



# Arkansas School for the Deaf and Blind

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Jacob Oliva  
Secretary

K. Nicole Walsh  
Superintendent

## ARDB Superintendent Report May 2026

### Update

This month was filled with meaningful celebrations, student achievements, and positive staff engagement across ARDB.

- Dallas Cathey had the amazing opportunity to join Steven Davis, the voice of the Arkansas Travelers, in the broadcast booth to help announce a game - an experience he handled with professionalism and enthusiasm.
- We were proud to celebrate our teachers during Teacher Appreciation Week with a coffee and pastries social. We are deeply grateful for all of our student-facing staff who make a real difference in students' lives each day.
- The prom was held for both departments and was a wonderful event - students looked amazing and had a great time!
- Our 6th–8th grade robotics students represented ARDB at the 7th annual NRSC VEX IQ Robotics Competition for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in Colorado Springs, competing alongside 32 teams from across the country. They placed 23rd in the Teamwork Competition and 21st in the Individual Driving and Autonomous Programming Skills category, an accomplishment that really shows their hard work and growing skills.
- The Athletic Banquet was a great time for both departments. Our students have had the opportunity to take part in Track, Goalball, Cheer, Bowling, Football, Cross Country, Academic Bowl, and Basketball.
- Looking ahead, summer camp registration is now open, and ARDB is excited to join Camp Aldersgate in their free summer camp for coming 1st graders through age 16 from across Arkansas who are blind, low vision, Deaf, or hard of hearing. This opportunity will allow students to participate in lessons and activities aligned with the Expanded Core Curriculum, supporting independence and essential life skills – such an amazing opportunity.
- Additionally, staff morale and recognition are growing through the launch of "Hump Day Heroes," a weekly initiative created by Mrs. Lori Cole that encourages staff to recognize one another's strengths and contributions. Participation has been high, and the initiative has really led to seeing the good that is all around and the deep dedication of our ARDB team.

## Human Capital Update

### New Hires/Rehires/Transfer

Cordell Farsee, Housekeeper

Kystal Barnett, Housekeeper

### Terminations/Resignations

Matthew Cowart, Cook

### Retirement

Clay Herren, Maintenance Technician

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## Operations Update

Kurt Swartzlander, Division Fiscal Administrator & Director of Operations

### Executive Summary

This was busy month especially for the inventory department. We are trying to organize, inventory and prep for M&R all assets across both campuses.

### Accomplishments

- Completed request to DFA to remove eligible items from asset listing with a value of less than \$2,500 under the new S4/Hana asset conversion process. Also, completed legislative auditor requests pertaining to assets at the school. Coordinated with IT to organize, inventory and prep for M&R (as eligible) all IT equipment.
- Began process of emptying shipping containers filled before demolition of old school buildings. Emptied two of 6 and sorted contents for both inventory and M&R purpose
- Security created a bed check app for dorm staff use.
- Worked with OSP on draft of new Transportation bid. Current bid expires at end of current fiscal year.

### Challenges

Continuing coordination of repairs on fire alarm systems required by the State fire marshal.

### Upcoming Projects/Priorities for the next 30-60 days

- Finalize school internal budget following state AOP.
- Complete emptying and sorting of remaining shipping containers by end of May.

- Complete 100% inventory before end of current fiscal year.

## Large Costs or Savings

Emptying shipping containers and sending back to rental company will result in approximately \$1,800 per month.

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## Education Update – Deaf Department

KaAnn Varner, Principal

### Data Highlights

Enrollment:

- 56 Lower School Students
- 34 Upper School Students

Attendance:

- Lower School: 86.49%
- Upper School: 98.33%

Safety or behavior data: Average number of referrals per day: 2.44

- Location of most referrals:

Dorm	36.07%
Classroom	32.51%
Playground	13.11%
Cafeteria	6.56 %

- Suspensions

In School Suspension	0
Out of School Suspension	1

### Accomplishments

- ATLAS Testing – Growth Noted
- A new elementary Leopard student joined ARDB. The student is acquiring language at a very rapid rate. He has come from just barely able to gesture to being able to fingerspell the word “money”.
- Deaf Awareness Day at the Capitol – April 7<sup>th</sup>. Supt. Nicole Walsh, JR Courtright, and Dr. Glenn Anderson spoke at the program. Deaf Dept. seniors presented Deaf History. Culinary Arts students made and provided delicious I Love You hand shaped cookies.

