



Arkansas School for the Blind & Visually Impaired

2600 W. Markham • Little Rock, Arkansas • 72205 • (501) 296-1810 • Fax (501) 296-1831

Jacob Oliva
Secretary of Education

Dr. Chris Barnes
Interim Superintendent



Board of Trustees Superintendent Report May 2025

Dr. Chris Barnes, Interim Superintendent

This month, Arkansas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (ASBVI) has been focused on student learning amidst many extracurricular activities. Below are some major points showcasing **ASBVI PRIDE** for the current month:

ASBVI Enrollment: 63 students

PreKindergarten-Grade 6 = 31 students

Grade 7-Grade 12 = 32 students

Overall attendance held steady for the month of April.

Highlights and Activities

1. **ATLAS Summative Assessment:** ASBVI administered the ATLAS summative assessment to students at the start of the testing window, April 14. **Mrs. Lori Cole and Mr. Dakota Dalton** worked through all the accommodations with our staff to ensure that the testing was accessible for all of our students. The flexibility of this team in working through issues cannot be over emphasized. Each time there was a problem, the team connected with the DESE Student Assessment office and found a solution. Notably, a DESE testing monitor visited on the final day of scheduled testing to inspect our testing procedures and issued a clean report. Great job to our team!
2. **ASBVI Prom:** On Wednesday, April 23, ASBVI held its annual Prom at the Burns Park Hospitality House in North Little Rock, bringing the glamour and intrigue of the Roaring Twenties to life. With a Prohibition-era theme, the event featured elegant decorations, delicious food, and lively music that kept everyone dancing throughout the evening. A highlight of the night was an interactive murder mystery performance, which captivated guests and showcased the dramatic



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talents of our students. Their enthusiastic participation brought the storyline to life, turning the evening into a theatrical experience full of energy and excitement. The festivities were led by **Mr. Dakota Dalton**, the charismatic Master of Ceremonies, whose lively hosting kept the night running smoothly. He was supported by an outstanding team of staff members, including **Ms. Jazmyn Adams, Ms. Trista Burton, Ms. Debbie Chambers, Ms. Nikki Finney, Ms. Courtney Hauf, Ms. Gracie Phillips, Mr. Terry Powell, Ms. Christina Robertson, Ms. Toni Russell**, and others who worked diligently behind the scenes to ensure the event's success. Special thanks go to **Ms. Barbara Cole** for her expert makeup artistry and to **Mr. Brian Tanner** for adding flair in his role as a chauffeur. We also extend our gratitude to alumna **Katherine Thacker (DJ Kat)**, who provided music that kept the crowd energized all evening long. The event was a true team effort, with contributions from every member of the ASBVI staff present—from planning and decorating to clean-up. Their creativity, enthusiasm, and dedication made the evening a memorable experience for all who attended. ASBVI continues to demonstrate a remarkable commitment to creating joyful and inclusive events for our students.

3. **Art Beyond Sight and Sound at Crystal Bridges:** On Tuesday, April 23, high school students from ASBVI and ASD took part in the **Art Beyond Sight and Sound** event at the renowned **Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art** in Bentonville. Designed specifically for blind and deaf students from across the state, this unique event offered inclusive and accessible ways to experience art while also introducing students to potential career opportunities within the museum and broader art world. Students in grades 10 through 12 from both ASBVI and ASD participated in the free event, which has been nearly a year in the making. Through hands-on activities, guided explorations, and curated exhibits, students engaged with art on their own terms—through touch, sound, and other sensory-rich experiences.

Following the museum visit, the group traveled to **Camp War Eagle** where they spent the night in preparation for another major opportunity the next day—a guided tour of the **University of Arkansas** campus in Fayetteville on



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Wednesday, April 24. This tour gave students a firsthand look at college life and allowed them to explore potential pathways for their future education.

The collaboration and hospitality extended by Crystal Bridges, Camp War Eagle, and the University of Arkansas were exceptional. All three institutions expressed their appreciation for the students' respectful behavior, curiosity, and engagement—and each extended open invitations for future visits. The students truly represented ASBVI and ASD with pride and maturity. Special thanks go to all the staff members who worked tirelessly to plan, coordinate, chaperone, and transport students for this meaningful experience. Their efforts helped make this multi-day event a success and provided students with lasting memories and valuable exposure to both art and higher education.

