



Arkansas School for the Deaf and Blind

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Jacob Oliva
Secretary

K. Nicole Walsh
Superintendent

ARDB Superintendent Report June - July 2026

Update

- Congratulations to Jena McDonnell for being recognized among the Top 10 for Early and On-Time eFinance Cycle 1–9 Submissions. The recognition highlights her commitment to timely and accurate reporting during the 2022-23, 2023-24, and/or 2024-25 school years. Her dedication to this important process helps ensure efficient and reliable data reporting and does not go unnoticed. ARDB is proud of her outstanding achievement and thankful to have her as part of the ARDB team.
- Senior Class – Postsecondary Plans
 - Anabel Flores – UA-PTC (Cosmetology Program)
 - Zoe Harris – Gap Year
 - Kivy Harshaw – UA-PTC (Associate of Science in Liberal Arts and Sciences – Psychology Major)
 - Jakhii Hunter – UA-PTC (Associate of Science in Education – Art Teacher)
 - Shalayah Phillips – UCA (Journalism)
 - Bryson Selby – UALR (Cyber Security)
 - William Surdi – Independent Living Program (Undecided)
 - Lexi Wright – UA-PTC (Associate of Applied Science in Early Childhood Education)
- As part of an incentive program designed to encourage strong performance during the recent ATLAS testing, four students—one from each department’s lower and upper school—demonstrated the greatest overall improvement in their test scores and were each awarded a \$200 shopping spree. The recognized students were Everlyn Sollis (Deaf Department), Danielle Alhamwi (Deaf Department), Zariah Hamilton (Blind Department), and Kaiden Taylor (Blind Department). Students utilized their awards at Ulta, Park Plaza Mall, and Walmart to enjoy their well-earned rewards.
- Field Day for our students was a huge success! Everyone had a great time!
- The school hosted an end-of-year Staff Awards event to recognize outstanding staff contributions rooted in our core values of Professionalism, Respect, Inclusion, Determination,

and Empowerment. PRIDE Award recipients included Jena McDonnell (P), Eddie Tuzon (R), LaHollis Hill (I), Rita Jordan (D), and Beth Helms (E). The event also honored retirees Beth Ballard and Todd Litchford for their 31 years of dedicated service. In addition, Ronnie Strong was recognized as Staff of the Year, and Kris Miller was named Teacher of the Year. The celebration concluded with a cookout prepared by the Nutrition Services team, with Nabholz generously volunteering their time to assist with grilling. We had a great time!

- Braille Classes will be offered this summer from July 7 – August 11 on Tuesdays from 5-6 pm at the Blind Department cafeteria on the ARDB campus. They will cover Braille reading and writing, use of Perkins Braille, functional braille basics for everyday use and reading by touch. We hope you can come and join us!
- This summer, we are offering two ASL classes: ASL 1 (Introductory Level) and ASL 4 (Morphemes & Advanced Deaf Culture). Our teachers would love to help you advance your skills!
- Construction on our new building and campus improvements are progressing at a rapid pace. With students and staff off campus, Nabholz and ARDB grounds staff are working diligently to complete projects best done with limited campus activity. We look forward to sharing many upcoming changes and enhancements.
- As part of preparations for the 2026–2027 school year, multiple in-person registration days have been scheduled to support families. Remaining sessions will be held on July 9 (8:00 a.m.–3:30 p.m.) and July 21 (8:00 a.m.–3:30 p.m.) in the Tornado Shelter, as well as August 6 (1:00–4:00 p.m.) and August 9 (12:00–5:00 p.m.) in the Tornado Shelter. We invite you, our board members, to attend any of these sessions, should you wish to help welcome students back to campus.
- ARDB welcomed architects, designers, and project partners for an onsite Wall Graphics Meeting focused on our new academic building. The group reviewed ideas for wall graphics, branding, and visual elements throughout the facility, followed by a walkthrough to discuss how these features can help create an engaging, educational, accessible and welcoming environment for students, staff, and visitors
- ARDB staff participated in the FY 2026 AR TESS Observation Training at ARESC, a three-day professional development opportunity focused on the TESS Rubric and effective instructional practices. Participants strengthened their skills in conducting observations, providing meaningful feedback, and supporting teacher growth to improve student outcomes. This will be the focus of our Instructional Leadership Team for the coming 26-27 school year.
- ARDB Admin Task Force came together at the Arkansas State Library for a three-day Summer Planning Retreat focused on preparing for the 2026-2027 school year. Our leadership worked together on strategic planning, department goals, schoolwide priorities, and strengthening systems, communication, and accountability. The retreat also provided time to celebrate accomplishments from the past year, align around shared expectations for the coming 26-27 school year, and develop 30-60-90 action plans & goals by department, all in an aim to support greater growth and student success.
- The Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) met together for an all day summer planning session to prepare for the 2026-2027 school year and refine the team's focus on teacher evaluation, instructional coaching, and TESS implementation. The group collaborated on expectations for WIN time, instructional scheduling, standards-based grading, lesson planning, and classroom

