

**MEDIA RELEASE**



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**For immediate release**



***David Parker, principal  
Groveland Elementary School***

**Groveland Elementary School Validated as 2015-2016 Minnesota School of Excellence**

*(St. Paul, MN – August 31, 2015)* – Groveland 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 Groveland Elementary School for its commitment to 21<sup>st</sup> century teaching and learning.

The Minnesota School of Excellence Program promotes excellence through a rigorous evaluation process that showcases dynamic schools of the 21<sup>st</sup> 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, 21<sup>st</sup> 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.”

Groveland Elementary, part of the Minnetonka Public School District, is the oldest active elementary in Minnesota. Groveland has an enrollment of 785 students in grades K-5. Minnetonka Public Schools and Groveland Elementary are committed to protecting and promoting the precious legacy of America’s public school system to educate all children regardless of wealth, religion, race, gender, and ability. Groveland Elementary is a connected part of the community in which it resides. The school seeks to involve community members and families in many ways. An annual parent survey reveals a high level of satisfaction in a number of areas including school communication, responsiveness, safety practices, and the opportunity to be involved in their child’s elementary experience.

“The Minnesota School of Excellence process gave us the opportunity to collaborate as a school community and redefine our historic elementary school’s vision for today’s 21<sup>st</sup> century learners,” said Principal David Parker. “As the oldest active elementary school in Minnesota, Groveland has a rich tradition of over 160 years of learning and in the past 12 years has nearly doubled in student enrollment with expanded and remodeled facilities. The SOE process gave us a structure to reexamine ourselves

amidst the continually changing context for teaching and learning resulting in a more adaptive and innovative school culture.”

Groveland strives to build upon the excellence of their past and create a world-class school by aligning every element of their organization toward the goal of supporting all students’ pursuits of their highest levels of academic and personal achievement. The synergy created by aligning all elements toward student achievement fuels greater student success and community support. Groveland provides a curriculum designed to stretch students’ minds and prepare them to thrive in American society and the world at large. The school recognizes and values the important role of parents in the educational success of their children and strives to create a positive learning environment. They have set a course to transcend traditional definitions of excellence with rigorous and ambitious goals requiring strong and collaborative leadership with teacher excellence.

Groveland Elementary staff meets twice per month in professional learning communities (PLC). The structure of these team meetings is to focus on student achievement with an emphasis on student learning through shared instructional practices and has developed into a strength area for Groveland teachers and paraprofessionals. Groveland staff also spent time this past year focusing on the district’s mission, looking at the role they play in carrying out that mission, and working with the district’s teaching and learning team to facilitate relevant discussion groups related to the mission. When teachers seek professional development opportunities outside of the school district, they are able to share what they learned at monthly all-school professional learning community meetings. Within the school, the professional development committee organizes professional learning opportunities during two professional development segments during the year.

“Through the Self-Study process guided by the six School of Excellence standards we identified clear strengths and points of pride in each strand including Learning Centered, Diverse Communities, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learners, Quality Instruction, Knowledge and Data, and Community Involvement,” said Principal David Parker. “Outstanding student achievement both academically as well as in the creative fine arts for all kinds of learners emerged as a strength guided by a fierce commitment to child-centered excellence. Staff development, technology integration, teacher leadership, broadened professional networks, collaborative teamwork, data-driven decision making, community partnerships and global perspectives were all characteristics of Groveland that were identified by this School of Excellence process.”

Groveland staff shares responsibility for the students’ educations by participating in committees: technology, building leadership, student support team, social, and professional development.

It is Groveland’s mission to “value and nurture each individual, inspire in everyone a passion to excel with confidence and hope, and instill expectations that stimulate extraordinary achievement in the classroom and in life.” Every aspect of the school community focuses on that mission. All staff members contribute to this ideal using common practices, such as Responsive Classroom, OLWEUS Bully Prevention, and differentiation to encourage whole child student growth and success academically, socially, emotionally, and physically. With an emphasis on the whole child, Groveland strives to differentiate for every learner through rigorous academics, artistic expression, responsive classrooms, fitness, and innovation.

Students have opportunities both within classrooms and outside of classrooms for inquiry-based learning. Genius Hour, Independent Investigations, and Project Think offer students a chance to identify an area of passion to investigate deeply. For the past five years, Groveland has implemented traits of 21<sup>st</sup> century learning with a focus on collaboration, such as eighth graders supporting second graders as they learn to navigate Google Docs.

In 2012, students, staff, principal, parents, and district leaders collaborated to redesign the Media Center to The Learning Commons – a place that better reflects the emerging 21<sup>st</sup> century fluency needs of the school community in this digital age. As a host to four National Technology Tours in the past decade, Groveland’s technology integration is fully embedded into everyday learning while extending learning and innovation beyond the walls of the classroom for students and families. In a more recent initiative, all day kindergarten received the highest number of open enrollment requests in the school’s history and resulted in full capacity sessions of Spanish Immersion and English kindergarten, including a new Ready Start Kindergarten program to ensure developmental readiness for students entering school.

Over the last eight years, Groveland’s “school within a school” Spanish Immersion model has dramatically changed the building environment as nearly 50% of the students are in Spanish Immersion and native Spanish speaking classroom teachers reflect various countries throughout Latin America and Spain. This diversified landscape has increased both awareness and understanding of cultural differences and global perspectives in a personalized way as grade level colleagues work together each day to deliver the same curriculum in two different languages. Interpersonal skills, professional agility, innovative ideas, and collegial supports best describe this new Groveland Elementary School.

In 2015-2016, Groveland will use strategic personality and skills testing to further focus Groveland staff members’ understanding of themselves and others, and to learn how to work together in a positive way

while building teamwork and leadership. Positive change is already evident and evolving with the goal of further enhancing the gains of a collaborative and energized organizational culture.

“Through this School of Excellence work at Groveland over the past year we discovered that our rigorous efforts in the past decade to become a ‘world class school of excellence’ in Minnetonka were being realized in all vital areas,” said Principal Parker. “This validation is both rewarding and encouraging as it celebrates our school community’s commitment to adapt and innovate to meet the changing needs of today’s learners as tomorrow’s leaders. We also rediscovered the value of staff development opportunities for ongoing dialogue and reflection to support staff awareness of the Minnetonka/Groveland vision as well as instructional resources to more deeply apply these 21<sup>st</sup> century learning practices in the classroom.”

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.