



MEDIA RELEASE

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Bemidji Area Schools Principal, Ami Aalgaard, Receives Professional Leadership Award

(electronic photo attached to this news release)



Ami Aalgaard

(Roseville, MN, May 6, 2021) – The Minnesota Elementary School Principals’ Association (MESPA) recognized Ami Aalgaard, principal of Gene Dillon Elementary School, Bemidji Area Schools, with the 2021 MESPA Division Leadership Achievement Award for MESPA’s Northern Division. Principals are responsible for a school’s instructional, school culture, and resource leadership. The award honors principals whose exemplary leadership and sustained efforts have made noteworthy contributions to the operation of effective school learning programs—improving education, their communities, and their profession. She was recognized by colleagues statewide on April 15, 2021 at the MESPYS, the premier elementary principal celebration of the year celebrated via [YouTube livestream](#).

Aalgaard summed up her educational philosophy in a quote: “Students need to know that you care before they will care what you know. Students are the energy that keeps all educators energized to teach the next generation of learners.”

Aalgaard was nominated by David Gooch, Assistant Principal at Gene Dillon Elementary School. On behalf of MESPA Northern Division principals, Gooch stated: “Ami set up our schedule and put in place several procedures for COVID-19. Our district cabinet went to her because of the example she

set at our school, and our district cabinet asked the other elementary schools in our district to follow her model because it worked to keep our staff and students safe.”

Among her most significant career accomplishments, Aalgaard includes:

- Being elected representative for multiple roles within the Bemidji Education Association.
- Being elected multiple years as a negotiator for the Bemidji Principals’ Association.
- Being hired as the principal to lead the development and implementation of curriculum, staffing, and overall planning of Gene Dillon Elementary.
- Developing and presenting a large school modeling system for potential hybrid instruction to over 100 Minnesota School Districts.

MESPA members selected 13 of their peers to receive the 2021 MESPA Division Leadership Achievement Award. Jon Millerhagen, MESPA Executive Director, congratulated the award winners by saying, “MESPA members who receive the Division Leadership Achievement Award are the strong foundations of their schools, their communities, and our association. They are transformational leaders who care deeply for their students. Our association benefits greatly from their knowledge, enthusiasm, passion, and commitment.”

2021 MESPA Division Leadership Achievement Award Recipients

- Mary Holmberg, Paynesville Area Schools, Central Division
- Kenny Newby, Forest Lake Area Schools, East Suburban Division
- Jamil Payton, Minneapolis Public Schools, Minneapolis Division
- Christopher Forrest, Anoka-Hennepin School District, North Suburban Division
- Darren Sheldon (Ed. D.), Duluth Public Schools, Northeast Division
- Ami C. Aalgaard, Bemidji Area Schools, Northern Division
- Chreese C. Jones, St. Paul Public Schools, St. Paul Division
- Bret Domstrand, Lakeville Area Schools, South Suburban Division
- Dr. Cindy Hansen, Pine Island Public Schools, Southeast Division
- Liam Dawson, St. James Public Schools, Southwest Division
- Dr. Heather Hanson, Robbinsdale Area Schools, West Suburban Division
- Trisha Mariotti, Detroit Lakes Public Schools, Western Division
- Dr. Carole Gupton, Retired Principals of MESPA

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MESPA works to: Improve education for Minnesota students through collaboration and advocacy; **Unite** current, past, and future licensed elementary and middle-level principals; **Encourage** and

support a cooperative relationship between MESPA and other state/national organizations; and **Advocate** for the professional ethical, economic, and social welfare of its members.

MESPA Mission: 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 education for all children through strengthening and enhancing the principal's role as educational leader in our schools.