

MEDIA RELEASE



Minnesota Elementary School Principals' Association

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For immediate release



*Eric Skanson, principal
Cold Spring Elementary School*

Cold Spring Elementary School Validated as 2015-2016 Minnesota School of Excellence

(St. Paul, MN – August 31, 2015) – Cold Spring 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 Cold Spring 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, 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.”

Cold Spring Elementary, the largest elementary school in the ROCORI School District, is a K-5 school serving approximately 475 students. Cold Spring Elementary is aligned to the ROCORI district’s mission and vision statement: “To be Central Minnesota’s public education standard of excellence. Making a difference today to create a better tomorrow for ROCORI students and their community.” Cold Spring is committed to success for all, lifelong learning, and a tradition of excellence. The Cold Spring Community believes in creating a caring, learning, and giving environment in which the values of being direct, appropriate, tolerant, positive, open, respectful, accepting, and prepared are considered the foundation of the learning community.

“When we examined our school holistically, it was amazing to see all the great work that people do for the kids of Cold Spring Elementary and the impact on the community,” said Principal Eric Skanson.

Cold Spring Elementary has embedded their student vision in the “Spartan Pledge” which states, “As a Cold Spring Elementary School student, I promise to respect all people and property, to be responsible

and do my best at all times, to recognize the rights of others, the differences between right and wrong, and the achievement of a job well done.” The Spartan Pledge and #CSEStrong – the school’s hashtag on social media – helps unite the school by promoting a sense of pride and strength as a collective group, including families and the community.

““We did a TON of work [on the School of Excellence application]! Outlining all of it in one document was overwhelming; we sure give all of ourselves in many ways. This validation of our hard work is a big ‘win’ for our school, earning recognition for us,” said Gwen Anderson, ELL teacher at Cold Spring. “It’s rewarding to see how our continued growth is paying off, most importantly with student growth.”

There are many opportunities for collaboration and leadership for the staff at Cold Spring. Some of the committees that the staff members are able to serve on include Response to Intervention, Staff Development, Curriculum and Instruction, Building Management Team, Student Assistance Team, Teaching and Learning, Parent Teacher Committee, and School of Excellence. These committees produce wonderful events, planning, and support for both the staff and students. Parents are also able to join committees in order to increase their input into school decision-making and to bring awareness to the current realities of the building. These committees create a team effort in brainstorming and planning interventions for best results.

One example of the Cold Spring committees’ success are the activities during Academy Day – a full day of professional development for the staff. The school creates professional development activities using internal resources and providing time and structure for adults to learn from each other. Cold Spring has continued to broaden the involvement of staff members in planning professional development to allow for a greater input on how funds are spent based on the needs and goals of the building. Another committee, the “Fun Committee” has worked to build opportunities for all staff members to connect and learn from each other.

“Our inventiveness and determination surfaced throughout this process,” said Principal Eric Skanson. “We aren’t afraid to step forward and try something new, and we work relentlessly to make it successful. Our staff has always been collaborative, but the SOE process has brought us together in a collaborative approach and expanded our leadership amongst our entire staff. This process has brought a focused and collaborative approach to our school that will benefit us for years to come.”

The staff at Cold Spring is committed to differentiated time to meet the needs of all students, ranging from at-risk to high achieving. This past year they have worked to increase the number of culturally

diverse events, such as hosting an EL Family Night. Across the school a shared language was used with “Top 20 Classroom Strategies” for positive behavior interactions.

Students receive individualized content delivery at a self-driven pace and at appropriate level through the I-Learn program in grades four and five. The entire curriculum was reviewed and Understanding by Design (Ubd) units were implemented based on grade-level standards. Staff routinely examines data through collaboration and differentiated instruction to ensure appropriate instruction for all students. A variety of data, including tiered planning sheets, benchmark data, and NWEA data, are regularly accessed and shared. Not only is data utilized in evaluating students, but also in new teacher evaluation plans that were implemented in the 2014-2015 school year.

There is very active community and parent involvement at Cold Spring Elementary. The Host Parent program was formed to provide a parent at each grade level to serve as a liaison to teachers, administrators, and other grade level parents. The host parent groups help create inclusive events for all students and families that occur outside of the school day, such as bowling, park events, sledding, and movie nights. Families are also supported through access to food and other resources. The community gives back to Cold Spring Elementary in a number of ways, including senior citizen volunteers in classrooms and field trips to local businesses.

“I am so proud of the Cold Spring Elementary staff and their work on the School of Excellence process and their validation,” said Principal Skanson. “Our school is great because of the people who make it great – the staff, students and parents. The Cold Spring staff is an incredible group of professionals that will do anything for the success of our kids and continue to make our school. #CSEStrong!”

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.