

Minnesota Elementary School Principals' Association



Guidelines

The Minnesota School of Excellence Program promotes excellence through a rigorous evaluation process that showcases dynamic schools of the 21st century.

For an electronic version of this document, go to www.mespa.net.
Click on *Professional Development* and *Minnesota School of Excellence*.

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Directions for Completing the MN SOE Process

What to do and when to do it
Timeline
Sample letter of intent

What to do and when to do it

1. Submit a letter of intent, indicating you are interested in pursuing the Minnesota Elementary School Principals' Association (MESPA) Minnesota School of Excellence process. A sample letter follows these directions.
2. Complete a Minnesota School of Excellence Self-Study (Part 1 of the MN School of Excellence Application). Electronic copies of the MN School of Excellence Application (Parts 1 and 2) are on the MESPA Web site at www.mespa.net, under *Professional Development*.

The self-study, Part 1 of the application, is a team effort to be conducted by members of your school community. It asks you to assess the strengths of your school community in terms of the six MESPA standards for effective elementary and middle level schools.

Each of the six School of Excellence standards contains several strategies. Within each strategy, you are asked to consider indicators of that strategy and rank on a scale of 1 to 5 how evident each indicator is in your school community.

- a. For each standard, indicate the total number of respondents (participating in that standard of the self-study).
- b. For each indicator within each strategy, indicate the **percent of respondents** that ranked that indicator 1-5 (see Figure 1 below).
- c. Include a description of your self-study methodology.

Note: If your school has applied for the Parent Involvement Schools of Excellence Certification through the National PTA, that application may be used in place of the MN SOE standard 6 (community engagement).

Figure 1: Example of completed strategy 2A, in Part 1 (self-study) of MN School of Excellence application.

| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use this table to assess the standard of leadership in your school community. • Key indicators of school community leadership are grouped under four strategies to develop and hone effective leadership. • For each indicator, indicate the <i>percent of respondents</i> who selected each ranking: 5-1 or N, 5 indicating <i>Outstanding</i> and N indicating <i>No Basis for Judgment</i>. | Outstanding | | Average | | Below Average | | No Basis for Judgment |
|--|-------------|----|---------|----|---------------|---|-----------------------|
| | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | N | |
| TOTAL RESPONDENTS FOR STANDARD 2: 115 | | | | | | | |
| 2A. Build consensus on a vision that reflects the core values of the school community. | | | | | | | |
| Everyone describes the school as a learning community that continuously examines the alignment of teaching and administrative practices with the school's vision, mission and core beliefs. | 40 | 30 | 15 | 15 | 0 | 0 | |
| Elements of the vision are evident in the daily language, decisions and ethical actions of almost all engaged stakeholders. | 72 | 14 | 14 | 0 | 0 | 0 | |



Directions for Completing the MN SOE Process

What to do and when to do it
Timeline
Sample letter of intent

3. After completing the Self-Study (application Part 1), use the Minnesota School of Excellence Application Part 2 to build on strengths and plan for improvement in your school community. Excellence is a process. Let the self-study guide your growth. In Part 2 of the application, **show concretely using brief narratives to cite examples of:**
 - Results demonstrated from building on the strengths evident in your self-study (indicators ranked 4 or 5);
 - Plans for improvement to address areas that were not as strong (indicators ranked 1 or 2); and
 - Results from the implementation of your plans.

Note: Standard 5, Knowledge and Data, is based on student and staff performance with data from your MCA scores and other applicable sources. In the application, attach documentation that supports your objectives in responding to areas from the self-study. Using multiple sources of data, including the Minnesota Department of Education Web site, illustrate your plans with concise, specific data examples.

4. When Part 2 of the application is complete, submit a paper and electronic copy (including data tables) **along with your completed self-study (application Part 1)**, and a \$100 application fee (payable to MESPA) to MESPA.

Note: Remember to obtain the required signatures from your school community to verify your application process.

Annual Minnesota School of Excellence timeline

Letters of intent to pursue the Minnesota School of Excellence (MN SOE) process are due in the MESPA office by **October 1** each year. These letters are not binding, but alert MESPA as to which school communities are interested in the process and may have questions or need assistance. Also, the letter verifies that the self-study will be a team effort and is supported by the superintendent, school staff, and parents.

The timeline for completing the MN SOE self-study and application for validation varies from one school community to another. For many it can be accomplished in one school year, but it may take up to two years. Once the applications are completed, the MN SOE program proceeds along the following timeline.

October 1: Letter of intent to engage in the Minnesota School of Excellence program due.

