



Arkansas School for the Deaf and Blind

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Jacob Oliva
Secretary

K. Nicole Walsh
Superintendent

ARDB Superintendent Report December 2025

Update

Merry Christmas and season's greetings! On behalf of our students, staff, and families, thank you for your dedicated leadership and continuous support of ARDB. Your guidance makes a real difference, and we are sincerely grateful.

I'm excited to share a fun milestone for our new campus: the official name of the street leading into our new school building has been selected and is...ARDB Ave.

This decision reflects a thoughtful, student and staff -centered process. Our Student Advisory Committee met to consider many possibilities and narrowed the options to two finalists: ARDB Ave. and Partnership Path. They then presented these choices to the ARDB student body for input. Because the initial results were very close, we reopened the survey and invited staff and board members to participate to ensure the final choice represented the majority's preference. And that it did! With a total of 141 voters, the final outcome was overwhelmingly in favor of ARDB Ave.

Thank you for supporting a process that elevates student voice and staff engagement!

Enrollment:

Deaf Department: 91

Blind Department: 51

Total: 142

Referred/Waiting: 9

Human Capital

Resignations/Terminations

- a. Patsy Murray, Housekeeper
- b. Amanda McClure, Residential Care Coordinator

New Hires/Rehires

- a. Cora Majan, Interpreter

School Operations

Deaf Department

KaAnn Varner, Principal

Top Accomplishment

On November 18, two representatives from the *American Reading Company (ARC)* visited classrooms and met with teachers. ARC representatives expressed strong satisfaction with teacher and student progress and noted that ARDB is becoming the flagship program among schools using the ARC curriculum.

Key Issues or Trends

Continued challenges with public school bus tardiness. Lamar Raper has been working with school district to improve this, however we continue to have a few consistent stragglers.

Teacher Spotlight

Teacher: *Kara Siemens*

Subject/Grade: 6th Grade ELA; 4th–6th Grade Math

Kara transitioned from Middle School to Upper Elementary this year following the ASD/ASBVI merger, which created a distinct Elementary and Secondary structure within the Deaf Department. She embraced the move with enthusiasm and quickly connected with students and staff.

Math is Kara's favorite subject, and she has played an instrumental role in boosting the use of the Imaginative Math curriculum in Lower School. Kara is a dedicated, skilled, and highly respected educator. She also serves as the Robotics Coach for the 6th–8th grade team.

Department Updates

A. Major Accomplishments

- November 5: Arkansas Rehabilitation Services counselors met with Deaf Department juniors and seniors via Zoom, coordinated by Guidance Counselor Camillia Lynch.
- November 6: Fall Party hosted by The Anthony School for students in grades K–6.
- November 7: ADE Veteran's Day Celebration — Danielle Alhamwi signed the Pledge of Allegiance; Ava Cooper signed the National Anthem.

- November 17: The Little Rock Touchdown Club honored football player Jakhii Hunter. He was accompanied by Head Coach Shaqke Robinson and Assistant Coaches Brandon Larry and Christian Ashcroft.
- November 18: ARC representatives visited campus and shared that ARDB is emerging as a leading model for Deaf Education programs using ARC.

B. Projects in Progress

- Developing a new Reading Incentive Program aligned with the ARC curriculum (target implementation: January 5, 2026).
- Working with Red River Cooperative on a reading plan incorporating phonics strategies appropriate for deaf learners.
- Operation Santa Workshop planning and implementation.

C. Data Highlights

Enrollment:

- Deaf Lower School– 53 students
- Upper School- 38
- Total: 91

Attendance:

- Lower School – 81.73% (noting many students with chronic health issues)
- Upper School – 96.16%

Behavior Report

• **Total Incidents:**

67 behavior incidents, averaging 4.79 incidents per school day
(*Slight increase from October: 60 incidents @ 3.33/day*)

• **Incident Breakdown:**

- Major Incidents: 29
- Minor Incidents: 38
- Timing:
 - 66% during the school day
 - 33% during dorm hours
 - 1% during transport (bus)

• **Suspensions:**

- Total: 4 major incidents resulted in suspension (11 days combined)
 - In-School Suspension:
 - 1 HS student – 2 days (Discriminatory Remarks)
 - Out-of-School Suspension:
 - 1 HS student – 5 days (Physical Aggression/Fighting)
 - 1 HS student – 2 days (Physical Aggression/Fighting)
 - 1 LS student – 2 days (Physical Aggression/Fighting)

