



OEF News

Fall 2013

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

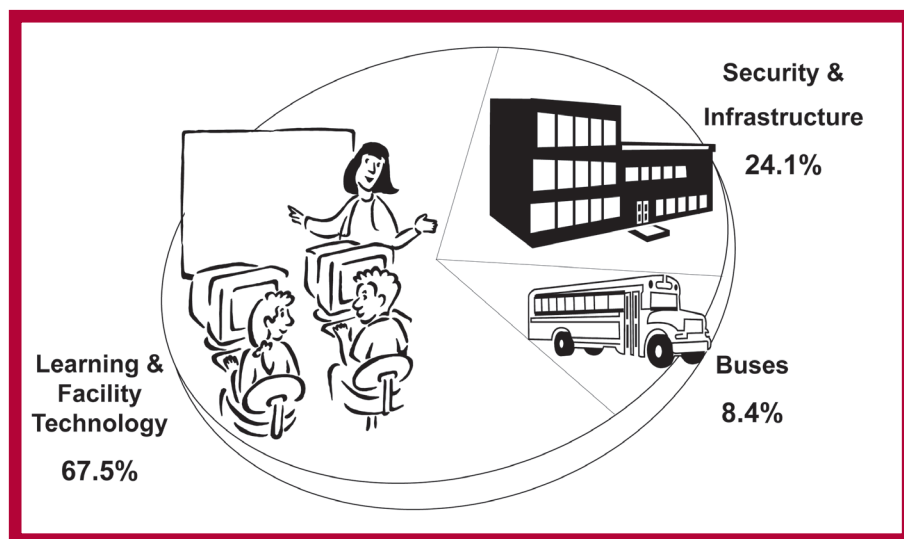
Key Ballot Measure on November 5 Technology/Security/Transportation Bond

We normally don't think of a bond proposal as something that will add value to our lives or wallets. However, the Okemos Public School's Technology, Security, and Transportation Bond on the ballot November 5 actually does both. Students, homeowners, and our entire community will benefit from this bond. From a financial perspective, approval of this bond will not result in an increase in the current millage rate.

The \$7.5 million bond will be used to update the district's technology and infrastructure, to provide all students with a personal learning device, to enhance building and classroom security, and to purchase replacement school buses. Again, approval of this bond will not raise the current millage rate. Further, a vote against this bond will not result in a decrease of the current millage rate.

Personal Learning Devices

First and foremost, this bond will provide Okemos students with the tools that will enable them to become more powerful learners, giving them access to the resources that they will need for success now and in the future. Every student on Okemos Public Schools will be provided with an age appropriate learning device to access the curriculum and extend learning opportunities.



For more information, including complete financial information and what will be provided at each school, visit www.VoteYesForOPS.com or www.okemosschools.net

Up until very recently, the breadth and depth of knowledge a student could access was limited to the amount of information a teacher could explain during the 50 minutes of class time. However, when provided with personal learning devices, today's students can locate and capture virtually an unlimited amount of information about any subject. In an era when information is abundant, the ability to form meaningful questions, to locate relevant and reliable information, and then to evaluate, organize, and apply that information is critical for our students' success.

These personal learning devices will make the classroom seem much smaller. Teachers will be able to apply technology judiciously to personalize learning plans that will

promote the success of each child. Some activities benefit from more personal attention from teachers. Other activities involve more independent work like individually assigned math problems to solve or replaying a screencast of a difficult-to-master concept. Teachers will be able to easily have students or groups of students working on a variety of tasks simultaneously.

These learning tools will allow for student-centered learning and will promote the success of our diverse learners.

Personal learning devices will also make the classroom seem larger. Students will be able to become more active learners, no longer limited by what they can access in

Okemos Education Foundation

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Message from the OEF Chair

Some are excited kindergarteners, eager to absorb every new discovery. Some are members of the Class



Dean Bolton - OEF Chair

of 2014, preparing for college, work and the duties and privileges of adulthood.

All of them will carry out the work that will determine what kind of future we will enjoy.

Thanks to the generosity of community members who care about these future leaders, the OEF is able to award high-impact grants that enrich our student's classroom experiences. They also provide our students with the author visits, ACT workshops, and the after-school clubs and activities that provide wonderful opportunities for students to expand on their classroom experiences, grow their talents, develop leadership skills, find friendship and learn the importance of community service in their lives.