4. **EAST Night Out/Parent Dinner/Spring Concert:** On Thursday, May 8, ASBVI hosted an exciting evening filled with creativity, achievement, and community connection. The event brought families, students, and staff together to celebrate a successful semester through project showcases, shared meals, and musical performances. The evening began with EAST Night Out at 4:30 p.m., where students in the EAST (Education Accelerated by Service and Technology) program presented a variety of innovative projects. These student-led initiatives demonstrated how technology and service can come together to make a meaningful impact on campus and beyond. Families and visitors had the opportunity to interact with students and learn about their research, design process, and community goals. Mrs. Phyllis Gunderman and the EAST student leadership did a fantastic job facilitating the showcase. Afterward, guests were treated to a parent dinner at 5:00 p.m., prepared and served by **Mrs. Barbara Cole and the ASBVI Food Service team**. The meal offered a chance for parents and staff to connect and unwind before the next event. At 6:00 p.m., the spotlight turned to our music students during the Spring Concert. Under the leadership of **Mr. Algis Staskevecius and Ms. Alicia Reddick**, students performed a variety of pieces that highlighted their hard work and musical development over the semester. Their performances were met with enthusiastic applause and pride from families and staff alike. Special thanks to all the staff



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that coordinated a successful evening of events. The entire evening was a celebration of student growth, talent, and the vibrant school community at ASBVI.

5. **March Students of the Month:** Jhaneli Diaz-Roman (Elementary) and Ka'Riyah Griffin (Secondary)
6. **Staff Shout-Out:** As the school year winds down, ASBVI has taken time to reflect on and celebrate the incredible individuals who make our school a vibrant, supportive, and successful community. In recent weeks, we've recognized **Teacher Appreciation Week, Nurse Appreciation Day, Administrative Professionals Day, Principal Appreciation Day, and School Lunch Hero Day**—each offering a moment to honor the many dedicated professionals who contribute to our shared mission. Our **teachers** remain at the heart of what we do, using their creativity, expertise, and care to guide, inspire, and empower students every day. Their impact is immeasurable, and we are deeply grateful for their commitment. Equally essential are the many team members who support our students and staff in countless ways—**nurses, counselors, paraprofessionals, maintenance and custodial staff, office personnel, food service teams, residential staff, related service providers, security, transportation, and administrators**. Each plays a vital role in creating the safe, nurturing, and enriching environment where students can grow and thrive. Whether working behind the scenes or on the front lines, every member of the ASBVI family brings value, heart, and professionalism to their work. As we reflect on these appreciation events, we are reminded that it takes a dedicated, collaborative team to make a meaningful impact—and we are proud to have one of the very best. Thank you to every staff member for all that you do.
7. **Upcoming Events:**
 - ASBVI High School Graduation: Thursday, May 22
 - Senior Breakfast: 8:00am in Leo's Lair
 - Graduation: 10:00am in Woolly Auditorium
 - ARKDB Building Project Family and Community Reveal: Thursday, May 22 at 2:00pm-3:30pm in ASD Parnell Hall



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- Senior Trip to Silver Dollar City: Tuesday, May 27
- West Wing Awards and Kindergarten Graduation: Wednesday, May 28 at 9:30am in the LC Multipurpose Room
- Sixth Grade Graduation: Thursday, May 29 at 10:30am in the LC Multipurpose Room
- Last Day of School: Friday, June 6
- ASBVI Summer Programs:
 - June 16-20: Students entering Grades 1-6 in Fall 2025
 - June 23-27: Students through age 16
- DSB Jump Start (for students Ages 16-19)
 - June 10-12: Virtual
 - June 16-27 (M-F): Onsite Assignments

Human Capital Updates

ASBVI has made great strides at recruiting qualified staff to fill our open vacancies. Our principals and program supervisors have done a fantastic job interviewing and making recommendations. The ADE Human Resources team is working on the onboarding process with those individuals and we are expecting to have teacher positions filled for start to the Fall 2025 and our ancillary staff vacancies filled very soon.

ASBVI is presently looking to hiring staff for the upcoming school year in addition to some other. The following positions are currently open and advertised:

- Teacher—Special Education (one candidate is filled; looking for one more)
- Teacher—Elementary—will be filled for the 2025-2026 school year
- Nurse—Registered Nurse (1) and LPN (2)—for immediate hire
- Residential Advisors (2)—had four vacancies and have recommended two for onboarding. Looking for two more to be filled for immediate hire
- Residential Activities Supervisor—position posted and currently interviewing for immediate hire

Building Project Updates



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While the academic year is coming to a close, progress on the new building project continues at a steady pace. The former structures on the construction site have been fully demolished, and groundwork is now underway. Architects from SCM and MMA have been working closely with internal stakeholder groups to finalize key aspects of the building's layout. They will also provide a community project reveal scheduled for May 22 in Parnell Hall, between ASBVI and ASD graduation ceremonies, where family and community stakeholders will be invited to preview the design features of the new facility.

In related news, Kevin Lentz and the architectural teams from SCM and MMA will be meeting with the Arkansas Natural and Cultural Resources Council (ANCRC) on May 21 to present a grant proposal for capital improvements to Parnell Hall, which is being incorporated into the broader building project. ASBVI and ASD are hopeful for a positive outcome, as ANCRC has previously supported enhancements tied to historical and cultural preservation on campus.

Looking ahead, major topographical changes to the construction site are expected over the summer. Nabholz Construction, in coordination with subcontractors and engineers, will be reshaping the terrain to create a more level building site—an essential step before foundation work can begin.