

OFFICIAL MINUTES FROM THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING OF THE
ARKANSAS SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF AND BLIND

The Board of Trustees for the Arkansas School for the Deaf and Blind met for their monthly meeting July 15, 2025, in Woolly Auditorium.

Present: Robert Fagan, Chair; Dr. John McAllister, Vice Chair; Cary Smith, Board Member; Philip Powell, Board Member; Jerry Belew, Board Member, and Phillip Miller, ASD Parent Representative, K. Nicole Walsh, ASD Superintendent; Interpreters; Members of the community.

Mr. Fagan called the meeting to order at 5:00 pm. He welcomed everyone to the first Board of Trustees meeting of the Arkansas School for the Deaf and Blind.

Mr. Fagan led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mrs. Walsh recognized the Security Team for helping the nurses move back into Infirmary. It was a huge job – filing cabinets, paperwork, etc. She thanked them for their positive attitude and teamwork. Mr. Fagan also thanked them for all the work they do.

Mr. Fagan called roll - all board members were present. He asked Mr. Miller to talk about himself and his daughter. Mr. Miller said his daughter will be in ninth grade at ASD. He said he is looking forward to working with the board and learning more about the schools. He is an elected sheriff in White County. Mr. Fagan said the board was lucky to have him.

The next meeting will be August 19, 2025, in Woolly Auditorium on the ASBVI campus. All members except Mr. Powell agreed on the date. Mr. Powell will not be able to attend in August. Mr. Fagan said there will still be a quorum without his attendance, so they will go ahead with the meeting and send Mr. Powell the minutes for review.

Joint Agenda

25-J-33 Motion to Approve Joint Meeting Minutes for May 20, 2025.

Mrs. Smith made a motion to approve. Dr. McAllister seconded. Motion carried.

Mr. Fagan said a new law passed recently regarding public comments. Public comments must be made before any action items.

Public Comments:

Mr. Fagan said you have three minutes to speak, and the board will not make any comments afterwards. LaHollis Hill: Mr. Hill said he was the president of the Arkansas School for the Deaf Alumni Association. He said he wanted to discuss the ARK regarding the abbreviation to the Arkansas School for the Deaf and Blind. He said they always finger-spell ARK, not AR. He said you may say that in English but the deaf way of doing things is with the ARK. He said you will see the University of Arkansas abbreviated UARK, but not UAR. He would like to recommend that ARKDB be used as the abbreviation for the school's name.

KaAnn Varner: She said she wanted to discuss the same thing. She recommends that ARKDB be used instead of ARDB. Like Mr. Hill mentioned, all the schools have their identities, Alabama, Arizona but the ARK is specific to Arkansas. ARK signs much better and she hopes the board will consider ARKDB.

Deana Shields: She said she is the nurse supervisor and wanted to say thank you for security for all their help moving and they really appreciated it.

Action Items:

25-J-34 Motion to Approve Student Handbook

Dr. McAllister made a motion to approve. Mrs. Smith seconded. Motion carried.

25-J-35 Motion to Approve School Level Improvement Plan

Ms. Walsh said it was a joint effort to put together the school improvement plan. It was made up by a variety of humans from both campuses. She said they came to three main topics to focus on – 1) academic improvement for literacy and numeracy for math and reading; 2) continuous improvement in the ECC and a focus in the expanded core competencies for both deaf and blind; 3) student climate – ensuring that students feel safe, comfortable and connected as the merger is made. Mrs. Smith said she thought the focus on ECC is a vital component. She asked about the ECC for the deaf. Mrs. Walsh said the ECC for the blind and visually impaired is federally standardized. The ECC for deaf students varies by state. They are all pretty common in that they focus on deaf history, heritage and culture, knowledge of hearing loss, understanding of communication, options and modality. She said Arkansas does not have a formalized ECC. Minnesota calls it expanded core standards. She likes the ones from Minnesota. She said she hoped to push legislation and rules to get ECC standardized.

Dr. McAllister made a motion to approve. Mr. Powell seconded. Motion carried.

25-J-36 Motion to Approve Parent Engagement Plan

Mrs. Walsh said it was put together by Teresa Doan. She said Ms. Doan said they needed to do more, making sure parents feel valued and are a partner in their child's education.

Mr. Powell made a motion to approve. Dr. McAllister seconded. Motion carried.

25-J-37 Motion to Approve Comprehensive School Counseling Plan

Mrs. Walsh said it addresses the legal requirement for the school to have a plan in place for students who need mental health resources. It includes the PBIS program (Positive Behavior Intervention System). The Deaf Department has instituted a ROAR store which is like a token economy – kids earn bucks and then can go shopping. For several years it has been very successful. Mrs. Cole asked if the Blind Department could do the same thing. Mrs. Walsh said they are taking the best of what each school has and putting them together, so the students have common supports in positive behavior.

