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The Count That Disappeared: What Arkansas Stopped Publishing When It Merged Its School for the Deaf

Heather Grizzle · October 25, 2026

Arkansas merged its schools for the Deaf and Blind and stopped publishing how many Deaf children it serves. The federal data still shows 440.

Contenidos

1. What the law actually did
2. The number that stopped being published
3. The school a parent would actually find
4. A bilingual promise with no map
5. A service system with no owner
6. The children the state does count
7. What is being built, and for whom
8. What the money record shows
9. The remedy is unusually cheap

NCG Insights.

Drawn from the National Deaf Education Data Index, state file 04 (Arkansas), compiled 15 August 2026.

All figures carry a year and a public source. Where sources conflict, the conflict is stated rather than resolved silently. Statements of interpretation are marked as such.

In August 2026, a parent in Arkansas looking up their child's school on My School Info, the state's official report card system, would find the Arkansas School for the

Deaf listed as operating with 98 students, grades K through 12, at 2400 West Markham Street in Little Rock. They would not find the Arkansas School for the Deaf and Blind. Searching for it returns the message "Invalid District for 2025," with the explanation that the district was not in operation during the 2024-2025 school year. The system, on a build dated 9 August 2026, was serving a live record for a school the legislature abolished on 1 July 2025 and no record at all for the school that actually enrols children. The 98 is not a current figure either. It is the certified 2024-25 count for the predecessor school, presented under a year selector defaulting to 2025-2026.

This is a small failure, and it is easy to write off as an IT backlog that someone will clear. It is worth starting there anyway, because it is the visible edge of a larger and more consequential pattern. When Arkansas consolidated its two sensory schools, it did not simply reorganise an institution. It reorganised what the public can know about Deaf children in the state, and the direction of that change was toward less.

What the law actually did

Act 796 of 2025, which began as House Bill 1810, filed on 17 March 2025 by Representative Joey Carr with Senator J. English as other primary sponsor, was signed on 17 April 2025 and took effect on 1 July 2025 under an emergency clause adopted in both chambers. It repealed Subchapter 2 and Subchapter 3 of Title 6, Chapter 43 of the Arkansas Code in their entirety, being the provisions that had separately constituted the Arkansas School for the Blind and the Arkansas School for the Deaf, and created new sections 6-43-119 through 6-43-121. This was not a co-location agreement or a shared services arrangement of the kind several states have adopted. It was a legal abolition and replacement. The Department of Education now carries one local education agency, code 6093000, where it previously carried two, and the predecessor codes have gone out of service.

Governance sits with a five-member Board of Trustees appointed by the Governor subject to Senate confirmation. Section 6-43-101(c)(3) as enacted provides that "There shall be at all times one (1) member of the board who is a deaf person who fluently utilizes deaf sign language." Two features of the drafting deserve recording. Act 796 left Arkansas Code section 25-17-205 untouched, so that section continues to describe a "Board of Trustees of the Arkansas School for the Blind and the Arkansas School for the Deaf," to require that a second vacancy be filled by a person who is legally blind, and to provide for two advisory nonvoting parent members. It now names two boards

for two schools that no longer separately exist, and the act does not state how its requirements relate to the new five-member board. Separately, the Arkansas Advocate reported on 21 March 2025 that the bill eliminated the requirement for deaf representation on the merged board. Both the as-introduced bill and the enacted text contain the deaf-member provision quoted above.

> **UNRESOLVED CONFLICT**
>
> That conflict is recorded here and is not resolved; the report may have referred to the loss of the separate blind seat or the advisory parent seats, but the article as published does not say so.

The merger was litigated before it passed. On 20 March 2025, three days after the bill was filed, the Arkansas Association of the Deaf sued the Secretary of Education and members of the State Board of Education in the Eastern District of Arkansas, represented by the National Association of the Deaf and attorney Mike Laux. The complaint, in Arkansas Association of the Deaf v. Oliva, No. 4:25-cv-00273, alleges violations of the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 arising from a December 2023 departmental survey on the two schools' future that was published without American Sign Language translation, audio description or other auxiliary aids, and that the plaintiffs say drew limited and inadequate feedback as a result. The association withdrew its motion for a preliminary injunction in April 2025, before the hearing could be held, and the case has since moved slowly. A bench trial before Chief Judge Kristine G. Baker, first set for the week of 27 April 2026, was reset to August and then to the week of 28 September 2026. In July 2026 the state moved for summary judgment and to exclude the testimony of the plaintiffs' experts, Dr. Judy Shepard-Kegl and Dr. Amy June Rowley, and on 27 August it asked the court to stay the trial until those motions are decided. As of 22 October 2026 the case remains open and the docket records no relief granted to either side. Readers using this piece later should check the docket for subsequent rulings.

INTERPRETATION

The sequence matters more than any single document in it, because the consultation the plaintiffs challenge was published in December 2023, the new facility was announced in February 2024, ground was broken on 12 March 2025, the bill was filed five days later, and the act carried an emergency clause. Whatever the litigation decides, the state committed to the physical and legal architecture of consolidation on a timeline that left the consultation little room to change it.