Challenges or Needs

Ongoing staffing needs, including:

- ASL Teacher (anticipated start 12/8)
- Agriculture Teacher (awaiting posting approval)
- Two paraprofessionals (posted and secondary round of interviews to be conducted)

Priorities for the Next 30–60 Days

- Develop a Behavior Crisis Response Plan with SOPs for severe behavior incidents.
 - Ensure the second semester schedule is finalized.
 - Begin planning for the 202–2027 school year schedule.
 - Explore expanded student opportunities for 2026–2027, including UALR, and Pulaski Tech partnerships.
 - Provide PD on the new TESS Evaluation System.
 - Finalize summer camp partnership agreement with Camp Aldersgate.
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Cross-Department Collaboration

- Joint planning between principals for a Summer 2026 partnership with Camp Aldersgate.
 - Cross-department work to align curriculum across Deaf and Blind programs.
 - Joint ARDB Picture Day on November 19.
 - Collaboration on Turkey Trot and Thanksgiving Luncheon.
 - Raptor Training held in Parnell Hall for both campuses.
 - Blind Department teachers observed Deaf Department teachers using ARC instructional strategies.
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Blind Department

Lori Cole, Principal

Summary

November was a positive and energetic month filled with engaging activities and academic focus. Key highlights included the Turkey Trot & Gobble Wobble events and a highly successful Disguise a Turkey project.

School Demographics

- Total Students: 51 - Elementary: 25, Secondary: 26

- **Attendance:** Attendance was lower this month due to seasonal illness. Nurse Deana Shields sent a campuswide reminder on health and hygiene practices, which was greatly appreciated.

Academic Performance

- **Elementary:** Using standards-based report cards.
- **Secondary:**
 - At midterm, 15 secondary students are maintaining passing grades.
 - 10 students have Ds or lower in one or more subjects.
 - *A Right to Fail Conference* is held for these students and families.
 - Accommodations are reviewed and an academic success plan is created.
 - Many low grades appear to be tied to missing work, and teachers report grades should improve once assignments are submitted.
 - Midterm data allows for meaningful intervention before the quarter ends.

Achievements

- **Elementary Student of the Month:** *Callie Taylor*
- **Secondary Student of the Month:** *Jolene Adams*
- **Goalball:**
 - Teams traveled to Nashville this month.
 - Both boys and girls won one game each, with the girls winning multiple sets.
 - Boys team continues to make strong gains in skill development.

Teacher Shoutouts

- A staff member highlighted Caitlin Pierce for facilitating joyful buddy reading during literacy time, where students supported each other with vocabulary and comprehension.
- Appreciation was expressed for Holly from Kids First, who visited math blocks and provided helpful strategies and encouragement.

Behavioral Data

- **Positive Behavior:**
 - 20 of 25 secondary students
 - 20 of 25 elementary studentsdemonstrated positive behavior and attitudes.
- **Incidents:**
 - Secondary: 5 lunch detentions.
 - Elementary:

- 3 incidents of threatening language on the playground (calls to parents + lunch detention).
- A separate conflict between two students resulted in parent calls and follow-up sessions with the counselor and social worker, including community-service-based interventions.

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)

PBIS continues to improve, and staff agree that a more visible, physical reminder system for points is needed to strengthen the connection between behavior expectations and rewards.

The ROAR Store and other PBIS components have strong potential, and the plan is to refine and fully implement the system.

Challenges and Struggles

Academic Challenges

The primary challenge is maximizing instructional time—especially with student absences—to ensure all curriculum requirements are met. The department remains committed and energized, and staff capacity is strong.

Behavioral Challenges

Many behavioral struggles originate from external/home factors.

- There is interest in further exploring Ruby Payne’s *Understanding Poverty* with staff to increase collective understanding and consistency.
- The counselor and social worker continue to be invaluable supports.
- Dean of Students, Mr. Adam Goyne, has begun working closely with the department and is already showing strong engagement and willingness to support student needs.
- The team will explore de-escalation strategies, such as using “juice cubes,” to help students self-regulate.

Resource Challenges

- Collaboration with Mrs. Donna Vandevender is underway to secure ARC literacy curriculum materials.
- Jennifer Baxter and Micaela Williams have been instrumental in producing large-print and braille resources quickly to prevent instruction delays.
- Registrar demands have increased due to merging systems, and shared support from Jennifer and Micaela has been vital.

