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**Craig Burford Honored with 2024 Exemplary Service Award at AESA
Summer Leadership Conference**

At the 2024 Summer Leadership Conference, the Association of Educational Service Agencies (AESAs) proudly presented the 2024 Exemplary Service Award to Craig Burford, Executive Director of the Ohio Educational Service Center Association (OESCA). This prestigious award, selected by the AESA Executive Council, honors individuals who have provided outstanding service and volunteerism to AESA and its programs. The award is named in honor of Peter C. Young, a charter member of AESA, founding member of the AESA Foundation, and AESA's Chief Financial Officer for 14 years.

Craig Burford has led the Ohio Educational Service Center Association (OESCA) as Executive Director since August 2000, overseeing the organization's operations and guiding policy development and advocacy through a robust grassroots network. His unwavering support for AESA and its mission has been a constant throughout his tenure.

In 2018, Craig was elected by his peers as the first state association executive director to represent them on AESA's Executive Council. His contributions have extended far beyond this role, with his membership on the AESA Perspectives Editorial Board since 2008, where he has served both as a board member and an influential writer. Additionally, Craig has taken the lead in organizing the network of state association executive directors, fostering regular monthly virtual meetings to share insights and strengthen collaboration.

During the 2023-24 year, Craig partnered with AESA to spearhead state advocacy initiatives for AESA members. He continues to author *The State Examiner*, a widely-read monthly online publication that provides a national overview of state legislative issues and trends. His work empowers AESA members to become effective advocates for education in their respective states. Craig has also designed and delivered a series of workshops—both virtual and in-person—focused on enhancing advocacy skills for ESAs.

Craig is known not only for his leadership but also for his extraordinary communication skills, reflected in his extensive writing and research. His commitment to putting people first, his compassionate collaboration, his systems-thinking approach, and his high moral authority are qualities that make him an exceptional leader in the education sector.

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