



# Arkansas Department of Education

*Division of Elementary and Secondary Education*

Jacob Oliva, Secretary

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Final Beam Placed on New Arkansas School for the Deaf and Blind Facility**

*State leaders celebrate milestone in construction of long-awaited, state-of-the-art campus*

**LITTLE ROCK, Ark.** — Arkansas Secretary of Education Jacob Oliva and Arkansas School for the Deaf and Blind (ARDB) Superintendent Nicole Walsh joined other dignitaries to sign and witness the placement of the final beam on the new Arkansas School for the Deaf and Blind facility.

The long-overdue, state-of-the-art facility will house classrooms for students who are deaf or hard of hearing and students who are blind or visually impaired. The building will also include a cafeteria, as well as fine arts and other common spaces large enough to accommodate all students. The new structure will replace campus facilities that date back more than a century and will help ensure student safety remains a top priority.

“It’s nice to have special buildings, but what makes these buildings special are the students who will learn inside them,” said Secretary Oliva. “We’re so excited for the students I get to stand in front of today. This beam signifies that it’s almost time to start counting down the days until the newest school in the state of Arkansas opens its doors.”

“We are going to put students in the same building for the very first time ever, and that cannot be stressed enough how exciting that is as a pioneering educational model across the United States,” said Walsh. “Our students deserve the very best education, and they will have a state-of-the-art building.”

Governor Sanders announced the construction of the new building in 2024. Since then, the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) has worked with SCM Architects of Little Rock, in collaboration with Mackey Mitchell Architects of St. Louis, Missouri. The project enlisted expertise from both deaf and blind architects to ensure the facility meets the needs of all students.

ADE and the architectural team also hosted more than 30 stakeholder meetings to gather input from students, parents, community members and staff. Nabholz Construction has since worked to bring

the project closer to completion, ensuring Arkansas' deaf and blind students have access to an educational environment designed to best support their needs.

### **Schools' History**

The Arkansas School for the Deaf was established in 1849 in Clarksville, Arkansas. According to historical records, it was the first school for the deaf west of the Mississippi River. The school later relocated to Little Rock in 1867.

The Arkansas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired was founded in 1859 in Arkadelphia as the Institute for the Education of the Blind. It moved to Little Rock in 1868 and was housed in the building now used as the Arkansas Governor's Mansion. The school was renamed the Arkansas School for the Blind in 1877.

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