



Supporting stakeholders in preparing all learners for tomorrow's opportunities

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Keene ISD Leader Named Region 11 Superintendent of the Year

(White Settlement, TX) Dr. Ricky Stephens, superintendent of Keene ISD, has been named the Region 11 Superintendent of the Year for 2026. The Superintendent of the Year Award, sponsored by the Texas Association of School Boards, honors outstanding Texas administrators for achievement and excellence in public school administration.

Candidates for the award must be nominated by their school boards and demonstrate strong leadership skills, dedication to improving the quality of education in their districts, a commitment to public support for and involvement in education, and the ability to build positive employee relations among teachers and staff. The award application highlights the following performance areas: (1) Leadership, Management, and School Climate; (2) School Board-Superintendent Relations; (3) School Improvement and Instructional Leadership; (4) Fiscal Management; and (5) School-Community Relations. The regional selection process included a robust application process and an interview that allowed candidates to voice their views on great leadership, current events in education, and highlights of their careers. All superintendents whose school boards are Active Members of TASB are eligible for nomination. Local nominees are submitted to a regional selection committee, which chooses one nominee to send to the State Selection Committee.

The State Selection Committee will interview all regional winners and select five state finalists. The State Superintendent of the Year will be announced at txEDCON in October.

Dr. Ricky Stephens has served as superintendent of Keene ISD since July 2013, leading a remarkable transformation that has positioned the district as a model of innovation, student engagement, and future-ready learning. Under his leadership, Keene ISD has embraced a bold vision centered on students as “makers of learning,” moving beyond traditional measures of success to create a culture rooted in creativity, belonging, and real-world readiness. Dr. Stephens led the district through the COVID-19 pandemic with courage and a steadfast commitment to students, making Keene one of the first districts in the nation to safely reopen for in-person instruction in August 2020. He has championed initiatives such as the districtwide House System, the Keene 22 soft skills framework, and IGNITE, a transformational instructional model focused on engagement, innovation, and capacity building. The Keene ISD Board of Trustees shared that Dr. Stephens “does not just manage a school district; he inspires a community,” praising his ability to balance visionary leadership, strong school safety practices, fiscal stewardship, and

a heart-centered approach to serving students. Under his guidance, Keene ISD has expanded student opportunities, welcomed hundreds of additional students through open enrollment, and gained statewide recognition as a destination district for educators seeking to learn from its innovative practices. Through his leadership, Dr. Stephens has not only elevated Keene ISD but has also demonstrated how a small district can serve as a blueprint for public education across Texas.

As the regional winner of the Superintendent of the Year award, Dr. Stephens will move on to compete at the State level with the other 19 regional candidates. TASB is a nonprofit association established in 1949 to serve local Texas school boards. School board members are the largest group of publicly elected officials in the state. The districts they represent serve approximately 5.4 million public school students. Texas is divided into 20 education service center regions. ESC Region 11 serves 76 traditional school districts and 90 charter schools in the north central Texas area.

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