



## Professional Learning Communities: *A focus on student learning, collaboration, and results*

As a result of the district's **2006-2010 Strategic Plan**, a committee comprised of teachers, administrators, and parents began to examine effective models for delivering on-going, high quality professional development to staff. The committee's work focused in three specific areas:

1. Extensive research of the literature on "best practices" for professional development;
2. Examination of exemplary models of professional development from around the state and nation; and
3. Education and feedback provided through parent and faculty presentations and surveys.

Following this extensive study, the Okemos Public Schools have committed to establishing professional learning communities (PLC's) throughout the district by scheduling time for teacher collaboration into the school day and school calendar. This model of professional development is shown to be results-driven and focuses on higher levels of "learning for all", ranging from our most struggling students to those who are academically gifted.



The purpose for establishing PLC's is based on the assumption that the core mission of



schools is not only to ensure that students are taught, but to ensure that they learn. It is a shift in focus from teaching to learning. Thirteen times during the school year our students will be released two-hours early so that teacher teams can work together in PLC's for the purpose of improving both teaching and learning.

The three "big ideas" that represent the core principles of professional learning communities include:

### 1. Ensuring that Students Learn

As the school moves forward, every professional in the building must engage with colleagues in answering the four critical questions that drive the work of those within a PLC:

- What do we want each student to learn?
- How will we know when each student has learned it?
- How will we respond when a student doesn't learn it?
- How will we respond when a student already knows it?

When a school begins to function as a professional learning community, the staff designs coordinated and systematic strategies to respond to the needs of

## PLC Early Release Dates and Times

### Dates of the PLC's:

September 22  
October 6 and 20  
November 10  
December 8  
January 12 and 26  
February 16  
March 2 and 23  
April 13 and 27  
May 18

### School Start and End Times on Early Release Days:

#### Elementary:

K AM 9:00 - 11:10 AM  
K PM 11:40 AM - 1:50 PM  
Grades 1-4 9:00 AM - 1:50 PM

#### Kinawa 5-6:

8:45 AM - 1:35 PM

#### Chippewa 7-8:

8:00 AM - 12:50 PM

#### OHS 9-12:

7:45 AM - 12:35 PM

## Okemos Education Foundation

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## New OEF Trustee

The OEF is pleased to announce the addition of one new Trustee to the board: Dr. Catherine Ash, Interim Superintendent of Okemos Public Schools.

**Catherine Ash**

Cathy began her teaching career in 1984 at Eaton Rapids High School, where she taught math and biology for seven years. Her first administrative position was as an assistant principal at Hastings High School from 1992 to 1994 and then DeWitt High School from 1994 - 1996. In 1996, Cathy was named Director of Human Resources in Okemos. After serving in that position for seven years, she assumed additional responsibilities in finance and became the Deputy Superintendent. Upon the retirement of the district's superintendent, she has been named the Interim Superintendent for the 2010-11 school year.

Cathy is an active member of various professional organizations including, the Michigan School Business Officials, Michigan Association of School Administrators and Michigan Association

of School Personnel Administrators. She has also been actively involved and provided leadership for specific district committees focusing on strategic planning, long range planning, technology and transportation bond, building and site sinking fund, minority recruiting and Montessori programming. **OEF**

## Mark your calendar!

**Wed., November 10:**

Last day to order tickets for OEF Awards Banquet

**Wed., November 17:**

OEF Awards Banquet

**Friday, February 4:**

Grants Application Deadline

**Thursday, April 21:**

Final Grants Application Deadline this school year

## Message from OEF Chair

Every single resident in the Okemos Public School district will receive this newsletter—what an opportunity to reach out not only to Okemos school parents, but every community member and business. If only I had the gift with words that Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln or Winston Churchill had! But it is just me, a parent, a volunteer, a proud Okemos resident who knows that a strong school system makes a strong community and believes in a simple

truth to keeping our schools strong— it is up to all of us.

If the articles in this newsletter do their job, each of you will witness the impact and reward that comes from people who know this



Dean Bolton-OEF Chair

simple truth too. Read about the quality programs and experiences our children are having, made possible by the 262 families and community members and businesses who have generously given to the Okemos

Education Foundation (OEF) in the last year. Read about the amazing teachers, staff, volunteers, alumni and community members who are being honored by the OEF this year for their dedication, commitment, excellence, and achievements as they have made our children's education a priority in their lives. Read about the time and effort our teachers are investing in professional

*We are so lucky to have such a great educational system in Okemos and it deserves our support, it needs each of us to assure a strong future.*

learning communities—a collaborative, concerted effort to assure that consistent, quality education is being delivered across the district at each grade level. And read what the Okemos community made possible when the technology and transportation bond was passed in 2007, enabling our students to have the technology and learning tools they need to succeed in today's world.

Look what happens when we work together, when we prioritize our children and schools, and when we step up! We are a stronger community for it, and the reward is extraordinary when you see Okemos students grow and prosper, becoming stronger individuals and future leaders. Indeed, it is up to all of us, and we are doing it.

