

MEDIA RELEASE



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



*Paul Meyer, principal
Hubert Olson Elementary School*

Hubert Olson Elementary School Validated as 2008-2009 Minnesota School of Excellence

(St. Paul, MN, September 2008)—*Hubert Olson Elementary School*, Independent School District #271, Bloomington Public Schools, is validated as a 2008-2009 Minnesota School of Excellence. The Minnesota Elementary School Principals' Association (MESPA) developed this research-based program aligned with national standards in: leadership, vision, student learning, the culture of adult learning, data and decision-making, and community engagement. MESPA endorses schools whose principal, staff, students, and community -- working as a team -- demonstrate the desire to strengthen education by successfully undertaking the Minnesota School of Excellence program. This school improvement process, recognized by the Minnesota Department of Education and National Association of Elementary School Principals, involves a systematic self-study, development of a school improvement plan, and implementation of the plan based on demonstrated results.

“In this time of high stakes testing, the quality of our school communities can far too easily be misrepresented by the single-purposed federal testing requirement,” said P. Fred Storti, MESPA executive director. “High stakes tests, such as the MCA II tests used to evaluate Minnesota schools for Adequate Yearly Progress as required by the federal No Child Left Behind Act, offer a snapshot in time with no context. One high stakes test should not determine a school’s public stature and cannot adequately assess

its educational effectiveness. Elementary and middle level schools provide the foundation for children's lifelong learning, and the Minnesota School of Excellence program clearly connects the education process to student learning," Storti continued.

"The Minnesota School of Excellence program takes schools on a meaningful analytical endeavor, engaging staff and community in purposeful conversations about their school," said Matt Dorschner, Minnesota School of Excellence program chair. "It is the premier way to identify current strengths and areas needing improvement for a school. The reward of the analysis is two-fold. First, it takes measure of where a school is and reveals where it needs to go. Second, it creates a wonderful opportunity for communities to celebrate their school – and to connect to their role in the school's accomplishments."

Hubert Olson Elementary, led by Principal Paul Meyer, is a K-5 neighborhood school serving 480 students. The school's mission is "to create a unique and dynamic learning environment that encourages students to be successful lifelong learners through excellence, cultural and learning diversity, partnerships, and community involvement."

As principal, Meyer believes: "Educating children is extremely complex. Each child has their own specific needs and their own personality. I believe in the old adage, 'It takes a village to raise a child.' For many years prior to my arrival, the Olson community adopted this approach and student success has followed. Numerous people have contributed in making Olson a great place to learn and work. I am thankful to be a part of such a rich tradition and I will continue to focus on the reason we come to work everyday, making a difference in the lives of children."

The school's mission and vision influence lifelong learning experiences at the school. All students, in all grade levels, participate in an annual community service project: such as "Feed My Starving Children;" Reading Buddies; a school wide food drive; and "Coins for Kids." Also all children in grades One through Three participate in at least one student council meeting each year. In grades Four and Five, students have the opportunity to run for student council. Fourth and Fifth grade classroom representatives may then run for office. The election of officers includes campaigning, speeches, posters, and culminates with an election on the same day as the adult general elections in November.

Hubert Olson Elementary embodies learner-centered leadership. Starting in 2002, the school was one of the first in the district to implement monthly "RESULT" meetings. Each meeting focused on assessing and measuring results in a single academic area, leading to recommendations for changes to improve student academic performance. The Bloomington district later adopted a similar model to measure student achievement called Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). Olson continues to seek ways to improve student achievement through monthly PLC meetings.

Olson has continually demonstrated flexibility and collaboration in efforts to improve achievement for students. Staff use a number of hard data sources to measure both student performance and level of progress: the CALT, MCA, and DRA to measure strengths and weaknesses of programs, student groups, and individual students. Also, Fact Fluency scores are monitored and measured through the district's data site by teachers and the principal. Also, Meyer states: "Student work is reviewed in a formative manner to determine mastery and comprehension. This helps to ensure that students are continually growing in knowledge and identifies when there is a need for more reinforcement."

Olson teachers recognize that technology is a valuable supplemental tool used to enhance learning in the classroom. Wireless accessibility is available throughout the school. LCD projectors are in all classrooms and the Internet is available throughout the school as a teaching and learning tool. This past year, Olson purchased document cameras for all classroom teachers to assist them in math instruction. Said Meyer, "Our philosophy regarding technology is: technology is a tool, not a curriculum subject."

Starting in Kindergarten, and continuing through the rest of the grade levels, parents are encouraged to volunteer in their child's classroom regularly, building a connection between the school and home. In addition, student learning goals are communicated to the parent community in a variety of ways: grade level teachers distribute the year's curriculum overview at the August "Meet the Teacher Night;" goals are continually communicated via the monthly *White Tiger* newsletter, teacher Web pages, and parent/teacher conference. Ninety-six percent of Olson families attend parent/teacher conferences. Parents who are unable to attend, are personally contacted by their child's teacher.

The Olson leadership, staff, parents, students, and community have worked together on a number of successful projects over the last several years – including a \$4 million renovation of the school in 2000 that included a new media center and added classroom space. Working in conjunction with business partners, the City of Bloomington, Olson Middle School, Tree Trust, and volunteers (parents/students), the school added an outdoor classroom space in a pond area, along with a walking trail. They are in the process of installing new playground equipment, once again working with their broad base of community support.

In addition to *Hubert Olson Elementary School*, eight other elementary schools achieved recognition as 2008-2009 Minnesota Schools of Excellence: *Delano Elementary School*, Delano (ISD #879); *L'Etoile du Nord French Immersion School*, St. Paul (ISD #625); *Indian Mounds Elementary School*, Bloomington (ISD #721); *Lake Park Audubon Elementary School*, Audubon (Lake Park ISD #2889); *Pinewood Elementary School*, Mounds View (ISD #621); *Sheridan Hills Elementary School*, Richfield

(ISD #280); *Valley View Elementary School*, Bloomington (ISD #271); *Washburn Elementary School*, Bloomington (ISD #271).

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The Minnesota School of Excellence program was established in 1986. The program offers a powerful comprehensive school improvement process that results in student learning growth. The program combines the findings of current research on effective schooling with the practical on-site experience of working principals and education staff. Since the program's inception in 1986, 135 schools have earned Minnesota School of Excellence validation.

MESPA is the professional association of Minnesota's elementary and middle level principals. With the vision to "be the premiere resource for preparing today's principals for tomorrow and a strong leading voice for public education" and a statewide membership over 950 principals, MESPA has represented Minnesota's principals since 1950. MESPA is affiliated with the National Association of Elementary School Principals and its 29,500 members nationwide.

MESPA Mission Statement

The Minnesota Elementary School Principals' Association is dedicated to promoting and improving education for children and youth, strengthening the role as educational leader for elementary and middle level principals, and collaborating with partners in education to assist in achieving these goals.