Dr. McAllister made a motion to approve. Mr. Powell seconded. Motion carried.

25-J-38 Motion to Approve Bell to Bell, No Cell Policy

Mrs. Walsh said some people are opposed but most educators and family members are thrilled about the law that passed to ensure students do not have access to their cell phones from the moment the bell rings until the bell rings at the end of school. The point of this is to have distraction free learning. So many students have notifications set to go off every 15-20 seconds. Every time a child is interrupted, it takes upwards of 20 minutes to get fully reengaged. Research shows that this is necessary for student productivity and learning. It was implemented on a pilot basis last year but did not have a formal policy. It was a success. It took about 3 weeks; everyone panicked for the first 3 weeks. Students were upset that their parents couldn't get in touch with them, but parents can call the office if they need to get in touch with a child. After about a month, they were seeing kids talking to each other. Bullying can be caught quicker because it is happening face-to-face not on the phone. She said this policy follows the law. Mr. Fagan asked about the residential students. Mrs. Walsh said there are designated times they will be able to have their phones (outside of study hours). There will be a curfew time, but it does not mean they cannot have their phones for alarm purposes. Mrs. Smith asked where the phones would be kept. Mrs. Walsh said during the school day, the phones will be kept in the front office in a locker. Mrs. Smith asked if that would slow down the after-school process. Mrs. Walsh said it hasn't since we do not have a large number of students. There will be a couple of drop-offs and pickup locations. There is a caveat for students who have it in their IEP that they need it for monitoring. It was asked if the RA's would have the same procedure. Mrs. Walsh said there would be a locker in the dorms also. She said they are asking the dorm students to leave their phones in the dorms. Mr. Fagan said it may be necessary for the RA's to take the phones at bedtime, correct? Mrs. Walsh said if it gets to the point, they are not being trustworthy, yes.

Dr. McAllister made a motion to approve. Mr. Powell seconded. Motion carried.

25-J-39 Motion to Approve Abbreviation for Arkansas

Mrs. Walsh said the choices are ARKDB versus ARDB. She said sometimes even if something feels different or unknown to us, as we move forward into the merger, it is important that we constantly look to both communities and take it as an opportunity to come together. If something means something to one community and not to the other, it is important to take it into consideration. You heard from the community tonight and there is a real heart for this. If you choose something other than ARKDB, she thinks people will accept it. As we move forward, everything must be with a heart for bringing these communities together. Mr. Miller said he heard folks say this is their identity and identity is very important to who we are. He said he would like it to be considered moving forward. Mr. Fagan said to think about what it looks like in print. ARK was Arkansas in the seventies and now it is AR. He said that was his concern. He said language changes on a regular basis. He said braille has changed in the last ten years. Mrs. Smith said she wanted to make a clarifying comment on the discussion last month. It was discussed that Arizona is ARDB, but it is ASDB, there was concern that we would have the same abbreviation as Arizona. Mr. Powell said there have been a lot of changes in the last year and if there is a way for the deaf community to hold on to something they had previously, he would say keep the ARK. Mr. Belew said he is strongly in support of ARKDB to protect their identity.

Mrs. Smith said prior to the merger, the School for the Blind was ASBVI, so the blind did drop the visually impaired portion of the name. Prior to the merger, it was ASD, so it was never ARKDB. She said it is not that it was being taken away, it was never there. Mr. Fagan stated it is the sign. Mrs. Smith asked if it was signed ASD and Mrs. Walsh said the school itself is signed ASD, but when asked where you are from, it is signed ARK. Mr. Fagan said that is a completely different thing. Mrs. Smith said this is about school. Mr. Fagan asked where the acronym would appear, what documents it would appear on, or signs facing Markham. Mrs. Walsh said she thought it would be in documents, but she thinks the signage will be Arkansas School for the Deaf and Blind. Mrs. Smith said she finds it interesting that they are very focused on voting for the acronym, but they did not vote on the name of the school. Mrs. Walsh said the name was written into the law. Mrs. Smith said it was never brought before the board for discussion. She said she loves the idea that the students have come together to talk about school colors, mascot, etc. Mrs. Walsh said she does not know that the acronym was intended to be for a vote because when things were given to her it was given as ARKDB after conversations with folks. She thinks that is why it was listed as a discussion item, but when the informal vote occurred, we had to formalize that vote. It would have to go back to legislation to change the name. Mrs. Smith said she thinks it would have been a hot topic for debate if they had had the opportunity to discuss the new name of the school. Mr. Fagan said he had heard things about that also.

Mr. Fagan asked who was in favor of ARKDB to raise their hand – there were 2.

Mr. Fagan asked who was in favor of ARDB to raise their hand – there were 2.

