



Arkansas School for the Deaf and Blind

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Jacob Oliva
Secretary

K. Nicole Walsh
Superintendent

ARDB Superintendent Report November 2025

Update

Veterans Day Celebration:

ARDB held a special Veterans Day assembly honoring staff and family members who have served in the U.S. Armed Forces. The program featured student performances in music and dancing. A big thank-you to the staff and students who made this meaningful event possible, and to our veterans for their service.

Holiday Food Drive:

Our ARDB Holiday Food Drive is underway. We are collecting non-perishable items to support students and families during Thanksgiving week and winter break.

Seasonal Illness Update:

We are experiencing an increase in seasonal viruses on campus, resulting in higher absences among staff and students. We continue to monitor the situation and encourage preventive measures.

Power Outage:

The campus experienced a recent power outage. Operations continued safely, and power was restored without further issue.

Upcoming Event – Thanksgiving at ARDB:

You are invited to join us on Thursday, November 20th, from 9:00–11:00 AM for our Turkey Trot, Gobble Wobble, and Thanksgiving meal celebration.

Human Capital Update

Resignations/Terminations

- Elaine Boland, Teacher II
- Purity Tallant, Education Paraprofessional
- John Brimley, Residential Care Coordinator

New Hires/Rehires

- Kurt Swartzlander, Division Fiscal Administrator
- Stacy Swartzlander, Educational Professional I
- Dionisia Vasquez Arago, Housekeeper
- Rebecca Nelson, Administrative Analyst

Transfer to/from Other State Agency or Other Position

- None

School Operations Update

Deaf Department (Principal: KaAnn Varner)

Key Highlights – October

- **October 2:** Crosswalk for Juniors and Seniors – Tour of Arkansas Career Development Center (ACDC) in Hot Springs. Two recent Deaf Department graduates are currently enrolled in the welding program and are doing well.
- **October 3:** Professional Development – Training by Tyler P. for Deaf Department teachers on *Aristotle*, a computer monitoring program for school-issued student devices.
- **October 6:** Parent-Teacher Conferences
- **October 7:** Professional Development
- **October 8–10:** Fall Break
- **October 13:** State Fair
- **October 14:** ECC-3 Field Trip to the Pumpkin Patch
- **October 15:** White Cane Day
- **October 16:** Homecoming Spirit Rally
- **October 17:** ARDB Homecoming Parade and Tailgate Lunch on the Football Field
- **October 18:** Homecoming Football Game – Game times were adjusted (Football at 10:00 AM, Volleyball at 2:00 PM) for safety due to forecasted severe weather. The Town Hall was held at 4:00 PM in Parnell Hall.
- **October 24:** Professional Development – SpedTrack
- **October 27–31:** Red Ribbon Week
- **October 31:** Trunk-or-Treat

Achievements

- **Athletics:**

- The Volleyball Team traveled to New Mexico for the Great Plains School for the Deaf Volleyball Tournament. Although we placed last, the team—composed primarily of younger players—gained valuable experience. We expect great progress in the coming seasons.
- On October 18, Tennessee School for the Deaf visited for Homecoming Football and Volleyball games. Both games were well played, and Danielle Alhamwi was crowned 2025 Fall Homecoming Ambassador.

- **Players of the Month:**

- Football: Jakhii Hunter
- Volleyball: Kivy Harshaw
- Cheerleader: Danielle Alhamwi

Teacher Shoutout

Judy Brint-Murphy (“JuJu”) – Graphic Design & Introduction to Media

Judy is a talented and creative teacher known for her strong commitment to school events such as Homecoming, Prom, and Senior Night. Her dedication reflects her deep belief in the school’s mission. She has long overseen the *Leopard Yearbook* and continues to do an outstanding job. This year, she and Dakota Dalton from the Blind Department are collaborating to produce the first joint ARDB Yearbook—a historic milestone.

Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS)

- **ROAR Store:**

- The improved selection of items has boosted student motivation to earn tickets.
- Store visits have been reorganized into smaller groups to improve management, reduce wait times, and minimize time out of class.

Challenges and Struggles

Academic:

- Continued work is needed to align and strengthen our math instruction. With ongoing support and fidelity checks—particularly from Holly Woodruff—teachers are improving their understanding and use of the IM math curriculum.

Behavioral:

- Some students continue to exhibit behavioral challenges. At times, family members struggle to accept that expectations for all students apply to their child as well. We will continue outreach efforts to help parents understand school rules and how they can support their child's behavioral growth.