HOW CONSOLIDATION WAS SEQUENCED

Dec 2023

Survey posted

The Department posts an online survey on the two schools' future to its Facebook page, without American Sign Language translation, audio description or other auxiliary aids.

Feb 2024

Building announced

A new instructional building for Deaf and blind students together is announced for the West Markham campus.

12 Mar 2025

Ground broken

Construction begins on the 89,000 square foot building.

17 Mar 2025

HB1810 filed

The merger bill is filed five days after groundbreaking.

20 Mar 2025

Lawsuit filed

The Arkansas Association of the Deaf sues in the Eastern District of Arkansas.

17 Apr 2025

Act 796 signed

The bill becomes law with an emergency clause adopted in both chambers.

1 Jul 2025

Merger takes effect
Two schools and two LEA codes become one.

Jul to Aug 2026
Dispositive motions
The state moves for summary judgment, to exclude the plaintiffs' experts, and to stay the trial.

Dec 2026
Completion target
The new building is due to be finished.

The number that stopped being published

Certified enrolment for the merged school in 2025-26 is 136 students, published as 73 at the elementary school and 63 at the high school. Those two figures reconcile exactly against the district-level total in the Department's Statewide Information System Cycle 7 certified reports, which is how we know the figure is sound. What it no longer contains is a deaf and blind split, and no state publication supplies one. In the three years before the merger the certified counts were available and specific.

Certified enrolment, Arkansas School for the Deaf and Arkansas School for the Blind, before and after merger

Año	School for the Deaf	School for the Blind	Combined total
2022-23	99	69	168
2023-24	102	67	169
2024-25	98	60	158
2025-26 (merged)	n/a	n/a	136

Source: ADE Data Center, Statewide Information System Cycle 7 certified enrolment reports

A figure that had been routinely published became unavailable at the precise moment it became most contested.

One conflict belongs beside that number. The Arkansas Senate reported in February 2026 that the school has approximately 167 students. That cannot be reconciled with the certified 136, and it carries no date, no collection method and the qualifier "approximately." The certified figure is preferred here because it comes from the state's own certified collection cycle, is dated, and reconciles internally at two levels of aggregation.

▼ **-13.9%** combined enrolment, 2024-25 to 2025-26

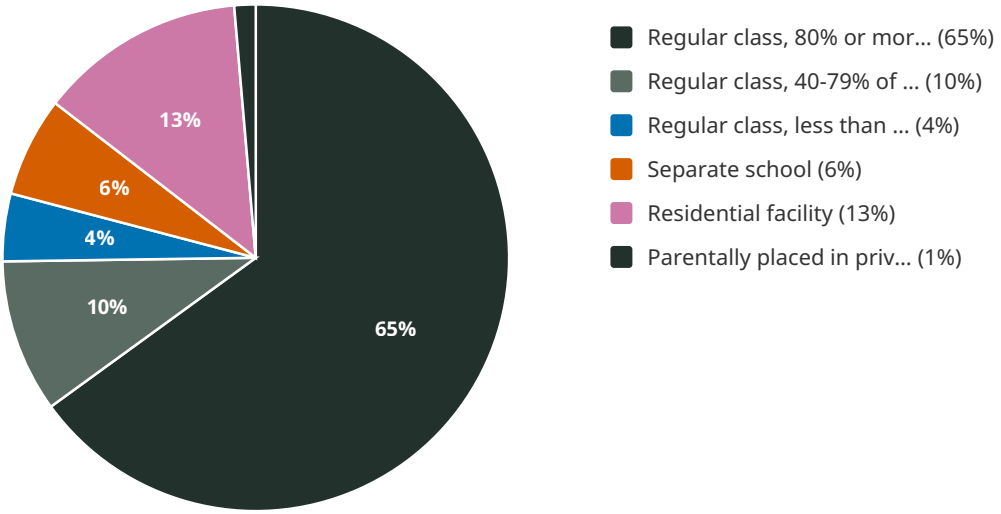
Readers should also note that the combined pre-merger total for 2024-25 was 158 against 136 in the first merged year, a fall of 22 students. That is a fact worth watching rather than a conclusion about cause, and it should not be reported as an effect of the merger without evidence that does not yet exist.

The missing split would matter less if the state published the number anywhere else. It does not. Arkansas publishes no IDEA Section 618 child count by disability category on any page of its own. The Division of Elementary and Secondary Education's Special Education District Profile for 2025-26, reporting as of 1 December 2025, carries exactly seven categories: intellectual disability, speech or language impairment, specific learning disability, other health impairment, emotional disturbance, autism, and "Other." Hearing impairment and deafness are not among them, and no note defines what "Other" comprises. A suppression rule masking counts below ten would limit district-level figures even if the category were reported. The same page routes readers to data.ed.gov for federal data, and one of the two links it offers is malformed, resolving to a broken address.

