



OEF News

Fall 2012

A publication of the Okemos Education Foundation www.oefsite.org

New Grants Program Launched

The OEF is pleased to announce a new grants program to benefit students both inside and outside the classroom. OEF Micro-Grants are now available to teachers for smaller projects or needs in classrooms or for extracurricular clubs or activities. These grants of no more than \$250 are available for projects such as transportation costs and normal classroom supplies.

In just the first two months of the school year, we've awarded 8 Micro-Grants providing funds for such things as website subscription fees for high school English courses allowing students



to collaborate among different classes and engage in creative digital literacy work, and vocabulary workbooks for kindergarten classes to help develop spelling skills.

This new grants program offers another opportunity for the OEF to enrich educational opportunities and promote innovation at all levels of the district.

Our traditional OEF Grants support larger innovative projects that enhance the curriculum in creative, beneficial ways and provide resources that are lasting and will remain in the district for long periods of time. In the first of three application periods this year, we have already awarded 5 grants providing reading and math materials in elementary classrooms at Cornell and Central.

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Reaching Beyond The 3 Rs – Positive Behavior

The “whole child” approach of Okemos schools means that our community's children are receiving far more than the age-old tradition of the 3 R's (readin' writin' and 'rithmetic!). They are learning about respect, responsibility, and a whole range of expectations for their behavior that helps them become positive, safe, compassionate young adults.

Do you know about Okemos Public Schools important initiative called **Positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS)**? You may not think so, but if you've visited any of our schools recently, you have likely seen signs in the hallways of the positive

proactive efforts that are taking place across our district. (see page 5).

PBIS is a system of teaching behavioral expectations in the same manner as any core curriculum subject, and is based on three principles:

- *We can effectively teach appropriate behaviors to all children.*
- *We must intervene early.*
- *We use data to make decisions.*

For each of these principles, consistent school-wide programming, rules, routines, and instruction have been developed, all aiming at reinforcing positive behavior and the behaviors that reach beyond academics to the whole

child, helping them become productive adults.

A PBIS system moves a school from a reactive to a proactive approach towards behavioral expectations. Recent research shows that this approach decreases problem behavior and increases student engagement and time spent on academic instruction, resulting in improved academic outcomes for students. Other benefits are that it unites all of the adults in the school through the use of common language and practices, consistency in reinforcing positive behavior, and responses to negative behavior – all of which results in a more consistent and fairer process for our students.

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Okemos Education Foundation

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** Superintendent of Schools

*** Board of Education Representative

New OEF Trustee

The OEF is pleased to welcome Missy McCarthy as trustee.

Missy McCarthy has been a math teacher at Okemos High School for the past thirteen years. She received a B.S. in Mathematics and a teaching certificate from Michigan State University in the spring of 2000 and completed a Masters of Arts in Curriculum in teaching in December 2003 as well as a Masters in Educational Technology in the summer of 2011.

While at OHS, Missy has taught ninth through twelfth grade math courses at a variety of levels (adaptive, standard, and honors). She served as the class advisor to the Class of 2004, has been a member of the OHS School

Improvement Team for 4 years, and served on the committee that helped implement Parent Connect, now PowerSchool. In addition, she served as the chairperson for the OHS Student Appreciation Committee. In 2006, Missy received an OEF Commitment to Excellence Award.

Outside of teaching, Missy dedicates all of her time to raising and nurturing her two beautiful daughters: a 6th grader at Kinawa and a 2nd grader at Hiawatha.

We would like to extend our great appreciation to **Jennifer Everhart**, **Craig Lazar**, and **Chris Nugent** who have stepped down from the board since our last newsletter. We thank them for their service and wish them well in their future pursuits. **OEF**

Message from OEF Chair

Here's a wonderful quote I ran across recently:

"I learned to make my mind large, as the universe is large."

Maxine Hong Kingston wrote that in her memoir of growing up in the 1950's, but I believe it also describes the task facing every Okemos student today.



Dean Bolton-OEF Chair

Making our students' minds as large as the universe is large will enable them to live successful lives and tackle the challenges that will face them, their communities, and their world.

And it's precisely what you can enable our students to do when you support

them through the Okemos Education Foundation (OEF).

This past year, the OEF funded 69 grants that promoted the kind of hands-on/minds-on learning that grows minds.

The OEF helped purchase software programs, learning games, and manipulatives that make mathematics and science come alive and provided high-interest reading materials and e-readers that will serve as inviting portals to all of the knowledge available via the written word.