My challenge to each of you, as members of the Okemos school community, is to step forward, to participate in some way, and to experience the reward that comes from realizing that simple truth—that it is up to all of us. There is such great benefit that can come from prioritizing the education of our children and investing in their future. Even if you can only contribute one dollar or one hour or make one phone call to ask how you can help, imagine how much more we accomplish if we have 100% participation-- at whatever level you can participate or contribute!

We are so lucky to have such a great educational system in Okemos and it deserves our support, it needs each of us to assure a strong future.

It truly is up to all of us! **OEF**

# Message from our Interim Superintendent

## The Year of Transition!

The district's journey began in 2008-09 when an intense long range planning process was initiated and ultimately resulted in this "year of transition."



Dr. Catherine J. Ash,  
Interim Superintendent  
of Schools

Representatives from all facets of our school community served on the long range planning steering committee. The foundational commitment of each member was to develop options and formulate a

recommendation on how the Okemos Public Schools might assure its tradition of educational excellence in light of the dramatically changing external environment.

More specifically, the intended outcome of the committees' work was to identify and communicate community priorities, allowing the Board of Education to make informed decisions as it continued its proactive efforts to address the District's structural deficit resulting from a fundamentally flawed school funding system.

After considering the committees work and community feedback, the Board took action on several of the recommendations, some of which have significantly impacted our schools and families beginning with the 2010-11 school year.

The decision that posed the most significant change to our families and staff was to reconfigure grades K-8. By establishing K-4 elementary schools, students, families and staff from five "traditional" elementary schools were consolidated or blended into three schools. Further, we would now establish a school community of 5th and 6th graders at Kinawa, and 7th and 8th graders at Chippewa. Similar to grades K-4, the 5th -8th grade students, families and staff would be blended into new school communities.

Finally, in response to community feedback from the long range planning process, moving and responsibly expanding Montessori programming was studied and ultimately resulted in the Board's decision to move the preprimary - 4th


grade elementary program to Central School.

Recognizing the magnitude of the changes and the inevitable stresses that every K-8 family and staff member would experience on some level, the 2009-10 school year was dedicated to planning for a successful implementation that would reflect our commitment to "the people" and to the quality and effective educational programs that define Okemos Public Schools.

Every effort was made to identify and proactively address all the possible ramifications of this change on families, staff, programming and services. Thank you to the district personnel and to the parents who worked to promote nothing short of a successful transition. However, until we experience the magnitude of this change in its entirety, we will need to work together to problem solve those specific areas that were inadvertently missed. Whether our role is that of an employee,

*For me, an emotion that has not wavered is my sincere appreciation for the families and employees of this district who will settle for nothing less than educational excellence and who consistently strive to achieve that for our youth.*

a parent/guardian or a community member "Together. . ." has never been more essential to pursuing our mission to educate with excellence and to inspire learners for life.

As we entered this "year of transition", emotions and reactions have ranged from sadness, frustration and overwhelmed to excitement and wonder. Regardless, the one sentiment that has not wavered is our shared commitment to the social, emotional and academic growth and success of all of our students. For me, an emotion that has not wavered is my sincere appreciation for the families and employees of this district who will settle for nothing less than educational excellence and who consistently strive to achieve that for our youth. We are all advocates for our children and that is why I am confident that "the year of transition" will be a successful one! 

## A Year of Transition... Implementing the decisions

### New to Okemos High School

Staff = 5

### New to Chippewa

Staff = 22

Students = 288

Current enrollment = 593

### New to Kinawa

Staff = 40

Students = 607

Current enrollment = 607

### New to Bennett Woods

Staff = 7

Students = 105

Current enrollment = 349

### New to Central

Staff = 31

Students = 283

(includes 3 and 4 year olds)

Current enrollment = 302

(includes 3 and 4 year olds)

### New to Cornell

Staff = 3

Students = 70

Current enrollment = 350

### New to Hiawatha

Staff = 7

Students = 82

Current enrollment = 376

### New bus routes

Secondary (7-12) = 14

Grades K-6 = 13

### Other major changes and/or challenges impacting our school year:

- New starting and ending times at all levels
- Construction on major roads
- Job embedded professional development (early release days)
- New K-4 reading program
- Budget reductions resulting in decreased staffing, programming and services



(PLC's - Continued from page 4)

students rather than leaving this response up to individual teachers.

## 2. A Culture of Collaboration

Educators who are building a professional learning community recognize that they must work together to achieve the collective mission of learning for all. The powerful collaboration that characterizes PLCs is a systematic process in which teachers work together to analyze and improve their classroom practice.

## 3. A Focus on Results

Every teacher team or PLC participates in an ongoing process of identifying the current level of student achievement, establishing a goal to improve the current level, working together to achieve that goal, and providing periodic evidence of progress.


