

Minnesota Association of School Administrators

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News Release

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Superintendent Julia Espe Receives Kay E. Jacobs Memorial Award

(St. Paul, MN) – The Minnesota Association of School Administrators (MASA) has named Julia Espe, Superintendent of Princeton Public Schools, as the recipient of the 2018 Kay E. Jacobs Memorial Award. The award recognizes excellent leadership and involvement in MASA and other educational organizations by an administrator who is a woman. Dr. Espe will be honored for her leadership, concern for students and active involvement in professional and community affairs at a statewide recognition ceremony during the MASA/MASE Spring Conference, March 8-9, 2018, at the Minneapolis Marriott Northwest in Brooklyn Park.

“Julia’s legacy in Princeton will be that she moved the district forward from being a small, rural, traditional district to a regional leader in innovative programming,” said Barb Muckenhirn, Princeton High School Principal. “She is absolutely determined and steadfast in her pursuit of growth and achievement for the district, and the students have benefited greatly from her leadership.”

During Dr. Espe’s time at Princeton Public Schools, she spearheaded a grassroots campaign to begin rebuilding of bridges between the schools and the greater Princeton community. In 2014, Dr. Espe was able to successfully pass the first bond referendum in Princeton in more than 15 years. The more than \$29 million bond referendum provided the district with a much needed primary school, new high school gym, improved district security and technology, a family center for early childhood programs, and the ability to move district staff to a shared building with the city offices. Along with the 2014 referendum, Dr. Espe brought parents, staff and community members together to complete a five-year strategic plan.

When she began her role as superintendent, Dr. Espe was faced with declining enrollment and inadequate student achievement at the district level. She worked with the district’s cabinet, administrators, school staff, and community members to define the needs of the students and explore options for increasing enrollment while also improving student achievement. Dr. Espe worked systematically to establish a budget that supported significant advancements in the district including the establishment of a Spanish immersion program, online academy, area learning center, facilities improvements, and a 1:1 technology initiative. Consequently, student achievement has increased to exceed the state average in both reading and math. Overall district English Language Arts (ELA) achievement increased by 10%, and district-wide math achievement increased by 8% with exceptional highlights in many areas. In addition to these successes, Dr. Espe relentlessly maintains urgency in the continued growth of student achievement for all students.

“There is no one I have worked with who shows the kind of dedication Julia shows towards improving teaching and learning,” said Princeton Middle School Principal Daniel Voce. “All of us at Princeton Public Schools appreciate the way Julia involves herself in every aspect of our school district.”

Dr. Espe is an active member and leader in many educational and community organizations. Her membership and involvement includes: MASA, Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) Task Forces in Multi-tiered System of Supports (MTSS) and Career and College Ready Initiatives, representative for Minnesota at the White House Summit, Midwestern Instructional Leadership Committee, co-founder of Math Masters of Minnesota, MN Educators of Gifted and Talented (MEGT), Lakeville Rotary Club, Rochester Phi Delta Kappa, Safe Schools of the United States, and the Blandin Community Leadership Program. She has received a number of awards such as the MASA Region 6 Professionalism Award and District Leadership Award; Influential Leadership Award from Resource, Training and Solutions; Leadership Award in Advanced Placement Programming from the St. Cloud Foundation (LEAF); Dakota County Technical College Technical Education Advocacy Award in Nanotechnology; MEGT State Award: Friend of Gifted; Austin Public Schools Distinguished Educator Award; and the Certificate of Special Congressional Recognition for Challenge to Change (Chemicals Prevention).

Dr. Espe earned a doctorate degree in Education from Saint Mary’s University of Minnesota, a master’s degree in Gifted Education from the College of St. Thomas in St. Paul, and a bachelor’s degree in Music Education from the University of Illinois. She received her principal and superintendent licenses from Winona State University.

The Memorial Award was established in 1983 in honor of Kay E. Jacobs, an outstanding young administrator of many achievements who died in a car accident in 1979. At the time of her death, Ms. Jacobs was the assistant superintendent for the Mahtomedi Schools and had just been nominated, through a national screening process, for membership in the 38th Annual Superintendents' Work Conference at Teachers' College, Columbia University. This was a distinct honor, because only forty-five outstanding chief school officers from school systems throughout the United States had been invited to participate. The Memorial Award recognizes women administrators who have demonstrated the attributes of leadership and involvement early in their careers as Kay Jacobs did.

Each year, MASA recognizes members for their contribution to public education. MASA is a professional organization of Minnesota's school leaders, including superintendents, assistant superintendents, directors of special education, and other central office administrators, as well as state department administrators, college and university professors, and other educators throughout Minnesota dedicated to educational leadership for students.

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