

## MEDIA RELEASE



### Minnesota Elementary School Principals' Association

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### Elm Creek Elementary School Validated as a 2017–2018 Minnesota School of Excellence

*(St. Paul, MN – August 28, 2017)* – Elm Creek 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 Elm Creek 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.”

Elm Creek Elementary School is located in ISD 279—Osseo Area Schools—and serves approximately 520 students. The school community is referred to as the Elm Creek Eagles, and the staff encourages their students to S.O.A.R.: Strive to do their best; Own their actions; Act respectfully; and be Ready to learn.

“The SOE process has helped staff and families to reflect on what Elm Creek Elementary is doing well for children and to identify what areas we need to build and strengthen,” said Elizabeth Ness, principal of Elm Creek Elementary. “It has been a great opportunity to get feedback about our school from staff, families and students.”

“The SOE process brought greater clarity to one of Elm Creek’s key strengths: our strong community focus,” said Ness. “This is evident in the teacher and student/family relationships as well as the family/community involvement. We have over 400 volunteers in a school of approximately 520 students. Staff, families and the community are invested in the well-being and success of Elm Creek Elementary students.”

In addition to highlighting strengths of the schools, the School of Excellence process also helps schools identify areas of growth. Principal Ness describes that process: “One area needing improvement is building partnerships. Over the last two years we have developed partnerships with Lowe’s to build buddy benches on the school playground; Maple Grove Lions and Osseo Lions to build our Eagles Roost, which is a room that provides a calming atmosphere and helps students get back into a ready-to-learn state; *Design Ready Controls* engineers who worked after school with 4<sup>th</sup> grade girls to prepare them to compete in a VEX Robotics competition; TC Farms to help kindergarten and students with special needs study embryology as they hatched chicks in the classroom; and Eastman Nature Center to provide opportunities for each classroom to take a field trip and learn about their local environment.”

“Another area identified for improvement was technology,” said Ness. “In the last two years we have added 1:1 iPad use for students in 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade, added a school Twitter account, and participated in various professional development opportunities to help us utilize technology in a way that supports student learning.”

In summing up Elm Creek’s School of Excellence experience, Ness said, “I would encourage other schools to engage in the Minnesota School of Excellence process. I have been impressed with the level of collaboration this process takes and the teacher and student leadership that arises as a result.”

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.