

Arkansas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired District Support Plan 2020-2021 School Year



Mission: To provide quality education and training for young people (birth through age twenty-one) who are visually impaired so that they possess the required skills to become personally productive and self-sufficient citizens.

Vision: To be a high performing school that is made up of life-long learners who are well equipped to succeed beyond high school, contribute actively to the community and be productive global citizens.

Introduction

This year's District Support Plan includes a new section for the Arkansas Ready for Learning Model as developed by the Division of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). As a district we have committed to fully implement a Ready for Learning Model for School Year 2020-2021. This is mainly due to the need to ensure the continuity of learning and being able to respond to the ongoing risk of COVID-19. Being able to deliver instruction face-to-face on campus as well as virtually and remotely off campus has become a new major component of our instructional programming.

The Ready for Learning Model incorporates a guaranteed and viable curriculum, blended learning and a student-focused approach. Also included are diagnostic assessments to assist us in addressing unfinished learning from the previous year. In addition, the plan includes the extensive use of technology in order to implement blended and remote learning systems. Training for teachers in utilizing blended and remote learning approaches as well as a Learning Management System (LMS) is also included. Finally, the Ready for Learning model also addresses support for and communication with families and students as they engage with us in these new instructional delivery methods.

In addition the District Support Plan includes our Literacy Plan that addresses improving outcomes for our students on the Reading section of the annual state Aspire assessment for grades 3-8. The last section of the support plan reflects the district's support of the Elementary and Secondary Schools improvement plans.

While we recognize that the 2020-2021 school year will be one of our most challenging we also recognize the commitment and dedication of our ASBVI family to meeting the special needs of our students and families. We are confident that with the right support and resources we will all be successful in this endeavor. It is the intention of this District Support Plan to reflect the support and resources we are committed to delivering to our students, parents, staff, and community.

District Support for Arkansas Ready for Learning Model

1. ASBVI is committed to ensuring the continuity of teaching and learning by providing a guaranteed and viable curriculum that includes blended learning (K-12) and diagnostic assessments (K-8).

K-12 Blended Learning

Our objective is to implement a system of blending learning that allows each student to continue learning grade level or content standards through an educational plan that leverages both technology-based and face-to-face instructional approaches. This objective includes ensuring the flexibility to pivot as necessary between onsite face-to-face and remote instruction delivery methods.

In support of this assurance and objective ASBVI has made significant investments in additional curriculum and technology and expanded our access to digital learning platforms. This has included a K-5 curriculum that consists of Benchmark Workshop – an approved reading curriculum through DESE, 6-12 curriculum consisting of teacher-made collaborative units based on Arkansas Standards, and all math curriculum consisting of Eureka Math from the Great Minds Organization.

In addition we recognized our need for additional technology to support both onsite blended and offsite remote learning environments. Additional Chromebooks and laptops have been purchased to ensure each student and teacher has access in both onsite and remote learning settings.

ASBVI recognizes that some of our families may not have internet access in their home or have very limited inconsistent access. ASBVI will be receiving several Wi-Fi access point devices that can be distributed. In addition outside campus Wi-Fi access points are being installed.

Implementation of the blended learning component for K-6 will consist of uploading curriculum to students Chromebooks on Google Classroom. Each student will be assigned a Chromebook or an iPad to ensure that they have access to the curriculum with or without an internet connection. This will also enable the student/teacher to develop skills in accessing content digitally should the need arise to implement remote learning.

Implementation of the blended learning component for 7-12 will consist of utilizing the Lincoln Learning curriculum and the Buzz Learning Management System. Lincoln Learning will be used in conjunction with Google Classroom so that the students have access to uploaded materials with and without an internet connection. Lincoln Learning is a state provided option that the district has opted into to provide another layer of learning for our students.

Diagnostic Assessments

In order to support teachers in assessing gaps in learning, especially due to our early closure of school, ASBVI will be using Renaissance Star 360 diagnostic assessments for K-8. Access is being provided by the ADE for a 2 year period. ASBVI has used Star 360 for several years so it is an assessment teachers are familiar with and one that we've found is accessible with our students. We will also continue as we have in past years to utilize Star 360 in the upper grade levels as well as Accelerated Reader.

2. ASBVI is committed to addressing unfinished learning from the prior year by utilizing the ADE Arkansas Playbook and the Planning for Re-engagement documents as well as district support of professional development resources.