Mr. Fagan said he was the tie breaker. He said he was going to vote for ARDB.

Discussion Items: Annual School Nurse Survey

Mr. Fagan introduced Deana Shields, RN – Infirmary Supervisor

Mrs. Shields said she came in March and has had to play catchup.

She said they have quite a few students with ADD/ADHD. She said there are approximately 200 students between the two schools, and they see quite a few every day. They give around 55 scheduled medications every day, which does not include emergency medications, Tylenol, etc. that the kids may come in for. She said they have called for EMS twice. She said they had two nurses start this past month. Mr. Powell asked about counseling. Mrs. Shields said they work very closely with the counselors on both campuses and social services as well. She said they had kids that had mental health episodes over summer camp. She is very big on nurse/student relationships, not all kids take medicine so they may not know them. She encourages the nurses to get out on campus to see and talk to the students. She said they want to teach the kids to be independent and how to live. Mr. Miller asked how accessible is Narcan. Mrs. Shields said she has about 200 things of Narcan. She said they have 15 AED stations that also have Narcan in them and security also has them.

ARDB Agenda

25-DB-40 Motion to Approve Consent Items (Minutes, Financial Statement, Personnel Items)

Mr. Powell made a motion to approve. Dr. McAllister seconded. Motion carried.

Action Items – None

Discussion Items – None

ARDB Superintendent Report

Mrs. Walsh said she wanted to address an article published on KATV's website. She said the reporter incorrectly cited the bill for the Division of Services for the Blind stating that we were going from two to one and the board would only be made up with blind members and over the age of 55. She said we are not Division of Services for the Blind. She said they are not removing deaf members from the board. Our Bill specifically states who will be on the board. She wanted to clear the air that the article was completely false. When addressed, the reporter asked how he was supposed to know. She told him if he had called, she could have explained it to him. He was supposed to have printed a retraction today. She said it is important that we keep accurate reporting out there. She said she thought there has been a lot of conversation about personnel issues. She said they are moving toward insuring that the people that are here have good intentions and positive mindsets for our students. People who are not part of that mission, that they are finding their way out. She wants everyone to know that we are moving in a very positive direction. She said there had been enough turmoil to this point that she felt the need to address right now.

- Had an incredible leadership retreat – 3 days. The retreat combined visioning exercises, department coordination, and action planning
- Human Capital Updates – HR has classified any break in employment (except for retirement) is considered termination of employment (whether you resign or are terminated)
- School Operations – estimating enrollment at 150 students for ARDB. The merger has made registration more complex with the new LEA number
- School Demographics – Several families from Missouri have moved in for the deaf department. Jump Start was a huge success this year
- 31 students already registered
- Staff Recognition – Could not have had summer programs without the staff that worked it. Brian Tanner served as a lead teacher for summer camp – He not only led daytime activities but adjusted his schedule to drive dorm trips to Cabot Water Park each week. He is here all the time and loves the kids
- The PBIS framework is currently in development (Positive Behavior Interventions & Supports). Building for both schools to be common
- Action Plan for Improvement-Programming is established, and schedules are almost finalized
- Facilities – No major issues, minor repairs such as clogged toilets. Organizing and cleaning the ASBVI Maintenance Shop
- Building Project – Quickly moving toward having a foundational pad
- Mr. DePriest is working on a recycling program for the new building
- Staffing and Training - Changes in the Facilities Department. Mr. DePriest went to the ASPMA Custodial Conference. Staffing continues to be a significant challenge for the maintenance, facilities and custodial departments.

- Statewide Services – Will officially come together when teachers return. They have met and are providing services to families across the state.
- Staff Training – Have a lineup of training for Back-to-School Week
- Interpreting – One staff interpreter, will try to hire more in the beginning of school
- ASD Transition Team has established monthly recurring meetings
- Two complaints filed for IEP concerns by parents – 1 for each school

Mrs. Smith asked about the partnership with the University of Kansas. Mrs. Walsh said the University of Kansas has an MOU with ADE to provide REACH University for paras who like to become teachers. There are paras at the Blind Department that have taken advantage of the program and now have paras interested at the Deaf Department. It costs the school \$75.00 a month. She believes the people that work here are our greatest assets and we want to keep them here. Mr. Powell asked about the students that had been denied admission. Mrs. Walsh said one was expelled from his school previously due to a criminal event, and the other two were students that deafness/blindness were not their primary disability.

Mr. Fagan welcomed Mr. Miller to the board again. He said he was an important part of the board being the liaison between the parents and the board.

Mr. Fagan asked for a motion to adjourn.

25-DB-41 Motion to Adjourn

Mrs. Smith made a motion. Mr. Powell seconded. Motion carried.

Mr. Fagan adjourned the meeting.


Robert Fagan, Chair


Cary Smith, Secretary