

# ERDI Honors National Education Leaders with 2025 Awards for Excellence, Mentorship, and Leadership Development

HIGHWOOD, IL, UNITED STATES, July 16, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The Education Research and Development Institute (ERDI) is proud to announce the recipients of its 2025 national awards, presented during a special ceremony at the ERDI Summer Institute. These honors recognize education leaders who model exceptional leadership, invest in future leaders, and make a lasting difference in the communities they serve.

"Each of these individuals represents what is best about public education—visionary leadership, deep care for students, and a commitment to helping others thrive," said Dr. Jennifer Ferrari, ERDI President and CEO. "We are honored to recognize their contributions and celebrate their ongoing impact."

Mike Kneale Excellence in Education Award

Recipient: Dr. Adam Clark, Superintendent, Mount Diablo Unified School District (CA)

Sponsor: Patty Kneale

Established in 2001 by Dr. Mike Kneale and his wife Patty, this award honors superintendents whose careers reflect integrity, visionary leadership, and a lasting commitment to student success.

Dr. Adam Clark was selected for his tireless advocacy on behalf of students and families, his steady leadership in complex systems, and his ability to build programs that prioritize student well-being and academic achievement. At Mount Diablo Unified, he has led wide-reaching efforts to strengthen learning opportunities, support staff, and engage communities with transparency and resolve.



In recognition of this honor, a \$5,000 donation will be made by Patty Kneale in Dr. Clark's name to a nonprofit organization or scholarship fund of his choice.

#### Gerald E. Dawkins Leadership Builder Award

Recipient: Dr. John Kurelja, Executive Director, Central Susquehanna Intermediate Unit (PA)

Sponsor: [SchoolLinks](#)

This award honors the legacy of Dr. Gerald Dawkins—a beloved educator and mentor who dedicated his life to shaping strong, student-centered school systems and supporting emerging leaders.

Dr. John Kurelja has spent more than 25 years serving school communities across Pennsylvania. As Executive Director of the Central Susquehanna Intermediate Unit, he supports 17 public school districts and more than 40,000 students. Known for his steady leadership and quiet strength, Dr. Kurelja has helped build leadership pipelines and coached dozens of administrators into new roles.

In his honor, a \$5,000 scholarship, generously sponsored by SchoolLinks, will be awarded to an emerging leader selected by Dr. Kurelja to further their own professional growth.

#### Kathy Hurley Distinctive Mentor Award

Recipient: John Gamba, Entrepreneur-in-Residence, University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education

Named in honor of ERDI's inaugural recipient Kathy Hurley, this award celebrates individuals whose mentorship reflects generosity, wisdom, and a personal commitment to guiding others.

John Gamba is a nationally respected advisor and entrepreneur in the education space. At the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Education, he mentors early-stage founders and supports new voices in the innovation ecosystem. Known for his authentic approach, thoughtful counsel, and passion for empowering others, John has influenced the careers of countless educators, entrepreneurs, and system leaders nationwide.

The awards were presented at ERDI's Summer Institute, which convenes district superintendents, education solution providers, and thought leaders from across the country to collaborate on the most pressing challenges in PK-12 education.

#### About ERDI

The Education Research and Development Institute (ERDI) is the premier professional learning community that brings together education leaders and industry partners to co-design practical, high-impact solutions for today's public schools. ERDI advances innovation, excellence, and responsive leadership through national convenings and ongoing research initiatives. For more information, visit [www.erdus.org](http://www.erdus.org) or contact [jbarraza@erdus.org](mailto:jbarraza@erdus.org).

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