



# Annual Report To the Public 2016

*The Arkansas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired*

# ***Superintendent's Letter***

October 15, 2016

Dear Stakeholders and Friends,

Since 1857 the Arkansas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired has engaged in the mission of educating students to become productive and self-sufficient citizens. Our vision is for the school to continue to be the statewide center for the highest quality programs, opportunities and resources for blind and visually impaired students birth through twenty-one.

Our academic programs remain strong and continue to expand through distance learning and other innovative academic opportunities for our students. ASBVI remains on the cutting edge of adaptive technology for the blind and visually impaired. In addition, we continue to expand our vocational/career-readiness programs through skills assessments, work study, internships and partnerships with other organizations that serve the blind and visually impaired in the state. Our birth to 3, STAAC, Pre-K and K programs, as well, continue to grow and expand providing greater opportunity for early intervention in the lives of our students and families throughout the state.

This report provides a brief overview of our programs and progress towards our mission and vision. Thank you for the opportunity to serve children with blindness and visual impairments in the state of Arkansas. Please come by and visit. At ASBVI we're "All About the Kids".

Kindest Regards,  
James Caton, Superintendent

## ***Board of Trustees:***

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# ARKANSAS SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND & VISUALLY IMPAIRED

## 2016 REPORT TO THE PUBLIC

### ***Mission:***

The Arkansas School for the Blind & Visually Impaired will offer statewide quality educational programs and resources to students who are blind or visually impaired, birth through twenty-one, enabling them to become productive, self-sufficient citizens through the involvement of all students, staff, parents and the community.

### ***The Future is NOW:***

Under the tenure of our new superintendent, Mr. James Caton, the Arkansas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired will continue to move forward as the flagship of services for the blind and visually impaired children of Arkansas. Mr. Caton brings a wealth of knowledge to our programs as he has had involvement in all of our departments here at ASBVI. He has had more than two decades of experience working both directly and indirectly with students and families who are touched with blindness and visual impairments. Mr. Caton is a natural leader and believes in doing what is best for our students, teachers and for the school as a whole. He is readily available to all persons who have a vested interest in the school. He has an open-door policy and is happy to meet with anyone, at any time! Feel free to contact him at (501) 296-1810.

### ***Current Enrollment:***

ASBVI has an enrollment of ninety-three (93) students with projections of adding additional students throughout the school year. In addition the school served eighty-one (81) babies enrolled in the Birth to Three Program. Many other students are served through ASBVI's various programs. Please see the "Reaching Out" section below. ASBVI works in tandem with local public school districts. In order to attend our school, students must obtain a referral from their local public school district.

### ***Achievement & School Performance:***

ASBVI's performance status is designated as "needs improvement". This status is based on annual state student assessment data and does not reflect the many other areas of student growth and achievement through ASBVI's programs. During the 2015-2016 school year, the Arkansas Department of Education required that the ACT Aspire Assessment System replace the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) assessment. The ACT Aspire Assessment System includes a vertically scaled battery of achievement tests designed to measure student growth in a longitudinal assessment system for grades 3 through 10. It is also designed to measure student's progress towards college and career readiness. It was administered to ASBVI students in grades 3-10 in April of 2016. Due to lack of accessibility

using screen readers and magnification within the ACT Aspire Testing Portal alternate paper-based assessment was used. Students were assessed in the areas of writing, science, math, English, and reading. Supplemental areas including text complexity, STEM, and progress toward career readiness were also assessed.

Students in grade 11 were required to be assessed using the college entrance exam referred to as the ACT, students' test results are considered private and falls under easily identifiable information. Kindergarten students were assessed using the Qualls Early Learning Inventory (QELI), an assessment tool for the use in primary grades to identify student development in six behavioral characteristics related to school learning. It is a "snapshot" of the child's skills entering kindergarten and early first grade. Grades 1 and 2 were excused from the Iowa Assessment due to inaccessibility. The Iowa Test of Basic Skills is heavily picture based and is not appropriate for young blind and visually impaired learners.

