



MEDIA RELEASE
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Finalists Announced for Minnesota 2024 NAESP National Distinguished Principal

(Roseville, MN, February 22) – Dr. Fatima Lawson, Principal of Highwood Hills Elementary; Jason Luksik, principal of Lincoln Elementary School in Bemidji; and Dr. Ronald Salazar, principal of Birch Grove Elementary School for the Arts in Brooklyn Park, have all been named finalists for the Minnesota 2024 NAESP National Distinguished Principal (NDP) award. This marks the 40th year that MESPA and the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) have presented the prestigious award.

“We are delighted to announce the top 3 finalists for the prestigious 2024 Minnesota National Distinguished Principal (NDP) Award, an accolade bestowed by the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP).” MESPA Executive Director, Michelle Krell, continued, “These exemplary educational leaders embody the spirit of excellence, innovation, and dedication to the betterment of their schools and communities. Their commitment to fostering a positive and impactful learning environment serves as an inspiration to educators statewide.”

The National Distinguished Principals (NDP) program was established in 1984 to recognize elementary and middle-level principals who set high standards for instruction, student achievement, character, and climate for the students, families, and staff in their learning communities. The program is based on three fundamental ideas:

- Children's attitudes towards learning and their perceptions of themselves as lifelong learners are established in the beginning school years.
- The scope and quality of children's educational experiences are determined primarily by the school principal, who establishes, through the important work of teachers and the support of caring parents, the character of a particular school's program.
- The dedication and enthusiasm of the outstanding principals who guide children's early education experiences should be acknowledged to both show appreciation for their work as well as to allow them to serve as models for others in the field.

Each year, NDPs represent Pre-K – 8th-grade public schools from all across the country as well as principals in U.S. private schools and those from the United States Departments of Defense Office of Educational Activity and the United States Department of State Office of Overseas Schools. Public school elementary and middle-level principals are nominated by peers in their state, and final selections are made by committees appointed by each of NAESP's state affiliate offices. Honorees from private schools and overseas schools are selected by special committees.

The NDP program is designed to recognize the outstanding leadership of active principals. Criteria established by NAESP require that the individual:

- Has been a building principal (not assistant principal) for at least 5 years;
- Is an active principal of a school in which a commitment to excellence is clearly evident through programs designed to meet the academic and social needs of all students, and through firmly established community ties with parents and local business organizations;
- Is respected by students, colleagues, parents, and the community at large;
- Is clearly committed to excellence; Shows a strong commitment to the principalship through active membership in professional associations; and
- Assumes an active role in their community, distinguishing themselves as a leader in civic, religious, or humanitarian activities;

The finalists will be interviewed by a statewide selection committee, including representatives from each of MESPA's 12 geographical divisions; 2023 National

Distinguished Principal, Brendan Bogart, and selection committee chair, Bret Domstrand.

For more details on the NDP process, visit *National Distinguished Principal under Honors* on MESPA's website: www.mespa.net/ndp



Dr. Fatima Lawson



Jason Luksik



Dr. Ronald Salazar

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The Minnesota Elementary School Principals' Association (MESPA) is the premier leadership resource for elementary and middle level principals, dedicated to connecting, developing, and providing resources for principals, and serving as a leading voice for Minnesota education.