

# OF Fall 2015 NEWS



## SEEDS OF SCIENCE

*Field trips offer an engaging way to learn about plant life*

The 4th grade life science curriculum focuses on plants, so it is a happy coincidence that Okemos students live close to the Michigan 4-H Children's Garden where MSU staff, led by Dr. Norm Lownds, make plant science come to life through hands-on activities that are both educational and fun. The MSU Seeds of Science program offers a series of three field trips which address topics such as the relationship between plants and other living things, why plants are important in our everyday lives, identifying plant parts through dissection and garden exploration, and answering plant-related questions using science experiments. These interactive lessons incorporate a variety of fun methods including microscopes, magnifying glasses, stories, journaling, brainstorming, group conversation, and technology.

"Students LOVE going to MSU to participate in the Seeds of Science field trips," says 4th grade Bennett Woods teacher Denise Nelson. "The staff at MSU have been wonderful at keeping up with our new science standards as well as incorporating technology into the students' learning. Students loved the iPads they were able to use to take photographs of plant structures, diseases and a variety of growing environments in the different greenhouses."

MSU plant science docents lead students through the



Dr. Norm Lownds with Okemos students at MSU's Children's Garden



various gardens on campus, directing the lessons, encouraging curiosity, and even staying connected in between field trips through the online “Wonder Wall.” The MSU staff are clearly a hit with both teachers and students. Says Cornell’s Don Mowry, “One of the things that impacts the children each year is the staff at the Gardens. Dr. Norm Lownds and his team have done such a thorough job of preparing activities that help the students understand how plants grow and how they reproduce. We especially have enjoyed the lettuce activity as each of the students plant seeds and watch them grow into plants that they actually study and then eat!!” Nelson adds, “Probably one of the best parts of the experience is all the hands-on and interactive learning that takes place. Students are completely engaged and can’t wait until we go back!”



The Okemos Education Foundation is proud to be able to fund these valuable learning experiences for every 4th grade class in the district through the Connie Osborn Deits Science Enrichment Fund.



*I really liked going to MSU to the gardens. We got to see how plants come from big and small seeds.*

Emma, 4th Grade Student

*I am very grateful to be a part of such a wonderful community that supports so graciously the type of learning that is invaluable to our students. Thank you OEF!*

Denise Nelson, Bennett Woods Elementary Teacher

*I find the Seeds of Science program at MSU to be a valuable program that allows our students to experience the plant curriculum in a very hands-on atmosphere. The staff is well trained and show a genuine enthusiasm for what they do.*

Karen Casler, Hiawatha Elementary Teacher

*I want to thank the OEF for the wonderful gift we have received each year to attend the Seeds of Science program at the MSU Children’s Gardens! It is one of the great learning experiences for our Cornell kids! This is one of the best field trips available and we are so privileged to be able to participate.*

*Thanks to the Okemos Education Foundation!!!*

Don Mowry, Cornell Elementary Teacher

Okemos Education Foundation grants fund a variety of academic innovations that Okemos teachers request for their students. Last spring, OHS English teacher Dawn Reed received a grant to create “flexible learning spaces” in her classroom. Her room now offers students three workspace options, each accommodating 4 students per group: traditional individual desks,



*OHS Teacher Dawn Reed with students using the new workspace*

# GRANTS TO SUPPORT CLASSROOM INNOVATION: Flexible Learning Spaces

low round tables, and high-top tables which allow students to either sit on a backless stool or stand. Reed notes that giving students a choice in seating encourages both creativity and collaboration, both important components in the writing process. “Some people ask me if students are less focused in groups,” Reed says, “but in my experience and especially this year, they are more focused in the configuration that I have than when in rows.” Reed also notes that “students sit in almost all their classes, all day long.” Allowing students the option to stand is a very welcome change for many.

What do the students think? Reed polled her classes and discovered that 52% prefer the tall tables, with

the rest equally split between their preference for the low round tables and the grouping of desks. Students have commented that the tall tables “make it harder to fall asleep in class” and that they “look more professional.” “I like to be able to stand,” says OHS senior Ariana, “since I sit in every other class.” Reed adds, “One student who moves every day to a tall table told me he just really appreciates standing. I used to have students want to stand in my room, but they felt singled out. Now they have a space where it is welcome and encouraged.”

The grant Reed received from the Okemos Education Foundation funded two wooden high-top tables and 8 stools. But the rest of her now-transformed classroom came together once Reed’s colleagues saw her vision. Okemos Senior Custodian Ken Green uncovered some unused circular low tables and math teacher Russ Pline donated a single-user high computer desk to round out her flexible workspace options. “My room looks amazing! I am so appreciative of the support from the OEF and the High School faculty. The learning spaces are a gift and treasure in my room for my students.”