## Challenges

- The ATLAS test is challenging for everyone. The Leopards also found challenges with the test. Though Arkansas is doing a very good job of providing accommodations for the test, specifically having all components signed online except for the reading portion is a huge win for Deaf/Hard of Hearing students. However, there is room for improvement in this component. Care needs to be taken to make sure Arkansas regional signs are used. Unfamiliar signs can cause significant test discrepancies.
- Too much time out of class due to too many High School Transition activities. There are plans to look more carefully at all off campus transition activities for the year and determine which students really benefit from each activity, avoid duplicating activities and determine dates for the school year by July 1 so that they can be worked seamlessly into the school year schedule.
- Implementing the ARC reading curriculum has been challenging this year, as it is a brand-new program adopted by ARDB for both the Lions and Leopards. Staff have had to learn how to effectively balance time across the various components of the curriculum, ensure adequate access to high-interest texts at appropriate reading levels, and secure all necessary instructional materials. Despite these initial challenges, implementation has been successful, and student growth is already being observed as a result of using the program. What began as a significant challenge has become an area of growth and progress, with the understanding that staff will continue to refine and strengthen implementation as they move forward.

## Upcoming Projects/Priorities for the next 30-60 days

- Complete 2026-2027 School Year Schedule
- Finalize Camp Aldersgate Plans
- Evaluations
- Ensuring E-School Resolutions
- Teachers complete Science or Reading requirements or submit plans to do so
- Finalize Athletics plans for 2026-2027 School year

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## Education Update – Blind Department

Lori Cole, Principal

### Executive Summary

April held the following events: Eggstravaganza, STEM fair for secondary students, Goalball alumni game, Deaf Awareness Day at the Capital, Spring Music Concert, Atlas Summative Assessments, and our family literacy night. Students successfully completed the ATLAS assessments, with 50% of the student population demonstrating academic growth this year. While there were several

noted to have lower scores, several contributing factors have been identified. One such factor includes the implementation of a new High-Quality Instructional Material (HQIM) for English Language Arts, which required adjustments in instructional practice and student familiarity. These results provide valuable insight and will help guide continued instructional support and refinement moving forward.

## Data Highlights

Current Enrollment Blind Department:

- Elementary School - 28
- Secondary School - 26
- Total Students Blind Department: 54

## Accomplishments

- Atlas Summative testing window successfully completed.
- Attendance improving through phone calls to parents and reminders of the possibility of truancy court.

## Challenges

Student behavior can be a challenge at times. The ARDB mental health team has been invaluable.

## Upcoming Projects/Priorities for the next 30-60 days

- ATLAS incentive field trips to the park or movies
- Summer Camp and Jump Start summer program – coordinating and awaiting MOU for Camp Aldersgate and DCFS.

## Large Costs or Savings

No large costs items noted for May.

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## Interpreting Services Update

Clayton Higgins

### Executive Summary

April saw an increase in interpreter requests, but it was handled well with the new 5/10 day request timeframe and the department has been able to keep contracting costs to the minimum possible by using a collaborative scheduling approach. Clayton attended the Arkansas Administrative Office of the Courts legal interpreter training and is now taking part in court observations to serve as an expert resource for ARDB in ASL accessibility for legal proceedings. Cora has successfully passed lesson 3 of her Braille transcriber program and is well on her way to becoming certified.

## Data Highlights

### April Activity

- Educational assignments: 2
- Mental health sessions: 15
- Medical assignments: 10
- IEP-related meetings: 12
- Staff meetings: 29
- After-hours events: 2
- Spoken language assignments: 2
- Other events: 12
- Total for April: 84

### Year-to-Date Activity

- Educational assignments: 275
- Mental health sessions: 163
- Medical assignments: 174
- IEP-related meetings: 123
- Staff meetings: 253
- After-hours events: 25
- Spoken language assignments: 53
- Other events: 228
- Year-to-date total: 1,294

## Accomplishments

- Clayton and Cora attended the UALR Interpreting Education Program Stakeholders Meeting and were able to contribute to ARDB's reputation as not only a sought-after internship site but also as a resource for the community.
- Cora is well on her way to becoming a certified braille transcriptionist.

## Challenges

There aren't enough interpreters in the state to cover the amount of work we have on a contract basis- a staff interpreter is imperative.

## Upcoming Projects/Priorities for the next 30-60 days

- Clayton will continue to attend legal observations and workshops to gain his qualifications as a court and legal interpreter through the state of Arkansas.
  - Searching for an additional staff interpreter to join the ARDB team.
  - Reviewing internship applications for the summer and fall semesters.
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# Development Department Update

Kevin Lentz, Director of Development

## Executive Summary

In April, the Development Department focused on outreach, planning, and implementation efforts. The department planned and implemented Deaf Awareness Day at the Capitol and supported a staff appreciation event through sponsorships and donated services. Social media activity increased during the month, with ARDB's Facebook page surpassing 5,000 followers and a Deaf Awareness Day post reaching more than 9,000 users.

Events and fundraising generated \$885.00 during the month, while sponsorships and donated goods and services resulted in approximately \$1,750 in savings. The department also developed and directed website design and usability changes.