The OEF funded intellectually-enriching extracurricular activities in all of our schools, thereby giving our students opportunities to strengthen their creative talents in art and drama clubs, to compete in academic tournaments, to improve their command of foreign languages, and to discover the deep satisfaction that comes from service to others, whether on Safety Patrols at our elementary

schools, in the high school's ACTION Community Service Club, or in student government across all grades.

The OEF gives our annual Commitment to Excellence Award recipients grants to purchase additional materials for their classrooms, so they can provide more engaging learning experiences for their students.

In these ways, and many more (visit oefsite.org and click on the Grants tab to see a complete list of the grants we've made in recent years), your donation will allow our students to expand their understanding of the world and to begin imagining how they might make it a better place.

Hoping that our students can count on your vital support, there is an envelope included in this newsletter. You can also make an online donation at oefsite.org. I hope that you will join us in making our students' minds as large as the universe they will inhabit and shape. **OEF**

Message from our Superintendent

Point of Pride . . . "Together"

While attending a "courageous leadership" course this summer, one of the tasks was to reflect on personal and professional peaks such as "my happiest moment", "my saddest moment" etc... It was the prompt, "What are you most proud of?" that made me think of



*Dr. Catherine J. Ash,
Superintendent of
Schools*

every aspect of the Okemos Public Schools' community. As I considered my source of pride, my immediate reaction was being a part of the Okemos Public Schools and the shared commitment to "Together...educating with excellence"! I truly believe that is why we are one of the highest performing districts in the state of Michigan. We have all of the key components, consisting of a supportive community, involved parents, motivated students who value education and a dedicated, talented staff!

It seems that together, we are a highly effective team. In my efforts to understand the "why", I reviewed the concepts presented in the "The Five Dysfunctions of a Team" by Patrick Lencioni. In describing the five "dysfunctions" of an ineffective team, Lencioni explained how these are remedied and would be illustrated in high functioning teams. Therefore, Lencioni's description of high functioning teams essentially offers a framework which describes and explains "us".

The very foundation of an effective team is the **existence of trust**. This is at the

heart of a highly functioning, cohesive team. Within the team (community members, parents, staff and students) there is confidence that intentions are good; questions are accepted and input is valued. This trust allows us to solve problems as they arise; accept differing ideas and know that we all want what is best for children.

As a team, there are times we engage in **productive conflict**, recognizing that it promotes growth, enhanced solutions and best possible outcomes. As we work together to resolve issues, we engage in productive conversations to resolve issues. We couldn't do this without a high level of trust and without valuing each other.

We have a **shared commitment**, with clarity about our priorities, as well as our purpose of educating with excellence. We are committed to delivering the best possible educational experience for all our students. As a school community, we will settle for nothing less.

As a district, we **embrace accountability**. We share a common vision of excellence in education and recognize that we all share in the responsibility for making our vision a reality. We are willing to reflect on and adjust our strategies to improve our performance and to promote the success of all of our students. We have high expectations for ourselves and for each other.

Finally, we pay **attention to results**. We are a goal oriented organization. We are constantly striving to enhance what we do, promoting greater levels of proficiency in our students by offering focused and intentional strategies to help each child reach his/her potential. We are data driven, utilizing data to guide our work. It helps us know

whether to stay the course or alter the route.

Community, parents, staff and students are each a critical component and an integral part of this highly effective team. Without each of these groups, we wouldn't have the whole of the "us" or the "together" of our highly effective team. It is our interconnectedness that makes us Okemos!

As a result of these productive relationships and our ability to work as a highly effective team, we had many successes in achieving our 2011-12 goals. Further, our efforts from last year will provide the foundation and the focus for our efforts in 2012-13 and beyond.

As a district, in 2011-12 we reviewed and revised the district's strategic plan to ensure that the district continues to address the critical issues and priorities as perceived by the board, the community, parents and staff. The committee identified seven (7) critical issues to focus our efforts: curriculum and instruction, diversity, facilities, finances, organizational capacity, social issues and technology. Broad goals and strategies were developed to guide the district's strategic direction from now and into the future (2012-16).

So, this is **OUR** focus for this year!

Substance Abuse and Our Youth (Strategic Goal: Social Issues) -

We are aware that alcohol and drugs are accessible by our students and that they are choosing to use these substances in a variety of settings, for a variety of reasons. As a school community, we are determined to make every effort to establish a culture that promotes healthy and informed choices. During the 2011-12 school year, a district-level

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Thanks to the generosity of the Deits family, Connie Osborn Deits Science Enrichment grants increase the understanding and appreciation of science for our students. So far this year we have granted funds for every 4th grade student in the district to take part in MSU's Seeds of Science field trips, a three-day course on plants at the Children's Garden.

