

OEF Fall 2020

NEWS



OKEMOS STRONGer together!

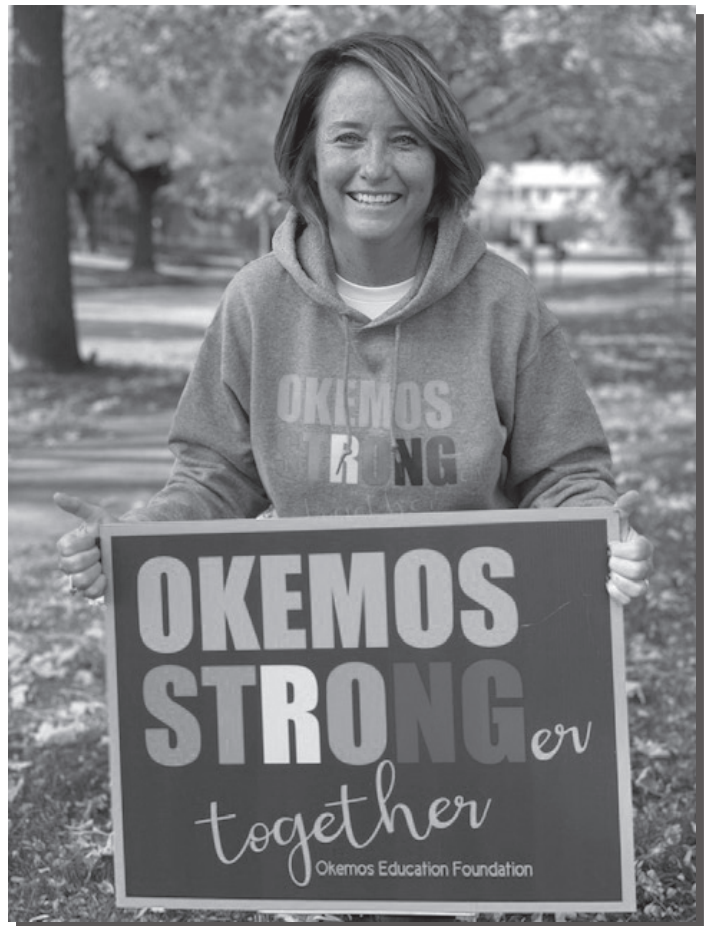
A Message from OEF Board Chair, **Sue Hallman**

For over 35 years, the Okemos Education Foundation (OEF) has proudly partnered with the community to financially support excellence and innovation in the classroom. Funded by your donations, we have been able to positively impact classrooms through various grant opportunities for teachers, as well as provide special programming to enhance the educational experience of our students. In this publication we have highlighted classrooms and programs which illustrate the benefits of this partnership for our students.

The 2020 year has provided unique and unprecedented challenges for families and communities. As a result of the pandemic, Okemos Public Schools have been challenged to deliver instruction in a virtual environment, keeping children safe while ensuring their academic progress. This challenge requires that OEF rethink how we support excellence and innovation in the classroom.

The OEF is in the process of identifying areas in this new environment that we can and should support. For the 2020-21 school year, the OEF has committed to funding student clubs at the elementary and secondary levels.

continued...



What's Inside...

- Grants and Programs
- 2020 Commitment to Excellence Recipients
- Update from the Superintendent
- School Board Candidates



These clubs will be virtual and offer students an opportunity to engage with others in a social platform, a critical need during this time of social distancing. We also recognize that there may be additional needs when students return to “in school” learning. It is with this knowledge of the known and unknown, that we are committed to working with the district to support our common goal of **“together. . . educating with excellence”**.

Our campaign, **OKEMOS STRONGer together**, has set a lofty goal of \$100,000. In an effort to successfully achieve this goal, the OEF is relying on our strong community partnership. This fall we are undertaking a direct solicitation drive. It is with this collaborative spirit that we hope you will consider donating to the OEF. ALL contributions, no matter the amount, will vastly enhance opportunities for Okemos students during this unique time in education. Donations can be made online at offsite.org, scanning the QR code located below, or mailing a check in the envelope included in this newsletter.

After living in this community 35+ years I have witnessed first hand the numerous challenges we have faced. In every instance, our shared commitment to excellence has remained at the forefront. Even during these unique times when we are physically apart, we can be together in our commitment to keeping Okemos schools strong.

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.**



PROGRAMS AND GRANTS

The OEF focuses on providing classroom grants to support excellence and innovation for students while also supporting ongoing projects, Unfortunately, due to Covid, we missed many of these opportunities last year. **As we rethink how to support students in this new learning environment, we hope you enjoy taking...**

A Look Back at Some OEF Highlights



Emmett Till - History was alive at OHS on 4-19-16

(We continue to look for special projects like this to support)

The Okemos Education Foundation presented a panel discussion about the 1955 murder of Emmett Till, one of the pivotal events that sparked the American Civil Rights Movement. The Legacy of Emmett Till: Understanding History from Four Perspectives featured guest speakers including Emmett Till's cousin, Wheeler Parker Jr., who was an eyewitness to the events, author and historian Dr. Chris Crowe, FBI agent Dale Killinger who reopened the case in 2005, and MSU English and African American Studies professor.

What people said...

The program was experienced by every Okemos High School student during the school day and by over 500 community members who attended the evening session. The OEF is grateful to OHS English teacher Jane Phillips and the OHS Black Student Union for their hard work in bringing this special event to our community.

Dr. Tamara Butler (MSU), Panelist

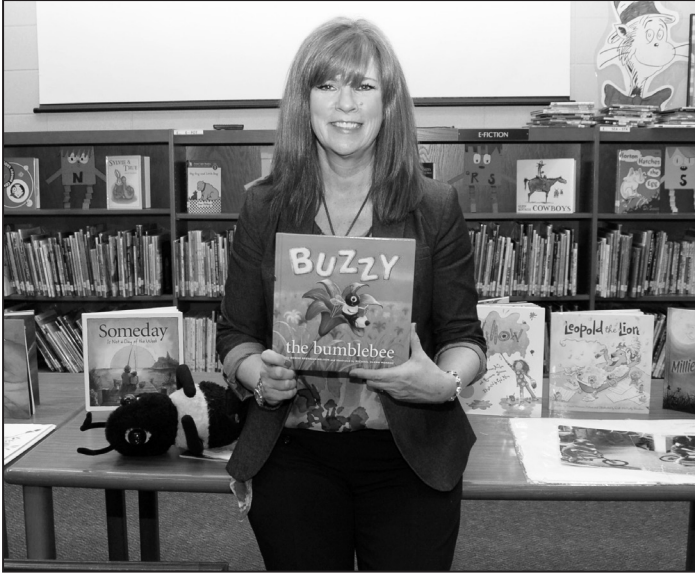
This event changed my life and the lives of my family. It brought history to life and our community together. But more importantly, it provided content for meaningful school and family discussions on what this means to us as human beings today-- what can we alive ("don't hate, appreciate"). **Survey Comment**

I'm really glad that Wheeler Parker was able to come because it gave us a view of what it was like to be there when it happened. I liked that the speakers interacted with us and answered our questions. **OHS Student**

I am so pleased that this event was brought to my community and hope that discussions of civil/human rights will be ongoing. The message of Emmett Till and the viewpoints shared by the panel and attendees were powerful. Thank you for shining such a powerful light! **Susie Black, OPM Central teacher**

Author Visit - Denise Brennan-Nelson

(Each year the OEF partners with Horizon Bank to bring an author to all four elementary schools - the OEF continues to support this)



Michigan author Denise Brennan-Nelson visited Okemos elementary schools March 27-30, 2017. Brennan-Nelson, who has authored 20 picture books, including Buzzy the Bumblebee, Willow, Leopold the Lion, and Someday, spoke to students about using their imaginations to spark ideas, which are the start of any story. "Keep your imaginations turned on," Brennan-Nelson told students, "and don't ever stop wondering."

