

October is National Bullying Prevention Month

Dr. Eisa Cox, Superintendent

October is National Bullying Prevention Month, a time for schools and communities across the country to unite around kindness, inclusion, and respect. Ashe County Schools is proud to stand together in this effort, guided by our core belief that *we are all in for kids* and that every student should be valued, supported, and treated equitably. We believe that strong relationships with our students, and growing partnerships with our families and community create an accepting, caring learning environment. By maintaining high expectations for both students and staff, we strive to provide an engaging, rigorous, and well-rounded education that prepares every graduate to be competent, competitive, responsible, and hardworking.

In alignment with these core values, Ashe County Schools continues to focus on helping students develop leadership, responsibility, and social-emotional skills that prepare them to live their best life. Several schools, including Ashe County High School, Ashe County Middle School, and Blue Ridge Elementary, have implemented the Leader in Me program, a schoolwide framework built around Stephen Covey's *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. The program empowers students to take ownership of their choices, seek win-win solutions, and practice empathy and proactive communication. These habits foster a more respectful and inclusive school culture, one where students are less likely to engage in bullying and more likely to stand up for one another.

Other Ashe County schools use Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and character education to reinforce positive behavior and prevent bullying. These research-based frameworks, supported by [PBIS.org](https://www.pbis.org), teach students how to make responsible choices, resolve conflicts peacefully, and contribute to a positive school community.

A creative example of this culture in action is the "clipping" initiative led by the Ashe County High School Student Lighthouse Team. Students recognize one another by attaching clothespins with positive, handwritten messages to backpacks or jackets—a simple act of encouragement that builds connection, kindness, and belonging across the school community. In addition, the district participated in the Sandy Hook Promise "Start with Hello" program during the week of September 15–19, which encourages students to build connections, foster inclusion, and strengthen peer relationships.

This school year, Ashe County Schools also introduced new efforts to limit phone usage bell-to-bell, giving students more opportunities to engage in learning and build positive, face-to-face communication and relationship skills.

Unity Day, on Wednesday, October 22, is a special part of this month. It's a day to stand together against bullying by wearing orange to show unity for kindness, inclusion, and acceptance. We invite all families, staff, and community members to join us by wearing orange

this Wednesday to send a powerful message that we are united in making our schools and community a kinder place for everyone.

Ashe County Schools takes all concerns about student safety and well-being very seriously. The most recent Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), completed in spring 2025, indicates that 18.6% of students in grades 9–12 who participated in the survey reported being bullied on school property during the past 12 months. While this is slightly higher than the 2023 local result of 17.6%, it remains **below** the national average reported in the 2023 YRBS, where 19% of students said they had been bullied on school property. Encouragingly, the percentage of students reporting being electronically bullied decreased from 13.2% in 2023 to 9.5% in 2025, a positive trend that reflects our ongoing focus on digital citizenship, responsible technology use, and student support.

Nationally, nearly 38% of students report experiencing at least one form of bullying, whether at school, away from school, or electronically. Locally, the percentage of Ashe County 6th–8th grade students who reported being bullied in the past year is lower, at 35.7%, and that number decreases to 18.6% for high school students and just 10.3% for 12th graders. Similarly, while 23.2% of middle school students reported experiencing electronic bullying through text or social media, that number drops significantly to 9.5% for high school students and 6% for 12th graders, a strong argument for limiting cell phone and social media use until students are older.

Parents also play a vital role in preventing bullying behaviors. A few helpful strategies include:

- Model kindness and empathy at home. Children who see respectful communication and conflict resolution are more likely to mirror those behaviors.
- Monitor and talk about online interactions. Encourage open conversations about how to treat others on social media and what to do if they witness unkind behavior.
- Reinforce accountability. Help your child understand the impact of their words and actions on others and praise them when they make positive choices.
- Encourage students to find a trusted adult at school and report any concerns.

For additional resources, families can visit stopbullying.gov for practical, research-based information on recognizing, preventing, and responding to bullying.

Ashe County Schools is committed to working with families to stop bullying, and together, we have work to do. By continuing to teach kindness, model empathy, and take action, we can ensure that every student feels safe, valued, and supported in reaching their full potential.