

Ashe County Educators Awarded \$25,000 for Innovative Learning Projects

Ashe County Schools proudly congratulates seven outstanding educators who have been awarded **2025–2026 Academic Innovation Mini (AIM) Grants** through the [Appalachian State GEAR UP Partnership](#)!

These educators earned their awards by presenting at the **2025 ExP=O Pitch Competition** in June—a dynamic, “Shark Tank”-style event where teams pitch innovative project ideas designed to elevate student engagement and academic performance. AIM Grants are awarded to support individual and school-wide passion projects that bring creative, inspiring and meaningful learning experiences into classrooms.

This year, more than **\$50,000** in mini-grants were awarded to educators across the region. Among the recipients were several outstanding teams from Ashe County Schools:

- **Tonya Denny and Kathy Evans (Ashe County High School)** received **\$10,000** for their District Impact Grant, *“Connecting Languages, Families, and Futures Lending Library”*
- **Brittany Perry and Autumn Chamberlain (ACS Social Workers)** received **\$10,000** for their District Impact Grant, *“Leaders in Bloom: Cultivating Change by Nourishing the Roots”*
- **Nikki Eason, Travis Eason, and Daisy Finley (Ashe County High School)** received **\$5,000** for their Whole School Impact Grant, *“The Outdoor Exchange Classroom”*

Rachel Nave-Lewis, Assistant Director of Curriculum and Instructional Design for [GEAR UP Appalachian](#), shared the following praise: “On behalf of our entire team, I am thrilled to extend heartfelt congratulations to the exceptional educators and student support staff from Ashe County Schools. This recognition reflects the outstanding dedication, creativity and student-centered vision that these teachers bring to the classroom every day. Their proposals stood out for their innovation, alignment with student needs, and commitment to opportunities for all. You should be proud, as this is a reflection of the high-quality instruction happening across your district.”

Dr. Eisa Cox, Superintendent of Ashe County Schools, echoed those sentiments: “These educators exemplify the innovation and dedication of Ashe County Schools educators. Their success at the ExP=O Pitch Competition reflects their creativity, passion, and commitment to students. We are truly proud of the impact they are making.”

Please join Ashe County Schools in celebrating these exceptional professionals and supporting them as they bring their visionary projects to life in the 2025–2026 school year!

(See next page for photo/caption)



Dr. Eisa Cox, ACS Superintendent, recognized all of this year's Academic Innovation Mini (AIM) Grant winners at the September Board of Education meeting. She is pictured with (L-R): ACHS Media Coordinator, Tonya Denny, and ACS Social Workers Autumn Chamberlain and Brittany Perry.