June 1: MN SOE applications (Parts 1 and 2) due in the MESPA office, along with the \$100 application fee.

Mid-June: Applications receive preliminary review from the MESPA MN School of Excellence Committee.

June 30: Schools notified if the committee feels Part 2 of an application requires revision or additional information to more fully address results from the self-study (application Part 1); revisions due mid-August.

Mid-August: MN SOE Committee conducts final review of applications.

Before Labor Day: MN SOE validations finalized and announced to the media. Schools receiving MN SOE validation are highlighted on the MESPA Web site.



Directions for Completing the MN SOE Process

What to do and when to do it

Timeline

Sample letter of intent

Annual Minnesota School of Excellence timeline (continued)

November: Schools receiving MN SOE validation meet to plan school and community celebrations, and the next step in their MN SOE processes. Follow-up on their process continues throughout the year.

February: Principals at schools receiving MN SOE validation honored during the annual MESPA Institute.

March – June: Schools receiving MN SOE validation are highlighted in the spring *MESPA Advocate* newsletter. MN SOE celebrations take place, honoring the combined work toward excellence by the principals, teachers, staff, students, parents, and community. Principals document ongoing results stemming from the MN SOE improvement plans.

Sample letter of intent

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| Date: | _____ | |
| To: | P. Fred Storti MESPA Executive Director 1667 N. Snelling Avenue, Suite C101 St. Paul, MN 55108 | Laura Pierce MN School of Excellence , chair Akin Road Elementary, principal 5231 195 th Street West Farmington, MN 55024 |
| Re: | Minnesota School of Excellence Program | |
| <p>This letter confirms the intent of our school community to implement a process of school improvement guided by the Minnesota School of Excellence Application (Parts 1 and 2). I have reviewed the process with my superintendent and/or Board of Education, teaching staff, and parent group.</p> | | |
| Sincerely, | | |
| Principal name | _____ | |
| School district | _____ | |
| School name | _____ | |
| School address | _____ | |
| City, state, zip code | _____ | |
| School telephone | _____ | |
| E-mail contact | _____ | |



Minnesota School of Excellence Program Overview

**What is the Minnesota School of Excellence program?
Six MN School of Excellence standards
PTA standards
Process of validation with seven-year limit**

What is the Minnesota School of Excellence program?

The Minnesota School of Excellence (MN SOE) program promotes excellence through a rigorous evaluation process that showcases dynamic schools of the 21st century.

The MN SOE program engages schools in purposeful conversations, leading to meaningful action. The program, supported by the Minnesota Department of Education and the National Association of Elementary School Principals, assesses six national standards for quality elementary and middle level schools. These standards are based on the NAESP *Leading Learning Communities: Standards for What Principals Should Know and Be Able To Do* in correlation with MESPA guidelines. The national standards were created in partnership with Collaborative Communications Group, with national research and development made possible by the LAB at Brown University, Principals Leadership Network, and funded by the office of Education Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education.

The MN SOE program has grown from the 1984 work of the MESPA Task Force on Standards and Assessment. To continue reflecting current issues in education, the program was updated in 1992, 1998, 2005 and again in 2010. Also in 2010, the program was peer-reviewed by University of MN Ed.PA doctoral students. The result is the current three-part MN SOE process that validates school communities dedicated to continual improvement. Through the program, elementary and middle level school principals, staff, and school community members demonstrate, as a team, the desire to improve the quality of education by:

- Completing a school community self-study (application Part 1).
- Developing a plan to build on evident strengths and address areas needing improvement.
- Assessing ongoing results from implementing the plan.

Excellence is a process. Everything done in an effective school community focuses on ensuring the learning of adults and students. The MN SOE program supports this focus by combining the findings of current research on effective schooling with the practical on-site experience of working principals and education staff. From its inception in 1986 through 2010, the MESPA MN SOE program has validated 149 Minnesota elementary and middle level schools. For a current list of endorsed schools, visit *Professional Development* on the MESPA Web.

Six Minnesota School of Excellence standards

The Minnesota SOE program assesses six standards for quality elementary and middle level school communities. Research has shown that if these six standards are evident in a school, best practices are being followed.

1. **Learning Centered:** Balance management and leadership roles to lead schools in ways that place student and adult learning at the center.
2. **Diverse Communities:** Set high expectations and standards for the academic, social, emotional, and physical development of all students in an environment that acknowledges, fosters, and celebrates diversity.
3. **21st Century Learners:** Demand content and instruction that ensure student achievement.
4. **Quality Instruction:** Create a culture of continuous learning for adults, tied to student learning and other school goals.
5. **Knowledge and Data:** Manage knowledge and data to inform decisions and measure progress of student, adult, and school performance.
6. **Community Engagement:** Actively engage the community to create shared responsibility for student performance and development.