Improvement Plan/Update

Goals for the Upcoming Month

- Teachers will refocus on the second quarter to ensure strong completion of the nine-week period.
- Implement a PBIS reward mechanism that connects behavior to the ECC and behavioral expectations.
 - Secondary: Points awarded at the end of each class.
 - Elementary: Points awarded at the end of morning and afternoon sessions.

Success Factors

- Effective use of Planbook lesson plans, TAC grades, and ROAR cards (or similar physical PBIS tools) to reinforce expectations and ensure consistent communication with students.
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Operations

Kurt Swartzlander, Division Fiscal Administrator and Director of Operations

Summary

The primary focus for the month was preparing for Thanksgiving Break to complete projects best suited for when students were off campus. A major highlight was the implementation of the new RAPTOR security update system.

Department Updates

A. Major Accomplishments

Security

- This period, we focused on Safety & Security by implementing the RAPTOR security system and beginning staff training. Next steps include conducting safety drills and identifying additional training needs.
- East Guard Shack is fully online.
- Installed new speed bumps in the Woolly exit lane.
- Finalized street numbering for each building (pending street name/number for the new building). New numbers will be installed on all buildings in the coming months.

Facilities

- Upgraded NAC Gymnasium lights to LED.

- Began installation of tankless water heaters in Marsden, Bradley, Adcock, and Shibley. Marsden is now complete.
- Installed a GOAB (Gang Operated Air Brake) for enhanced protection of the campus-wide electrical system.
- Upgraded exterior lighting on Adcock; Shibley scheduled for December completion.
- Conducted several interviews that resulted in three job offers: skilled tradesman, maintenance technician, and inventory/asset management positions.

B. Projects in Progress

Finance

- Began budget planning for the next fiscal year.
- Created an investment policy; reinvestment of donated funds is underway.

Facilities

1. Shop Improvements

Shawn Galmore continues to make significant progress in cleaning and organizing the shop, an effort intensified after ASD shop contents were moved last spring. Additional work remains.

2. Tankless Water Heater Project

After several months of delays, one of four tankless water heater rack systems was installed at Bradley over Thanksgiving Break. The remaining three must be installed by year's end to secure rebate funding. Installations are planned for Christmas Break.

3. "Throw It Out" Cleanup Project

The campus-wide cleanup effort has been on hold since Kevin Kenreich's departure in October. Work will resume once his successor is onboarded and trained on surplus and asset-management processes.

C. Data Highlights

- 243 Operations Hero work requests were created in November (excluding event-related EVNT requests).
- 169 requests were completed during the same period, including those handled by third-party service providers.
- Future reports will include the number of new versus completed requests, along with a running average of outstanding tasks.

Challenges or Needs

Staffing continues to be the largest challenge. The three new hires mentioned above are expected to significantly improve service delivery once in place.

Priorities for the Next 30–60 Days

- Begin safety drills to test the RAPTOR system.

- Reinvest available cash funds.
- Continue budget setup and planning for the new fiscal year.
- Ongoing tankless water heater installations.
- Begin asbestos abatement project in Huckabee Hall.
- Maintain coordination for multiple projects scheduled over Christmas Break.

Special Services

Teresa Doan, Director of Special Services

Quick Summary

November was a high-engagement month across all Special Services departments, marked by strong event support, increased collaboration with clinical partners, tighter alignment in documentation workflows, and unified community engagement across the Deaf and Blind programs. The team maintained strong service delivery (>90%) and continued interdisciplinary planning while participating in exploratory meetings with UAMS PRI/CDU and ACH Behavioral Health. Deaf Department SLPs also continued their established collaboration with the ACH Listening Center to support students’ auditory-verbal and hearing technology needs.

Progress Toward ARDB Priorities

Priority Area	What We Did This Period	Evidence / Results	What’s Next
Student & Family Support	Provided 200 health office visits.	Documentation required for nursing programs completed.	Provision of flu and COVID testing and onsite clinics.
Organizational Health	Continued reinforcing the mindset that “we are better together.” Joint staff–student activities, including the Turkey Trot.	Positive observations of student and staff interactions between departments.	Continued support for both departments and planned joint activities.

Department Updates

A. Major Accomplishments

- Launched the Gifted & Talented (GT) program; three students currently identified. More being referred for assessment.
- Successfully served 425 meals to students, families, and staff on Thanksgiving.

- Continued progress in addressing and correcting previous special education non-compliance issues.
- Health Services supported all field trips involving medically fragile students.
- Statewide Services caseload: 87 children (ages 0–3).
- School Counselor and Behavioral Specialist delivered training for teachers, residential advisors, and staff.

