



MEDIA RELEASE

Minnesota Elementary School Principals' Association

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Ariana Wright, Kasson-Mantorville Schools, Named Minnesota's 2022 NAESP National Distinguished Principal

(Roseville, MN, May 18, 2022) – Ariana Wright (*pictured, right*), principal of Kasson-Mantorville Elementary in the Kasson-Mantorville Schools District, and a member of the Minnesota Elementary School Principals'



Association (MESPA), is Minnesota's 2022 NAESP National Distinguished Principal (NDP). MESPA and the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) present the prestigious award.

"I am humbled and honored to represent the hundreds of passionate, dedicated and student-centered elementary principals from around the state as the 2022 National Distinguished Principal of Minnesota," said Wright, "Serving students, families, staff, and the communities of Kasson and Mantorville is my passion and being recognized for doing what I love is something I will treasure as a highlight of my career! I am genuinely grateful to the Minnesota Elementary School Principals'

Association for providing a strong foundation of support and leadership development opportunities.”

Wright began her career in education in 2001 as a music teacher at the St. Michael Catholic School in St. Michael, Minnesota. In 2003 she moved to the Belle Plaine Public Schools District, where she continued to teach music until she was hired as a principal at Menahga Elementary School in 2011. Then in 2015 Wright made the move to her current position as principal of Kasson-Mantorville Elementary. She received her Bachelor of Arts in Music Education from Luther College in Decorah, Iowa; then completed her Masters in Teaching and Learning at St. Mary’s University of Minnesota; and finally received a degree in Specialist Education Leadership from the University of Minnesota Mankato in 2010.

Among her greatest accomplishments as a principal, Wright is proud of building a strengths-based leadership culture at Kasson-Mantorville Elementary. “Over the past four years we have developed this culture in our school community through learning about strengths and embedding a strengths based approach into our systems,” Wright said in her application, “Teacher and student agency has been a positive result of this effort.” Wright emphasized that staff, not just administrators, must be part of the framework for this system to work, “To ensure positive learning conditions for students, work needs to be done to ensure positive working conditions for all staff.”

When asked how she supports learners who are struggling, challenges learners who are excelling, and maintains high standards for all, Wright stated, “One of my core beliefs as a leader is that everyone deserves excellence. All students, staff,

parents, and our community deserve an excellent education for our children. At Kasson-Mantorville Elementary I set high expectations and do not settle for less.” She explained that she focuses on actionable feedback and instructional coaching with her staff, and emphasizes compassion in her leadership, “I see the best in others and call them into their limitless potential. Seeing the best in staff and providing feedback to help them grow ensures success for all students.”

Alecia Meline, a First Grade Teacher at Kasson-Mantorville Elementary, recommended Wright highly for the honor, “Mrs. Wright has many admirable leadership qualities, but most foundationally, she leads by example. She does not ask her staff to do something she would not do herself. She reaches out to families with strategies and solutions she has used with success. She knows that the mark of a good leader is building a community of good leaders. This has been built in our school by paying attention to the voices around her, sharing responsibility, recognizing compatible strengths, making a safe space for differing opinions without judgment, delegating when necessary and appropriate, being creative, being persistent, and being inexhaustibly positive with a great sense of humor. For that, she is admired.”

“MESPA is very excited to have Principal Ariana Wright from Kasson-Mantorville Elementary School to be selected by her peers as the 2022 MESPA National Distinguished Principal,” said MESPA Executive Director, Jon Millerhagen, “Principal Wright's energy in helping other principals is infectious. She is a true leader and has led principals at the division level in Northern and Southeastern Minnesota, in fact, she received the Southeast Division Leadership Achievement Award in 2018. Ms. Wright’s leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic benefitted several schools

throughout Southeast Minnesota when she shared her COVID Learning plans for in-person and virtual learning. Congratulations Principal Wright on receiving the 2022 NAESP National Distinguished Principal Award from Minnesota.”

The National Distinguished Principal program was established in 1984 to recognize and celebrate elementary and middle-level principals who set high standards for instruction, student achievement, character, and climate for the students, families, and staff in their learning communities. Each year, NDPs represent Pre-K through grade 8 public schools from all across the country as well as principals in U.S. private schools and those from the United States Department of Defense Office of Educational Activity and the United States Department of State Office of Overseas Schools. All nominated Minnesota principals’ applications were reviewed by a statewide selection committee, including representatives from each of MESPA’s 12 geographical divisions; 2021 NAESP National Distinguished Principal Nancy Antoine; and selection committee chair, Dawn Brown, Minnesota’s NAESP State Representative. On May 6, Wright and the other two finalists were interviewed by the committee to determine Minnesota’s 2022 NAESP National Distinguished Principal.

The other finalists for this honor were: Jen Olson, principal at Humphrey and Winsted Elementary Schools, Howard Lake-Waverly-Winsted Schools, and Melanie Jiskra, principal at Aspen Academy, a public, tuition-free charter school located in Savage.

For more details on the NDP process, visit *National Distinguished Principal* under *Honors* on MESPA’s website: www.mespa.net/ndp

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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 leaders in our schools.