This is not a gap that only outside researchers encounter. The Bureau of Legislative Research hit the same wall from inside state government. Its 2022 Adequacy Study special education report gives 2021 counts for eight categories and then a residual "All Others" of 859 students, which the report states includes deaf-blindness, deafness and hearing impairment, orthopedic impairment, traumatic brain injury and visual impairment. The legislature's own research arm could not see how many Deaf students Arkansas educates either. When the state file was compiled in August 2026, the most recent Arkansas-specific breakdown of where students with hearing impairment are

educated that the Index could locate sat inside that same report, drawn from federal data for FFY 2017.

The number the state does not publish is, in fact, published, only not by Arkansas. The Index has since retrieved the U.S. Department of Education's IDEA Part B Child Count and Educational Environments file for 2024-25, extracted on 30 July 2025, which carries Arkansas row by row. It records 440 school-age students, ages 5 through 21, served under the hearing impairment category, and 32 more aged three to five. It also records where each of the 440 is educated.



Where Arkansas students with hearing impairment are educated, ages 5 to 21, 2024-25
Source: U.S. Department of Education, OSEP, IDEA Part B Child Count and Educational Environments, 2024-25 (extracted 30 July 2025)

View data

Categoría	Value
Regular class, 80% or more of day	286
Regular class, 40-79% of day	43
Regular class, less than 40% of day	19
Separate school	28
Residential facility	58
Parentally placed in private school	6

Set beside the 2017 figures, the 2024-25 file tells a story the state has never told about itself. The share of Arkansas students with hearing impairment in a separate school or residential facility barely moved, from 19.3 percent to 19.5 percent. Almost everything

else did. The share spending 80 percent or more of the day in a regular class rose from 40.5 percent to 65.0 percent, and the share in the middle band fell from 32.4 percent to 9.8 percent. Two cautions attach. The 2017 figures arrive second-hand through a legislative report and sum to 98.8 rather than 100, and the age bands of the two collections may not match exactly. The direction is still unmistakable.

Educational setting, Arkansas students with hearing impairment, FFY 2017 and 2024-25

Setting	FFY 2017	2024-25
Regular class 80% or more of day	40.5%	65.0%
Regular class 40-79% of day	32.4%	9.8%
Regular class less than 40% of day	6.6%	4.3%
Separate school or residential facility	19.3%	19.5%
Other (unreported in 2017; private placement in 2024-25)	1.2%	1.4%

Source: FFY 2017: Bureau of Legislative Research, 2022 Adequacy Study, citing federal data. 2024-25: U.S. Department of Education, OSEP, IDEA Part B Child Count and Educational Environments

The federal numbers sharpen the rest of this article considerably. Of the 440, 348, or 79 percent, are educated in regular public schools, inside the same districts where the Index found one published program. Another 86 are in a separate school or residential facility. Read as interpretation, that figure describes principally the state school's Deaf students, and it sits close to, but not on, the 98 students the Arkansas School for the Deaf certified for 2024-25; children at the school recorded under another IDEA category, such as multiple disabilities, would account for a gap of that kind. All of it describes the school year before the merger. The Index's holdings do not yet include the 2025-26 federal collection, and when they do, its separate school and residential cells will be the closest thing the public has to a count of Deaf students at the merged

school. The state's Part B State Performance Plan and Annual Performance Report does not disaggregate any indicator by disability category at all.

The school a parent would actually find

Set the report card system aside and go to the school itself, and the picture sharpens without becoming clearer. The Arkansas School for the Deaf and Blind occupies the campus at 2400 West Markham Street, carries LEA code 6093000, and is led by Superintendent Nicole Walsh, who previously led the Arkansas School for the Deaf. It runs day and residential programs, and its 2025-2027 student handbook draws the line by geography: a day student lives within 50 miles of the school, and a residential student lives beyond that radius. Roughly half the student body lives in the residence halls. Local districts transport day students, and the school buses residential students home at weekends. For a family in Texarkana, Jonesboro or the Ozarks, the only school in the state built for their child is a weekly separation, and the decision to enrol is also a decision about where the child sleeps during the week.

What a family cannot learn from the school's own pages is almost as instructive as what it can. The school does not agree with itself about whom it serves. Its About page describes children and young adults from age three through twenty-one. The Department of Finance and Administration budget manual for the predecessor school described programs from birth to 21. The student handbook describes a K-12 school. No published document reconciles the three. Cost to family is not stated on the admissions pages, the About pages, the State Required Information index or the handbook. The school is funded by state appropriation, which implies attendance is free, but a parent has to infer that. Accreditation is not published on any official page, and no accrediting body's record for the merged school has been located.

The accountability pages are thinner still. The school's Annual Report to the Public and Annual School Performance Report pages render as empty headings. Its board page returned a server error when the Index checked it, while the legacy page for the abolished Arkansas School for the Deaf still resolved and listed a different chairperson. A parent trying to find out who governs the school, how it is performing and whether it is accredited would find, in that order, an error, two blank headings and nothing.

