Issues of school safety, goals and achievements and the future of education in Avery County were discussed by the Avery School Board Thursday evening. With that focus, State Senator Dan Soucek, North Carolina House of Representative Josh Dobson, the Avery County Board of Commissioners, Superintendent David Burleson, Sheriff Kevin Frye and others. Mike Dorn with Safe Havens International, who has worked with the White House and FEMA, gave a power point presentation on keeping children safe and evaluating each school's individual needs. He talked about preparing teachers and administrators with the tools to react and respond to any type of threat in and around school grounds. He said threats could involve custody disputes, weapons, a child not breathing or a natural disaster, and he said there cannot be a delay in response. He said there must be communication, dedicated safe rooms, and procedures to keep children safe. But like the Police department, he said, one must protect themselves first so they can protect others, then secure the building and call police. Even in the aftermath of the incident in Newtown, Connecticut, he said we must remember that schools are still relatively safe. John Greene, Board of Education Chair, asked for comments from local, state and federal representatives in attendance. Sheriff Kevin Frye stated that Avery County has the courage to try new things and not settle for mediocrity. A Safe Program starts this year with state personnel acting as volunteers to be in each school in the morning and afternoon to make sure schools are safe and secure. Over 200 volunteers have already committed to participate, making Avery County a blueprint for a state wide program. Senator Soucek commended Avery County for its focus on children and being a role model for the state. Superintendent David Burleson stated that through supportive relationships with everyone "Every child will be a success," and that "Educators must be role models and have high expectations." And "We must provide a safe, nurturing environment in order for students to learn." Burleson made it clear that, "If there is a need we are there to meet that need." He said that Avery County is the only county in North Carolina to offer 1:1 Technology, and might be the only county in the Country to embrace iPads and tablets for every student from kindergarten thru 12th grade. He said Avery County Schools are proud to have the 4th highest graduating rate in North Carolina. Among the many goals the School Board is working towards building a new High School without incurring a huge debt.