



Arkansas School for the Deaf and Blind

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Jacob Oliva
Secretary

K. Nicole Walsh
Superintendent

ARDB Superintendent Report August 2026

Update

During July, ARDB completed several campus improvement projects focused on safety, visibility, and beautification. We also continued refining internal processes and budgets to reduce unnecessary costs, successfully launched the new school year, and look forward to promoting ARDB while welcoming additional students throughout the year.

- Construction for our new perimeter fence has officially begun! The fence will border the ARDB campus and serve as an increased security measure for our school. Completion is expected in early fall.
- Students from both the Deaf and Blind Departments were merged into Marsden and Bradley dormitories to enhance student safety, supervision, and access to support services. The transition, which was successfully tested during summer camp, allows students to have both nursing and security staff in the dorms, providing an added layer of safety and care.
- The city's removal of the pedestrian bridge on Markham Street has enhanced campus security by eliminating direct access from the bridge stairs onto campus.
- Conducted numerous interviews as we continue working to fill vacant positions across campus
- Held tours of the new building on August 7 for staff who wished to see the progress, with many expressing excitement about the opportunities and possibilities the new space represents.
- We kicked off the school year with two weeks of professional development, beginning with optional summer sessions followed by a week of required training and preparation.
- Began meeting one-on-one with each member of the administrative team to discuss goals and develop three-year visions for their departments.
- Welcomed students and families back to campus through our Welcome Back Fair and registration event, with support and participation from some of our board members.
- Nicole's monthly classroom observation visits with principals began this week.
- Beginning in September, Nicole and members of the Instructional Leadership Team will each spend one day per month serving as classroom substitutes to stay connected to classroom experiences and ensure substitute plans are clear and effective.

Human Capital Update

Terminations/Resignations

- a. Breanna Rhodes, Teacher I
- b. Tricia Tighe, Teacher II
- c. Tasia Reynolds, Education Paraprofessional
- d. Melissa Johnson, Residential Care Coordinator
- e. Anne Marie Toomer, Teacher II

Operations Update

Kurt Swartzlander, Division Fiscal Administrator & Director of Operations

Accomplishments

- Staff worked on developing 30/60/90 day plans by their departments.
- Finance worked on Year End closing procedures for close of fiscal year 2026.
- Finance Staff have been playing catch up and learning how the new accounting software works.
- Filled Maintenance Tech Position by promoting from a housekeeping position.
- Filled Accountant II position by promoting from a fiscal services position.
- Continued work on school safety assessment due in September
- Implemented new budgets within procurement express for FY2027

Challenges

- Need to fill 2 Housekeeper, 1 security guard and 1 finance position(s).

Upcoming Projects/Priorities for the next 30-60 days

- Update security procedures for new dorm office location and future plans following completion of the new school building.
- Schedule 2 vans to go to M/R.
- Rebid Transportation bid as there was only one bidder and price was about 45% higher than previous year pricing.

Education Update – Deaf Department

KaAnn Varner, Principal

Data Highlights

Enrollment:

- 38 Lower School Students
- 31 Upper School Students

Accomplishments

- Developed and completed an MOU with Little Rock Metro that allows ARDB students to take classes there. Two students are enrolled. They will take courses in Construction Trades, Automotive Collision Repair and Automotive Services.
- Partnership with Jacksonville Christian Academy to provide opportunity for ARDB student athletes to play football.
- Hired three new teachers: Kallen Boyett, Special Education; Sabrina Horton, Elementary; Heath Simpson, Physical Education.
- Attended a three-day TESS Training at the Arkansas River Educational Services Co-op and passed the test to become a certified TESS Evaluator.

Upcoming Projects/Priorities for the next 30-60 days

- Revising Standards Based Report Cards
 - Refining Reading Incentive Plans
 - Ensure the Master Schedule is complete, and schedules are ready for students
 - Complete online components for Teacher Additional Licensure Plans, Teacher Licensure Plans and Aspiring Teacher Licensure Plans and enter into the ADE District Portal.
 - Implement staff sign language classes
 - Plan for SLPI roll-out
 - Back to School Assembly for Students
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Education Update – Blind Department

Lori Cole, Principal

Executive Summary

July was a busy month reviewing the 2025-26 school year for growth as well as evaluating our systems. The Blind Department administrative team worked together to reflect on the year and identify areas for continued improvement.

Data Highlights

Current Enrollment:

- 23 Lower School Students
- 27 Upper School Students

Registration continues for the upcoming 2026-27 school year. Many of the Blind Department teachers attended the ADE DESE Summit and the Summer Optional PD week. The CATT (Centers for Assistive Technology Training) from the Alabama Institute for the Deaf and Blind) and Nanopac hosted training sessions in using the Monarch braille tablet, embossers and the JAWS screenreader with Focus 40 braille displays. Additional trainings included CPR, CPI, and the Everway SPED curriculum.

Accomplishments

- 2026-2027 school year working schedules were ready for registration day.

Challenges

- A continuing challenge is balancing enrollment needs with the strategic allocation of staff and resources to maximize student achievement. As enrollment grows, opportunities continue to emerge to refine systems, build capacity, and enhance practices that support a positive experience for students and families.

