

Newsletter

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- Financial Report 2021-22



OEF Board Chair
Sue Hallman

WHAT DO THESE HAVE IN COMMON?

Letter from the Chair

- World Language E-novels
- Filter for 'salmon in the classroom'
- Updating elementary library collection
- Online audio recording studio program for CMS orchestra
- Animation stations
- Character Building program
- Bowling set
- Nakomis/OPM partnership
- Flexible seating
- National Montessori conference
- Holocaust Storyteller
- Responsive classroom
- Quiz Bowl
- Social emotional books

All of them, and more, were supported by the Okemos Education Foundation (OEF) in the 21-22 school year through micro grants, regular grants and the Lee Gerard Professional Development grant. This is the mission of the OEF - to encourage and recognize excellence and innovation in the classroom that enhances student learning. Since its inception in 1984 the OEF has contributed over \$1,200,000 to ensure that these opportunities for excellence and innovation are available to ALL students!

In addition to grants, the Okemos Education Foundation also supports annual ongoing opportunities such as:

- Partnering with Horizon Bank to bring in a well known author who visits each elementary school during March is Reading Month
- Offsetting the cost of science fairs
- Providing funds for each 4th grade class to attend a three day Seeds of Science field trip at MSU

We are also proud to have committed \$10,000 to the district's DEI initiative last year, supporting professional learning for teachers that will positively impact student learning. We continue to work with the district to determine how we can best support student learning this year, including partnering with the new Woofpack program, a resource that has a direct positive impact on students.

Through these grants and ongoing budgeted support, the Okemos Education Foundation provides students with opportunities that might otherwise not be available to them. While the OEF is fortunate to have many individuals and businesses who support the foundation from amounts as little as \$25 upwards of \$10,000, we cannot continue our mission without help from ALL of our community. If you are already a regular donor to the OEF - THANK YOU - your support is greatly appreciated. If you have not donated in the past please consider doing so today. OEF donations support Okemos students in EVERY building at EVERY level in EVERY subject matter. Donate today using the form on the back of the newsletter, going online at oefsite.org/donate or accessing the QR code found in this newsletter.

On behalf of the Okemos Education Foundation, thank you for your support. Your generosity truly makes a difference for our students. Okemos is strong, but we are stronger together.

**OKEMOS
EDUCATION
FOUNDATION
2022-23 TRUSTEES**

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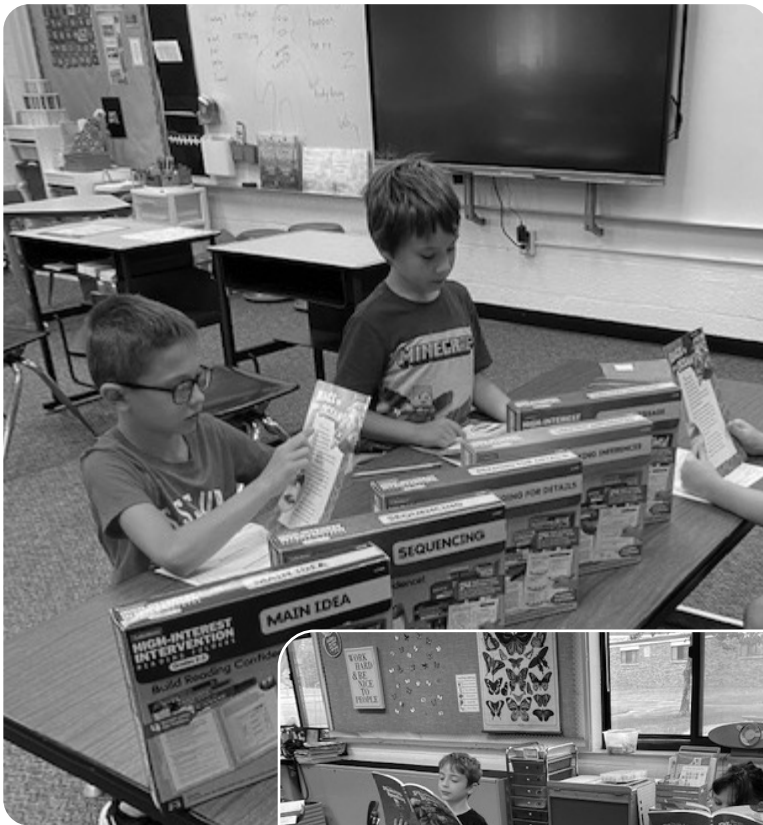
A Tribute



This past February, Okemos and Meridian Township lost an amazing member of the community, Ron Styka. If you looked in the dictionary under 'servant leader' Ron's picture would be the first thing you would see. As a founding member of St. Martha's parish, a volunteer for his four sons who went through Okemos Schools, an Okemos School Board member for 22 years, a Trustee on the Meridian Township Board for four years and the Township Supervisor for six years, who still held that position when he passed away, Ron never met a volunteer/service opportunity he could pass up! In addition, Ron was a Trustee with the Okemos Education Foundation for many years as well as the chair for two years. In every position he maintained a well honed sense of humor with an easy laugh. Ron, we miss that humor, your calm demeanor and your thoughtful insight. On behalf of the Okemos Education Foundation, "Thank you, thank you, thank you! You were one of a kind and we miss you!"

ENHANCING EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES THROUGH OUR OEF GRANTS!

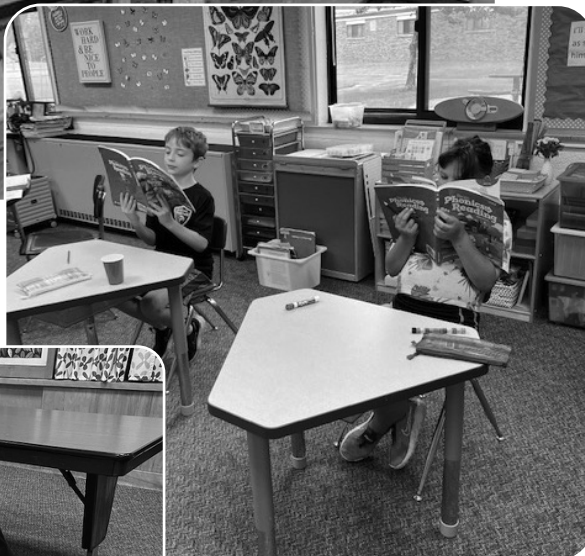
The OEF focuses on enhancing educational opportunities in the schools by providing grants to staff to support excellence and innovation in their teaching. Last year the OEF committed over \$20,000 in grant money for that purpose.



