Minutes
Arkansas School for the Deaf and Blind Board of Trustees Meeting
September 15, 2026

Present: Dr. John McAllister, Chair; Cary Smith, Secretary; Robert Fagan, Board Member; Jerry Belew, Board Member; Phillip Miller, ASD Parent Rep; Nicole Walsh, Superintendent; Alysson Tate, Board Liaison; Caitlynn Cochran, Attorney; Interpreters; Members of the Community

Absent: Philip Powell

Call to Order

The Board of Trustees for the Arkansas School for the Deaf and Blind met Tuesday, September 15, 2026, in Woolly Auditorium. Dr. McAllister, Chair, called the meeting to order at 5:00pm and the Board led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Public Comments

None

Consent Agenda

1. Minutes
2. Financial Statements

The August meeting minutes were corrected to reflect that Parent Representative Phillip Miller was absent rather than present. The minutes were approved as corrected with a motion by Robert Fagan and a second by Cary Smith.

Action Agenda

26-DB-85 Approval of Personnel Items

26-DB-85 Superintendent Walsh introduced three new teachers in the Deaf Department Elementary, Kallen Boyett and Sabrina Horton, as well as Heath Simpson, who is the new Physical Education teacher in the Deaf Department. The Board thanked them for their service.

Cary Smith made a motion to approve the personnel items, seconded by Robert Fagan. The motion was unanimously passed.

26-DB-86 Approval of the Annual Equity Compliance Report

26-DB-86 Superintendent Walsh explained that the Annual Equity Compliance Report is an assurance that is signed by the Board that states that we have Title IX and that we are following both the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Section 504. Cary Smith asked if co-teaching in some classes meets the required service minutes and Superintendent Walsh confirmed that it does as long as there is a special education teacher present.

Cary Smith made a motion to approve the Annual Equity Compliance Report, seconded by Jerry Belew. The motion was unanimously passed.

25-DB-87 Approval of the ARDB Transportation Supplemental Compensation Policy

25-DB-87 Superintendent Walsh announced that the ARDB Transportation Supplemental Compensation Policy will give both 10 and 12-month exempt employees the opportunity to get paid a set amount per bus ride that they can earn to be paid out at the end of the month as they are not allowed to earn compensatory time.

Robert Fagan made a motion to approve the ARDB Transportation Supplemental Compensation Policy, seconded by Cary Smith. The motion was unanimously passed.

Discussion Items

Superintendent Walsh gave an update on the new building, noting that we had 25 Saturdays until it was time to move in. Paul Jones from Nabholz and Brad Place with SCM Architects gave updates stating that the brick work is 95% complete as well as having the HVAC work completed in some areas of the building. They also explained that they have a mock classroom assembled to help them observe every aspect of a typical classroom. There will be indicator strips on the edges and in the middle of the floor in the hallways to assist in spatial perception of students that are sweeping canes. Mr. Place also spoke of warranties on different aspects of the building and said that even after the warranty period is over, they will still be here for the school and the community.

Superintendent Report

- Enrollment Updates: Current enrollment across both departments stands at 121 students. This total reflects the return of multiple re-enrolled students alongside newly matriculated students, with additional prospective applications currently being processed through the admissions queue.
- Operations & Cost Savings: Operations successfully renegotiated the waste management agreement, securing a cost reduction of $1,500 per month. This

contracted service will seamlessly transition to support the new facility upon relocation.

- Transportation Logistics: Transportation has successfully transitioned 2 of the 4 bus routes into in-house management. Rebid requests for the remaining routes have been issued, and competitive vendor proposals are anticipated shortly.
- Staffing & Recruitment: Active recruitment is underway to fill vacancies across administrative and operational roles (Housekeeping, Finance, and Security) as well as academic instructional positions (Teachers and Paraprofessionals).
- Upcoming Academic Event: The annual Abacus Bee is scheduled to take place on September 17th.
- Student Field Experience: Space Camp participation for 5th and 6th-grade Blind Department students is finalized, with departure scheduled for September 27th.
- Vocational Education: Three students are currently enrolled in specialized trade programs at the Metropolitan Career Center in Little Rock, pursuing coursework in HVAC, Plumbing, and Automotive Technology.
- Alumni Bequest: ARDB will receive a generous $70,000 bequest from an alumnus, designated specifically for high-impact student enrichment activities outside the scope of standard operating funds.
- Development & Community Engagement: The Development Department continues to expand community outreach via social media and ParentSquare. ParentSquare access has also been enabled for the Board to review school news, calendars, and institutional updates. Additionally, Kevin Lentz is coordinating outreach to corporate partners to secure branded apparel and merchandise donations.
- Community Support Initiatives: Planning for the annual Angel Tree program is underway, with 88 families identified to receive holiday assistance this year.
- Related Service: In-house capacity has been expanded with the hiring of a new Occupational Therapist and an extended employment offer to a Speech-Language Pathologist Assistant.
- Facilities & Food Services: Child Nutrition operations have continued coordinating meal service in alternate locations while Breeding Cafeteria is unavailable.
- Departmental Leadership: Nicole Walsh is currently directing Special Services operations and oversight during Teresa Doan's absence.
- ADCC Program Capacity: The ADCC program currently serves 16 clients, including 7 enrolled in the residential Elevate program on campus. All clients are actively engaged in either on-the-job training or vocational skills development.

Alysson Tate and Caitlynn Cochran spoke briefly about the timeline for legislation as the Board Workshop that was scheduled has been postponed. They asked the Board to submit

any legislative ideas with brief descriptions to them by Friday so that there is time to have the legal department consider it for the legislative session.

Nicole Walsh spoke to a meeting that she, Lori Cole, and Jena McDonnell had with the Division of Services for the Blind about work readiness and pre-employment transition services. She also reported that they are preparing to hold a three-week JumpStart program in the summer as well as the potential for Braille Bootcamp or a mini-JumpStart during school breaks.

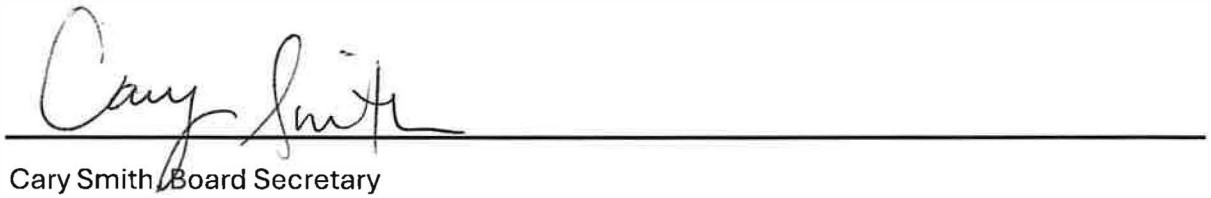
Adjournment

26-DB-88 Motion to Adjourn

Robert Fagan made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Cary Smith. The motion to adjourn passed unanimously.



Dr. John McAllister, Board Chair



Cary Smith, Board Secretary