



Minnesota Elementary School Principals' Association

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 2, 2025

CONTACTS

Melanie Jiskra
Principal
Aspen Academy
Savage, MN
melanie.jiskra@aspenacademymn.org
952-226-5944

Simone LaBonté
Communications and Awards Manager
Minnesota Elementary School Principals'
Association
simone@mespa.net
952-297-8670

Aspen Academy Named a 2025–26 Minnesota School of Excellence

(Roseville, MN, September 2, 2025) —Aspen Academy has been named a 2025-26 Minnesota School of Excellence, an honor awarded by the Minnesota Elementary School Principals' Association (MESPA). This status is given to a select group of Minnesota schools that sustained a one-to two-year commitment of self-reflection and underwent a peer review.



The reflection is centered around six standards of effective schools. Aspen Academy stands out for blending rigorous instruction with real-world learning and community connection.

"A mentor of mine has always said, 'When you know better, you do better.' This statement has become a part of my leadership philosophy. It is one of the main reasons that being the recipient of the prestigious Minnesota School of Excellence Award means so much to our school and community," shared Mrs. Melanie Jiskra, K-8 Principal of Aspen Academy. "Learning is a continuous, dynamic process of change that occurs

through experiences and interactions with the environment. Receiving The School of Excellence award is important to us because it is a validation for our teachers, learners, and community demonstrating that we continue to take what we have learned and in fact, do better!" The reflection and study through the School of Excellence process supported our growth in the national standards."

"Rising Standards Through Instruction and Collaboration"

Aspen Academy was recognized for content and instruction that ensures student achievement. Following state standards and board-approved curriculum, the school supplements with high-quality resources and adjusts quickly to student needs.

"We pride ourselves in being proactive and swift in adjusting to the needs of our students, rather than waiting for predetermined, scheduled review cycles," the school shared in its application.

This flexibility has allowed Aspen to lead in implementing Minnesota's READ Act. Teachers use supplemental materials and all K-8 English Language Arts teachers—and even in-house guest teachers—receive intensive training on evidence-based approaches to teaching reading. These trainings are reinforced through biweekly Professional Learning Communities (PLCs).

The school takes a similar data-driven approach in mathematics, using multiple assessments each year to monitor progress and guide instruction, supported by targeted interventions like Math Corps and guided small groups.

Real-World and Enrichment Experiences

Aspen also excels at weaving experiential learning into the school day. Students engage with community partners such as Dem-Con Recycling, CLIMB Theater, Kare 11 Weather, the Minnesota Wild, Savage Police and Fire, and the Lions and Optimists Clubs. Fifth graders explore STEM through Starbase Minnesota. While enrichment programs like Math Olympiads, WordMasters, Scripps Spelling Bee, and Battle of the Books challenge advanced learners.

The arts are thriving as well, with student artwork displayed locally and at the Minnesota State Fair and Savage City Hall. The music program prepares middle school bands for festivals and State Honor Band competition.

Celebrating Traditions and Building Community

Annual traditions deepen learning and build pride: first graders present an American Symbols museum, fourth graders showcase Medieval Europe, and middle schoolers present inventions, Rube Goldberg machines, and science projects at the SciVentBerg Fair. Fine Arts Night unites families to celebrate student creativity across music, drama, and art.

Field trips further enrich learning, from sixth graders exploring Native culture at the Hočokata Ți Cultural Center, to BizTown's real-world economics for fifth graders, to the Young Authors' Conference.

"Aspen Academy blends rigorous academics with real-world experiences," said Michelle Krell, MESPA's executive director. "Their partnerships, enrichment opportunities, and community connections ensure students thrive both inside and outside the classroom."

About the MN School of Excellence Program

The Minnesota School of Excellence program is grounded in research, based on six standards of effective schools and is peer reviewed. It's a one- to two- year-long journey of reflection, learning, and goal-setting. The Minnesota School of Excellence program emphasizes that excellence is not an end goal—it's a process. It's built day by day, decision by decision, through reflection, responsiveness, and a shared belief that growth is always possible.

Congratulations to Aspen Academy for this extraordinary achievement.