

## **Ashe County Schools Launches Yondr Pouch Pilot to Support Student Focus and Wellness** *By Dr. Eisa M. Cox, Superintendent, Ashe County Schools*

Beginning this fall, Ashe County Schools will pilot the use of **Yondr Pouches** at Ashe County High School and Ashe Early College as part of our ongoing efforts to create learning environments that are focused, safe, and supportive of student well-being.

While cell phones are often helpful for family communication, they also pose significant challenges in the school environment, causing frequent distractions, decreasing face-to-face interaction, and impacting students' ability to stay focused during the instructional day. The Yondr Pouch pilot aims to address these concerns while still respecting students' access to their devices outside of school hours.

This initiative is especially timely. Just last week, Governor Josh Stein signed into law a bipartisan and statewide policy requiring students to turn off and store away phones during instructional time, with exceptions for documented medical needs or those outlined in an IEP or 504 Plan. Ashe County Schools is not banning phones entirely, but we are taking a thoughtful and balanced approach to reduce distractions and strengthen student engagement.



The **Yondr system** works by placing each student's phone in a secure, locked pouch that stays with them during the day. At the end of the school day, students unlock their pouch and regain full access to their phone. This approach encourages responsibility while helping to maintain a strong academic focus in the classroom.

Research continues to show that reducing phone access during the school day can lead to improved student focus, stronger peer connections, and better mental wellness. We also recognize that families may have questions, and we're here to provide support and information.

### **Opportunities to Learn More**

Ashe County Schools is hosting a special community-wide event on **Tuesday, August 26, 2025, from 6:00–8:00 p.m. at Ashe County High School** titled "*The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness.*" This evening will feature keynote speaker Dr. Scott St. Clair, a pediatrician at Blue Ridge Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine with over two decades of experience in caring for children and adolescents. His presentation will explore the themes of the bestselling book *The Anxious Generation* by Jonathan Haidt and provide insight into how screen time, social media, and modern technology are impacting youth mental health.

The event will also include other important topics such as internet safety, the vaping epidemic, and how Ashe County Schools is partnering with AppHealthCare to expand access to school-based mental health services. Community organizations will host informational booths to provide families with resources, tools, and support.

## **Looking Ahead**

As we prepare for the 2025–26 school year, our focus remains clear: creating schools where students can learn, connect, and thrive. The Yondr Pouch pilot is one way we are working to protect classroom learning time, reduce stress, and promote healthy habits.

Thank you for your continued partnership and trust. Together, we can ensure that Ashe County remains a place where students are well-supported academically, socially, and emotionally.

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