

MEDIA RELEASE



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



*Paul Helberg, principal
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Valley View Elementary School Validated as 2008-2009 Minnesota School of Excellence

(St. Paul, MN, September 2008)—*Valley View 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."

Paul Helberg is the principal of Valley View Elementary School, a diverse suburban school serving a student population of 560 in Kindergarten through Fifth Grade. Approximately 70 percent of Valley View's student population receives free and/or reduced lunch services, while over 40 percent qualify for English as a Second Language (ESL) services.

"Our Valley View Elementary School community is thrilled with the recognition as a Minnesota School of Excellence," said Helberg. "There are so many dedicated teachers, staff and parents who work each day to help each child reach his or her maximum potential. I am honored to be a part of such a professional and dedicated learning community."

The school community faces the challenges of highly transient population, and complex cultural issues between the home and school. "Nonetheless," said Helberg, "the Valley View Elementary staff embraces these challenges, and all students, with enthusiasm, dedication, compassion, and vigor." Helberg continued: "At Valley View Elementary School we work diligently to make the most of every interaction and opportunity we have with each individual student in our care."

Valley View Elementary has established multiple ways in which learner-centered leadership is embodied. One exceptional example is the implementation of a Literacy Leadership Team. It focuses especially on collecting and analyzing student data in the area of literacy, individualizing instruction to enhance academic success for each student, and improving instructional practice to meet the diverse needs of our learners. The sole purpose of this group is to maximize student growth and development in all areas of literacy and do so with both an individual and collective focus. While specific attention is paid to individual learners, the growth of the collective group is considered equally important.

The Valley View Elementary learning community believes that reflection is important for the improvement process. Time is provided for all staff members to reflect. One example of a reflective tool designed to improve educational practice is the Valley View Assistance Team, or VVAT. Every two

weeks, a collection of staff members – classroom teachers, special education teachers, licensed staff, and administrators – meet to discuss the specific academic and social needs of a small group of Valley View students. The VVAT reflects upon what can be done to accommodate the varying needs of each of the students it discusses. The VVAT is a “think tank” designed to develop intervention strategies and accommodations for students who are struggling in the regular education classroom. It provides a forum in which teachers have the opportunity to discuss what is and isn’t working with a particular student, solicit help from his or her peers, and develop a plan for intervention to enhance student performance.

The school’s community firmly believes in the importance of using collected data to improve instruction, and that it is essential to include everyone in the discussion and interpretation of data in a manner that staff and families can easily understand. The mid-year and end-of-the-year reporting that for students and families is one example of a practice demonstrating Valley View’s comfort with utilizing data. Each January and June a comprehensive report card is sent to families detailing a variety of individualized data regarding each Valley View student, accompanied by other information for families that aids in the interpretation of the data.

Valley View uses the Language Ambassador program to interpret and translate services for families. The staff at Valley View diligently works to translate documents into multiple languages throughout the school year, and the school has hired interpreters for parent-teacher conferences, Special Education meetings, and school events. The program’s goal is to help make Valley View families feel comfortable engaging in the learning community at all times.

In addition to *Valley View 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); *Sheridan Hills Elementary School*, Richfield (ISD #280); *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.