support systems to ensure consistent, high-quality instruction and improved outcomes for all students.

- Many ARDB staff members attended the ADE Summit in Hot Springs, where they were able to choose from a wide variety of professional development sessions and select the ones best matched to their individual roles and areas of interest. The conference provided opportunities to explore current educational practices, and strengthen professional skills allowing our staff to bring back new ideas and resources to support student achievement and continuous improvement across the campus.

Human Capital Update

Terminations/Resignations

- a. Mary Wenkus-Dunlap, EH-Admin Specialist
- b. Krystal Barnett, Housekeeper
- c. Gretchen Cobb, Statewide Services

Operations Update

Kurt Swartzlander, Division Fiscal Administrator & Director of Operations

Accomplishments

- ARDOT installed yellow barriers in front of the security guard shack.
- Completed emptying all of the storage/shipping containers on campus.
- Attended ANCRC meeting following up on grant application for additional funding for Parnell Hall. ARDB was awarded approximately \$2.7 million in addition to the \$1.2 million the school received in a previous funding cycle.
- Finance worked on Year End closing procedures for close of fiscal year 2026.
- Finance Staff have been continually involved in training classes for the new S/4hana software changeover beginning July 9th.
- Filled Skilled Trades Position.
- GEOTAG devices installed on all school automobiles.
- Continued work on school safety assessment due in September

Challenges

- Continuing coordination of repairs on fire alarm systems required by the State fire marshal. Ongoing work with contractors. Anticipate completion by end of June early July.
- Need to fill Housekeeper, Maintenance and Skilled Trades positions.

Upcoming Projects/Priorities for the next 30-60 days

- Finalize school internal budget following state AOP. Still Pending
- Complete emptying and sorting of remaining shipping containers by end of May. Completed Hugg and Hall to pickup last container June 2nd.
- Complete 100% inventory before end of July. Still pending.
- The school is now mandated to install Geotag GPS devices on all school(state) owned vehicles. Our transportation director has been authorized to train as an installer and once trained will be installing the devices on all vehicles.

Large Costs or Savings

New Cost - State required geotags for vehicle gps will increase vehicle cost by \$15.00/month per vehicle. They are being installed on approximately 22 vehicles. Estimated annual cost of \$4,300. By having the devices installed in-house the school is saving approximately \$2,200 in installation costs.

Education Update – Deaf Department

KaAnn Varner, Principal

Data Highlights

Enrollment:

- 56 Lower School Students
- 34 Upper School Students

Attendance:

- Lower School: 88.63%
- Upper School: 92.41%

Referrals by Behavior:

Defiance/Insubordination	15 Incidents
Physical Aggression	9 Incidents

Suspensions

In School Suspension	0
Out of School Suspension	0

Accomplishments

- First Leopard Literacy Night
- Two deaf students participated in the Lion Talent Show
- First annual Joint Leopard and Lion Track and Field Day

- Improved ATLAS Reward Incentive – Main Event
- Leopard Graduation

Challenges

- Campus Lockdown – An ARDB full campus lockdown occurred. Shibley Classrooms and offices did not have locks. This was promptly resolved. Each classroom and office now have locks.
- We need more substitutes to cover staff absences (teachers, paras).