The OEF approved 35 classroom grants in 2014-15, totaling almost \$30,000. This was in addition to the \$49,800 grant to fund extra-curricular student clubs and organizations.

Ashley Andersen  
(Cornell, 2nd grade)



Kara Dokter  
(Chippewa, 7th)



Alison Evenson  
(Chippewa Counselor)



Amy Petersburg  
(Cornell, Kindergarten)



Kris Schoen  
(Cornell, Kindergarten)



Tammy Deppong  
(Okemos Parent)



The Media and Technology Team  
(left to right):  
Drew Sartorius,  
Matt Ottinger,  
Kathy Nicholas,  
Errin Chapman,  
Kathy Shore,  
Matthew Ethington,  
and Ryan Lewis

# Announcing the 2015 OKEMOS EDUCATION FOUNDATION AWARD Recipients

The Okemos Education Foundation has a long tradition of hosting an annual banquet to honor the faculty, staff, and volunteers who have made a significant impact on the Okemos school community. We are so pleased to introduce you to this year's deserving recipients and to invite you to help us honor them at the banquet. The banquet includes a social hour (cash bar with live music provided by OHS strings students), sit-down dinner, and an uplifting awards presentation that will leave you feeling proud of not just those being honored but of the entire Okemos school community. Please consider joining us at this community celebration of educational excellence. For more information about the OEF Awards or to purchase banquet tickets, please visit our website at [www.oefsite.org](http://www.oefsite.org)

**The 2015 Okemos Education Foundation Awards Banquet**  
featuring keynote speaker **Deb Borton-McDonough** and  
hosted by **Mark Bashore**  
**Thursday, November 19, 2015**  
Kellogg Center at Michigan State University  
5:30 pm: Social Hour  
6:30 pm: Dinner and Program  
**Banquet tickets must be purchased by Nov. 11**

# APPLE Awards

## 2014-15 APPLE Award Orders

### APPLE AWARD RECIPIENTS:

*Katie Alexander  
Melissa Allis  
Ashley Andersen  
Kimberly Anglin  
Christine Batora  
Tori Benton  
Erika Bridge  
Jora Brummette  
Christina Burke  
Tim Case  
Karen Casler  
Joy Chase  
Deborah Clay  
Adam Clements  
Laura Cook  
Gary Cooper  
Missy Cosby  
Josh Coty  
Nicole Dault  
Tiffany Dixon  
Kara Dokter  
Kelli Dowling  
Jennifer Eddy  
Cindy Erickson  
Kathleen Eyia  
Darla Ferracciolo  
Molly Francis  
Carolina Giraldo  
Sheri Gunns  
Sally Heister  
Jennifer Hendrix  
Jill Hoort  
Tom Hopper  
Jamie Horn  
Kristie Howart  
Lori Howe  
Sheryl Hudler  
Lauri Johnson  
Laura Kampf  
Marsha Kilpela  
Donna Kregelka  
Brian Kushion  
Kathy Lanzetta  
Beverly Lillrose*



*Phil Magsig  
Jocelyn Mankowski  
Niki Mann  
Julienne Mason  
Heather McNeilly  
Amanda Medina  
Julie Mittan  
Eric Morrison  
Marian Murembya  
Denise Nelson  
Amy Olivarez  
John Olstad  
Noelle Palasty  
Caitlin Pemble  
Amy Petersburg  
Alana Pignataro  
Russ Pline  
Matt Prinz  
Paula Pultar  
Vicki Pursley  
Elizabeth Reed  
Dawn Reed  
Laura Richter  
Laura Ross  
Ivy Schmidt  
Ashleigh Schooley  
Margaret Scribner  
Andy Sheufelt  
Mary Simon  
Eric Staib  
Cathy Staudt  
Kristen Terrieri  
Jessica Warren  
Theresa Weber  
Leslie Wertz  
Cindy Wolf  
Jenny Woodruff  
Cora Zink*

The **Okemos Education Foundation APPLE Award** offers families a way to publicly honor Okemos staff members who have touched the lives of their students. For a \$20 donation to the Foundation, the OEF will deliver a full-color, personalized 5x7 certificate that includes the specific reason why that person is being honored. Visit [www.oefsite.org](http://www.oefsite.org) to read some of the heart-warming messages sent to teachers and staff. APPLE Awards are available at any time of the year and can be ordered at [www.oefsite.org](http://www.oefsite.org). This program is a win-win: it gives a “pat on the back” to our deserving staff and also provides needed donations to the Foundation to fund programs for our students.

