

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 special meeting February 15, 2024, at the Arkansas School for the Deaf.

**Present:** Robert Fagan, Chair; Dr. John McAllister, Vice Chair; Dr. Samuel Atcherson, Secretary; Philip Garner, Board Member (Zoom); Tyrone Williams, ASBVI Interim Superintendent; Dr. Gretchen Cobb, ASD Interim Superintendent; Holley Mott, ASD Parent Representative; Will Gorum and Jonathan Smith, Interpreters; Members of the Blind Community; Members of the Deaf Community

**Absent:**

Mr. Fagan called the meeting to order at 5:00 pm. The February board meeting will take place on February 20, 2024, at the Arkansas School for the Deaf.

Mr. Fagan introduced Secretary of Education, Jacob Oliva.

Secretary Oliva thanked Mr. Fagan and the board members for their above and beyond duties recently. He updated the board on the recent public announcement, talking about the progress made. They held a faculty meeting earlier this week to talk about the research collected and work collaboratively to establish a concept to reimagine the facilities on campus. To make sure students have access to a safe environment and high-quality education opportunities that are world class. They have been meeting with the legislature and Governor and have a lot of support to move forward with taking ideas and concepts to roll out a plan and a timeline. Secretary Oliva provided the board with printed copies of the new concept, including an overall assessment of the facilities by a contracted architect. The buildings were graded A through F or one through five, with five being worst and one needing the least amount of work. They identified buildings that were in rough shape, old, and the cost would not be prohibitive. There is a recommendation to go ahead and demolish those buildings. They are identified on the facility conditions plan and through this plan can see minor, extensive, and major to minor renovations needed. When reimagining the learning space to be efficient and high-quality, the recommendation would be to build a unified campus to share some facilities. They have heard clearly through surveys and feedback from many folks in this room that the integrity, culture, and identity of both schools must be protected. To respect the instruction and needs of the staff. There are ways to be efficient with a unified office, one way in and out, and maybe sharing a kitchen, cafeteria, and gym. This is where the vision of the project started moving forward and through the architect, they identified buildings to utilize best case scenarios or where would be a wise space to do that. Additionally, this is conceptually not a finalized project or program. To identify a space, need to start looking at square footage, what does the classroom space look like, and the different things that need to go into it. The architects identified a space on campus that is yellow, mostly on the blind side of campus, there is not a plan to renovate the identified buildings. New facilities up and running will be done in phases. Secretary Oliva is optimistic that families and communities see the state-of-the-art opportunities, enrollments will go up and will need to

reimagine those spaces in yellow. They would remain on hold until a future use is identified in a couple of years. Due to the age, it is hard to determine a cost estimate for renovations until the walls are opened. For now, it would be wiser to put a new footprint on this campus. There are conceptual ideas on the aerial maps to look at. These ideas were shared with some school staff earlier this week. Through the legislature, collectively everyone is in favor of the idea or the notion that we need to move forward and get something going now. We are getting questions about the details and that is great. The phased approach would be renovating existing buildings with good bones that need to be updated. Our support from the Governor and asking the legislature would be to get all renovations and new buildings done at once. Secure the funding now. Optimistic based on conversations that we will be able to move forward. Acting with urgency as legislative session for budget starts in March. We need to ask for money and rely on our friends in the legislature to approve this project. Acting on a quick timeline, share this and get as much feedback on this concept as possible, and start being able to move forward. Secretary Oliva wanted to say we have ideas, there is a comprehensive plan, and as we move through the legislative process we need to lean on the board for additional support.

Dr. McAllister asked about shared space and protecting the integrity of both schools, and would it be in the best interest to make the new buildings in the center of campus not on one side. We would get less push back if it were in the middle of campus.

Secretary Oliva said that is fair feedback to take to the architects. Most of the buildings that are being renovated and the proximity to the dorms, the idea was to reduce the footprint and the placement of the new building would do that for students.

Dr. Atcherson responded to Dr. McAllister stating the placement is centralized and they are attempting to preserve the historic gravesite.

Dr. Cobb thanked Secretary Oliva for coming and explaining to the board. Dr. Cobb stated it is like her team's proposed plan to Secretary Oliva. She noticed on the proposed facility is there is a big raven through her and to address would be an exorbitant cost. Same on the other side of Pack Hall towards Shults house, making more sense to have it on the most level piece of the property.

Secretary Oliva, this is just a concept. The feedback will be provided to the architect, to determine if it is cost effective to be more centralized.

Dr. McAllister stated that the facility could be moved more east and still preserve the historic gravesite.

Secretary Oliva informed the chair that there are four renderings that will be provided to the school.

ASBVI will tactile the renderings and be made available on Thursday.

Mr. Williams asked everyone to keep in mind while reimagining things and preserving historic values of both campuses, we got to make decisions that are best for the students. If we are working in the best

interest of the students while preserving separate identities, there will be give and take from both sides. In a respectful manner, we can all move forward accordingly in this joint adventure.

### **Comments by Deaf Community Members**

As an alum of the School for the Deaf and former teacher at Florida School for the Deaf and Blind. The way that the campus is set up, it is not clear if there is going to be a deaf side or a blind side, and shared services. We need to have two gyms, one on each side. To keep them separate so there are no conflicts between students with sports and practice. Additionally, here with dorms if we have sports, competition, or tournaments with other schools staying in the dorms. All the dorms are going to be full if we do that. Third concern, some of us have heard ADE wants to put both schools under one superintendent. Are we going to have two superintendents, I am curious about that as well.

### **Joint Agenda**

#### **24-J-05 Motion to Retire into Executive Session**

Mr. Fagan stated at this time, the board is going to discuss ASB superintendent and Dr. McAllister will read a legal statement.

Dr. McAllister stated at this time, the board will retire into executive session to consider three applicants for the position of superintendent. We will reconvene in public session following executive session to present any vote or action taken in executive session.

Mr. Fagan stated we will be discussing which applicants to interview; we are not hiring a superintendent tonight. They must be interviewed first.

Dr. McAllister made a motion to go into Executive Session. Dr. Atcherson seconded. Motion Carried.

Mr. Fagan asked the audience to exit the room.

### **Executive Session**

#### **Review of Applications for Position of ASBVI Superintendent**

The meeting is back in session. The board has unanimously agreed to interview the three candidates received for superintendent of the Arkansas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired. The next step is for HR to set up interviews, hopefully soon.

#### **24-J-6 Motion to Adjourn**

Dr. Atcherson made a motion to adjourn. Dr. McAllister seconded. Motion carried.

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Robert Fagan, Chair

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Dr. Samuel Atcherson, Secretary