Upcoming Projects/Priorities for the next 30-60 days

- Complete 2026-2027 school year schedule
- Meet with Metro regarding Leopard students taking classes there
- Send Summer Packets Home with each student
- Teachers complete Science or Reading requirements or submit plans to do so
- Finalize Athletics plans for 2026-2027 School year
- Successful ARDB/Camp Aldersgate partnership
- Revise Standards Based Report Cards – Elementary
- Grading Protocols – Secondary
- Valedictorian, Salutatorian, and honor student eligibility

Education Update – Blind Department

Lori Cole, Principal

Executive Summary

May was a very busy month in the Blind Department. The expectation for each classroom continues to be bell to bell instruction. Student schedules are being finalized for the 2026-2027 school year, with 4 high school students planning to take concurrent coursework next year through Virtual Arkansas (ATU) and UALR. Letters were sent to families to offer tutoring support for math and ELA based on Atlas test scores and high achievers were recognized by a celebration party to the Main Event. May also came with our high school graduations. Our three graduates are off preparing for JumpStart in the summer, then their respective colleges: UALR, UAPTC, and UCA. The Blind Department honored Kristopher Robinson at graduation and that weekend learned of the passing of Matthew Greenhill, our 2025 Valedictorian. Please continue to remember his parents, family and friends at this time.

A highlight was a visit to World Services for the Blind, where students met successful blind young adults and alumni who shared their experiences with independence and career development. Students also heard from guest speakers, including Eric Yarberry, who presented on topics such as personal strengths, independent travel, creative writing, and financial literacy.

Data Highlights

Current Enrollment:

- 28 Lower School Students
- 26 Upper School Students

Camp Aldersgate attendance:

- 13 Deaf Department, 23 Blind Department, total number 36 students.

Accomplishments

- Atlas Summative testing window successfully completed. Scores show the following students showing academic growth:
 - Elementary: ELA: 57%, Math: 40% and Science 46%
 - Secondary: ELA: 60%, Math: 40%, and Science: 46%
- Atlas MAP shows the following percentages for student growth:
 - Elementary: 60% reading, 48% math
 - Secondary: 48% reading, 57% math.

I project that through professional development, strong classroom instruction and an increase in student growth will be seen in 2026-27 schoolyear.

- Three students graduated from the Blind Department with all three continuing their education through higher education: (1) UAPTC, (1) UALR, (1) UCA.

Challenges

- Allocating sufficient time to keep students motivated while ensuring mastery in all areas—from literacy to life skills—remains a challenge. Balancing the needs of the whole student without compromising the integrity of the classroom—including therapies, expanded core curriculum opportunities, and real-world, hands-on experiences—while maintaining consistent, rigorous instruction and prioritizing student learning remains a challenge.
- Reflecting on the 2025–2026 school year, one of our greatest challenges has been developing schedules that maximize student learning opportunities. It remains a complex task to ensure that students receive their required therapy services while also providing access to all components of the Expanded Core Curriculum within the academic school day. Despite these challenges, our commitment to student success remains unwavering.

Upcoming Projects/Priorities for the next 30-60 days

Fine-tuning the 26-27 school year schedule, calendar and schedule of events

Large Costs or Savings

Purchasing the new ELA curriculum (ARC) and Math (Kendall Hunt) for the upcoming school year will be costly. Thank you for working to ensure the students in the Blind Department get access to these materials.

Interpreting Services Update

Clayton Higgins

Executive Summary

May saw many student and staff related planning events in preparation for the end of the school year. We've seen our highest staff meeting occurrence for a single reporting month yet with 62 individual meetings ranging from 1-4 hours long. We have only had 3 applications for the interpreting position despite national advertisement. We suspect this is due to offering significantly below national average for interpreting salary.

We are currently searching for a 3rd staff interpreter, after several interviews we've had the position declined due to low pay. Typical staff interpreter pay for an individual with a QAST V/V or RID Certification has a low average of \$85,000 and we're only able to offer \$57,351. We've also been hard at work with summer camp accessibility, and professional development for teaching staff. All of which has required an exorbitant amount of interpreters and some clever scheduling. The interpreting department will also be partnering with health services and the mental health team to teach students about the use of interpreters and advocating for them. Presentation development is underway for the Interpreting Department to begin hosting monthly workshops for the interpreting community to improve educational outcomes of Deaf/hoh students in public schools.

