Arkansas School for the Deaf and Blind (ARDB) Admissions Policy

Effective Date:

Section 1 — Policy Statement

This policy establishes the admissions criteria, processes, and procedures for students seeking to enroll in the Arkansas School for the Deaf and Blind (ARDB), ensuring all prospective students are appropriately evaluated for eligibility and placed in an educational setting that meets their individual needs. It incorporates requirements from the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), 20 U.S.C. § 1400 et seq., Arkansas Code Title 6, Chapter 43, and Act 796 of 2025. ARDB offers specialized sensory instruction in hearing and vision.

Eligibility and referral for admission to the Arkansas School for the Deaf and Blind (ARDB) is governed by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Arkansas Code Title 6, Chapter 43.

> A student who has been identified by his or her resident district or district of enrollment (through school choice) as a student with a disability under IDEA, may be referred by his or her IEP team if the IEP team determines that the Arkansas School for the Deaf and Blind (ARDB) is the appropriate placement and the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) for the student. If the student is accepted and enrolls in ARDB, the responsibility for FAPE is shared by the referring District (LEA of Record) and ARDB. The LEA of record shall participate in ongoing IEP development and review. ARDB shall provide the specialized instruction and related services necessary to provide a free appropriate public education (FAPE) and implement the IEP, conduct progress monitoring, and maintain IDEA-required documentation. Both entities shall collaborate to ensure the IEP is implemented with fidelity, statutory and regulatory requirements are met, and the student receives educational benefit in accordance with federal and state law.

Section 2 — Admissions and Intake Process

Step 1: Initial Inquiry and Application Request

LEA of record may initiate the admissions process by contacting ARDB's Admissions Coordinator.

ARDB will provide the Admissions Application Packet, which includes:

- Admissions application form
- Release of information form
- Authorization for evaluation/arena screening
- Health and immunization documentation requirements
- Academic records request form

Step 2: Completion and Submission of Required Paperwork
All required paperwork must be fully completed and submitted by the LEA of record before any school tour or student screening is scheduled.
- Completed admissions application
- Current IEP
- Most recent evaluations (educational, psychological, audiological, ophthalmological, etc.)
- Medical and immunization records
- Signed consent and release forms
- Documentation of sensory impairment (audiological and/or ophthalmological reports)

Incomplete documentation will delay the admissions process.

PLEASE NOTE: The Notice of Action Recommending Placement at ARDB is not a requirement of initial paperwork but IS required prior to admission.

Step 3: Scheduling of School Tour and Arena Screening
Once documentation is verified, a school tour and student arena screening will be scheduled.

Tours are offered on designated Tuesdays of each month by appointment.

Prospective students are required to accompany parent(s)/guardian(s) and resident district representatives to the in-person ARDB scheduled tour. If a prospective student is unable to attend, the resident district shall collaborate with ARDB to arrange an onsite observation of the student in his or her current placement.

If an interpreter is needed to ensure language access, please be sure to include this information when scheduling your tour.
During the visit:
- Parent(s)/guardians(s) may observe educational settings and, if applicable, dormitory facilities.

- The guided tour will include academic and residential areas, related services areas, the infirmary (for health services discussion), and the Registrar.
- ARDB staff will be available to answer questions about services, programs, and next steps.
- The student and parent(s)/guardians(s) will be provided lunch by ARDB.

Step 4: Arena Screening and Functional Assessments

The arena screening is an informal observational process used to understand the student's strengths, needs, communication access, learning profile, and program compatibility with ARDB. These screenings are not diagnostic evaluations. The purpose of the screening is to inform Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) considerations and placement recommendations. Parent(s)/guardian(s) and resident district representatives are encouraged to attend. Screening records remain the property of ARDB and are maintained in accordance with state and federal guidelines.

Screenings may include observational review of:
- Communication modality & access (ASL, spoken language, AAC)
- Audiological or low-vision functional screening
- Braille/tactile literacy readiness
- Academic engagement & concept understanding
- Social-emotional regulation & interaction
- Orientation & mobility or environmental navigation

How Determinations Are Made

When skills appear absent or emerging, ARDB specialists use informed clinical opinion, student interaction, prior evaluation data, work samples, and parent/school input to determine current functioning and potential for benefit within ARDB's sensory-specific instructional model.

Consent

Observational arena screening is non-diagnostic and not an evaluation. If evaluations are required to meet eligibility or placement determinations, parental consent will be obtained prior to testing.

What This Means for Parent(s)/Guardian(s)

Arena screenings are observational, not diagnostic.	Your child is not being "tested" — we are observing how they communicate, learn, and engage so we can understand how to support them.
Specialists use informed clinical opinion when skills are emerging or uncertain.	If a student doesn't respond yet or is still developing a communication system, our team looks at multiple sources — interaction, history, IEP data, parent input — not just one moment.
Consent is required only if formal evaluation occurs.	If testing or evaluations become necessary, we ask permission first.
Screening does not guarantee placement.	Not all students who visit are admitted. Placement is based on whether ARDB is the setting where the student will have meaningful access, make progress, and receive FAPE.
LRE decision must be supported by evidence.	We look for signs that the student can benefit from our environment — or if they need something different first. We want to ensure ARDB is the right placement for your child.

