

Ashe County Schools Celebrates Outstanding Educators and Staff

The Ashe County Board of Education and Ashe County Schools proudly announce the 2024-2025 District Employees of the Year. These exceptional educators and staff members have demonstrated unwavering dedication, compassion and excellence in their service to students and the school community.

This year's honorees include:

- **Dustin Farmer**, *Principal of the Year*
- **Mason Wagoner**, *Rookie of the Year*
- **Tania Rollins**, *Teacher of the Year*
- **Summer Davis**, *Supervisory/Support Staff Employee of the Year*
- **Jennifer Hart**, *Classified Employee of the Year*
- **Charles Johnson**, *Exceptional Children Educator of Excellence*



ACS Superintendent Dr. Eisa Cox presents Principal of the Year award to ACHS Principal Dustin Farmer.

Dustin Farmer, Principal of Ashe County High School, has been named the district's *Principal of the Year*. A lifelong resident of Ashe County and dedicated educator for over two decades, Farmer's leadership and commitment to student success have earned him this prestigious recognition from his peers.

Farmer, a graduate of Northwest High School, continued his education at Virginia Tech and Appalachian State University. His career in education began at Ashe County Middle School, where he spent nine years as a physical education teacher. He then served as assistant principal at Westwood Elementary School before returning to Ashe County Middle as principal for seven years. He is currently in his third year leading Ashe County High School.

On receiving the honor, Farmer expressed deep appreciation for his colleagues and community: "I am truly humbled to be recognized in this way," said Farmer. "This award reflects the hard work of our students, teachers and staff. I'm incredibly grateful to be part of a district that values growth, collaboration, and putting students first. Ashe County has always been home, and it's a privilege to serve the place that shaped who I am."

Mason Wagoner, recognized as *Rookie of the Year*, is in his first full-time year of teaching physical education at Blue Ridge Elementary School. He received his teaching license in 2010 and previously served as the school's custodian for six years. He brought diverse experience from former work in construction, landscaping and Samaritan's Purse.



(L-R): BRES Principal Mitchell Reedy, Superintendent Dr. Eisa Cox, Mason Wagoner, and Asst. Superintendent of Human Resources Dr. Susan Mochen

Wagoner also brings heart and reflection to his new role. He said, “Students may not remember our best days, but they will remember our worst days. Every moment can make a difference.”



Tania Rollins, named *Teacher of the Year*, is a veteran educator with 27 years of experience, 23 of those in Ashe County. Her teaching journey began in Florida’s Orange County School System and continued at a private school in Fairfax, Virginia. She has taught 2nd, 5th and 6th grades at Blue Ridge Elementary School and served as a K–6 curriculum coach. Now at Ashe County Middle School, Rollins teaches 7th grade ELA & Media and contributes to the BRUH news show and yearbook.

She shared, “I was honored to be chosen by my colleagues as Teacher of the Year, but I was speechless and amazed that the county named me Best of the Year in the same category. Some of the teachers nominated are former colleagues of mine who have a reputation of being the best of the best. I hope I represent our county as the hardworking, ambitious, and caring teacher I know we all are.”

Summer Davis, honored as *Supervisory/Support Staff Employee of the Year*, has dedicated her 17-year career to Ashe County Schools. She began teaching 6th grade at Blue Ridge Elementary School before moving to Ashe County Middle School, where she taught 7th grade math for 14 years. For the past two years, she has served as the middle school’s curriculum coach.



Davis said, “This recognition reflects the hard work and dedication of all the incredible people I have the privilege of working with every day. I’m grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the success of our students and the continued growth of our school system.”



Jennifer Hart, recognized as *Classified Employee of the Year*, made the transition from healthcare to education in 2013. After working as a Certified Ophthalmic Assistant at Western Carolina Eye Associates and a medical assistant at Mount Jefferson Family Medicine, she began as a receptionist at Ashe County Middle School. She became the school’s Data Manager in 2018 and said that her shift to education has allowed her to spend more time with her family.

