



Challenging young minds to soar.

Dr. Eisa M. Cox, *Superintendent* • Joshua D. Roten, *Chairman* • Dianne Eldreth, *Vice Chairman* • Teresa Calhoun • Polly Jones • Janet Ward

March 27, 2026

Good evening, Ashe County Families.

I want to follow up with you regarding the recent incident at Westwood Elementary School. I understand that hearing about a weapon on a school campus is deeply concerning. As a parent and educator, I share that concern, and I want you to know that the safety of our students and staff remains our highest priority. **At no time was there an active threat to students or staff, and the situation was addressed immediately.**

When situations involve law enforcement, there are limits to what we can share while an investigation is ongoing. We work closely with our law enforcement partners and follow their guidance to ensure the integrity of the investigation and the safety of everyone involved.

We understand that situations like this can impact trust. Families expect that every layer of our safety system is implemented with consistency and care. When an incident occurs, it is natural for that confidence to be shaken, and we take that seriously.

While we cannot speak to all aspects of this situation due to the ongoing investigation, we can share the steps we are taking to strengthen our practices moving forward.

What we can do, and what we are doing, is take action.

In response to this incident, we are:

- Retraining all staff who operate weapons screeners to ensure procedures are followed consistently and with fidelity
- Thursday morning, staff who man the screeners were retrained at Westwood. The West Jefferson police monitored the process at Westwood Elementary to ensure protocol was followed.
- Working in coordination with the Ashe County Sheriff's Office and our School Resource Officers to review and reinforce screening protocols
- Utilizing law enforcement partners to observe procedures and provide feedback
- Increasing monitoring and oversight of screening practices across our schools
- Continuing a full review of safety procedures to identify and address any areas for improvement



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I also want to clarify that while our School Resource Officers are an essential part of our safety efforts, they are held by the courts to laws, that school administrators are not, and vice versa. Their role is to support school safety through prevention, relationship-building, and rapid response.

Safety in our schools is built through a layered approach. Metal detectors are one tool, but they are not our only line of defense.

Our safety measures include:

- School Resource Officers on every campus
- Strong partnerships with local law enforcement, including joint planning, training, and response
- Gaggle alerts and digital monitoring systems
- Say Something anonymous reporting system
- Threat assessment teams and school safety teams that meet regularly
- Secured facilities, including locked doors, cameras, and controlled access
- Random canine checks
- Trusted adults building strong relationships with students
- Students who speak up and report concerns
- Ongoing collaboration with emergency services

Most importantly, safety depends on people, adults, and students paying attention, communicating, and taking concerns seriously.

We also want to be honest with our community: no place can ever be guaranteed 100% safe. However, we are fully committed to reducing risk, responding quickly, and continuously strengthening our practices.

Families play a critical role in school safety. We strongly encourage all parents and guardians to ensure that firearms are securely stored and inaccessible to children. Safe storage is one of the most important steps we can take together to prevent situations like this.



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Looking ahead, we will continue to enhance our safety measures. One such measure is a possible implementation of a clear bag requirement as an additional proactive layer of security.

We understand that situations like this can create concern and questions. While we may not always be able to share every detail, please know that there are many layers of protection working behind the scenes every day.

Please know this: we take this responsibility seriously. We learn from every situation, and we act.

Safety is not built in a single moment; it is built over time through strong relationships, clear systems, and shared responsibility. When students speak up, when adults listen, and when families stay engaged, our schools are safer.

Thank you for your continued trust, partnership, and support of Ashe County Schools.

Sincerely,

Dr. Eisa M. Cox
Superintendent
[Ashe County Schools](http://www.asheschools.org)