Please consider being part of this generous community of people who are shaping the

future by supporting our students through the OEF, the district-wide group that focuses on nurturing academic excellence in all of our students. Please consider being our Partner in Education.

A list of last year's grants made possible by our Partners in Education can be found on page 5. All of the grants we've given over recent years can be found on our website, www.oefsite.org, where you'll also find a list of our 2012-13 Partners in Education. Since 1984, OEF Partners in Education have supported hundreds and hundreds of learning opportunities that help make Okemos Public Schools one of the leading school districts in the state and nation.

Please join me, and hundreds of your fellow parents and community members as a Partner in Education this year. You can use the enclosed donation envelope or visit www.oefsite.org to make a secure online donation. We are a 501(c)(3) organization, so your donation is tax-deductible.

Your donation will help our children acquire the insights and skills they will need to master the challenges facing our community, nation, and world throughout their lives. It is the most powerful way any of us have to shape the future. **OEF**

OEF Donations

A gift to the Okemos Education Foundation helps 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-deductible to the fullest extent of the law. For your convenience, we accept online credit card donations at www.oefsite.org, or use the envelope included with this newsletter.

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!

Okemos Education Foundation mission:

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

Message from Our Superintendent

Our Journey to "Success for All"

Over the past several months, I have been doing some reading about culture, causing me to reflect on my life experiences and how they have shaped



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

the lens in which I view the world. More importantly, the reading has caused me to consider how these experiences and this acquired knowledge are reflected in my behavior and responses to situations and people.

Culture controls our behavior in deep and persisting ways, many of which are outside of our own awareness and beyond our conscious control. Regardless of our background, all of us bring a "cultural lens" or values, norms and traditions which affect how we, as individuals or as a particular group perceive, think, interact, behave, and make judgments about our world. When I put this in the context of being an instructional leader in the Okemos Public Schools (OPS), I started to consider how this impacts our work . . .

Our diversity includes gender, race, cultures, ethnicity, socio-economic, sexual orientation, religion, limited English proficient learners, disabilities etc . . . As a culturally or diversity enhanced school district, OPS needs to ensure we are meeting the academic, social, emotional and behavioral needs of all of our students. As educators and as a school community, we need to examine and reflect on our relationships, curriculum, instructional strategies, policies and practices to promote the success of every child.

I truly believe that we all have good intentions to bring about the changes needed in an educational environment that desires to promote the success of all students. Good intentions and awareness are wonderful qualities. However, this "good will" must be accompanied by an enhanced understanding of cultural impacts, broadened instructional knowledge, the implementation of evidence based strategies, as well as the courage to embrace and commit to the belief that "we can do better!"

The concept of "promoting the success of every child" is multifaceted and continues to be our focus in 2013-14.

Culturally competent and responsive school environment (Strategic Plan: Diversity and Curriculum and Instruction) - We are committed to creating a culturally competent and responsive school environment where students, staff and community recognize, embrace, celebrate, appreciate and value the diverse attributes and identities of each other. The 2013-14 school year will involve foundational work to continue to create a safe environment to self reflect and to engage in open and honest conversations regarding this topic. Our focus will include identifying and defining our "current reality", understanding the issues, reflecting on our practices and identifying impactful strategies. We want to ensure that as individuals and as a system we are responding respectfully and effectively to children of all cultures, languages, socio economic backgrounds, races, ethnic backgrounds, disabilities, religions, genders, sexual orientation and other diversity factors in a manner that recognizes, affirms and values the worth of individuals, families and communities.

We need to gain an accurate understanding of "where we are" and to develop a vision for "where we need to go." We will build awareness and understanding through professional development, self reflection, data analysis, research review and surveys. A district level advisory committee comprised of members with diverse perspectives or cultural lenses will be established with the intent of informing meaningful and relevant action. It is through our conscious and deliberate focus on promoting a culturally responsive environment this year and beyond that we can continue our commitment to promoting the success of all of our students.

Substance Abuse and Our Youth (Strategic Goal: Social Issues) - Our commitment to addressing the issue of substance abuse and our youth remains strong. We recognize that alcohol and drugs are accessible by our students and that some 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, the Okemos Substance Abuse Prevention (OSAP) committee was established to develop a strategic plan specifically for this issue. During the 2012-13 school year, the 2013-16 Strategic Plan was finalized and adopted by the Board of Education. A copy of the strategic plan can be found on the district's website (www.okemosschools.net).

