

## Ashe County Schools Announces Annual Employees of the Year Honors

Ashe County Schools is proud to announce its annual “Best of the Year” district awards, recognizing outstanding educators, administrators and staff members who demonstrate exceptional dedication to the district's students, schools and community.

### This year’s honorees include:

- **Scott Grubb**, *Principal of the Year*
- **Kendra Wineberg**, *Teacher of the Year*
- **Emilee Worley**, *Beginning Teacher of the Year*
- **Sara Lambert**, *Supervisory/Support Staff Employee of the Year*
- **Tabitha Mahaffey**, *Classified Employee of the Year*
- **Cori Richardson**, *Exceptional Children Educator of Excellence*



Among the Westwood Elementary team celebrating Principal Grubb (L-R): Assistant Principal Amanda Halsey, School Counselor Amanda Bloomer, School Nurse Libby Matheson, Data Manager/Bookkeeper Kayla Moore, Administrative Assistant/Payroll Katie Eggers, and School Resource Officer Katelynne Hollandsworth.

### Principal of the Year: Scott Grubb – Westwood Elementary

Mr. Scott Grubb brings 28 years of experience in education to his role, with 25 of those years dedicated to Ashe County Schools. He is currently completing his seventh year at Westwood Elementary and his third year as the school's principal.

Mr. Grubb holds a Bachelor of Science in Physical Education and Sports Administration from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, a master’s in Sports Administration from Appalachian State University, and a

School Administration Certificate, also from Appalachian State University.

Reflecting on his leadership path, Mr. Grubb noted that his prior experience as a coach provided an outstanding foundation for school leadership. “Coaching taught me how to build strong relationships, work effectively with a wide variety of people, and adapt quickly to changing circumstances,” he said. These skills have served him well as an administrator.

He continued: “I was also incredibly fortunate to have an exceptional mentor in Jennifer Holden. After spending my entire career in high school, Jennifer helped me understand the unique rewards and challenges of elementary education. I will always be grateful that she took a chance on me seven years ago and gave me the opportunity to serve as her assistant principal. That opportunity changed the course of my career. Serving in elementary education has been the most rewarding work of my professional life, and without question, the best job I have ever had.”

Regarding his Principal of the Year recognition, Mr. Grubb shared: “I am honored to be named Principal of the Year, but this recognition is a reflection of the incredible staff at Westwood

Elementary. I have the privilege of working alongside a dedicated team of teachers and support staff who care about children and are always willing to do what is best for students even when it means the work becomes more challenging. No single person makes a school successful. It takes a committed group of people united by a common purpose and a shared belief that all students can succeed. I am extremely grateful for the passion, professionalism, and heart that the Westwood staff brings each and every day. Their unwavering commitment to our students is what makes Westwood such a special place.”

### **Teacher of the Year: Kendra Wineberg – Ashe County Middle School**

Ms. Kendra Wineberg, an eighth-grade English Language Arts (ELA) teacher at Ashe County Middle School, has been teaching middle school for 13 years, spending eight of those years at her current school.



*(L-R): ACMS Principal Sherrie Hines celebrates Ms. Wineberg’s win, along with Superintendent Dr. Eisa Cox, Assistant Principal Aaron Butt, and Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources Dr. Susan Mochen.*

She earned her undergraduate degree, a Bachelor of Science in Middle Grades Education, from Appalachian State University, where she is currently pursuing a Master of Arts in Literacy Education. Among her many career achievements, Ms. Wineberg was named the "Best of the Best" Teacher by the *Ashe Post and Times* in 2023. In 2025, she was awarded the Janet Williams Bloodgood Endowment for Reading and Children's Literature scholarship, and she currently serves as a Lead Literacy Learner with the North Carolina Center for the Advancement of Teaching (NCCAT).

Upon receiving her award, Ms. Wineberg stated: “Being named Ashe County's Teacher of the Year is one of the greatest honors of my career—an honor I share with the incredible educators, mentors,

students, families, and friends who have walked alongside me. This award is meaningful because it reflects everything that I have poured into my work for the last thirteen years, and it reaffirms my core belief that teaching is ultimately an act of love. It is about showing every student—and everyone who comes into contact with our students—that they are worthy, important, and that they matter. I am proud and immensely grateful to represent my school, my community, and my district.”

### **Beginning Teacher of the Year: Emilee Worley – Mountain View Elementary School**

Mrs. Emilee Worley is completing her first year as a teacher with Ashe County Schools at Mountain View Elementary School, though her history with the district includes valuable experience as a teacher assistant and working within the afterschool program.



*Mrs. Worley (center) and her class are all smiles, pictured with Superintendent Dr. Eisa Cox, MVES Assistant Principal Cynthia Harless, and Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources Dr. Susan Mochen.*

She earned her Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education from Lees-McRae College and is currently working toward a master's degree at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Reflecting on her "Best of the Year" honor, Mrs. Worley shared: "It is truly an honor to be

selected as Ashe County Schools Rookie Teacher of the Year. To be recognized in my very first year of teaching by a community of educators I respect so deeply means more than I can fully put into words. This award represents not just my work, but the support, encouragement, and guidance I've received from colleagues, mentors, and students every single day. I am incredibly grateful to be part of a school system that invests in its teachers and believes in helping them grow. Being chosen for this recognition motivates me to continue learning, improving, and showing up as the best educator I can be for my students."

### **Support/Supervisory Staff Employee of the Year: Sara Lambert – Ashe County High School**

Mrs. Sara Lambert has been a valued member of the Ashe County Schools family for 23 years, serving students across West Jefferson Elementary, Westwood Elementary, Ashe County Middle School, and now Ashe County High School. She has served in her current role as an Instructional Coach at Ashe County High School since 2024.

