

Superintendents Direct More Than \$180,000 To Support Local Causes

In service of improving public ed, district leaders share their time and expertise at ERDI, and their efforts will have a lasting impact in their communities.

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS, UNITED STATES, February 25, 2020 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Superintendents and other public school leaders from across the United States directed more than \$180,000 in donations to provide scholarships to students, reward innovation in the classroom, and help educators brighten the futures of students in their home districts in Alabama, Arizona, California, Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Washington and Wisconsin.

The donations came after the leaders participated in an event organized by the [Education Research and Development Institute](#) (ERDI). The 35-year-old organization convenes think tank-style gatherings to engage public school leaders in sharing innovative ideas with one another and with solution providers who are designing products and services to support districts, schools and classrooms from pre-kindergarten through high school.



David Vroonland Superintendent of Mesquite Independent School District, Texas

At the start of 2020, ERDI launched its Commitment to Social Impact project. To recognize superintendents for their valuable expertise, ERDI makes a donation in honor of each participant to the charity, non-profit, or educational foundation of their choice.

Dr. David Vroonland, superintendent of the 40,000-student Mesquite Independent School District in Texas, directed funds to launch a scholarship fund for students who — like him — spent at least part of their childhoods in foster care.

The Hubert and Georgia Rossin Memorial Scholarship will provide two \$2,500 scholarships to students who write essays about the impact of their experiences in foster care. The grant program is named for a Waterloo, Iowa, couple who provided Vroonland with a home from the time he was two or three until he was adopted at age 10.

“Like many children today, I was born into unfortunate circumstances, circumstances of neglect and poverty, and I ended up in the foster care system,” Vroonland said. “I came under the care of this family who provided love, stability, educational support and a foundation of faith for me that was going to be so important to my ultimate success in life.”

“They had served over 100 foster children during their time; it was a mission of theirs,” Vroonland said of the couple, who also raised six children of their own. Hubert Roisin died in

2013, and his wife last August. "I want the power of the Rossins' story to live on."

The grants may be used by students to pursue studies not only at the college and university level, but also in trade or professional certification programs, Vroonland said. Hubert Rossin was a member of the Molders and Allied Workers Union who spent his adult life working at Viking Pump Co. and Rock Island Millwork in Iowa.

"We didn't want to limit it to a student who was going to university," Vroonland said of scholarships, which are also being supported by the couple's family and will go to students in Texas and Iowa. "That wouldn't have been Hubert Rossin's desire."

Vroonland and other school district leaders gathered at the ERDI event in Austin at the start of February to tackle some of the biggest problems facing education, such as equity and access, effective instruction, social and emotional learning, school safety and security, parent and community engagement, and leadership development.

Dr. Michelle Rodriguez, superintendent of the Pajaro Valley Unified School District in California, said she will direct the \$2,000 donation to the Pajaro Valley Education Foundation to provide "Innovator of the Year" awards to students, teachers and staff members who devise new ways to improve public education.

"The idea was to honor people who think differently and better," Rodriguez said of the \$350 awards, which will be available not only to educators but also to the district's bus drivers, food service and maintenance workers. "We want the whole organization to be thinking about innovation."

Many of the school leaders directed ERDI to make donations to their districts' nonprofit educational foundations, which supplement tax dollars in supporting public schools.

Dr. Heidi Kattula, superintendent in East Grand Rapids, Michigan, said her district does not receive adequate public funding to send administrators to sustainable and systematic

training in trauma-informed education, restorative practices and other approaches to improving their students' social emotional learning. She will direct the \$2,000 ERDI donation to the East Grand Rapids Schools Foundation to start a professional development fund "to support lead learners in our district."



Dr. Michelle Rodriguez, Superintendent of Pajaro Valley Unified School District, California



Dr. Heidi Kattula, Superintendent of East Grand Rapids Public School District, Michigan

“Our ERDI education leaders are truly best in class. They represent our nation’s most complex districts, and they bring a level of expertise that is second to none,” said ERDI President Jennifer Ferrari. “Driven by a strong mission to support children and their learning, our education leaders generously share their time and energy to contribute to the continuous improvement of public education. It’s tough work, and we are pleased to honor them for their time, expertise, and efforts by fully contributing to altruistic causes on their behalf.”

“We thank the many education leaders who have, and continue to contribute to such worthwhile and inspirational causes and organizations,” said Joseph Wise, CEO of the organization. “Their generosity and collective efforts to support education will have a powerful and lasting impact on so many.”

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