

## Ashe County Schools Announces Employees of the Year

The Ashe County Board of Education and Ashe County Schools congratulates its 2023-2024 Employees of the Year district winners. Among those recognized were Lindsey Williams, Principal of the Year; Jim Ashley, Teacher of the Year; Andy Cerillo, Rookie of the Year; Mandy Keziah, Supervisory Support Staff Employee of the Year; and Tim Walton, Classified Employee of the Year.

Lindsey Williams, Principal of Ashe County Early College High School, has 18 years of education experience, having spent 16 of those in Ashe County. "Education is truly my passion and purpose in life," she said.

Following two years as a high school educator in Wilkes County Schools, Williams joined Ashe County High as a math teacher and women's volleyball coach. She also coached women's junior varsity basketball. She then served from 2015 to 2019 as Mountain View Elementary Assistant Principal before joining Ashe County Middle School as Assistant Principal, where she also coached seventh grade girls' basketball. Williams accepted her current role in 2021.



*Ashe County Schools Superintendent Dr. Eisa Cox with Ashe Early College High School Principal Lindsey Williams (named Principal of the Year) and AEC Math Teacher Jim Ashley (Teacher of the Year winner).*

She shared a unique perspective about the Ashe County school system. "Watching my own children come through our schools while I've worked with students, teachers, staff, families and the community over the years has shown me that there is absolutely no better place than Ashe County!"

About her recognition as Principal of the Year, Williams said, "I am humbled to receive this award and incredibly thankful for everyone who has helped me along my educational journey."

Ashe Early College math teacher Jim Ashley, who has been teaching for 30 years, said he enjoys it now more than ever. His career goal has been for his students to know that he genuinely cares about them. Showing interest in who they are and supporting students in their out-of-school activities has helped Ashley form meaningful connections. "They know I am truly invested in their success," he said, "and they respond in positive ways in my classroom."

Ashley strives to demonstrate the importance of always learning and aspires to live up to this quote he saw years ago: "Teaching is not my job. Teaching is my passion. Getting better at it is my job."

Upon receiving the Teacher of the Year recognition, Ashley applauds others. He said, "It is truly an honor and blessing to work alongside the best principal, faculty and staff."



*ACS Superintendent Dr. Eisa Cox with Ashe County Middle School Math Teacher Andy Cerillo (Rookie of the Year winner).*

Andy Cerillo, recognized as Rookie of the Year, has just completed his first year of teaching seventh grade math at Ashe County Middle School. “I am so proud to be part of such a dedicated and supportive team at ACMS,” he said. “When I joined last year as a substitute, after a long corporate career, I knew right away that I had found my second career.”

Cerillo worked for 25-plus years as a certified Operations Manager under U.S. law, reporting to regulatory authorities regarding matters of data protection and data governance. As a senior executive accountable for global adherence to related policies, he even worked in India for four years. But it has been during this past year that Cerillo said he’s experienced some of the greatest

and most rewarding challenges of his professional career.

“Developing relationships with students and parents, as well as collaboration with my colleagues, has made a positive impact on my teaching style,” said Cerillo. He enjoys witnessing the ‘A ha’ moments and seeing students — who have never done so before — begin to engage and excel in math.

“Earning this recognition and being able to represent Ashe County in the regional round is the honor of a lifetime,” he said.

Mandy Keziah, selected as Support Staff of the Year, has been with Ashe County Schools for 18 years, serving for the past five as Westwood Elementary Media Coordinator. “When I did my student teaching at Westwood 19 years ago,” she said, “I begged Mr. McClure to hire me, because I knew there wouldn’t be another place like this one. On faith and a prayer, I turned down two jobs back home in hopes that Westwood would be my forever school, and it has been.”

Before she stepped into her current role, Keziah connected with about 20 students per year as a teacher. Now, she interacts with nearly 500 students yearly. Keziah said her mission is to make the library a place that students love. She does so by learning what they love and finding creative opportunities to engage them and help them grow. “It’s truly rewarding to see students’ growth year to year,” she continued, “as well as the wonderful individuals they are becoming.”

Keziah said she is humbled to be selected among her peers as the Support Staff of the Year. “I know that everyone in this school system is deserving of recognition.”



*Westwood Elementary Principal Scott Grubb and ACS Superintendent Dr. Eisa Cox with WWES Media Coordinator Mandy Keziah (Support Staff of the Year winner).*



*(L-R): ACS Maintenance Director Anthony Leek, Ashe County High School Head Custodian Tim Walton (Classified Employee of the Year winner) and ACHS Principal Dustin Farmer.*

Tim Walton, head custodian at Ashe County High School and Classified Employee of the Year, has spent his entire career working to keep a clean and safe environment for students and teachers there.

He began that 32-year career even before he graduated. “As an ACHS senior, I helped clean rooms during my study hall period,” Walton said. He also drove a school bus. For him, rewards on the job include hearing the students call him by name, witnessing how much they mature in their high school years and seeing them graduate.

Walton shared a saying he lives by: “Make the best of what you’ve got.” Being grateful goes hand in hand with that. “I am thankful for my co-workers and for this recognition,” he said.

Ashe County Schools congratulates these wonderful employees on receiving recognition for their outstanding job performance. Superintendent Dr. Eisa Cox said, “It takes truly special people to dedicate their lives to serving children. Please join me in thanking and recognizing these outstanding individuals, who represent the very best of our community.”

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