

**RECOGNIZING AND CELEBRATING SUCCESS**  
**“PUTTIN’ ON THE RITZ” AT ASHE COUNTY MIDDLE SCHOOL**

Bobby Ashley

*Imagine* a gymnasium decorated with round tables draped with linen table cloths, lit candles, colorful streamers, and a glitter-lined red carpet leading up to a podium. This gym is full of excited middle school students. A limo pulls up with faculty members who get out and begin filling the gym floor and sitting at the decorated tables. The students rush to the red carpet to get autographs as the staff filters into the room. The air is bursting with excitement. As the program begins, a middle school rock band plays loudly and a student emcee welcomes everyone to the end-of-the-year ACMS Academic Awards Celebration. The special gala is filled with student performances intertwined with team awards and concludes with the administration awarding the highest overall award, “The Bulldog Award”. This award is given to students who are tenacious and focused on making good decisions and grades, not necessarily those with the highest grades.

Students cheer as their friends perform talents such as gymnastics, clogging, and dancing. Pianists, flutists, rock bands, and solo vocalists also entertain between team award announcements. The house erupts as Sarah, one of our exceptional students, sings accompaniment for Michelle’s ballet dance performance. Michelle just happens to be an AIG student who takes all honors classes. The students probably know that Sarah is an exceptional child. Her speech is slurred and her notes are not perfect, but her ambition is obvious. The students probably know that

Michelle is a very smart and talented child, but do not know she is in all honors classes. Due to the work and effort of integrating students’ classes as the master schedule is planned each summer, students do not know or care about educational labels or placements. What they do care about is that both of these students achieve success in their performances. Cheer on!!!



*Ashe County Middle School students are all “smiles” at the End of the Year Social.*

This celebration of success and achievement is only one of many ways Ashe County Middle School recognizes success and celebrates it. It is a caring school with a supportive community.

Ashe County Middle School opened in 1999 and serves the entire county. Four hundred, ninety-seven students attend in grades seven and eight. Forty-eight certified staff members serve our students. Of the 48, 4 are National Board Certified, 25 have advanced degrees, 4 are working on an advanced degree, and 7 are certified in Academically and Intellectually Gifted.

Over 50% of the school population is economically disadvantaged. Ninety-three percent are Caucasian, 18% English as a Second Language, 13% are exceptional children and 19% are served in the Academically Gifted Program. Last year we had 94.8% overall composite score for all subjects tested. We have been an Honor School of Excellence for the past 2 years and a School of Excellence in 2003 and 2002.

Ashe County Middle School is strong academically. This strength is a credit to many dedicated staff members who recognize that middle schools need to look different from other schools. It is a school where you can find academic excellence and happy students. There are many programs that contribute to the success and happiness of the students at ACMS.

One such program is the Alternative Learning Lab (ALL). In this classroom, students get individual assistance in any subject area. Attendance in ALL is limited to only a few students per day. Students are assigned to ALL by the classroom teachers. Usually, students are there to catch up on assignments missed due to poor attendance. This is a lab where students get individual attention and some extra loving care. Our goal is to teach students who need one-on-one instruction in a different learning environment. It is staffed by a 31-year veteran with experience in all subject areas. It is one of the many programs designed to recognize individual learning styles and meet each student's needs.

At ACMS, inclusion classes are the norm for teaching most every

exceptional child. We believe that every child is capable of learning, and the best place for students to learn is in the regular classroom. Inclusion classes offer the pace of a regular classroom while catering to the needs of learners who struggle in reading and math comprehension.

Discovery Block is a 35 minute class at the end of the day. During Discovery Block, students are allowed to pick from a plethora of classes that might spark their interest. Topics range from wellness classes to Technology Leadership to Greek Mythology to broadcasting and journalism. This block of time also serves as a time to teach Character Education Traits and Advisor/Advisee activities. The class size averages 12 students per class. Our entire faculty, including some support staff, teaches or tutors during our Discovery block.



*Ashe County Middle School Seventh Grade students reenact "A Christmas Carol."*

ACMS offers a myriad of after school activities that support the academic program. Certified teachers stay after school and tutor core subject areas four days per week. Art activities, physical education, snacks, and computer time are all offered as part of

the after school program. Partnering with Ashe County 4-H, created a one time annual fee of \$5.00 for each student to attend every day of the week. Transportation home is also provided.

Our athletics and Life Time Sports are other examples of activities where students may become involved at ACMS. We have a firm commitment to a “no cut” policy in most of our athletic teams. This means we field two teams in all of our competitive sports teams. In the fall, we will take as many cheerleaders to a football game as we do players. ACMS will take one bus just for the cheerleaders. We do not have any athletic banquets or trophies to pass out. Here, it is about teaching the sport, being competitive, and preparing for the next step. ACMS also offers Life Time Sports which includes golf, tennis, skiing, and swimming; our most popular is skiing. During the winter months on Tuesday evenings we take everyone who chooses to go to Appalachian Ski Mountain.



*Ashe County Middle School students participate in “Sports for a Lifetime.”*

Going through the Schools to Watch process and being recognized as a National School to Watch confirmed our feeling of success in this school. It validated what we knew about ourselves

and our students. Now, when bringing in our seventh graders and talking about the successes of our school, we add that we are a National School to Watch. This helps parents understand that the expectations and high standards we set are purposeful and that we are doing what is right for students. Achieving this recognition also inspired our staff to become more reflective practitioners. Teachers strive to take their lessons to new levels and guard against complacency by acutely analyzing strengths and shortfalls. The drive to succeed and help students reach personal and academic success motivates the ACMS staff to continue to learn, explore, and venture into the best methods of teaching.

One of the first things found in the school’s Professional Handbook is a quote from Ralph Waldo Emerson that sums up the core belief of the ACMS faculty:

### **In Search of Success**

To laugh often and much;  
to win the respect of intelligent people  
and the affection of children;  
to earn the appreciation of honest critics  
and endure the betrayal of false friends;  
to appreciate beauty; to find the best in others;  
to leave the world a bit better,  
whether by a healthy child,  
a garden patch  
or a redeemed social condition;  
to know even one life has breathed easier  
because you have lived.  
This is to have succeeded.

At Ashe County Middle School, we believe that success comes in many ways. Test scores validate our teaching methods, becoming a National School to

Watch validated our beliefs, but our day-to-day successes come when we see adolescent children bounce down the

hallways with a smile on their face, and a sparkle in their eyes.

*About the Author:*

*Bobby Ashley has been an educator for 22 years, working at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. He has served as a teacher, coach, assistant principal, and principal. He currently serves as Principal of Ashe County Middle School.*