Brennan-Nelson encouraged students to keep a journal. "Ideas come at us all the time. Be ready for them." The author showed students a stack of her own journals, one started at age 10, another begun in 1932 by her grandmother. "She wasn't an author," Brennan-Nelson told students, "but her journal is the best story I've ever read." Brennan-Nelson makes the point that writing isn't just for authors: "Everyone is a writer because no one else can tell your story."

Hands On Learning Through Owl Pellets

(Made possible by a micro grant provided by the OEF)

Ever wonder what an owl eats? The 3rd and 4th grade students at Okemos Public Montessori at Central can tell you. They dissected owl pellets as part of a science unit on animal structure last year.

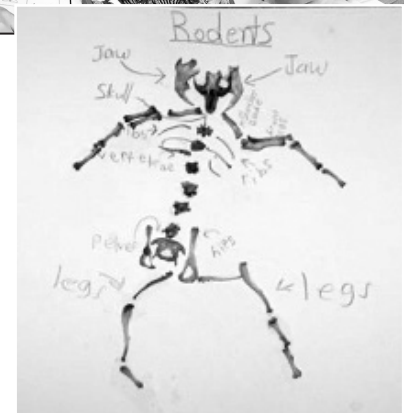
Owls consume their prey whole, then regurgitate a mass of indigestible parts. These hard, dry pellets can be pulled apart to reveal the contents of the owl's meal. Using toothpicks, OPM students gently separated the different parts of the pellets, which were purchased from a scientific supply company.

The students used photo guides to identify the types of bones. Bone identification led to the discovery of what type of animal the owl had eaten (bird, rodent, etc.).

In some cases, the pellet contained enough bones to allow students to assemble the bones in the proper structure on paper, building a skeleton of the prey.

Students wrote a newsletter article about their learning, prepared visual presentations for a school-wide display, and gave a verbal presentation for an OEF board member.

This activity taught students grade-appropriate science lessons about animal diet, bone structure, and how both predator and prey fit into an ecosystem. But it also taught them about the excitement of scientific discovery, how to analyze findings and compare them to a chart, broadened their vocabulary, honed their written and verbal presentation skills, and, most importantly, made learning fun.



Students beamed with pride as they showed off their bone diagrams and explained what they learned.

"It was so fun!" "I loved it!" Not all students were so enthusiastic at first. One student was disgusted by the idea of the project and hung back as his classmates started pulling apart their group's pellet. But, after he saw the tiny bones, he was intrigued and participated in the rest of the activity. And that may be the most valuable lesson of all.

The Okemos Education Foundation provided funding for the owl pellet project through the OEF Micro Grant program.

Electrophysiology - Active Learning at OHS

(Made possible by a grant provided by the OEF)

OHS biology teachers now have specialized equipment to give their students an active learning experience in the study of neuroscience. OHS teacher Colleen Palmer requested an OEF grant to purchase three Human to Human Electrophysiology devices, equipment which allows users to see (and feel) how the human brain transmits messages through our neurons.



Our brains constantly send electrical impulses to our neurons, telling them to perform everyday

functions such as squeezing our hands or raising our arms. When hooked up to this new equipment, the brain's electrical impulses are detected, then amplified and transmitted to another person, causing that second person's arm to rise or fist to squeeze. Students were able to experience having their arm be controlled by the brain of their peer, making a memorable impression about the functionality of our neurons. Most students laughed during the experience. "This feels so weird!" was a common exclamation. A few disliked the sensation, but all left the lesson with a much clearer understanding of how our neurons, brain, and muscles work together.

The OEF is grateful to the OHS biology teachers for requesting this equipment and helping to inspire our own students here in Okemos.



Lifesaving Lessons at Kinawa

(Made possible by a grant provided by the OEF)

Kinawa students had the opportunity to learn First Aid and CPR skills this year as part of a special exploratory class. Teacher Sheree Jungwirth is a licensed CPR instructor who created the class to allow 5th and 6th graders the opportunity to learn valuable life saving skills, including CPR and the use of an AED (Automated External Defibrillator) device. Students completed the American Red Cross Adult/Child/Infant CPR/First Aid/AED course during the class and had their new skills tested through both practical and written exams.

Meridian Township paramedics visited the class at the end of the session. Paramedics demonstrated their equipment and role-played what would happen during a real emergency. Students started CPR using an AED device, then saw exactly what the paramedics would do when they arrive on the scene. This experience will hopefully give students the confidence to put their lifesaving skills to use, should they ever be faced with an emergency.

The OEF partnered with the Kinawa Parent Group to fund the purchase of the manikins and AED machines needed to offer this valuable class to Kinawa students.



Learn more about the projects and programs made possible by OEF funding at www.oefsite.org/grants

Update from the Superintendent

by **John Hood**, Superintendent

Strategic Plan Update

From October to December 2019, the Okemos Public Schools (OPS) engaged in a Strategic Planning process characterized by community input and active participation of fifty committee participants. Preparatory to the Strategic Planning sessions, consultation occurred with key stakeholders by way of a pre-planning community survey, high school student focus group meetings and a community forum during the fall of 2019. As a result of this planning, a new, shared vision for the future of the district was articulated that included becoming leaders in educational equity, and a focus on the development of students to have the academic and social-emotional skills they need to pursue the many pathways to a positive future. In addition, the district's mission statement was both validated and updated to incorporate "each" learner, signifying our efforts to meet individual needs of our students:

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

During the process, the following critical issue areas were identified with goal areas established to ensure these continue to be areas of focus and clear outcomes for the district:

- ***Equity***
- ***Instruction and Learning***
- ***Social Emotional Learning***
- ***Organizational Capacity***
- ***Facilities***

Equity Planning Initiative

As a diversity enhanced district, Okemos Public Schools continually works to ensure that we are meeting the academic and behavioral needs of ALL of our students. As educators, we strive to examine and reflect on our relationships, curriculum, pedagogy, policies and practices to promote the success of every child.