What the school publishes	What a parent still cannot find
Its address, campus and LEA code	Which ages it serves, stated once and consistently
The 50-mile day and residential rule	Whether attendance costs the family anything
A bilingual language philosophy	How a child is placed on a language pathway
A combined headcount of 136	How many of the 136 are Deaf
Annual report page headings	The annual reports themselves
A board page	A working board page, or who sits in the deaf seat

A bilingual promise with no map

The school does publish a language philosophy, and it is a strong one. Under the heading Bilingual Beliefs, it commits to "a bilingual approach that honors both American Sign Language (ASL) and English," recognises ASL as a complete language, and states that Deaf children thrive with regular access to Deaf adults who serve as fluent language models and mentors. A companion page, the Deaf and Blind Children's Bill of Rights, asserts a right to acquire English and ASL simultaneously, and the student handbook repeats it. Read strictly, this is a bilingual-bicultural commitment in the school's own words, and the Index records it as such rather than inferring it from the school's history or its use of ASL.

The difficulty sits inside the same paragraph. Having committed to a bilingual approach, the statement defers to parental choice in determining "the educational pathways that best meet their child's needs." No published document names those pathways, states the placement criteria that apply, describes a language assessment or a language planning protocol, or explains how a child comes to be on one pathway rather than another. The school also maintains speech-language services alongside its bilingual commitment without publishing how the two relate. A promise of full access to language without a published method of allocating it is a value rather than a framework, and a parent cannot hold a school to a framework that does not exist on paper.

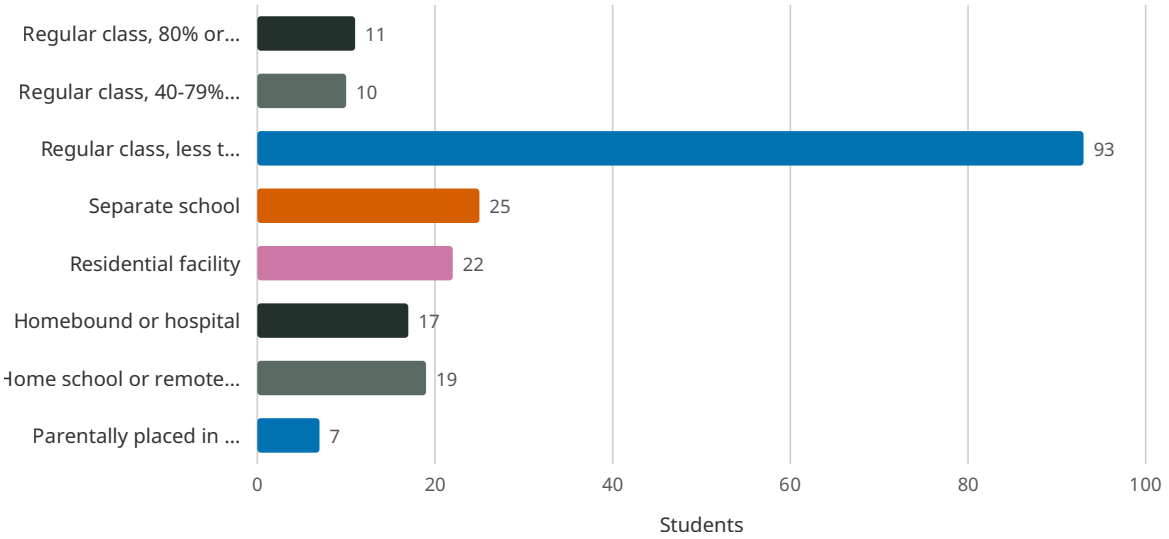
Two further facts make the gap harder to set aside. The image asset on the Bilingual Beliefs page was uploaded in late December 2025, which places the statement roughly

six months after the merger took effect rather than before it. And the superintendent has said publicly that consolidation allowed staff to identify twenty-three students with both vision and hearing needs. That is the strongest argument the state has offered for the merger, and it deserves to be taken seriously. Yet no published language framework at the school addresses deafblind students at all.

> Consolidation found twenty-three students with both vision and hearing needs. No published language framework at the school mentions them.

The deafblind picture outside the school is no more legible. Arkansas's state deaf-blind project, CAYSI, the Children and Youth with Sensory Impairments and Additional Disabilities Project, is funded by the U.S. Department of Education under grant H326T230038 and housed inside the Division rather than at a university. It serves children from birth through age 21 who are deafblind or at risk of deafblindness, and it compiles Arkansas's submission to the National Deaf-Blind Child Count. That count is published, though not by Arkansas. The National Center on Deafblindness's 2024 National Deafblind Child Count Report records 245 Arkansas children on the 1 December 2024 count, and 266 served during the year. Two state-adjacent sources also describe the project's leadership differently, one naming Jennifer Greiman as education consultant and one naming Stacey Tatera as project director. Tatera is also the Division's only named Deaf Education Specialist. Whether one person holds both roles is unresolved, and it is the kind of capacity question a legislator should be able to answer from a published page.

