



MEDIA RELEASE
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Minneapolis Public Schools Principal, Jamil Payton, Receives Professional Leadership Award

(electronic photo attached to this news release)



Jamil Payton

(Roseville, MN, May 6, 2021) – The Minnesota Elementary School Principals’ Association (MESPA) recognized Jamil Payton, principal of Hmong International Academy, Minneapolis Public Schools, and President-Elect of MESPA’s Minneapolis Division, with the 2021 MESPA Division Leadership Achievement Award for the Minneapolis 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](#).

Payton summed up his educational philosophy with two quotes from Ancestor, African American historian, professor, and pioneer in the creation of Pan-African and Africana studies, Dr. John Henrik Clarke: “Powerful people cannot afford to educate the people they oppress, because once you are truly educated, you no longer ask for power. You will take it,” and, “I only debate my equals. All others, I teach.”

Payton was nominated by Jim Clark, principal at Emerson Spanish Learning Center in the Minneapolis Public Schools District and President of the Minneapolis Division. On behalf of MESPA Minneapolis Division principals, Clark stated: “Jamil has been a leading voice for equity in our district.”

Among his most significant career accomplishments, Payton includes:

- Being hired to lead in Minneapolis Public Schools and specifically at Hmong International Academy.
- Having a teacher and staff retention rate of over 90% for the past four years.
- Leading the Minneapolis Principal’s Forum on their equity journey, and professional growth and development through the MPS Equity Leadership Team: ensuring that they interrupt the barriers that are put in front of Black, Brown, and Indigenous students and families by interrupting white supremacy culture, institutional, and systemic racism.

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.