

MEDIA RELEASE



Minnesota Elementary School Principals' Association

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Mora Elementary Validated as 2019-2020 Minnesota Schools of Excellence

(Roseville, MN – August 28, 2019) – Mora Elementary has been validated as a Minnesota School of Excellence (SOE) by the Minnesota Elementary School Principals' Association (MESPA). This prestigious honor was awarded to Mora Elementary for its commitment to modern teaching and learning.

“Through the Minnesota School of Excellence (SOE) program, grounded in national research on high-performing schools, MESPA has created the premier opportunity in the state for validating excellence and a commitment to continual growth 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.”

Tami Staloch-Schultz, chair of the Minnesota School of Excellence Committee, said, “It takes commitment and teamwork to honestly and thoroughly assess areas of strength and at the same time identify a plan for continual growth. The SOE process asks the entire school community – parents, students, staff, administration, and more – to reflect on and celebrate the collaborative work being done in school communities. Schools that receive validation have had important data-driven conversations about what a high-quality, modern learning experience should be for all students and have plans to make that learning experience a reality for many years to come. Honoring the important work of dedicated staff, eager students, and supportive communities is an essential component of becoming a School of Excellence.”

Mora Elementary is part of Mora Public Schools and serves 948 students in grades preK-6. Randy Qual and Brenda Spartz are co-principals of Mora Elementary. Mora Public Schools' mission statement is: "Preparing self-directed and resourceful learners able to thrive in a changing global community."

A major strength of Mora Elementary identified by the SOE process is that the school has talented individuals willing and able to step into leadership roles. Both certified and non-certified staff take on responsibilities such as managing programming, chairing committees, planning events, facilitating PLCs, and leading professional development. Harnessing collective expertise is critically important to the success of Mora Elementary.

Other strengths of Mora Elementary identified by the SOE process include: community partnerships with organizations such as Lighthouse and Love the Journey to bring mental health services into the school; a sizable investment in digital access for students through shared mobile carts and dedicated classroom devices for daily use integrated with daily learning; and the collaborative nature of the district as a whole. The elementary and high school operate as two distinct, but vertically aligned programs under one strategic plan with a shared vision and mission. The administrative teams, instructional leadership teams, and various committees work collaboratively from both sites in delivering aligned messages with a common language and understanding.

In the spirit of excellence being a continuous improvement process, Mora Elementary plans to expand meaningful parent engagement opportunities by offering a free parent education series this fall. "Parenting the Love & Logic Way" sessions will be offered to K-2 families, which will include a family meal and childcare. The course will help parents learn how to build and improve their relationship with their children. Families having a more positive home environment will lead to having more regulated, happier, and healthier students at school.

"The [SOE application] document turned out longer than expected, more detailed than originally planned, and contained more pictures than we had room for," Mora's School of Excellence team wrote in its application. "However, it tells the story of Mora Elementary exhibiting all the hallmarks of a School of Excellence!"

Eight schools achieved recognition as 2019-2020 Minnesota Schools of Excellence:

- *Battle Lake Elementary School*, Battle Lake Public School District, Principal/Superintendent Darren Kern
- *Breckenridge Elementary School*, Breckenridge School District, Principal Corinna Erickson
- *Hermantown Elementary School*, Hermantown Community School District, Principal Debra Reynolds
- *Mora Elementary School*, Mora School District, Principals Randy Qual and Brenda Spartz
- *Shannon Park Elementary School*, Rosemount-Apple Valley-Eagan Public Schools, Principal Erik Davis
- *Viking Elementary School*, Pelican Rapids Public Schools, Principal Derrick Nelson
- *Washington Elementary School*, Cloquet Public Schools, Principal Robbi Mondati
- *Winfair Elementary School*, Windom Public Schools, Principal Jamie Frank

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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, 210 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.