B. Projects in Progress

- Continued development of the GT program for full compliance including: push-in services, pull-out opportunities, identification procedures, and referral processes.
- Ongoing delivery of SEL lessons during the school day and in dormitories.
- ASL lessons provided for families.
- Continued professional development for teachers and case managers on due process requirements.

C. Data Highlights

- Students without immunization exemptions: 147
- Immunizations provided at school: 145
- Students with no proof of immunization/exemption: 2

Priorities for the Next 30–60 Days

- ECC training for dormitory staff.
- Facilitated cross-department meetings with staff from both programs.
- Continued development and expansion of the GT program.
- Small-group teacher trainings focused on due process.
- Ongoing collaboration with the Arkansas Department of Education Special Education Division.

Cross-Department Collaboration

- **PE/Athletics:** Coordinated safety protocols, mobility routes, hydration, and sensory supports for the Turkey Trot.
- **Deaf Department & ACH Listening Center:** Continued auditory-verbal collaboration, technology troubleshooting, and progress monitoring (11/4 & 12/2).
- **UAMS PRI/CDU & ACH Behavioral Health:** Participated in preliminary discussions exploring developmental/behavioral evaluation pathways.
- **Special Education:** Alignment of documentation workflows, timelines, and ASPYRE/SpedTrack processes.
- **Academics:** Ongoing collaboration regarding push-in supports, communication routines, and scheduling.

- **Residential Life:** Coordinated behavioral supports, communication routines, and student transition planning.
- **Audiology & Low Vision Clinic:** Continued access for needed evaluations.
- **Child Nutrition:** Daily collaboration for all meals.

Board Support Needed

- Appreciation for the Board’s support during the merger—our teams truly believe we are stronger together.
- Approval of the Enrollment Policy Manual.
- Support for returning ESVI to ARDB to ensure students receive appropriate services.
- Support for expanding psychoeducational evaluation capacity through contractor partnerships and internal staff training.

Interpreting Department

Clayton Higgins, Education Program Coordinator

Quick Summary

November was a very busy month. We hired a second staff interpreter, which significantly strengthens our capacity and reduces reliance on contract services.

Progress Toward ARDB Priorities

Priority Area	What We Did This Period	Evidence / Results	What’s Next
Safety & Security	Developed common ASL vocabulary for security staff.	Vocabulary list sent to department head.	Assess additional vocabulary needs.
Instructional Excellence	Met with SLPI trainers.	SLPI training scheduled to occur on campus in January.	Confirm dates with Donna and secure funding.
Student & Family Support	—	—	Investigating hosting an interpreter conference/workshop.
Organizational Health	Developed common ASL vocabulary for nursing staff.	Vocabulary list sent to department head.	Assess additional vocabulary needs.

Department Updates

A. Major Accomplishments

- Hired a second staff interpreter, Cora Majan, who has contracted with ARDB since 2020 and will be a strong addition to the department.
- Interns Hope and Sydney successfully completed internships, each exceeding 300 hours of supervised experience.
- Of the three goals identified in the previous board report, two have been fully completed.
- Reduced the use of contract interpreters by one-third with the hiring of an additional staff interpreter.

B. Projects in Progress

- Scheduling and securing funding for SLPI training.
- Clayton is temporarily leading this initiative while awaiting the arrival of a new ASL Specialist.

C. Data Highlights

Category	November	YTD
Educational	27	181
Mental Health Sessions	14	69
Medical Assignments	19	114
IEP-Related Meetings	16	55
Staff Meetings	16	96
After-Hours	0	8
Spoken Language	5	29
Other Events	21	137
TOTAL	102	689

Challenges or Needs

- Increased need to train staff on proper interpreter use. Several non-standard interactions have occurred, highlighting the need to reestablish expectations.
- Continued issues with interpreter request forms being submitted with less than 72 business hours' notice—often on Friday afternoons for Monday services. The request form has been updated to clarify “72 business hours.”

Priorities for the Next 30–60 Days

- Retrain staff on proper use of interpreters.
- Explore hosting a statewide training conference for ASL interpreters on best practices.

- Train emergency interpreters (hearing staff with strong ASL skills) for use in crisis or emergency situations on campus.

Cross-Department Collaboration

Working with Nursing to develop an SOP for situations when interpreters are not available overnight in the infirmary.

Board Support Needed

Guidance on additional cost-saving opportunities for the Interpreting Services Department.