



# Arkansas School for the Deaf and Blind

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## Superintendent's Report Arkansas School for the Deaf and Blind July 2025

### Events

#### Summer Admin Retreat 2025

##### Overview:

The three-day Arkansas School for the Deaf and Blind Summer Admin Retreat brought together school leaders to unify our mission, refine systems, enhance safety, improve communication, and strengthen leadership for the 2025–26 school year. The retreat combined visioning exercises, department coordination, and action planning as a foundation for success.

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#### Day 1: Foundation & Goal-Setting

- **Group Norms** set the tone for respectful engagement: raise hands before speaking, assume positive intent, humor, and mutual respect.
- **Visioning Activity:** Attendees described the Arkansas School for the Deaf and Blind as “friendly, humble, service-oriented experts serving ages 0–99,” and committed to eliminating perceptions- of low academic standards, dysfunction, and unsafe practices.
- **Survey-Informed Leadership Goals:**
  1. Improve communication
  2. Define professional standards
  3. Establish annual objectives (to be reviewed at Christmas)
- **Additional Priorities Identified:**
  - Standardize platforms (e.g., Operations Hero, Parent Square)
  - Enhance safety: rapid-response teams, golf cart safety, mandatory training
  - Embed “Kids First,” consistent procedures, positive intent

- Improve budgeting timelines: Nicole will clarify funding and allocation since Arkansas budgets monthly
  - **Finalized Focus Areas:**
    - Systems
    - Safety
    - Communication
  - **Core Leadership Values Defined:**
    - Kids First
    - Procedures = Progress
    - Positive Intent
  - **Assigned Responsibilities & Timelines:**
    - Safety planning & signage: David & Roy
    - Systems inventory & training needs: Kevin (platforms list), Donna (program PD inventory), Tyler (onboarding resources via Google Classroom/Parent Square)
    - Communication hierarchy mapping: Jena by July 28
    - Email response guidelines: Penny by July 28
    - Generational communication training: Beth by July 28
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## Day 2: Campus Vision & Collaboration

- **Campus Improvements & Opportunities:**
  - Suggested repurposing the Helen Keller Building as a museum
  - Proposed independent living spaces in Shults or Huckabee Hall
  - Considered creating a student-run shop and ADCC in Huckabee Hall
- **Future Pool Feasibility Discussion:**
  - Emphasized safety, staff certification, standalone design, accessibility, lifeguard presence, and potential community partnerships
- **Emergency Response Scenarios:**
  - Prepared for tornado sheltering, missing student, flu outbreak, power outage, and unexpected personnel loss
- **Focus Group Outcomes:** Identified three priority areas and brainstormed strategies:
  1. **Enrollment** – student ambassadors, immersion retreats, open houses, family engagement events (“Donuts with Dads”), rebranding, social media, YouTube content
  2. **Public School Support**
  3. **Family Engagement**
- **Next Steps:** Enrollment strategies to be prioritized after Q1 implementation
- **Retreat Recap:** Emphasized the value of diverse input, teamwork, shared responsibility, and the beginning of ongoing collaboration.

- **Celebration of Unity:** “Congratulations—you are officially ONE: Arkansas School for the Deaf and Blind.”
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### Day 3: Collaboration, Strategy & HR Alignment

- **Icebreaker Activity:** “Name That Person” with fun facts
- **Ask & Offer Round-Robin:** One-on-one peer exchanges to request and offer departmental support
- **SWOT Analysis:** Group sessions to evaluate organizational strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats
- **HR Session:** Covered staff classifications, vehicle registration, HR systems (eFinance/APSCN), benefits rollover, FSA processes; clarified exemption from hiring freeze for critical roles; introduced HR team contacts and roles
- **Action Items:**
  - Establish group email/text channel: Tyler
  - Host monthly leadership meetings
  - Plan HR Supervisor training with Vanessa
  - Schedule mid-year goal review at Christmas

This retreat laid a strong foundation for unified and focused leadership at the Arkansas School for the Deaf and Blind.

## Human Capital Updates

### New Hire/Rehire:

1. Bobbi Johnson, Residential Advisor
2. Bobbie Davenport, Licensed Practical Nurse
3. Darren Thomas, Residential Activities Supervisor

### Termination:

1. Brooks King, Maintenance Technician
2. Christy Pettis, Certified Bachelor’s Teacher
3. Lashe’ Dixon, Residential Advisor
4. Bobbi Johnson, Residential Advisor

### Retirement:

1. Bobby Owens, Maintenance Supervisor
2. Eddie Schmeckenbecher, Family & Student Engagement Services

## School Operations Updates

### Key Highlights:

- This year marked the first-ever collaborative ASD/ASB summer camp, which was a great success. Week 1 included 17 elementary students; Week 2 included 10 secondary students. Staff collaborated effectively across both schools.
- A special thank-you goes to the University of Arkansas at Little Rock Orientation and Mobility students for their support with the dorms and day camp.
- The JumpStart program served 18 students this summer. Further details are included in Jena McDonnell's report.

