

Arkansas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired Elementary School Improvement Plan



Our Vision: It's All About the Kids!

Our Mission:

To provide quality education and training for children and young people (birth through age twenty-one) who are visually impaired so they possess the required skills to become personally productive and self-sufficient citizens.

Our Goal:

(In general, to provide state approved curriculum that is delivered with rigor. In addition we strive to foster independence, stability, and self-worth as we strive to educate the whole child and encourage family involvement.

Specifically:

Elementary staff members determined critical areas in which improvement was needed. The entire staff met, broke up into groups and had honest, in-depth and meaningful discussions regarding the areas in which the elementary school was thriving and also areas that were lacking. Groups shared the top 3 areas that they had identified as “needs improvement”. Staff members shared ideas and possible solutions that could be initiated in an effort to produce positive outcomes and change. The results were as follows:

Target Areas for Improvement

- Increased student attendance
- Increased reading and writing skills
- Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) skills
- Increased student accountability/responsibility

Increased student attendance:

Much discussion revolved around this ever present problem. Student absences permeated and became paramount as the staff discussed all facets of overall “school improvement”. As a school it was determined that negative reinforcement was not an effective way to change behavior (parents rarely responded to “truancy letters”) and students still continued to be absent with additional far-fetched excuses. One thought was that waiting until a student had missed 9 days per semester before a truancy letter was sent was “too little, too late” and still doesn’t address the issue with the sending LEA. Following through in a consistent manner to both the child’s custodians and the sending LEA notification at 3 days, 6 days and at 9 days of absence may improve this trend.

Additionally, creating and then facilitation of an incentive program for students to encourage their attendance at school. For example, students would earn “student bucks” for their attendance that could be saved and then spent in the “student prize store”.

Thirdly, the staff will provide elementary parents easy to understand information regarding the truancy laws in Arkansas and covering the negative impact that truancy has on their learner’s education. Moreover, the staff will emphasize the importance and positive impact that BEING at school has on their learners’ education. This information can be shared with parents at the annual registration activity in addition to sending reminders regarding attendance throughout the school year. This could be done through school messenger, notes from teachers and also from the principal.

Increased reading and writing skills:

One of the core beliefs of the staff of the elementary program is that a strong foundation in the English Language Arts curricular area is critical for life long success. Student engagement and motivation are 2 key components for a successful ELA program.

First, the teachers would like to provide a consistent uninterrupted block of time each day for reading instruction and ELA. Research indicates that student focused reading and instruction that is rigorous and uninterrupted is critical for improvement outcomes in the early grades.

Predictable routines will be established as soon as school starts and the students will know and understand their educational goals and have ownership in keeping track of their progress toward meeting their goals. The use of “peer models” /“reading partners” will also be initiated during the 18-19 school year. Students will have the opportunity to meet with a student from a different grade and have book talks with their “book buddy”.

Moreover, the Library Media Specialist will be doing “push in” lessons with the students in collaboration with the classroom teachers. She will be modeling a more hands-on, student lead experience that will motivate students and teachers to explore and expand their experiences with literacy.

Additionally, the Library Media Specialist will facilitate a Book Fair to further motivate students to deepen passion and love of literacy. The elementary school will continue with “RISE and shine” every day. ELA focused classes will be considered sacred and will not be interrupted or disturbed for any reason.

Teachers will have shared planning times that will allow for teacher group discussion and professional development with the goal of having a positive influence upon ELA performance. PLC’s can also be a focus of this joint time. Moreover, vertical and horizontal alignment of curriculum can be ensured and reinforced through such PLC’s. Teachers will make data walls that are accessible to students so that they can track their individual progress within this critical area. Data from STAR 360 assessments will be completed and shared within individual student teacher conferences. (Assessment information will also be shared with parents.) Students will be given goals and objective to help raise their skills and abilities in ELA.

Teachers will receive specific PD in the area of “the science of reading” and will be provided support through AFESC throughout the academic school year.

