

MEDIA RELEASE



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For immediate release



***Lisa Pikop, principal
Carlos Elementary School***

Carlos Elementary School Validated as 2015-2016 Minnesota School of Excellence

(St. Paul, MN – August 31, 2015) – Carlos Elementary School has been validated as a Minnesota School of Excellence by the Minnesota Elementary School Principals' Association (MESPA). This prestigious honor was awarded to Carlos Elementary School for its commitment to 21st century teaching and learning.

The Minnesota School of Excellence Program promotes excellence through a rigorous evaluation process that showcases dynamic schools of the 21st century. Established by the Minnesota Elementary School Principals' Association (MESPA), the program is recognized by the Minnesota Department of Education, as well as the National Association of Elementary School Principals, and was nominated for the Brock International Prize in Education – which “recognizes particular innovations and achievements in the field of education.”

MESPA endorses schools whose principal, staff, students, and community -- working as a team -- demonstrate the desire to strengthen education by successfully undertaking the research-based Minnesota

School of Excellence school improvement process. This includes a systematic school-wide self-study, development of a school improvement plan, and implementation of that plan. The entire Minnesota School of Excellence Program is aligned with six national standards: Learning Centered, Diverse Communities, 21st Century Learners, Quality Instruction, Knowledge and Data, and Community Engagement.

Sam Richardson, chair of the School of Excellence Committee, said of the School of Excellence process, “It takes hard work and commitment to thoroughly assess areas of strength and at the same time plan for continual improvement. The SOE process provides an opportunity for the entire school community to reflect on the collaborative work being done and to celebrate these accomplishments. Schools that receive validation have had the important data-driven conversations about what a high quality 21st century learning experience should be for all students. Honoring the important work of dedicated staff, eager students and supportive communities is an essential component of becoming a School of Excellence.”

“Through the MN School of Excellence program, grounded in national research on high performing schools, MESPA has created the premier opportunity in the state for validating greatness in a school community,” said Jon Millerhagen, MESPA executive director. “This school improvement program examines the entire school community, as opposed to making decisions based solely on students’ assessment data.”

Carlos Elementary, part of Alexandria Public Schools, is a K-5 elementary school located in Carlos, MN – a small town with a population of only 426. Students at Carlos come from a wide variety of backgrounds, with 37% of students receiving free and reduced lunch and 19% of students in special education. Teachers recognize the varying needs of students in their classrooms – working to provide for students from non-traditional homes and engage all families. In addition to the core curriculum, social skills and character education are more important than ever. Carlos Elementary lives by the mission and vision of the Alexandria Public School District. The district’s mission is “to achieve educational excellence and to inspire a life-long passion for learning,” and their vision is to “be an extraordinary school district that tailors learning for each child, by working together!”

“The Alexandria School system supports all of the schools with great leadership and vision,” said Principal Lisa Pikop. “Without that vision and leadership we wouldn’t be where we are. I am so proud of the staff at Carlos, from the classroom teachers, specialists, paraprofessionals, school secretary, the cook to the custodian they all have an effect on our students and their learning. We have great parent support

for our school and students. We all work hard to bring the best out in our students and help them to meet and exceed their potential. It is a great place for kids!”

Staff members at Carlos Elementary model continuous learning and the value of education. 51% of teachers have their Master’s degrees, or are in the process of obtaining their Master’s degree. Professional Learning Communities (PLC) meet twice monthly to develop formative assessments, look at data, and work as a team to help inform instruction. The teachers across the Alexandria Public School District also meet four times a year, to collaborate and discuss with colleagues teaching the same grade levels. The staff members feel the benefits of these designated meeting times: “This learning culture allows us to encourage each other with the realization that we are learners right along with our children.” Supporting each other is especially important due to the small staff size.

