

MEDIA RELEASE



Minnesota Elementary School Principals' Association

1667 North Snelling Avenue, Suite C101
St. Paul, MN 55108

Contact:

Sam Richardson, Minnesota School of Excellence Program Chair
Glendale Elementary School Principal
Prior Lake-Savage Area Schools
952-226-0200
Kelsey Gantzer, MESPA Communications Manager
651-999-7313

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Hiawatha and Howe Community Schools Validated as a 2016–2017 Minnesota School of Excellence

(St. Paul, MN – August 29, 2016) – Hiawatha and Howe Community Schools have been validated as a Minnesota Schools of Excellence by the Minnesota Elementary School Principals' Association (MESPA). This prestigious honor was awarded to Hiawatha and Howe Community Schools for their 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.

“Through the Minnesota 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 through six national standards, ensuring there is a holistic approach to creating a plan for future achievement and celebrating the unique accomplishments of each School of Excellence.”

Sam Richardson, chair of the School of Excellence Committee, said, “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 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.”

Hiawatha-Howe Dual Campus Community School serves pre-kindergarten through fifth grade students in the Minneapolis Public School District. Pre-K through second grade are housed at the Hiawatha Campus and third grade through fifth grade are housed at the Howe Campus, located approximately six blocks away. The mission of the school is to maximize individual student potential through the use of technology, differentiation, critical thinking, and high expectations within a nurturing and diverse community of learners. The school’s vision is to ensure that Every Child is Middle School Ready and their purpose is to provide a balanced, comprehensive program that maximizes each student’s learning potential and fosters a supportive, respectful atmosphere in which all student’s strengths are celebrated.

“The School of Excellence certification process gave us the opportunity to reflect on current systems and operations,” said Kevin Oldenburg, principal of Howe Campus. “Beyond our regular outreach to students, families, and staff, the SOE process allowed us to take a deeper look at a number of aspects of our organization. We were able to evaluate and discuss aspects that were successful and other aspects that needed improvement.”

“It gave us an opportunity to really look at the six standards as a school community,” said Deb Regnier, principal of Hiawatha Campus. “It really helped us reinforce our beliefs about all of the great things that are happening in our school and really validated it for us. Hiawatha had been an SOE site previously and we are excited to continue forward with this recognition.”

Hiawatha and Howe Community School fosters a community of learners through Professional Development Process Learning Communities (PDPLCs). PDPLCs are comprised of grade-level teachers,

content specialists, special education teachers, ESL teachers, related service providers, and administration. They meet weekly to improve instructional practices through action, planning, collaboration, and professional development based on student achievement data. Each PDPLC team selects a goal aimed at improving student outcomes and related to the School Improvement Plan (SIP) and District Improvement Agenda. The PDPLCs also keep running logs to track students' current achievement levels, essential learning needs, lessons developed, and strategies for implementation. At the end of each quarter, the groups do a SIP review with the Instructional Leadership Teams and a Site Council to look at action plans and determine if goals are being met.

A culture of learning has developed within each building that supports and utilizes the learning gained within the PDPLCs. All staff members also participate in pre-fall planning around Positive School-Wide Engagement, Racial Equity, Educational Non-Verbal Yardsticks (ENVoY) Training, Second Step social skills curriculum, and Inclusion Practices. "As a school, we have recently set out to become more transparent about our collaborative student-to-teacher goal setting meetings," Oldenburg said. "We now need to go to the next step of helping families understand how that process benefits our students, and how they can support students in achieving those goals."

All stakeholders have a say in improving student achievement. The teachers collaborate together in grade-level team planning and use student data in making instructional decisions. Grade-level teams also meet monthly with the Response to Intervention Team to look at data of individual students' and talk about interventions to improve student's success. Stakeholders meet every other month to celebrate student and teacher success. To develop effective teaching policies and best practices, the school collaborates with staff, students, families, and district departments through various meetings: Site Council Meetings, PTO Meetings, student focus groups, surveys, and district-led professional development sessions. Site Council, PTO, and School Board meetings are all open to the public to allow the opportunity to provide feedback to the school about specific policies and curriculum.

"The SOE process brought to light the support that stakeholders have for our instructional teams," Oldenburg said. "Of the families and staff that responded, 100 percent felt that learners were provided with appropriate, rigorous instruction that was relevant to students' lives. More than 91 percent of our families felt that we built relationships which helped them support their student's learning."