Creating Classroom Success

Montessori

Thanks to the generosity of the Okemos Education Foundation's Commitment to Excellence award, my classroom was able to add a variety of learning resources to our day to day learning activities. I was able to add fun, flexible seating options. The students now have stools with built in exercise balls and balancing floor desks called "The Surf." These new seats allow my students to move while encouraging both concentration and balance. They are always in popular demand! Additionally, I added a set of high interest intervention reading folders to our classroom library. These exciting, brightly illustrated articles in various reading levels focus on a variety of comprehension skills. These motivating reading materials encourage my students to identify main ideas, sequence events, read for details, make inferences, and determine a central theme. To further develop core reading skills, I was able to purchase a new reading intervention, "From Phonics to Reading" to add to our toolbox for growing readers. This intervention has my students studying phonetic patterns in multisyllabic words, sentences, and connected texts. Students chop syllables, build words, highlight patterns, solve a variety of word puzzles, and independently track their progress. This intervention continues to encourage my students to focus on the structure of words - building their decoding, fluency, and encoding of words. These materials have added motivating learning opportunities and enhanced my classroom's inclusive environment. Many thanks to the OEF for investing and funding the success of our community's learners!



Hiawatha Elementary Social Emotional Staff Library

The “Hiawatha Elementary Social Emotional Staff Library” - Okemos Education Foundation Grant will provide social emotional books, teacher activity guides, and posters for grades K-4th grade for the development of a staff social emotional library. Teachers will be able to check out items to use with their classrooms and provide feedback regarding items and the lessons to inform the replication and expansion of the social emotional library at other elementary schools within the district. We know that when there is an investment in the social emotional learning of students, it will impact their skills and classroom behaviors, therefore contributing to the overall success of their academic and school experience. Hiawatha Elementary wants to thank the Okemos Education Foundation for their support in this initiative.



Makerspace

We are so lucky to revitalize our poster and Makerspace resources for both Kinawa and Chippewa Libraries. The new posters have helped us update and diversify our collection. As visual learners, posters help us explore new ideas, make one feel welcome, and add aesthetic appeal to the libraries. The Makerspace allows students to explore STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art and math) concepts with hands-on activities like SNAP Circuitry projects, logic puzzles, and other fun and engaging games and activities.

The OEF helped us start the Makerspace at Chippewa Library several years ago and now with this new grant we are updating and extending the collection to both schools. Students love to engage and explore new activities especially those that are different from their daily routine enriching their school lives. Thank you to the OEF for continuing to support our students!



Okemos Public Montessori Teachers Receive Lee Gerard Grant

Christine Batora, Erin Gould, & Susie Black, Montessori

Okemos Public Montessori teachers received the \$2000 Lee Gerard Professional Development Grant in January, allowing them to attend the annual American Montessori Society (AMS) Event held last March in Nashville, Tennessee. The 2022 Montessori Event focused on equity in the classroom. Isabel Wilkerson, author of *The Warmth of Many Suns* and *Caste* was the Nancy McCormick Rambusch keynote speaker of the event. Other impactful speakers included humanitarian and activist Ashley Judd and Dr. Ulcca Joshi Hansen of Grantmakers for Education and author of *The Future of Smart*.



OPM teachers Christine Batora, Erin Gould, and Susie Black

Okemos Public Montessori teachers Christine Batora, Susie Black, and Erin Gould spent three days attending workshops, lectures, and open discussion forums centering on social justice, equity, peace, and best practices for students. The grant from the OEF paid for their admission to the conference.

Following the conference, the teachers guided professional development rooted in Montessori philosophy and reinvigorated by attendance at the conference. They shared Montessori resources to meet the professional development needs of staff as well as to support families in the school. The teachers also shared some impressionistic stories - following the example of story-telling that Maria Montessori used with students in order to inspire further study - to staff and families at OPM, to Montessori teachers at Kinawa and Chippewa, and to our OPS administration.



Susie Black gives a lesson on the rock cycle with materials found and purchased at the conference.



OPM first grader uses picture cards to retell a Montessori impressionistic story shared by teacher Erin Gould. These vibrant story-telling cards were purchased for the children at the Montessori Event.

Okemos Public Montessori teachers would like to once again extend their deepest gratitude to OEF for their financial support for such a rich and beneficial experience! The seeds planted from attendance at the AMS event are sure to grow and blossom for years to come.

Apple Awards

Parents/guardians are invited to celebrate the excellent staff throughout our district by purchasing an APPLE Award. The **APPLE Award (Amazing Performance in Promoting Learning and Excellence)** offers an opportunity for parents/guardians to communicate their appreciation for someone who has positively impacted their child(ren). Any time throughout the year, you can visit the OEF website (oefsite.org) and purchase (\$20 donation) a 5 x 7 certificate. A personalized message can also be included and is encouraged. Staff are genuinely touched when they receive such an impactful gesture which acknowledges their impact. It is a simple but wonderful way to say thank you!



Responsive Classroom

Cornell Elementary

As students returned to the classroom after Covid, we noticed that many of them struggled to be back in school. As a staff, we wanted something that would embed Social Emotional Learning into our entire day, rather than an add on. We wanted to change the classroom experience so that emotional growth and connectivity were infused into the culture. We wanted to strive to model lifelong skills, such as - how to greet each other, how to give each other compliments, and how to work as a cohesive group on a common goal. To this end we implemented the Responsive Classroom - a student-centered, social and emotional learning approach to teaching and discipline. It consists of a set of research, and evidence-based practices designed to create safe, joyful, and engaging classrooms and school communities for both students and teachers. In evaluating the effects of this approach we have seen so many positive changes. Students know other students better. They have shared more interests than ever before. We all know that one child likes pickles. We learned that another child's dad had a brain tumor removed. This, the little things and the big, is true bonding.

We are creating space for each other to be heard and valued. It has allowed students to be more open to working with others that they may not have worked with before. It has truly formed a strong sense of belonging. An authentic community is being formed, allowing a safe place to grow. School can be stressful. When you start each day with a shared experience and fun, it eases the burden and increases our capacity to stretch and grow. Thank you to the OEF for giving us the opportunity to truly help our students be successful as they return to school!



OHS Quiz Bowl Program

A tremendously successful year for the OHS Quiz Bowl program was capped off with the Varsity A team finishing in a tie for 60th place (out of 272 teams!) at the NAQT national championship meet in Atlanta over Memorial Day weekend. Team members Harshil C., Pooja M., Pranav S., and Aswath K. thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to compete against the top quiz bowl programs in the country.

The team was very grateful to receive a generous Okemos Education Foundation mini-grant that offset a significant portion of the registration fee. The OEF has long been a supporter of Okemos Quiz Bowl, and their help has allowed the program to flourish, with well over forty students attending weekly practices and participating in various competitions throughout the school year. Thank you, OEF!

Docent Day!

Thanks to the generosity of OEF, Okemos Public Montessori @ Central partnered with two representatives from Nokomis Learning Center to create a year-long educational program. We wanted to provide students with an authentic and immersive learning experience about local Native American culture. We also wanted to strengthen and expand the relationship between Okemos Public Schools and Nokomis, especially as we looked for new ways to authentically honor Native American heritage and Chief Okemos within our curriculum. This program aligned with our district goals of equity and diversity, as well as with the curricular standards of our third grade social studies curriculum. We considered this a pilot year for the program, and we hope to share this experience with Bennett Woods, Cornell, and Hiawatha once it is fully developed.