Strategic Fund Grants provide funding for programs, activities, or purchases

that have been reduced or eliminated from the district's budget. This year we are again funding 36 extra-curricular clubs and student activities ranging from Safety Patrols at the elementary schools, Archery Club at Kinawa, Student Council at Chippewa, and ACTION, Okemos High School's community service club.

Lee Gerard Professional Development Fellowships provide opportunities for our teachers to conduct projects focused

on improved learning for all students, and Commitment to Excellence Award recipients are each awarded a grant to support their continued contributions to education.

Your generous support is the only thing that allows us to make these grants. We've included an envelope in this newsletter with hopes that you will join us this year as a Partner in Education! **OEF**

2012 OEF Award Recipients

The annual OEF Awards Banquet is scheduled for Thursday, November 15, at the Country Club of Lansing. Each year students, parents, community members, support staff, teachers, and/or administrators support the nomination of outstanding individuals within the Okemos school community for these 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 will be recognized at the OEF Awards Banquet on November 15.

Congratulations to the following 2012 recipients!

Commitment to Excellence 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. Current educators will receive a \$1,000 grant from the OEF to support their continued contributions to Okemos Public Schools.

Deb Hamilton, Language Arts Teacher at Chippewa 7-8 School & District Coordinator of Gifted Education

John Olstad, Science Teacher at Okemos High School

Fred Partlow, Latin Teacher at Okemos High School (retired)

Elizabeth Reed, Music Teacher at Hiawatha Elementary School

Chrissy Schoonover, Math Teacher at Okemos High School

Carmen VanAlstine, French, ELL and Language Arts Teacher at Chippewa 7-8 School and French Teacher at Okemos High School

Special Recognition Award:

This award is presented to support staff who demonstrate a passion for excellence and whose work elevates Okemos Public Schools.

Lynna Hassenger, Director of Food & Nutrition, Okemos Public Schools

Kathy Hunter, Administrative Assistant at Okemos Public Montessori at Central (retired)

Volunteer Service Award:

This award honors an individual who has had a significant positive impact on students, staff, and/or the school community through their extraordinary volunteer service.

Lynne Page, Okemos High School Parent Group Treasurer, amongst other volunteer roles throughout the district

Please plan to honor the recipients and nominees by attending the 2012 OEF Awards Banquet! **OEF**

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Students know what is expected of them without having to wonder.

The OEF is proud to have been able to support this program in its grant-making. While each school has developed creative slogans for their PBIS program (see sidebar), some have developed creative teaching tools to support their efforts. An example is an OEF grant that helped Cornell Elementary self-publish a children's book that has become a teaching tool in all classrooms, to be used repeatedly throughout the year to teach and review positive behavior. SOFI SMILES, written by Cornell teacher Tena Sinila and edited by parent Cheri Meyer, is the story of a big lovable dog who is in search of the right school, a school filled with heart, for her two elementary aged children. As you follow Sofi in her visits to many schools, you



learn the value of positive behavior and that Cornell is the right school for her children because the students there are Respectful, Responsible, and Safe.

As with all of its grant-making, the OEF strives to support innovation and creative advances in the education of our students. SOFI SMILES is an example of that kind of innovation, creating a lasting tool to assist our teachers in deepening the education of the whole child. The OEF also strongly supports the district's commitment to PBIS programming – yet another reason to feel lucky we are all part of the Okemos community, and an example of how the Okemos Public School district is committed to achieving its mission of “Together...Educating with Excellence. Inspiring learners for Life.” **OEF**

“An investment in knowledge always pays the best interest.”

-Benjamin Franklin

A gift to the Okemos Education Foundation helps support excellence in educational programs and services for Okemos students now and in the future. The OEF is a 501(c)(3) organization and donations are tax-deductable to the fullest extent of the law. For your convenience, we accept online credit card donations at www.oefsite.org.

OEF Partners in Education are donors who contribute \$50 or more annually with recognition and benefits at various levels of giving. More information about OEF Partners in Education recognition can be found at www.oefsite.org.

Now more than ever before, it's up to all of us to maintain the quality of education for Okemos students. Thank you for considering a gift to the OEF! **OEF**

Good Words To Live By . . .

Our Okemos Schools' PBIS Mottos:

Bennett Woods Trail Blazers Will:

Be Respectful, Be Responsible, Be Positive, Practice Safety, and Do Their Personal Best.

Cornell Elementary:

Respectful: I will be kind, honest, and thoughtful to others.

Responsible: I will do my best to listen and follow directions.

Safe: I will respect the rights of others and keep my hands and feet in my own space.

Hiawatha's Flying Hawks:

Show Respect, Take Responsibility, and Act Safely.