Hart shared, “I’m blessed beyond measure to do a job that I love every day. I love working with the students of Ashe County to help them be the best they can be, and it’s an honor to represent all the dedicated and hardworking staff at Ashe County Schools.” She added one of her favorite quotes, which also hangs on her office wall: “Be a fountain, not a drain.”

Charles Johnson, selected as *Exceptional Children Educator of Excellence*, has 13 years of dedicated service in the district. He began his career as a teacher assistant at Ashe County Early Learning Center before transitioning into a lead teaching role. He taught for four years at Westwood Elementary School and has spent the past eight years serving students at Blue Ridge Elementary.



(L-R): Director of Exceptional Children & PreK Programs Terry Richardson, Charles Johnson and BRES Principal Mitchell Reedy

“I’m truly honored to be named EC Teacher of the Year,” said Johnson. “Working with my students and watching them grow—both in the classroom and in the community—is incredibly rewarding. Every day, they remind me to find joy in the little things and to appreciate the simple moments. I’m also grateful for the support of my colleagues, who inspire me daily.”

Megan Colvard, Nursing Teacher at Ashe County High School, has been named Ashe County Schools *CTE Teacher of the Year* and

nominated for the **2025-2026 Career and Technical Education (CTE) Teacher of the Year** by the North Carolina Center for the Advancement of Teaching (NCCAT). Also, **Stefan Kunz**, Ashe Early College History and English Teacher, has been selected as the *GEAR UP Ashe County Innovator of the Year*, which serves as his nomination for **2025 GEAR UP Innovator of the Year**, a regional award sponsored by Appalachian State GEAR UP.

Colvard has taught Health Science and Biomedical Technology at Ashe County High School since 2020. She also co-sponsors the HOSA CTSO (Health Occupations Students of America; Career and Technical Student Organizations). Before entering education, Colvard worked as an emergency room nurse at Ashe Memorial Hospital.

Earl Pennington, Ashe County Schools Director of CTE & Accountability, praised Colvard’s efforts: “Her commitment to her students’ success is unmatched.” He added that she consistently goes above and beyond to help her students thrive both in and out of the classroom.



Megan Colvard with ACS Director of CTE & Accountability Earl Pennington

Colvard responded with gratitude. “Being named Ashe County Schools CTE Teacher of the Year and nominated for NCCAT’s CTE Teacher of the Year is incredibly meaningful—but also a little humbling,” she said. “I know the level of talent and heart that exists within Ashe County CTE. Every day, I get to work alongside educators who go above and beyond for their students. This honor reflects their influence just as much as my own efforts, and I’m genuinely excited for the opportunity to represent the amazing work we do together.”

NCCAT will announce its CTE Teacher of the Year finalists in July and an overall winner in December of this year.



Stefan Kunz’s GEAR UP Ashe County Innovator of the Year honor recognizes his creative, student-centered teaching. Kunz began that journey in 2014, joining Ashe County Schools in 2016 after two years at East Wilkes High School. He taught social studies at Ashe County High School until 2021 before transitioning to Ashe Early College. In recent years, he has

expanded his teaching portfolio to include English and CTE courses, including Adobe-based digital media.

“I am honored to receive this award and grateful for the support from both GEAR UP and ACS,” said Kunz. “Teaching in the Early College’s new Digital Media Lab has pushed me to grow, innovate my teaching practices and embrace problem solving.”

Kunz will interview for the regional award in June. He and other county honorees will be recognized at a special luncheon and closing dinner at the GEAR UP conference and will receive a certificate and banner to display throughout the year.

Ashe County Schools wishes Colvard and Kunz the best of luck in the final selection process of their respective nominations.

Superintendent Dr. Eisa Cox shared words of appreciation for all this year’s outstanding honorees: “Excellence in education doesn't happen by chance—it happens because of passionate individuals who go above and beyond every single day. Our Teachers and Staff of the Year are shining examples of the heart and commitment to the success of every student in Ashe County Schools.”

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