Upcoming Projects/Priorities for the next 30-60 days

30–60–90 Day Priorities:

- Finalize key instructional systems, including standards-based report cards, student schedules, IXL settings, testing dates, and classroom observation schedules.
- Coordinate student supports, including related services, low vision clinic scheduling, case manager assignments, educational placements, and teacher placements.
- Clarify staff expectations, professional development plans, PLC norms, attendance incentives, communication processes, and parent/family engagement priorities.
- Strengthen shared systems for tracking standards, protecting instructional time, monitoring student learning, meeting reporting deadlines, and maintaining consistent classroom presence.
- Build shared commitments with students, families, and staff to support strong partnerships, positive intent, and continued student growth.

Interpreting Services Update

Clayton Higgins

Executive Summary

July was full of learning and development. The interpreting department completed 2 presentations to be submitted for approval to begin the process of providing CEUs and workshops to Arkansas interpreters. Clayton interpreted at the ADE Summit to further showcasing ARDB and ADE's commitment to accessibility and unity. The interpreting department hosted the ARDB/UALR internship partner meeting and successfully onboarded our newest intern.

Data Highlights

Category	This month (July)	YTD	FY26
Educational	2	2	335
Mental Health Sessions	1	1	209
Medical Assignments	0	0	198
IEP Related Meetings	1	1	161
Staff Meetings	21	21	397
After-Hours	0	0	47
Spoken Language	0	0	56
Other Events (PD, etc.)	37	37	270
TOTAL	62	62	1673

The table above reflects interpreting assignments where interpreter services were provided across educational, mental health, staff meeting, professional development, and other campus-related settings.

Accomplishments

- Cora Majan attended the Mental Health Interpreter Training Institute to bring back new skills and approaches while interpreting for mental health clinicians on campus.
- Interpreting Intern Jacy Roth started her first week observing interpreters on campus for Summer Optional PD

Challenges

- Non-competitive pay for new staff interpreters.
- Excess assignments requiring interpreter presence with only 2 staff interpreters

Upcoming Projects/Priorities for the next 30-60 days

- Presentation completion and approval
- Hiring process for 3rd staff interpreter

Large Costs or Savings

- PD costs during the month of July were higher than normal due to a variety of Professional Development happening simultaneously.

Development Department Update

Kevin Lentz, Director of Development

Executive Summary

The Development Department focused on communication, outreach, and operational support across the district. Staff supported 90 events between June 1 and July 31, launched monthly Ghost Tours as a community engagement initiative, and supported the Back-to-School Fair. Staff also streamlined district communication processes through ParentSquare, restored access to Canva resources following the district email migration, coordinated website, handbook, and policy updates, provided staff training during professional development week, and submitted the AR App. Priorities for the next 30 to 60 days include fundraising preparation, recruitment outreach, event coordination, and continued optimization of core departmental systems and processes.

Accomplishments

1. Oversaw 90 events between June 1 and July 31, supporting school operations and community engagement throughout the summer.
2. Launched monthly Ghost Tours — two tours in July generated \$825 in revenue. Special thanks to Rob Fagan for leading these tours.
3. Led Canva account reconciliation after staff email migration to ar-db.org resulted in loss of access to prior designs. Worked with staff to restore access to existing materials.
4. Streamlined the ParentSquare posting process to centralize district-wide communications through the Development office, including facilitating class and group creation and ensuring the most important information is shared at the district level.
5. Submitted the AR App and offered ParentSquare training during professional development week.
6. Supported the Back-to-School Fair.
7. Coordinated handbook and policy updates with departments for posting to the ARDB website.
8. Coordinated website design and content updates.

Upcoming Projects / Priorities for the Next 30–60 Days

- Complete budget planning and funding allocations for 2027 Perkins 1% and Title programs.
 - Begin planning and implementation of year-end and holiday fundraising initiatives.
 - Participate in university and community recruitment events to support staff and volunteer outreach.
 - Plan and coordinate staff appreciation, donor engagement, and community outreach events scheduled for October and November.
 - Continue optimization of GiveButter, ParentSquare, Events HQ, and Canva to improve efficiency, consistency, and staff support.
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Special Services Update

Teresa Doan, Director of Special Services

(Special Education, Mental Health & Counseling, Related Services, Statewide Services, Residential Life, Health Services, Child Nutrition, Gifted & Talented)

Executive Summary

During the month of July, the Department of Special Services primarily focused on preparation for the new school year. Each sub-department completed activities with the goal of meeting specific needs for our students.

Data Highlights

- Related Services continues to coordinate speech-language pathology, occupational therapy, physical therapy, orientation and mobility, audiology and low vision services to meet the needs of our students in addition to offering assistance via free evaluations for students not in attendance at ARDB.
- The Related Services Department also successfully completed its first comprehensive review of contracted therapy services garnering data to enable services to be offered with fidelity.
- The GT Program continues to grow and remains in compliance successfully offering GT and enrichment support to students and teachers.
- Senior students will have the opportunity to participate in Independent Living Skills training while living in an apartment.

Accomplishments

- Many members of the Special Services department attended the ADE Summit and participated in professional development and received valuable information regarding the wide scope of education in Arkansas.
- The Residential Life program successfully merged and is providing home-life services in Marsden and Bradley dormitories located at the Deaf Department.
- Child Nutrition successfully completed a 7-week menu cycle.
- One senior has successfully moved into an apartment.

Challenges

- Ensuring staff vacancies are filled within an appropriate and timely manner.

Large Cost Savings

- Reclassifying and filling the vacant OT Position is expected to reduce long-term dependence on higher-cost contracted OT services. Current contract amendments are also intended to ensure that ARDB pays direct-service rates only for verified direct or evaluation services.
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