

## MEDIA RELEASE



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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **Hawthorne Elementary Validated as 2022-2023 Minnesota School of Excellence**

*(Roseville, MN – September 19, 2022)* – Hawthorne 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 Hawthorne 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.”

Hawthorne Elementary is part of the Albert Lea School District and serves over 400 students in grades K-5. Hawthorne Elementary's mission is to ensure individual academic, social and emotional growth that leads to engaged citizens and lifelong learners.

Hawthorne Elementary Principal John Mahal explains how important it was to go through the School of Excellence process. "At Hawthorne, going through the process of applying for School of Excellence was truly about validating the incredible work happening here day in and day out. It was important to validate this work because it keeps us not only motivated, but grounded on our path through High Reliability Schools and the Marzano Network."

Hawthorne Elementary embodies learner centered leadership. Everyone is expected to be a learner at all times. Mahal describes a major strength identified through the process. "We operate with integrity to our values, and collaborate to stay relevant and best meet the needs of each learner. We are advocates for students and it is evident. We also support each other as a staff through the ups and downs that come with a school year. Through the HRS process, we have been certified Level 1: Safe, Supportive, and Collaborative Culture for two years and return to this work on a daily basis. We are now working on supporting Effective Teaching in Every Classroom (Level 2) as we know staff is the number one factor in student achievement."

At Hawthorne Elementary, they hold their community partnerships in the highest regard. They take pride in having community connections they developed such as working with local churches or with their Backpack Program to provide meals on the weekend for Hawthorne families in need. Mahal explains, "We also had a "Soup"er Bowl food donation week where we partnered with our local Salvation Army. We strive to build more capacity to effectively make decisions all while trying to be as transparent as possible to our entire school community."

Hawthorne Elementary still wants to accomplish more. Mahal continues, "We would like to create a monthly "Hawthorne Happenings" video to better inform our stakeholders. We'd also like to look into creating a Hawthorne podcast that allows our students to have more voice within our school to tell our story. Additionally, we plan to continue our work to learn more about cultural competence, especially given our growing diverse population."

For the Hawthorne Family, The School of Excellence process has been incredibly validating. "We learned that we have multiple systems in place that are working to help us accomplish the ultimate goal of helping

each child to learn, grow, and reach their full potential in an environment that is safe, fun, and supported by high academic and social/emotional expectations. As we evolve in our practices, we hope to determine effective and accessible steps/systems/mechanisms to communicate pertinent information (data, safety, multi-tiered systems of support) to our families and stakeholders.”

For Hawthorne Elementary, Mahal says, “Receiving the School of Excellence recognition constitutes our work thus far and motivates us to improve on our areas of weakness to be the best school we can be for our Hawthorne students, staff, and community!”

Four schools achieved recognition as 2022-2023 Minnesota Schools of Excellence:

- *Kasson-Mantorville Elementary*, Kasson-Mantorville Schools, Principal Ariana Wright
- *Oak Hills Elementary*, Lakeville Area Schools, Principal Dr. Wade Labatte
- *Hawthorne Elementary*, Albert Lea Area Schools, Principal, John Mahal
- *Sebeka Public School*, Sebeka Public Schools, Principal, Amie Westberg

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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, 222 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.