

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 their monthly meeting February 25, 2025, at the Arkansas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (Woolly Auditorium).

Present: Robert Fagan, Chair; Dr. John McAllister, Vice Chair; Cary Smith, Secretary; Jerry Belew, Board Member, and Holley Mott, ASD Parent Representative, K. Nicole Walsh, ASD Superintendent; Dr. Chris Barnes, ASBVI Interim Superintendent; Interpreters; Members of the community.

The meeting was called to order at 5:00 pm.

Mr. Fagan asked Dr. Barnes to introduce the ASBVI student who led the audience in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mr. Fagan called roll. Mr. Phillip Powell was absent. The next meeting is scheduled for March 18, 2025, in Woolly Auditorium on the ASBVI campus.

Joint Agenda

25-J-08 Motion to Approve Joint Meeting Minutes for February 25, 2025

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

Action Items:

2025-2026 ASB/ASD Calendar Approval:

Mr. Fagan turned the meeting over to Superintendent Walsh to explain the calendars

The two options are similar – one starts a week before the other

Option 1 includes a week off in October

Equal number of instructional days and equal number of staff days

Inclement weather days are built in

Anticipating that minutes/hours will no longer be accepted next year

Feedback overwhelmingly was in favor of Option 1

Staff concerned about the 199 staff days – Public school contracts for 190 days, ASB/ASD are not contract schools but are state agencies

The hope is to offer 5 personal days with the two options – currently staff do not receive personal days

Mrs. Walsh said sometimes you need to schedule an appointment, and this gives them the opportunity to plan for needed appointments and events without using sick days and calling in the night before. If personal days are offered it would give administration time to plan.

Mr. Fagan asked if that included the 2 weeks at Christmas, 1 week at Thanksgiving, and 1 week at Spring Break. Mrs. Walsh said sometimes things come up that are not scheduled during these breaks. Teachers need time off, so they use their sick time and wait until the night before to call in, leaving administration scrambling to find coverage. If personal days were offered plans could be made in advance.

Mr. Fagan asked what it would take to add the 5 days. Mrs. Walsh said the 5 days are already added to both calendars.

Mr. Fagan asked what if a staff member does not use the 5 days. Mrs. Walsh is hoping to offer to roll over 3 days a year.

Mr. Fagan asked what ADE thinks of it. Mrs. Walsh said they are in support if this is what the board wants to do.

Mr. Fagan asked if it was just for teachers. Mrs. Walsh said right now it is all 10-month staff.

Dr. McAllister asked if the start date was in line with LRSD. Mrs. Walsh said the top three are different from one another. She said they decided to do what works for our students. The districts are required to provide transportation for our start and finish times.

Mrs. Smith said even if their bus drivers are off contract, they must provide somehow. Mrs. Walsh said yes, they would adjust the contract. Dr. McAllister said that was what he was worried about. Mr. Belew asked if the time off in October could be used if needed for inclement weather. Mrs. Walsh said yes if they knew when those days would be, but normally the snow days are in January and February. Mr. McAllister asked what Option 2 looks like. Mrs. Walsh said it is like this year. It starts August 11th and goes to June 10th.

Mrs. Smith asked how many parents responded to the survey. Mrs. Walsh said she knew how many responses she received but not who they were from. She said she received forty-seven responses. She is going to double check to make sure of the number. Mrs. Smith asked what the requirements for student days are. Mrs. Walsh answered 178. Mrs. Smith asked in a public school and Mrs. Walsh said 190. Mrs. Smith said her concern would be 9 added days for staff. Mrs. Walsh said if she needed to adjust the calendar, she would be happy to do that. Mrs. Smith asked about the requirements for PD per year. Mrs. Walsh said 36 hours. Mrs. Smith said once they get 36 hours, do the teachers have to come in on the required PD days. Mrs. Walsh said that is where the flex days come into play. Teachers must come in during the summer and complete PD to earn the flex days. Mrs. Smith asked if regular state employees must earn their time off. Mrs. Walsh said they earn annual leave by working a certain number of hours. Mrs. Smith said she thinks it gets muddled between a state/school employee. Mrs. Walsh said she thinks that is a conversation to have with OPM. Mrs. Smith asked if there would be blackout days for the five personal days. Mrs. Walsh said yes, typically testing. She said teachers would need to notify their supervisor a week in advance of taking one of those days. There will be a policy put in place for the personal days.

Mrs. Smith said the long weekends are difficult for a dual working family. She said she took her own poll from ASB families and found that many students (if old enough) are home alone, so it really does not afford a lot of extra family time. Mrs. Walsh said that is a valid concern. She said it would be a good time for the school to offer something like a camp. She said she has heard that is when families can get into see a doctor or dentist. Mrs. Smith said there are always going to be two sides. She said she hates to base a decision on only forty-seven responses between both campuses. Mrs. Walsh said a traditional calendar does not take care of the students' needs. It shortens the time they are in school and at home. Dr. McAllister asked if it shortens the amount of time in the summer for the students. He asked what the amount of time between the ending and beginning of school.