Data Highlights

Category	May	YTD
Educational	20	295
Mental Health Sessions	20	183
Medical Assignments	9	183
IEP Related Meetings	16	139
Staff Meetings	62	315
After-Hours	10	35
Spoken Language	2	55
Other Events	3	231
TOTAL	142	1,436

Category	June	YTD
Educational	15	335
Mental Health Sessions	4	209
Medical Assignments	3	198
IEP Related Meetings	3	161
Staff Meetings	37	397
After-Hours	0	47
Spoken Language	0	56
Other Events	18	270
TOTAL	80	1,673

Accomplishments

- We have one interpreting intern confirmed for the fall of 2026.
- Began a partnership with medical staff at UAMS to provide training to Physician Assistant students on the use of ASL interpreters with Deaf and Hard of Hearing patients.

Challenges

- Non-competitive pay for new staff interpreters.

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.
- Reviewing internship applications for the summer and fall semesters.

Development Department Update

Kevin Lentz, Director of Development

Executive Summary

May was a big month for the Development Department. The highlight was approval of a \$2.7 million grant from the Arkansas Natural and Cultural Resources Council to fund a fire suppression system and second-floor renovations in Parnell Hall.

The department brought in \$3,468 in fundraising revenue, anchored by \$2,500 from the 7Brew Caffeine for a Cause event on May 23–24. A promotional reel for the fundraiser reached 48,000+ viewers and added 242 Facebook followers in a short window, contributing to a net gain of 357 followers for the month and engagement and views up 255% and 284% respectively. Hocott's Garden Center hosted four groups of lower school students for educational tours, with a social media reel in production.

Over the next 30–60 days, the department will begin retooling its core systems — GiveButter, ParentSquare, Events HQ, Canva, and volunteer management—to streamline processes, and will develop staff training for August professional development. Monthly Ghost Tours and five-week ASL and Braille community classes will launch in July.

Data Highlights

Metric	This Month	Change / Notes
ANCRC Grant Approval	\$2.7 million	For Parnell Hall renovations
Facebook Followers	5,464	+357 net follows
Engagement Rate	+255%	Significant increase
Post Views	+284%	Significant increase
7Brew fundraiser promo reel	48,000+ viewers	1,800 interactions, 168 shares
Fundraising Revenue	\$3,468	
Events (on and off campus)	84	

Accomplishments

1. We were approved for a grant from the Arkansas Natural and Cultural Resource Council for \$2.7 million. This will fund installation of a fire suppression system and 2nd floor renovations in Parnell Hall.
2. We gained 242 Facebook followers from the 7Brew fundraiser promotional reel, with continued major engagement growth.
3. The reel and shares helped generate \$2,500 in revenue from our fundraiser at Little Rock 7Brew locations May 23-24.
4. Hocott's Garden Center hosted four groups of lower school students, providing them with educational tours of the grounds and letting them pot their own flower plants to take home. Reel coming to social media soon.
5. Generated \$968.00 fundraising revenue besides the 7Brew fundraiser.

Upcoming Projects / Priorities for the Next 30–60 Days

- Begin re-tooling Development systems including GiveButter, ParentSquare, Events HQ, Canva, and volunteer to streamline processes and increase their effectiveness.
 - Develop training for staff on Development systems for August professional development.
 - Launch ASL and Braille summer courses.
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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)

Statewide Services

Executive Summary

The department completed mandatory training and met with First Connections at ADE to prepare for October's Federal Monitoring. The primary upcoming challenge is maintaining timeline compliance through the summer, making the continuous auditing of IFSPs, therapy notes, and documentation the top priority for the next 30 to 60 days.

The team successfully completed the SFY 2024 Fiscal Monitoring review following several months of audit preparation and corrective actions. All required corrections were submitted, and casefiles were verified for compliance. The review team confirmed that no further action is needed at this time and applauded the timely attention, cooperation, and commitment to ensuring compliance throughout the process, stating that the department's efforts contribute to the continued integrity and success of the program.