The teachers in professional learning

communities are organized into teams that have a shared responsibility for ensuring that all students learn within that grade



or subject area. The teacher engage in a team learning process that includes: 1) clarifying the essential learning outcomes for that grade/subject area; 2) developing common formative assessments that can "inform" the teaching that needs to occur; 3)

establishing a specific target or benchmark for the learning; 4) analyzing the results of the assessments; and 5) identifying and implementing improvement or enrichment strategies.

By investing the time and hard work necessary to implement these principles, the educators of the district will develop a strong, shared capacity to help all students learn at higher levels. We also believe that developing a culture of professional learning communities will keep the Okemos Public School on the cutting edge of what has been found to be most effective in improving both teaching and learning in schools across the nation. Strengthening our professional development for staff keeps us focused on the mission of our district: Together... educating with excellence, inspiring learners for life! 

*Patricia Trelstad is Deputy Superintendent of Okemos Public Schools.*

# Strategic Fund Update

Last spring, in response to the impact Michigan's school funding crisis has had on our students (the district has been forced to cut nearly \$8.5 million from its operating budget over the past 8 years) we launched the OEF Strategic Fund to restore funding for programs, activities or purchases that have been reduced or eliminated from the district's budget.



Thanks to the generosity of parents, community members and businesses, we have raised \$52,600 so far! These funds will be targeted at two areas – core academic subjects and extracurricular activities. The OEF has asked the district's leadership team - central administrators, department heads, and principals - to


identify and prioritize where Strategic Fund support is needed. Strategic Fund support will be distributed equitably among the elementary, 5-6 and 7-8 schools, and high school levels reflecting the identifiable needs and established priorities in the district.

To date, the following OEF Strategic Fund grants have been awarded:

- **Textbooks for the Comparative World Religions and Traditions** class at Okemos High School. These textbooks replace materials that were written in 1958 and will provide students with a good basis and organized content.
- **A field trip to MSU for every 4th grade class** in the district to take part in the 4-H Children's Garden Seeds of Science program. This program is correlated with the Michigan Curriculum Framework for elementary science.
- **Transportation for the Marching Band to participate in the Okemos homecoming parade.** Funds for band, orchestra, and choir transportation were eliminated this year and the OEF is currently working with the Okemos Music Patrons and the Band Boosters to restore funding.

- **After-school clubs at all levels in the district.** Funding for almost all clubs was eliminated last year, restoring these valuable opportunities will provide hundreds of students with meaningful learning experiences.

This year the OEF will continue providing support through the Strategic Fund as well as supporting classroom innovation with our Mini-Grant Program, Connie Osborn Deits Science Enrichment Fund, Lee Gerard Professional Development Fellowships, and Commitment to Excellence Awards.

None of this would be possible without the generous support of our donors, our partners in education. Thank you for providing our students with powerful learning experiences and helping to maintain excellence in Okemos Public Schools. 

*In conjunction with the Partners in Education campaign, donations to the OEF Strategic Fund are still very much appreciated. To make a contribution, please use the remittance envelope in this newsletter, or visit [www.oefsite.org](http://www.oefsite.org) to make an online donation.*

# Update on the Technology and Transportation Bond

**W**ith the passing of the **Technology and Transportation Bond of 2007**, Okemos Public Schools (OPS) began a three-year journey to enhance district technology and transportation.

Ten buses and surveillance cameras were purchased for transportation as was a new card reader refueling system. The technology portion of the bond is somewhat more in depth. We began with the replacement of all data electronic equipment in the



district. The data center head-end was remodeled with equipment racks, battery backup, and a fire suppressant system. Simultaneously, up-to-date networking and data wiring was replaced in all classrooms and a new voice over IP phone system was installed, replacing every phone handset across the district. Thirty file servers have been virtualized on our new VMWare virtualization environment. In a nutshell, we now have a state-of-the-art network with high-speed connections to the desktop (1 G) with a 10Gb backbone. This gives OPS a solid foundation of technology as we move forward.

Each classroom received a new computer complimented by some or all of the following: ceiling-mounted projector, tablet computer, document camera, sound enhancement system, and/or SmartBoard. With the recent changes in the district configuration, this is an "in process" task. Teaching staff can draw from a multitude of online resources to complement and enhance instruction. Students are engaged in learning through the use of the interactive SmartBoards and the hundreds of software pieces that accompany the boards. Through classroom audio enhancements, each student can hear the teacher's voice and any audio equally throughout the room. Overhead projectors are a thing of the past, being replaced by document cameras.

Additional bond purchases, such as digital cameras for buildings, increased the use of digital photography in student projects. Replacement of our dated copiers and printers has made the district more efficient and lowered print costs. Auditorium sound and lighting updates for Kinawa, Chippewa, and the High School gave new life to our stages. Wireless access (WiFi) is now incorporated throughout the entire district offering the ability to have secure wireless devices inside our network and filtered guest access separate from our network. Six hundred and forty laptops were introduced this year, transported by twenty Computers-On-Wheels (COWs) carts. With these COWs we have doubled our computer labs in the district and brought the computer labs to the students.