#### **Challenges Faced:**

- Staffing for summer programs in the dorms remained a consistent challenge.

#### **School Demographics**

- We are currently in the registration process for the 2025–2026 school year. Final enrollment numbers are pending.

**Jump Start**, the high school summer internship program for blind or visually impaired students was held from June 16 - 27. Eighteen students participated. Internships work sites included KARK Chanel 4, the AR State Library, UA Little Rock, Helping Hand food pantry, Arkansas I-Can and more. Students gained real world work experience while being ambassadors for the blind and visually impaired in our community.

**Registration for 2025-2026:** 31 students have registered for school during the summer camps. There are two more student registration dates for next school year. The eligibility committee has approved 5 new deaf students and 1 new visually impaired student. There are several additional students for both campuses at various stages of the application process to be reviewed for admission. We are estimating enrollment at 150 students for both campuses.

The merge has added complexity to the registration process. ADE has advised that online registration cannot be used until the new LEA (6093) is set up. The earliest date provided us to begin building the new LEA is Thursday, July 10, 2025. Until then, registration is being completed using paper forms.

#### **Staff Recognition**

##### **Teacher Shoutout:**

- All staff involved in the summer programs deserve recognition for managing the many moving parts.
- Special appreciation to Coach Brian Tanner, who served as the lead teacher for summer camp. He not only led daytime activities but also adjusted his schedule to drive the dorm trips to Cabot Water Park each week. His dedication was tireless and greatly valued.

## **Behavioral Data**

### **Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS):**

- A PBIS framework is currently in development.

## **Action Plan for Improvement**

### **Goals for the Upcoming Month:**

- Begin planning and programming for the 2025–2026 school year.

### **Strategies and Interventions:**

- Identify and prioritize needs for the new school year.

### **Success Factors:**

- Review outstanding tasks and track progress against key deadlines.

## **Facilities Department**

### **Executive Summary**

June was an active month, primarily focused on groundskeeping and campus moving projects.

### **Maintenance and Repairs**

No major issues to report—only minor repairs, such as a few clogged toilets.

### **Facilities Improvement Projects**

Several projects remain pending, as students and staff were on campus through the end of June for summer school. These include:

- Organizing and cleaning the ASBVI Maintenance Shop
- Installing tankless water heater racks in Marsden and Bradley
- Converting NAC gym lighting from high-energy bulbs to LED fixtures

### **Energy and Sustainability**

We continue to implement energy-saving measures wherever feasible. For example, when fluorescent bulbs require replacement, fixtures are either retrofitted or replaced with ballast-bypass LED lamps. Preventive maintenance (PM) on HVAC equipment also contributes to more efficient energy use.

Larger energy-efficiency projects—those beyond lighting and PM work—will fall under capital improvements and require additional resources outside the department’s regular scope.

### **Sustainability Initiatives:**

Work has begun on developing a recycling program, scheduled to launch alongside the opening of the new building in winter 2027. The program aims to reduce waste disposal costs and potentially generate revenue through recycling efforts. More information will be included in future updates.

## **Staffing and Training**

**Staffing:** The department saw a net loss of one staff member in June due to the retirement of Bobby Owens on June 27, 2025.

**Training:** On June 12, the custodial team attended the first annual ASPMA Custodial Conference hosted by Lake Hamilton School District, featuring training and breakout sessions by industry professionals. Both the maintenance and custodial teams are scheduled to attend training at the Arkansas River Education Service Cooperative on August 4. Topics will include bloodborne pathogens, chemical safety, asbestos handling, and more.

## **Challenges and Opportunities**

### **Challenges:**

- Staffing continues to be a significant challenge. The current team cannot meet all demands for preventive maintenance, grounds upkeep, and corrective work in a timely manner.
- The transition to the new Arkansas School for the Deaf and Blind agency raises questions—particularly around changes to procurement protocols that may impact operations.

### **Opportunities:**

- The department has identified cost-saving measures by closing utility accounts with no usage, avoiding unnecessary monthly charges. A full review of all utility accounts is underway to identify additional savings.