After each lesson from a Nokomis speaker, students debriefed and shared reflections in small or large groups. Then, they shared a reflection and plan to continue their education for that month. Each lesson from Nokomis allowed the students to spend quality time with the representative and the hands-on exhibits. After the last lesson in April, students created showcase presentations that displayed knowledge they had gained throughout all of the

Nokomis lessons, called Docent Day. All upper elementary students filled the OPM @ Central gym on the early release day in May. Students created a visual presentation for the Okemos community where they acted as a docent to educate those walking by their presentation. The gym was sectioned off into the 4 seasons and each upper elementary class represented how the Indigenous People of Michigan met their basic needs in that season. The floor became the

Great Lakes where children could fish and learn about fish. Then they could move to the left to play a drum and learn about music. Storytelling around a wigwam filled the other corner of the gym and walking through the process of making maple sugar filled another. Tall exhibits, hands on models, and wall to wall visuals helped the docents share their experience. We had visitors from ages 3 through fourth grade, OPM staff, and OPS administration visit the event. The project not only was used as an advertisement for Nokomis Learning Center, but also a summative assessment tool that showcased student comprehension of the

third grade Social Studies standards. We look forward to seeing where this may lead next year!

Thank you OEF!



Update from the Superintendent

by **John Hood**, Superintendent



BALLOT INITIATIVE

Last year, Okemos Public Schools began a collaborative process to evaluate needs across the district. This summer the Board of Education unanimously voted to call for an election on a bond proposal for consideration by our voters. On November 8th, voters in the Okemos community will weigh in on a comprehensive ballot proposal which, if approved, is expected to maintain the current tax rate for our residents.

The major projects in the proposal would:

- Construct secure school entry corridors at all school buildings
- Replace Cornell Elementary (at its current location), Chippewa Middle School and Kinawa Middle School
- Construct a new car line and additional learning space at Hiawatha
- Replace building roofs, insulation, and mechanical systems where needed
- Address aging infrastructure in every school building
- Address aging and undersized fine arts and athletics facilities
- Replace student “1 to 1” learning devices and classroom technology
- Purchase flexible learning furniture in classrooms
- Gradually replace our aging bus fleet
- Allow the district to meet these needs, while preserving the district’s limited general fund for student programming.

Okemosbond.net contains information that provides greater detail on the bond proposal, answers to frequently asked questions, and gives background information. To access this information directly, please scan the QR code below:



**Please remember to vote
November 8th!**

COMMUNITY EMAIL SERVICE

The Okemos Public Schools embraces community involvement in its schools and the sharing of information regarding the district with all of our community members. Furthermore, the district wishes to empower our community to be well-educated and informed in regards to district matters.

To connect with our community, the district is offering an At Large Community Information Service, intended for members of the Okemos community who are not currently receiving district email communications. In other words, those who do not have students in the district but wish to be informed. *(Examples: future Okemos families, former Okemos families, senior citizens, other Okemos community members and local businesses)*

Note: Current caregivers/parents/guardians for currently enrolled students already receive these communications and therefore, no action is necessary.

If you wish to be included on the district’s At Large Community Information Service to receive email communications from the Superintendent’s Office, please click on the QR code below. Opt-ins are processed at the start of each month, so those that opt in mid month will receive communications at the start of the next month.

Once you opt in to this service, you will receive email communications from the Superintendent’s office until you ask to be removed from the list. If you have any questions, please contact our Media and Technology Department at 517-706-5624.



**Okemos Community
Information Service**

Thank you OEF!

Thank you OEF for your generous financial support of the Okemos Schools. Your support allows us to offer enriching school activities that engage our students and honor our hardworking teachers, staff and volunteers. The more our students and staff feel connected with their schools, the better outcomes are- for all! Thank you!

Thank you Okemos Community!

The Okemos Public Schools recognizes the critical importance of the partnership between home and school, and how we work best when we work together on meeting the needs of our children. Thank you for your continued support, advocacy and constructive feedback as we navigate educating with excellence together.

John J. Hood
Superintendent



First Friday!!

Any given day working in education, in any capacity, comes with a number of challenges. In appreciation of the work of the Okemos staff the OEF provides First Friday (of the month) treats to ALL staff in all schools and all departments, over 550 employees! We are grateful for the dedication of all staff to ensure our students are able to learn in a safe, positive and creative atmosphere. THANK YOU!

#GreatHarvestBread
#BarkhamCreekFarms



Award Recipients 2022

Outstanding Educators in Okemos Public Schools

Commitment to Excellence Award-

Joanna Adams

Commitment to Excellence, Social Worker Cornell Elementary



Joanna is beginning her 7th year with Okemos Public Schools and 17th year as a social worker. She earned her Bachelor's Degree in Psychology with a concentration in Learning and Development from Framingham State University in Massachusetts. She earned her Master's Degree in Clinical Social Work with a certification in

School Social Work from Michigan State University.

Joanna is the Special Education School Social Worker at Cornell Elementary. In previous years, Joanna also served as the social worker for the entire student population at Cornell and OPM at Central. She became a school social worker because she loves children, school, and helping others. She finds her job rewarding, fulfilling, and fun! She is very thankful for her caring and compassionate colleagues, who inspire children and one another on a daily basis. It makes Okemos a wonderful place to work!

In her free time, Joanna enjoys road trips, gardening, home improvement projects, and most importantly, spending time with friends, family, and her petite goldendoodle, Benny.

Stacy Cook

Commitment to Excellence, 1st grade Hiawatha

Stacy is the product of Okemos Public Schools. She attended Cornell for kindergarten, continuing on to Edgewood, Kinawa, and graduating from Okemos High School in 1982. She received her Bachelor's and Master's degrees from Michigan State University.

Becoming an educator was important to Stacy because her mom, grandma and aunt were also teachers and were greatly influential in her career.

This August, Stacy began her 34th year of teaching. She began her career at Cornell Elementary teaching 5th grade, coached the first-ever girls soccer team at Okemos High School and has been a first grade teacher at Hiawatha Elementary since it first opened in 1989.



Family is of utmost importance to Stacy. She is proud to be a wife to her husband, Roger Cook, and a mom to three grown children who also graduated from Okemos Schools: Corey (Paige), Kyle (Lexi) and Claire (Brian). She is also a grandmother to two grandchildren, Carter (4) and Collyn (3) and a dog-grandma to three grand-dogs: Breck, Matty, and Benona.

Outside of the classroom, Stacy enjoys spending time traveling up north and relaxing at the family pond with family and friends. She also enjoys staying active; regularly exercising on the Peloton, walking the grand-dogs and assisting with various tasks around the family property.

When asked about working in Okemos, Stacy says, "My experiences of working in Okemos have been very rewarding. Okemos is a very desirable place to work. Every school year, I meet new wide-eyed first graders and their parents. The students start as very dependent learners and leave as independent, confident and prepared almost-second graders. I would like to thank all of my fellow educators (past and present), support staff, administrators and parents for making Okemos such a great place to teach!"

*Commitment to Excellence Awards Recipients continued...***Gracie DeLadurantaye***Commitment to Excellence, 3rd grade Cornell*

Gracie DeLadurantaye is in her 7th year of teaching 3rd grade. Her first year of teaching took her to Fremont, California however she has been at Cornell Elementary ever since. Gracie graduated from Michigan State University twice, first as an undergraduate in Elementary Education with a minor in Geography and then with a Master's Degree in K-12 Educational Administration.



