

MEDIA RELEASE



Minnesota Elementary School Principals' Association

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Braham Area Elementary School Validated as a 2017–2018 Minnesota School of Excellence

(St. Paul, MN – August 28, 2017) – Braham Area 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 Braham for its commitment to 21st century teaching and learning.

“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 and have plans to make that learning experience a reality. Honoring the important work of dedicated staff, eager students, and supportive communities is an essential component of becoming a School of Excellence.”

Braham Area Elementary School is located in Isanti County in East Central Minnesota and serves approximately 500 students in grades preK-6. Braham Area Elementary is dedicated to carrying out the

Braham District's mission: "We are dedicated to providing high-quality, positive lifelong learning of nurture each individual's unique potential, talent, and self-worth."

"The SOE process has been an incredible journey," said Jeff Eklund, principal of Braham Area Elementary. "The application process gave us a chance to reflect on our current practices and have some great conversations about how we can improve for our kids! It also reinforced many of the great things going on here at Braham Elementary. Through this process, we have found more teachers willing to share ideas and expertise during staff meetings, committees, and Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). Teachers at Braham Elementary are empowered and encouraged to share ideas regularly!"

"We have PLC's that meet regularly," said Eklund. "These PLCs are driven by the question of, 'What can we do to improve learning for ALL of our students?' This question has led us to create WIN (What I Need) time daily for all of our students in reading and math. During this time paraprofessionals, interventionists, and classroom teachers challenge students at their level of understanding. Many of these interventions are driven by our RtI team that was created a couple of years ago."

The School of Excellence process helps schools identify and expand upon their strengths. Principal Eklund elaborated on this aspect of the SOE process, "Without question, the strength of Braham Elementary is the teaching staff. Our teachers take great pride in building strong relationships with kids that last many years after they have left their classroom. It is not uncommon to have high school kids stopping at the elementary school to read in their favorite teacher's classroom."

In addition to the staff, the community is another one of Braham's strengths. Eklund describes, "Our community is incredibly supportive of our school. We routinely have over 98% of our parents attend parent teacher conferences. Parents are encouraged to volunteer in the classroom or serve on BEPO, our elementary parent organization. We have always known that relationships are the cornerstone of what we do at Braham, but in going through the SOE process, we were able to find new, and in many cases better, ways to involve parents. One of the easiest and best ways to involve our parents is through phone calls, emails, newsletters, and student celebrations. Some of these celebrations include: Veteran's Day, I love to Read Month, Dr. Seuss's Birthday, and Bomber PRIDE celebrations. Each teacher also has their own Twitter account. Parents can very easily check in throughout the day to see what is going on in their child's classroom."

"One of the most encouraging things we found during this process was that our staff truly believes in teaching the whole child," said Eklund. "We believe that our students are successful because of

this. Teaching to the test is a disservice to our kids. Making connections, teaching outside the box, and giving real-life examples and lessons are what makes our kids successful. This thinking has led us into creating our own Makerspace program. The program is in its first year, but we are really excited about the learning possibilities for our students!”

A few years ago started their own version of PBIS called Bomber P.R.I.D.E. (Positive Attitude, Respect, Integrity, Discipline, Excellence). This program started out as an elementary endeavor, but last year it moved to a PreK-12 program. A committed group of teachers got together over the summer and planned several lessons that would create common language to connect this program district wide. “During our SOE process, we found that by involving the community, we could see even greater results,” said Eklund. “Local businesses are encouraged to recognize students and other community members that are showing Bomber PRIDE. We are lucky to have a community that cares so deeply about the school. During the year, we gather several times, as a school, to celebrate students that go above and beyond in showing PRIDE. Students are excited to do this and cheer each other on. Because of this program, we have seen less discipline issues, greater involvement, and a stronger feeling of ownership in our school!”

“Every student has unique talents and abilities,” said Eklund. “As teachers, we are privileged to help students discover and develop these talents, and realize just how awesome they can be! We have a great education system in the state of Minnesota. It is truly an honor to be named a School of Excellence! This is something that our students, staff, and community can all be proud of! Together we can accomplish amazing things for kids!”

Eight schools achieved recognition as 2017-2018 Minnesota Schools of Excellence:

- *Sioux Trail Elementary School*, Burnsville–Eagan–Savage School District, Principal Shannon McParland
- *Braham Area Elementary*, Braham Area Schools, Principal Jeff Eklund
- *Jordan Elementary*, Jordan Public Schools, Principal Melissa Barnett, Assistant Principal Carol Lagergren
- *Triton Elementary*, Triton Public Schools, Principal Nancy Stucky
- *Normandale Hills Elementary*, Bloomington Public Schools, Principal Andrew Vollmuth
- *Lyndale Community School*, Minneapolis Public Schools, Principal Mark Stauduhar, Assistant Principal Sarah Hunter
- *Elm Creek Elementary*, Osseo Area Schools, Principal Elizabeth Ness
- *Armatage Montessori*, Minneapolis Public Schools, Principal Joan Franks, Assistant Principal Paul Scanlon

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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. 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.”

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, 197 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.