

MEDIA RELEASE



Minnesota Elementary School Principals' Association

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Kenny Community Schools Validated as a 2016–2017 Minnesota School of Excellence

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

“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.”

Kenny Community School’s mission is to ensure that all students learn, and to support their growth into knowledgeable, skilled, and confident citizens capable of succeeding in their work, personal, and family life in the 21st century. Kenny Community School is located in the Minneapolis Public School District and provides students an educational setting where high academic success can be achieved through experiential learning and workshop teaching strategies, focused on math and literacy, while developing citizenship and teaching the whole child. Kenny is dedicated to the success of all of their students and works diligently to maintain a positive school climate with high expectations for academic and social learning.

“The SOE process established the great pieces of Kenny, and made us examine where we can push our work and move forward to advance the success of all students,” said Principal Bill Gibbs. “The process also brought to light some internal struggles we were having, and forced us to critically determine our next steps. The insight from the survey provided an opportunity to hear from our community and look back on our strengths and our areas for growth. We know Kenny is great, and now we know how to become even better.”

Kenny teachers participate in weekly peer-to-peer professional development, professional learning communities (PLCs), and additional outside professional development as needed. The Office of Black Male Student Achievement facilitated six cultural understanding sessions to the Kenny staff this past year. Kenny parent survey data is presented to the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) so it can be incorporated into their weekly meetings to monitor Kenny’s School Improvement Plan and presented to the PLCs to continually evaluate their professional goals for improving student achievement. The PLCs

reviewed student work in order to determine student growth, specific to Specific Measurable Achievable Results-oriented and Timely (SMART) goals, and team development needs. One representative from each PLC participates in ILT meetings, to create a common hub of communication and shared decision-making.

“Kenny Leadership is shared broadly,” Gibbs said. “Teacher leaders are empowered and asked to lead their peers in every aspect of their teaching day. Grade level teams plan and focus on the needs of their students through Professional Learning Communities, completing data cycles and progress monitoring students. The data cycles translate into the school-wide Response to Intervention meetings, where teams problem solve around meeting the needs of individual students after looking at the whole child’s needs. The community of Kenny School has rallied around the school and supports the growth and development of our students and staff.”

Learning is the cornerstone at Kenny Community School. Students, staff, parents, and the community are engaged in learning through professional development, hands-on activities, field trips, community events, and reflection. Students are asked to collaborate on projects in the classroom, learning group dynamics, how to work together to accomplish a task, as well as understanding the learning target of the project. “Data is a very strong part, if not the key component, in driving instruction,” stated a Kenny teacher. Kenny presents the school’s data, results, and goals via weekly newsletters, the school’s website, and the annual State of the School presentation.

“We focus on students and their learning. Instruction is adjusted to ensure student learning. Our learning as instructors is continuous; through academic conversation, professional learning communities, and support, we ensure that we are always developing as teachers,” said a Kenny teacher.

Teachers use flexible groups to work with students in small groups during math and literacy blocks. Providing support and closing the achievement gap continue to be points of focus for the Kenny staff, especially in reading. “Having both group and individualized learning in the classroom seems to help the students work at his/her own level. In my experience, if a student seems to be struggling, the teacher will take the time to find another way to explain and work through the problems, which can be a struggle given the multiple learning levels in each classroom. The teachers care and want the students to succeed,” said a parent of a Kenny student. In order to support students with a limited staffing budget, Kenny brought in student teachers and school psychology practicum students from the University of Minnesota and a principal intern from The Aspiring Transformational Principal Academy. Kenny has an extremely high teacher retention rate and a positive reputation for having quality teachers.

Kenny School utilizes a variety of programs that provide opportunities for students in and out of the classroom. The staff tries to educate the whole child, not just teach to the test. With funding from the PTA, students have participated in “Art Adventures” from the Minneapolis Institute of Art (MIA), where they discuss artwork with MIA volunteers, visit the MIA to look at artwork up-close, and receive a museum tour. Additionally, each grade level chooses fieldtrips and activities for students to participate in throughout the year. Students learn how to be responsible for their own actions and to encourage others to be responsible. “Teachers talk about children as leaders and how to enhance their leadership abilities. A novel concept for young learners!” said Kenny parent. “Kenny creates a supportive, inclusive environment, which provides children with a safe place to inquire and express themselves. The goal of learning is pervasive across all activities and efforts at Kenny,” said the parent of another Kenny student.

One of Kenny’s greatest assets is the parent, family, and community engagement. Through parent-led organizations, the voice of families is articulated and the work of the school is supported. Volunteers stream through the door daily to read to students or help them with daily tasks. Parents and families of Kenny make so many things possible, and their engagement provides more opportunities for students. The PTA plans and executes a variety of activities, as well as provides a forum for parents to learn more about what takes place at Kenny. In addition to the PTA, a group of Kenny parents saw the need to provide greater fiscal support to the school, so they formed The Kenny Foundation, which holds fundraisers to support projects around the school that would not otherwise be possible.

Each Friday, Principal Gibbs reviews the Kenny Bees: Be Respectful, Be Responsible, Be Safe, and Be Your Best. Then Gibbs asks all students to respond in the statement, “The harder you work,” and in unison the students yell, “the smarter you get!” Each week students can receive Kenny Koupons, which are drawn for prizes, when they are observed demonstrating one of the Kenny Bees. Once a month the school gathers to celebrate the Students of the Month, everyone sings songs, parents of students being recognized attend if possible, and everyone shows their pride and love for the school.

Principal Bill Gibbs summed up the results from the School of Excellence process best when he said, “Wow, we have a lot of systems and processes that safeguard our students from being left behind and make sure that all students have the opportunity and ability to succeed.”

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.