Step 5: Apply LRE Decision Framework

The ARDB Admissions Team reviews the submitted documentation to:

- Verify eligibility under IDEA and Arkansas law.
- Identify missing or unclear information.
    - If clarification or additional documentation is needed, the admissions Coordinator will follow up with the parent(s)/guardian(s) or resident district.
- Review sensory access data (hearing/vision)
- Apply the LRE Decision Framework (Appendix A) to each domain.
- Determine whether the student's educational access and communication needs necessitate specialized placement at ARDB.
- If additional data is required to determine a prospective student's LRE, ARDB and the LEA of record will collaborate to obtain all needed information to support specialized placement.

Step 6: Admissions Committee Review

The ARDB Admissions Committee convenes monthly to review all student referrals, submitted records, and screening data.
The committee may include:

- Building Principal
- Special Education Supervisor

- Related Services Coordinator and representatives (OT, PT, SLP, O&M, Audiology, etc.)
- Residential Life Supervisor (if applicable)
- Nursing Supervisor
- Admissions Coordinator
- Registrar
- Other support staff as needed
- LEA of record representative(s)

All newly enrolled students are subject to a 90-day probationary period to ensure that ARDB is the appropriate placement for the student in compliance with IDEA.

Step 7: Notification of Decision

Parent(s)/guardian(s) and LEA of record will be notified of the committee's decision by email (or written mail if email is not available).

Possible outcomes:
- Determination of appropriateness for ARDB placement (acceptance).
  - Next steps for enrollment.
- Deferral pending additional documentation.
- Non-acceptance with recommendation(s) for alternative support (denial).
  - Reason(s) for non-acceptance may include lack of evidence that ARDB is the LRE, limited access to the bilingual sensory environment at this time, or the need for foundational instruction/support that may be better provided in a different setting.
  - If a student is denied admission, the parent(s)/guardian(s) or LEA of record may request a meeting to discuss the reason(s) for denial.
    - If the superintendent of ARDB is not present at the meeting, the parent(s)/guardian(s) may request a review of the student's records by the superintendent following the meeting. The superintendent's decision regarding acceptance is final.
  - Denial for admission does not prohibit a new referral from being submitted in subsequent school years.

Step 8: Enrollment and Transition Planning

If a student is accepted, ARDB will:
- Schedule enrollment and registration.
- Coordinate transportation and/or residential placement with the LEA of record.

- Plan the transition from the student's previous school, including transfer and implementation of the IEP.
- Provide school calendars, handbooks, and staff contact information.

Step 9: Student Orientation and First Day

Upon arrival, parent(s)/guardian(s) and students will be given a welcome packet containing:

- School policies and expectations.
- Academic and support services overview.
- Dormitory and residential life information (if applicable).
- Review of health protocols and medication procedures.
- IEP instruction and services will be provided beginning on the student's first day.

Appendix A — FAPE & LRE Decision Framework (Placement-Neutral)
Purpose
A Guide for IEP teams to determine which placement provides FAPE in the least restrictive environment, by systematically comparing *all viable placements* against the student's sensory access needs and overall profile.

Step 1— Define the current and recommended placements on the continuum.

Step 2 — LRE Comparison (side-by-side): Rank the placements that meet FAPE from least to most restrictive *for this student* (note: "restrictive" is about access & harmful effects, not location).

Consideration	Referring District (LEA of record)	ARDB	Notes/Comments
Component	☐ Meets ☐ Partial ☐ No	☐ Meets ☐ Partial ☐ No	
Specialized: Large Print, Braille, ASL	☐ Meets ☐ Partial ☐ No	☐ Meets ☐ Partial ☐ No	
Orientation & Mobility Services	☐ Meets ☐ Partial ☐ No	☐ Meets ☐ Partial ☐ No	
Specialized Transportation	☐ Meets ☐ Partial ☐ No	☐ Meets ☐ Partial ☐ No	
Medical Supports	☐ Meets ☐ Partial ☐ No	☐ Meets ☐ Partial ☐ No	
One-on-One Paraprofessional	☐ Meets ☐ Partial ☐ No	☐ Meets ☐ Partial ☐ No	
Adaptive Behavior Support	☐ Meets ☐ Partial ☐ No	☐ Meets ☐ Partial ☐ No	
Functional Behavior Support	☐ Meets ☐ Partial ☐ No	☐ Meets ☐ Partial ☐ No	
IEP Development	☐ Meets ☐ Partial ☐ No	☐ Meets ☐ Partial ☐ No	
Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)	☐ Meets ☐ Partial ☐ No	☐ Meets ☐ Partial ☐ No	
Efficiency of Services	☐ Meets ☐ Partial ☐ No	☐ Meets ☐ Partial ☐ No	
Transition Planning	☐ Meets ☐ Partial ☐ No	☐ Meets ☐ Partial ☐ No	
Related Services	☐ Meets ☐ Partial ☐ No	☐ Meets ☐ Partial ☐ No	

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