Her extensive elementary experience includes teaching first, second, and sixth grades. Mrs. Lambert also worked as an Instructional Technology Facilitator at Westwood Elementary and Ashe County Middle School before stepping into her current position as an Instructional Specialist at the high school level.

Mrs. Lambert holds a Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education and a Master of Education in Instructional Technology, both from Appalachian State University. She has also been a National Board Certified Teacher – Early Childhood Generalist since 2008.

"This honor belongs to the teachers and administrators I work with every day—people who love students and show up again and again," Mrs. Lambert said. "When we invest in our children, we invest in our future. I'm proud to be part of a community that never stops working to be better."



*(L-R): Celebrating Mrs. Lambert's win with her are ACHS Assistant Principal Travis Richardson, Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources Dr. Susan Mochen, ACHS Principal Dustin Farmer, ACHS Assistant Principal Brian Hampton, Superintendent Dr. Eisa Cox, ACHS Assistant Principal Jennifer Crisco, and ACHS Financial Secretary Justine Hopkins.*



Mrs. Mahaffey celebrates her honor with (L-R): Child Nutrition Director Tammy Woods, Cafeteria Staff Alicia Holcomb, WWES Administrative Assistant/Payroll Katie Eggers, WWES Principal Scott Grubb, Superintendent Dr. Eisa Cox, Cafeteria Staffers Erica Fletcher, Donna Faricloth and Kim Ray, as well as Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources Dr. Susan Mochen, WWES School Nurse Libby Matheson, and WWES Data Manager/Bookkeeper Kayla Moore.

**Classified Employee of the Year:  
Tabitha Mahaffey – Westwood  
Elementary School**

Mrs. Tabitha Mahaffey recently completed her first year as the Cafeteria Manager at Westwood Elementary School. She has spent three years total with Ashe County Schools, ensuring students are well-fueled and ready for learning.

Prior to joining the school district, Mrs. Mahaffey gained valuable professional experience working for Hardee's. Reflecting on her start there in 2013 and her years with the restaurant, she noted, "I learned so much and was treated like family—a family that helped me in so many ways

through the years."

Mrs. Mahaffey also expressed special appreciation for Tina Greer, an outstanding teacher who provided tremendous help as Mrs. Mahaffey earned her ServSafe Certification.

"I am so honored to be receiving this award," said Mrs. Mahaffey. "I am blessed to be working alongside so many wonderful people and amazing students." She also shared a few of her favorite quotes that guide her everyday work ethic and team mindset: *"Alone we can do so little. Together we can do so much"* - Helen Keller; *"There is no I in team"* – Unknown; and *"No matter how good each member of your team is, if they don't work together and function as one, they will never reach their full potential"* - Dr. Patton.



Ms. Richardson (center) celebrates with her mother, Terry Richardson (left), Director of Ashe Early Learning Center and Exceptional Children, and with EC Programs Specialist Jodi Grubb.

**Exceptional Children Educator of Excellence: Cori  
Richardson – Ashe County Middle School**

A heart for education and exceptional children runs deeply in the Richardson family; Ms. Cori Richardson's mother, Mrs. Terry Richardson, serves as the district's Director of the Early Learning Center and Exceptional Children.

Ms. Richardson is wrapping up her fourth year as a self-contained Exceptional Children (EC) teacher at Ashe County Middle School. Her service to the district began earlier, having worked as a substitute teacher for Ashe County Schools since her freshman

year of college. "I loved subbing in the EC classrooms," she said.

Ms. Richardson holds a Bachelor of Science in Adapted Special Education and a Master of Arts in Reading Education, alongside a certificate in Autism, both from Appalachian State University.

Regarding her selection as the Exceptional Children Educator of Excellence, she shared: “I am honored and blessed to work with and serve this population, my administration, my coworkers, and Ashe County Schools. I couldn't ask for a better school or school system to work for.”

**NCCAT CTE Teacher of the Year (2026–2027):  
Stefan Kunz – Ashe Early College**

Ashe County Schools also extends its congratulations to Mr. Stefan Kunz, an educator at Ashe Early College who has been named the district's NCCAT CTE Teacher of the Year for the 2026–2027 academic year.

Since joining the school system in 2016, Mr. Kunz has taught social studies, expanded his instruction into English and Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses, and currently leads innovative, Adobe-based digital media instruction designed to prepare students for real-world success. His creativity and dedication previously earned him recognition as GEAR UP's Ashe County Innovator of the Year.



*AEC Principal Lindsey Williams and Earl Pennington, Director of Accountability, CTE, and GEAR UP, celebrate Mr. Kunz's honor with him.*

Earl Pennington, the district's Director of Accountability, CTE, and GEAR UP, praised Mr. Kunz's efforts, sharing, “Thank you for your commitment every day to our students and for the progress you’ve made with Adobe programs at Ashe Early College,”

In response to the recognition, Mr. Kunz stated: “I am deeply honored to receive this recognition and grateful every day to work with such amazing students and supportive colleagues here in Ashe County. Moving into a Digital Media CTE role has been an exciting and rewarding transition. One of the best parts of this work is seeing students bring their ideas to life using these powerful tools and having the opportunity to help guide them through that creative journey.”

**Leadership Reflections**

“Our employees are the foundation of Ashe County Schools’ success,” said Superintendent Dr. Eisa Cox. “These outstanding individuals exemplify excellence through their leadership, service, innovation, and commitment to students. They inspire learning, build meaningful relationships, and create opportunities that positively impact children's lives every day. We are proud to honor each of them for the extraordinary difference they make across our schools and community.”

Please join Ashe County Schools in extending the warmest congratulations to all of this year’s exceptional honorees and thanking them for their unwavering commitment to the success and future of our students.