A total of 193 APPLE Awards have been sent since the program began in May 2014.

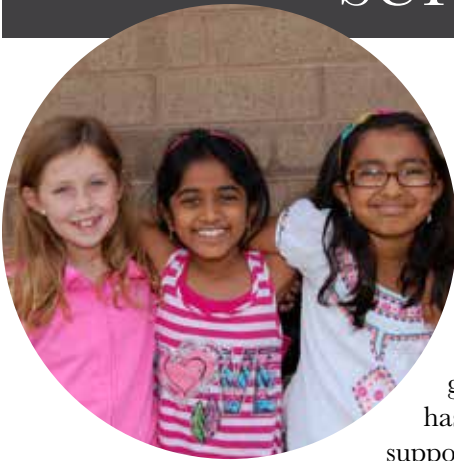
**Thank you for your support!**

### APPLE AWARD DONORS:

*Sadie Adams  
Pranav Ajarapu  
Anonymous  
Day Beck  
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Nancy and Mark Bennett  
and family  
The Bonemer Family  
Edward and Laura Brown  
The Buck/Hentz Family  
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Vishal Karna  
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Dr. Ilsoon Lee*

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Ruchi Madan  
Murali Mahadevan  
Veronica Marquez  
The Mason Family  
Reagan McCarthy  
Kim Midgley  
Daniel Moore  
Niko  
The Nowlin Family  
Yuktha Padamati  
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David Parker  
Pennington Family  
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The Williams Family  
The Wohlford-Nieland Family  
Kevin Wu  
Weihua Xu  
The Yang Family  
The Zegarac Family  
Peng Zhang and Hui Liu  
Yin Zhang*

# THE OKEMOS EDUCATION FOUNDATION NEEDS YOUR SUPPORT!



A Message from OEF Board Chair  
**Martha Hentz**

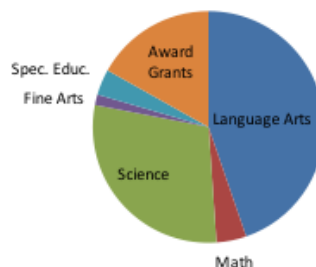
The Okemos Education Foundation has given over \$1,000,000 in support of academic excellence since its inception in 1984. That support started out rather low, with just a few thousand dollars being given annually to fund classroom grants, but in recent years, the Foundation has been called upon to provide much more support, averaging \$77,000 annually since 2003.

Unfortunately, the level of incoming donations has not kept pace with the growing need. For the past five years, contributions to the Foundation have been lower than the outgoing funding to our schools.

The Okemos Education Foundation began funding extra-curricular student clubs in the 2009-2010 academic year, and we significantly increased that funding in 2011-2012 to meet the budget crisis that threatened to cut all clubs and student organizations. The Foundation stepped in to cover the costs of groups such as OHS ACTION, the elementary Safety Patrol program, Chieftain Champs, OHS Connect, as well as numerous after-school clubs which provide our students with valuable and diverse experiences and permit our students to explore new areas of interest outside the normal academic schedule. The Okemos Education Foundation dug into its financial reserves to meet this need, believing in the importance of these programs and hoping that the financial climate would change in favor of public schools in the near future.

But that change has not happened. State funding levels continue to prevent the district from being able to fund programs that were once eliminated from its budget, so the OEF is being asked to continue to provide the \$50,000 needed to fund these extra-curricular clubs and student organizations. And that's in addition to the classroom grants, awards, author visits, and other program costs that the Okemos Education Foundation already provides. We need your help to be able to continue to support Okemos students at the same level as in recent years. Please donate to the OEF's General Fund today! Use the donation form on the next page or [visit www.oefsite.org](http://www.oefsite.org) to make an online donation. **Thank you!**

## 2014-15 OEF Grants: \$29,638



## How OEF donations are spent on our students...

### 2014-2015 OEF Support to Okemos Students:

Clubs and Student Organizations:	\$ 49,800
OEF Grants:	\$ 29,638
.....	
	\$79,438

### 2014-2015 OEF-Sponsored Clubs: \$49,800

#### Okemos High School

- ACTION (*Community Service*)
- Quiz Bowl
- Asian Club
- Connect (*OHS freshmen orientation/mentoring program*)
- Drama Club
- Earth Club
- Gay/Straight Alliance
- Political Club
- SADD (*Students Against Destructive Decisions*)
- World Language Club

#### Chippewa 7/8

- Art Club
- Computer Coding Club
- Homework Club

#### Kinawa 5/6

- Archery Club
- Choir Club
- Cross Country Club

#### Bennett Woods Elementary

- Safety Patrol
- Chieftain Champs (*mentoring program*)

#### Cornell Elementary

- Safety Patrol
- Chieftain Champs (*mentoring program*)

#### Hiawatha Elementary

- Safety Patrol
- Chieftain Champs (*mentoring program*)

#### Okemos Public Montessori at Central (OPM)

- Safety Patrol
- Culinary Club

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



Please visit [www.oefsite.org](http://www.oefsite.org) to see the full list of our Business Partners in Education. We appreciate your support of Okemos students!