Okemos Public Schools commitment to creating a culturally competent and responsive school environment continues with the district addressing community concerns through updates to our handbooks to ban hate symbols on clothing and vehicles, review of an equity driven Board policy review tool, establishing a committee to review of our use of "chiefs" as our mascot, and additional equity learning to inform online instructional practices - to name a few!



Additionally, this year the Okemos schools rewrite our district Equity Plan, informing that process by seeking additional community input to drive updates and to inform our continuous improvement. Our view of educational equity casts a wide lens- including analysis of equity needs, implementation of equity driven practices, ensuring high outcomes for each student, supporting equity focused leadership and the continual capacity building throughout our systems, including our policies and practices. We are excited to continue this journey to improve our system and serve as a model for other districts.

Bond Implementation Updates

In May of 2019, voters in the Okemos community voted to approve the 24.9 million dollar ballot proposal to meet areas of need identified across our district. Since then, the district has been working diligently on implementation of the proposal. Major projects implemented thus far include:

Expansion of Bennett Woods

The construction project for improvements to Bennett Woods elementary school is successfully winding down. After working through the significant disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting mitigation measures, the building was ready to receive administration and teaching staff to support the remote learning environment. The classroom additions at the north end of the building are substantially complete and offer a fantastic expansion of the teaching space within the school. Several interior areas were renovated including new toilet rooms to support the added classrooms and relocating the art room to expand the multi-purpose room. Exterior improvements were also made. The new bus drop off loop with additional parking spaces is clearly visible now and will receive final asphalt pavement soon. A new fence was installed around the kindergarten playground area to replace the aging and damaged brick wall. It really improves the look and functionality of that safety barrier. The construction team is looking forward to completing the last few remaining construction items over the next few weeks and are excited to hear how the students and families enjoy the building once in-person learning is occurring again.

Bennett Woods:



New Music Room



New Fence at Kindergarten Playground



New Women's Restroom Renovation



East Addition Corridor and Lockers



New Casework in Classroom Addition



West Addition Exterior Window

.....

We are grateful to our community for your continued financial support and look forward to continued implementation of bond projects this year and beyond!

Thank you OEF!

Thank you OEF for your financial support of K-12 student clubs for the Okemos Schools during the 2020-21 school year. Your generous support will allow us to offer enriching after school activities that strengthen bonds between our students and schools! The more students feel connected with their schools, the better outcomes are- for all! Thank you!

Thank you Okemos Community!

Covid 19 continues to challenge our entire community in unforeseen ways. The Okemos Public Schools extends our sincere gratitude to our families. We honor and recognize 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 this difficult time together.

John J. Hood, Superintendent



Toilet Room Wall Tile and Lighting at Central

Phase #1 - Installation of air conditioning, bathroom renovations
(Phase #2 - Summer 2021)

Phase #1 Highlights:

- *Central: Toilet Room Improvements*
- *Chippewa: Toilet Room Improvements, Air Conditioning to Science Classrooms, and LED Lighting Improvements to Gymnasiums and Music Classrooms*
- *Cornell: Air Conditioning in All Classrooms*
- *Edgewood: Toilet Room Improvements and Air Conditioning in Office Area*
- *Hiawatha: Air Conditioning in All Classrooms*
- *High School: LED Lighting Improvements to Gymnasiums and Pool Areas*
- *Kinawa: LED Lighting Improvements to Gymnasium*



Chippewa Gymnasium LED Lighting



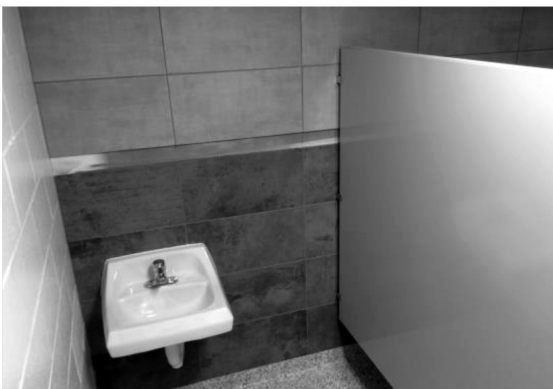
LED Lighting at High School Gymnasium



Unit Ventilator with Air Conditioning at Hiawatha



Rooftop Condensing Unit for Air Conditioning at Cornell



Edgewood Toilet Room with Tile and Partitions

2020 Okemos Education Foundation Award Recipients

The OEF is pleased to announce the recipients of this year's awards for excellence, given to educators, support staff, community volunteers, and distinguished alumni who have made a significant impact on the Okemos school community. Learn more at www.oefsite.org/2020banquet.



Jose Gutiérrez, Okemos High School
Commitment to Excellence Award Recipient

Jose, is currently in his ninth year teaching Spanish at Okemos High School. Before coming to Okemos he taught fifth and sixth grade in another school district and spent time at the college level with Michigan State University. In addition, this is his sixth year as the World Language Club advisor.

Jose is originally from Mexico and was born in Morelia, Michoacán. Prior to moving to the United States, he was a lawyer working for the Mexican federal government for 4 years. Once in the United States he received his teaching certification from Grand Valley State University.

In his free time, he loves spending time with his lovely wife Renée and their 4 children, José, Elizabeth, David and Mateo. He enjoys being outside, running, bicycling, walking his 3 dogs, playing tennis and soccer. Jose also enjoys cooking, dancing, painting and playing the ukulele.

Jose shares that, *“I have truly enjoyed teaching these years at Okemos High School and being able to share with my students my beautiful language and culture. I feel very lucky to be part of this amazing school district and work everyday with the best administrators, staff and students.”*

Congratulations and thank you Jose for all you do. We are glad you chose this profession and this district!



Paul Hinze, Kinawa Middle School
Commitment to Excellence Award Recipient

Paul, has been a 5th grader for 20 years! Currently he is at Kinawa teaching Science and LA. His passion is science and his BA was in elementary education with a minor in environmental science. He received a Masters in Science with both degrees coming from MSU. His first years as a teacher started at Wardcliff where he partnered with Ivy Schmidt and Sheryl Hudler, moving to Central and working with Don Poore. Central was also the school where he started the Salmon in the School program, supplementing the Chinook Salmon life cycle into the science curriculum.

Paul's wife, Jennifer is primary owner of Polkadots Boutique in Old Town. He has become a DIY'er as he tackles the role of “maintenance/ landlord” of their small business. He is always assessing student needs and “creating new things” to support individual/ classroom needs. He has a sophomore (Hunter) and freshman (Nagoya) at OHS. He loves hearing and seeing their experiences and feels fortunate that his family gets to know so many talented and supportive teachers at OHS.

With science as his passion he loves anything outdoors. His family loves the water so often they find themselves paddleboarding, kayaking or fishing lakes and streams around Michigan.

