

## MEDIA RELEASE



### **Minnesota Elementary School Principals' Association**

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **Viking Elementary School Validated as 2019-2020 Minnesota Schools of Excellence**

*(Roseville, MN – August 28, 2019)* – Viking 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 Viking Elementary School 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.”

Viking Elementary School is part of Pelican Rapids Public Schools and serves 546 students in grades preK-6. Viking Elementary School's mission statement is: "A community of learners dedicated to improving our world."

A major strength of Viking Elementary School identified by the SOE process was that its school community actively works to sustain a culture that values diverse people, ideas, perspectives and experiences. Viking Elementary School staff have been learning about trauma sensitive environments over the last 2 years. Additionally, staff have engaged with parents to learn more about the Somali culture to better understand and meet the needs of its Somali families. To support families during the initial year of our 1:1 iPad roll-out, monthly meetings provided opportunities to learn about digital citizenship and apps students are using in the classroom. The "Pastries with Parents" and "Family Tech Nights" also provide opportunities for parents to learn from students, ask questions, and share concerns & ideas.

Other strengths of Viking Elementary School highlighted by the SOE process include: Strong student and staff leadership through the Viking Leadership Team and the Student Lighthouse Team; strong belief in alignment between teaching and administrative practices and school values; and a strong teacher professional development model based on internal peer-to-peer learning and designed to help teachers better serve the needs of English language learners and low-income student groups.

One area of improvement identified by the SOE process is in parent engagement, as participation in Viking's Parent Teacher Partnership (PTP) program has declined in recent years. To increase participation in its parent group, the PTP will be included in Title One Family Reading and Math Nights, and Viking will also promote PTP activities in its monthly Viking Family Newsletter.

"To be chosen for the Minnesota School of Excellence is a great honor for Viking Elementary School," said Derrick Nelson, Viking Elementary Principal. "This is a validation and celebration of the hard work of our teachers, staff, students, and parents of Pelican Rapids."

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.