Resources:

- Staff are progressing with SpedTrack, though there is still a learning curve.

Goals for the Upcoming Month

- **Academic:** Strengthen teacher use of HQIM IM Math curriculum.
- **Behavioral:** Ensure Behavior Intervention Plans (BIPs) are implemented with fidelity.
- **School Culture:** Promote respect—for self and others—across all settings.
- **Operational:** Support Kids First visits and professional development speakers.
- **Safety:** Collaborate with Transportation and our Dean of Students to improve bus safety and integrate BIP strategies for transportation support.

Success Indicators

- Reduced SWIS behavior reports for identified students.
- Increased student participation in self-tracking and reflection on behavior and progress.

Statistics

Enrollment and Attendance:

- Total Students: 53 (26 boys, 27 girls).
- Largest Grade: 5th Grade (10 students).
- October Attendance: Overall 89.2%.

- Highest: Kindergarten (99.32%), 2nd Grade (99.42%).
- Lowest: 4th Grade (97.33%).

Referrals By Grade:

- Grade 10: (~65).
- Grades 4 and 8: (~50 each).
- Grades 2 and 9: (~ 25).
- Grades 1, 6, 11, 12: (<10).

Suspension and Expulsion:

- In-School Suspension: 3 events, 1 student, 1.5 days total.
 - Out-of-School Suspension: 2 events, 2 students, 7 days total.
 - Expulsion: None.
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Blind Department (Principal: Lori Cole)

Key Highlights

- Homecoming
- Cane Quest
- Student trip to the Arkansas State Fair
- UCA Occupational Therapists visited campus to provide a hands-on workshop
- Trunk-or-Treat activities were a success with great participation from students, staff, and outside organizations

School Demographics

- **Total Number of Students:** 25 Elementary | 25 Secondary
- **Student Attendance Rates:** Attendance remains stable. Early October saw a temporary decline due to a stomach virus, but attendance has since leveled out.

Academic Performance

- At the end of the first quarter, all students received passing grades in every subject — no failing grades were reported.

Achievements

Athletics:

- The ASB Goalball Teams traveled to Nashville; both the boys' and girls' teams each won one game.

Teacher Shoutout:

- Joe Reynolds — for his exceptional commitment to implementing the new ARC curriculum and ensuring materials are accessible for students. He also serves as the lead case manager for the Blind Department and is doing an outstanding job in this role.
- The department also welcomed new SPED team members, Leanne and Laura, who are already making a positive impact.

Behavioral Data

- Three students served lunch detention during the month.
- One staffing was held to address an elementary student's behavior. The team met to plan strategies to support the student and their classmates for success in the classroom environment.

Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS)

- The 5th–6th grade team added visual reminders on desks to reinforce ROAR behavior expectations and reward systems.
- The ROAR Store reopened last Thursday with great success. Student and staff engagement in the PBIS program continues to grow.

Challenges and Struggles

Academic Challenges:

- Teachers are working diligently to cover all required curriculum content within limited instructional time.

Behavioral Challenges:

- Many behavioral challenges stem from home environments. To help teachers better understand and respond, excerpts from *Ruby Payne's Framework for Understanding Poverty* are being shared in morning emails to promote empathy, collaboration, and positive classroom management.

Resource Challenges:

- The department continues to collaborate with Mrs. Donna Vandevender to ensure ARC program books are produced and ready for student use.

Action Plan for Improvement

Goals for the Upcoming Month:

- Teachers will maintain focus through the second quarter and work to finish the nine weeks strong.

Success Factors:

- Evidence of progress will be reflected through Planbook lesson plans and TAC grade records.
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Special Services

Key Highlights

The Special Services department has many different facets and functions. The goal of the department is to provide the best services for our students possible. Additionally, we continue to focus on “Better Together” and try to support and work closely with every department.

Food Services

Child Nutrition works collaboratively for both departments. Students receive healthy and tasty meals.

- October Meals Served: Breakfast –1692
 - Lunch – 1966
 - Days Served – 18
 - Eligibility Numbers as of 10/31: Free: 59
 - Reduced: 8
 - Paid: 7
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Nursing and Health Services

The Health Services Department continues to provide comprehensive care and support to students, ensuring their physical, emotional, and medical needs are met within the school environment. Our team remains focused on promoting student safety, health education, and staff training to maintain a high standard of care.

Staffing and Training

- Ongoing training for paraprofessionals on Personal Care tasks, allowing the school to bill for care provided on campus.
- All health services staff participated in refresher courses covering medication administration,

emergency response, and infection control protocols.