When asked about working in Okemos, Paul says, *“I feel honored and blessed to work in Okemos. As a teacher, I've only known the Okemos district but it is clear this district is filled with talented teachers who are very respected. As I look back on my career I feel lucky to have “crossed paths” with some of the best humans on the planet taking advantage of the impressions they left to be able to integrate those experiences into some of my core beliefs as a teacher.”*

Congratulations Paul! We are glad you have stayed in 5th grade for so many years!



Rachel Krier, Montessori Program, Okemos Public Schools
Commitment to Excellence Award

Rachel, is beginning her 14th year as an elementary resource room teacher; all 14 years with the public Montessori program. As a graduate of Michigan State University, she is a proud Spartan having earned her Bachelor's Degree in Special Education with an emphasis on learning disabilities and a Master's Degree in Literacy Instruction with a certification as a reading consultant.

Rachel's family includes her husband, Dr. Joshua Krier; son, Harrison; parents Deborah and Christopher Danko and mother-in-law, Virgiline Krier.

In her free time she enjoys keeping up with her almost 3 year old (playing a lot of super heroes and block building), reading, traveling, attending MSU football games, and trying new recipes.

As a teacher working with struggling students, Rachel says her favorite part of spending her day with her students is witnessing their curiosity and all the "ah-ha" moments along the way.

Rachel shares that, *"The greatest part of working in Okemos is that I always feel that I am part of a team. Parents, students, educators, and administrators are always working together to meet a common goal. I feel supported by my colleagues, mentors, and relationships. I have formed lifelong friendships and a community that are invaluable to me."*

Congratulations Rachel and thank you for inspiring our neediest learners. You make a difference!



Tyler Hursey, Okemos High School
Commitment to Excellence Award Recipient

Tyler, received his Bachelor of Science degree from Michigan State University with a major in Mathematics and minor in Computer Science. He also earned a master's degree from MSU in Curriculum and Teaching.

Currently Tyler is in his 25th year of teaching mathematics at Okemos High School. He has also coached girls and boys golf and girls and boys basketball at OHS.

His family includes: wife, Christie, who is a teacher; children: Andrew, a sophomore at OHS and Rachel, an eighth grader at Chippewa; parents, Thomas (*former teacher*), and Tina (*former teacher*) and brother Todd (*teacher*). As you can see, teaching runs in the family for Tyler!!

In his free time, he enjoys: golfing, biking, reading, watching sports, travelling and spending time with friends and family.

About his time in Okemos Tyler says, *"I would like to thank my fellow teachers, support staff, administrators, students, athletes, and parents for making Okemos a great place to teach. The commitment shown to help students learn, improve and grow is truly something special that we have in our community. I continue to learn so much from those who I interact with on a day to day basis."*

Thank you Tyler for your commitment and congratulations!



Melissa Samluk, Okemos Public Schools
Commitment to Excellence Award

Melissa, attended the University of Detroit Mercy, earning a BA in History and French (*majors*). She also attended Michigan State University, earning her MA in French Language and Culture as well as a Master’s in Curriculum and Teaching.

Melissa began her career in Okemos in 1998 at Chippewa as an English as Second Language (ESL) teacher. That same year, she began teaching at the high school as a French teacher and has been there ever since. She has also taught History and World Language AC.

Her family includes her husband, Mike and children Kyle (*OHS 2019, currently attending Michigan Tech*), Nathan (*South Lyon HS 2021*), Kaylie (*South Lyon HS 2023*), and Lila (*5th grade*). She also has two ‘fur babies,’ Bear and CeCe.

Reading is a passion of Melissa’s and she just built a Little Free Library with her husband. She started a photography business last year and has run in 12 marathons!

In addition, Melissa coached soccer at OHS for about 14 years, winning a state championship in 2006! She runs the Care Closet at OHS with her partner in crime, Trisha Funk. She also started a non-profit on April 1 of this year, feeding frontline healthcare workers in the Lansing Area!

When asked about her time in Okemos, Melissa says, *“I turned down an interview at Ann Arbor Huron to interview at OHS because Kathy Kirksey made me feel so welcome. I had the good fortune to work alongside Kate Marsh, who was an invaluable mentor, and I can never thank her enough for the guidance that she provided me through the years. I drive 50 miles, one way, to get to Okemos High School. Many people have questioned why I never looked elsewhere for a job. It has always been about the people. Teachers and administrators do not have an adversarial relationship in Okemos. I’ve always thought that was the key. We have a common goal of doing our best for students and families.”*

Congratulations and thank you, Melissa, for doing what is best for students and our community!



Cyndi Webster, Chippewa and Kinawa Middle Schools
Commitment to Excellence Award

Cyndi, graduated with honors from Earlham College, a small private college in Richmond IN, as a Sociology/Anthropology Major with a semester abroad in Europe. She attended the University of Michigan where she was awarded a Masters in Information and Library Science degree and received a K-12 Library Media certificate. Cyndi is starting her 15th year with the district and is currently the Director of the Library Media Centers at Chippewa and Kinawa Schools

Coming from a long line of educators, including her parents, Cyndi was raised in Lansing MI and had the great opportunity to live overseas in Great Britain and travel in Yugoslavia and Germany for college. She lived in Japan while her father did a teacher exchange program with Lansing Public Schools and their sister prefecture Shiga.

She is lucky to come from a family of world travelers who have visited or lived on every continent (including Antarctica) which has formed her worldview on the importance of our global community and her joy in learning about various cultures.

Reading, of course, is a passion of hers as is fighting climate change. She loves that libraries help to share valued resources and reduce the strain on our overburdened environment. She also loves to garden, hike, explore genealogy and visiting her local library.

Libraries intersect all of her career interests of equitable access to information and research, a love of reading and literature, and a joy in working with young people. Cyndi believes that libraries are one of the backbones of democracy.

When asked about her time in Okemos Cyndi says, *“I have been lucky to work for Okemos and a staff that has time and again stood up for libraries when others in the state have been shortsighted and decimated their school libraries’ staffing and funding.”*

Thank you Cyndi for all you do for all of our students and staff. Congratulations!

***Congratulations to all 2020 Award Recipients.
Thank you for your support to Okemos Public Schools!***

Help us Recognize Excellence!

Each year the OEF recognizes excellence in our instructional staff, support staff, a parent volunteer and an OHS alumnus through the following four awards:

- **Commitment to Excellence - instructional staff or administrator**
- **Special Recognition - support staff i.e. admin asst, parapro, food service, transportation, etc.**
- **Dean Bolton Volunteer Service - parent/community member**
- **Alumni**

Nominations for these awards can be made by other staff, a parent or a community member. These nominations are then reviewed, recipients are selected and each is honored at our annual OEF Awards Banquet.

This past spring we received nominations for instructional staff and selected six outstanding individuals, highlighted in the previous article, to receive the Commitment to Excellence Award. Given the unexpected ending to school in March, we did not receive nominations for the other three awards.

