

OFFICIAL MINUTES FROM THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING OF THE
ARKANSAS SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF AND BLIND

The Board of Trustees for the Arkansas School for the Deaf and Blind met for their monthly meeting August 26, 2025, in Woolly Auditorium.

Mr. Fagan called the meeting to order at 5:00 pm.

ASB senior led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mr. Fagan called roll.

Present: Robert Fagan, Chair; Dr. John McAllister, Vice Chair; Cary Smith, Secretary; Jerry Belew, Board Member, and Phillip Miller, ASD Parent Representative, K. Nicole Walsh, ASD Superintendent; Interpreters; Members of the community. **Absent:** Philip Powell.

The next meeting will be September 16, 2025, in Woolly Auditorium on the ASBVI campus. Mr. Miller will not be available to attend.

Joint Agenda

25-J-42 Motion to Approve Joint Meeting Minutes for August 26, 2025.

Mrs. Smith made a motion to approve. Dr. McAllister seconded. Motion carried.

Public Comments: Mr. Fagan said she has 3 minutes to speak, and the board would not make any comment.

Beth Helms spoke about the difficulty of merging two schools with distinct cultures and histories. She said building one agency out of two legacies takes trust, collaboration, and visible unity and that unity starts with the board. She urged the board to lead with openness, not predetermined outcomes, and model collaboration, not division. She said the families and staff in the room are doing their best to embrace the merger, even when the acronym chosen wasn't a crowd favorite. They have shown up anyway because at the end of the day, what matters most is the students.

Mr. Fagan thanked Ms. Helms for coming and speaking.

Mr. Fagan said before the action items he had something to share. Vision Core who is the parent company for the Arkansas Lighthouse for the Blind came to Little Rock recently. He said they met with the CEO of WSB and employees of Lighthouse. He said they donated a lot of money to several agencies – WSB, the Alumni and the Arkansas School for the Deaf and Blind. He presented a \$5,000.00 check to Mts. Walsh from Vision Core. Mrs. said she looked forward to working with them and thanked them for the donation.

Action Items:

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25-J-43 Motion to Approve Policy Governing Public Comments at Board of Trustees Meeting

Mr. Fagan asked if there were any questions. Mrs. Smith asked if the changes could be highlighted. Mrs. Walsh said it allows us to emulate the new law that requires us to have a policy in place. She said our policy has always been in place because we are a state board not a school board. Dr. McAllister made a motion to approve. Mr. Belew seconded. Motion carried.

25-J-44 Motion to Approve Dress Code Policy

Mrs. Walsh said the dress code policy was missing in the handbook. This is an addendum to the handbook

Dr. McAllister made a motion to approve. Mrs. Smith seconded. Motion carried.

25-J-45 Motion to Approve Policy for Student Academic Acceleration

Mrs. Walsh said it has come to our attention that we have some students that would like to accelerate their education and something we want to support. She said they needed a set policy. The policy outlines how it is determined who and who cannot accelerate. Mrs. Smith asked if it was for all age groups. Mrs. Walsh said yes.

Dr. McAllister made a motion to approve. Mr. Belew seconded. Motion carried.

25-J-46 Motion to Approve 2025-2026 District Assurances

Mrs. Walsh said this confirms we are in compliance to the best of our knowledge. The second part is about constitutionally protected prayer. Mr. Belew said it should be the student's choice and Mrs. Walsh said that was correct.

Mrs. Smith made a motion to approve. Dr. McAllister seconded. Motion carried.

Discussion Items: Bullying Report

Mrs. Walsh went over both schools' reports. ASB had one documented incident, and ASD had two documented incidents.

ARDB Agenda**25-DB-47 Motion to Approve Consent Items (Minutes, Financial Statement, Personnel Items)**

Mrs. Smith made a motion to approve. Mr. Belew seconded. Motion carried.

Action Items – None**Discussion Items** – None

Mr. Fagan asked if the board could get an organizational chart. Mrs. Walsh said she was working on getting one from OPM.

Mr. Fagan asked for a breakdown of students by grade for both campuses. Mr. Fagan said he was concerned about the number of students. Mrs. Walsh said the funding is not dependent on enrolment.