Very early in the process, we defined our mission: "Together. . .students, families, staff and community will sustain a focused effort to promote healthy, informed choices on the issues of alcohol and substance use." Our mission and vision are reflected in the goals and strategies that will focus the school community's work on the following critical issues: Communication, Education, Leadership, Partnership/Outreach and Policies/Practices/Procedures.

The OSAP committee identified their top priorities for the Okemos school community: (1) **Communication** - Create a school/community environment with on-going (re-current) discussions about alcohol and substance use and (2) **Education** - Align all prevention education to evidence based best practices - provide a K-12 curriculum that is both educational and interesting to students. This will be the focus of our work during the 2013-14 school year.

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/Security/Transportation Bond (Strategic Goals: Technology and Finance) - Last year, one focus for the district was to determine our technological needs now and in the future allowing us to deliver relevant and meaningful educational programming and efficient practices and services. Recognizing that we must prepare our students for the 21st century, a committee of school staff, parents and community members researched the topics of personal learning devices, Smarter Balanced Assessment, on-line learning, digital textbooks, and the Common Core State Standards. As a result of their work, a recommendation was made to the Board of Education that reflected our vision for technology, teaching and learning that will promote the continued excellence expected

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and embraced within the Okemos Public Schools.

Additionally, we engaged in a proactive process to analyze and evaluate our existing security processes and procedures. We identified both strengths and gaps or areas of focus that needed to be addressed to continue to promote the safety of our students. Finally, it's important that we maintain a safe and efficient bus fleet. Our aging fleet is experiencing more breakdowns and requiring more costly repairs. After considering the technological, security and transportation needs of our district, as well as the funding required to address these critical needs, the Board of Education decided to pursue a \$7.5 million bond. On the November 5, 2013 ballot, our community is being asked to consider this bond proposal. The proposed purchases will enhance our ability to promote the safety of our students, to deliver relevant and meaningful educational programming and to maintain a safe and efficient bus fleet.

Academic growth and performance (Strategic Goal: Curriculum and Instruction and Technology)

The newest accountability scorecards developed by the Michigan Department of Education that link a color code with a school or district are "troubling" on many levels. Based on a complicated, statistical representation of MEAP and MME results, a scale of green (high), lime green, yellow, orange, and red

(low) was developed to "label" schools and districts. OPS was originally considered orange, but upon further review has recently been reclassified as yellow. As a highly respected school district within our state and known for our academic excellence, it's difficult to embrace this "judgment" and not just dismiss it as a "mathematical calculation skewed by a weighting system that fails the rational test." However, the positive component of MDE's accountability system is the depth of data that is available to help inform our work! We embrace the value that this adds to our commitment to educating with excellence.

We are able to access and sort the data in meaningful ways, enhancing our understanding of the academic proficiencies of every individual student. This will assist us in our ongoing efforts to review and analyze data from a variety of performance measures, then plan and implement focused strategies to help each child reach his/her potential, including our most at-risk learners. I believe this is truly the intended outcome at the State and certainly at the District level . . . to promote academic proficiency for all of our students, supporting the low performers and challenging the highest performers. To remain one of the top performing districts in the State of Michigan, we will continue to enhance our practices and respond to the identified needs of all of our students, on our journey to excellence...

recognizing we have not yet arrived.

I have highlighted four initiatives or areas of focus that will positively impact the educational experience for all of our students: creating a culturally responsive environment, enhancing our technology, security and bus fleet, addressing substance abuse and our youth and promoting the academic achievement and growth of all of our students. The common theme is "success for all", based on understanding and addressing individual needs.

David Koyama, Principal at an elementary school outside of Seattle truly captured my belief when he stated, "One of my most important functions as a school leader is to transform political jargon like 'no child left behind' into a moral imperative that inspires teachers to work toward justice, not mere compliance." I embrace that sentiment. However, I would change it slightly to more accurately reflect who we are in Okemos. One of OUR most important functions is to embrace the concept of "no child left behind" as a moral imperative that inspires not only teachers, but also staff, students, parents/guardians and our community! After all, we have established a culture of "Together . . . educating with excellence, inspiring learners for life." Our work together will be challenging, but exciting. Together, we will continue to make a difference. **OEF**

2013 OEF Award Recipients

The annual OEF Awards Banquet is scheduled for Thursday, November 21, 2013 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 21.

