

District Administration Announces 2026 National Awards Program Winners

DA announces 2025 Awards of Distinction winners, recognizing educational leaders driving innovation, student achievement, and community transformation.

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EINPresswire.com/ -- Dr. Jeff Horton of Southwest Metro Intermediate School District 288 in Minnesota and Dr. Carmen Balgobin, Superintendent of Volusia County Schools in Florida, received the highest honors at the 2026 Awards of Distinction program, announced at the [District Administration Leadership Institute](#) (DALI) National Superintendents Summit.

“

Our award winners embody a new model of leadership—one that unites vision, trust, and community engagement to build resilient, future-focused school systems.”

Amy Dujon, Vice President of Education for Community EDU



2026 DA Awards of Distinction

The 2026 Awards of Distinction program recognizes education leaders and initiatives driving meaningful change across six categories: Academic Acceleration, Community & Family Engagement, Culture, Vision & Strategic Planning, Professional Development & Wellness, STEM & Career Pathways, Student Engagement & Wellbeing, as well as exceptional Women of Distinction and Leaders of Distinction.

2026 National Award Winners

Superintendent of the Year: Dr. Jeff Horton, Southwest Metro Intermediate School District 288, Minnesota

Dr. Horton was recognized for transforming SouthWest Metro through bold, community-centered leadership—conducting over 1,000 listening sessions, achieving full staffing for the first time in a decade, and engaging 38,000 stakeholders in shaping the district's future. He was selected from a competitive field that included finalists Dr. Jenny McGown of Klein Independent

School District in Texas and Dr. Kenneth Spells of Hoke County Schools in North Carolina.

Woman of the Year: Dr. Carmen Balgobin, Superintendent, Volusia County Schools, Florida

Dr. Balgobin was recognized for groundbreaking academic gains and a significant reduction of absenteeism, demonstrating exceptional leadership that has elevated student outcomes and reshaped the educational landscape.

Districts of Distinction

The Leaders of Distinction award honors individuals spearheading groundbreaking initiatives and inspiring educational progress within their districts.

2026 DA Districts of Distinction Winners:

Academic Excellence: Englewood Public School District, New Jersey

Community & Family Engagement: Kenton County School District, Kentucky

Culture, Vision & Strategic Planning: St. Vrain Valley Schools, Colorado

Professional Development & Wellness: Itasca School District 10, Illinois

STEM & Career Pathways: Collierville Schools, Tennessee

Student Engagement & Well-Being: Springfield Public Schools, Missouri

Leaders of Distinction

The Leaders of Distinction award honors individuals spearheading groundbreaking initiatives and inspiring educational progress within their districts.

2026 DA Leaders of Distinction Winners:

Dr. Rui Dionisio – Fair Lawn Public Schools, New Jersey
Dr. Adam Ehrman – Bourbonnais Elementary School District #53, Illinois



2026 DA Woman of the Year
Superintendent Dr. Carmen Balgobin



Dr. Jeff Horton 2026 DA
Superintendent of the Year

Dr. Joseph Famularo – Bellmore Union Free School District, New York
Dr. Marnie Hazelton, Ed.D – Englewood Public School District, New Jersey
Scott Olinger – Plainfield Community School Corporation, Indiana
Glenn Robbins – Brigantine Public School District, New Jersey
Bill Runey – Dighton-Rehoboth Regional Schools, Massachusetts

Women of Distinction

The Women of Distinction award recognizes women in education whose exceptional leadership has elevated student outcomes and opportunities.

2026 DA Women of Distinction Winners:

Lindy Beckman – Director of Curriculum and Instruction, Hemlock Public School District, Michigan
Djeneba (DJ) Cherif – Chief Academic Officer, University Prep Schools, Michigan
Yolanda Conaway – Assistant Superintendent, Palo Alto Unified School District, California
Dr. Tahira DuPree Chase – Superintendent of Schools, Westbury Union Free School District, New York
Dr. Sally Parish – Director of Schools, University of Schools, Tennessee

"The superintendency is evolving beyond operational management to encompass civic stewardship," said Amy Dujon, Vice President of Education for Community EDU. "Our award winners embody a new model of leadership—one that unites vision, trust, and community engagement to build resilient, future-focused school systems."

The invitation-only 2025 National Superintendents Summit convened approximately 100 K12 Superintendents from December 17 to 19, 2025, at The Breakers in Palm Beach, Florida.

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About the District Administration Leadership Institute

The District Administration Leadership Institute (DALI) connects K-12 leaders nationwide through invitation-only summits and executive-level forums. DALI provides a platform for superintendents to engage in peer-to-peer learning, explore innovative strategies, and develop actionable solutions to today's most pressing educational challenges—all within a trusted, vendor-free environment. For more information about the Superintendents Summit, visit www.DistrictAdministration.com/DALI.

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