“Carlos is Learning Centered! That is what a school should be all about, and our ranking [on the School of Excellence survey] was very high in that area,” said Principal Lisa Pikop. “Our school district has the vision to personalize learning for each student and individualize instruction and that was apparent with our results. Our use of data and how we use it making decisions is also a strength. We had amazing community engagement, this past year especially, which was highlighted as a strength.”

The staff works to ensure that school resources are shared equitably. The small staff revisits the needs of the building several times each year. Each member of the staff realizes that in order for them to meet the needs of their learners, they must be flexible and adapt to necessary changes. They also have a problem-solving team that can meet sooner than the scheduled stakeholder meeting if a situation arises. This team can help plan interventions for students having problems in academic, behavioral, or social areas. In this situation, an intervention is put in place, data is gathered for three weeks and the team meets again. Every three weeks the group meets to see if the intervention is working, needs to be adjusted, or a new plan needs to be developed.

The leadership team at Carlos meets every August to analyze data from the previous year in order to plan building goals, professional development, and resources allocation. That plan is then presented to the rest of the staff, parents, and paraprofessionals. This ensures that all of the stakeholders know the goals for the year and the action plan to reach those goals.

Carlos values student growth for each individual student. They strive to ensure that each child is learning at their full potential. This is supported and encouraged by the school district’s academic target levels set for students to meet three times each year. Child development at Carlos goes beyond academics. One example of this is their Veteran’s Day program for the Carlos community. Students prepare songs, poetry,

decorations, and gifts for the veterans. Students are also given the opportunity to participate in an environmental camp, downhill skiing, and ice-skating. All of these experiences help to develop well-rounded students.

All teachers at Carlos have smart boards, document cameras, and either iPads or Chromebooks to enhance student learning. There are numerous opportunities for teachers to receive training using these technologies. Carlos Elementary is planning to further their technology initiatives by utilizing the technology to globally expand students' awareness. New teachers are paired with a mentor and receive ongoing support for three years, through mentor observations and feedback. Monthly meetings are held with the mentorship coordinator, helping new teachers through their first years.

All of the K-2 staff, including classroom teachers, specialists and paraprofessionals, are trained in TCIT (teacher child interaction training). This is a program to help students self-regulate by recognizing exactly what their body should be doing to be calm and ready to learn. Students thrive on the verbal feedback they receive. When students are self-regulated, they are able to understand instruction and learning takes place.

“Reflection is critical for moving forward,” said Principal Pikop. “Taking this time to reflect on what we have accomplished and recognizing the amazing things that take place at Carlos Elementary were a boost to all of the staff. It really opened up communication too. There were things that were taking place that support staff understood much better after the process. The SOE process is lengthy and time intense, but a great process to reflect on what is going well within the school and what areas need more attention.”

Six elementary and middle level schools achieved recognition as 2015-2016 Minnesota Schools of Excellence:

- *Carlos Elementary School*, Alexandria Public Schools, Principal Lisa Pikop
- *Cedar Park Elementary*, Rosemount–Apple Valley–Eagan Public Schools, Principal John Garcia
- *Cold Spring Elementary School*, Rocori Public Schools, Principal Eric Skanson
- *Groveland Elementary School*, Minnetonka Public Schools, Principal David Parker
- *Lake Park Audubon Elementary*, Lake Park Audubon Public Schools, Principal Sam Skaaland
- *Miltona Science Magnet School*, Alexandria Public Schools, Principal Lisa Pikop

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Minnesota School of Excellence Program Mission and History

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

The Minnesota School of Excellence Program was established in 1986, combining the findings of current research on effective schooling with the practical on-site experience of working principals and education staff. It offers a comprehensive school improvement process that results in student learning growth. This school improvement process focuses on six national standards and involves a systematic self-study, development of a school improvement plan, and implementation of the plan based on demonstrated results. Since the program's inception, 177 schools have earned Minnesota School of Excellence validation. The validation remains effective for seven years, at which point schools may choose to reapply for validation.

MESPA Mission and History

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.

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 20,000 members nationwide.