Due to the small number of students who participated in the QELI, IOWA, ACT Aspire, and ACT the Department of Education historically publishes ASBVI performance data as "restricted value". Release of specific percentages would identify individual students which would result in breach of confidentiality. The school improvement status remains "Needs Improvement" for both the elementary and secondary schools. This is based on Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) from recent testing results. The *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) may glean more positive results for our students given the fact that more flexibility is built into this piece of legislation. The elementary and secondary schools are fully accredited and have been awarded Program Approval from the Department of Education. ASBVI continues to work in conjunction with the Arkansas Department of Education and ACT Aspire to make computerized assessments accessible and available to ASBVI students

ASBVI continues to implement remediation programs for all students scoring within the designation of "Close" or "In Need of Support" according to the ACT Aspire Assessment. Teachers are provided professional development on Data Disaggregation, Closing the Achievement Gap, and are introduced to instructional techniques designed to provide students with enhanced "Test Taking Skills". However, until appropriate student accommodations are allowed and test bias and formatting issues are corrected ASBVI will remain extremely concerned about our students' assessment outcomes and the validity of the results.

### ***Distance Learning Program:***

ASBVI has continued to partner with Virtual Arkansas, a state approved online learning community that hosts a variety of classes in many different subject areas. Virtual Arkansas provides our students with the opportunity to take classes based on interest and educational needs not offered in a traditional classroom setting. Distance learning also increases students' computer skills, time management, and responsibility which all contribute to a higher rate of success in a post-secondary setting. ASBVI students have taken Spanish, oral communications, health, ACT preparation courses, psychology, sociology, higher level math classes, computer programming, and anatomy and physiology. Virtual Arkansas allows ASBVI students the ability to navigate

online classes through Moodle and Blackboard using JAWS and Magic. Virtual Arkansas teachers work extremely well with facilitators and the DL Coordinator in order to meet students' accommodations and modifications. ASBVI and Virtual Arkansas will continue to partner together to improve accessibility for students who are blind and visually impaired in the future in order to help guarantee success in an alternate learning environment.

### ***Accreditation Status:***

The General Education and Special Education Programs (elementary and secondary) at the Arkansas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired are fully accredited by the Arkansas Department of Education.

### ***Generally Speaking:***

The **Elementary Program** at ASBVI provides academic and developmental services for students who are in pre-kindergarten through the 5<sup>th</sup> grade. The pre-school program consists of two classrooms. The youngest group is the STAAC (Short Term Academic Assessment Classroom) program. Placement into the STAAC classroom is designed for children who are 2 ½ years old. This affords the chance for the students to be evaluated in a structured setting prior to consideration of placement into special education. Currently there are 7 students enrolled in the STAAC classroom. There are 6 students in the Pre-K classroom. At this time there are 24 students enrolled in the Kindergarten through 5<sup>th</sup> grade classrooms. Additionally, there are 6 students who receive functional academics within an elementary self-contained special education classroom. This brings the total census for the ASBVI elementary school to 43.

The primary focus of the ASBVI elementary school program is to academically challenge and prepare young students for their future. The program provides rigorous academic instruction that meets all the standard guidelines of the Arkansas Department of Education.

ASBVI began the school year with a new **Middle School** program. Comprised of grades 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>, and located on the second floor of the Keller Building, "Team Time" is the slogan of the year. This initiative was created to provide additional support and experience with the Expanded Core Curriculum to increase overall independence of our students prior to them entering into high school. The students are divided into 3 different random groups and work to blend their strengths, needs and leadership skills. To date, the project is going very well! We are looking forward to the overall outcomes as we get nearer to the end of the school year.

