



MEDIA RELEASE
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St. James Public Schools Principal, Liam Dawson, Receives Professional Leadership Award

(electronic photo attached to this news release)



Liam Dawson

(Roseville, MN, May 6, 2021) – The Minnesota Elementary School Principals’ Association (MESPA) recognized Liam Dawson, principal of Northside Elementary School, St. James Public Schools, with the 2021 MESPA Division Leadership Achievement Award for MESPA’s Southwest 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. He was recognized by colleagues statewide on April 15, 2021 at the MESPYs, the premier elementary principal celebration of the year celebrated via [YouTube livestream](#).

Dawson summed up his educational philosophy with a quote from Nelson Mandela: “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”

Dawson was nominated by Toni Baartman, principal at Hill and Brown Elementary Schools in the Pipestone Area Schools District and President-Elect of the Southwest Division. On behalf of MESPA Southwest Division principals, Baartman stated: “Every time I hear him talk in meetings he has some pretty amazing things going on and has some great ideas that he shares with people. He has a plethora of knowledge and is always an inspiration.”

Among his most significant career accomplishments, Dawson includes:

- Fostering relationships with school and community stakeholders to build and create a better vision for Northside Elementary school.
- 2021 Belouga #SameHere Mental Health Summit speaker on “Parenting in the Pandemic.”
- Creating systems of support through enhancing MTSS systems to address the academic, behavioral, and social emotional needs of students.
- The opportunity to see and be a part of Northside Elementary's transformation from a priority school in 2012, to a celebration school in 2015, to a 2020 National Blue Ribbon school for exemplary achievement gap closing.

When considering his school’s transformation, Dawson wrote, “It is a testament to the staff at Northside for responding to adversity and overcoming those challenges to effect immense positive change on the educational outcomes for the students at Northside!”

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.