Currently we are working on getting teachers trained on the student response systems. These devices allow teachers to ask questions and have students respond through a wireless calculator type device. This will give the teacher instant feedback on the understanding and comprehension of the students. This can also save time for the teacher in the gathering test information. We are also concentrating the implementation of IP TV throughout the district. As of the writing of this article, we are roughly 80% complete. This tech-



nology will alleviate the need for TVs in the classroom by routing TV channels or a DVD/VHS through the teacher's computer. The channel can then be displayed through the projector in the classroom for students to view. Antiquated clock and bell systems are in the process of being replaced.

There are a few hundred people that need to be thanked for making the bond

a success. The Okemos community and Board of Education have been supportive throughout the process. OPS employees have been amazing in their support and perseverance in the use of technology and the integration in the classroom. This is all done with the focus on the student and their success.



**Below are a few quotes from the hands-on users.**

*"I use my tablet PC everyday in math class. It has transformed my teaching as well as student learning. Kids appreciate the use of technology and even learn how to use the tablet too. Class participation has gone up and I am able to model great note taking strategies for the kids."* - High School

*"In my Basic special education class I use the SmartBoard every day. My students are very visual and adding pictures to notes or even having the notes on the SmartBoard help the students with several things: 1. Staying focused 2. Help locate where we are in the notes 3. Visual schedules for our autistic students 4. Allow them to be an active participant in their learning and go up to the SmartBoard to choose an answer etc... 5. Able to show educational clips from Discovery Channel pertaining to what we are doing in the curriculum. This has been an amazing tool for our special education students and has enhanced their learning. I would like even more training so that I could take my students even further."* - High School

*"At the drop of a hat, I can pull up a specific picture, video, math manipulative or website for all students to see, question and get involved."* - 6th Grade Teacher

*"Using the SMARTBoard has completely changed my teaching and students' learn-*  
(See Tech Bond, page 6)



(Tech Bond, continued from page 5)

ing. Each student has the chance to "be the teacher" regularly, and they tend to listen to each other more, since they want their turn at the SMARTBoard." - 6th Grade Teacher

"The SMARTBoard has allowed me to bring images and video clips to supplement my lesson plans and it is really a powerful tool when a teachable moment arises." - 6th Grade Teacher

cHaving a web page has really aided in communicating with parents and students. Students can download assignments and parents can use my calendar to know the when there are tests/quizzes or when a project is due." - 6th Grade Teacher

"Technology is embedded throughout our curriculum. SmartBoards, COWs, and other tools help teachers both engage students and tailor curriculum for individual needs." - 7th/8th Grade Teacher

"I love having a document camera in my classroom. It allows me to quickly show student work as examples and my students can use it to share projects like brochures and books that would otherwise be difficult for the whole class to see." - 7th/8th Grade Teacher

"Presenter is used daily. Digital storytelling in French – Photostory Monument Project. Cameras used for class biographies." - 7th/8th Grade Teacher

"It is amazing how far technology has come in my math class. I utilize the TI-84 Plus on my SmartBoard to demonstrate graphing calculator capabilities. I use educational software to differentiate for my Math Lab students. Finally I use power PowerPoints and video tutorials to teach my algebra classes. This year I have a document camera! This allows me to write directly on a worksheet notebook paper or the SmartBoard, whichever is best for the lesson." - 7th/8th Grade Teacher

"I use my SmartBoard every day. It allows me to demonstrate and animate solutions to math problems in student-friendly ways." - 7th/8th Grade Teacher

OEF

**Errin M. Chapman** is Director of Media and Technology for Okemos Public Schools.

## 2010 Commitment to Excellence Award Recipients

The annual OEF Commitment to Excellence Awards Banquet is scheduled for Wednesday, November 17, at the Country Club of Lansing. Each year students, parents, community members, administrators, and/or colleagues support the nomination of outstanding individuals within the Okemos community for five prestigious awards.

Based on what is always an extraordinary array of nomination packets presented, the OEF has the unenviable task of selecting a discrete number of award recipients. Award recipients receive a commemorative plaque, but all nominees are recognized at the awards banquet. Congratulations to the following 2010 recipients!

### Commitment to Excellence Educator Award:

*The criteria for this award includes the ability to inspire and motivate students, implement innovative and/or creative ideas, promote the welfare of students, and provide leadership within the school*

*community. Each educator will receive a \$1,000 cash grant from the OEF.*

- **Dr. Catherine Ash**, Interim Superintendent of Okemos Public Schools
- **Fred Martinez**, Former Third Grade Teacher at Hiawatha Elementary School
- **Heather McNeilly**, Art Teacher at Cornell Elementary School and Central Montessori
- **Don Poore**, Fifth Grade Teacher at Kinawa 5-6 School
- **Matt Prinz & Josh Coty**, Montessori Teachers at Chippewa 7-8 School
- **Linda Yaske**, Third Grade Teacher at Bennett Woods Elementary School