- Staffing coverage provided for out-of-state sports trip to Nashville for the Goalball Tournament, ensuring student safety and medical support during travel and competition.
- Currently, our staffing includes Dayshift staff: Full (1 RN, 1 LPN, 1 CCMA), Evening Staff: Full (1 RN, 1 LPN), Overnight Staff: 1 LPN position open.

Student Health Initiatives

Initiative	Description
<u>Immunizations</u>	Monitoring and updating all student vaccinations, including DTaP, HepA, HepB, IPV/OPV, MCV4, TDAP, HPV, and Varicella. Compliance with CDC recommendations is maintained.
<u>Allergy Safety</u>	Students with food allergies are provided with customized allergy alert name tags for use during school events and activities.
<u>Individual Health Care Plans (IHCPs)</u>	Updated and implemented for students with chronic medical conditions, including adrenal crisis protocols and behavioral health accommodations.

Health Education & Support

- Continued health education initiatives for students and staff, including hygiene, nutrition, and wellness practices.
- Behavioral health monitoring and support provided in coordination with school counselors and external providers.
- Reminder to all staff and students of flu and COVID season, with multiple viruses circulating. Emphasis on hand hygiene and staying home when ill to prevent spread.

Incidents and Safety

- One student was sent to ACH ER for a spinal injury sustained during the Homecoming football game. The student has since returned to campus and will continue physical therapy at an outpatient therapy center.
- Minor injuries and acute illnesses addressed promptly following established protocols.
- Emphasis on proactive care and monitoring for students with complex medical needs.

Improvements and Achievements

- Expansion of Paraprofessional Personal Care Training, increasing in-school care capacity.
- Implementation of streamlined communication protocols for discharge instructions, medication updates, and external provider coordination.
- Enhanced allergy management and preventive measures during school events.
- Successful staffing and support for students during the Nashville Goalball Tournament.

Challenges and Next Steps

- Continue monitoring and supporting students with chronic health conditions.
 - Goalball Tournament schedule for Nov. 2025 at St. Louis, MO - Nursing Staff will accompany.
 - Ongoing vigilance during flu/COVID season to minimize illness and absenteeism.
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Special Education & Admissions

Our Team

Randi “Leann” Brazeal the new /old Special Education Director for ARDB started on September 15, 2025.

Laura Yarberry was hired September 29, 2025, and is a Special Education Coordinator. She will serve the students and teachers of the blind campus. She is also graduating with her Educational Specialist degree in Educational Leadership on December 13th.

Belinda Graham is our amazing SPED clerk.

Stacy Swartzlander started Monday, October 27, 2025. She will serve in the same capacity as Laura on the deaf campus and will also be the Gifted and Talented Coordinator for both campuses.

SPED Compliance Due Process Complaints/Corrective Action Plans (CAP)

We are working diligently to clear all corrective action plans from SPED monitoring (Feb. 2023). As of Tuesday, October 14, we have cleared all K-12 monitoring caps! We have cleared 2 of 3 due process complaints. The last one is anticipated to be cleared as soon as possible.

What's Next?

Indirect/Direct Services Special Education Training is anticipated for this month.

Admissions

A new ARDB Admissions Policy and Procedures Manual has been completed. It is ready to be reviewed by our board and DESE.

Growth Strategy

We are working with local school districts and families around the state to help students that are seeking enrollment.

We are making sure that ARDB's Admissions Policy and Procedure Manual ensures all prospective students are appropriately evaluated for eligibility and placed in the educational setting that BEST meets the needs of the students.

Since November 3rd we have admitted one new student to each campus at ARDB. We also have two prospective students for the blind campus.

Related Services

Department Overview

October marked a season of visibility, collaboration, and continued momentum across Speech-Language Pathology, Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, Audiology, and Orientation & Mobility - All fully staffed departments maintained 100% service implementation throughout the month. A few service areas experienced short-term coverage gaps; however, coordination with the Special Education Department is already underway to recover missed minutes and ensure full compliance.

All disciplines contributed to ARDB's joint Blind and Deaf Awareness celebrations, reinforcing our "Better Together" mission.

Language Access & Equity

- Cross-department collaboration continues toward Language Access Plans for all D/HH students by December 2026.
- Early-language tracking expanded through the Story Grammar Marker narrative-analysis model in K-2 classrooms.
- The Related Services Coordinator developed an internal growth framework for the SLP team to unify bilingual goal writing, data collection, and co-teaching models. This living document will guide consistent practice and future PD priorities.