ASBVI recognizes that the early closure of school from the prior year will have created a larger gap in learning for our students who are all provided educational services according to their IEP. In conjunction with the students IEP teachers will utilize the ADE Arkansas Playbook and the Planning for Re-engagement documents to address prior year unfinished learning. In addition instructional staff will be providing remediation/tutoring before and after school. ASBVI will

further support teachers in addressing unfinished learning by providing on-going professional development to ensure high-quality implementation of re-engagement with students.

3. ASBVI is committed to utilizing a Learning Management System (LMS) to provide students access to digital learning systems and to develop their skills in blended and remote learning systems.

ASBVI has been engaged with digital learning for several years by providing students the opportunity to take courses offered through Virtual Arkansas. However, we recognized the need of further developing both student and teacher skills in utilizing digital learning systems for the delivery of instruction. This is especially needful in light of the possibility of having to pivot from onsite to remote instruction throughout the school year.

ASBVI has previously used Google Classroom as a LMS and will continue to expand its use in the new school year. Primarily K-6 will be using Google Classroom as their LMS. 7-12 grade levels will utilize Lincoln Learning and the Buzz platform as a LMS. Lincoln Learning is primarily the content aligned with standards and Buzz is the software/LMS through which it is delivered. The ADE has provided districts with the option of utilizing Lincoln Learning for this school year. Additionally, 7-12 students will continue to utilize Google Classroom as appropriate. ASBVI recognizes the need to provide students and teachers with a variety of instructional access due to students' disabilities and individual needs.

4. ASBVI is committed to teacher training for how to utilize the LMS

ASBVI recognizes the need for training teachers in utilizing a variety of digital learning resources. This summer we provided training for an instructional staff member who will be providing 7-12 teachers training on utilizing the Lincoln Learning system during the teacher professional development week. Since this is a new system to the school ongoing training and support will continue to be provided throughout the school year during scheduled PD days and utilizing some of our weekly educational staff meetings.

ASBVI will also assess periodically how effective the system is for our teachers and students. This will primarily be indicated by how accessible it is to individual students in relation to their blindness and visual impairments. For this reason Google Classroom will also continue to be used since we have worked through different accessibility issues.

Training will also be provided during teacher professional development week on further developing and utilizing Google Classroom as a LMS and instructional delivery method for K-12.

5. ASBVI is committed to teacher training for how to develop and implement blended learning in the delivery of instruction.

Along with training for utilizing a LMS in delivering instruction ASBVI recognizes the need to train teachers in developing and implementing blended learning instructional methods. Initial training for both K-6 and 7-12 will be implemented during the annual teacher professional

development week and then be ongoing throughout the year during scheduled PD days as well as utilizing some of our weekly educational staff meetings.

6. ASBVI is committed to providing support for parents and students in learning and adapting to new instructional methods and opportunities.

ASBVI recognizes the need to provide ongoing support for parents and students as we implement new instructional delivery methods. ASBVI has a relatively small population and community and believes in reaching out to parents individually to assess their needs. We accomplish this primarily through teacher and administrator communication throughout the school year. To provide further support ASBVI will develop and hold online sessions that a parent can attend to learn more about remote instruction, blended learning and assisting their child with their Chromebook or other digital device.

7. ASBVI is committed to providing a communication plan for interacting with parents, students, and the community.

ASBVI utilizes several methods for communicating and interacting with parents, students and the community. We always post official information regarding school events to our website that also pushes it out to our Facebook and Twitter feeds. In addition we utilize School Messenger to deliver messages by phone, email and text to families, students and staff. Since our population and community are relatively small we are also able to reach out individually to our families as necessary. In addition, ASBVI sends out a number of mailings to families during the school year, includes information in Elementary school student's weekly take home packets, and distributes monthly school newsletters. The school's EAST program also provides a weekly update of school life on their YouTube channel.

During the coming school year due to the ongoing risk of COVID-19 there may be times we have to pivot to remote offsite learning for all students. We will post this information to our website but we will also follow up by phone as well as a School Messenger announcement.

District Literacy Plan

Due to the early closure of school in March of 2019 the spring state Aspire assessments for grades 3-8 were cancelled. ASBVI will be using reading data from the 2018-2019 assessment to inform our literacy plan. In addition we will use data collected from the Star 360 diagnostic assessments mentioned earlier to assess further gaps students might have in reading.

2018-2019 data from the ACT Aspire state assessment shows that 44.68% of students in grades 3-8 scored "in need of support" in the Reading section of the assessment. ASBVI recognizes the special needs of our students with blindness and visual impairments and the challenges they face in successfully navigating the state assessment. ASBVI also recognizes the vital importance of our students being able to meet those challenges as they prepare for transition towards college and career success and towards productive lives of independence. Additionally, ASBVI recognizes that effective and strong reading skills are an essential foundation to success in other content areas pursued by the student.

