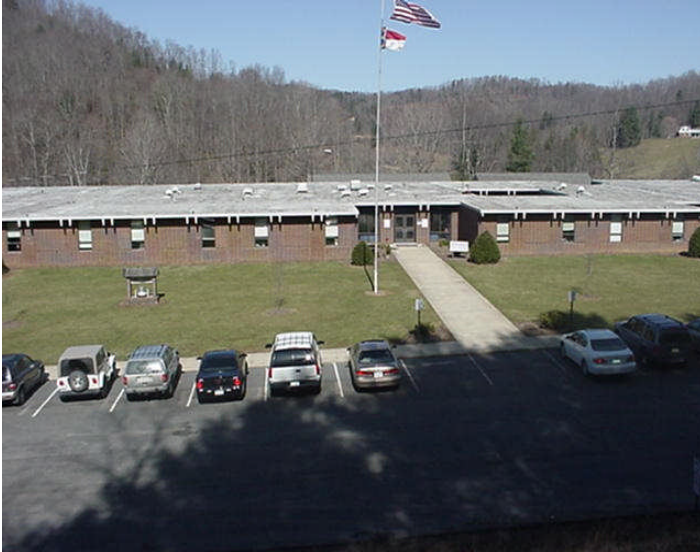




## NORTH CAROLINA SCHOOLS TO WATCH MODEL SCHOOL—VISITOR'S GUIDE

### Ashe County Middle School



#### Designated in 2003; Re-Designated 2006, 2009

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### 2009-10 School Statistics

(Source: 2009 NC School Report Card.)

Community: Rural  
Enrollment: 475  
Grade Levels: 7-8  
School Schedule: Traditional

#### Student Demographics

93% White  
4% Hispanic  
2% African American

50% Free/Reduced Lunch  
<1% English Learners

2007 AYP: High Growth, School of Distinction  
Met 17 of 17 performance targets

2008 AYP: High Growth, School of Progress  
Met 14 of 17 performance targets

2009 AYP: High Growth, School of Distinction  
Met 16 of 17 performance targets

(Visit <http://www.ncreportcards.org> to view this school's data for prior years.)

### School Characteristics and Replicable Practices

Ashe County Middle School is located in the northwest corner of NC--high in the Blue Ridge Mountains. The school of about 500 students is located in a very rural area and is the center of the community--and is of great pride and importance to the county. A rich school environment has been created through numerous resources, community involvement, and a caring school community.

#### Academic Excellence

- During one team meeting, teachers summed up their philosophy about expectations by saying, "We push, push, and push."
- Students appear to have no idea that they are writing FAR more than most middle school students across the state. The quality of writing, which is student-edited and peer-edited repeatedly before the teacher gets it, is outstanding!
- Students, while not knowing the term "rubric", repeated use them to assess their progress.

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### **Academic Excellence** *(continued)*

- Despite limited resources, there is strong use of technology. Wireless labs, Internet research, and PowerPoint presentations are commonly used.
- There was virtually no "down time" observed. We asked many students if this was typical. All replied that, "They expect us to work here."
- There are a plethora of support systems to support academic achievement-GEAR-Up, SOS, tutoring, grandparents, etc. We observed four adults working in one class. Again, this was their scheduled task, not something out of the ordinary.
- Professional development is a strong part of the culture. The staff has presented at many regional, state, and national conferences. The school was celebrating teachers who had recently received National Board Certification.

### **Developmental Responsiveness**

- While there are many activities after school, sports are a cornerstone in the community. There are two boys' basketball teams, numerous intramurals, and a "no-cut" policy for football and fall cheerleading. There were 78 cheerleaders this fall--and the school and community came up with the funds to provide a uniform for EACH girl.
- The after school program serves ALL students, not just targeted students.
- "Meet in the middle" is an orientation program for four feeder elementary schools that is highly effective.
- The school-based health center treats 89% of the student body, and is seeking to expand to an afternoon-evening clinic that would also serve parents/community.
- The school environment is warm and welcoming. There is an abundance of student work on the walls in the classrooms and halls. When we asked one student about this, she replied, "Well, I can always find some of my work up on the walls somewhere in the building!"
- One team had decorated their hall in a Victorian theme, and had a reception in costume, and attended "A Christmas Carol" as a culminating activity.
- The school has done a masterful job of connecting to the community. There was initially some resistance to the middle school, but parents, some of whom openly admit to being against it in the beginning, are now their biggest supporters. Parents, grandparents, preachers, and others are in and out of the building CONSTANTLY.
- Students held a talent show to raise funds to purchase an electric wheelchair for a classmate, and then helped him learn to use it. The child is now able to participate in many more activities.

### **Social Equity**

- When observing inclusion classes (and there were many of them), the visiting team could not distinguish between gifted, "regular," or EC students. When one EC teacher was asked how many students were hers, she had difficulty answering. "I teach them all," she said as she counted students for us.
- A number of parents admitted to being strongly opposed to middle school. In fact, some campaigned hard against it. They now say, "My child is happy here" and that "the middle school is the best thing to happen to the community in years."

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**Social Equity** (*continued*)

- One student reported, "Teachers aren't fair. They expect too much. They make everyone work too hard."
- Teachers and parents state that rising 7th graders have "a rude awakening" the first nine weeks. All students report that they constantly find themselves accountable for performing at a high level.
- Students report, "I can always find an adult to talk to." When the team asked students whom they would turn to if they had a problem at school, every single child immediately identified an adult in the building--and many teachers, administrators, and support staff (including a cafeteria worker) were mentioned.
- Ashe County Middle does a TERRIFIC job of inviting and engaging parents, family, and community.
- Despite their very rural location, there were SIX artists in residence working with teams on things like folklore, book writing, etc. Interdisciplinary instruction is a norm, and the artists in residence fit right in.

**Organizational Support**

- A shared vision is present and all staff feels empowered. We repeatedly heard, "We know that we're doing things well...What can we do to make it even better?"
- "The principal, does a great job of getting us what we need to do our work!"
- The school does an excellent job of partnering with the community, arts council, health organizations, and others.
- Families are a critical part of all areas of the school and participate regularly in conversations about increasing achievement and promoting improvement.
- University students from Appalachian State persuaded the college to allow them to continue working at Ashe County Middle after their internships ended. Interns turned down stipends just to be able to come to Ashe.