Minnesota School of Excellence Program Overview

What is the Minnesota School of Excellence program?

Six MN School of Excellence standards

PTA standards

Process of validation with seven-year limit

Embrace PTA standards

The national Parent Teacher Association (PTA) School of Excellence program is comprehensive. If a school is seeking that validation, it may be used in place of standard 6, the community engagement standard in the Minnesota School of Excellence program.

A process of validation: any school can apply and have the potential to receive the seven-year validation.

This is a continuous learning process. Any school community that has embraced and incorporated the Minnesota School of Excellence process has demonstrated the successful desire to create a community-wide, continuously growing learning environment.

Seven-year limit

Once a school has received Minnesota School of Excellence validation, the validation remains in effect for seven (7) years. After that time has passed, MESPA encourages school communities to reinitiate the process of self-study and submit a new application.



Frequently Asked MN SOE Questions, with answers!

Can any school apply for Minnesota SOE validation?

When is the letter of intent due?

Is there a fee for taking part in the Minnesota SOE program?

When is the application due?

What does a completed application look like?

Can we include additional materials with our application?

How long does the Minnesota SOE validation last?

Who can we contact if we have questions?

Can any school apply for Minnesota School of Excellence (MN SOE) validation?

Any Minnesota elementary or middle level school community may seek Minnesota SOE validation provided the school's principal is a member of MESPA. Regardless of whether or not a school seeks validation as a Minnesota School of Excellence, any school may use the Minnesota SOE program as a school improvement process.

When is the letter of intent to seek Minnesota SOE validation due?

A letter indicating a school community's intent to seek MN SOE validation is due in the MESPA office by October 1. Please mail it to the address below under "When is the application due?" or fax it to: (651) 999-7311.

Is there a fee for taking part in the Minnesota SOE program?

Yes. An application fee of \$100 (payable to MESPA) is due with the completed application.

When is the application due?

The completed application (Part 1: self-study; Part 2: building on strengths and planning for improvement), application fee, and signed verification page are due in the MESPA office by June 1. Please direct them to:

Minnesota Elementary School Principals' Association
1667 N. Snelling Avenue, Suite C101
St. Paul, MN 55108
Attn: Minnesota School of Excellence Program

e-mail: mespa@mespa.net
Attn: Minnesota School of Excellence Program



Frequently Asked MN SOE Questions, with answers!

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What does a completed application look like?

Electronic copies of the blank Minnesota SOE application (Part 1, self-study; Part 2, building on strengths and planning for improvement) may be found on the MESPA Web site at www.mespa.net under *Professional Development*.

The completed application (Parts 1 and 2) should be submitted at the same time electronically and in paper form. The electronic submission should include all data tables, but will not include signatures. The paper materials may be bound in a three-ring or other binder. Please include:

- the completed six-page checklist from the Minnesota School of Excellence Self-Study (application Part 1)
- the completed plan for building on strengths and planning for improvement (application Part 2)
- data printouts from the Minnesota Department of Education Web site and other applicable data sources, to support answers in standard 5 (Knowledge and Data)
- a page of signatures from your school community verifying the application

Note: If your school has applied for the Parent Involvement Schools of Excellence Certification through the National PTA, that application may be used in place of the Minnesota SOE standard 6 (community involvement).

Can we include additional materials with our application?

Yes. An optional CD may be submitted with your application – showing evidence of your school community's strengths and best practices. However, these materials are optional and do not have bearing on a school's validation. The MN School of Excellence Committee may not have time to view materials that are not part of the self-study or strength/improvement plan.

How long does the Minnesota SOE validation last?

The Minnesota SOE validation remains in effect for seven years. After that time has passed, MESPA encourages school communities to reinitiate the process of self-study and submit a new application.

Who may we contact if we have questions?

If you have any questions, please contact Matt Dorschner, a member of the Minnesota SOE Committee, or the MESPA office:

- Laura Pierce, chair, Minnesota School of Excellence Program: 651-460-1700; lpierce@farmington.k12.mn.us
- Olivia Gault, MESPA Director of Professional Development: 651-999-7313; ogault@mespa.net
- For a list of School of Excellence Committee members and their e-mail addresses, please visit the MESPA Web site at www.mespa.net and click on *About MESPA* and *Committees*.