Mrs. Walsh said the students are gone on June 6th and counted 8 weeks at a minimum. Option 2 would be 9 weeks. Dr. Barnes said there would be a two-week time for summer camp. Mr. Fagan asked what percentage of students attend camp. Mrs. Walsh said it is hard to say how many of their students come because there are public school kids and siblings that attend. Mr. Fagan said camp was an option for parents to send their children to camp. He remembers when it was a 4-week summer camp. Mrs. Mott said on the flip side she remembers all the years of them having parent meetings, there were always those that would send letters complaining about a lot of things, but when you send out requests to complete something or ask questions, the parents do not reply. She said if they are not willing to send their input in, you must make a decision. Mrs. Mott said personally she thinks adding the 5 days would be something she would want.

Mrs. Smith asked why 199 days was decided on. Mrs. Walsh said she added the extra 5 days and there are 5 PD required PD days. Mrs. Smith asked if there was a way to set a limit, so the teachers know the days are going to keep increasing each year. Mrs. Walsh said she thinks it needs to be kept at "X" number of days built in for inclement weather. She said if ADE changes requirements, we have to meet them so we cannot give a set number of days we will never go beyond. Dr. McAllister said he thought what Mrs. Smith was saying was if there is a break in October some parents might have to take time off which could hurt them financially. Dr. McAllister said he was okay with either one, but we have to be practical if Option 1 is approved. It could potentially be a problem for some families. Mrs. Walsh said An ASL or Braille Camp could be offered during the week in October. Teacher could earn a stipend for working. Mr. Fagan asked Dr. Barnes if he wanted to say anything about the calendars. Dr. Barnes said he thought Mrs. Walsh summed it up very well. He said the reality of all this is a calendar needs to be set soon so plans can be made around it. He said everyone cannot be pleased and, in all reality, we cannot serve too many masters. He said they need to look at what is best for the students. Mr. Fagan asked Mrs. Cole if she had anything to say. Mrs. Cole said they need to support the students and everyone involved. The calendars have pros and cons for both students/staff. She would like to see options for parents during the long breaks such as a Braille Boot Camp. She thinks PTO days will be a huge win for the teachers. Mr. Boland said if he were a teacher, he would go with Option 1 for the fall break. He said you have to weigh the pros and cons of each one but he would lean toward Option 1.

Mrs. Varner said she tries to stay neutral. She tries to point out the differences. She said she personally would lean to Option 1. She commented regarding the football perspective. Dr. Cobb said from the SWS perspective, she likes Option 1. She said the fall break would be a good time to do events with the parents around the state.

Mr. Fagan said they needed to move on to board business. He asked the members what they wanted to do. He said the goal of these calendars is to have an extended calendar to aid in being less learning loss. He asked for recommendations. Dr. McAllister said to try Option 1 and if it does not work go back to the regular calendar later. Mr. Fagan said he cannot make a motion, but he recommends that they adopt the first calendar for 2025/26 school year. Mrs. Smith said she did not feel comfortable making a motion for either one of them. She said she wants the teachers to be considered. Mr. Fagan said they are getting the 5 days that they can use at other times. Mrs. Smith asked if we do not use all the inclement weather days, do you get them back. Mrs. Walsh said no. Mr. Fagan said the main goal of these calendars is that students can stay in school on a more regular basis instead of going home for the whole summer and coming back having a deficit of what they learned in the spring.

Mr. Fagan asked if the board wanted Mrs. Walsh to come back with another calendar or adopt one tonight. Dr. McAllister said he thought they needed to adopt one tonight. Mr. Fagan said he needed a motion and a second.

25-J-09 Motion to Adopt Option 1 Calendar for 2025/26 School Year

Dr. McAllister made a motion to try Option 1 for 2025/2026 school year. Mr. Belew seconded. Motion carried.

Dr. McAllister said he thought next year they should start the process earlier to get more feedback.

Mr. Fagan said before he moves on to the Employee Resolution, he asked Mrs. Walsh to introduce the special guests and explain what happened on campus.

Mrs. Walsh said last month ASD hosted the Great Plains School for the Deaf Conference which is basketball and cheerleading. There were eight schools from other states participating. She said they had an interesting time. They had 300 teenagers on campus. She said their team did an awesome job; however, she wanted to recognize some personnel Tommy, Roy and a couple of others who were absolutely a huge component when it came to making sure GPSD was a success. We had a situation where one of the schools really struggled with supervision and we had some breaking into classrooms and property destruction. She said our security personnel did a fantastic job at making sure everyone was safe and in their dorms at night. She said they could not have done it without David and his security team and Roy and his maintenance team for making sure everyone had access to Huckabee Hall; Tommy for coordinating the entire event; and Ray. Mr. Belew asked about the Iowa situation. Mrs. Walsh said one of the Iowa students had someone on the internet stalking her. He flew in from another state and came here to see her. The security staff was able to remove the man from the gym without him realizing he was being removed. They brought him to Mrs. Walsh so she could have a conversation with him. He was removed from campus along with another individual who was not supposed to be on the campus. She said she had to commend this team for pulling everything together and they made every single team feel welcome. She said she was very grateful to all of them.

