

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Media Contact:

Michelle Ganley, Communications Manager | Hmong American Peace Academy
ganley.michelle@myhapa.org and 414-520-3720

Hmong American Peace Academy Named National ‘Distinguished School’

MILWAUKEE — Hmong American Peace Academy (HAPA) has been recognized as a National ESEA Distinguished School, one of the most prestigious honors a federally funded school can receive.

The National ESEA Distinguished Schools Program shines a national spotlight on schools that demonstrate exceptional academic achievement and meaningful growth—particularly while serving high percentages of English Language Learners and economically disadvantaged scholars. HAPA was selected for **Category I: Exceptional Student Performance and Academic Growth**.

“This recognition affirms what our scholars, staff, and families work toward every day,” said Dr. Chris Her-Xiong, founder and CEO of HAPA. “It reflects our unwavering belief that when high expectations are paired with culturally responsive, student-centered learning, all scholars can thrive, regardless of background.”

This recognition places HAPA among a highly select group. In the entire history of the National ESEA Distinguished Schools Program, **only three Wisconsin schools have ever been recognized in Category I**: HAPA, a school in Iron River, and a school in Waukesha.

Behind this honor is a rigorous review process conducted by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, which examines school performance data, accountability metrics, and a school’s effectiveness in serving all scholars, especially those supported by federal programs.

HAPA’s leadership will be formally recognized at the 2026 National ESEA Conference, taking place February 10-12, 2026 in Denver, Colorado, where Dr. Her-Xiong and Chief Academic Officer Brendan Kearney will accept the award on behalf of the HAPA community. Around this same time, State Superintendent Dr. Jill Underly will visit HAPA to acknowledge the achievement.

National program contact:

Dr. M. Edward Cheeks, Chief Executive Officer
National Association of ESEA State Program Administrators (NAESPA)
distinguishedschools@ESEAnetwork.org
www.ESEAnetwork.org