

Ashe Educators Bring Innovative Ideas to Life through Endowment Grants

From 3-D printing and music to physical education and sensory-rich Pre-K experiences, four innovative classroom projects are getting a boost through the Ashe County Schools Endowment Fund. The grants will give educators the resources to turn creative ideas into hands-on learning opportunities that spark curiosity, build skills, and engage students across the district.

At its September meeting, the Ashe County Board of Education recognized the educators behind this year's winning projects and celebrated the difference community-supported Endowment Fund grants are making in Ashe County classrooms.



At the September Board of Education meeting, Endowment Fund grant winners and educators Sara Kesterson (pictured with Superintendent Dr. Eisa Cox) and Braxton Grose share how grant funding will help support innovative, hands-on learning and student engagement.

Congratulations to this year's winning grant recipients:

Rhythm & Regulation: Breathe, Beat, Belong – Creating a Sensory-Supportive Music

Submitted by Polly Bradley (Music Teacher, BRES)

At Blue Ridge Elementary, this project will create a more sensory-supportive music classroom where all students can participate, learn, and feel successful. Serving approximately 320 students, the project will provide flexible seating, movement tools, breathing visuals, adaptive headphones, calming lighting, and ribbon streamers. These resources will help students strengthen musical skills such as steady beat, coordinated movement, and musical expression while also developing self-regulation and focus. The project is especially valuable for supporting students with varying sensory needs and creating an inclusive music experience where every child has an opportunity to engage and belong.

Jammin' into Fitness

Submitted by Braxton Grose (P.E. Teacher, WWES)

This project will bring new energy and engagement to Physical Education for approximately 250 Westwood Elementary students in grades 3–6. With Kan Jam sets and additional cones, students will have more opportunities to practice throwing accuracy, hand-eye coordination, teamwork,

communication, and strategic thinking. The equipment will support skill-building drills, small-group games, and cooperative challenges while increasing active participation and reducing wait time. Just as importantly, the project helps ensure students have equitable access to quality PE equipment, building confidence, positive experiences, and habits that can support lifelong physical activity.

Preschool Playdough Kitchen

Submitted by Sara Kesterson (Pre-K Teacher, Ashe Early Learning Center)

The “Preschool Playdough Kitchen” is designed to make learning foundational skills feel like play. Through a mobile sensory station, young learners will practice sharing, collaboration, communication, emotional literacy, and other social-emotional skills while working together. The playdough tools, including scissors and rollers, will also strengthen fingers, hands, and grip—important skills for future self-help tasks, pencil control, and writing. The elevated station provides opportunities to play while standing and build trunk strength, too. Ultimately, this project gives Pre-K students a fun, inviting way to develop skills that will support success when they enter kindergarten.

Imagine It. Design It. Print It. Bringing Student Ideas to Life with 3D Printing

Submitted by Mandy Keziah (Media Coordinator, WWES)

“Imagine It. Design It. Print It.” will give Westwood students in grades 4–6 the opportunity to turn ideas into real, three-dimensional creations. Through 3D printing, students will move through the full design process—imagining, modeling, testing, evaluating, and improving their work—while developing creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration, and perseverance. The project will provide filament for ongoing library and classroom STEM activities and could serve approximately 175–200 students each year. It also lays the groundwork for a future STEM club, giving students greater exposure to technology, engineering, innovation, and real-world career skills.

Thanks to the generosity of community donors and the success of the Endowment Fund’s annual golf tournament (held this year at Jefferson Landing Club), more than **\$166,738** has been awarded since 2003 to support over 120 educator-led projects that go beyond traditional classroom funding.

“These grants represent the passion, creativity, and dedication of our teachers,” said Dr. Eisa Cox, Superintendent of Ashe County Schools. “We are so proud of their commitment to enriching our students’ educational experiences and grateful to the Endowment Board and our supporters for making it possible.”

Endowment Fund Board President Sonya Chatham expressed her appreciation for everyone who helped make the tournament a success: “We are incredibly grateful to every sponsor, player, volunteer and community supporter who continues to believe in the work of the Endowment Fund and the difference these grants make in our classrooms.”

The **Ashe County Schools Endowment Fund** is a nonprofit initiative that empowers teachers to try bold, engaging approaches in their classrooms. Visit the [Community section](#) at asheschools.org to learn more.

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