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2026 NJ STEM Month Award Winners Recognized at New Jersey STEM Pathways Network Quarterly Meeting

WEST LONG BRANCH, N.J. – The New Jersey STEM Pathways Network (NJSPN) honored the recipients of the 2026 NJ STEM Month Awards during its quarterly meeting on June 25 at Monmouth University. Representing education, industry, nonprofit organizations and collaborative partnerships, this is the 8th year honorees were recognized for their exceptional contributions to STEM education, workforce development, innovation and community engagement.

"Each year, NJ STEM Month reminds us that innovation begins with people who are willing to invest in others," said Kim Case, Executive Director of RDNJ and Manager of the NJSPN. "This year's honorees are creating opportunities, removing barriers, and inspiring the next generation of scientists, engineers, educators, and innovators. We congratulate each recipient and thank them for helping ensure New Jersey remains a national leader in STEM."

Co-hosted annually by NJSPN and the Research & Development Council of New Jersey (RDNJ), NJ STEM Month is a March statewide celebration of STEM education and innovation. In 2026, more than 100 events across 19 counties engaged an estimated 60,000 learners, with notable participation through NJ Makers Day. Since 2018, New Jersey STEM Month has impacted over 500,000 learners.

The 2026 NJ STEM Month Award Winners are:

STEM Advocate of the Year: HealthCare Institute of New Jersey (HINJ)

This award recognizes an organization or individual serving as a leading voice for STEM in New Jersey, this award recognizes efforts to elevate public understanding of STEM's importance to the state's future.

HINJ's launch of its weekly NJ Innovates campaign has helped educate policymakers, business leaders, the media and the public about New Jersey's longstanding leadership in innovation and life sciences. Through a series of statewide opinion pieces and public awareness efforts, HINJ has reinforced New Jersey's reputation as the "Medicine Chest of the World" while highlighting

the state's continued leadership in science, advanced manufacturing and the broader innovation economy. This award was accepted by HINJ President & CEO, Chrissy Buteas.

STEM Civic Leadership Award: Richard Anderson, Director of Emerging Technology at Rutgers University

This award recognizes an organization or individual demonstrating exceptional civic leadership through STEM education, volunteerism, mentorship and community engagement.

As Director of Emerging Technology for Rutgers University's Office for Online Educational Services, Richard Anderson leads innovative applications of artificial intelligence, extended reality (XR), robotics and immersive technologies in higher education. Beyond his professional work, he serves as Principal Advisor to Sussex County 4-H STEM, where he has helped grow a small student robotics program into a thriving community of young innovators designing, coding and engineering real-world solutions.

STEM Collaboration of the Year: Paterson Museum, Paterson Great Falls National Historical Park, P-TECH Planetarium/Paterson Public Schools and NASA Solar System Ambassador

This award recognizes partnerships that break down organizational silos to expand STEM opportunities and strengthen career pathways through collaborative programming.

Together, the Paterson P-TECH Planetarium and its student leaders, the Paterson Museum, Paterson Great Falls National Historical Park and NASA Solar System Ambassador Michael Greene have created free, student-led STEM programming—including STEM instruction, planetarium access, exhibit space, volunteer support, marketing and educational programming—to create engaging experiences for families throughout the community. Paterson P-TECH students serve as mentors and program facilitators, gaining valuable leadership experience while inspiring the next generation of STEM learners.

STEM Corporate Champion of the Year: New Jersey American Water

This award recognizes a company demonstrating an outstanding commitment to strengthening New Jersey's STEM workforce and innovation economy.

Through the American Water Charitable Foundation, New Jersey American Water has invested in workforce development, occupational training, career exploration and STEM education initiatives that expand opportunities for underserved communities. Programs such as STEMinist provide hands-on learning experiences that encourage K-12 students—particularly young women—to explore STEM careers while building the skills needed for tomorrow's workforce. This award was accepted by American Water External Affairs Specialist, Doreene Bennett.

STEM Educator of the Year: Sheila Tabanli, Ph.D., Associate Teaching Professor of Mathematics at Rutgers University

This award honors an educator or organization that has made significant contributions to improving STEM education while fostering STEM identity, critical thinking and student success.

As an Associate Teaching Professor of Mathematics at Rutgers University-New Brunswick, Dr. Sheila Tabanli uses an innovative 3C Pedagogical Model, combining cognitive science with classroom practice to help students build confidence, strengthen problem-solving skills and develop the mindset needed to succeed across STEM disciplines. She has expanded STEM access through partnerships with the Rutgers School of Arts and Sciences Educational Opportunity Fund Program for historically underrepresented students.

For more information about NJ STEM Month, visit **www.njstempathways.org/njstemmonth**.

Nominees for 2027 NJ STEM Month awardees will be accepted beginning September 2026. The next NJSPN Quarterly Meeting will be held on September 25th and you can register **here**.

Press Release Digital Assets
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NJ STEM Month Logo

The New Jersey STEM Pathways Network (NJSPN), managed by the Research & Development Council of New Jersey, is a statewide coalition of more than 800 STEM leaders representing K-12 education, higher education, business, government, nonprofit organizations, philanthropy and informal STEM providers. Through eight regional STEM ecosystems, NJSPN connects partners across the state to strengthen STEM education, expand career pathways and inspire the next generation of innovators. Learn more at www.njstempathways.org.