The entire school community works hard to honor, support, and value diversity as a way to increase learning. The staff seeks to engage parents as equal partners in their children's learning through activities such as Family Heritage Night where students and families share their cultures with the school community. The school regularly examines the need for diverse people, ideas, perspective, and

experiences in supporting increased student and adult performance, and the staff examines their own backgrounds and experiences for biases that must change in order to better support diverse student and adult learning needs. Learning plans and instruction practices are reviewed, revised, and adjusted to not only include diverse perspectives, but also challenge the dominant narrative. Teachers are provided with district training on inclusive strategies for teaching students with disabilities, and moving forward, the school plans to support staff with cultural competence training and additional training in supporting students with disabilities. The principal, teachers, and stakeholders consistently implement a balanced whole-child learning culture for all students with in-school and out-of-school learning experiences, such as Sweet on School Social, School Fiesta, Heritage Night, musicals, plays, art projects, field trips, and more.

Hiawatha and Howe Community School are committed to using technology to enrich and extend learning. Every classroom is equipped with a Promethean board, document camera, projector, and at least one computer that can access the internet. This equipment enables teachers to create detailed lesson plans with interactive activities that help students to achieve the desired learning outcomes. Each site also has an iPad cart that moves between classrooms and a computer lab. Students are given the opportunity to build the necessary skills to interact with applications on iPads and computers. The school also provides access to the computer labs outside of school hours and informs students of public libraries with free internet access, for those that do not have access to the internet at home.

The principals fully understand the needs and challenges of teaching, and dedicate their efforts to helping make all classrooms centers of rigorous learning. Teachers benefit from the fact that they have a very engaged group of parents at the school. Parents participate in supporting the achievement of their children, keeping lines of communication strong between home and school, and taking part in the myriad of parent-involvement opportunities offered. Teachers at Hiawatha-Howe know they're part of a team of peers who are second to none. Teachers approach their jobs with high expectations for students, both academically and behaviorally. This leads to students who are eager to learn and who enjoy being a part of the school. Low teacher turnover creates a stable environment for students, families, and staff. The schools plan to increase co-planning and co-teaching with Special Education and English Language Learner support staff, as well as look at how their extension classes for students can be more intentional.

“We hire and retain high-quality teachers at all grade levels and across disciplines,” Regnier said. “Our students, staff, and families all feel safe, welcome, and supported. When I think about our superintendent's goal around the ‘Power of Three’ [1. Focus on Students, 2. Invest in Staff, and 3. Engage our Community], we have met this and are validated through our work with SOE.”

Teachers ask critical questions to ensure students are learning: What do we expect our students to learn? How will we know they are learning it? How will we respond when they don't learn? And how do we respond to the students who already know it? Through Quality Compensation, a state grant program, teachers can observe other teachers to get insight and feedback from their peers. One teacher at Hiawatha said, "This was the best PD I have ever received. I learned so much just watching other first grade teachers teach the same content as myself. This really helps me to improve my practice with students." Hiawatha and Howe are committed to the belief that all students can learn. The entire staff wears t-shirts that read, "Effort Creates Ability," as a reminder that all students can learn.

"At Hiawatha we are so honored to receive this validation at this time," Regnier said. "We are also celebrating 100 years of educating students in our community! It is rewarding to know that then, now, and in the next 100 years Hiawatha strives to always be a School of Excellence!"

"The School of Excellence Certification Process has helped us reflect on where we have been and where we wish to go as a school community," Oldenburg said. "We will use the information gleaned from this process to aid us in providing equitable learning opportunities for all students and their families."

Six schools achieved recognition as 2016-2017 Minnesota Schools of Excellence:

- *Cuyuna Range Elementary School*, Crosby-Ironton Public Schools, Principal Kurt Becker
- *Eagle Creek Elementary*, Shakopee Public Schools, Principal Josie Koivisto
- *Hiawatha Community School*, Minneapolis Public Schools, Principal Deb Regnier
- *Howe Community School*, Minneapolis Public Schools, Principal Kevin Oldenburg
- *Kenny Community School*, Minneapolis Public Schools, Principal William Gibbs
- *Randolph Elementary School*, Randolph Public Schools, Principal Matt Rutledge

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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,

189 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

MESPA is the professional association of Minnesota's elementary and middle level principals. MESPA has represented Minnesota's principals since 1950 and is affiliated with the National Association of Elementary School Principals and its 20,000 members nationwide.

The Minnesota Elementary School Principals' Association strives to be the premier leadership resource for elementary and middle-level principals and a strong leading voice for public education. MESPA is committed to ensuring a high quality of education for all children through strengthening and enhancing the principal's role as educational leader in our schools.