In order to accomplish improved student outcomes in the area of reading on the annual state assessment ASBVI will begin work with the following goals during the 2020-2021 school year.

Goals

1. For the 2021 ACT Aspire state assessment the students currently “in need of support” will obtain scores at least 15 percentage points higher than the last assessment results.
2. For the 2021 ACT Aspire state assessment ASBVI will increase the percentage of students moving from “in need of support” to “close” by 6%. In addition ASBVI will increase the percentage of students moving from “close” to “ready” by 8%.
3. In support of improved reading skills and improved student outcomes on the ACT Aspire state assessment for reading; ASBVI will provide professional development opportunities for instructional staff to work towards demonstrating proficiency or awareness as required in the Science of Reading by the 2022 school year.
4. Additionally, ASBVI is currently providing professional development opportunities and resources for a lead administrator to obtain proficiency as a SoR Assessor in the Science of Reading and will continue in the 2020-2021 school year to work towards this goal.

Funding/Resources

ASBVI is a state agency and works within the constraints of a state budget and general revenue appropriation for the operation of the school and the meeting of students’ needs. ASBVI at this time does not receive ESA or other categorical funding normally associated with a public school system.

ASBVI is committed to prioritization of funding towards needs related to reading skills and instruction. ASBVI will also provide necessary resources as they are needed by the schools to work towards improved student outcomes in reading skills and on the state assessment.

ASBVI has already demonstrated this commitment by purchasing an in-service training webinar for all teaching staff on the Heggerty curriculum and methods that was attended by teaching staff. As reflected in the school individual plans ASBVI has also purchased additional Heggerty curriculum for all teachers. Teachers at ASBVI are already in the process of following Pathway D in the Science of Reading through Arkansas IDEAS. Additionally the school’s Lead Principal has been attending RISE training through Arch Ford Educational Services Cooperative to improve understanding and skills and has been attending SoR Assessor training. The district has also made available professional development related to the Science of Reading which was conducted on campus by a Literacy Specialist from Arch Ford. In addition, ASBVI has added a resource teacher that is focused on reading and providing support both to teachers and students.

Additionally, for the current 2020-2021 school year ASBVI has invested funds in the Benchmark Workshop curriculum for grade levels K-5. Benchmark Workshop is an approved reading

curriculum through ADE. We also invested funds in the training component for our teachers to be better prepared at implementing the curriculum in their classrooms.

ASBVI faces a unique challenge in implementing the Science of Reading for students with blindness and visual impairments. Many of these challenges are related to materials and methods being made accessible for the use of blind and visually impaired students. We are committed though to integrating the Science of Reading into braille literacy and literacy for visually impaired students. ASBVI is also committed to examining the research available in the field of blindness as it relates to reading instruction and successful outcomes for students.

District Support of the Elementary and Secondary Improvement Plans

ASBVI is a specialized school district on one campus that is comprised of students from PK-12. All students are students with disabilities that are blind or visually impaired and are served under IDEA with Individual Education Plans (IEP). All students are referred by their local school districts to ASBVI. All students are considered at risk based on their disabilities. The school serves both local students and students from out of town.

Class and grade sizes are relatively small (generally <10) and will vary each year according to the number of students moving forward to the next grade and according to new referrals of students from local school districts. Due to the relatively low number of students in each grade and the school as a whole data related to numbers and subgroups is typically skewed and cannot be relied upon alone as an overall needs assessment process.

Students at ASBVI have many needs in addition to their visual needs. Staff, parents, stakeholders and other community partners plays a vital role in meeting those needs. While ASBVI recognizes that other factors related to demographics and other types of subgroups can impact student growth the primary focus of the school is on students' visual needs and compensatory skills. In addition the school is also focused on growth in the nine areas of the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC). These areas are comprised of essential compensatory skills that directly relate to the needs of blind and visually impaired students. These two areas of focus must form the foundation for student academic and career success.

Individual student data as found within each student's IEP informs the overall needs assessment process. The IEP is each individual student's Student Success Plan. ASBVI assesses many forms of student data that includes Functional Vision Assessments, psychological testing, and academic/career skills assessments. In addition data related to student attendance, teacher effectiveness (especially as a Teacher of the Visually Impaired) and parent engagement is assessed.

Both the Elementary and Secondary school have identified targeted areas for improvement within their plans. As a district we are committed to supporting the overall plans of the school and making available the necessary resources to meet the goals within the plans.

