

## MEDIA RELEASE



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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **Hawley Elementary Validated as a 2018–2019 Minnesota School of Excellence**

*(St. Paul, MN – August 21, 2018)* – Hawley Elementary School has been validated as a Minnesota School of Excellence (SOE) by the Minnesota Elementary School Principals' Association (MESPA). This prestigious honor was awarded to Hawley Elementary for its commitment to 21st century teaching and learning.

“Through the Minnesota School of Excellence program, grounded in national research on high-performing schools, MESPA has created the premier opportunity in the state for validating greatness in a school community,” said Jon Millerhagen, MESPA executive director. “This school improvement program examines the entire school community through six national standards, ensuring there is a holistic approach to creating a plan for future achievement and celebrating the unique accomplishments of each School of Excellence.”

Sam Richardson, chair of the School of Excellence Committee, said, “It takes hard work from a committed team to thoroughly assess areas of strength and at the same time plan for continual growth. The SOE process provides an opportunity for the entire school community to reflect on the collaborative work being done and to celebrate these accomplishments. Schools that receive validation have had important data-driven conversations about what a high-quality 21st century learning experience should be for all students and have plans to make that learning experience a reality. Honoring the important work of dedicated staff, eager students, and supportive communities is an essential component of becoming a School of Excellence.”

Hawley Elementary is part of Hawley Public Schools and serves 525 students in grades K-6. Hawley's mission is to develop responsible students who strive to reach their maximum potential through lifelong learning.

“We have an excellent staff here at Hawley Elementary, from teachers to the support staff that really do focus on the students and they all work hard to make Hawley Elementary a great place to be,” said Chris Ellingson, principal at Hawley Elementary. “To be a successful school you need great people. We have great people, from the bus drivers, kitchen staff, custodial staff, paraprofessionals, teachers, and the school board that put ALL students first.”

“The SOE process showed us that a strength of Hawley Elementary is developing 21st century learners,” Principal Ellingson said. “Each year we look at goals and ways we can help prepare our students for the ever-changing world they are facing. We do this by educating the whole child and exposing them to as many experiences as possible inside the building as well as outside. Another area of strength is our use of data to drive instruction. We have monthly grade level data meetings that use the information to form our intervention groups so students can receive interventions at their level. This includes our high learners to challenge them during this time as well.”

Another strength Hawley Elementary identified through the SOE process is its extensive Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) program called What I Need (WIN), where highly qualified paraprofessionals are trained in Path to Reading Excellence in School Sites (PRESS) interventions as well as with other research-based interventions. Students at each grade level receive 25 minutes of data-based interventions as well as enrichment opportunities for students at each grade level during this time. Grade level teachers meet monthly with the literacy coordinator and principal for 45 minutes to discuss progress and realign groups.

Hawley's Teacher Assisting Teacher (TAT) team meets regularly to discuss students that are brought up by classroom teachers that show concerns academically, behaviorally, and socially. The TAT team will come up with interventions that can be used by the teacher and that data is tracked to determine effectiveness of those classroom interventions. This team approach has helped cut down the number of special education referrals overall as well as the number of students who do not qualify for services in comparison to data prior to the implementation of TAT.

Another strength of Hawley Elementary identified by the SOE process included a commitment to technology and STEM. Grades 2-6 have regularly scheduled technology time. Kindergarten and 1st grade

students have access to a state-of-the-art computer lab and have weekly computer times scheduled. Hawley has a part-time tech integrationist located in its building to work with staff on any technology wants and needs. The integrationist will be in the classroom with the teacher during the lesson to help troubleshoot and to support the teacher when trying something new. This is a very valuable resource that teachers really take advantage of.

“What I discovered during this process and looking at the survey results is that our staff really does have high expectations for students and embrace the whole child development through the elementary years,” Principal Ellingson said. “We don't fixate on year-to-year test scores (although it is good feedback) but we watch the growth of students each year and as they go to the high school and even after. When Hawley students are successful through their high school years and beyond, we like to think we had a big part in that growth and development.”

“Through the SOE process, our building leadership team was able to identify strengths in our building so we can continue to improve upon what we are doing well,” Principal Ellingson said. “We were also able to find some areas for growth and looked at how we can improve upon those areas, whether it be at a grade level or building-wide.”

Five schools achieved recognition as 2018-2019 Minnesota Schools of Excellence:

- *Eastview Elementary*, Lakeville Area Public Schools, Principal Taber Akin
- *Floodwood School*, Floodwood School District, Principal Dr. Rae Villebrun
- *Hawley Elementary*, Hawley Public Schools, Principal Chris Ellingson
- *New York Mills Elementary*, New York Mills Public Schools, Principal Judith Brockway
- *Vandyke Elementary*, Greenway Public Schools, Principal Susan Hoeft

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#### **Minnesota School of Excellence Program Mission and History**

The Minnesota School of Excellence Program promotes excellence through a rigorous evaluation process that showcases dynamic schools of the 21st century. Established by the Minnesota Elementary School Principals' Association (MESPA), the program is recognized by the Minnesota Department of Education, as well as the National Association of Elementary School Principals, and was nominated for the Brock International Prize in Education—which “recognizes particular innovations and achievements in the field of education.”

The Minnesota School of Excellence Program was established in 1986, combining the findings of current research on effective schooling with the practical on-site experience of working principals and education staff. It offers a comprehensive school improvement process that results in student learning growth. This school improvement process focuses on six national standards and involves a systematic self-study, development of a school improvement plan, and implementation of the plan based on demonstrated results. Since the program's inception,

202 schools have earned Minnesota School of Excellence validation. The validation remains effective for seven years, at which point schools may choose to reapply for validation.

### **MESPA Mission and History**

MESPA is the professional association of Minnesota's elementary and middle level principals. MESPA has represented Minnesota's principals since 1950 and is affiliated with the National Association of Elementary School Principals and its 20,000 members nationwide.

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