

SPIRIT OF EXCELLENCE



What Is SOE?

Spirit of Excellence, often referenced as SOE, is a Parkway School District Awards ceremony that honors African-American students in grades 3-12 who have excelled academically. This celebration provides an opportunity for our African-American students to be recognized by their peers, teachers, family and the Parkway community, encouraging ALL our students to live in their genius and full potential.

When Is SOE?

The Spirit of Excellence ceremony occurs in February to enhance the observance of Black History Month. Historically, the ceremony was held on a university campus to enhance the focus on academic achievement. The event was moved to a bigger venue with the increased number of award recipients. In addition to honoring students' academic achievement, a combination of student and community performances and district and community recognitions are featured.

Who Is Eligible For SOE?

All middle or high school students who have earned a cumulative grade point average of 3.5 or higher meet the requirement for this recognition. Elementary students in grades 3-5 who have "On-Track" for 11 of 12 indicators on their first-semester progress report and score at the 70th Achievement percentile or higher on the Fall or Winter NWEA Assessment in Reading or Math also meet the requirement to receive SOE distinction.

Why Do We Have Spirit Of Excellence?

This district-wide recognition ceremony directly connects to Parkway's efforts to eliminate the achievement gap. Through the Spirit of Excellence celebration, African-American awardees can genuinely say, "I see me in you!" In this uplifting celebration, students' hard work, dedication, perseverance, and excellence are affirmed by their peers, families, and the Parkway community.

The impact of the Spirit of Excellence can be felt in several ways. Award winners are encouraged and find themselves encouraging others to aspire along this journey. Students often serve as role models, ambassadors, and leaders to other students and families, inspiring others to strive for excellence. The legacy of Spirit of Excellence has helped to challenge the archaic and damaging stereotypes around African-American achievement. As a result, educators have begun to rewrite the narrative through advocacy, encouragement, and support of students' efforts as they strive to reach their full potential.

The History Of Spirit Of Excellence

Spirit of Excellence began in 1996 under the direction of Luther Bellinger, Director of Parkway's VST Program. Initially, the gathering was small and held at the Salad Bowl Restaurant in St. Louis City. Only students in grades 6-12 were honored with a cumulative grade point average of 3.0 or higher. After two years, David Harris, Parkway's VST Program Coordinator, moved the celebration to Washington University. The program expanded to celebrate the academic achievement of students in grades 3-5. During the next four years, participation grew, and the event was moved to the Adam's Mark Hotel by Lisa Thompson, Parkway's VST & Special Programs Facilitator. With this move, the minimum requirements for the award were raised to a cumulative grade point average of 3.5. Students were also honored for their dedication to school, community, and excellence in the Arts. The Spirit of Excellence celebration continued at the Adam's Mark Hotel for two years, then moved to the Blanch M. Touhill Performing Arts Center. With the increase in students demonstrating academic excellence, the event is currently held at the St. Charles Family Arena. Under the leadership of Stacey Myton, District Counselor, African-American Parkway alums are now honored. In 2023, the Dr. Charlotte Ijei Award was added in honor of its namesake in recognition of her stalwart advocacy for students of color, their families and their success in the Parkway School District.

The Spirit of Excellence awards ceremony has a rich history of academic excellence and community and family involvement. It continues to grow in recognition of our students' high-achieving and diligent efforts toward distinction.