The 2024 deafblind count is the most detailed portrait of any group of Arkansas children in this article, and it reads very differently from the state's own record. Of the 245, 229 are of school age: 78 between six and eleven, 96 between twelve and seventeen, and 55 between eighteen and twenty-one. Fourteen are aged three to five and two are infants. Only six are recorded under IDEA as deaf-blind. A further 133 are recorded under multiple disabilities, nine under hearing impairment and seven under visual impairment, which is why any count organised by primary IDEA category will make deafblindness in Arkansas look vanishingly rare. Twenty-two of the 245 receive intervener services, and eleven have a cochlear implant.



The report's setting tables account for 204 of Arkansas's 229 school-age children on the count.

Source: National Center on Deafblindness, 2024 National Deafblind Child Count Report (2025)

View data

Students	Value
Regular class, 80% or more of day	11
Regular class, 40-79% of day	10
Regular class, less than 40% of day	93
Separate school	25
Residential facility	22
Homebound or hospital	17
Home school or remote learning	19
Parentally placed in private school	7

The exit figures are the hardest line in the report. The Part B exiting table for Arkansas records 14 deafblind students who dropped out, against 8 who graduated with a regular diploma, 11 with an alternate diploma and 2 with a certificate. The superinten-

dent's twenty-three students with both vision and hearing needs plausibly sit inside the 25 in a separate school and the 22 in residential facilities, but the two figures come from different instruments and should not be equated.

ARKANSAS ON THE NATIONAL DEAFBLIND CHILD COUNT, 2024

245
children on the 1 December 2024 count

6
recorded under IDEA as deaf-blind

22
receive intervener services

14
dropped out, against 8 regular diplomas

Source: National Center on Deafblindness, 2024 National Deafblind Child Count Report (2025)

A service system with no owner

The counting problem would be less serious if a single body were accountable for Deaf students in Arkansas. None is. The state school's statewide arm, Statewide Services, describes itself as holding an agreement with First Connections, the Part C lead agency, which makes the state school a direct early intervention provider for infants and toddlers. Its published list of services goes further than that, naming regional audiology, IEP development and consultation, and classroom consults, all of which are school-age activities. Its published referral process does not. That process runs from a referral to the service coordinator, through a developmental evaluation in the child's home or daycare, to an eligibility determination and an Individualized Family Service Plan, and ends with developmental therapy delivered in the home or daycare. It is a Part C pathway from beginning to end. The unit advertises school-age consultation and publishes no route by which a district or the parent of a school-age child can request it.

What exists above age three is distributed across mechanisms that answer to different masters. The Division operates Arkansas Deaf Educational Services, whose published services are consultative rather than instructional and which names one staff position, a Deaf Education Specialist. Educational audiology runs through EARS, an outreach project of the audiology and speech pathology department at Arkansas Children's Hospital, where general technical assistance is free to districts but targeted and intensive services require a fee-based contract, which places the depth of audiology a Deaf child receives partly downstream of the district's willingness and ability to pay. Beneath both sit fifteen education service cooperatives, the ordinary vehicle for special education delivery in Arkansas, none of which publishes a service line for Deaf or hard-of-hearing students.

The district evidence points the same way and needs its denominator stated plainly. The Index audited Arkansas's 259 auditable local education agencies. Of those, 187 were reached and 133 had published content that could actually be read; the remainder either ran JavaScript-rendered sites that returned no readable body or were not opened before the research budget ran out, and they are recorded as unaudited rather than treated as evidence.

WHAT ARKANSAS DISTRICTS PUBLISH ON DEAF AND HARD-OF-HEARING SERVICES

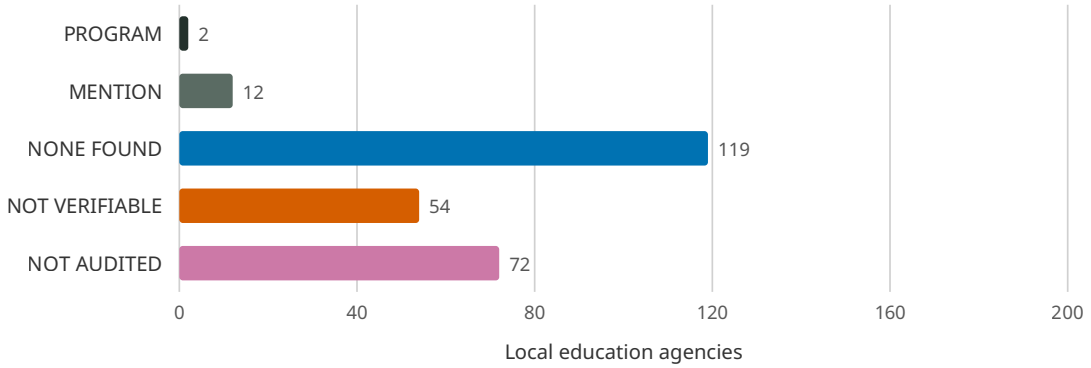
133
of 259 LEAs had readable published content