This past July, Gracie married her husband Brian at a beautiful barn in Sparta- very fitting for a dedicated Spartan couple!

They recently bought a house in East Lansing and are very busy with house projects. They have no pets... yet. In her time outside of the classroom, Gracie enjoys spending time with family and friends, reading, working on art projects, and taking trips to Lake Michigan.

When asked why she enjoys teaching in Okemos, her answer is simple: I love my school community! I have so much appreciation and admiration for my amazing fellow staff members - I love my Cornell family! I feel lucky to be in a district with so many talented educators that I can work with and learn from. I am especially grateful for my wonderful students - past and present - and their families. No doubt about it, teaching is a hard job, but I am constantly reminded why I teach when I come to school and see my foxes and watch them grow. I am so proud of my students and am thankful for the smiles they bring to my day!

Andrew Floyd*Commitment to Excellence, German OHS*

With a B.A in German & Italian from University of Michigan and a M.A. in Educational Studies from University of Michigan, Andy begins his 21st year as a German teacher at OHS. He is especially excited about a new adventure this year teaching an 8th grade German course at Chippewa. This is the only district he has worked in and he cannot imagine ever wanting to be anywhere else.



Andy particularly enjoys interacting with students both within and beyond the classroom. He inherited a wonderful immersion exchange program from his predecessor, Sarah Juntune, and has organized 8 such exchanges with a partner school in Radebeul, a beautiful, small town on the outskirts of the wonderful city of Dresden.

He spent his first nine years at OHS coaching soccer; the past ten years he served as OHS quiz bowl advisor.

He is in constant awe of the professionalism and dedication of everyone in the OPS. Likewise, he feels grateful every day for the opportunity to work in a community that so values and supports its schools. Despite living in an adjacent district, Andy and his wife, Kim, have chosen to have their children attend Okemos schools and they are proud to all be wolves!

Quirky Facts: Andy spent two separate years studying abroad in Germany, one in Freiburg and the other in Heidelberg. He also had a two-month stint working in the Kellogg's packaging plant in Bremen. He is a self-confessed soccer fanatic and avid supporter of SC Freiburg!

Congratulations to all of our 2022 Award Recipients!

Your commitment to excellence in all you do is recognized and appreciated!

Commitment to Excellence Awards Recipients continued...

Megan Malkus

Commitment to Excellence, 2nd grade Cornell



Megan has been a part of the Okemos School District since 2007 when she started as an intern at Cornell Elementary. Megan has taught both upper and lower elementary including 4 years as a Montessori teacher at Okemos Public Montessori. She has spent the last 8 years teaching 2nd grade at Cornell. Megan graduated from MSU with a degree in Family

Community Services with a young child emphasis. With this degree, she taught preschool in her hometown of South Lyon and was the Assistant Childcare Director at a local early childhood center. Megan returned to MSU where she earned a post-BA degree in Elementary Education. She later earned her master's degree in Teaching and Curriculum, also from MSU.

Megan lives in Okemos with her husband Nathan, daughters Piper (an 8th grader at Chippewa) and Penelope (a 5th grader at Kinawa), and her son Will (a second grader at Cornell). As a former soccer player, Megan loves watching Will and Penelope play for Okemos and Piper at Lansing Rush and is currently helping coach Penelope's OSC team. She also enjoys spending getaways in Harbor Springs and Petoskey and watching movies with her family. Her favorite kid's movie is Ratatouille, but she also has a deep love for classics like Star Wars and Indiana Jones.

Megan's favorite thing about teaching is forming meaningful relationships with all her students. Her goal is not only to help each child reach their full potential academically but she is equally grounded in helping her students become kind and caring human beings. One of her favorite things to do with her 2nd graders each year is to raise painted lady butterflies and release them in the Spring. When asked about working in Okemos, Megan says, "I feel so fortunate to work in a district where I am surrounded by some of the most amazing teachers. Their examples of teaching and love for their job continue to inspire me to want to work harder and be better for my students".

Christine Skoutelas

Commitment to Excellence, LINKS Coordinator & Special Ed Coach OHS

Christine Skoutelas has twenty years of experience teaching at the high school level. She taught Biology and Earth Science in Romeo, Haslett, and Grand Ledge before coming to Okemos and working as a special education resource room teacher.

Christine brought the LINKS Peer to Peer program to Okemos in 2013. Six students were enrolled in a pilot program that first year, and the enrollment has continuously grown. There are currently 63 students taking the class this semester. This year Christine began a new role focusing exclusively on the LINKS program and also serving as Special Ed Coach for the building. She is married to a very handsome and stubborn - excuse me, STRONG - Greek man and she has two delightful children - Penelope, who is 10, and Daphne, who is 8. She grew up in Okemos and she feels lucky to work in a community with so many different types of support, resources, and opportunities for students. In her free time, Christine enjoys reading, writing, and creating.



Steve Stierley

Commitment to Excellence, Principal, Kinawa



Steve Stierley is in his 20th year as an educator, 9th year as a principal, and 7th year as principal of Kinawa 5-6 school. Steve graduated from Grand Valley State University with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Kinesiology and a minor in History. He earned his Master's degree in Administration from Central Michigan University.

Steve has a passion for teaching and learning and thrives to leave a positive impact on every student and staff member he comes into contact with.

Commitment to Excellence Awards Recipients continued...

He believes his role as a principal is to remove barriers to allow teachers and students to shine.

Steve and his wife Kristyn, live in Okemos. They have three kids Hudson (18), Oliver (8), and Grace (5). Steve enjoys coaching/cheering on his kids in many sports. In his free time Steve enjoys spending time with his family, being outdoors, and cheering for the Michigan State Spartans and Detroit Tigers.

Sara Roland

Commitment to Excellence, Assistant Principal, Kinawa



Sara Roland is in her 17th year as an educator and is currently the Assistant Principal of Kinawa 5-6 School. Sara graduated from Michigan State University with a Bachelor's degree in Elementary Education and Language Arts which also included an internship year at Bennett Woods Elementary in 2004. Sara continued her education by obtaining her Masters degree in Literacy from Loyola College in

Maryland, and in 2018 received her Ed. Specialist degree in Educational Leadership from the University of Michigan - Flint.

Sara has experience teaching Kindergarten, 1st, 2nd, and 3rd grades both out-of-state and within Okemos Public Schools, in addition to working as a Reading Interventionist for Lapeer Community Schools. In 2018, Sara had the opportunity to pursue a role in administration and has since thoroughly enjoyed working alongside the incredible staff, students, and families at Kinawa.

As an educator, Sara strives to build meaningful relationships and places collaboration at the center of her work. As for her time in Okemos, Sara believes that the focus on supporting students as individuals through a together approach is what sets the district apart. She values the intentional care placed on meeting the needs of everyone connected to the learning community and for the collective mindset of reflection and growth. Sara feels incredibly grateful to be working for Okemos Public School and continues to admire the commitment to excellence that is demonstrated by all who serve our students. Sara and her husband Jeff live in Williamston and spend a majority of the time being fans at the many sporting events for their sons, Hunter (14) and Cooper (12). In her free time, Sara enjoys staying active, reading, and spending time with her extended family.

