

NOMINATION FORM

**2022-23 A Craig Phillips North Carolina Superintendent of the Year
AASA 2023 National Superintendent of the Year**

SUPERINTENDENT INFORMATION

Name: Dr. Eric Cunningham

School System: Halifax County Schools

Mailing Address: 9525 Highway 301 South

City, State, ZIP/Postal Code: Halifax, NC 27839

Telephone: (Office: 252-583-5111 Cell: 252-578-3783)

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NOMINATOR INFORMATION

Name: Dr. Tyrana B. Battle

Relationship to Superintendent (i.e. board member, colleague, parent, community member): colleague

School System: Halifax County Schools

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April 29, 2022

Dear Mr. Croom,

It is with joy and admiration that I nominate Dr. Eric Lee Cunningham, Superintendent of Halifax County Schools, for consideration for the NC Superintendent of the Year Award. His professional character, phenomenal dedication to the cause of excellence in education, community outreach, and commitment to the wellbeing of the Halifax community at large make him a viable candidate for the honors that come with this award. His tenure includes five-years of outstanding service in Halifax County. I am proud to share the impact that this visionary leader is having on the northeastern region of North Carolina.

Dr. Cunningham's community mantra is steeped in President Theodore Roosevelt's quote – "*Nobody cares how much you know, until they know how much you care.*" His heart, hand, and head of leadership speak loudly to his affective commitment to the staff, students, parents, and stakeholders of Halifax County. For examples, he led the district through a two-year world-wide pandemic and kept the entire staff economically whole. Both certified and non-certified staff had job security throughout the pandemic. Over 500,000 meals were prepared and transported to the homes of needy families. He worked untiringly to ensure scholars' remote access to quality academic and social-emotional support within an internet desert. His initiative for decreasing student offenders resulted in the implementation of a Teen Court Program which is noted for its significance in the school community and is receiving continued funding. Dr. Cunningham believes students should have the opportunity to "*give back*" –contribute to their family, community, and the world; thus, the birth of additional innovative and highly-recognized student apprenticeships such as the Lighthouse Solar Energy Program (recognized state-wide) Green Leaf Farms (certified), & Technology Help Desk to name a few. In the words of Dr. Cunningham, "Halifax is on the rise, and nobody loves you better than Halifax County Schools".

Throughout the district, "*Get your five-fingers up when you see Dr. C.*" resounds around the school community as Dr. Cunningham encourages staff and students to strive for a five-star life. As an outcome, he led the way to securing quality research-based core curriculum programs in reading, math, science, and supplemental resources to build teaching and learning capacity and credit recovery. The drive for excellence resulted in an established curriculum framework for teaching and learning which promotes *the value and protection of instructional time, a high profile on teaching and learning, and rigorous differentiated student learning.* As a result, the 2016-2020 historical data at one consistently failing elementary and one middle school (both housed on the same campus) show consistent academic increase. The elementary school made the most growth in the State in 2020 and the middle school is consistently thriving as well. Dr. Cunningham strongly emphasizes the need for a highly qualified principal, highly qualified teacher, and key resources to close diverse achievement gaps. He is focused and intentional about meeting students' academic and social-emotional needs within a professional community of caring educators. You'll find that he is certainly a researcher and a forward thinker. His data-driven purview guards against random acts. On any given day, you will find him in and out of

schools professionally braiding students' interest, talents and community partnerships to ensure the best for Halifax County Schools. His latest signature program is "*Earn While You Learn*". This program brought the school, families, universities, and community together in a learning and wealth exchange. Halifax County Schools, North Carolina State Energy Office and NC A&T State University joined forces with Halifax Community College, the Governor's Office and the Center for Energy Education to produce a solar camp where juniors and seniors received a 176-hour training program to expand their knowledge of photovoltaic and solar energy. "*Earn While You Learn*" is the conduit to expanding Halifax County Schools' global interest.

Clear communications and messaging and the art of having crucial conversations are the comprehensive point guards to Dr. Cunningham's quest for leading district and school transformation. As a result, Halifax County Schools is awarded a Blue Ribbon for outstanding public relations and communications accomplishments from the North Carolina School Public Information Association (2021-2022). This honor recognizes exemplary efforts made by the district in communication and messaging with stakeholders. Dr. Cunningham graciously extends himself to his staff, students, and school community. He has an open-door policy, and advocates on behalf of the well-being of all students and staff. His community outreach is intentional as he seeks to bridge the divide between small township feuding and neighborhood conflicts that matriculate to the classroom through community forums. As a result, the community looks forward to joining his televised sessions of Sweet Tea with Dr. C, listening to his twice-a-week shoutouts, and following updates on social-media.

Dr. Eric Lee Cunningham is an outstanding professional and a strong strategic leader. He works honorably with the Halifax County Schools Board of Education and school community. Over the years, he has shared his many life struggles, shortcomings, and scars --and how he keeps refining himself with a growth mindset. As a youth growing up in poverty in the projects of Bermuda Run in Chesterfield, Virginia, he acknowledges his humble beginnings and uses his transformed life to encourage the students and staff of Halifax County Schools to stay in the game of life because "you matter". Dr. Cunningham has always aspired to be numbered among the great leaders of the world. His high energy and strategic ability to cast the vision of Halifax County Schools with a futuristic hook into the vacuum of a low wealth district has resulted in better days ahead for Halifax County Schools (HCS). What an impact his leadership has had on the district and community!

With sincere respect for the diligent work and community impact that Dr. Eric Lee Cunningham is having on Halifax County Schools, it is my pleasure to nominate him for the NC Superintendent of the Year Award.

Kind regards,



Dr. Tyrana B. Battle
Assistant Superintendent