Written by Steve Frank
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First, the State Teacher of the Year, now the North Carolina School Counseling Association (NCSCA) has selected a Watauga Counselor as the Elementary School Counselor of the Year for 2012-13. And again, it comes from one of Watauga's smallest schools, with Mabel School Counselor Christy Welch selected by the organization. Her selection was lauded by Mabel Principal Mark Hagaman, who said "she richly deserves the honor. She has been instrumental in helping provide a safe, happy, and nurturing environment for the students of our community. Ms. Welch is creative and innovative in her approach to students and her opinion is valued at the local level and beyond." In addition to her duties as school counselor, Welch is the school testing coordinator for Mabel, a role that Hagaman described as "a job within itself." Welch also maintains a parent resource center that provides information helpful in coping with the challenges of parenting, a food pantry for families who lack the means to provide adequate food at home, and a "Pioneer Prom Boutique" to help less fortunate young women with prom dresses. The NCSCA offers school counselor of the year awards for counselors working in elementary grades, middle grades, and at the high school level. The purpose of the awards is "to recognize one outstanding professional on each level who has made a positive impact in their school with students, teachers and parents." Nominees for the awards must be certified school counselors with a master's degree and at least five years of experience in the field, and they must have displayed innovation and leadership in their work as a counselor. Welch has been at Mabel since she came to Mabel as an intern and is now in her eleventh year as the school's counselor. She completed her bachelor's degree at Wingate University, a master's degree at Appalachian State University.