Mr. Fagan thanked them all for their support with the students and making sure the students were safe. He said that is our ultimate goal to make sure they are educated and safe.

Employment Resolution Letter:

Mr. Fagan asked Mrs. Walsh to explain. Mrs. Walsh said the resolution letter is for the potential director of transportation individual that they want to hire. He has worked many years for Arrow Transportation and Village who is our current transportation people. He works closely with our transportation employees and would like to come on as our transportation director. She said unfortunately back in his 20's (25 years ago) he got in a bar fight and was arrested. On his record it shows he was charged with aggravated assault. He has had no additional concerns since then. He maintains his CDL consistently and has proven repeatedly that he is a valued member of our community already. She asked that the board agree to waive the background check component since it has been 25 years with no additional concerns. Mr. Fagan asked when he would start. Mrs. Walsh said he has been calling her, and he is eager to start.

25-J-10 Motion to Approve the Employment Resolution Letter

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

Discussion Items: None

ASB Agenda

25-B-11 Motion to Approve Consent Items (Minutes, Financial Statement, Personnel Items)

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

Action Items - None

Discussion Items – None

ASB Superintendent Report

- 66 Students – 2 new students
- Illnesses continue around campus. Mr. DePriest has had all the filters changed to help with the air quality issues and additional cleaning
- NCASB wrestling/cheer conference at Tennessee School for the Blind in Nashville-students worked hard and had a strong showing
- ASBVI hosted the Arkansas Blind and Low Vision Competition Day February 6th which included Braille Challenge, Cane Quest, and Abacus Bee
- Two of our Rising Senior students were recommended for Arkansas Governor's School
- Two Students of the Month
- Staff Shout Out - Tammy Harrison (teaches 1st & 2nd grades) is amazing in every way
- Upcoming Events
 - Black History Program February 26th – Dr. McAllister is the guest speaker
 - Arts Advocacy Day
 - Talent Show March 13th
 - Parent/Teacher conferences March 21st
- ASBVI continues to look for a Special Education teacher, Science 7-9 teacher, Gifted & Talented teacher, Nurses and an RA
- Recent Bills passed that affect our schools
 - Act 119 Allows Coaches/Athletic personnel to supervise students in changing areas
 - Act 122 No Cell Phones/Personal Devices in School
 - Act 123 Free Breakfast for all students
 - Act 120 Minutes posted within 24 hours of approval
- Arkansas Access Act Governor's overhaul bill of public education – similar to LEARNs

25-D-12 Motion to Approve Consent Items (Minutes, Financial Statement, Personnel Items)

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

Discussion Items – None

Action Items –None

ASD Superintendent Report

- Added two students to high school – 35 total; middle school – 20; lower school including ECC – 54 Total of 109
- Hired Krystal Barnett, Educational Paraprofessional
- Alyssa Ransome has become 3-5 Science teacher
- ASB Art teacher, Elizabeth Spilman is teaching elementary Art at ASD
- Lori, KaAnn and Ray visited Boone Elementary School to observe HQIM
- PBIS Student of the Month
- Building Updates
 - February 14 Children’s First Daycare last day
 - Nabholtz planning a student interactive time to explain what they are doing
 - Demolition day is March 13
 - Demo Day Celebration March 12 at 10:00 am
 - Schematic Design is scheduled to be completed by end of the month
- HR Employee Updated – List on agenda
- Shout Outs – Nancy Hicks – ECC PreK Teacher; Kara Siemens – Middle School English Language Arts Teacher
- Reappropriation Bill-Mrs. Walsh has the draft. The Bill has not been filed. Mrs. Walsh met with Representative Carr who is in support of the Bill. They talked about why to merge the schools. Mrs. Walsh’s understanding is the Bill will be filed the end of this week or beginning of next week and should go to the committee quickly afterwards. Draft is not public information yet. The language has been updated
- Snow days were a success last week
- Administration Team Master Schedule Retreat held at State Library last Friday to establish bell schedule for ASB/ASD to maximize Shared Services. The goal is to give the schedule to the teachers before the end of the year
- Interpreting Services Update: Due to our new staff interpreter, costs have been cut drastically.

25-D-13 Motion to Adjourn

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

The meeting adjourned at 6:45 pm.

Robert Fagan, Chair

Cary Smith, Secretary