October Awareness Month

- ARDB unified White Cane Day (Oct 15) and World Sight Day (Oct 9) into one campuswide event celebrating independence, communication, and sensory awareness.
- Students and staff participated in tactile navigation challenges, Braille and ASL learning stations, and Deaf/Blind peer partnerships.
- The event reflected the guiding theme “Better Together — One School, One Mission, Many Ways to Shine.”

Integrated Therapy & Behavior Supports

- The Behavior Intervention Planning Team completed fidelity checks and data reviews for high-support students, reinforcing consistency across classrooms and dorms.
- OT and PT staff introduced sensory-regulation and movement-break stations paired with communication visuals created by SLPs.
- Push-in and co-teaching sessions increased across Deaf Department elementary classrooms.

Audiology

- First quarterly coordination meeting with the Arkansas Children’s Hospital Listening Center is scheduled for November 4, 2025. This collaboration will streamline device management, communication goals, and shared data for students served by both agencies.
- The team is in the early stages of designing an “ARDB Listening & Audiology Day” — a recurring on-campus day for audiology appointments, technology checks, and therapy coordination sessions in partnership with ACH staff. This model will strengthen continuity of care, improve family communication, and reduce service gaps statewide.

Leadership & Departmental Alignment

- The October Third Thursday Leadership Meeting emphasized renewed expectations for professionalism, communication, and 90-day goal planning.
- Department heads were tasked with reviewing the Professional Expectations for School Employees and ensuring all team members understand and model these standards in interactions with colleagues, families, and students.
- Leaders began the 90-Day Department Planning process, requiring identification of top priorities, measurable actions, and quarterly progress updates.
- The Related Services Department will integrate these expectations by:
 - Embedding the Professional Expectations into upcoming team meetings and reflections.
 - Finalizing a 90-Day Plan (Nov–Jan) focused on compliance consistency, inter-department collaboration, and expansion of bilingual data tracking.
 - Submitting progress updates during January’s leadership session.

- Leadership also reaffirmed the core principles guiding all departments:
 - Kids First • Process = Progress • Assume Positive Intent.

Medicaid Billing Update (Aspyre)

Status	Amount
Total Billed (YTD)	\$92,341.22
Total Received	\$6,158.84
Pending	\$86,182.38

Reimbursements increased substantially since September as eligibility files and provider re-authorizations finalized. October claims reflect 90% submission compliance across disciplines.

Department Collaboration & Culture

- Welcome back to Lenae Sullivan, M.CD., CCC-SLP, who returned from maternity leave on October 14 and immediately hit the ground running — maintaining all October service minutes for her caseload and ensuring continuity of care.
- Deaf Department SLP Meeting (Oct 23) focused on caseload alignment, due-process timelines, and IEP goal quality assurance.
- Cross-department planning with OT/PT/Audiology strengthened the “one-student-one-plan” model.
- Staff reflections emphasized collaboration, wellness, and transparency per the “Better Together: Leading Across Generations” framework.

Looking Ahead (November Focus)

- Host ACH Listening Center quarterly coordination meeting – Nov 4.
- Complete 90-Day Department Plan and begin tracking metrics.
- Finalize fall ASPYRE documentation audit and prepare Mid-Year Compliance Snapshot for DESE.
- Continue bilingual narrative sampling for winter data review.
- Support ECC/SEL co-teaching units linking emotional vocabulary and functional communication.
- Begin scheduling adjustments for mid-semester testing and reevaluations.

Department Commitment

Language access, sensory equity, and collaborative practice continue to be our driving priorities. Through shared professional standards, proactive planning, and cross-department alignment, ARDB's Related Services Department continues to prove that we are — and will remain — Better Together.

Dorms

- Students and staff have very good operational schedules; they all know what to expect (time of study hour, independent living skills and maintaining a safe environment in which they can grow.
 - Small groups have been created to enable students to talk about different topics, including their feelings and having them share those feelings.
 - For this month staff and students are working on student independence and being able to cope appropriately and demonstrate appropriate life skills. We have implemented a weekly group session with the students where we sit in group setting and talk about our week
 - Policies for dorm staff have been created to ensure that staff know and understand their responsibilities.
 - All dorms continue gearing up for outings, and collaborating with both departments.
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Mental Health and Counseling