Over the next 30–60 days, the department will review development systems, streamline processes, and begin monthly Ghost Tours in June.

## Data Highlights

### Social Media & Outreach Highlights

- Facebook followers reached 5,067, surpassing the 5,000 milestone
- Engagement rate increased by 195%
- Post views increased by 136%
- Deaf Awareness Day post:
  - Reached 9,000+ users
  - Generated 191 interactions and 16 shares
- Events and fundraising revenue totaled \$885.00

## Accomplishments

1. Exceeded 5,000 Facebook followers with major engagement growth.
2. Held Deaf Awareness Day at the capitol and hosted a support staff celebration.
3. Generated \$885.00 in events and fundraising revenue and saved \$1,750 through sponsorship and donated services.
4. Led the development of website design and usability recommendations and directed their implementation by ADE IT.

## Upcoming Projects / Priorities for the Next 30–60 Days

- ANCRC funding meeting will take place at the end of May.
- Evaluate development systems (fundraising, events, volunteers, communications) and make any changes that will streamline and increase their effectiveness.
- Formalize events processes and SOPs

- Launch monthly Ghost Tours beginning June 2026

## Large Costs or Savings

- Over \$1,400 saved through donated beverages and sponsorship for staff celebration
  - Approximately \$350 saved through in-house baking for Deaf Awareness Day
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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)*

## Related Services

### Executive Summary

During April, the Related Services Department maintained a strong focus on service delivery consistency, compliance, and fiscal alignment. Through structured monitoring and staff support, the department sustained high levels of service provision across all disciplines while also maintaining steady Medicaid billing performance. Efforts remained centered on ensuring students received required services while strengthening systems for accountability and end-of-year readiness.

### Data Highlights

Greater than 90% of service minutes were delivered across all related service disciplines for April.

Reimbursement to date: 1/1/2026-current

- Total billed services: \$66,365.52
- Total received: \$56,757.38
- Remaining pending reimbursement: \$9,608.14

### Accomplishments

- Maintained high levels of service delivery compliance across all related service areas.
- Strengthened internal monitoring processes to support consistent implementation of IEP services.
- Continued cross-disciplinary collaboration to ensure student access to services and supports.

## Challenges

Ongoing need to ensure consistency in documentation and service implementation across all staff.

- Response: Ongoing monitoring of service logs and billing entries to ensure alignment with compliance expectations.
- Reinforcement of timelines and accountability measures across staff.

## Upcoming Projects/Priorities for the Next 30–60 Days

- Finalize end-of-year documentation, including IEP progress reporting and service logs.
- Ensure all service minutes, documentation, and Medicaid billing components are complete and audit-ready.
- Prepare staffing plans and service delivery structures for the upcoming school year.

## Large Costs or Savings

- Continued Medicaid reimbursement remains a key funding support for Related Services.
  - Current tracking indicates strong alignment between service delivery and billing, with minimal outstanding reimbursement.
  - No significant unexpected expenditures during this reporting period.
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## Statewide Services

### Executive Summary

Received the department's Verification of Data information and after making a few corrections, Statewide Services is on track to make another historic mark of satisfying all standards under the Federal Office of Special Education's annual audit of the eight mandated indicators.

### Data Highlights

- 38 Developmental Therapy Sessions
- 11 Consults
- 2 Evaluations
- 14 Due Process Meetings

Total Enrollment=68 total served (42 on IFSPs and 26 Consults)

14 Referrals

Medicaid Funds Received=\$792.00

## Accomplishments

The team satisfied Core Competency training, which renews their Developmental Therapy licenses

## Challenges

Finding teletherapy and curriculum training, preferably in State

## Upcoming Projects/Priorities for the next 30-60 days

Continued collaboration with Dr. Allison Sedey at the University of Colorado Boulder to engage in an opportunity for Arkansas to participate in project and receive assistance in collecting and reporting language assessments.

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## Food Services

### April Meals Served:

- Breakfast –1818
- Lunch – 2039
- Days Served – 20

### Eligibility Numbers as of March 31,2026:

- Free: 61
  - Reduced: 8
  - Paid: 75
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## Health Services

### Executive Summary

Health Services provided safe and consistent care for students in April. Most student health needs were handled at school, allowing students to return to class quickly. We also worked on future planning by applying for a grant and attending training to improve health and mental health services. Mental health needs and students with complex medical conditions continue to require extra time and support.