1
district publishes anything meeting the Index definition of a program (Springdale)

12
districts publish a passing mention only

119
districts publish nothing specific to Deaf or hard-of-hearing students

Source: National Deaf Education Data Index, state file 04



PROGRAM covers Springdale and the Arkansas School for the Deaf and Blind itself. NOT VERIFIABLE means the site was found but returned no readable body. NOT AUDITED means the site was never opened because the research budget ran out; it is a limitation of the file, not a finding about the district.

Source: National Deaf Education Data Index, state file 04

View data

Agencias educativas locales	Value
PROGRAMA	2
MENCIÓN	12
NINGUNO ENCONTRADO	119
NO VERIFICABLE	54
NO AUDITADO	72

The shape of what was found matters more than the totals. Springdale's Special Services page states that district staff include "teachers of students with hearing and vision impairments," some of whom serve multiple schools. That is a named itinerant position, and Springdale is the only conventional district in the readable set to publish one. The twelve mentions are almost uniform. Bryant, Glen Rose and Hot Springs reproduce the IDEA eligibility definition of hearing impairment with no service attached. Benton and Blytheville list hearing among Child Find screening areas for young children. Jonesboro and Pea Ridge list hearing in an undifferentiated row of related services beside occupational therapy and vision. Cabot comes closest to substance, lis-

ting special instruction and interpreters for hearing and visually impaired students, still as a generic related service rather than a named position. Hector and Helena-West Helena publish a bare Child Find link. Danville's only relevant text is the federal nondiscrimination boilerplate offering the relay service.

The 119 districts with nothing to show typically name a special education director, educational examiners, speech-language pathologists and paraprofessionals, and describe purchased occupational, physical and psychological services. Audiologists, teachers of the deaf and educational interpreters are missing from those staffing descriptions with near-total consistency. The 126 districts that could not be coded are a different matter and are not a finding about Arkansas. Fifty-four were located but returned an empty body to text retrieval, almost always because they run a JavaScript-rendered platform, Apptegy above all. Seventy-two were never opened because the Index's own search budget ran out. The official address of every one has already been captured from My School Info, so completing the audit needs a browser rather than a search.

The cooperative layer, which ought to fill the gap, is silent too. Act 349 of 1985, now Arkansas Code section 6-13-1001 and following, authorises "not more than fifteen" multicounty education service cooperatives, and fifteen exist, from Arch Ford at Plumerville to Wilbur D. Mills at Beebe. Their own published inventory lists K-12 special education supervisory services, early childhood special education, and behavior and transition specialists, and nothing low-incidence. Even the number of cooperatives carries a conflict. The ADE Data Center returns a sixteenth row, "Pulaski County Schools," carrying 18 districts, which also appears as co-op code 9999000 in My School Info. It looks like a placeholder rather than a cooperative, but no state document says so.

Two silences carry more weight than any of that: no district in the readable set names a cooperative as its provider of these services, and none names the state school or any statewide outreach unit as its mechanism.

A NOTE ON WHAT A GAP MEANS

The Index applies a discipline here that this article keeps. A finding of nothing published is a statement about publication, not about service delivery, and obligations under IDEA are not evidence of a program. Arkansas districts serve Deaf students. What the record shows is that the arrangements by which they do it are not documented anywhere a parent, a researcher or a legislator could find them.

INTERPRETATION

Taken together, the state school's statewide obligation ending at age three, one advisory position at the Division, a hospital that charges for depth of service, and regional cooperatives answerable to their members describe a system in which each part is defensible on its own terms and no part owns the outcome.

The children the state does count

There is one point in a Deaf Arkansan's life at which the state counts with real precision, and it is the first month. In 2022, according to the CDC's Early Hearing Detection and Intervention data, Arkansas recorded 34,465 occurrent births and screened 34,078 of those infants, a rate of 98.9 percent. Of those screened, 504 did not pass. Forty were diagnosed as deaf or hard of hearing, and twenty-six were enrolled in early intervention. Another 214 of the 504, or 42.5 percent, were lost to follow-up or documentation before anyone confirmed whether they could hear.

