

**CONTACT: Sharmila Williams**

Ripple Effects

888-259-6618 ext. 507

swilliams@rippleeffects.com



---

## PRESS RELEASE

### **eSchool Media Announces Winners of the 2022 eSchool News K-12 Hero Awards**

Recognizing the country's best examples of K-12 success during the pandemic-era school year, eSchool News recognizes three winners for their exceptional efforts to help all students continue learning, while ensuring students felt safe, empowered, and engaged.

**Gaithersburg, MD (Monday, October 3, 2022)**– eSchool Media is thrilled to announce the winners of the 2022 [eSchool News K-12 Hero Awards](#), sponsored by [JAR Systems](#) and [SAP Concur](#), and dedicated to recognizing the innovative contributions of K-12 education professionals.

#### **eSchool News K-12 Hero Awards Program Winners:**

- Ann Hughes, Director of Student Intervention for Sanger ISD in Texas  
Nominated by [Ripple Effects](#)
- Kim Leblanc, Chief Technology Officer for Calcasieu Parish School Board in Louisiana  
Nominated by [Bluum](#)
- Daniel Olivas, Network Analyst at Austin Independent School District in Texas. Nominated by [Identity Automation](#)

Winners were chosen for their commitment to education during and in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, their creativity and innovation in helping all students continue learning while ensuring students felt safe, empowered, and engaged.

Nominations were judged by a panel of education experts, including Laura Ascione, eSchool News editorial director, Kevin Hogan, eSchool News editor-at-large, and Eileen Belastock, CETL, Belastock Consulting.

“eSchool Media would like to thank JAR Systems and SAP Concur for sponsoring the K-12 Hero Awards Program. The program is in its second year and has been tremendously successful. We’re grateful to everyone who submitted nominations and took the time to recognize educators’ commitment to students and their learning,” expressed Nancy David, eSchool Media executive vice president.

**CONTACT: Sharmila Williams**

Ripple Effects

888-259-6618 ext. 507

swilliams@rippleeffects.com



---

**Here's a brief look at each winner:**

**Dr. Ann Hughes, Director of Student Intervention, Sanger ISD, nominated by [Ripple Effects](#)**

Ann's students struggle with myriad challenges, including issues such as depression, hyperactivity disorders, and anger. Troubled students frequently come to Linda Tutt from other districts in the state as a last resort. In short, Ann's program is the last hope to get these kids on the right track.

Ann has limited resources, both from a funding and personnel perspective. However, she meets those challenges holistically and creatively. She stops students each day to engage in meaningful conversations about their lives. She taps into programs like [Ripple Effects for Teens](#), which has modules that address a wide range of issues including mental health, personal trauma, and academic challenges. Ann has designated individual rooms throughout campus dedicated to giving students space to regroup. There's a Movement Room to work off excess energy and a Chill Out Room for relaxation. Music, yoga, and dance are other key elements she incorporates to reach her students.

To fill the gaps in funding and personnel resources, Ann has spearheaded community partnerships with local churches and charities, which provide counseling support not available at school. These collaborations have resulted in students honing their agriculture skills at community gardens and learning how to run a business via a nonprofit grocery store.

**Kim Leblanc, Chief Technology Officer, Calcasieu Parish School Board, nominated by [Bluum](#)**

Conventional wisdom would say that economically-disadvantaged schools across the country would need to think twice before making a major investment in technology. However, not all districts in that predicament have a technology director like Kim Leblanc. Calcasieu Parish School Board serves 29,500 students across 60 schools. It is a 100 percent CEP district, which means that every student is eligible for free lunch based on the economic poverty data submitted to the federal government.

Calcasieu Parish School Board Chief Technology Officer Kim Leblanc has developed a system for providing the type of technology in classrooms that one would only expect at affluent schools. Under Kim's leadership, Calcasieu Parish conducted a thorough needs assessment before purchasing more than \$4.1 million in technology and technology professional development with federal funds under Title I and Title IV to implement the technology within the existing curriculum. The investment included 400 3D printers and the professional development necessary to advance STEAM education, most of which came at no cost to the district. It also is developing a STEM bus with fun technological gadgets to enhance student learning.

Calcasieu Parish's Training Tech Center, led by Kim, was already instrumental in introducing new technology to its classrooms, including robotics and a computing device for each student and teacher. Armed with a philosophy to "make it happen in the classroom," Calcasieu Parish and Kim are committed to preparing students for STEAM careers, illustrated by its investments in student design

**CONTACT: Sharmila Williams**

Ripple Effects

888-259-6618 ext. 507

swilliams@rippleeffects.com



---

competitions, summer tech camps and the STEM bus. The students are already utilizing the 3D printers in classrooms to solve real-world challenges and develop 3D designing skills within projects.\

**Daniel Olivas, Network Analyst, Austin Independent School District, nominated by [Identity Automation](#)**

The pandemic has accelerated the transition to remote and hybrid learning, and it made school districts the number one target for cyberattacks. As the fifth largest school district in Texas, [Austin Independent School District](#) was no exception. Guided by the motto “AISD Anywhere,” the district used the pandemic as an opportunity to provide over 100,000 students, teachers, staff, parents, and other users with secure access to classroom tools from any Wi-Fi network.

As Network Analyst at Austin ISD, Daniel Olivas led the implementation of an identity-centric zero trust security strategy that ensured this access was not only user-friendly, but secure. Unlike traditional, perimeter-focused approaches to security, Austin ISD’s zero-trust approach assumes all network traffic is untrusted until an identity has been verified—a critical step to securing a digital ecosystem that can be accessed from anywhere.

To tie Austin ISD’s digital ecosystem together and orient it around digital identities, Olivas leveraged the district’s long-time Identity and Access Management (IAM) platform, RapidIdentity, to grant individuals access to needed applications, while connecting data from those applications back to the correct digital identity. Acting as the new perimeter of Austin ISD’s digital environment, RapidIdentity has helped Austin ISD bolster security and become a leader in K-12 authentication and zero trust.

---

“The K-12 Hero Awards Program highlights some of the amazing and innovative examples of how educators at all levels have worked tirelessly to ensure students were able to continue learning during, and in the wake of, the COVID-19 pandemic. Learning looks a bit different now, as schools emerge from the thick of the pandemic and address learning gaps, equity challenges, and increased opportunities for technology use. It is inspiring to see, from the many nominations eSN received, the dedication our nation’s educators have to our students and their learning,” commented Ascione.

In the coming weeks, Hero Awards nominations will be highlighted on [eSchoolNews.com](#). Winners and finalists will be featured on the site throughout Fall 2022, and on the eSchool News podcast [Innovations in Education](#), hosted by Hogan.

The winners and all program finalists will also be published in a custom K-12 Hero Awards ebook, which will be available for download later this Fall.

---

**CONTACT: Sharmila Williams**

Ripple Effects

888-259-6618 ext. 507

swilliams@rippleeffects.com

---



**About eSchool News**

eSchool News is an online platform that delivers daily news and information to K-12 education administrators, educators, and technology professionals. For over twenty years, eSchool News has been dedicated to the advancement and wise use of technology to improve teaching and learning. Explore more at [eSchoolNews.com](http://eSchoolNews.com).

**About eSchool Media**

[eSchool Media](#) is a digital marketing and custom content service platform. Through eSchool News and eCampus News, eSchool Media provides daily original news, objective analysis, resources, and information to decision-making education professionals in K-12 and higher education. eSchool Media serves the advertising and marketing needs of companies and organizations that want to influence and do business with its loyal and professional audience of education decision-makers.