### Special Recognition Award:

*Presented to support staff or volunteers who demonstrate a passion for excellence and whose support elevates the Okemos district:*

- **Linda Flood**, Okemos School Bus Driver
- **Cyndi Rolley**, Okemos High School Registrar

### Alumni Award:

*A graduate of Okemos Public Schools selected for their dedication and achievement as well as humanitarian contributions:*

- **Shannon Petroff**, OHS Class of 1988

### Dan C. Wertz Founder's Award:

*Recognized for a commitment to quality in education through generous financial support as well as exceptional and notable service in the Okemos Public Schools:*

- **The Deits Family**, an Okemos family

### Volunteer Service Award:

*This award honors individuals who have a significant positive impact on students, staff, and/or the school community through their extraordinary volunteer service:*

- **Connie Tuma**, Volunteer Aide at Wardcliff Elementary School

Please plan to honor the Recipients and Nominees (see **Highlight on Award Nominees** on the next page) by attending the 2010 OEF Awards Banquet!

## 2010 Okemos Education Foundation Awards Banquet

**Wednesday  
November 17, 2010**

**Country Club of Lansing  
2200 Moores River Drive, Lansing**

**Social Hour 5:30 p.m.  
Dinner 6:30 p.m.**

**Adult \$30.00,  
Children (12 and younger)  
\$12.00**

**Tickets available  
October 1 until  
November 10, 2010 at all  
schools, or visit  
www.oefsite.org  
for mail-in ticket order form!**

## Highlight on Award Nominees

We thank all of the parents and faculty who wrote so many wonderful Commitment to Excellence, Special Recognition, and Volunteer Service Award nomination letters. Being nominated for these awards is an honor, and we would like to recognize and congratulate the **2010 OEF award nominees: Marisa McCormick, Margaret Smith, Tammy Deppong, Christel Marschall, and Cheri Meyer.** We are very grateful for your contributions to our school community!

**Marisa McCormick** (Montessori Teacher at Kinawa) was nominated for a **Commitment to Excellence Award.** Marisa has been instrumental in the formation of Montessori Middle School. She served on the reconfiguration committee then spent her own money and summer break to train to be a Montessori school teacher. She is a caring, knowledgeable, and passionate teacher with a strong work ethic.

Not only is Marisa the Science Fair Coordinator and Safety Patrol Coordinator, but she also sponsored the First Lego League at Edgewood Montessori. As sponsor, Marisa tackled the challenge of a new program that has rigorous procedures and requirements. She educated herself on Lego competitions, put in countless hours after school, and guided students to the competition held at Michigan State University. All the while, she communicated frequently with parents and league coordinators. By competition time, the Edgewood team was prepared and demonstrated outstanding skills as first-year participants. Participating students will cherish and draw from their experience for years to come, thanks to Marisa.

**Margaret Smith** (Assistant to the Director of Okemos Community Education) was nominated for a **Special Recognition Award.** She is extremely talented, diverse in her approach to work, and professional and positive in whatever she does. When she is not assisting the Director of Community Education, she is helping staff with communication and record keeping, confirming financial deposits, filling in at the front desk, and planning trips for senior citizens. All the while, she exhibits a beautiful attitude.

**Tammy Deppong** (Parent Volunteer at Cornell and Chippewa) was nominated for the **Volunteer Service**

**Award** because, while serving as Cornell's PTO President for two years, she tirelessly worked to create grant opportunities for teachers, scholarship possibilities for children, and a wonderful place to learn and grow for all. As Cornell PTO President, Tammy also brought together parents and staff to support academic enrichment opportunities, school beautification projects, and school/family social activities.


As a parent volunteer, Tammy was instrumental in the Fifth Grade Drama Club by coordinating costumes, attending most of the rehearsals, and helping with props and sets. After the play, she baked a Mad Hatter tea party cake and surprised the cast and crew with Alice in Wonderland t-shirts. To this day, Tammy needs her own office or at least a cot at Cornell because she is there so often.

Tammy is the kind of person who can recognize a need, brainstorm solutions, develop and implement a plan, negotiate obstacles, coordinate a team of people, and reflect or accept feedback on ways to improve things. As just one example, last winter she coordinated a meeting of all the elementary school PTO Presidents to discuss the transitions that the Okemos schools were facing.

**Christel Marschall** (Committee Member of "Supporters of Okemos Science") was also nominated for the **Volunteer Service Award.** Christel is a member of SOS, a parent-teacher group dedicated to promoting science education in the OPS. Christel and three others founded it 25 years ago. Thanks to Christel, hundreds of children have enjoyed classroom science enrichment activities, field trips, and educational materials purchased with money raised by SOS over the years.

Christel is still a driving force behind Science Fun Day. In fact, she has organized the event every year since starting it 22 years ago. She keeps lists of: volunteers (high school students as well as physicians, veterinarians, and MSU faculty); those who do demonstrations (like Potter Park Zoo and Pruess Animal House); and businesses that donate door prizes. She also organizes the publicity, stores materials in her home, sets up the event, sells pizza and raffle tickets during it, then cleans up afterwards. Almost single-handedly, she ensures that hundreds of families enjoy science together.