Okemos Public Montessori At Central:

Peace Begins with Me

P – Positive Attitude

E—Everyone is Respectful

A—Act Responsibly

C—Create a Safe Environment

E—Encourage Others

Kinawa Cares:

Cooperative

Accountable

Respectful

Empathetic

Safe

Chippewa Middle School:

Be Safe

Be Responsible

Be Respectful

Okemos High School's

Be Excellent! Day

This year's theme was: **MAKE A DIFFERENCE: It All Begins With You!**

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committee was established to develop a strategic plan specifically for this issue.

Our ongoing efforts align well with the strategic goals addressing social issues. In 2012-13 and beyond, the work will continue. We are committed to sustaining our focus and engaging students, parents, staff and community through words and actions in our effort to “establish a culture that promotes healthy and informed choices”.

Technology

(Strategic Goals: Technology and Finance) - We will establish a district level committee comprised of the various stakeholders and experts to assess our current technology and to develop a vision for our future technology. We must prepare our students for the 21st century which requires that we seamlessly integrate technology into all of our classrooms. Technology will enhance our ability to deliver relevant and meaningful educational programming, as well as efficient practices and services.

The funds from our previous technology/transportation bond have been expended. After two years without this additional funding source, combined with the ever changing technology that is available, it's important to make an informed decision regarding our future

technological needs and the potential impact on the district's finances. As the Board deliberates on the possible pursuit of another technology bond in November of 2013, they will consider the critical technological needs while being sensitive to the financial impact on Okemos taxpayers.

Academic Growth and Performance

(Strategic Goals: Curriculum and Instruction and Technology) - Our goal is to promote academic proficiency for all of our students, supporting the low performers and challenging the highest performers. As part of the school improvement process, we will continue to review and analyze the data from a variety of performance measures to plan instructional strategies that will yield positive outcomes for all of our students, including our most at-risk learners in identified subgroups. We will work to decrease the gap between our lowest performing students and our highest performing students.

Other Strategic Goals:

Even though I have highlighted some specific areas of focus, please be assured, we also will be addressing other critical issues that are of equal significance. As a school community we will identify and promote a respect and understanding of diversity, as well as develop appropriate policies and practices to promote and

sustain inclusive diversity. We will continue to manage financial resources to support instruction and services that will sustain a quality educational experience. We will develop short and long term plans to maintain or improve our facilities and grounds. Finally, we will reflect on existing organizational systems and processes, searching for opportunities to develop leadership, to enhance communication, as well as to promote partnerships with community organizations.

We will do this “together”, because we have established ourselves as a highly effective team. A team that has established a high level of trust, allowing us to engage in productive conflict that promotes enhanced outcomes. A team possessing a shared commitment to a quality educational experience and embracing accountability for promoting the success of our students with an intense focus on the results!

You are an integral piece of this team and I will continue to rely on each of you! It is the “we” and the “together” that makes us Okemos! I am so proud to be a part of this fine district. A district that strives to educate with excellence, comprised of people who committed to the mission and who recognize that it is only through collaborative, focused effort that we will continue to be an outstanding public school district! **OFF**

Meet The Board Candidates

The November 6th election will give voters an opportunity to fill three seats on the Okemos School Board: two regular 4-year terms expiring December 31, 2016 and one partial term expiring December 31, 2016. The partial term is the remainder of former board member Damian Fisher's term, who resigned in February of 2012.

Amy Lothamer filed as a candidate for a regular 4-year term. There are five individuals who have filed declarations of intent to be write-in candidates for the vacant Board seats. **Stephen Alexander, Barry Carr, Samer Naser, and Felix Sharpe** have filed declarations for the regular 4-year terms; and **Tonya Rodriguez** filed a declaration for the partial term.

Each candidate submitted the following biographies. Statements from each of the candidates can be found at www.okemosschools.net/election.



Amy Lothamer
Regular 4-year
term candidate

Amy and her husband Jesse Lothamer have resided in Okemos since 1999. They have 2 children in the district; one being at Kinawa and the other at Cornell.

Amy obtained a Bachelor in Science from Michigan State University. She currently serves as the Marketing and Human Resources Vice President at Lothamer Tax Resolution.

Amy is involved with Junior League of Lansing and served on the Board as Fund Development Vice President. She is also involved with Okemos Special Needs Day Camp. In conjunction with working, volunteering, and raising a family Amy is very passionate about health and fitness and how it can impact people of all ages.



