

ERDI Celebrates Distinguished Leaders Advancing Excellence, Service, and Connection Across Education

HIGHWOOD, IL, UNITED STATES, July 15, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The Education Research and Development Institute (ERDI) proudly recognized three district leaders at its 2026 ERDI Summer Institute. The awards celebrate individuals whose careers exemplify exceptional leadership, service, and a lasting commitment to strengthening public education.

Each year, ERDI honors members of its national community whose impact extends beyond their own organizations through visionary leadership, the development of others, and meaningful collaboration across the education ecosystem.

"These awards represent the values at the heart of the ERDI community," said Dr. Jennifer Ferrari, ERDI President and CEO. "The leaders we recognize are accomplished professionals who elevate those around them and remain deeply committed to improving education for students and communities."

Mike Kneale Excellence in Education Award

Recipient: Dr. Raymond González, Superintendent, Westfield Public Schools (NJ)

Established in 2001 by Mike and Patty Kneale, the Mike Kneale Excellence in Education Award recognizes superintendents whose leadership reflects vision, integrity, and an unwavering commitment to student success.

Dr. Raymond González was selected for his exceptional leadership and sustained contributions to public education. Throughout his career as a teacher, principal, district leader, and superintendent, he has strengthened educational systems while expanding opportunities for students. As Superintendent of Westfield Public Schools and the 2026 New Jersey Superintendent of the Year, Dr. González is widely respected for his thoughtful leadership, commitment to continuous improvement, and ability to unite communities around a shared vision.



ERDI Summer Institute Award Winners 2026

In recognition of this honor, Patty Kneale will make a \$5,000 donation in Dr. González's name to an organization or initiative of his choice.

Gerald E. Dawkins Leadership Builder Award

Recipient: Dr. Kimberley Markus

Created in honor of Dr. Gerald E. Dawkins, this award recognizes leaders who invest in others and strengthen the profession by developing future education leaders.

Dr. Kimberley Markus has devoted her career to advancing public education through leadership at the district, state, and national levels. A former district leader and former Commissioner of Education for the State of New Jersey, she is widely respected for her unwavering commitment to students and her ability to recognize potential in others. Throughout her career, she has encouraged emerging leaders and she generously shares her experience to help others grow. She continues to serve the education community as an advisor and mentor, offering thoughtful guidance to leaders and organizations across the country.

In her honor, a \$2,000 leadership scholarship will be awarded to an emerging leader selected by Dr. Markus to support their continued professional growth.

Kathy Hurley Distinctive Mentor Award

Recipient: Anna Strassner

Named in honor of Kathy Hurley, a pioneering leader in the education technology community, the Kathy Hurley Distinctive Mentor Award recognizes individuals who make a lasting investment in the growth and success of others through generosity, connection, and mentorship.

Anna Strassner was selected for her extraordinary commitment to building authentic relationships across the education community. A longtime ERDI member and respected industry leader, she is known for creating meaningful relationships and generously sharing her time and expertise with others. Her example demonstrates that mentorship is shaped through everyday acts of encouragement, support, and genuine connection.

About ERDI

The Education Research and Development Institute (ERDI) is a premier professional learning community where education leaders, solution providers, researchers, and industry experts collaborate to develop practical, high-impact solutions for PK-12 education. Through national convenings, research initiatives, and ongoing engagement, ERDI advances innovation, responsive leadership, and meaningful partnerships that strengthen public education. For more information, visit www.erdus.org.

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