**Cheri Meyer** (Parent Volunteer at Cornell and Chippewa) was also nominated for the **Volunteer Service Award.** Her dedication is not only focused on teachers' needs but the needs of students, secretaries, administrators, and custodians throughout the buildings. She runs copies, helps and mentors students, volunteers with the PTO, helps with fundraisers and Staff Appreciation Week, helps with Field Day, and is one of the first to find clothing for a needy child or assist in food drives, coin drives, or any fundraiser to help families in need. If you want to find Cheri at Cornell, you only need to turn a corner and she may be sitting on the floor with a student reading, writing, or just talking about how they are the greatest child in the world.

As teacher Cathy Staudt wrote, *"I was on the receiving end of having the most exceptional volunteer this year, Cheri Meyer. One student in my classroom ... is considerably below grade level. Cheri gave of her time for this student, not one day a week, but many times five days a week. She would come in each day, ask what he should be working on ... work very hard with him, and keep track of his progress ... The student would come back smiling and feeling good about his progress. When she came in he would show her other work he had done and she would tell him how proud she was of him ... Cheri made a huge difference in this child's life and he will always remember what she did for him. I have never had a parent give of their time for three, four and five days a week for the whole school year."* 



## Meet the School Board Candidates

*The November 2nd ballot will give voters an opportunity to fill three seats on the Okemos School Board: two 4-year terms, and one 2-year term. The 2-year term is the remainder of former board member Bob McDonough's term, who resigned in July 2010.*

**Amy Crites and Steve Vagnozzi** are running unopposed for the two 4-year terms. Two candidates, **Damian Fisher** and **Deb Baughman**, are vying for the two-year seat on the school board.

### Deborah Baughman

**D**eb Baughman and her husband, Mick, moved to Okemos in 1985 based on the excellent reputation of the school district. They now have two graduates, Trey (OHS Class of '07) who attends Kalamazoo College, and Connor (OHS Class of '09) who attends DePaul University.

Deb earned her bachelor's degree and master's degree from Michigan State University. She has worked for the last 25 years at Shiawassee Regional Educational Service District as a school social worker in six different school districts, lending her a unique perspective on K-12 education. She currently works at Lincoln High School, an alternative education high school in Owosso.

Mrs. Baughman served as the parent representative to Edgewood's school improvement team from 1994-2001. In 1997, she organized the first annual Edgewood Family 1-2-3 Run/Walk, an annual Edgewood community event aimed at prioritizing fitness and bringing children, their families, and neighbors out to exercise together. She also served on the Parent-to-Parent district-wide committee aimed at extinguishing drug and alcohol use by Okemos students.

While her sons attended Kinawa Middle School, she served as Parent Group Vice President; and at OHS, she served as Co-President of the Okemos Athletic Boosters and on the board of the Drama Boosters. She and her husband Mick co-chaired the Taste of Okemos 2008. Mrs. Baughman joined the Okemos Education Foundation Board as a school board representative in 1999 and continues to actively participate on that board. When not working in the schools or volunteering in school activities, Deb's interests include reading, tennis, skiing, and spending time with her family.

Mrs. Baughman was elected to the Okemos Board of Education in 1999 and achieved

Michigan Association of School Boards (MASB) certification. Deb served the board as Parliamentarian, Vice President, and President before "retiring" from the school board in 2006. Deb served from June to December, 2009 in the seat vacated by a former board member. She was appointed to serve again on July 13, 2010 in the seat vacated by Robert McDonough. Her appointment will end December 31, 2010 at which time the board member elected in November will be seated.

### Amy H. Crites

**A**my H. Crites and her spouse, Dan, an Okemos native, have resided in Okemos for over 20 years. They have three children, Matt (19), Alison (16), and Catherine (14). Amy's B.A. is from the University of Michigan (1984). She worked in the investment and banking industries (Series 7 licensed, CFP, and a trust officer) until 1995 when her second child turned one and her time and energy were needed at home. More than three years ago, Amy started a home-based business and continues developing her entrepreneurial and sales skills.

Amy joined the Junior League of Lansing in 1990 and served the organization for 10 years in a variety of positions including assistant treasurer, treasurer, and member advisor. She has been treasurer and president of Central Elementary's PTO and a volunteer in each of her children's classrooms; was an integral part of Central's parent committee; served as the deputy superintendent's co-chair for the K-5 Configuration Committee in 2004-05; and acted as Chippewa's parent representative on the school district's Strategic Planning Committee.

Amy was the parent representative on the 2004 and 2007 superintendent search trips, gaining first-hand knowledge about the process, candidates' leadership styles, and the internal workings of other districts. Amy is an active volunteer in Music Patrons, Art Patrons, and Okemos Athletic Boosters. During her first term as Okemos School Board member, Amy has served as Parliamentarian and Treasurer and is currently seated as Vice President. She is also the Okemos representative on the Ingham Intermediate School District's Consolidation and Collaboration committee.