Pam Williams

Commitment to Excellence, Resource Room Teacher OHS

Pam Williams has been a special education teacher for almost 34 years. She began her career after graduating from Michigan State University in December of 1988 after earning her Bachelor of Arts Degree in education. She immediately went on to earn her Master's Degree in Learning Disabilities. Her first job was at Dansville High School where she was the only special education teacher working with students of varying needs. In 2001, she joined the staff at Okemos High School where she was a resource teacher for 21 years. Pam also was the advisor to a World Game Club for a couple years as well as advisor of the Black Student Union which she started.



She retired from teaching at the end of June 2022, but continues to work with students as the part-time Youth Director at Faith Lutheran Church here in Okemos. Pam also has been placing and supervising high school foreign exchange students for about thirteen years. This has enabled her to meet many amazing students from around the world, while also meeting new families in and around Okemos.

She has been married to her husband, Bill, for 35 years! They have three children, T.J., Tara, and Drew. They have also been blessed with three beautiful grandchildren, Peyton, Riley and Luca.

Outside of work, she loves to volunteer, read, go to the movies and spend time with family and friends. She has enjoyed traveling around the world which she has been able to do as a result of working with the exchange students.

Pam feels very fortunate to have been able to work in a career that she loved for so many years. She loves working with the kids and making a difference in the lives of our youth. The memories she has from all of her students, and from working with some amazing educators here in Okemos is something she will always carry in her heart.

Special Recognition Award-

Jim Boardway

Special Recognition Award, Student Supervisor, Chippewa



Prior to joining Chippewa Middle School as their Student Supervisor in 2018, Jim was the Executive Director for three statewide trade Associations. He received the Michigan Society of Association Executives “Chairman’s Gavel Award” for dedicated service to the profession proven by advancing the ideas and aspirations of the Chairman of the Board.

Jim graduated from Spring Arbor University, with a Bachelor of Arts of Degree in Art Education. Education is a deep part of Jim’s heritage with a Great Aunt, sister and daughter all educators.

In Jim’s spare time, he delights in spending time with his two daughters’ families, especially his four grandchildren. “I can’t think of a more rewarding use of my time than investing time and support into these precious lives” says Jim. He also is a part-time cashier at a local Home Depot store. A little-known fact about Jim’s is his holiday illumination skills which were recognized by his home town Chamber of Commerce in a Christmas light decorating contest.

When asked about his time in Okemos Jim says, “The administration, teachers and staff at Chippewa Middle School have provided me with amazing support and flexibility to make sure that each and every student feels known, acknowledged and appreciated. Being part of the Okemos School Community has allowed me the opportunity to create friendships and mentors throughout the district.

Doug Warren

Special Recognition Award, At-Risk Aide, Hiawatha

Doug is starting his eleventh year of teaching (depending on how you figure it), mostly at Hiawatha Elementary in Okemos. Although a majority of his teaching is in the at-risk role working with struggling learners with literacy and mathematics, he has served in numerous other roles along the way. These roles included long-term substitute teaching (at Cornell Elementary), daily substitute teaching, teacher aide, playground supervisor, and early release after-school program coordinator. He also volunteered in numerous classrooms, as well as serving on Hiawatha’s Parent Teacher Organization (including two years as PTO President).



Jennifer Nanzer

Special Recognition Award, At-Risk Aide, Hiawatha

Jennifer has served as an at-risk aide in Okemos Schools for the last four years. In this position she worked with small groups of children to focus on improving their reading and math skills. She has held many positions in Okemos Schools since moving to Okemos in 2016, including substituting in classrooms, the library, and the front office, as well as being a lunch and recess supervisor. She returned to Okemos Schools as a Speech-Language Pathologist substitute in Fall 2022. She enjoys working with elementary school students and seeing their progress in small group settings.

Jennifer earned her M.S. degree in Speech-Language Pathology from Michigan State University in 2003. Following this she worked at several rehabilitation clinics in Austin, TX, in roles including managing clinics and supervising therapists. She and her husband, Jeffrey, moved to Maryland in 2009, where she worked in the school system as a preschool teacher.

Jennifer’s husband is a professor at MSU; she has two children: Henry, a freshman at Okemos High School, and Nora, a seventh grader at Chippewa. Jennifer and her family love living in the Okemos area and look forward to many more years here.

In 2017, Doug returned to his alma mater Michigan State University to obtain his elementary teaching endorsement and to renew his secondary endorsement. In addition to his Bachelor of Arts in multidisciplinary studies, Doug has a Master's Degree in the field of Journalism, also obtained through MSU.

Prior to working at Hiawatha, Doug's professional life started in the field of journalism, where he worked for a political newsletter as a reporter and editor, primarily covering the Michigan Senate. He also worked for various non-profit organizations, in positions such as a communications specialist and Director of Communication.

Outside of school, Doug is also a tutor in literacy, mathematics, and English language – primarily for elementary-aged students. He also coached his two sons Conor (age 21) and Braden (19) for a number of years, mostly in the sport of soccer. Recent empty nesters, Doug and his wife JoLynne enjoy traveling and seeing their boys march in their respective university marching bands - Conor on the trumpet with the Spartan Marching Band and Braden on the clarinet with the Central Michigan University Chippewa Marching Band. Doug is also writing a series of non-fiction books geared toward upper elementary students, which he hopes to have published one day.

Doug shares that, "Whether it's working with students as a teacher in an at-risk group, a full classroom, tutoring, or somewhere such as the playground, education starts with building relationships. From that foundation, showing students - of all abilities - that they too can succeed is very achievable. I get a lot of satisfaction from helping students discover the joys of learning through developing a belief in themselves. "I want to thank the numerous co-workers who have inspired me throughout the years, and the students I've worked with who have challenged me to be the best I can be as well."

Dean Bolton Volunteer Award

Carly Patel

Dean Bolton Volunteer Award

Carly still remembers the first event she volunteered for before her oldest son even began Kindergarten. A neighbor asked her to join her at Hiawatha to help clean up the landscaping at the end of summer. She thought this would be a perfect opportunity to meet some of the parents and her son might meet some new friends while helping get the school ready for the first day back. What she didn't know is that it would confirm that she can't tell the difference between a weed and a plant! But, it would also be the start of 8 years of volunteering in the Okemos Schools.



Volunteer work has always played a big role in her life so she knew when her kids entered school she would be an active parent. She has had the

privilege of serving on the PTO boards at both Hiawatha and Kinawa. She also represents Hiawatha on the District Parent Council and has served on district committees. After her younger son started Kindergarten she realized that there was another way she could help the teachers and schools and that was to become a substitute teacher. She has been working as a substitute for 5 years now and although some days are challenging she loves getting to know the students. It is a great feeling to have them call out her name when they're walking through the hall or run up to give her a hug when she is outside working recess.

The planning and organizing of school events and fundraisers is hard work and can be stressful at times, but she does it because she loves seeing the faces of the students, staff, and families enjoying the result of all the volunteers' hard work. It makes her so happy to see the school community come together to raise money for the school or celebrate the end of another great year. These are some of the best memories of her time in the schools.