Stephen Alexander
Regular 4-year
term write-in
candidate

Stephen's three passions of fitness, technology, and children can be traced throughout his personal and professional

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life. As a United States Marine, Stephen lived all over the country and abroad and strengthened his commitment to fitness that began during his high school years as a state-ranked 800M runner. In Texas, as a Project Manager for Electronic Data Systems, Stephen enjoyed the challenge of developing and implementing complex technical solutions for dynamic government and private organizations. Active in his local school district, Stephen served at the Leander Middle School as the Parent Volunteer Coordinator, Treasurer of the PTA, the parent representative on the School Site Committee, the founder of the chess club, a mentor for at-risk boys, and an after-school tutor for the advanced math class.

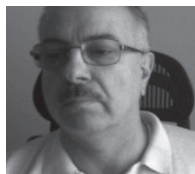
Reunited in 2008 with his high school sweetheart, a professor at MSU, Dr. Nicole Buchanan, they have six children between them (ages range from 11 months to 20 years old) and are both rooted in Okemos with a son who attended OHS and a fifth grader at Kinawa Middle School. At Kinawa, Stephen serves as a volunteer on the Parent Group and was recently one of the captains at the Keep Kinawa Moving fundraiser.



Barry Carr
Regular 4-year
term write-in
candidate

Barry has a Bachelors of Science in psychology and a Master's degree in Economics from MSU, and completed Ph.D. coursework in Communications. He is the Vice President and IT manager at ICS Marketing Services in Lansing.

Barry moved to Okemos in 1992 with his two young daughters specifically for the schools. Both his daughters and his step son graduated from Okemos high school. His older daughter went on to graduate from Western Michigan, and his younger daughter graduated just this year from the University of Michigan. All of them found that their experience in Okemos Schools prepared them exceedingly well for the academic rigors of college life.



Samer Naser
Regular 4-year
term write-in
candidate

Samer has lived in the district since 1998. He is married to Nanette Naser and they have four children. Two are in college, one graduated from the Okemos Schools, and the other from the Novi Schools. The younger ones are still in the Okemos Schools.

Samer received his B.Sc. from Washington University in St. Louis, and his M.Sc. and Ph.D. from the University of Toledo. Samer completed postdoctoral work at the University of Michigan which included work on developing educational software as part of an NSF funded project, "A focus on Developing Innovative Engineers". He is an Adjunct Faculty in Computer Science at both Baker College, and Davenport University. Samer has consulted in the systems and software area for many years for companies such as Jackson National as well as for the State of Michigan and the Veterans Administration. He is currently working in the Healthcare Information Technology arena.

Both Samer and Nanette are active in the community with Nanette volunteering at the children's school, girl scouts, and Junior League; and Samer having served several years as a member and a president of the board of the Keystone neighborhood association. Samer also coaches boys' Soccer in Meridian Township.



Tonya Rodriguez
Partial term
write-in candidate

Ms. Rodriguez grew up in the Okemos school system. In 1978, then known as Tonya Peterson, she was enrolled in the second grade at Cornell Elementary School. She graduated from Okemos High School in 1990. This year, Ms. Rodriguez enrolled her own 9-year old daughter at Cornell in the fourth grade.

Ms. Rodriguez earned a Bachelor's of Science from Michigan State University and a Juris Doctorate, Cum Laude, from Michigan State University College of Law. Ms. Rodriguez started her family while in law school. In 2004, her family moved to Southern California where she was a practicing attorney until returning, and moving her practice, to Okemos this past summer to be closer to family and to give her daughter the benefit of the excellent educational opportunities available here. Ms. Rodriguez has strong family roots in this area and she looks forward to raising her daughter in Okemos.




Felix Sharpe
Regular 4-year
term write-in
candidate

Felix Sharpe is currently the Director of Substance Abuse Prevention,

Treatment and Recovery Services for the State of Michigan. He served 4 years as the Director of Legislative Affairs in the administration of Mayor Dennis W. Archer in the City of Detroit. In that capacity he was significantly responsible for the successful implementation of the Compuware Campus Martius Development, the Lions/Tiger Stadia Development Projects, and the Casino Development Agreements.

He was appointed by Governor Jennifer Granholm to serve as the Director of Facilities Operation for the Bureau of Juvenile Justice. There Felix Sharpe negotiated a successful consent agreement related to the W.J. Maxey Boys Training School with the United States Department of Justice.

Felix lives in the Riverwood Park Sub-Division with his wife Lisa Webb Sharpe, who serves as a board member on the Okemos Education Foundation. Their daughter, Alexandra, attended Okemos Public Schools, and two grandchildren Cameron and Chase are current students. 

OEF News

Okemos Education Foundation

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See Page 6 & 7 For Okemos School Board Candidates!

2012 Okemos Education Foundation Awards Banquet

Thursday, November 15, 2012

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 are available at all school offices
until November 7, 2012*



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now more than ever!

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