

## MEDIA RELEASE



### Minnesota Elementary School Principals' Association

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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

*(St. Paul, MN – August 21, 2018)* – Vandyke 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 Vandyke 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.”

Vandyke Elementary is part of the Greenway Public School District and serves 390 students in grades K-4. Vandyke’s mission is to increase student achievement by providing a positive, safe learning

environment where dedicated teachers have high expectations, provide rigorous academic instruction and support the development of the whole child.

Vandyke Elementary has a long history of recognition for student achievement, being recognized as a National Blue Ribbon School in 2009 and having received previous Minnesota School of Excellence validation in 1996 and 2004.

“Completing the self-study allowed time for reflection, developing common language, and analyzing our educational system,” said Susan Hoeft, principal of Vandyke Elementary. “Without the SOE format it would have been difficult to examine our school system in such a comprehensive manner.”

One strength identified through the SOE process was Vandyke’s focus on closing the achievement gap for students living in poverty while promoting high levels of learning for all students. Staff Professional Learning Community (PLC) time was dedicated to exploring the needs of learners living in poverty and developing action plans to address barriers. These included identifying the need for more music and arts experiences, along with collaborating with local community organizations. The action plan resulted in Vandyke hiring a full-time school social worker, adding a part time music teacher, and developing a unique partnership with a local art studio. The partnership with 3, 2, 1 Art Studio was awarded a NAESP/Crayola Championing Creativity Grant and was featured in *Principal Magazine*.

Other strengths identified through the SOE process included how Vandyke honors, supports, and values diversity, a commitment to technology and STEM, how staff professional development is directly tied to student performance data and the changing needs of the student population, and how the principal, teachers, and staff view data as fundamental in guiding and creating systematic interventions to improve student, adult, and school performance.

The SOE process also brought about new ideas and areas for improvement. “One area that Vandyke staff has not focused on in the past is advocacy at the national and state level,” Principal Hoeft said. “The SOE process allowed for great discussion and many ideas were generated that will be part of future action.”

“Schools are busy environments and the SOE self-study helped us press ‘pause’ to reflect and grow together,” Principal Hoeft said. “The SOE process gave structure and focus to our school improvement efforts.”

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.