

NEWSLETTER UPDATE



Progress of the new Ashe County Middle School on page 2.

JANUARY, 2026

asheschools.org

SCHOOL BOARD APPRECIATION

This month, Ashe County Schools proudly recognizes and thanks our dedicated Board of Education members for their leadership, commitment, and support of our students, staff, and community. Beyond meetings and policies, these individuals give their time, voice, and vision to guide decisions shaping classrooms and futures across our district. Thank you, **Josh Roten, Dianne Eldreth, Teresa Calhoun, Polly Jones, and Janet Ward**, for your continued service. [Readers can share appreciation here.](#)

THANK YOU, BOARD OF EDUCATION

We are grateful for your dedication, leadership and unwavering commitment and support for our students, staff and schools!

SCHOOL BOARD APPRECIATION MONTH



A WELL-DESERVED HONOR

What a wonderful December evening, celebrating Ashe County High School Teacher of the Year, Ashe County Schools' CTE Teacher of the Year, and NCCAT CTE Teacher of the Year State Finalist, **Megan Colvard**. She was one of 24 state finalists for this prestigious award. Superintendent, Dr. Eisa Cox, Mr. Nathan Colvard, and CTE Director Earl Pennington, attended an event in Greensboro to honor the finalists. ([View photos here.](#)) Congratulations, Mrs. Colvard!

**FOCUSED,
DETERMINED,
FUTURE-READY**



Congrats to 29 Ashe High School students who graduated last month, reaching a milestone early. Their determination and hard work reflect focus, responsibility, and commitment to goals. As they move on to college, careers, and opportunities, we applaud their success. Thank you to families and staff who made this possible. [See more.](#)

HONORING EXCELLENCE

Join us in celebrating **Mr. Dustin Farmer**, Principal of Ashe County High School, recently named the Wells Fargo 2026 NC Northwest Region Principal of the Year. This honor reflects his exceptional leadership, dedication to students and staff, and commitment to excellence, including continued school growth and improved graduation rates.

Mr. Farmer was recognized in December alongside his family, Ashe County Schools staff, administrators, and NC DPI representatives. The award was presented by Jason Johnson, 2025 Wells Fargo NC Principal of the Year, who commended Mr. Farmer. [See more.](#)

“A leader is only as good as his staff, and I am blessed to work with an amazing team. I thank them, as well as my incredible family, for their support, guidance, and encouragement.”
- Dustin Farmer



CELEBRATING LEADERSHIP IN LEARNING



We proudly announce six outstanding educators who recently earned or renewed their National Board Certification. This prestigious, rigorous credential recognizes a deep commitment to student-centered learning and instructional mastery. By meeting these elite national standards, these teachers join a select group of leaders dedicated to excellence. We applaud their hard work and the lasting impact they make on our students' success!

Congratulations

Newly Certified:

Charles Johnson, BRES
Christine Polk, MVES
Taylor Ashley, WWES
LeeAnn Cronk, ACMS

Certification Renewals:

Teresa Goodman, MVES
Makayla Warren, WWES

EXCITING MILESTONES

Construction continues with strong momentum on the new Ashe County Middle School. To date, crane and multiple lifts are on site, with the first structural steel delivered and installation underway in Area A, including columns, beams, and roof framing. The elevator pit is complete with waterproofing and drainage, and the underground duct bank has been installed. Area B foundation work is progressing, including step footings between Areas A and B.

Each step brings us closer to a modern, safe, and innovative learning space for our students. The project is steadily taking shape for our students. [See more here.](#)



WIN FOR STUDENT WELLNESS

We are excited to announce that the three-way partnership of Ashe County Schools, Appalachian State University, and RTI has been awarded a **\$2.8 million** U.S. Department of Education grant! Titled *Integrating School Psychologists into a Rural School Mental Health Model*, the grant will expand access to school psychologists and strengthen a sustainable mental health pipeline for students. Funding also supports a behavior specialist position and the continued operation of the ASC Center at Ashe County High School—an important investment in student well-being.

[Learn more.](#)



JANUARY EMPLOYEES OF THE MONTH

Congratulations to two outstanding educators selected as January's Employees of the Month: **Mrs. Brooke Brownell**, Exceptional Children Teacher Assistant at Westwood Elementary, and **Mrs. Lisa Sibaja**, ESL Teacher at Mountain View Elementary.