On top of volunteering and substituting, she has two boys that keep her busy. Aryan, is in 7th grade at Chippewa and Micah, is in 4th grade at Hiawatha. They love to play sports and are both rock stars at School of Rock. Her husband, Subhash, and she also own and manage rental properties in the area. Her life is crazy most of the time, but she wouldn't have it any other way! She considers herself lucky to be able to give back to the schools and school communities. She sees first hand how hard the teachers and staff are working for the kids and the best way she can say thank you is to give back her time to them. She looks forward to many more years serving the Okemos School District.



*Dean Bolton Volunteer Award continued-***Niki Robinson***Dean Bolton Volunteer Award*

Niki Robinson is a devoted leader, wife and mother of three children. She is involved as a volunteer in many aspects of the Okemos Education System for both the safety of children and as a mentor. In the Okemos School District Niki served on the DPTO and PTO, as a Lunch Aid and classroom volunteer, Student Supervisor at the high school, as well as a parent representative on hiring committees. She has also participated in various community forums including inclusion, equity and diversity. She enjoys encouraging children to believe in themselves and make better choices as they become the best of themselves. Niki is always seen with a smile. She currently has two children attending the Okemos School District and one attending their first year of college. Niki's favorite quote is "Heeey, good morning and have a wonderful day at school" and to close the day out, "Have a good night and see you all in the morning."

**Help us Recognize Excellence!****Annual OEF Awards Banquet**

As a part of supporting excellence it is also important that we celebrate and recognize the excellence within our district. Each year we host an Annual Awards Banquet where we honor teachers, support staff, and a parent volunteer. (See previous article.) We take this time to honor those who have contributed to making Okemos Public Schools the amazing district it is. While this evening individually recognizes a handful of staff and others, it is truly an opportunity to celebrate ALL of our Okemos School District family as we work Together... Educating with Excellence, Inspiring Each Learner for Life.

This year we recognize:**COMMITMENT TO EXCELLENCE -***Instructional Staff or Administrator*

- Joanna Adams
- Stacy Cook
- Gracie DeLadurantaye
- Andrew Floyd
- Megan Malkus
- Christine Skoutelas
- Steve Stierley/Sara Roland
- Pam Williams

SPECIAL RECOGNITION -*Support Staff i.e. Admin Assistant, Parapro, Food Service, Transportation, etc.*

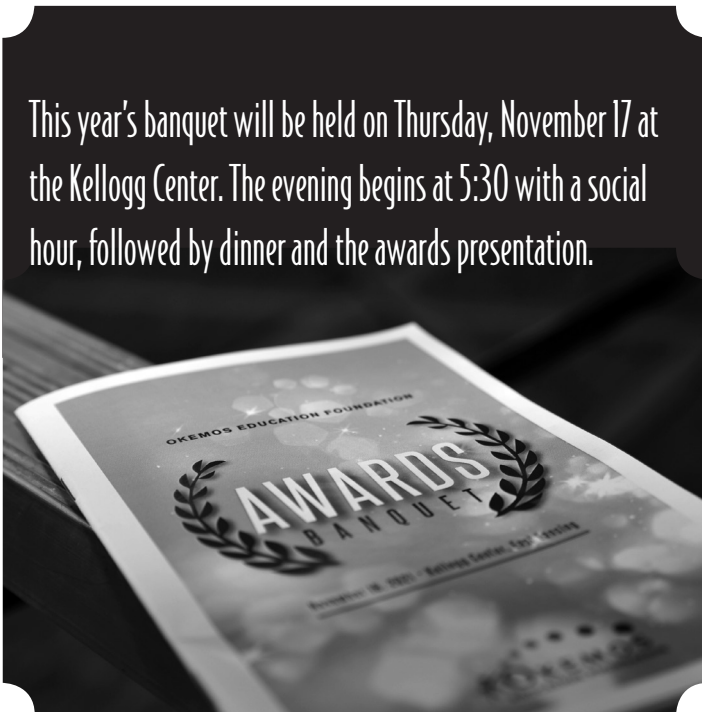
- Jim Boardway
- Jennifer Nanzer/Doug Warren

DEAN BOLTON VOLUNTEER SERVICE -*Parent/Community member*

- Carly Patel
- Niki Robinson

This is a wonderful opportunity to honor individuals who exhibit excellence and have been selected to receive one of our awards. If you have attended before, you know what a special event this is. We hope many of you can join us as we celebrate our 2022 recipients. Tickets are available at each school or online at oefsite.org.

This year's banquet will be held on Thursday, November 17 at the Kellogg Center. The evening begins at 5:30 with a social hour, followed by dinner and the awards presentation.



SCHOOL BOARD CANDIDATES

**ELECTION DAY:
TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 8**



Tom Buffett

Bio Statement

Tom Buffett and his wife moved to Michigan in 2006 and to Okemos in 2013 because of the diversity and reputation of its public schools. Tom has been an involved parent and volunteered in schools for many years, serving on the Okemos Music Patrons the

past two years, and coaching basketball on and off over the past six years.

Born on the northside of Chicago but raised in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Tom ventured to California for college (UC Santa Cruz), a graduate degree in public policy (USC), and teaching 6th grade in Pasadena. He then returned to Cambridge and completed his doctorate in administration and policy at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Since moving to Michigan, Tom has designed and implemented professional support for Michigan educators from MSU's Office of K-12 Outreach, served as principal for the Lewton Global Studies/Spanish Immersion School in Lansing, and consulted with the Michigan Department of Education. Now semi-retired, Tom continues to consult with school districts around the state.

Tom has two daughters, Olivia (OHS) and Helena (Chippewa). His wife, Desiree Baolian Qin, is a faculty member at MSU. Tom is running for his first term as Trustee. Please visit tombuffett.com for more information.

Mary Gebara

Bio Statement

Mary Gebara, and her husband, Rani Gebara, a PM&R physician at Michigan State University, have lived in Okemos since 2010. They have four daughters, one currently in law school, and three others in the Okemos Public Schools.



Mary has a Bachelor's of Science in Business Administration and Psychology from Central Michigan University, and a Master of Arts in Human Development and Family Studies with a focus in Child Development from Michigan State University. Prior to attending graduate school, Mary worked in the investment management and healthcare industries. During her time at MSU,

she managed the research program at the Child Development Laboratories in East Lansing and Haslett.

During the pandemic, Mary was appointed by Governor Whitmer to represent school leaders in Michigan on the Return to School Advisory Council and Student Recovery Council. Mary helped create strategies and roadmaps for students and staff to return to school safely.

Mary was elected to the Board of Education in November 2018 and currently serves as president of the board, she is also a member of the Policy committee and serves on the Okemos Education Foundation.

I don't have a website, but I do use facebook for an online presence. It is <https://www.facebook.com/mgebaraboardofeducation>

Liz Luyendyk**Bio Statement**

After earning her bachelor's degree from Colorado State in 2001, Liz spent most of her career with United Way in non-profit management. She served as a campaign manager in San Diego before relocating to Kansas City where she became the Director of New Business Development. When her husband joined MSU in 2012, they moved to Okemos becoming an OPS family in 2015 when their daughter started Kindergarten at Cornell, and again in 2017 with their son starting Begindergarten at OPM.



