

Ashe County Schools: Rising Above the Storm to Achieve Academic Excellence

ASHE COUNTY, NC — In a year marked by extraordinary challenges, Ashe County Schools has once again proven that our community's commitment to education is stronger than any storm. Despite losing 47 in-person instructional days—including 31 full closures, 16 remote learning days, 12 two-hour delays, five one-hour delays, and one three-hour early release—students not only persevered but excelled, outperforming the state in nearly every measure.

Even as the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction noted that the state's growth model did not account for the number of days missed due to Hurricane Helene, the disruption was real. Yet, Ashe County students demonstrated that hard work, determination, and the strength of community can overcome incredible odds.

"This achievement reinforces what we already know: a school is far more than a single test score on a single day," said Superintendent Dr. Eisa Cox. "While scores provide one measure of progress, the true impact of our schools is reflected in the resilience, character, and accomplishments of our students."

Today's Ashe County students are **earning admission to top universities with scholarships**, earning associate degrees before graduating from high school, competing as **state champions**, representing the district on **19 high school athletic teams**, **launching businesses**, and being recognized across North Carolina for their **community service and leadership**.

Exceptional Academic Outcomes

Ashe County students rose to the occasion, far exceeding state averages:

- **8th Grade Math:** 25.9 percentage points higher than the state average
- **NC Math 1:** 15 percentage points higher than the state average
- **7th Grade Math:** 21.2 percentage points higher than the state average
- **Overall:** Outperformed the state average by **6.8 percentage points in all subjects**

All three elementary schools also met or exceeded growth, a remarkable accomplishment given the instructional time lost.

Ashe County Schools proudly celebrates a **92% graduation rate**, significantly higher than the state average of 87.7%. Nearly every student who begins their journey in our schools crosses the finish line prepared for college, career, or community service. For example, one recent graduate completed the Fire Academy while still in high school and was hired as a firefighter before graduation—an inspiring example of the real-world readiness of Ashe County students.

Adding to this success, workforce credential attainment has increased by more than **67%**, and both Ashe County High School and Ashe Early College continue to surpass the state in Math, English, and ACT performance.

Growth is also evident in year-to-year cohort data in reading:

- Students who finished **3rd grade at 52.0% proficiency** grew to **61.9%** by the end of 4th grade.
- Students who ended **5th grade at 48.1% proficiency** rose to **65.6%** by the end of 6th grade.
- Students who finished **7th grade at 59.6% proficiency** advanced to **68.9%** by the end of 8th grade.

By the 8th grade, our test scores are among the best in the state. These results show that, even amid adversity, Ashe County students are making significant academic gains, evidence of teacher dedication and instructional strength.

Preparing Students for Life

Our investment in students begins early and extends beyond the traditional school day. Expanded **Pre-K classrooms** ensure more children start school ready to learn, while **after-school and summer programs** serve more than **250 students**, offering academic support, enrichment, and safe opportunities for growth.

Both the middle and high schools have also adopted the **Leader in Me** framework, guiding students through the 7 Habits of Highly Successful People. This focus helps students build responsibility, collaboration, and leadership skills that will serve them for life.

Building Opportunities Through Community Partnerships

Our commitment to preparing students for success extends well beyond the classroom. We are continually seeking ways to partner with our community to expand opportunities for students and families.

- **Community Eligibility Provision (CEP):** All students now receive free breakfast and lunch, ensuring every child is ready to learn.
- **Back to School Blast & Heart of a Husky:** Events and initiatives that provide school supplies, resources, and free physicals for student athletes.
- **ASC Center (Appalachian State University):** A long-standing partnership offering mental health resources for students.
- **Bulldog Clinic (Appalachian Health Department):** A partnership providing expanded healthcare and wellness services.

These efforts help to ensure that no barrier stands between students and success.

Schools That Do More Than Teach

The numbers tell part of the story, but the heart of Ashe County Schools lies in the care and service provided by teachers, leaders, and staff during the most difficult of times. When Hurricane Helene devastated our community, schools became lifelines.

- Staff checked on families and neighbors.
- Cafeteria workers and volunteers delivered meals.
- Bus drivers delivered supplies and fueled emergency vehicles.
- Schools opened gyms as distribution centers, and Ashe County High School served as a shelter with DSS.
- Emergency child care supported first responders and working families.

All of this happened while staff themselves faced hardship—losing homes, cars, and power. Yet, they returned to provide stability and encouragement to students.

Moving Forward Together

Already in the new school year, Ashe County Schools has **doubled paid student internships** and expanded opportunities for students to earn **college credits through dual enrollment with Wilkes Community College, Ashe Campus**. Work is also underway with local business leaders to design course options that lead directly to full-time, competitive employment in Ashe County.

The Power and Promise of Public Schools

The story of Ashe County Schools is more than academic achievement. It is the story of resilience, service, and the enduring promise of public education.

“Our future is one of excellence, innovation, and limitless possibility,” said Superintendent Dr. Eisa Cox. “We are not simply measuring progress—we are cultivating resilience, inspiring leadership, and preparing every student to thrive. More than scores, more than grades, we are a community of learners, builders, and dreamers. Our students will make a positive impact on our community for years to come.”