

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

The Board of Trustees of the Arkansas School for the Deaf and Blind held its regular monthly meeting on December 16, 2025, in the Tornado Shelter.

Chair Robert Fagan called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.

Mrs. Walsh invited students from the Blind Department to introduce themselves. The students then performed “We Wish You a Merry Christmas” and “Away in a Manger,” featuring two students on violin, followed by a piano solo by another student.

At the request of Mr. Fagan, the students led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mr. Fagan called the roll.

Present:

Robert Fagan, Chair

Dr. John McAllister, Vice Chair

Jerry Belew, Board Member

Philip Powell, Board Member

K. Nicole Walsh, Superintendent

Interpreters

Members of the Community

Absent:

Cary Smith, Secretary

Phillip Miller, Deaf Department Parent Representative

The next meeting was originally scheduled for January 20, 2026. Mrs. Walsh requested that the meeting be rescheduled to January 27, 2026, due to the holiday. The Board agreed unanimously. The next meeting will be held on January 27, 2026, at Woolly Auditorium.

25-DB-64 Motion to Approve Meeting Minutes, Financial Statements, and Personnel Items

Mr. Powell made a motion to approve the meeting minutes, financial statements, and personnel items as presented. Dr. McAllister seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Action Items

25-DB-65 Motion to Approve Naming the New Street “ARDB Avenue”

Mrs. Walsh reported that the Student Advisory Council (SAC) developed two proposed names for the new street and conducted a vote among students. Due to the close results, the vote was subsequently extended to staff and Board members. The name “ARDB Avenue” received overwhelming support.

Mrs. Walsh expressed pride in the professionalism and thoroughness demonstrated by the SAC throughout the process. When asked about a logo, Mrs. Walsh stated that it would be discussed at a later date and noted that the street-naming initiative represents the culmination of several collaborative efforts.

Mr. Powell made a motion to approve naming the new street “ARDB Avenue.” Dr. McAllister seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Discussion Items

Immunization Report

Mrs. Walsh reported that the school had 147 students enrolled at the time of reporting. One hundred percent of students were compliant without immunization exemptions, and immunization records had been provided for 98 percent of students. Two students (0.01 percent) required exemption letters, which were obtained. Mrs. Walsh also reported that the school hosted an on-campus immunization clinic for staff and students to receive flu vaccinations.

Superintendent’s Report

Mrs. Walsh noted that there was limited activity to report due to the timeframe between the week before Thanksgiving and the week before Christmas break. She shared the administration’s excitement regarding the newly approved street name and reported that 141 individuals participated in the voting process.

Mrs. Walsh reported enrollment totals of 91 students in the Deaf Department and 51 students in the Blind Department, for a total enrollment of 142 students. Additionally, nine students are currently in the referral process awaiting acceptance.

Mrs. Walsh announced the hiring of Cora Majan as a second staff interpreter to support campus interpreting needs. She expressed enthusiasm regarding Ms. Majan’s addition to the team.

Mrs. Walsh reported that representatives from the American Reading Company (ARC), the curriculum provider adopted by ARDB for both departments, visited classrooms last month. She stated that implementation has exceeded expectations. Two ARC representatives observed classrooms and provided instructional support, noting that curriculum adoption includes professional training. Mrs. Walsh recognized Donna Van Devender, Jennifer Harrington, Joe Reynolds, and Jennifer Baxter for their efforts in implementing the curriculum.

Teacher Spotlight – Deaf Department:

Kara Siemens was recognized for her transition from middle school to elementary education over the summer and for bringing enthusiasm and innovative mathematics instruction to her classroom. She also serves as the Robotics Coach for grades 6–8.

Teacher Spotlight – Blind Department:

Caitlin Pierce was recognized for facilitating collaborative buddy reading during literacy instruction, supporting students' vocabulary development. Appreciation was also extended to Holly from Kids First.

Mrs. Walsh reported that Adam Goyne has begun supporting students in the Blind Department as Dean of Students as part of the continued merger process.

The Operations Department reported a very active month, including the installation of tankless water heaters over Thanksgiving break, with additional installations planned over Christmas break. Work has also included new water lines, upgraded lighting, and other infrastructure improvements.

Mrs. Walsh announced the hiring of David Aldana as a certified HVAC technician.

Facilities staff continue to clean out multiple campus buildings, removing items dating back to the 1980s. Mrs. Walsh commended the Facilities team for their efforts.

Mrs. Walsh reported the installation of a GOAB (Gang Operated Air Break) system. Due to the campus's aging electrical infrastructure and three-phase power system, power interruptions have previously caused equipment damage. The GOAB system allows for centralized power shutdown and represents a significant improvement in operational efficiency.

Mrs. Walsh announced the launch of the Gifted and Talented (GT) program. Three students have been identified, with several additional referrals currently under assessment. She noted that while the program is required by the State of Arkansas, it is also highly valued by staff and administration. The Special Education Department was recognized for its work in implementing the program.

Mrs. Walsh reported that the Food Service Department served 425 meals to students and families during Thanksgiving.

She also reported that all 78 students identified through the Angel Tree program were sponsored this year, with additional funds raised to support the program moving forward. Mrs. Walsh expressed gratitude, noting the challenge of securing sponsors for all participants.

Mrs. Walsh formally recognized Mr. Robert Fagan for his service on the Board of Trustees. Mr. Fagan has served five years in total, including two years as Board President. Mrs. Walsh thanked him for his leadership, trust, and service and presented him with a plaque in appreciation.

Mr. Fagan expressed his gratitude and stated that it has been an honor to chair the Board for the past two years. He reflected on the Board's accomplishments, including the hiring of a new superintendent, and emphasized mutual respect despite differing perspectives. Mr. Fagan expressed hope for reappointment to the Board and his desire to see the completion and opening of the new building.

Dr. McAllister provided an update on the University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UALR). He reported that the university board voted to retrench the Orientation and Mobility program, despite a unanimous faculty senate vote opposing retrenchment. The program will conclude on June 30, 2027. Dr. McAllister stated that there has been interest from the University of Arkansas to continue the program and that he plans to reach out to the University of Central Arkansas and other institutions. The Orientation and Mobility program will continue its affiliation with the Arkansas School for the Deaf and Blind.

25-DB-66 Motion to Adjourn

Dr. McAllister made a motion to adjourn. Mr. Belew seconded the motion. The motion carried.

The meeting was adjourned.

Robert Fagan, Chair

Cary Smith, Secretary