Liz has spent her time at Cornell Elementary as an active classroom volunteer who has been elected to the PTO board as President for the last 5 years. Known to the community as a hard-working, compassionate leader, she was asked to serve on the 2019 Strategic Planning Committee, numerous hiring committees, as the parent representative for District Parent Council, and even as coach. Liz has served OPS in many capacities throughout her 7 years, and her strongest commitment remains to the relationships she's developed with parents, students, teachers, staff, and administrators.

More importantly, he also met his amazing wife there. After living in many interesting places as she pursued her graduate work, they settled in Okemos to raise their family. Nathan currently enjoys the rewarding experience of being a stay-at-home parent to his three beautiful children.

Please find more information on his website at nathanmahn.com.

Shulawn L. Doxie**Bio Statement**

Shulawn Doxie and her family moved to Okemos in 2015. The district's high academic performance and diversity of the student population were key factors for Shulawn and her husband's decision to move to the Okemos community. Shulawn's eldest son is a student at Kinawa and her youngest son is a student at Okemos Public Montessori.



Shulawn has been an active volunteer for a number of school activities over the years, including serving as a member of the Okemos Public Schools Cultural Diversity Advisory Committee since 2018.

Shulawn graduated from Michigan State University with a Bachelor of Arts in Finance and from Northwood University with a Master of Business Administration. Shulawn is also a fellow of the Michigan Education Policy Fellowship Program.

She has worked as a civil servant for the State of Michigan for over 20 years in various capacities with the Michigan Department of Education and the Michigan State Housing Development Authority. Shulawn currently serves as Chief of Staff to the Chief Deputy Superintendent of the Michigan Department of Education. Her experience over the years includes reviewing state and federal legislation; managing multimillion-dollar budgets in state and federal funds; and working with community organizations supporting underserved or vulnerable populations.

<https://www.shulawndoxie4opsboard.com>

Nathan Mahn**Bio Statement**

Nathan Mahn and his wife Kendall moved to the area in 2014, and then Okemos in 2015 in large part due to the excellent reputation of the school district. They arrived with their first child, and their family has grown to three wonderful children, currently aged nine, six, and two, including an



incredible daughter with special needs.

Nathan grew up in the small community of Kaukauna, WI before attending the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where he earned both his Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Electrical Engineering.

BUILDING AN **EQUITABLE** AND **INCLUSIVE** SCHOOL DISTRICT

Over the summer, the OPS Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Advisory Coalition gathered input from students, staff, caregivers, and community members to update the district's equity plan. Work teams are being established this fall to put the equity plan into action. We are looking for volunteers to help bring the plan to life - please contact Dr. Lara Slee, Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI), for more information (lara.slee@okemosk12.net, 517-706-5011).

Being equitable in OPS means that we are creating fair and inclusive learning experiences for all students. Every person has opportunities to thrive and reach their potential. They all get what they need, and needs will differ from person to person. Equity is often mixed up with equality, which means that everyone gets the same support. Here are two examples of equity:

- Because she broke her arm, the young woman wrote slower than usual; she was given extra time to take her final exam.
- A student who is not reading at grade level will be invited to summer school, while others who are reading at or above grade level will not.

Building an equitable and inclusive school district is something we must do in partnership with our community. The Okemos Education Foundation has made a commitment to equity in OPS, and they are giving us opportunities to learn and grow to better support our students. During the 2021-22 school year, OEF funds helped:

- 28 staff members receive 16 hours of social justice training from the Justice Leaders Collaborative.
- 3rd and 4th graders at Okemos Public Montessori learn about Native American history and culture from our Nokomis Cultural Heritage Center partners throughout the school year. We plan to expand this program to Bennett Woods, Cornell, and Hiawatha.
- All district administrators and directors participate in Eastern Michigan University's Leading for Equity and Justice Certificate course.



Here are some of the equity-related initiatives currently underway in the district:

- The district is partnering with Child and Family Charities to embed a mental health clinic within Okemos High School as part of the Expanding, Enhancing Emotional Health (E3) grant. The E3 program will provide on-site comprehensive mental health services from mild to moderate severity of need with a full-time therapist based within the clinic at OHS five days a week. The therapist will be able to serve all youth ages 5-21 within the school district, but will primarily focus on the high school youth.
- This fall, the Okemos Woof Pack makes its official debut at Chippewa and Okemos High School. The district has partnered with Canines for Change to create a team of facility dogs that will enhance our learning community. Our vision is to have a dog in each school to motivate, empower, and provide comfort to students and staff alike. The support of our inaugural donors - Grewal Law and Delta Dental - has allowed us to purchase our first two dogs this summer. Training and puppy visits to schools will begin in the fall. Chip will work at Chippewa, while Willow joins CeCe at OHS, doubling the size of their pack. Special thanks to Melissa Samluk and CeCe for piloting the program at OHS last year.
- Ingham Intermediate School District has received a grant that will provide OPS with a mental health therapist to work primarily with students in grades K-8 up to three days per week. The therapist can provide one-on-one counseling and group therapy.
- We are developing Culturally Responsive Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (CRPBIS) systems for all grade levels.
- A monthly cultural overview is sent to staff to highlight major holidays and events that are likely to connect with our curriculum. All staff have also received a calendar of religious holidays to consider when scheduling assignments, assessments, and events.



Okemos Public Schools Equity Plan

PURPOSE

Provide direction for creating learning environments that are safe, healthy, and effective for everyone.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

DIVERSITY

Our students, families, staff, and community members bring with them diverse and unique identities, abilities, and strengths.

EQUITY

Each student has access to, can meaningfully participate in, and make progress in learning experiences that result in empowerment and academic success.

INCLUSIVITY

Everyone has the right to feel safe, happy, affirmed, and encouraged.

COLLABORATION

Our system must be representative of, constructed by, and responsive to all members of our community.

REFLECTION

Making continuous progress requires us to reflect on our intentions, evaluate our processed and practices, and measure our impacts.

DATA-DRIVEN DECISION-MAKING

Data from diverse sources will be routinely collected and analyzed. We will use new information to guide our decision-making and inform ways in which we adapt to the needs of our community.

AREAS OF FOCUS

AUTHENTIC SELVES & RELATIONSHIPS

Goal 1: OPS is an inclusive district in which students, staff, families, and community members accept and respect the diverse identities of one another.

Goal 2: Our relationships are built upon actions that promote and sustain mutual trust and respect.

Goal 3: We utilize effective, consistent, culturally and linguistically responsive, and honest communication strategies to build community and establish collaboration.

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE - SUSTAINING EDUCATION

Goal 4: We have developed a district culture in which students, staff, families, and community members are prepared for an increasingly diverse society & world.

POLICIES/PRACTICES/PROCEDURES

Goal 7: OPS has a clear public statement of its values and commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Goal 8: OPS policies, practices, and procedures are representative of, constructed by, and responsive to students, staff, families, and community members.

INSTRUCTION/CURRICULUM/ ASSESSMENT

Goal 5: Our district's instructional practices, curriculum, and assessment methods are responsive to and inclusive of diverse perspectives, abilities, and cultures.

