

MEDIA RELEASE



Minnesota Elementary School Principals' Association

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Normandale Hills Elementary School Validated as a 2017–2018 Minnesota School of Excellence

(St. Paul, MN – August 28, 2017) – Normandale Hills 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 Normandale Hills 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.”

Normandale Hills Elementary School has approximately 500 students and is located within the Bloomington Public School (BPS) District. All Bloomington Public Schools are united under the core values of respect, responsibility, integrity, citizenship, honesty, and teamwork, and BPS' mission statement: *The Bloomington Public School District is an educational leader developing in all our learners the ability to thrive in a rapidly changing world.* The mission statement of Normandale Hills states: *We are committed to maximizing individual excellence by developing capable, ethical children with a passion for learning using innovative, quality programs and fostering a sense of community.* Collectively, all students, staff, and families are guided by three expectations: Be Respectful, Be Responsible, and Be Safe.

“The School of Excellence (SOE) journey gave Normandale Hills Elementary the opportunity to conduct an in-depth audit of our school,” Dr. Andrew Vollmuth, principal of Normandale Hills. “This comprehensive study validating many areas of strength but also gave us several areas for continued growth. In the spirit of continuous improvement, process improvements were identified for each area in need of attention and then implemented. It is our hope the SOE process will be a springboard for continued school improvement for years to come.”

Vollmuth described the process of undergoing SOE validation: “The first part of this two-year, School of Excellence journey was an in-depth audit of Normandale Hills Elementary. Our SOE team spent a significant amount of time gathering input from both staff and families and then creating themes for areas of strength and improvement. Areas of strength included our use of 21st century teaching strategies to meet the academic and social needs of all students; a strong learning centered culture; and finally the collaborative partnerships that exists between Normandale Hills' staff, families and community partnerships. The School of Excellence process was just one more example of how all parties are committed to working together on behalf of our students.”

One way Normandale Hills meets the social needs of their students is through their PBIS Mentors, which pairs up a handful of students with a Normandale Hills staff member to create positive adult/student relationships. The PBIS Mentor Program was developed in response to analyzing Student Support Center (SSC) referral data. The team concluded that ten students accounted for 25% of the school's SSC behavior misconduct referrals. The Mentorship program consists of a staff member checking in with his or her student at least once per week and creating a social goal for each student. Currently, thirteen Normandale Hills students are in the PBIS mentor program. The program has helped reduce the number of SSC referrals for these students by over 50% and also contributed to reducing the total school referrals by 30% in the 2016-2017 school year.

Some examples of Normandale Hill's partnerships between staff, families, and the community include the Festival of Learning and Reading Education Assistance Dogs (R.E.A.D). The Festival of Learning is an all-school cross-curricular cultural study that takes place over a two-month span and culminates in an evening of exhibition that highlights the academic, artistic, and musical achievements of our students to their families. Each year the focus of Festival of Learning is on a different continent, and over the course of their six years of study at Normandale Hills, each student will have visited all six populated continents in their learning.

Another method Normandale Hills Elementary school regularly engages with stakeholders in the community is through weekly partnering with Reading Education Assistance Dogs® (R.E.A.D.) program. R.E.A.D. dogs are registered therapy animals that volunteer with their handler as a team going to schools on a regularly scheduled basis. In the special education setting, two different read therapy dogs work with students in need of additional reading or behavioral support. The goal behind this program is to improve children's reading and communication skills by employing a powerful method: reading to a dog.

“The Normandale Hills' School of Excellence team approached the SOE process as a journey and worked hard in collaboration with one another in order to ensure our findings were accurate,” said Vollmuth. “Of equal importance was our attention to ensure the areas of continued improvement we identified were meaningful and implemented with high-fidelity. This took longer than originally expected but we believe the end result has the potential to have a more profound impact on Normandale Hills due to the time, energy, and attention to detail we put into this endeavor throughout the journey.”

“The Normandale Hills School community is indebted to [the School of Excellence Committee's] commitment to this important project as collectively we strive to make Normandale Hills Elementary an excellent educational environment for students to learn as well as a rewarding place for staff and families,” wrote Dr. Andrew Vollmuth, principal of Normandale Hills, in the School of Excellence application.

Vollmuth summed up the SOE experience by saying, “The Normandale Hills' school community is honored to receive this distinction from the Minnesota Elementary School Principals' Association (MESPA), and appreciate their efforts in creating an award that not only recognizes excellence but encourages continued growth and development on behalf of all students.”

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.