

## MEDIA RELEASE



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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



*Joey Page, principal  
Sheridan Hills Elementary School*

### **Sheridan Hills Elementary School Validated as 2008-2009 Minnesota School of Excellence**

(St. Paul, MN, September 2008)—*Sheridan Hills Elementary School*, Independent School District #280, Richfield 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."

Joey Page is the principal of Sheridan Hills Elementary School, which serves primary students in Kindergarten through Grade 2. Page states that: "Today's children will face new challenges in an ever-changing world, and the knowledge and skills they learn today must prepare them with the tools they need for future success and to be productive citizens. The validation of Sheridan Hills as Minnesota School of Excellence is a testimony to our strong teaching staff, shared leadership, parent and community support, and the overall school climate that supports learning and high-quality instruction."

The mission of the Richfield Public Schools is "to help prepare all learners for a changing world by developing their knowledge and abilities within a climate of mutual trust and respect." Consistent with this mission statement, Page outlines the educational philosophy practiced at Sheridan Hills: "In a stimulating and nurturing environment geared toward young children, students are grounded in the early learning fundamentals of reading, writing and math and begin to explore other curriculum areas as well. Here at Sheridan Hills we work very hard to create an environment that develops the skills needed for our students to be successful. Like most educators today, we have been changing our practices to reflect new knowledge about learning and teaching. Teachers are continuously receiving training and support in literacy, mathematics, and technology instruction."

At Sheridan Hills Elementary the teachers have learned extensively about balanced literacy through a five year partnership with The Ohio State University called the Literacy Collaborative. The goal of this framework is to allow numerous opportunities for reading and writing to occur in authentic contexts. Through these opportunities students develop into independent readers and writers. The program provides a framework that connects reading and writing throughout the day. Children and teachers engage in reading aloud to students, shared reading, guided reading, and independent reading. They participate in shared writing, interactive writing, writing workshop and independent writing. Letters and words are learned within authentic reading and writing tasks.

As principal, Page believes that: “Responsibility for student learning is a collaborative effort among the classroom teachers, specialists, gifted and talented teachers, special education teachers, ESL teachers, Title I teachers, , the social worker, the school outreach worker, and parents.”

Sheridan Hills Elementary makes use of numerous initiatives and approaches to serve its students. Through the L.E.A.R.N. initiative and the building’s equity plan to address educational equity and institutional racism, teachers consistently communicate high expectations for all students and reflect the belief that all students can succeed. Nearly all Sheridan Hills Elementary teachers have been trained in and employ the philosophy and teaching of Choice Theory/Reality Therapy (CT/RT). Its fundamental idea is that no matter what has happened in the past, our future is ours and success is based on the behaviors we choose. It has become a technique widely studied and embraced by people throughout the world.

In addition to CT/RT, teachers are cycling through extensive development in the National Urban Alliance (NUA), Responsive Classroom and S.M.A.R.T. (Stimulating Maturity Through Accelerated Readiness Training) training. The focus of NUA training is toward high intellectual performance through students’ culture, language, and cognition. Responsive Classroom is an approach to teaching that strives to fully integrate social and academic learning throughout the school day and to create a caring community where students are able to become strong and ethical thinkers. S.M.A.R.T. is a multi-sensory approach to learning, designed to develop and enhance physiological and neurological readiness skills students need to succeed in school. The curriculum consists of activities for developing and/or enhancing students’ large and fine muscle skills, visual perception and eye-hand coordination, all necessary tools for learning to read and academic success. The staff at Sheridan Hills is committed to using this approach and many teachers have spent weeks attending workshops to develop their understanding of the Responsive Classroom approach.

To sum up Sheridan Hills’ secret to success, Page maintains that: “Teams are not created, they are built. Here at Sheridan Hills, all teachers are actively involved in all facets of the organization. Teachers participate in a substantive way and communicate regularly with other team members. Sheridan Hills experiences a high level of success because teachers embrace the goals of the school.”

In addition to *Sheridan Hills 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); *Hubert Olson Elementary School*, Bloomington (ISD #271); *Indian Mounds Elementary School*, Bloomington (ISD #721); *Lake Park Audubon Elementary School*, Audubon (Lake Park ISD #2889); *Pinewood Elementary School*, Mounds View (ISD

#621); *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.