Goal 6: Our students' academic assessment data show that the opportunity gaps between student groups have decreased.



*Together...educating with excellence,
inspiring each learner for life.*

2021-2022 OEF DONORS

(7/1/21 through 6/30/22)



The Okemos Education Foundation relies on financial donations in order to fulfill its mission. Thank you to our 2020-2021 Partners in Education for supporting Okemos students!

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Marcia & Bruce Tanner
Michael Williams

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Make a donation today and we'll add your name to the donor list.

Thank you for supporting Okemos students!

Who Are The Okemos Education Foundation Donors?

- Parents of Okemos students
- Parents of Okemos graduates
- Okemos alumni
- Grandparents of Okemos students and alumni
- Okemos school staff
- Community members
- Area businesses

People who believe in the importance of high-quality education for our youth.. people like you! Please donate today! Use the donation form on the back page, donate online at www.oefsite.org or scan the QR code.

Your support makes a difference in the lives of Okemos students!

2021-2022 FINANCIAL REPORT

The OEF's mission is to support excellence and innovation in the classroom.

For the 21-22 school year we committed:

- Over \$20,000 to staff through grants
- \$10,000 to the district's DEI initiative
- \$5,000 to the Seeds of Science field trip at MSU for ALL 4th grade students

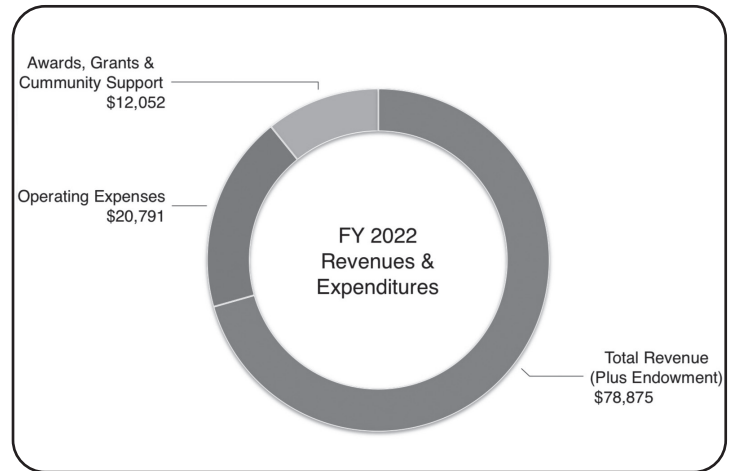
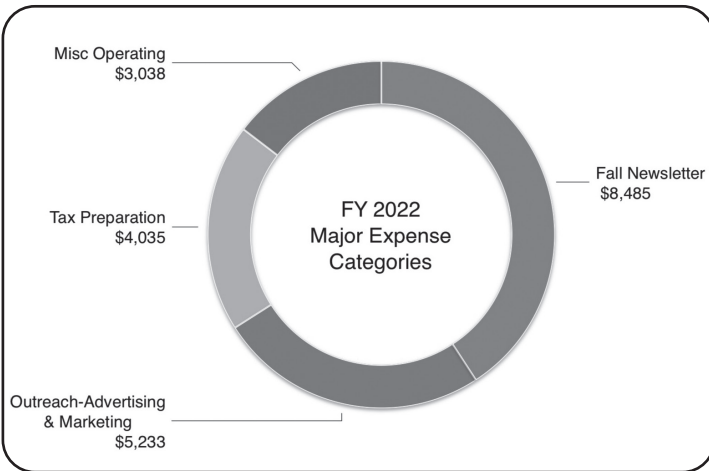
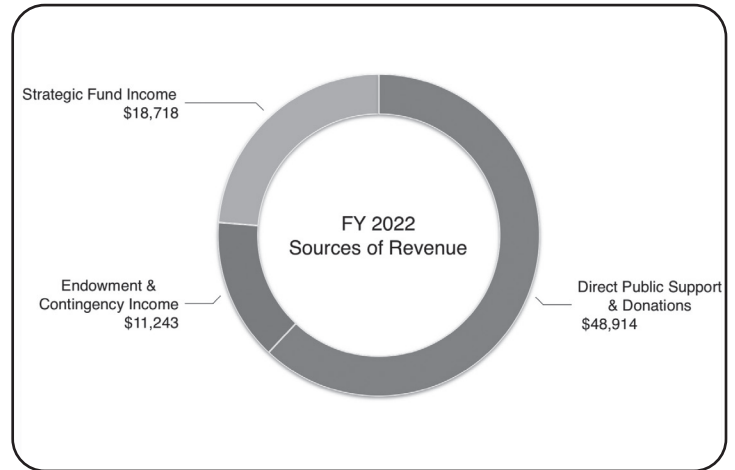
In addition, we received two large donations:

- \$60,000 that went directly back to staff last year (Michael Williams, alumni)
- \$20,000 that will go toward professional development for OHS English Department staff (Marcia, retired OHS English teacher, and Bruce Tanner)

For the 22-23 school year our budget supports:

- Continuing the \$20,000+ for grants
- \$5,000 (possibly more) to support DEI in the district
- \$5,000 to the Seeds of Science field trip
- Reinstating our author for March is Reading Month - \$2500 (with a matching amount from Horizon Bank) to support an author visit to all elementary schools for March is Reading Month

As we work with the district to identify additional needs that allow the OEF to positively impact student learning, your financial support is needed. Please consider making a donation by check to the OEF (4406 Okemos Rd), online at oefsite.org, or you can scan the QR code on the back cover. **THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!**



BUSINESS SPONSORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

Let the OEF help you advertise your business to the 2600 families in the Okemos Public School District. Contact Board Chair **Sue Hallman** at chair@oefsite.org for more information about how your support can help our students.

Our full donor list is printed in our newsletter each year. It is always available on our website at www.oefsite.org. Make a donation today and we'll add your name to our list.

The OEF is grateful to the following businesses for their generosity and support.

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Make a Donation Your contribution will help to enhance the education of all Okemos students.

Sponsor an OEF program or event Let the OEF help you advertise your generosity as you help the OEF support Okemos students. Learn more at www.oefsite.org/business.

Purchase an Okemos Education Foundation **APPLE Award** to honor an Okemos teacher or staff member.

Leave a Legacy Support Okemos students with a planned gift through your will or trust.

Attend the annual **OEF Awards Banquet** and enjoy a memorable evening as we celebrate educational excellence in our district.

Volunteer your time and talents. We need help with **development/fundraising, publicity, graphic design, and website support.**

Follow the OEF on **Facebook** or **Twitter** and help spread the word about the OEF.

Contact OEF Chair Sue Hallman at chair@oefsite.org for more information.
Thank you!

Visit www.oefsite.org to support OEF



www.oefsite.org



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Your donation helps the OEF support educational excellence in our schools.
Donate today!

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Please include this form with your donation. Donations are tax-deductible, as permitted by law. Please see our website for recognition benefits based on levels of giving. Online donations can be made at www.oefsite.org

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Parent/Grandparent (circle one) of Okemos grad
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OPS staff (current/former)

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