AESA
ASSOCIATION OF
EDUCATIONAL SERVICE AGENCIES

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Dr. Mark Klaisner Receives AESA's 2026 Exemplary Service Award

July 15, 2026 — The Association of Educational Service Agencies (AESA) has named Dr. Mark Klaisner, Executive Director of West40 Intermediate Service Center #2 in Illinois, as the recipient of the 2026 Exemplary Service Award, recognizing his outstanding leadership, service, and commitment to strengthening educational service agencies (ESAs) nationwide.

The Exemplary Service Award honors leaders whose impact extends beyond their own organizations through collaboration, innovation, and an unwavering commitment to advancing the ESA community.

Throughout his career, Klaisner has been guided by a simple philosophy:

"Every kid's success is in the hands of us all."

That belief has shaped a career focused on removing barriers to student success. From advocating for evidence-based school funding to expanding educational opportunities during the pandemic and addressing challenges such as homelessness, trauma, and truancy, Klaisner has continually asked, *"What else can we do differently?"*

His influence reaches far beyond West40. Klaisner has generously shared his time, expertise, and leadership to strengthen ESAs across Illinois and the nation, consistently supporting colleagues and advancing the work of the association.

"Mark exemplifies the kind of leadership this award celebrates," said Joan Wade, Executive Director of AESA. "He leads with humility, invests in others, and is always looking for ways to strengthen educational service agencies so they can better serve students and communities."

A passionate advocate for AESA, Klaisner has encouraged colleagues nationwide to become involved in the association while actively supporting its initiatives. He has invested in AESA's succession planning efforts to help prepare future ESA leaders and was an early champion of AESA Global, making West40 the first ESA to enroll a staff member in the Global Coordinator Program.

Klaisner has also participated in AESA Global learning experiences in Singapore, South Korea, Portugal, Spain, and China, demonstrating his belief that educational leaders and the students they serve benefit from global perspectives and international collaboration.

His leadership is defined by action. He invests in new ideas, mentors colleagues, supports emerging leaders, welcomes international partnerships, and continually looks for ways Educational Service Agencies can better serve students. Those efforts have strengthened AESA, advanced the ESA community, and created new opportunities for children and educators alike.

The 2026 Exemplary Service Award recognizes Dr. Mark Klaisner's enduring commitment to service and his lasting impact on Educational Service Agencies across the country.

About AESA

The Association of Educational Service Agencies (AESA) is the national organization representing Educational Service Agencies (ESAs), which provide leadership, programs, and services to school districts across the United States. Through professional learning, advocacy, innovation, and collaboration, AESA helps ESAs improve educational opportunities and outcomes for millions of students.

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