



MEDIA RELEASE
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Red Lake Falls Schools Principal, Chris Bjerklie, Receives Professional Leadership Award

(electronic photo attached to this news release)



Chris Bjerklie

(Roseville, MN, April 21, 2022) – The Minnesota Elementary School Principals’ Association (MESPA) recognized Chris Bjerklie, principal of J. A. Hughes Elementary School, Red Lake Falls Schools, with the 2022 MESPA Division Leadership Achievement Award for MESPA’s Northern Division. Principals are responsible for a school’s instructional, school culture, and resource leadership. The award honors principals whose exemplary leadership and sustained efforts have made noteworthy contributions to the operation of effective school learning programs—improving education, their communities, and their profession. He was recognized by colleagues statewide on February 3, 2022, at the MESPYS, the premier elementary principal celebration of the year celebrated during MESPA Institute, the annual statewide convention of Minnesota’s elementary and middle-level principals.

Bjerklie summed up his educational philosophy in a quote from Nelson Mandela: “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”

Bjerklie was nominated by Kurt Becker, principal at Cuyuna Range Elementary School in the Crosby-Ironton School District. On behalf of MESPA Northern Division principals, Becker stated: “The past 18 months have been difficult for all principals. Chris has done an amazing job both leading

his building through the pandemic, as well as leading our division through it. Chris was the division president during the 19-20 and 20-21 school years... He went above and beyond to ensure that all of the Northern Division principals stayed connected and were able to support each other during those unprecedented times. Without Chris's leadership, many of us may not have made it through the early days of the pandemic as well as we have... Imitation is the greatest form of flattery, and I have imitated many of Chris's practices over the years. Chris is a true leader in every sense of the word in the Northern Division, and in the state of Minnesota.”

Among his most significant career accomplishments, Bjerklie includes:

- Being principal of J.A. Hughes Elementary School through the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Adding a high-quality reading and math intervention program to J.A. Hughes Elementary School.
- Being a part of the growth of J.A. Hughes Elementary School to a two section PK-6th grade elementary school.

Bjerklie also served on the MESPA Board of Directors for four years; spending two years as the Northern Division President-Elect and then two more as the Northern Division President.

MESPA members selected 13 of their peers to receive the 2022 MESPA Division Leadership Achievement Award. Jon Millerhagen, MESPA Executive Director, congratulated the award winners by saying, “MESPA members who receive the Division Leadership Achievement Award are the strong foundations of their schools, their communities, and our association. They are transformational leaders who care deeply for their students. Our association benefits greatly from their knowledge, enthusiasm, passion, and commitment.”

2022 MESPA Division Leadership Achievement Award Recipients

- Sam Court, Rocori School District, Central Division
- Travis Barringer, North St. Paul-Maplewood-Oakdale, East Suburban Division
- Renee Montague, Minneapolis Public Schools, Minneapolis Division
- Amy Oliver, Anoka-Hennepin School District, North Suburban Division
- Clayton Lindner, Independent School District 318, Northeast Division
- Chris Bjerklie, Red Lake Falls Schools, Northern Division
- Nancy D. Páez, St. Paul Public Schools, St. Paul Division
- Josie Koivisto, Shakopee Public Schools, South Suburban Division
- Jared Groehler, Rochester Public Schools, Southeast Division

- Amanda Feterl, Sibley East Public Schools, Southwest Division
- Melissa Ness, Hopkins Public Schools, West Suburban Division
- Dana Christensen, Alexandria Public Schools, Western Division
- Elmer Koch, Retired Principals of MESPA

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MESPA works to: Improve education for Minnesota students through collaboration and advocacy; **Unite** current, past, and future licensed elementary and middle-level principals; **Encourage** and support a cooperative relationship between MESPA and other state/national organizations; and **Advocate** for the professional ethical, economic, and social welfare of its members.

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