### Damian Fisher

**D**amian Fisher is a private practice attorney living in Okemos with his wife Bonnie and their four chil-

dren. The Fishers moved to Okemos from the Isabella Indian Reservation in Mt. Pleasant, Michigan in 2001 after Damian graduated from Cooley Law School and began working for Legal Aid of Lansing. Damian is member of the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe of Michigan.

Damian earned his Bachelor of Arts Degree from San Diego State University, completed coursework toward a Masters of Business Administration from Central Michigan University, and earned his law degree from Cooley Law School. Prior to private practice, Damian worked as an assistant prosecuting attorney, a court officer, a contract attorney, and as a legislative attorney. He is a recipient of the Eagle Spirit Achievement Award, the Susan Farrell Scholarship Award, and the Voelker Foundation Scholarship Award. He currently serves as President of the Michigan Indian Legal Services Board of Trustees, appointed by the State Bar of Michigan, and as Secretary of the Saginaw Chippewa Tribal College Board of Regents.

Damian and Bonnie participate in many school activities with their children. In the past, Damian joined the Okemos varsity football coaching staff and enjoyed a successful season with all the players and coaches.

### Steve Vagnozzi

**S**teve Vagnozzi and his wife, Darlene, moved to Okemos in 1985. They have two daughters who graduated from Okemos High School in 2006 and 2009. Their son is a current sophomore, and is following in his sisters' footsteps as a student of Okemos Public Schools since Kindergarten.

Steve received a Bachelor of General Studies degree from the University of Michigan, and subsequently completed numerous computer science courses at Lansing Community College. He worked in Information Technology for 26 years with the State of Michigan. For 15 of those years, he was the systems manager for occupational & professional licensing computer systems at the state. He is currently self-employed as an IT consultant specializing in occupational & professional licensing systems.

Steve has served the Okemos Public Schools as the Citizens Millage Committee treasurer, a Technology Committee member, a Junior Achievement elementary school instructor, and a computer lab volunteer at Hiawatha Elementary School. **OF**



## OPS Budget Update

As October begins, school boards around the state finally know the state's budget, and the official student enrollment count is coming into focus. These are two key components of the general fund budget for Okemos Public Schools (OPS). This article is intended to help provide clarity regarding the 2010-2011 budget for OPS. The following information was collected from okemosschools.net and from the Michigan Association of School Board (MASB) website masb.org.

### State Revenue

Keeping up with the ever-changing state foundation allowance can be a full time job.

To balance the budget in November of 2009, the State Legislature cut the foundation allowance by \$287 per pupil, and used ARRA funds to backfill this cut, resulting in no immediate impact on school districts. However, this money was a one-time fix that will not be available for future budgets.

In February, 2010, the Okemos School Board was informed that our funding for the 2009-2010 school year would be cut by \$165 per pupil. This reduction of about \$662,000 would have been daunting under any circumstances, but was particularly difficult to absorb mid-year. The vast majority of this cut was taken from our fund balance.

In July, state revenues were higher than anticipated, and OPS was reimbursed \$11 per pupil for the 2009-2010 school year. This had a positive impact of \$44,000 on a fund balance that was projected to decrease by approximately \$1.6 million. Finally, potentially impacting the 2010-2011 budget is the Education Jobs Bill which provides for \$316.3 million in one-time federal money to local districts, ISDs and the Department of Education. Okemos is predicted to receive the equivalent of \$154 per pupil, plus an equity payment of \$23 per pupil (HB 5872). The total positive impact on the fund balance would be about \$714,000. This has been passed by both Houses in the Michigan Legislature and, as of October 10th, is awaiting the Governor's signature. It is not clear if she will sign it or not. (*Editor's note: On Oct. 12 the Governor issued a line-item veto of the formula used to distribute the \$154 per pupil payment. The Legislature must now reconvene to pass a new bill to distribute the federal funds.*)

### Enrollment

Another major factor in determining our total general fund revenue is the total enrollment for the district. The foundation allowance for a student living in Okemos for the 2010-2011 school year is \$8,489, assuming the one-time restoration of \$154 through the Education Jobs Bill. This is the same level of funding the district received during the 2008-09 fiscal year. If a child participates in the school of choice program, Okemos receives the foundation allowance of the student's district of residence. During the 2009-2010 school year, the total enrollment for OPS was 4,017. During the budgeting process, the School Board took a conservative stance and projected a loss of 100 students. This was mainly due to the declining population in the area. However, we were encouraged to see on count day that the district's preliminary enrollments only reflected 80 fewer students, for a total student population of about 3,935.

