

2026 Lou Thompson Distinguished Service Award

The North Carolina Association of School Business Officials is proud to name Ashley Sutton, Chief Financial Officer at New Hanover County Schools, as the 2026 recipient of the Lou Thompson Distinguished Service Award. With more than 20 years of experience in auditing and school finance, Ashley has built a career grounded in integrity, strategic vision, and dedicated service to North Carolina school districts.

After earning her Master of Science in Accounting from the University of North Carolina Wilmington, she began her career in auditing before joining New Hanover County Schools, where she advanced through multiple leadership roles. She later served as Chief Financial Officer for Duplin County Schools, earning an Outstanding Leadership Award, and was recognized statewide as SASBO's Emerging Leader in 2018. She returned to New Hanover County Schools in 2020 and was appointed Chief Financial Officer in 2022.

A respected leader and former NCASBO President, Ashley helped develop the organization's first strategic plan and guided the first Tyler Munis implementation in a North Carolina school district. Ashley's influence extends beyond budgets and balance sheets—her work helps ensure stability, sustainability, and opportunity for the school communities she serves.

History of the Award

Lou Thompson served the State of North Carolina and the Department of Public Instruction for 33 years working in various financial positions. Lou was a leader in improving the operations of school finance and epitomized the principle of fiscal integrity. She never compromised her principles in the execution of her responsibilities for fiscal accountability. When the decision was made by NCASBO's 1995-96 Executive Council to initiate a distinguished service award designed to annually recognize a NCASBO member who has made substantial contributions to improve the organization and the school business official profession, Lou Thompson was their unanimous choice to be the first recipient. The membership voted to name the award for their friend and mentor and thus the Lou Thompson Distinguished Service award has been presented annually to the member who typifies the qualities and leadership of Lou Thompson.



Ashely with New Hanover County Schools Superintendent, Dr. Christopher Barnes



Ashley with her colleagues.