Congratulations to the following 2013 recipients and nominees!

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.

Lynn Atkins, EI Basic Classroom Teacher at Kinawa 5-6 School (retired)

Lee Ballor, Math/Science Teacher at Chippewa 7-8 School

Nichole Berridge, RtI Coach at Cornell Elementary School

Karen Canestraight, Science Teacher at Okemos High School

Ingrid Yarbrough, 4th Grade Teacher at Hiawatha Elementary School (retired)

Special Recognition Award:

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

Catherine Hickey, At Risk Aide at Hiawatha Elementary School

Kathy Maki, Library Media Specialist at Hiawatha Elementary School

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.

Christine Burgess & Cari Thomas, Uniform Committee Chairs for the Okemos High School Band

Other nominees for the 2013 Volunteer Service Award were:

Elizabeth Clifford, PTO Secretary and volunteer at Hiawatha Elementary School

Jodi Schrader, Vice President of the Okemos Parent Council and the Kinawa Parent Group

Diane Shafer, Secretary of the Chippewa Parent Group, OHS Choir trip Fundraising Chair, Okemos Drama Boosters Hospitality Chair

Please plan to honor the recipients and nominees by attending the 2013 OEF Awards Banquet!

(Ballot - Continued from page 1)

a classroom, or to what a teacher can teach in a classroom, or to what they can find in their textbooks or the library. The devices will have wireless capabilities that will expand the classroom to the entire school grounds and beyond, and will allow the district to purchase digital textbooks for anytime, anywhere access.

These tools will foster collaboration, creativity, innovation and communications among students. They will also provide research and information literacy and give all students the opportunity to learn the critical skills of a good digital citizen.



Have many schools done this before? Has it been successful? Yes and yes. Personal learning programs have been implemented in districts across the nation, including many here in Michigan. Districts are reporting increased motivation and student attentiveness. Early reports are showing that students are scoring higher on achievement tests in schools that are using personal learning devices.

It is critical to the success of our students that they master the technology tools that are commonly available, as well as to reap the improved learning benefits personal learning devices will allow.

Technology Infrastructure

Thanks to the community's support of a technology bond in 2007, the district's technology infrastructure is sound and solid. While most of the classroom equipment purchased with the 2007 bond is still in good

working order, some of it has reached its life expectancy and needs to be replaced. Further, the computers at the Meridian Senior Center need to be replaced so that we can continue to extend learning opportunities to all of the members of our community.

In order to meet the demands of the personal learning program wireless capabilities will be expanded and mobile device management will provide the filtering and firewalls for the devices as required by law for all district-owned computers.

Security

The security of our children has always been a priority. Meridian Police and Fire Departments have been consulted and while they found the district's practices and procedures to be solid, there are gaps that need to be addressed to promote the continued safety of students and staff.

Bond funds will be used to complete the installation of electronic locks on all exterior doors and install an internal locking system on all classroom doors which will allow for quick and complete lockdowns.

Enhanced 911 capabilities will be installed so that emergency personnel can identify the room a call is placed from rather than the current system which only identifies the building address. Communication improvements will include updates to the public address systems. Currently there are areas in some buildings where announcements cannot be heard. The bond will provide for full communication coverage and the replacement of the aging two-way radio network to ensure communication in emergencies.

Transportation

The oldest buses in the district's fleet are 8 to 11 years old. As with

any older vehicle, they require more extensive and frequent maintenance and they are more susceptible to breakdowns. As a matter of fact, since the start of this school year, two of the oldest buses have had major maintenance issues that are no longer cost-effective to repair. The district will be leasing two buses for the remainder of the school year to meet the district's needs and to continue to operate a safe and efficient fleet.

Bond funds will be used to purchase 7 buses over a three year period, with the first replacement buses going into service at the start of the next school year. Using bond funds to purchase buses will preserve the district's operating funds which support classrooms, programs and services.

No Increase in the Millage Rate

Voting yes for this bond will not increase the current millage rate. Voting no for this bond will not result in a decrease of the current millage rate. The current school debt millage rate is 7 mills and that will not change regardless of the results of the election on November 5.