### Data Highlights

- Total nurse visits: 203
  - Returned to class: 183 (90%)
  - Sent home: 18 (9%)
  - Emergency transport: 2

## Accomplishments

- Maintained 100% accuracy and compliance with medication administration
- Submitted the Arkansas School-Based Health Center Grant (ADE) to expand student health services
- Attended the SBHC Spring Conference (Rogers, AR) and the School Behavior and Mental Health Conference (Fayetteville, AR) to improve services for students

## Challenges

- Increased need for student mental health support
  - Continuing to work closely with counseling and school teams
- Students with complex medical needs require more time and coordination
  - Ongoing communication with families and healthcare providers

## Upcoming Projects / Priorities (Next 30–60 Days)

- Complete end-of-year health record reviews
- Prepare for summer and ESY health services
- Follow up on grant application and next steps

## Large Costs or Savings

- SBHC Spring Symposium Conference
- School Behavior and Mental Health Conference
- Medication/Medical Supply Restock
- AllCare Pharmacy
- The department remained within budget for the reporting period with no significant or unusual expenditures.

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## Mental Health

During the reporting period, the Mental Health Team supported one student experiencing a crisis that required hospitalization and ensured continuity of care following discharge. A total of 61 behavior incidents were documented for the month, averaging 3.05 incidents per school day, reflecting an increase from March. Of these incidents, 7 were classified as major and 54 as minor, with 62% occurring during the school day and 38% after school hours. One major incident resulted in a one-day out-of-school suspension related to a vape policy violation. Ongoing monitoring and intervention continue to support student behavioral and mental health needs.

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## Gifted and Talented

## Executive Summary

During the month of April, students learned about frogs and worked as cooperative teams to solve a problem involving spatial orientation, weight distribution, and imagination. They made predictions about what happens when force is applied to Peeps marshmallows and graphed their results. In addition, students were challenged to use their creative fluency skills by generating drawings from scribbled lines demonstrating flexibility in thought.

The GT coordinator attended the Arkansas River Educational CoOp Spring Session.

## Accomplishments

Noticeable growth in students' willingness to think outside the box and take risks.

## Challenges

Scheduling changes during ATLAS testing.

## Upcoming Projects/Priorities for the next 30-60 days

- Gifted/Talented 101 Trainings for teachers to include referral process
  - AR App documentation
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## Dorms

### Executive Summary

During April, dorm students participated in a variety of activities that promoted engagement, independence, and community. Students across all dorm levels took part in card games focused on sportsmanship, along with multiple outings including visits to Murray Park, MacArthur Park, the Big Dam Bridge, and a fishing trip where all participating students successfully caught fish.

Students also enjoyed a dorm cookout, assisting with food preparation and clean-up, and attended an indoor movie night at Parnell Auditorium after weather required a change in plans. Additional highlights included attending a UALR baseball game to support a fellow dorm student who was broadcasting the event and high school students participating in Prom.

Looking ahead, plans are in place for a s'mores competition to continue student engagement.

### Data Highlights

Dorm students have been working on completing Activities of Daily Living (ADL) skills. Staff will be assessing to see how the students are able to do various skills independently, without cues from staff.

## Accomplishments

- Students were happy to complete a 1 mile walk on the Big Dam Bridge.
- Students enjoyed going to the UALR baseball game to observe their classmate, Dallas Cathey, announce the game.

## Challenges

- The primary challenge identified during the month occurred in the boys' dorm and relates to student independence with daily routines. While students are increasingly completing dorm responsibilities and personal hygiene tasks independently, some students still require periodic hygiene checks to ensure appropriate self-care standards are being met.

To support students and address concerns proactively, communication with parents has been strengthened to keep them informed of behaviors and routines occurring within the dorm setting.

## Upcoming Projects/Priorities for the next 30-60 days

Planning for events and outings for the first half of the upcoming school year is already underway. From August through December, two outings are scheduled each month. Planned activities include bowling, visits to the Museum of Discovery, walking the bridge, off-campus dinners, and picnics.

## Large Costs or Savings

No money was spent for the month of April

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## **SPED**

### Executive Summary

As a department we have and will continue to work diligently to correct errors of the past, train staff to ensure compliance with IDEA, the AR Learns Act, and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education requirements.

### Data Highlights

The SPED Department has completed a processes and procedures manual for direct versus indirect Special Education and evaluation components. We received the "clear" from DESE on April 30, 2026, and will begin training staff on Wednesday, May 6, 2026, during WIN (What I Need) time to avoid class disruption.

## Accomplishments

- Attended “After the FBA” training at Arkansas River Co-op.
- Enrolled two new students at the blind side and held tours with two perspective students
- Continue ensuring compliance with timelines.

## Challenges

The school is currently in the midst of a Due Process Hearing and is awaiting confirmation of scheduled dates. Following completion of the hearing, next steps will be determined. With the school year nearing its end, the timing of this process has added an additional layer of complexity to planning and end-of-year decision-making.

## Upcoming Projects/Priorities for the next 30-60 days

Determine summer Professional Development.

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