The **Secondary School** is continuing to develop 21<sup>st</sup> century learning models and strategies in order to engage students in learning and increase instructional effectiveness. The school has implemented blended and digital learning components in several academic classrooms. These tools will help increase instructional effectiveness and student learning across the STEM disciplines. The school's distance learning program, through Virtual Arkansas, continues to grow. Currently, the school has students enrolled in a variety of distance learning courses. These include concurrent credit courses as well as computer science, foreign language and

*ASBVI Motto: "We're ALL About the Kids!"*

mathematics. Initiatives are underway to develop a culture of learning and highly engaged learning environments for the students.

### ***Teacher Excellence Initiative:***

It is the goal of ASBVI to have 100% of our teaching staff certified as teachers of the blind and visually impaired in addition to their core area of education licensure. We have worked diligently with Stephen F. Austin State University and the Arkansas Department of Education licensure unit to meet all necessary requirements for this additional licensure area. It takes approximately 18 months for a teacher to obtain the TVI licensure area. We are extremely proud of this initiative and are further pleased to acknowledge the Arkansas Department of Education's support for us through their tuition reimbursement program.

### ***Vocational Initiative:***

ASBVI is working to expand this program through a cooperative effort with agencies that traditionally serve adults with visual impairment and blindness. ASBVI is seeking partnership opportunities with World Services for the Blind, the Lighthouse for the Blind and the Division of Services for the Blind. The goal is to better prepare students for gainful employment in the work force. Rehabilitation specialists are becoming actively involved with high school students earlier in their educational careers which will help to pave the way for training and internship experiences, which will result in candidates who are better equipped for competitive employment. On campus work study experiences are also available to students.

### ***Technology Initiative:***

The use of adaptive technology is fundamental and essential to students with visual impairments and blindness. ASBVI has made major strides in integrating technology into the classroom and curricula. The following technology has been added during the past year:

- Six 65" SmartBoards
- Twenty iPads (10 iPad Pro 12.9" and 10 iPad Pro 9.7")
- Fifty-two desktop computers
- Ten laptops for use by SmartBoard users and new employees
- Ten headphones for the Distance Learning Lab
- One 48" flat screen television

One 60” flat screen television  
One Blu-Ray DVD player  
Seven refreshable Braille displays  
Upgraded 10 Duxbury (DBT) licenses to the latest version  
Upgraded 80 JAWS licenses to the latest version



### ***Facilities Improvement Initiative:***

Providing a learning environment that is safe, sanitary and efficient is paramount for the operations and maintenance department. This year a new chiller was purchased and installed for the Keller Building. A new Middle School science lab was designed and constructed on the second floor of the Keller Building. Our choir room in the Woolly Building was remodeled and brought to an improved state of existence. Additionally, the installation of HVAC water treatment system was completed to help prolong the life of major equipment. Also, LED lighting was installed in the library/materials center and in the Primary Building. Smaller improvement initiatives such as pressure washing, re-stripping of parking lots, painting of handrails, and upgrading of the roof exhaust systems continue to be on-going projects.

Additionally, ASBVI received 1.5 million dollars from the Governor’s “Rainy Day Fund”. This money is to be used for infrastructure repairs and restoration projects. Specifically, monies are to be allocated for building improvements, security updates and health and safety upgrades within existing buildings.

### ***Reaching Out:***

- ***Birth to Three Program*** – Our “Family, Infant and Toddler” program was able to touch the lives of 82 families throughout the state of Arkansas during the 15 – 16 school year. This program serves babies and children ages birth to three years in a variety of settings (home and day-care/pre-school). Instruction is provided to parents or caregivers to offer information and emotional support for acceptance of their child’s visual impairment. Additionally, the “hands-on” approach provided by the ASBVI teachers is designed to help the children develop the prerequisite skills that are needed for entrance into a pre-school setting. ASBVI believes in the importance of early intervention for young students and their families and strives to visit with each child and their caregivers at least one time each month.
- ***Summer Programs*** – ASBVI houses and coordinates two very important summer programs- Summer Camp and Jump Start. Summer Camp is designed to provide educational and Expanded Core Curriculum intervention services for students who are in grades one through the age of 15 years. JumpStart is geared toward older students, ages

16 through 21 years. JumpStart, through partnership with Division of Services for the Blind, provides paid work experiences throughout the greater Little Rock community. Both programs are 3 weeks in length and historically provide programmatic services for over 65 students (46 in Summer Camp and 20 in JumpStart).