Elementary School

1. Increased student attendance

ASBVI recognizes the vital importance of student attendance as it relates to student learning and success and supports the school's efforts to improve attendance. Funding and other necessary resources will be provided as needed to provide student incentives and provide consistent communication to parents and the referring district.

2. Increased reading and writing skills

ASBVI recognizes the vital importance of a strong foundation in the English Language Arts (ELA) and supports the school's efforts to improve reading and writing skills. Funding and other necessary resources for requested curriculum, supplemental instructional tools and materials, and student activities to promote literacy will be provided as necessary throughout the school year. Resources related to professional development and training in the RISE initiative for the Science of Reading, will be provided as requested and needed throughout the school year.

3. Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) skills

ASBVI recognizes the ECC as one of the school's primary focuses in teaching blind and visually impaired students the compensatory skills that lead to independence and lifelong success. Funding and other necessary resources will be provided as needed to provide professional development related to the ECC skills especially for our teachers and staff that are new to the field of blindness. Funding and resources as necessary will also be provided for requested student activities and parent communication initiatives as it relates to the ECC.

4. Increased student accountability/responsibility

ASBVI recognizes the vital importance of student accountability and responsibility in developing students into successful learners and independent and productive citizens. Funding and other necessary resources will be provided as needed for staff development, student activities and materials that can help support a culture and climate of student accountability and responsibility. The school's counseling and mental health departments will be provided with requested resources as necessary.

Secondary School

1. Reading

ASBVI recognizes the vital importance of a strong foundation in the English Language Arts (ELA) and supports the school's efforts to improve reading and writing skills and outcomes on the state assessment. Funding and other necessary resources for requested curriculum, supplemental instructional tools and materials, and student activities to promote literacy will be provided as necessary throughout the school year. Resources related to professional development and training in the RISE initiative for the Science of Reading will be provided as requested and needed throughout the school year.

2. Mathematics

ASBVI recognizes the vital importance of a strong foundation in mathematics and supports the school's efforts to improve mathematic skills and outcomes on the state assessment. Funding and other necessary resources for requested curriculum, supplemental instructional tools and materials, and student activities to promote math skills will be provided as necessary throughout the school year. Resources related to professional development for staff will be provided. Time will be dedicated to developing a structured math curriculum that is aligned vertically between Elementary and Secondary schools.

3. Attendance

ASBVI recognizes the vital importance of student attendance as it relates to student learning and success and supports the school's efforts to improve attendance. Funding and other necessary resources will be provided as needed to provide student incentives and provide consistent communication to parents and the referring district.

4. Plans for Post-secondary success

ASBVI recognizes that students must not only be successful in their learning but should be prepared to successfully transition into post-secondary learning and career training opportunities. ASBVI supports the school's efforts in taking a team approach to transition that includes the student, parents and staff. Resources necessary to support this effort will be provided as requested.

Monitoring Timeline and Written Expectations

School Improvement Plans will be monitored during weekly administrative staff meetings. This will allow for frequent monitoring and feedback as well as for keeping the plans linked and relevant to the everyday work with students and staff. It is expected that school leaders will be able to address specific areas of the plan and highlight specific efforts in place and progress as well as present requests for resources and support.

Evaluation Timeline and Expectations

School improvement plans will be evaluated at the end of each nine-week period and revised as necessary. Since ASBVI is a combined school district evaluation will take place as a team comprised of the Superintendent, Principals, Special Education Supervisor, and Lead Teachers. The team will look at data sources related to each area in the plan and assess where revisions need to be made.

Funding

ASBVI is a state agency and works within the constraints of a state budget and general revenue appropriation for the operation of the school and the meeting of students' needs. ASBVI at this time does not receive ESA or other categorical funding normally associated with a public school system. However, ASBVI remains committed to prioritizing funds in support of the Elementary and Secondary schools.

Conclusion

The District Support Plan along with the Elementary and Secondary Improvement Plans are considered living documents and will be revised and updated as necessary to reflect a continuous cycle of improvement at ASBVI. Our approach is one of Plan, Do, and Check.

For over one-hundred and sixty years ASBVI has been educating blind and visually impaired students in the state of Arkansas. The years have brought many challenges. Through a dedicated staff, community and Board of Trustees that puts students first we have met those challenges. COVID-19, missed learning from the previous year, and the need to implement new instructional delivery methods to ensure the continuity of learning are some of the new challenges we face in 2020-2021. Through putting kids first and the commitment to a continuous cycle of improvement ASBVI will meet these challenges as well. At ASBVI "It's all about the Kids"!