### Expenses

The School Board addressed an approximate operating shortfall of \$4.2 million facing the district for the 2010-2011 fiscal year by implementing budget cuts, revenue enhancements, and drawing down the fund balance. The total amount cut from the budget for 2010-2011 was about \$2.8 million. This includes eliminating a number of positions, closing and reconfiguring schools, sacrifices by our employees and

*The projected fund balance for June 2011 is \$1.5 million, or roughly 3.5% of the total budget.*

many other cuts to important programs and services throughout the district. Over the past seven years, a total of over \$8 million were cut from OPS. The cuts that were made were all in areas that historically had been avoided due to their importance. There are only a few areas in the budget where a district may legally charge a fee. The School Board voted to increase fees substantially in a number of these extra-curricular areas. One area where the district cannot by law charge a fee is for bus service.

The approximately \$1.4 million deficit remaining was taken from the fund balance for the 2010-2011 budget. The projected fund balance for June 2011 is \$1.5 million, or roughly 3.5% of the total budget. This is only enough operating capital to run the district for 17 days. Auditors and school finance experts advise that districts keep a fund balance between 10-15%. If the Education Jobs Bill is signed into law, preliminary enrollment counts don't change, and the required contribution by the district into the School Employees retirement fund is reduced; the projected fund balance could increase to \$2.1 million. However, it is important to note that the State will be starting the 2011-2012 budget year with an anticipated \$1-\$1.5 billion shortfall, and that the \$441 in per pupil foundation allowance in the 2010-2011 budget came from one-time federal money.

### The Future

The budget problems for the State of Michigan are not going away. Many analysts project another mid-year pro-rated cut to the foundation allowance. This is consistent with many other state-wide election years. Another concern is that the current fiscal year is the last year of both the ARRA funds and the Education Jobs money from the federal government.



While these numbers may seem overwhelming, I have the utmost confidence that the district will continue to provide an excellent education. I know that this is a difficult time for families as well, and I continue to be inspired by your efforts, as well as the work of the OEF. We have so much to be proud of in this community, and I can assure you that OPS employees and the School Board will continue to work to keep it that way! **OEF**

**Andrew Saultz**, Okemos School Board member, currently serves as Parliamentarian, and also serves on the board's Policy Committee.

# Thank You 2009-10 Partners in Education!

The Okemos Education Foundation thanks the many individuals, families, professionals, and businesses that so generously supported the foundation's 2009-10 *Partners in Education* program. This is a program intended to recognize donors on an annual basis for different levels of giving. Our Partners played a key role in supporting the most recent Commitment to Excellence banquet as well as ongoing classroom grants that supplement the excellent staff and programs at Okemos Public Schools. Strategic Fund supporters are also recognized as Partners, with recognition level based on the accrued total of all gifts given this past year.

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**\* Strategic Fund Donor****Your support is making a difference for OPS kids!**

*"Teaching this complex subject would be significantly more daunting without a proper textbook. The fact that we were able to appeal to the OEF for funds to purchase this text helps to ensure another quality class here at OHS.*

*The support of the OEF is just one more reason why the district is able to provide a superior education to its students. I should also add - it is one more reason why this district provides such an amazing workplace for its employees.*

*Again, your gift is much appreciated."*  
**- Fred Partlow, regarding textbooks purchased by the OEF Strategic Fund.**

*"... The students love the books. For many of them it is the only opportunity they have to experience rich vocabulary. This also strengthens their own fluency, comprehension, and expression. We are excited to add to our collection with this award. Since we will not be teaching in the same building next year, this grant*

*will support many students. We can now complete classroom sets with this generous donation. Thank-you again!"*

**- Lori Howe and Jenny Woodruff**

*"... Please know that your grant is truly appreciated... I'm thrilled! This allocation will be enjoyed for many years to come. As a teacher of language arts, it's critical that we provide students with material that encourages kids to read. Most often times, that material tends to be what's current, for teens, in the world of reading. This OEF grant will provide that opportunity for many middle school students for many years to come...."*

**- Heidi Greenhoe, Chippewa**

*"Thank you to you and your committee for granting us our request to purchase badminton nets and equipment. We are excited to add the teaching of this lifelong sport to our 7-8th grade Physical Education curriculum. We will keep you updated on our successes with this program! Thanks again for all that you do to support*

*our efforts day in and day out! "*  
**- Jamie Ianni, Phys Ed. Chippewa**

*"It is with immense gratitude that I accept the O.E.F. grant. Please know that it will be put to tremendous use with Kinawa students this fall, spring and the years to come. I have ordered The Stevenson Program and Phonics First Foundations for Reading Program. I look forward to their postal deliveries and classroom instruction. ...*

*Again - thank you! You have made a difference in my students' education."*  
**- Jen Harnick**

*"I am thrilled for our second graders at Cornell to have received the second phase of my grant from the OEF. ...*

*I speak for many when I say that the OEF has truly enriched the lives of Okemos students. Thank you for supporting this endeavor."*

**- Julie Bellinger, 2nd Grade Cornell**

# OEF News

## Okemos Education Foundation

4406 N. Okemos Road

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*“Recognizing excellence and  
promoting innovation in  
Okemos Public Schools.”*

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