Data Highlights

31 Developmental Therapy Sessions

11 Consults

6 Evaluations

14 Due Process Meetings

4 Referrals

Total Enrollment=68 total served (36 on IFSPs and 30 Consults)

Medicaid Funds Received=\$4680.80

Accomplishments

- The entire department completed the Core Competency training that is required for recertification of Developmental Therapy licensure.
- Participated in a Data Review meeting with First Connections at ADE to satisfy any issues for the upcoming Federal Monitoring in October.

Challenges

Maintain compliance, specifically timeline indicators, throughout the summer months.

Upcoming Projects/Priorities for the next 30-60 days

To continue monitoring our IFSPs, therapy notes, and other paperwork for Federal compliance.

Food Services

May/June Meals Served:

- Breakfast –1673/321
- Lunch – 1881/357
- Days Served – 19/5

Eligibility Numbers as of May 31/June 30:

- Free: 60/57
 - Reduced: 8/8
 - Paid: 75/70
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Health Services

Executive Summary

Health Services provided ongoing nursing care and support to students throughout May and June. Services included illness and injury assessment, medication administration, treatment support, and management of student health needs. The department continued to support student wellness while helping students remain engaged in the educational environment whenever possible. Health Services responded to 162 student visits and provided 1,899 medication administrations during May. In June, Health Services saw to student needs during Summer Camp and Jump Start. Illness-related concerns accounted for many visits, while injury events remained low.

Data Highlights

- Total Health Services Visits: 162
- Illness Events: 120
- Injury Events: 18
- Other Health Events: 25
- Management Events: 8
- Medication Administrations: 1,899
- Administrative Visits: 1,043
- Students Served: 59

Accomplishments

- Provided 1,899 medication administrations while maintaining compliance with medication administration and documentation requirements.
- Delivered nursing services to 59 students across both campuses through illness, injury, and health management support.
- Supported student health needs through 162 documented health services visits, helping students access care while minimizing disruption to instruction.
- Prepared health services coverage and planning for Extended School Year (ESY) and summer programs.

Challenges

- Continued support for students with chronic and complex medical needs requiring ongoing monitoring and coordination.
- Increased nursing demands associated with end-of-year activities, medication management, and student health needs.

Upcoming Projects/Priorities for the Next 30-60 Days

- Complete end-of-year health record reviews and medication documentation.
- Review and update student health plans in preparation for the 2026–2027 school year.

Large Costs or Savings

- Department operations remained within budget.
 - Routine expenditures included medical supply replenishment and student health-related materials.
 - No significant unplanned expenditures were identified during the reporting period.
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Mental Health

- ROAR Store - Opened the final ROAR Store this month. Students redeemed PBIS points and practiced Responsibility, Organization, Achievement, and Respect.
 - Student Support - Coordinated weekly Friday Food Bag deliveries for students and families.
 - Dorm-Based SEL Lessons - Worked with Sue Lyn to teach mini lessons focused on cooperation, taking turns, waiting, sharing, dorm rules, and expectations. Also provided regular check-ins with dorm students for emotional support.
 - Tier 2 Support Groups - Led small groups focused on communication, responsibility, and conflict resolution.
 - Hosted a spa night with staff for LS dorm girls.
 - Completed check-ins during field days and graduation.
 - Worked alongside the social worker to support student check-ins.
 - Attended planning meetings for Holiday Giving and Angel Tree support.
 - Participated in mental health meetings.
 - Updated MOU with RPI for School Based Mental Health Therapy during the 26 – 27 school year
 - Updated the Mental Health Guidebook for 26 – 27
 - Collaborated with Student Services to streamline registration for 26 – 27
 - Participated in Summer Admin Retreat planning meetings
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Behavior

- A continued decrease in disruptive and aggressive behaviors has been noted across students that require Tier 3 PBIS supports.
 - Automated Behavior Tracking across teachers and paraprofessionals continues to function well and inform all members of students IEP team about behavior in real time.
 - Two lower school students no longer require a Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP) due to significantly improved behavior and as such, their plans have been discharged.
 - One middle school student no longer requires a BIP due to significantly improved behavior and his plan was also discharged.
 - One high school student with a BIP will continue be monitored through August and September upon her return. If she continues to demonstrate significantly improved behavior, discharge of her plan is anticipated at that time.
 - A refresher training was conducted for two additional middle school students that still have BIPs in place with their teacher and paraprofessional. Further training with new and returning staff will be scheduled this Fall for all students with BIPs.
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Gifted and Talented

During the month of May, teachers and staff received Gifted/Talented 101 training that included information about gifted characteristics, the referral process, and differentiation ideas to use when lesson planning. Staff will be receiving a GT program evaluation survey for feedback and to assess needs for next school year. A GT Advisory Committee will be established and will meet annually.