We know there are MANY individuals who exhibit excellence in their role of supporting Okemos Public Schools. If you know one of these individuals, please consider nominating them so they can be recognized at our annual banquet. More information and a nomination form can be found at oefsite.org under the tab Annual Awards and OEF Awards for Excellence. These forms are due by Friday, February 19, 2021 and can be submitted to grants@oefsite.org or dropped off on the third floor of the administration building, 4406 Okemos Rd.

Annual OEF Awards Banquet

This is a wonderful opportunity to honor individuals who exhibit excellence and have been selected to receive one of our four 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 2020 recipients.

Typically this is held the third Thursday of November. Given the pandemic we are not able to do that this fall. Recognizing there are still many unknowns, we have tentatively rescheduled the 2020 OEF Awards Banquet.

When: April 29, 2021

5:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.

Where: Kellogg Center at MSU

Why: To recognize and celebrate excellence within the Okemos Public Schools!

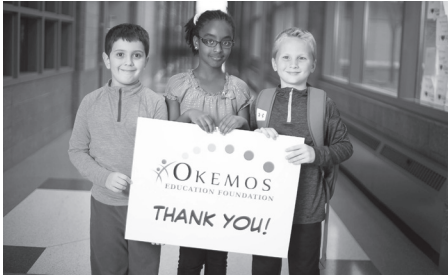
Golf Outing 2021

As part of our OKEMOS STRONGer together campaign we will be hosting a golf outing in the spring. More information will come once details are solidified. We hope you will join us for this fun and worthwhile event!



2019-2020 OEF DONORS

(7/1/19 through 6/30/20)



The Okemos Education Foundation relies on financial donations in order to fulfill its mission. Thank you to our 2019-2020 Partners in Education for supporting Okemos students!

Platinum Donors (\$2,500 - \$4,999)

Granger

Gold Donors (\$1,000 - \$2,499)

Fahay Schultz Burzych Rhodes PLC
James & Maribeth Fletcher
Great Lakes Hand Surgery Center
Dave & Rashi Gupta
Heat 'n Sweep
Hina Shah, DDS
Irem & Tunga Kiyak
Okemos Alumni
Okemos Pointe LLC
True North Development LLC

Silver Donors (\$500-\$999)

Rich & Sarah Allen
Cathy Ash
Stacy Bailey
Michael & Deb Baughman
Mark & Kim Burzych
CBL & Associates
Comcast
Andrew & Erin Hagman
Sue Hallman & Juris Pagrabs
John & Kristen Hood
Thomas & Tina Hursey
Cheri Meier
Shivani & Neal Mody
Steve & Kristin Schoen
Gordon VanWieren Thrun Law
Paul & Darlene Workman

Copper Donors (\$250 - \$499)

Julie Bellinger
Mary Davidson
Desk Drawer Fund
Don Romain
Thomas Glasmacher

Graff Chevrolet-Okemos
Harkness Law Firm, PLLC
Lynna Hassenger
Independent Bank
Kellie's Consignment
Peng Zhang & Hui Liu
Peter & Susan Long
Christopher & Krista Loose
Beth & Jon Lundy
Minesh & Hina Mody
Shannon Nedds
Okemos Auto Collection
Okemos High School Parent Group
Christian & Noelle Palasty
Bidhan & Prasanna Redey
Jeremy & Angela Wilson
Yimin & Yin Xiao

Friends of OEF (Under \$250)

Linda Arens
Lisa Backus
Michelle Beck
John & Nancy Bjorkquist
Scott & Celeste Boboltz
Dean & Helen Bolton
Joseph & Beth Bonsall
Kelly Bozung
Dorean Brazier
Julie Brixie & Randy Schaeztl
Deb Chamberlain
David & Jacquelin Chapman
Christine Tenagalia
PTO Cornell Elementary
Don & Renita Donaldson
Careena Eggleston
Tara Fry
Mary Gebara
Rollin Godette III
Great Lakes Renaissance Fund
Patricia Herring Jackson
John & Meg Janssens
Joe Dunn
Danny & Jennifer Keith
Matthew Koehler
David & Sally Langley
Elizabeth Lentz
Kevin Lim
Wayne & Melanie Lynn
John & Julie MacKenzie
Steve & Kathleen Michael
Corey Neiland
Okemos Public Montessori at Central PTO
Daniel Opsommer
Amy Petersburg
Lindsey Pirochta
Paula Pulter
Tonya Rodriguez
Alan Rosenberg

Karen Salmon
Christina Schoonover
Dan & Christine Sermak
Mark & Christena Simila
Christine Skoutelas
Ron & Georgina Styka
Dennis & Kathleen Swan
Lynne Thatcher
Tomie Raines, Inc.
Pratin & Pratiksha Trivedi
Steve & Darlene Vagnozzi
Frank & Shar Walsh
Hedlun & Stephanie Walton
Charlene Walton-Windham
JoAnn Warren
Theresa Weber
Cyndi Webster
Marcela Westrate
Pamela Williams
Linda & Mark Yaske

We apologize for any errors or COVID data entry delays. Please send any corrections to chair@oefsite.org.

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!

SCHOOL BOARD ELECTION

NOVEMBER 3, 2020

BOARD CANDIDATES:

ANDY PHELPS - My name is Andy Phelps, a proud husband and devoted father of two Okemos students, and I am excited for the opportunity to serve as a member of the Okemos Board of Education.

For decades, the Okemos Public Schools have set the standard for the highest quality educational opportunities for all students and have continually been recognized as one of the best districts in our state. This should come as no surprise. This reputation is part of the fabric of our community – and is why so many families; including mine, have

made the decision to move to this district.

As a member of the Board of Education, I will work every day to build upon this tradition, drawing from the collective strength of our amazing community, teachers, staff, and students.

I was proud to be a member of the 2019 Okemos Bond Committee which advocated for crucial infrastructure and technology improvements across the district that will directly benefit our



students and families. Not only are we now seeing those improvements come to fruition, but best of all, all of these improvements were made in a fiscally responsible way. Our district is now in a strong position going forward to fund future improvements to maintain the best facilities and technology for our students and staff.

Okemos can continue to create a rich and diverse educational experience that is accessible to all of our students. We can only do this by maintaining small class sizes, a variety of extracurricular activities and a strong portfolio of honors and Advanced Placement courses that will prepare our students for the next level. Broad student participation in the arts, sports, and clubs are a few examples of the educational experience beyond academics. The Okemos Public Schools has many things to be proud of and our challenge is to continue the positive momentum.

I am excited for the opportunity to meet these coming challenges and serve you on the Okemos Board of Education. I humbly ask for your vote and support as together we make this the best school district in the state.

Bio Statement - Andy Phelps is a proud husband, devoted father of two Okemos students, and a candidate for Okemos Board of Education. Andy Phelps and his wife Amanda purchased a home Okemos in 2009 because it was the perfect place to start a new family. They were excited to be part of a community that highly values the educational experience of all students. Andy and Amanda have since had two children, Leila (4th grade) and Jensen (1st grade), enrolled at Bennett Woods Elementary.