NEWBORN HEARING SCREENING IN ARKANSAS, 2022

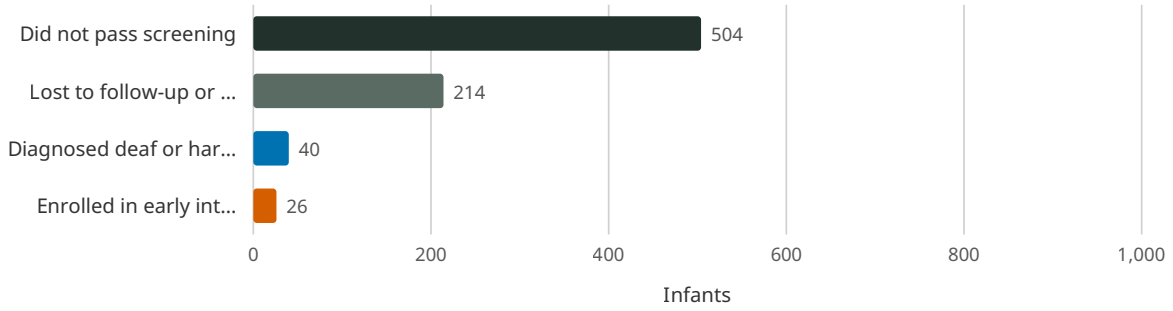
34,465
occurrent births

98.9%
of infants screened

504
did not pass screening

42.5%
of those lost to follow-up or documentation before diagnosis

Source: CDC Early Hearing Detection and Intervention data, 2022



What happened after a failed newborn hearing screen, Arkansas, 2022

Source: CDC Early Hearing Detection and Intervention data, 2022

View data

Infants	Value
Did not pass screening	504
Lost to follow-up or documentation	214
Diagnosed deaf or hard of hearing	40
Enrolled in early intervention	26

The screening rate is a real achievement. The follow-up rate is not. More than four in ten babies who failed their newborn screen in 2022 left the record before a diagnosis, and those are the children most at risk of reaching school age without full access to language. Statewide Services, the state school's Part C arm, is the program built to catch them, which makes its referral pathway, and the absence of anything comparable after age three, matter more than it might first appear.

The state's own reporting does not close the gap. The Arkansas Department of Health's document titled "Infant Hearing Program 2023 Annual Report" contains 2021 data, reports no diagnosis or early intervention counts at all, and applies the phrase "lost to follow-up" to the 853 infants who were never screened, a different denominator from the CDC's 214 lost after failing a screen. The two figures cannot be compared, and the report's title year does not match its data year.

The workforce is specified and uncounted in the same way. Arkansas publishes no count of certified teachers of the deaf and no count of credentialed educational inter-

preters, though its requirements are precise. Under the Arkansas Standards for Educational Interpreters and Transliterators, rule 005.15.15-002, a permanent credential requires RID certification, an EIPA score of 3.0 or QAST 3/3, and provisional credentials allow an EIPA of 2.5 for up to two years or 2.0 for up to three. Community interpreters outside K-12 are licensed separately under Act 1314 of 2014 through the Department of Health's Advisory Board of Interpreters for the Deaf. The state knows exactly what an interpreter must score to work in a classroom. It does not publish how many are working in one.

> **INTERPRETATION**
>
> The arc of this section is the argument of the article in miniature. Arkansas can say, to the infant, how many babies it screened in 2022. By the time those children reach school age, the state publishes nothing on its own pages about how many of them are Deaf, where they are educated, or who is teaching them. The answer to the first two questions sits in a federal spreadsheet, and the third has no answer anywhere. The state's own counting does not fail at random. It stops at the age where its statewide Deaf services stop.

What is being built, and for whom

The state is not disinvesting. A new 89,000 square foot instructional building at the West Markham campus, intended to house Deaf and blind students together for the first time, drew a $30 million allocation in 2021 against a total project estimated at $53.9 million, with ground broken on 12 March 2025 and completion targeted for the end of December 2026. Operating appropriations run through a single combined act covering both schools. For FY2024, Act 869 of 2023 gave the school for the Deaf line items of $12,904,334 in state operations, $1,081,936 in federal operations and $230,000 in cash operations, within a both-schools total of $24,798,773.

No per-pupil figure appears here, and none should. An appropriation covering statewide early intervention, residential operations and two distinct sensory populations divided by a campus headcount produces a number with no defensible meaning. The point is simpler and harder to answer. Arkansas is committing $53.9 million to a facility for a population whose size it no longer reports, in a state that publishes no count of Deaf students on any page of its own, no count of certified teachers of the deaf, and

no count of credentialed educational interpreters, and whose most recent public count of these students is a federal spreadsheet describing the year before the merger.

What the money record shows

The fiscal record is more complete than the enrolment record, and it carries its own cautions. Arkansas appropriates for the state schools through one combined act each year: Act 869 of 2023 for FY2023-24, Act 17 of 2024 for FY2024-25, Act 244 of 2025 for FY2025-26 and Act 26 of 2026 for FY2026-27, the last passing the Senate 34 to 0 on 15 April 2026 and the House 92 to 7 the next day. In Arkansas an appropriation is a spending ceiling rather than cash in hand, so a gap between what was authorised and what was spent is normal and should not be read as a cut. It is still informative.

