



MEDIA RELEASE
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Duluth Public Schools Principal, Darren Sheldon (Ed. D.), Receives Professional Leadership Award

(electronic photo attached to this news release)



Darren Sheldon (Ed. D.)

(Roseville, MN, May 6, 2021) – The Minnesota Elementary School Principals’ Association (MESPA) recognized Darren Sheldon (Ed. D.), principal of Lakewood Elementary, Duluth Public Schools, with the 2021 MESPA Division Leadership Achievement Award for MESPA’s Northeast 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](#).

When asked to sum up his educational philosophy, Dr. Sheldon said, “My favorite quote is, ‘The thing I hate about referees is they don’t care who wins or loses.’ I think that applies to the principalship especially now in times of equity in that one of our many jobs is leveling the playing field.”

Dr. Sheldon was nominated by Tom Cawcutt, principal at Homecroft Elementary School in the Duluth Public Schools District and President of the Northeast Division. On behalf of MESPA Northeast Division principals, Cawcutt stated: “Dr. Sheldon works tirelessly for his students, Lakewood Elementary, and for ISD709. He exemplifies what it means to be a servant leader and is well deserving

of our Division Leadership Award. Not only is he the principal at Lakewood, but he is the Federal Programs director for Duluth Public Schools. His expansive role requires him to navigate multiple leadership roles, collaborate with those throughout the district/state, and has continued to demonstrate excellence in all his endeavors. Dr. Sheldon is our division legislative representative and has been influential locally and throughout the state in planning and implementing educational programs focused on school reform. He is also a loving father and husband—his balance of professional and personal life sets him apart. Congrats Dr. Sheldon, you are a wonderful colleague, friend, and leader!”

Among his most significant career accomplishments, Dr. Sheldon includes:

- Incorporating the Success for All Reading/Math Reform Model (Reading First & CSRD Grants).
- Chairing the Fine Arts Curriculum Committee.
- Working as Teacher Center Director, Assistant Principal, Activities Director, Federal Programs Coordinator, District AdvancED Chair, having the pleasure of starting a new Kindergarten Center, and serving on many state committees.

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.