During the month of June, a summary of the information from the GT program evaluation survey created for feedback and to assess needs for next school year was compiled and reported on in the AR App. Feedback is being used to create and plan a schedule for informal staff development for the upcoming 2026-2027 school year.

Dorms

- Dorm department hosted a successful Cinco de Mayo cookout, bringing both sides of campus together to celebrate with Mexican cuisine and piñatas - it was a huge hit!
- Dorm students enjoyed a picnic and hike at Pinnacle Mountain.
- The Dorm Supervisor and Senior RA took the graduating seniors to dinner at Texas Roadhouse.
- The dorm also hosted a cookout in honor of the seniors.
- Lower School girls participated in a spa night with special guests, including Nicole Walsh, Beth Helms, Suelyn Green, Anna Snare, two high school students, Tessie Swafford and Rita Jordan. Students were pampered with face masks, foot treatments, hair styling, and nail care.

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

Since we received the “all clear” from DESE on April 30, 2026, have moved on to train staff on Tuesday, May 5, 2026, and Wednesday, May 6, 2026, during teacher WIN time to avoid class disruption.

Accomplishments

Between September 16, 2025 and June 2, 2026, we have held over 200 scheduled IEP meetings!

Challenges

- We are in the middle of a Due Process Hearing. We are waiting on the Hearing Officer’s ruling to determine our next steps.

Upcoming Projects/Priorities for the next 30-60 days

- To develop back to school Professional Development.
- Ensure all student details are up to date and correct.
- Make sure Eschool and SpedTrack data are the same.
- Attend summer professional development sessions, including ADE Summit.

Related Services

Executive Summary

The Related Services Department concluded the 2025–2026 school year by maintaining specialized services across Speech-Language Pathology, Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, Orientation & Mobility, Audiology, and Low Vision. Quarter 4 priorities focused on completing end-of-year service delivery, annual documentation, Medicaid billing, staffing transitions, and operational planning to support a successful start to the 2026–2027 school year.

Data Highlights

- Related Services maintained an overall 83% service delivery compliance during Quarter 4.
- Service delivery by discipline:
 - Occupational Therapy: 98%
 - Physical Therapy: 86%
 - Speech-Language Pathology: 73%
- Fiscal Year 2025–2026 Medicaid activity:

- Claims Submitted: \$362,270.35
- Reimbursement Received: \$88,194.82
- Claims Pending Processing: \$274,075.53

Accomplishments

- Successfully completed end-of-year service delivery, annual reviews, evaluations, and required documentation.
- Maintained interdisciplinary collaboration to support student access to related services across both campuses.
- Completed staffing and service planning to prepare for implementation of services for the 2026–2027 school year.

Challenges

- Deaf Department Speech-Language Pathologist Carri Arman resigned at the conclusion of the 2025–2026 school year, creating a vacancy for the upcoming school year.
- Recruitment of qualified related service professionals continues to present challenges in specialized service areas.

Response:

Recruitment efforts are underway, and interim service coverage is being coordinated to ensure continuity of services and compliance with student IEPs.

Upcoming Projects / Priorities (Next 30–60 Days)

- Fill the Deaf Department Speech-Language Pathologist vacancy.
- Complete review of related service provider contracts and documentation.
- Finalize provider schedules and student caseload assignments for the 2026–2027 school year.
- Continue Medicaid monitoring and compliance activities.

Large Costs or Savings

- Medicaid reimbursement continues to offset the cost of eligible related services, with \$362,270.35 in claims submitted during FY2025–2026.
 - No significant unplanned departmental expenditures to report during Quarter 4.
-