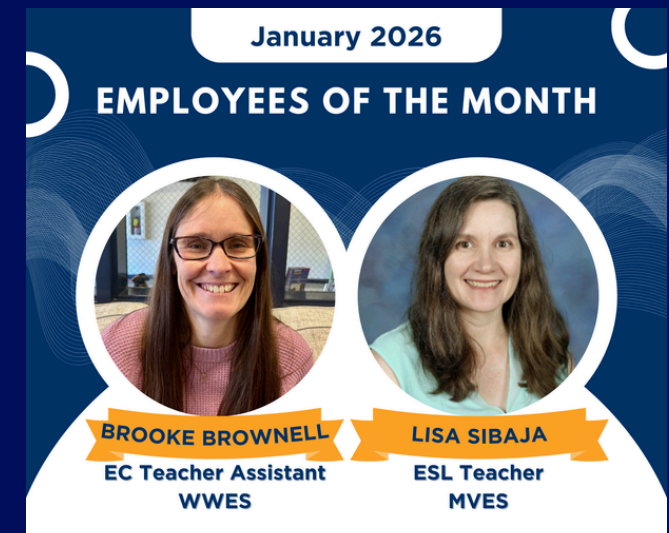
Chosen by their colleagues, these teachers exemplify the heart of our schools through their compassion, professionalism, and unwavering commitment to student success. Their work underscores the vital role that Exceptional Children and ESL educators play in supporting diverse learners and strengthening school communities. Through her dedication to students with exceptional needs, Brooke creates a supportive and nurturing environment where learners feel valued and encouraged to grow. Lisa's work bridges language and cultural barriers, fostering trust, understanding, and strong connections between home and school.

Thank you, Mrs. Brownell and Mrs. Sibaja for the care, energy, and commitment they bring to Ashe County Schools. Their passion not only supports students and families but also strengthens our entire district. We are grateful to have such exceptional team members serving our schools every day! The words shared by their peers reflect the impact these educators make each day:

Brooke Brownell

"Brooke has made a huge impact with my students, and she is so conscientious and caring. She goes above and beyond to help the students and teachers at Westwood."

"Brooke loves her job—it shows in how she takes such good care of the students in her classroom. She is engaging, kind, and professional."



Lisa Sibaja

"I am nominating Lisa for Employee of the Month because she consistently goes above and beyond for our Spanish-speaking families. She ensures their needs are met—from transportation support to clear communication—so families feel welcomed, valued, and truly part of our school community."

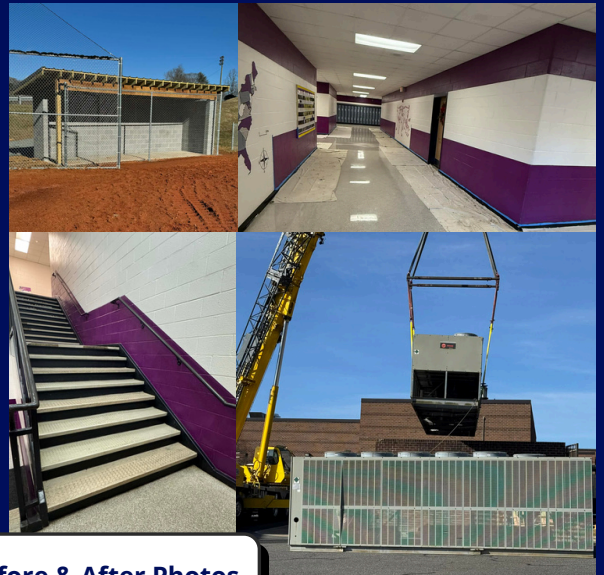
"Lisa helps parents understand what is happening in the classroom and reassures them that their children are learning, supported, and cared for every day. Her dedication makes a meaningful difference for our students and families."

IMPROVEMENTS IN ACTION

Out with the old and in with the new! We're proud to share exciting upgrades underway across our campuses, made possible through teamwork and dedication.

- At Ashe County Middle School, brand-new dugouts are ready to better support our student-athletes.
- At Ashe County High School, fresh paint is brightening hallways and creating a more welcoming environment for students. Also at ACHS, new chillers were set, marking a major milestone toward keeping learning spaces comfortable year-round for students, staff, and visitors.

Thank you to our outstanding maintenance team and all the helping hands who made these projects happen. Youkeep our schools running strong, and we are so grateful for all you do!



See Before & After Photos



BUILDING OUR BEST

Before students returned in January, ACS administrators and educators came together for purposeful planning to ensure a strong start and a bright future. Building on gains such as higher graduation rates, improved attendance, and stronger student connections, leaders shaped a five-year strategic plan focused on whole-child success that emphasizes development of citizens who are knowledgeable, empathetic, skilled, and prepared to contribute positively to society. Educators also collaborated in workshops centered on curriculum, thinking classrooms, and student support.

Thank you to all who helped plan, organize and lead these events. Together, we are keeping student success at the heart of every decision. [See more.](#)

DRIVE THE FUTURE: HIRING NOW

We are actively accepting applications for bus drivers—and providing FREE upcoming Bus Driver Training classes!

- Paid CDL training
- Set routes once assigned
- Make a difference for students every day

Training includes 3 virtual days + 1 in-person skills day, with multiple 2026 class dates available. If you're ready to join a dependable, student-focused team, don't wait—click the button at right or contact our Transportation Department today!

Call 336-846-9103 or email wendy.baker@ashe.k12.nc.us.



- Set Schedule
- Paid Training
- Retirement
- Earn up to \$20/hr based on experience
- Paid Monthly

**GET DETAILS
& REGISTER**





IMPORTANT DATES

Jan. 19 – Martin Luther King Jr Day; Schools and offices closed

Jan. 29 – BRES Leader in Me Breakfast

Feb. 2 – BOE Meeting

Feb. 3-7 – National School Counselor Appreciation Week

SCHOOL HIGHLIGHTS