Andy and Amanda have been frequent volunteers at their local school including service on the Bennett Woods Family Council where they help with events throughout the year. Andy was proud to be a member of the 2019 Okemos Bond Committee, presenting to the public and helping spread the word about the important and fiscally responsible bond proposal. He is also a volunteer coach for youth softball and basketball.

Before coming to Okemos, Andy attended Dearborn Public Schools and graduated from Western Michigan University with a degree in Political Science and Economics. He has been a proud employee of the State of Michigan since 2004, currently with the Department of Corrections. Andy's wife, Amanda, is a hairstylist in Meridian Township.

JAYME TAYLOR - It's time to channel my continued passion and advocacy for our children's education, our district, and our community. My husband and our 3 boys have resided in Okemos for 14 years. Two of our sons are Okemos alums (Class of '14 and '17) and our baby boy is in 7th grade this school year. Advocating for our boys' educational needs has been my priority for many years. Giving voice to those who do not have one is what drives me. Over the last 14-years I have served our great district as Parent Group President at both Kinawa and Okemos High School (for 11 years), served on 2 Strategic Planning Committees, and served on the Bond Committee to pass the much-needed mileage proposal for continued improvements to our infrastructure, technology, transportation, security, and academics. My commitment has not wavered!



continued...

Great schools are the foundation of a great community. We are blessed to reside in a district with exemplary schools. Yet, even exemplary schools can improve and there is always work to be done to continue the excellence we desire. I am ready to roll up my sleeves and do the work it takes.

The issues of most importance to me:

- Equity. In all its various definitions. Barriers to learning vary and I am dedicated to ensuring all of our students, families, and staff feel safe, heard, and supported.
- Transparency. Our community and stakeholders deserve to know what is happening in their district and why.
- Consistency. Common language, messages, processes, cultures from building to building is essential. Without it, transitions are hard and frustrations can rise. I will work tirelessly to ensure that our district creates a consistent culture.
- Accountability. Your Board of Education, Administration, teachers, and staff are accountable to you.

There is much to celebrate about our phenomenal school district and there is much change needed. Accountability to reward and share the good news, and accountability to listen and make change when needed. We are all in this together. I am humbly asking for your vote so that we may work together towards continued excellence. *“Together... educating with excellence, inspiring each learner for life.”*

Bio Statement - Jayme is an adoring wife, devoted Mother, and doting Nini. Jayme, her husband Jeff, and their 3 boys have proudly called Okemos home for 14 years. 2 of their 3 sons are Okemos graduates and their youngest is now in the 7th grade! Growing up in Holt, Jayme is a lifelong resident of the Greater Lansing area, and has been committed to serving her community.

Early on Jayme demonstrated her leadership skills as captain of her cheerleading squad and president of her class all four years at Holt high school. Her leadership followed her through college and into her professional career where she mentored and trained young professionals. Being involved in her community is also important to her. Jayme has served on numerous volunteer committees for local organizations such as Capital Area United Way, Alzheimer’s Association, and Care Free Medical & Dental.

As Jayme’s boys entered school, she channeled her energies into advocating for their educational needs. Jayme and Jeff’s boys all struggle with learning disabilities and/or ADHD. Advocating and fighting for them has been the center of her world. She understands what this entails. She has fought the fight for the last 17-years, and continues to do so, for her boys. Jayme’s involvement in Okemos Public Schools, for the past 14-years, has been driven by her desire to lead, learn, and make a difference. From serving as Parent Group President at both Kinawa and Okemos High School, to participating in Strategic Planning Committees, and the Say Yes To Okemos Bond Committee, Jayme has the experience to serve as Trustee for Okemos Board of Education.

One of Jayme’s core values is integrity whether in her personal life or her professional career, her reputation and integrity are everything. As she built her successful career, this was evident by the relationships she built with her clients, co-workers, and leadership. She works hard on integrity by treating others with kindness, empathy, dignity and civility. Jayme’s heartfelt compassion for others allows her to feel the suffering and misfortunes of others and gives her a strong desire to do something to alleviate the suffering.

JOE FREIDHOFF - One of the biggest challenges currently facing our schools is the transition to and establishment of quality online learning programs. Because of my professional expertise, I feel called to run for Okemos School Board to help lead through this difficult time. I have more than a decade of experience in K-12 online learning and am an expert on how to do it well. As an example, I serve on the leadership team for the National Standards for Quality Online Learning. Through the standards, we established quality indicators for K-12 online programs, teaching, and courses.

Every year since 2014, I have also authored an annual report on the effectiveness of K-12 virtual learning in Michigan schools which highlights positive trends, but also points out equity concerns and disparities among those in poverty. I know what strong online programs look like and where weaker ones tend to fail, and I want to use that knowledge to help shape our district’s approach.



Even though I am a proponent of online learning, I am also a staunch believer in public schools and face-to-face instruction, having served as a high school teacher in the past. Many residents of Okemos, like my wife and I, choose to live in the district because of its superior academics, sensational fine arts, successful athletic teams, and sizable club offerings. I consider all of these to be critical learning spaces that are necessary for the development and wellbeing of our diverse student body. I am excited to work with district leaders, community members, and other trustees to ensure that this rich Okemos tradition continues.

Bio Statement - Joe and his wife, Laura, and their three sons - Isaac (OHS), Teague (Chippewa), and Gavin (Kinawa) - have resided in Okemos since 2010. Joe’s community involvement includes: coaching youth soccer for the Okemos Soccer Club; volunteering at school-related events such as OPM Flash Dash, Keep Kinawa Moving, and the Spaghetti Dinner; and participating in various organizations such as the Capital Chamber Music Society, the Kinawa Community Garden, and a local food cupboard.

Professionally, Joe has 20 years of experience in K-12 education. He has a Ph.D. in Educational Psychology and Educational Technologies from MSU, and has taught at the high school, undergraduate, and graduate levels. For the last 11 years, Joe has worked for a nonprofit organization that specializes in K-12 online and blended learning and teacher professional development. He is a nationally-recognized expert in K-12 online learning, a leading expert in Michigan’s online learning policies and student performance, and a frequent speaker at national conferences. Joe is also an alumnus of the Institute for Educational Leadership’s Education Policy Fellowship Program. He looks forward to using his professional experiences to serve the Okemos community.



KATIE CAVANAUGH -

I am thrilled to be a Trustee on the Okemos Public Schools Board of Education. Okemos is my hometown, and I am proud to be a graduate of Okemos Public Schools. My two children are thriving in the Montessori programs at Central and Kinawa, and I am grateful that OPS offers unique opportunities for students. Okemos is a great district - I've watched my nieces and nephew, as well as my own kids, grow and learn in our fantastic schools from

preschool through graduation. Serving on the Board of Education has been a rewarding experience, and I am dedicated to continuing and strengthening the District's work of providing the best opportunities for our children with an outstanding and diverse faculty in safe and supportive schools.

