

Report highlights

Arizona State Schools for the Deaf and the Blind (ASDB)

Performance Audit

ASDB graduated students who did not meet graduation requirements and thus may have been unprepared for secondary education or the job market; could not demonstrate that it conducted background checks for some employees and did not timely investigate complaints it received, potentially affecting student/staff safety; did not complete all required staff evaluations and could not demonstrate that it assigned qualified substitutes for teacher absences and vacancies or all its staff met required qualifications, potentially impacting educational quality; and did not assess student impacts or obtain input from stakeholders and formal Board approval before deciding to relocate its Tucson campus, resulting in a lack of transparency regarding its future operations.

Audit purpose

To assess ASDB's student outcomes and operations, including graduation requirements, complaint handling, staff background checks and qualifications, teacher absences and staff vacancies, staff evaluations, and student-teacher ratios. The audit also provides information on ASDB's services, curricula, and standardized testing results compared to other state schools for the deaf and the blind, and a comparison of its teacher salaries to state- and nationwide averages.¹

Key findings

- ASDB graduated 25 students in fiscal years 2024 and 2025 who may have been unprepared for secondary education or transition to the job market because they did not meet graduation requirements and it did not maintain consistent records associated with graduates, risking misreporting student information to the Arizona Department of Education.
- ASDB did not investigate all 15 complaints it received between August 2024 and June 2025 within the time frames required by its policy, including some complaints involving safety issues, and it lacked a process to prioritize complaints based on risk, potentially affecting student and staff safety.
- ASDB could not demonstrate that it obtained and reviewed background-check documentation for 19 employees that were employed by ASDB at any point during fiscal years 2022 through 2024, as required by statute, and certain types of staff are not required to maintain a valid fingerprint clearance card, increasing the risk that its student population, which includes vulnerable individuals, could be exposed to individuals with precluding criminal charges or convictions.
- ASDB could not demonstrate that all its staff met required qualifications, potentially compromising students' ability to fully engage in instruction and daily activities; limiting their access to essential information needed for safety, learning, and independence; and affecting retention of qualified staff.
- ASDB could not demonstrate that it consistently assigned qualified substitutes for teacher absences or vacancies, which could negatively affect educational quality.

¹ Sikich conducted this performance audit of ASDB pursuant to a December 10, 2024, resolution of the Joint Legislative Audit Committee. This audit was conducted as part of the sunset review process prescribed in Arizona Revised Statutes §41-2951 et seq.

- ASDB did not complete 22% and 97% of the staff evaluations required for permanent and probationary employees, respectively, in fiscal years 2022 through 2024 and its staff evaluations are not aligned with State requirements for public school district staff, increasing the risk of insufficient staff development and unresolved performance issues.
- ASDB has established student-teacher ratio goals but lacks a process for determining when class sizes can exceed its goals, has not conducted a required annual review of its ratios, and has not updated its goals since 2007, risking inconsistent or inappropriate class size decisions that could negatively impact student learning.
- ASDB leadership has not established or maintained an effective internal control system for managing its operations, resulting in the various deficiencies identified during this audit.
- Prior to announcing its decision to relocate its Tucson campus, ASDB did not assess student risks and impacts, solicit input from stakeholders, or obtain formal ASDB Board approval, resulting in a lack of transparency regarding plans for its future operations.

Key recommendations to ASDB

- Perform a comprehensive review of student records related to graduation requirements and staff qualifications documentation to identify errors, correct inconsistencies, and obtain missing documentation.
- Develop and implement policies, procedures, or guidance related to maintaining accurate student records, complaint investigations, background checks, staff qualifications, teacher absences, staff evaluations, student-teacher ratio goals, and obtaining public input on proposed organizational decisions that impact ASDB students. For example, we recommend that ASDB develop and implement:
 - Policies, procedures, or guidance associated with prioritizing complaints, based on clearly identified criteria.
 - A monitoring and enforcement process that includes regular reviews of employee certifications and consequences for noncompliance.

Key recommendations to the ASDB Board of Directors

- Require the Superintendent to develop and submit to the Board a detailed corrective action plan to address the internal control deficiencies identified during the audit and require the Superintendent to provide an update on the progress toward completing the corrective action plan at each Board meeting.

Key recommendations to the Legislature

- Consider revising statute to require all ASDB employees to obtain and maintain a Level I fingerprint clearance card to help ensure ASDB receives timely notification of any subsequent charges or convictions.
- Consider a statutory change that would require ASDB to align all educational staff evaluation policies to relevant requirements in Arizona Statute Title 15 – Education.