

April 2, 2025

## **Superintendent Dr. Eisa Cox Among Western North Carolina School Administrators Honored for Leadership**

Ashe County, NC – Superintendents of the 11 western North Carolina school districts most severely impacted by Hurricane Helene accepted the North Carolina Association of School Administrators' (NCASA) 2025 Raymond Sarbaugh Leadership Award on behalf of their district and administrative team during NCASA's 2025 Conference on Educational Leadership, Friday, March 28, 2025. This award, named in honor of NCASA's first full-time Executive Director, the late Raymond Sarbaugh, is given annually to an NCASA member or members who show outstanding leadership in public school service, as well as a commitment to enhancing and supporting efforts by fellow administrators and educators.

Among the recipients was Ashe County Schools Superintendent, Dr. Eisa Cox. She said, "This recognition is a testament not to any one leader but to the dedication of our principals, directors, teachers, staff, and community partners who stepped up without hesitation. When our students, families, and community needed us most, our schools stood strong—not just as places of learning, but as pillars of support, comfort, and recovery."

Immediately following the impact of Hurricane Helene, school and district leaders from Ashe, Asheville, Avery, Buncombe, Haywood, Henderson, Madison, McDowell, Mitchell, Watauga, and Yancey got to work ensuring that not only their staff and students were safe, but also that their entire community had the support and resources needed to begin recovering. Despite their own personal loss and lack of power and water, these leaders dedicated their time to ensuring the safety and well-being of every employee and child in their districts.

Following initial search and rescue efforts, schools in these 11 districts opened their doors to the community to serve as vital resource hubs. Classrooms became food distribution sites. School parking lots served as fueling stations. Gyms were converted into emergency shelters. Sports fields became helicopter pads for supply distribution, and buses were repurposed for evacuations and food delivery. These schools operated around the clock, and school leaders remained on-site 24/7 to oversee operations. Thanks to their efforts, their school buildings served as a place of reprieve, where community members could enjoy a hot meal and obtain needed water, food, clothes, and other supplies. This crisis showcased how school and district leaders stepped up in unprecedented ways to support and serve their students, families, and communities.

"The collective leadership shown by the superintendents, principals and other administrators in these 11 hardest-hit districts is nothing short of remarkable," said Katherine Joyce, NCASA's Executive Director. "Even as they faced heartbreak and loss of their own, these school and district leaders went above and beyond to ensure that local children and families had the essential support needed following their region's devastation by this unprecedented natural disaster. They proved that public schools are indeed the heart of local communities."

As immediate recovery efforts concluded, school and district leaders remained committed to addressing the long-term needs of their school communities. They conducted ongoing assessments, met with staff, and implemented strategies to support the mental health and well-being of students and educators. Districts even banded together to provide school counselors and social workers to assist students and teachers upon their return to school. In anticipation of ongoing needs, school districts also created relief funds to provide long-term support for students and families. The outstanding work achieved by school and district leaders from Ashe, Asheville, Avery, Buncombe, Haywood, Henderson, Madison, McDowell, Mitchell, Watauga, and Yancey is a testament to their extraordinary leadership and thus earned them well-deserved recognition as co-recipients of NCASA’s 2025 Raymond Sarbaugh Leadership Award.

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*Photos courtesy of EdNC.org*





## 2025 RAYMOND SARBAUGH LEADERSHIP AWARD WINNERS!

**THANK YOU DISTRICT TEAMS FOR YOUR LEADERSHIP**