Support Our Students, Teachers, and Families

The Covid-19 pandemic has changed education like we never imagined. Within months, our administrators and teachers had to reinvent education to meet the needs of virtual learning. Okemos Public Schools is leading the state in this new challenge by working with experts in online education to devise a new way to teach our curriculum and by training our teachers to successfully implement it. Our students, from the youngest in Kindergarten to those beginning their senior year, are having to quickly adapt to this new reality in education. Our families are having to adapt to this new normal in so many ways - from channeling their inner teacher helping with student learning to juggling work and childcare demands in new ways.

We can help our teachers succeed by providing them with the necessary professional development and training both in providing content online in age appropriate ways and by providing the training and tools to most effectively use technology. Our students will face new challenges, but with support from the District, they will be able to succeed. Regular and consistent synchronous classes, one on one interactions with teachers, and additional educational supports as needed, will keep our students on the path to success.

The Okemos Public School District can help families by offering childcare as much as possible, communicating clearly and openly with parents, and listening to their input and suggestions. All stakeholders will benefit from a well thought out and well communicated plan in the time of a pandemic. I am proud to have helped guide our District in this transition to a rigorous and accessible online platform.

Make The Best Choices For Our Students' and Teachers' Health and Safety

The health and safety of our community is of the utmost importance to me as a mother and Board of Education Trustee. My decisions as a Board member over the past two years have been made with that priority in mind. Our District has a strong commitment to student well-being. We have had to make hard choices in the last several months, but we have chosen to base our decisions on the health and safety of all of our students and staff.

Safe and healthy schools include access to mental health services for any and all students who may need them. During my tenure on the Board, Okemos Public Schools has added a counselor and more administrative aid support for our counselors so students have more access to mental health support. During our online learning, when

students are dealing with more isolation and may be in need of more mental health support, our students are universally screened to identify any emotional needs. In the past two years we have also increased building security by completing the installation of the front door camera/buzzer system, which I lobbied for as a parent before sitting on the board, and thanks to the successful passage of the 2019 school bond, shatterproof film was installed on all school building windows. A safe and healthy school, including virtual schools, provides the best environment for teachers to teach and students to learn and succeed.

Increased Equity and Diversity

Okemos Public Schools is fortunate to have a diverse student body, and we are dedicated to equity and inclusion for our students, staff, and families. We must do more to ensure that all students, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, socio-economic status, or disability are treated with the same respect and offered every opportunity for success in a welcoming and equitable environment. I am pleased to work with our Cultural Diversity Advisory Committee to update and improve the Okemos Public Schools Equity Plan, and I look forward to improving the experiences of all Okemos students and staff.

Working Hard for Okemos Families

After two years' experience as an Okemos Public Schools Board of Education Trustee, I can officially tell you that it is a lot of hard work! Even during normal times, the hours (and meetings) are long. Those were nothing, though, compared to the work the Administration, teachers, and Board of Education have put in to successfully guide the district during the Covid-19 pandemic. I take pride in helping our district, and I work to achieve the best outcome for the most families. During my tenure on the Board, I have:

- **Written resolutions**
- **Encouraged political engagement**
- **Helped lead the successful 2019 school bond campaign that provided funding for many things including new computers and devices for all students, the addition at Bennett Woods to address our growing student body, and renovations on all schools including bathroom upgrades and air conditioning installation**
- **Helped write the new Strategic Plan that will guide our district over the next years**
- **Helped decide on exciting additions to our budget including adding an additional counselor at the 5th - 8th grade level, making lacrosse as a varsity sport, and decreasing student extracurricular fees**
- **And unfortunately, helped make tough decisions on what to cut from our current budget due to the massive cut in state school aid**
- **Served on the Policy Committee that sets policy within our district**
- **Helped guide Okemos Public Schools through the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic**

While it is not always easy, serving the community as a member of the Board of Education has been an honor, and I look forward to continuing to serve as an advocate for our children.

Bio Statement - Katie Cavanaugh is an Okemos native and 1994 OHS graduate. She and her husband, Dr. Bill Truluck, have a 4th grader and a 6th grader, both in the Montessori program. Katie and Bill purposely chose to start their family in Okemos, a perfect place to raise kids. Katie was first elected to the OPS Board of Education in 2018, and she is excited to serve the district for another four years.

Katie has a BA in English and Anthropology from Albion College and a MA in American Studies from George Washington University. For many years, she was Assistant Director of the Michigan Women's Historical Center and Hall of Fame. She has been in the classroom as a substitute

continued...

teacher in several districts, including Okemos, and taught courses in cultural diversity and English at Baker College. Katie now is fortunate to be home with her kids while managing her husband's medical practice.

Katie has a longstanding commitment to community service. She has volunteered with Big Brothers/Big Sisters, served as a Board Member of Michigan Capital Council Girl Scouts, served as a Board Member of the Michigan Women's Studies Association from 2010 to 2018, and, with her husband, has sponsored several OEF, OPM at Central, and Kinawa events. Katie volunteers in her kids' school as classroom helper, a Meet the Masters presenter, guest presenter on women's history, and helps with special events including the Grandparent's Tea, the Flash Dash, and Mileage Club, and is the OPM at Central representative to the District Parent Council. She coached her kids' soccer and t-ball teams for several years. In 2018 Katie founded Secure Our Schools to engage and promote discussion among OPS parents about school security and to lobby the Board and the administration for security improvements.

MELANIE C. LYNN - I am honored to have served our community as a member of the Okemos Board of Education since 2010. I have demonstrated Board leadership serving on various committees and in several Officer positions - President (2 Terms), Vice President (2 Terms), Treasurer and Parliamentarian. I intended to retire my service to the Board of Education at the end of my term in December 2020. However, my leadership, Board of Education experience and learnings can support the governance associated with the COVID-19 challenges and addressing the outstanding equity work. I am committed to this community as we continue to deliver educational excellence in Okemos - TOGETHER...



My husband and I have been part of the Okemos community since 2007. We are the proud parents of three (3) Okemos Public School graduates - 2012, 2014 and 2016. I am an Electrical Engineer, and I have an MBA. I currently work with Consumers Energy (Jackson, MI) managing strategic projects/programs. Additionally, I have experience teaching career and technical education at the high school and post-secondary levels.

During my Board tenure, I have framed my "definition" of effective board service. Effective board service is GOOD GOVERNANCE which involves orderly and transparent policy/decision-making, engaging community/student voice and building consensus. I have experienced our educational community maintain our TOGETHER spirit while delivering excellence in education despite economic fluctuations that significantly impacted the general fund budget, re-configuration of schools, school closings, changes in district leadership, district strategic planning and envisioning/strategically planning our equity journey. My experience and leadership will continue to support GOOD GOVERNANCE as our community addresses the challenges of delivering educational excellence given the COVID-19 pandemic, and as we continue our equity journey to educational justice. On November 3rd, I ask you to re-elect me to continue serving our community in this important capacity.

