

## MEDIA RELEASE



### **Minnesota Elementary School Principals' Association**

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **Oak Hills Elementary Validated as 2022-2023 Minnesota School of Excellence**

*(Roseville, MN – September 19, 2022)* – Oak Hills Elementary has been validated as a Minnesota School of Excellence (SOE) by the Minnesota Elementary School Principals' Association (MESPA). This prestigious honor was awarded to Oak Hills Elementary for its commitment to modern teaching and learning.

“Through the Minnesota School of Excellence (SOE) program, grounded in national research on high-performing schools, MESPA has created the premier opportunity in the state for validating excellence and a commitment to continual growth 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.”

Tami Staloch-Schultz, chair of the Minnesota School of Excellence Committee, said, “It takes commitment and teamwork to honestly and thoroughly assess areas of strength and at the same time identify a plan for continual growth. The SOE process asks the entire school community – parents, students, staff, administration, and more – to reflect on and celebrate the collaborative work being done in school communities. Schools that receive validation have had important data-driven conversations about what a high-quality, modern learning experience should be for all students and have plans to make that learning experience a reality for many years to come. Honoring the important work of dedicated staff, eager students, and supportive communities is an essential component of becoming a School of Excellence.”

Oak Hills Elementary is part of the Lakeville School District and serves 700 students in grades K-5. Oak Hills's mission is to provide students with opportunities to become self-directed learners and successful communicators within a nurturing environment.

Principal Dr. Wade Labatte explains why Oak Hills Elementary embarked on the SOE application journey. "Excellence is found everywhere at Oak Hills Elementary. From our dedicated teaching staff, support staff, leadership, and parents to the students, we are proud of the community we have created. As a staff, we decided to embark on the SOE application journey to explore targeted aspects of our school community in an effort to celebrate the many ways our staff and students have achieved great things, and also to create goals as we move forward."

"One notable aspect of the SOE application is how instruction is regularly reviewed by staff based on student performance data and revised based on this data and student needs. We see so many examples of differentiated instruction as we navigated the many challenges Covid presented, especially for those in our community with access barriers whether it be due to language or technology." Dr. Labatte says they watched as staff regularly reached out to students who were struggling and went above and beyond to deliver materials to doorsteps and created time to meet even 1:1 with students who needed extra learning support, which many times occurred after regular school hours.

"Despite this interrupted learning, we celebrated as students showed amazing growth on MAP tests and assessments as they returned. Staff encouraged one another as schoolwide goals were created and met. This past school year, the Site Leadership Team created a goal to increase student performance in the area of Math. With the implementation of new techniques to improve number sense and current research on best practices in teaching mathematics, students not only met the goal but exceeded the goal by over 25%!"

Oak Hills Elementary wants to explore ways to create cultural awareness to better support their diverse student body. Dr. Labatte explains, "This process showed so many reasons to celebrate our unique community and also created conversations to make new goals for improvement. Now that Covid gathering restrictions are lifted, we are exploring ways to create events like a Cultural Fair to celebrate the diversity we are fortunate to have at Oak Hills Elementary, as well as ways to involve community partnerships in this process."

Dr. Labatte goes on to say, “We continue to hold a high bar of excellence for students, staff, and families. We are excited to celebrate achieving the SOE Award and create new initiatives that will lift our entire community going forward.”

Four schools achieved recognition as 2022-2023 Minnesota Schools of Excellence:

- *Kasson-Mantorville Elementary*, Kasson-Mantorville Schools, Principal Ariana Wright
- *Oak Hills Elementary*, Lakeville Area Schools, Principal Dr. Wade Labatte
- *Hawthorne Elementary*, Albert Lea Area Schools, Principal, John Mahal
- *Sebeka Public School*, Sebeka Public Schools, Principal, Amie Westberg

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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, 222 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.