Behavior Specialist & Counseling Report

- The Behavior Specialist, Sue Lyn Green, carries a caseload of 13 students as of 10.30.25. All students served are in the Deaf Department and are distributed across Lower School, Middle School and High School.
- Teacher, para and dorm staff training is ongoing as each student's Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP) is review for effectiveness and implementation. To date, 2 group overview trainings have occurred to familiarize staff with the components and purpose of a BIP and twelve 1 to 1 trainings have occurred with teachers and dorm staff collectively to familiarize them with how to implement specific BIPs.
- Parent training, via video chat has been initiated with one student's mother to assist with implementation of behavior strategies at home to create consistency across all environments for this student.
- Most students are showing decreases in challenging behaviors and some are meeting criteria to discharge behavior goals from their BIP. One student has met the criteria to no longer require a BIP.
- ROAR Store: Opened once this month, allowing students to redeem points while reinforcing PBIS expectations of Responsibility, Organization, Achievement, and Respect.

- SEL Classroom Guidance: Launched the *Inside Out* and *Inside Out 2* SEL curriculum with LS Group 1 and Group 2, focusing on emotional awareness, self-regulation, and positive behavior.
 - Student Support: Coordinated Friday Food Bag deliveries each week to assist students and families in need.
 - Secondary WIN Schedule: Continued implementing the schoolwide SEL focus on character traits, aligning with counseling program goals and the ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors framework.
 - Dorm-Based SEL Lessons: Collaborated with Sue Lyn to provide mini-lessons on transition routines, rules, and dorm behavior expectations to support positive dorm life.
 - PBIS Communication: Shared PBIS updates and Red Ribbon Week highlights through ParentSquare to promote schoolwide awareness and family engagement.
 - Tier 2 Support Groups: Provided targeted small-group sessions focused on friendships, communication, and conflict resolution for identified students receiving Tier 2 interventions.
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Statewide Services

Services Provided in October:

46 Developmental Therapy Sessions (0-3 years old)

32 Consults (3-5 years old)

12 IFSP Conferences (0-3)

5 New Referrals (0-3)

2 Family Engagements (0-3)

2 EI Evaluations (0-3)

1 Transition to Part B

Enrollment Numbers

32 IFSP 0-3

52 Consults

Total served for the Deaf and Blind Departments is 84

Medicaid billing reimbursement for October was \$5,580.00, which includes some back billing.

The department's year-to-date billing is \$16,834.00

Professional Development

Kate Berry and Amanda Gregoire, the mother of a toddler in the Early Intervention program, were awarded scholarships to cover their registration, lodging, and transportation to the Hands and Voices Leadership

Conference Scholarship from Regional Early Acquisition of Language (REAL) South Center. The conference was held October 5-7 in Panama City Beach, Florida.

This year's theme was: "Riding the Waves: Anchored in Purpose, Committed to Connection." Highlights included meeting other parents, volunteers, advocates, and professionals from around the world, which provided Kate and Amanda the opportunity to obtain up-to-date information, engage in conversations and networking, and explore content in new and exciting ways. Some of this content included learning about 504s, sibling interactions, and resources to connect our department with strategies on the national and global level.

Attendees to the conference included Hands and Voices (H&V) Chapter Leaders, H&V Guide-by-Your-Side parent volunteers, Advocacy Support & Training (ASTra) advocates, parents of children who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing, professionals, and other family-based organizations.

Compliance and Reporting

All compliance issues are clear this month. The department is waiting for further information about additional funding for Part C allocations.

Professional Collaboration

Continued collaborations with ACH Speech Therapy team, First Connections Provider Call, and Medicaid Billing Specialist.

Meetings attended include Interagency Coordinating Council Quarterly Meeting, Third Thursday Task Force, Board Workshop and Meeting, Universal Newborn Hearing Screening Tracking and Intervention (UNHS) Advisory Board, and SWS Department regular monthly meeting.

The department started collaborating with Henderson State University to provide opportunities for internships with pre-service Developmental Therapists in HSU's Master of Science in Early Intervention program. This month, two interns joined in therapy sessions and IFSP meetings. Additionally, HSU Assistant Professor, Kristen Dickerson, is the program coordinator for Special Education-Early Childhood and Early Intervention, and she is the parent of a child in the Deaf Department.

Special Service Department Goals

- Continue to enhance the infirmity program with professional development/training for all staff.
- Have all documentation (SPED) submitted to DESE Special Education department as required.
- Continued compliance with Special Education/Due Process practices through continued monitoring and training for teachers who serve in the role of "case manager"/Advocate.
- Continued provision of mental health therapy/support for residential students and day students.