoption of a small amendment: the addition of a requirement for Senate confirmation of board members appointed by the Governor. The amended version of the bill was then brought before the full Senate, where it passed overwhelmingly with a vote of 34–1. Following Senate approval, the bill returned to the House for concurrence on the amendment. With final legislative steps nearly complete, the bill is now expected to be transmitted to the Governor for signature later this week.

We are incredibly grateful for the many individuals who came forward to speak in favor of the bill throughout this process, including most members of our Board of Trustees, who offered thoughtful and compelling testimony. The support, along with that of other advocates and stakeholders, has been instrumental in advancing this legislation. The passage of HB1810 represents a significant milestone in our schools' shared history and an opportunity to enhance collaboration, streamline governance, and strengthen services for the students and families we serve. We look forward to the next steps as we prepare for transition.