Approval of this bond will allow the district to continue to take advantage of the state's School Loan Revolving Fund. The purchases made with this bond will be paid off over the next 5 years, beginning in 2014. The current debt levy associated with the newest school buildings (Okemos High School, Bennett Woods, and Hiawatha) will be extended one additional year, into 2024.

See Ballot, page 7

(Ballot - Continued from page 6)

People often ask if Okemos Public Schools' school-related taxes are high compared to others. The answer is that our school-related taxes are lower than a majority of local districts. In fact, Okemos ranks 13th out of 21 local school districts for 2013-14. (See sidebar) Since approval of this bond will not increase the existing millage rate, Okemos will still have lower millage rates than such districts as DeWitt, East Lansing, Haslett, and Holt. Okemos offers a nationally ranked education while maintaining a lower school-related property tax – an extraordinary value for our students, families and community.

The Excellent School Premium

Realtors estimate that an excellent public school district can result in a 15% increase in the selling price of a home. When people choose where to buy a home, one of the primary factors is the quality of the public schools. If we maintain and enhance our public schools, we will be doing the same for our home and property values. This can all be accomplished without an increase in the current millage rate.

Voting yes for this bond will prepare our students to be 21st century life-long learners, ensure the safety of our students, and provide safe and efficient transportation. All of this will help Okemos sustain its reputation for excellence and will keep our property values strong.

It has been observed by many that Okemos is defined more by its public schools than anything else. On November 5, Okemos residents will have a remarkable opportunity to continue maintaining one of our greatest resources – our public schools – and fulfilling our most important responsibility – the education of our children.

It will only take a few minutes of your time to go to the polls and vote yes and it will make a lifetime of difference for our children. **OK**

The Impact of Your Vote:

YES = No Increase in Millage Rate + A Lifetime of Difference for Our Children

NO = No Decrease in Millage Rate

Voting yes for the Technology/Security/Transportation Bond on November 5, 2013 will not increase the current millage rate. Voting no will not decrease the current millage rate. Approval of the bond will have a profound positive impact on our students and our community without a change in the current millage rate.

Local Schools Districts

Millage Rates

2013-14

| Rank | School District | Hold | | | Total |
|---------|-----------------|-------------------------|-------|---------|-------|
| Current | | Harmless/ Recreation | Debt | Sinking | |
| 1 | Potterville | | 7.35 | 4.99 | 12.34 |
| 2 | Waverly | 4.31 | 7.62 | | 11.93 |
| 3 | DeWitt | | 10.00 | | 10.00 |
| 4 | Holt | | 10.00 | | 10.00 |
| 5 | Haslett | | 8.33 | 1.45 | 9.78 |
| 6 | Laingsburg | | 8.70 | 1.00 | 9.70 |
| 7 | East Lansing | | 8.12 | 1.28 | 9.40 |
| 8 | Bath | | 8.00 | 1.00 | 9.00 |
| 9 | Springport | | 8.95 | | 8.95 |
| 10 | Webberville | | 7.45 | 0.98 | 8.43 |
| 11 | Fowlerville | | 8.34 | | 8.34 |
| 12 | Charlotte | | 8.09 | | 8.09 |
| 13 | Williamston | 0.75 | 7.30 | | 8.05 |
| 14 | Okemos | | 7.00 | 0.99 | 7.99 |
| 15 | Howell | | 7.39 | | 7.39 |
| 16 | Leslie | | 7.39 | | 7.39 |
| 17 | Pewamo-Westph | | 7.00 | | 7.00 |
| 18 | St. Johns | | 7.00 | | 7.00 |
| 19 | Eaton Rapids | | 7.00 | | 7.00 |
| 20 | Perry | | 7.00 | | 7.00 |
| 21 | Grand Ledge | | 5.40 | 0.80 | 6.20 |
| 22 | Mason | | 3.85 | 1.00 | 4.85 |
| 23 | Lansing | | 2.30 | 1.50 | 3.80 |

Since approval of this bond will not increase the existing millage rate, Okemos will still have a lower millage rate than a majority of local school districts while continuing to offer a nationally ranked education – an extraordinary value for our students, families, and community!

OEF News

Okemos Education Foundation

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2013 Okemos Education Foundation Awards Banquet

Thursday, November 21, 2013

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 13, 2013*



Be our Partner in Education!
Your support makes a difference for Okemos students,
now more than ever!

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