School for the Deaf lines, FY2023-24: appropriated against actual

Line	Appropriated	Actual	Share spent
State operations	$12.90M	$10.58M	82%
Federal operations	$1.08M	$0.50M	46%
Cash operations	$0.23M	$0.13M	55%
Total	$14.22M	$11.21M	79%

Source: Act 869 of 2023; Department of Finance and Administration budget manual, agency 0513

The forward figures run upward. The FY2024-25 authorised amounts were $13,010,420 in state operations, $1,081,936 federal and $230,000 cash. The agency's FY2025-26 request totalled $14,394,131 and the executive recommendation for FY2026-27 totalled $14,401,532, against 150 authorised positions. These later figures come from the budget manual rather than the enacted acts, because the line items inside Act 244 of 2025 and Act 26 of 2026 could not be retrieved from the legislature's document server, and the FY2024-25 authorisation should not be blended with the Act 869 figures for the year before. On 10 March 2026 a $500,000 temporary appropriation was requested under Act 1006 of 2025 to "meet the operating needs of the school as it closes out the year," funded from salary savings. Act 796 also rewrote the

fund accounts at section 19-5-402 to create a single School for the Deaf and Blind Fund Account. Whether future appropriation acts will keep separate Deaf and blind lines is not yet visible in any enacted text the Index could retrieve.

Oversight has been light. The school has never been audited on its own; Arkansas Legislative Audit examines it inside the Department of Education's report, and two recent findings name it. Finding 2021-1, for the year ended 30 June 2021, records a capital assets control deficiency at the Arkansas School for the Deaf: two items with a recorded value of $33,075 that could not be located, and one item valued at $35,065 removed from the asset records while still in the agency's possession. The agency concurred and committed to annual full inventories. Finding 2024-4, for the year ended 30 June 2024 and released in October 2025, records that the board was told on 18 July 2023 that a Gator utility vehicle valued at $9,947 had been stolen. Neither finding is large.

Two assumptions a reader might bring to Arkansas are also wrong, and both are worth correcting before they travel. The LEARNS Act of 2023, Act 237, contains no provision naming the school for the Deaf, the school for the blind, deafness or sign language, so the claim that LEARNS restructured the state schools is unsupported. And Arkansas has enacted no Language Equality and Acquisition for Deaf Kids bill or any language-milestone standard for Deaf children in any session the Index searched.

The remedy is unusually cheap

Most findings in the National Deaf Education Data Index describe problems that would take money or legislation to fix. These would not. Arkansas already holds every number discussed above, because it enrols the students, certifies the collection, and submits the federal reports.

☐ Publish the deaf and blind split alongside the elementary and high school split. This would take a column.

☐ Correct the report card system so the operating school appears and the abolished one does not. This is maintenance.

☐ Report hearing impairment and deafness as their own categories in the district profile, or state plainly what the residual "Other" contains. This is a formatting decision inside an existing document.

☐ Publish a referral route for the school-age services the state school already advertises. This is a page.

☐ Fill the Annual Report to the Public and Annual School Performance Report pages, which currently render as empty headings. If the reports exist, this is an upload.

☐ Republish, on the Division's own data page, the hearing impairment and deaf-blind counts Arkansas already reports to Washington. This is a table and a link.

Until those things happen, the position is this. Arkansas has consolidated its Deaf education institution, committed a substantial capital sum to it, and defended the decision in federal court, while the public record has lost the ability to answer the first question anyone would ask about the result, which is how many Deaf children are in it.

This piece draws on state file 04 of the National Deaf Education Data Index and its verification trail. Load-bearing sources include Act 796 of 2025 as enacted and its legislative history from the Arkansas General Assembly; Arkansas Code sections 6-43-101 and following and 25-17-205; the ADE Data Center Statewide Information System Cycle 7 certified enrolment reports for 2025-26 and prior years; the My School Info report card system as observed on 15 August 2026 against a build dated 9 August 2026; the Division of Elementary and Secondary Education's Special Education District Profile 2025/26; the Bureau of Legislative Research's 2022 Adequacy Study special education report; CDC Early Hearing Detection and Intervention data for 2022; the Department of Finance and Administration budget manual for agency 0513; Arkansas Legislative Audit's Department of Education reports for the years ended 30 June 2021 and 30 June 2024; the Arkansas School for the Deaf and Blind's Bilingual Beliefs, admissions and board pages and its 2025-2027 student handbook; the Division's CAYSI Project pages; the Arkansas Standards for Educational Interpreters and Transliterators; the U.S. Department of Education's IDEA Part B Child Count and Educational Environments file for 2024-25; the National Center on Deafblindness's 2024 National Deafblind Child Count Report; the Arkansas School for the Deaf and Blind's own Statewide Services pages; and the docket in Arkansas Association of the Deaf v. Oliva, No. 4:25-cv-00273 (E.D. Ark.). Figures were verified against primary sources on 15 August 2026, the account of the litigation was updated against the court docket on 25

October 2026, and the federal child count and deafblind count figures were added from the Index's national holdings the same day. All of it should be rechecked against the docket and the state's certified collections before republication.

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