## **Special Services Department**

### **Statewide Services**

#### **Program Activity:**

- 38 developmental therapy sessions (ages 0–3)
- 2 consults (ages 3–5)

- 12 IFSP conferences, 3 new referrals, 2 family engagements, 1 early intervention evaluation (all 0–3)
- 2 transitions to Part B services
- First Connections awarded additional funding of \$1,008

#### **Staff Training & Development:**

- Dr. Cobb completed Visual Communication and Sign Language (VCSL) checklist training to assess early language development in infants and toddlers.
- Dr. Cobb and Kate Berry also trained on the Child Cochlear Implant Profile (CHIP) Rating Scale, used for cochlear implant candidacy assessments. Teamwide training is planned for July.
- Kate attended follow-up sessions on ECHO training and participated in a workshop on language acquisition and deprivation in Deaf/Hard of Hearing children ages birth–3.

#### **Compliance & Collaboration:**

- The team met with a Medicaid specialist to resolve billing issues for Part C services.
- Submitted a joint bid for state audiology services alongside EHDI.
- Initiated quarterly meetings with Hands and Voices to enhance family engagement.
- Continued partnership with EHDI, which refers all infants who do not pass hearing screenings.
- A new Arkansas Hearing and Vision collaboration website is being developed to connect families with resources from both Deaf and Blind departments.
- Ongoing collaboration with Arkansas Children’s Hospital’s TLC team to align client lists and referrals.

## **Interpreting**

### **Overview**

The Interpreting Services Department at the Arkansas School for the Deaf and Blind provides communication access for Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing students, staff, and families. Services include ASL and spoken language interpreting across all campus activities and events.

### **Staffing**

- Staff Interpreters: 1 - Clayton Higgins, Interpreter Coordinator
- Consistent Direct Contractors: 8
- Interpreting Agency: Communication Plus+
- Interns: 2 expected in the fall

### **Program Highlights**

- Provided interpreting support for the SkillsUSA team. Following conversations with national leadership, SkillsUSA will revise registration forms to include interpreter and communication preferences.
- The Arkansas School for the Deaf and Blind is partnering with Sorenson to offer “Sorenson Express,” providing short-term on-demand interpreting via mobile devices for staff.
- Sorenson will also donate \$2,000 to student fundraising initiatives in exchange for promotional opportunities and student outreach on video relay services.
- Identified student needs in communication skills and understanding interpreter use in real-world settings. Plans are underway for targeted instruction.

### **Training & Development**

- Interpreters are scheduled for Summer Optional PD and Back-to-School PD.
- Clayton will lead interpreter training and present sessions to both Deaf and Blind students, as well as dorm residents, on independent living and communication skills.

### **Initiatives**

- New SOPs implemented for interpreter requests (e.g., 72-hour advance notice, proper engagement practices).
- Increased interdepartmental collaboration to promote best practices for interpreter use and communication accessibility.

### **Challenges**

- Interpreter shortages are increasing reliance on agency services.
- Additional training is needed to orient spoken language interpreters to campus procedures.

### **Goals**

- Host a campus workshop on ethics and dual roles in educational interpreting.

## **Special Education and Admissions**

### **Admissions Activity**

**ASD Tours Held:** 1 (Early Childhood student, age 2.5)

**New Admissions to ASD:** 5 students

**Admissions Denied:** 3 students

### **IEP Activity**

#### **Activity**

IEP Meetings and Summary of Performance (SOPs)	1
Existing Data Reviews (EDRs)	0



Evaluation Programming Conferences with IEP Development	3
Manifestation Determination Reviews (MDRs)	1
Early Childhood Transitions to Kindergarten	1

### Significant Update

Two new state complaints were filed in June—one for ASBVI and one for ASD.

### Student Support Highlights

- The ASD Transition Team has established recurring monthly meetings with Transition Consultant Jeremy Hogue. The team is revising the PISA plan and developing a High School Transition Program for grades 8–13.
- Partnership with the University of Kansas continues to support the GSC App and SDLMI Research (Cohort 2). Digital permission slips will be sent in July via ParentSquare to families of incoming 9th–12th graders for the 2025–2026 school year.
- State Advisors conducted their monthly file review and meeting.
- Collaborated with Kevin on the Indistar section regarding Special Education information.
- Held a 1:1 meeting with ADCC Director to discuss transition programming.
- Conducted data checks and verification for:
  - Primary disability documentation in eSchool vs. student paperwork.
  - Student addresses and school district assignments—several discrepancies found and corrected across both ASD and ASBVI. The root cause appears to be families not updating us when they move or incorrect school district entries in eSchool.
- Ongoing work to revamp Admissions Policy and Procedures with the team.
- SpedTrack is exploring options for platform consolidation. While no progress was made this month, administrators completed self-paced training modules.
- Complaint interviews were conducted for the following cases:
  - **C-25-68** (ASD)
  - **C-25-71** (ASBVI)

### Professional Development & Training

- Tier 1 and Legal Updates provided by Stacy.

### Challenges & Successes

#### Challenges

Continued focus on maintaining compliant paperwork

#### Successes

High School Transition Team progress  
Successful Admissions Team coordination