ASBVI will complete Pathway D. to fulfill the requirement for RISE. This includes the completion of 18 hours of video training in ARIdeas and 3 additional days of professional development offered at AFESC. Currently, all teachers have begun working in ARIdeas and have been given the charge to complete the 6 available courses prior to the end of the school year. The science of reading initiative recommends the use of “decodable books” especially for beginning readers and continued use of curriculum that focuses on morphology for all students. Specifically, ASBVI will start with the program “Decodable Books Written by Teachers” and the “Reading Genie” both are accessible for blind and visually impaired students. These products are recommended and created in conjunction with Auburn University’s college of education. Additionally, ASBVI will use the “Orton-Gillingham Based Stories Level 1-5 Multisensory Reading Decodable Passages” which is suggested for grades K-8. We are also planning to use the available resources from Orton-Gillingham that screen/assess morphological awareness and the available teaching resources that address building these skills. Mrs. Doan will attend the K-2 RISE academy training session in summer 2019 (July 9 – 11) and the 3 subsequent training days to meet the requirement to become a RISE assessor.

Reinforcement of Expanded Core Curriculum skills:

The Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) is one of the most important curricular areas within the entire educational process for students with impaired vision. Yet, due to limited time, lack of support and organization, we often graze amongst the key ECC skills, and glaze over the rest of the sub areas. Required PD will be provided to all staff at ASBVI (O&M, AT, braille, and self-advocacy) to encourage consistent reinforcement and continuity of ECC skills. This required PD will also be provided to the Home Life staff (residential advisors). All staff members on the campus will be empowered to provide support for use of canes, appropriate etiquette and ensuring that students are engaged in the learning process at all times. The residential advisors will continue to monitor skills and progress of ECC skills throughout the school year. Progress reports will be shared with parents, teachers and advocates at the same frequency as academic grades (each 9 weeks). This information will also be shared in “mini-conferences” with the students, RA, teacher and parents to verbally review progress and to allow students to better understand progress and deficits regarding specific ECC skills. For non-residential students, parents will also be given similar information and goals that their children should be working toward regarding ECC skills. The overall objective is to foster meaningful and action provoking conversations as information is shared through “mini-conferencing”, parental support and student sharing of information and self-awareness.

Students will participate in “Manner’s Masters” throughout the academic school year. This program is designed to encourage appropriate behavior in the 1st – 5th grades. Students are awarded a small golden plate each Friday for having the best manners and etiquette in the dining room during the lunch period. At the end of the 4th 9 weeks, the class that has won the most golden plates, will be awarded a trip to a nice restaurant (of their choice with teacher approval).

Elementary teachers also suggested giving our students the tools to create a platform for making healthy life choices at a young age. For example, the teachers suggested providing gender specific hygiene classes for all grades (K – 6) to promote self-esteem, cleanliness and overall wellness. Teachers would also like to establish a culture of support and safety through specific character building activities that will be facilitated in conjunction with the school counselor.

Student responsibility/accountability:

The elementary school will begin the year with an “Accountability Campaign” in order to establish an understanding of school climate and rules that are consistent within the elementary school. Rather than elect a “president” or “winner”, we will be electing rules that which every child will have input. With teacher help, per classroom students will establish the most important rules by which they all should abide. All students grades K – 6 will then vote upon the suggested rules. The winning rules will be posted within each individual classroom, and all public areas within the elementary school. Students will learn the rules and be able to recite and explain the rules at any given time. Internalization of the rules will help students make better decisions and fully understand and value the culture we are attempting to make at ASBVI.

Additionally, student PD will be given through the school counselor, the school social worker and also through the principal. Our vision is to provide periodic learning experiences to foster self-regulated behavior management skills that become intrinsic. Basically, returning to the “tool box” concept of having students make good decisions for themselves and those around them based upon prior knowledge and expected learned norms. The elementary school would prefer to become proactive rather than simply be reactive. If we can subscribe to utilizing teachable moments and student preparation for a healthy and happy life, we feel that our students will grow into more healthy and happy life-long learners.

Please note, as the principal of the elementary school, this document should be considered a beginning of positive change and not the end of a project or assignment. This endeavor will be revisited, monitored and adjusted as necessary throughout the entire school year. I am very excited to exercise my authority to better lead our teachers and students as we face another year of learning and growth.