- ***Prison Braille Project*** – The Wrightsville Unit of the Arkansas Department of Corrections houses our prison braille project. Currently 2 inmates are certified as transcriptionists, with 2 more inmates working to earn their certifications. The inmates are working to provide Braille and large print materials for students all over the state of Arkansas. There are 75 students receiving services from the Instructional Resource Center housed at ASBVI – 50 students receive large print materials and 25 students receive Braille materials.
- ***The Low Vision Clinic*** – The Low Vision Clinic at the Arkansas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired offers premier assessments for students who are identified as having impaired vision. Each week Dr. Kennan Doan, OD visits the school and examines students with the goal of maximizing their visual efficiency through the prescription of optical devices or functional related services (O&M, etc.). Of the approximate 180 students served through the Low Vision Clinic, one-third (60) of those students are public school students.
- ***The Braille Challenge*** – The Arkansas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired hosts the Regional Braille Challenge competition. The goal of the program is to identify and prepare Braille students for the annual National Braille Competition in Los Angeles, California. Each year students from all over the South East region of the US attend our Braille Challenge program. Last year all age groups were represented in all competitive categories; approximately 27 students competed for the overall top spot and trip to California.
- ***Braille Boot Camp*** – Each month our Braille Department offers parents, family members and care givers the opportunity to learn basics of literary Braille production (reading and writing). Virtually each time the class is offered, between 5 and 10 members are present. The design of the class is to focus upon fundamentals and also to make learning Braille enjoyable for all those enrolled.
- ***Local Wellness Committee*** – The Arkansas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired participates in the National School Lunch Program. The school has a Wellness Committee with the focus on encouraging healthy life-styles. The committee coordinates the “Annual Turkey Walk”, Weekly Friday “Dance Days” at lunch and hosts several other events in which the community is involved. The committee has developed a Wellness Policy which can be found on our website.

### ***SCHOOL PROGRAMS:***

General Education Curriculum  
Virtual Arkansas/Distance Learning Curriculum  
Gifted and Talented Program  
Special Education Program  
Counseling Department  
Licensed Certified Social Worker  
Vocational Curriculum

Expanded Core Curriculum Program: Compensatory or Functional Academic Skills Including Communication Modes, Orientation and Mobility, Social Interaction Skills, Independent Living Skills, Recreation and Leisure Skills, Career Education, Use of Assistive Technology, Sensory Efficiency Skills, Self-determination

Extra-curricular: Track and Field, Wrestling, Swimming, Cheerleading, Goal Ball

Functional Curriculum

Licensed Infirmary

Media Center

Residential Program

Child Nutrition Program

Adaptive Technology

Physical Education

Instrumental Music

Choir

Fine Arts

Student Council

Family Career and Community Leaders of America

Future Business Leaders of America

Transition Activities: Work Place Readiness, Independent/Apartment Living, Work-study

ESOL – Teaching English to speakers of other languages

## ***CONCLUSION:***

The Arkansas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired Website provides additional information related to the school, its board of trustees, staff, students and the school's educational programs. It can be found at [arkansasschoolfortheblind.org](http://arkansasschoolfortheblind.org). If you have additional questions you may contact any administrator at 501-296-1810. The administrators are as listed below:

**James Caton, Superintendent**  
**Chris Jones, Secondary Principal**  
**Teresa Doan, Elementary Principal**  
**Justin Rasnick, Special Education Supervisor/ Dean of Students**