Bio Statement - Melanie C. Lynn and her husband, Wayne, are the proud parents of three (3) Okemos Public School graduates. They have resided in the Okemos community since 2007. Melanie received her BS in Electrical Engineering from Clemson University (Clemson, South Carolina) and her MBA/Operations Management from the University of South Carolina (Columbia, South Carolina). She manages strategic automation projects/programs at Consumers Energy (Jackson, MI).

Melanie was not only committed to supporting her children's education; she was also an active volunteer in the school community. She enjoyed participating as a member of Parent Groups and volunteering with/supporting athletic activities and Girl Scout Troop leadership.

Melanie is proud of the service that she renders on behalf of children. She completed tenure as the Regional Director for the Mid-Western Region of Jack and Jill of America, Incorporated, a national organization that promotes leadership development, community service and civic engagement for children ages two (2) years old to nineteen (19) years old.

Melanie began her tenure as an appointed member of the Okemos Board of Education in October 2010. She was subsequently elected to serve in 2011 and 2016.

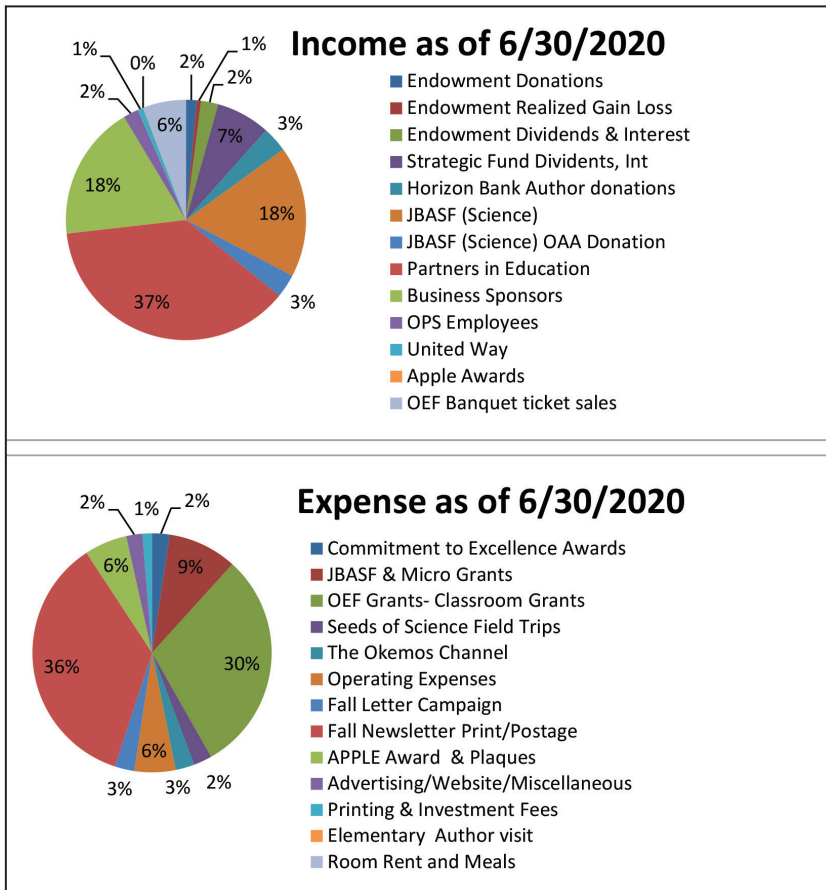
Contact Melanie:
Facebook: @MelanieLynnOPS
Website: www.MelanieLynnOPS.com

THOMAS GORMAN - As a recent graduate, I believe my perspective would be valuable to the board in creating policies regarding student engagement, productivity, and mental health. Without student insight on the board, we cannot expect them to be as successful as they could be. My familiarity with how Okemos operates and recent student experience make my voice uniquely reflect our students' needs. My primary concern is keeping our children safe by following all local, state, and federal public health guidelines. I am eager to prove my worth to the Okemos community as we continue to struggle through this historic and unprecedented time.



Bio Statement - A resident of Okemos since the age of three, I received my K-12 education at Okemos, graduating in 2020. Throughout high school, I have participated in extracurriculars such as the physics and engineering club, band, orchestra, as well as track and cross country. I have volunteered for programs such as Chieftain Champs mentoring as well as Hiawatha and Kinawa after school care. I am currently employed part-time and have worked for the past two summers at an IT company called The Solutions Group, writing code for and managing the database connections of our clients' sites. I am also a student at MSU, pursuing a bachelor's in computer science.

2019-2020 FINANCIAL REPORT



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** for more information about how your support can help our students.

Our full donor list is printed in our Spring 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.

Platinum Sponsors



GRANGER.
COLLECTING TOMORROW'S ENERGY

Gold Sponsors



MERIDIAN MALL

BERKSHIRE HATHAWAY | Tomie Raines
HomeServices REALTORS®

Hina Shah, DDS
Family Dentistry
Okemos

2020-21 OEF TRUSTEES



Back row: John Hood, Pratin Trevedi, Bidhan Redey, Tena Simila
Middle row: Lynne Thatcher, Sue Hallman, Donna Kregelka, Deb Baughman, Shruti Nandani
Front row: Ron Styka, Mary Gebara, Sara Roland, Jen Hall-Berman

OKEMOS EDUCATION FOUNDATION 2020-21 TRUSTEES

Sue Hallman
Chair
Pratin Trivedi
Vice Chair
Lynne Thatcher
Recording Secretary
Bidhan Redey
Treasurer
Jennifer Hall-Berman
Assistant Treasurer

Deb Baughman
 Donna Kregelka
 Shruti Nandani
 Sara Roland
 Tena Simila
 Ron Styka
 Mary Gebara, OPS Board Rep
 John Hood, OPS Superintendent

WAYS YOU CAN SUPPORT THE OEF

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



This newsletter is designed by
 smita sawai | avani-design.com

avani-design
Print • Web • Branding

Printed by Allegra of Lansing
www.ally-press.com



Okemos Education Foundation
4406 Okemos Road
Okemos, MI 48864

www.oefsite.org

Non Profit Org
US Postage
PAID
Okemos MI
Permit No 5

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

DONATION FORM

Thank you for supporting the Okemos Education Foundation.

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**

Name: _____
(as you wish to be recognized)

Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Please accept my gift of: _____

- I would like my gift to be used:
- Wherever Needed Most
 - OEF General Fund: Program/Project Support
 - OEF Endowment Fund: Future Needs

I wish to honor a special person with this gift:

I wish to remember a special person with this gift

- Check all that apply:**
- Parent/Grandparent (circle one) of Okemos student
 - Parent/Grandparent (circle one) of Okemos grad
 - Okemos Alum (year: ____)
 - OPS staff (current/former)

Please make checks payable to:
Okemos Education Foundation
4406 Okemos Rd, Okemos, MI 48864
Or donate online at: **www.oefsite.org**



Thank you for supporting Okemos students!