

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

The Board of Trustees for the Arkansas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired and the Arkansas School for the Deaf met for special meeting May 25, 2023, at the Arkansas School for the Deaf

Present: Susan Pack, Chair; Robert Fagan, Vice Chair; Dr. Samuel Atcherson, Board Member; Dr. Priya Gupta, ASBVI Parent Representative; Holley Mott, ASD Parent Representative; Will Gorum and Sydney Morris, Interpreters; Members of the Deaf Community; Members of the Blind Community

Virtual: Philip Garner, Board Member

Absent: Dr. John McAllister, Secretary; James Caton, ASBVI Superintendent; Dr. Janet Dickinson, ASD Superintendent

Mrs. Pack called the special meeting to order at 5:00pm.

Agenda

23-D-049 Motion to Nominate ASD Interim Superintendent

Mr. Fagan made a motion to nominate Dr. Gretchen Cobb to be Interim Superintendent for the School for the Deaf. Dr. Atcherson seconded. Motion carried.

Dr. Cobb will begin immediately as Interim Superintendent.

Action Items – None

Discussion Items –

New Superintendent Appointment Process

The board will advertise nationwide for a new ASD Superintendent. A committee will be formed consisting of various members, that will be a part of the interview process. Before it was narrowed down to three or four candidates by zoom. Later narrowed down to two candidates that came to Arkansas, met with the board, and toured ASD campus. A process the board hopes to use again. The position must be posted for thirty days.

Members of the Deaf Community

Members of the ASD community, including behavioral health professionals, school principals, librarians, speech pathology, special education and other faculty came forward at the meeting to discuss their questions and concerns. Concerns including recent changes made to the ASD, ASBVI Health Services building plans without the involvement of ASD, ASBVI staff and health services committee members. Several staff fear the future of ASD and the lack of communication and support received from ADE. ASD

community is concerned about the growing number of vacancies campus wide including teachers and dormitory staff and ask that ADE allow the school to fill crucial vacancies. Additional concerns included effectiveness of appointed interim superintendent, lack of communication between ASD and ADE, and lack of quality education for students during ongoing teacher shortage.

Secretary Oliva, Department of Education

Secretary Oliva discussed his background in special education, connection to the deaf community, and his work as administrative professional on both the school and state level before coming to Arkansas. Secretary Oliva addressed the challenges mentioned by the members of the deaf community and is disheartened that ASD faculty feels they can't trust ADE. Arkansas is 43rd in Education in the nation and while many concerns are new to him, he is committed to getting what is right for students. The status quo in Arkansas has been failing children for decades. I look forward to getting more engaged and working with the board to getting more engaged to give this school what it needs He recently met with Dr. Dickinson, and she shared many of the same concerns regarding staffing, support, and budget. He stated, we'll get this right. We didn't get here overnight, and we are not going to get out of here overnight. Secretary Oliva asked the members of the community to partner with him in protecting students and doing what's right. Sometimes it's going to ruffle the feathers of adults who are interested in protecting a system that is broken but he is prepared to take on those challenges. There are security issues on campus and have previously met with both Superintendents to discuss those issues, as ASD and ASBVI have some of the most fragile students in the state.

Secretary Oliva congratulated Dr. Cobb on her appointment as Interim Superintendent at ASD. He said the national search for a qualified Superintendent with special training to run ASD will be very challenging. He looks forward to working with the board of trustees to find a long-term solution.

Regarding the Health Services building, Secretary Oliva stated zero decisions were made. There is a real reality with school districts that have gone through the process to get new construction done like ASD, ASVI Health Service building. Plans were drawn up years ago and budget set. However, there are recent changes tornado sheltering requirements and making sure new construction meets new codes. Also, the supply chain has hit the construction industry hard, almost doubling the average cost for commercial projects. This forces schools to relook at budgets and plans to decide if more money is needed or how to reduce costs.

For this school and every school in the state, we are going to get better. I appreciate everyone here, the board, teachers, and parents for being an active part.

Mrs. Pack asked if ASD and ASBVI would have access to literacy coaches. Secretary Oliva said if there is a desire, we would be happy to ensure they are included in those opportunities.

Mrs. Pack asked if ASD and ASBVI teachers would be looked at for the teacher salary increases. Secretary Oliva stated he has given a directive to ADE finance folks to find a way to implement salary increases. No official answer was given.

Mr. Fagan asked what top three changes are needed most on ASD, ASBVI campuses. Secretary Oliva said higher quality instruction and material for students, consolidated services between the two campuses, and each school to be more financially stable and less micromanagement from ADE.

Additional board members expressed their gratitude towards Secretary Oliva and look forward to partnership with ADE and bridging the disconnect between the board and ADE. Additionally, asked for more support regarding vacancies and security.

23-J-050 Motion to Adjourn

Mrs. Pack made a motion to adjourn. Motion carried.

Susan Pack, Chair

Dr. John McAllister, Secretary