ARDB Superintendent Report

- Building Progress: North easterly footings were poured last week. Footing are the concrete in the ground that hold the building to the dirt. You can see how wide the hallways are going to be. Confirmed 91,000 square feet. Talking about technology, picking out carpet, talked about carpet colors. The steel package comes in second week of September. Once the foundation is poured, it is going to go quickly. She said to be looking for a “topping off ceremony” sometime in December.
- AR App – required to submit every year to the Department of Education confirming our strategic plan, how we handle gifted students and dyslexia The AR app was approved before the end of July which is an improvement over last year (end of October).
- Every department is staying focused on our mission: serving students.
- Human Capital Updates: You can see the list of people hired and there has been more since then. We have had a little turnover.
- Enrollment – 140n total students
- Behavior Data: Principals got together and had in depth conversations about positive behaviors, interventions and support systems (PBIS)
- TESS (Teacher Evaluation System) – We will be able to have TESS this year so staff will have the ability to earn merit pay.
- HQIM training was completed
- Statewide Services – 31 students receiving services (Deaf)
- Food services – Free breakfast going well. Mrs. Smith asked how merging the food services is going. Mrs. Walsh said all food prepared at Breeding Cafeteria (ASD). The food is loaded into chaffing dishes and taken to ASB. The staff has reported that it is going well. It was awkward at first trying to get the timing right. Having one menu has address supply chain issues.

Barbara Cole has moved into our Events Coordinator role. She has taken the role and run with it. She shines when it comes to events. She is helping streamline events overall.

Mrs. Walsh asked if there were any questions. Mrs. Smith asked if there were a plan and budget for a playground at new building. Mrs. Walsh said yes. What was originally budgeted was not enough because playgrounds are expensive, but we have had full support from the Department of Ed to reach out and consult with a playground architect who specializes in ADA accessible playgrounds. She said they listened to feedback from teachers who said while they do want playground equipment, they want some big, open areas for the kids to be able to run and play. They are working with a consulting firm out of Chicago. They have brought a plan and will be bringing a quote. Mrs. Smith said a concern she had is there are no mature trees for shade and asked if there was a plan for that. Mrs. Walsh said yes – shades would be put up.

Mrs. Smith asked if we were still sharing an art teacher and librarian and Mrs. Walsh said yes. She said it is working out nicely.

Mr. Fagan asked about the Parnell elevator progress. Mrs. Walsh said they received the grant for \$1.2 million. Plans are being drawn and will have to go through approval. Almost all employees have been moved from Parnell. The goal is that it will be completed at the same time as the building is completed.

Mrs. Smith asked as the merger continues, in terms of off-campus field trips, will the grades be going together. Mrs. Walsh said when there is opportunity and makes sense, yes.

Mrs. Smith asked Mrs. Walsh to speak to the ECC after school and the dorm. Mrs. Walsh said they are still looking for a Director of Residential Life. She hopes to find someone who is certified in vision and/or hearing loss or special education certified. She said the supervisors are doing a great job. They are having lessons on hygiene and social/emotional learning. Mrs. Smith asked if the dorms were going off campus now. Mrs. Walsh said some of gone off.

Mrs. Walsh said last year they talked about wanting to have workshops and asked if they had a preference as to how often. Mr. Fagan said because people work during the day, let's do it every three months. She asked if next month would be a good time to have a workshop. Mr. Miller and Dr. McAllister have something already. Mrs. Walsh asked if October would be better. Mr. Fagan said October 21st at noon.

Mr. Belew said parents have been asking about nepotism. Mrs. Walsh said Mrs. Varner is not the supervisor or evaluator of the people she is related to. Mrs. Walsh said Aaron Choate has been promoted to a Teacher Supervisor, so Tommy and Shannon will report to him.

Mr. Fagan asked for a motion to adjourn.

25-DB-48 Motion to Adjourn

Mr. Belew made a motion. Mrs. Smith seconded. Motion carried.

Mr. Fagan adjourned the meeting.

Robert Fagan, Chair

Cary Smith, Secretary