**BUSINESS SPONSORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES**

Let the OEF help you advertise your business to the 2600 families in the Okemos Public School District. Contact Board Chair **Martha Hentz** for more information about how your support can help our students.

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

**DONATION FORM**

**Thank you for supporting the Okemos Education Foundation.**

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

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
*(as you wish to be recognized)*

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Check all that apply:  Parent of current Okemos student

Parent of former Okemos student     Okemos Alum (year: \_\_\_\_)

OPS staff (current/former)

Please accept my gift of: \_\_\_\_\_

I would like my gift to be used:

- Wherever Needed Most
- OEF General Fund: Program/Project Support
- OEF Endowment Fund: Future Needs

I wish to honor a special person with this gift:

\_\_\_\_\_

I wish to remember a special person with this gift:

\_\_\_\_\_

**Please make checks payable to:** Okemos Education Foundation

**Donations may be sent to:** 4406 Okemos Rd, Okemos, MI 48864 or donate online at: [www.oefsite.org](http://www.oefsite.org)



# The Journey Towards **Cultural Competence** Continues!

Superintendent's Message: **Dr. Catherine J. Ash**

**W**e actually started this “intentional” journey towards cultural competence and a responsive school environment two years ago! Our district made a conscious commitment to create 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.” As a diversity enhanced school district, we need to examine and reflect on our relationships, curriculum, instructional strategies, policies and practices to promote the academic, social, emotional and behavioral success of every child.

Creating a culturally competent and responsive school environment has been and continues to be a focus. This year, we are taking this conversation to another level. 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 diverse attributes in a manner that recognizes, affirms and values the worth of each person in our district and community.

The concept of “promoting the success of every child” is multifaceted. We recognize that to realize our goal of promoting academic growth for all of our students, our efforts must include creating culturally competent and responsive school environments. As we work to eliminate achievement gaps, it’s not just about multi-tiered systems of support. While that is a critical component, there’s more! Our intervention model must be accompanied by cultural competence!

In Gary R. Howard’s book, *We Can’t Teach What We Don’t Know: White Teachers, Multiracial Schools* (2006), he utilizes the “Achievement Triangle: Dimensions of Knowing” to explain how to address the achievement gap and educational equity. In reality, these concepts apply to all diverse attributes, not just race and socio-economics. The triangle identifies three dimensions of knowing: my “self”, my students and my practice. In depth knowledge of all three, through the lens of culture, is critical to promoting the success of all.

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, each of us has 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. Knowing my “self”, involves reflection and gaining a deep sense of our own identity. We must acknowledge and embrace that our cultural views are not absolute! Through an enhanced level of self-awareness, we can understand how our unconscious biases affect our interactions with students, parents and peers.

In our opening day session with staff, our keynote speaker, Dr. Dorinda Carter Andrews encouraged us to ask and reflect:

- *How does my social location (gender, race, class, religion, sexual orientation, age, etc. . .) shape my mind set about teaching/learning, the students I serve and the practices I engage?*
- *What more do I need to know, that I don’t know around culture, power and difference?*
- *How can I be a more culturally conscious person?*



As a school community, we all need to ask these questions of our selves. To be agents of personal or organizational change and to make improvements in the system, we must first examine our role and function within it. Life in general and school in particular is not the same experience for everyone.

As we engage in these courageous and often emotion laden conversations, it's important that we have shared norms to guide our work. As a district, we have committed to the following norms:

1. *Open and honest communication - Speak your truth.*
2. *Stay engaged.*
3. *Be inclusive of all voices.*
4. *Allow yourself to experience "discomfort" - This often leads to positive and impactful growth.*
5. *Expect to be misunderstood.*
6. *Seek to understand - Genuinely listen; Ask questions, of yourself and others, especially if you feel "defensiveness" starting to surface; It's not personal!*
7. *Take risks.*
8. *Practice forgiveness - Assume good intentions; There are no judgments in these conversations. It's more about the fact that we just don't know what we don't know!*
9. *Expect and accept "non-closure" - It's a journey!*



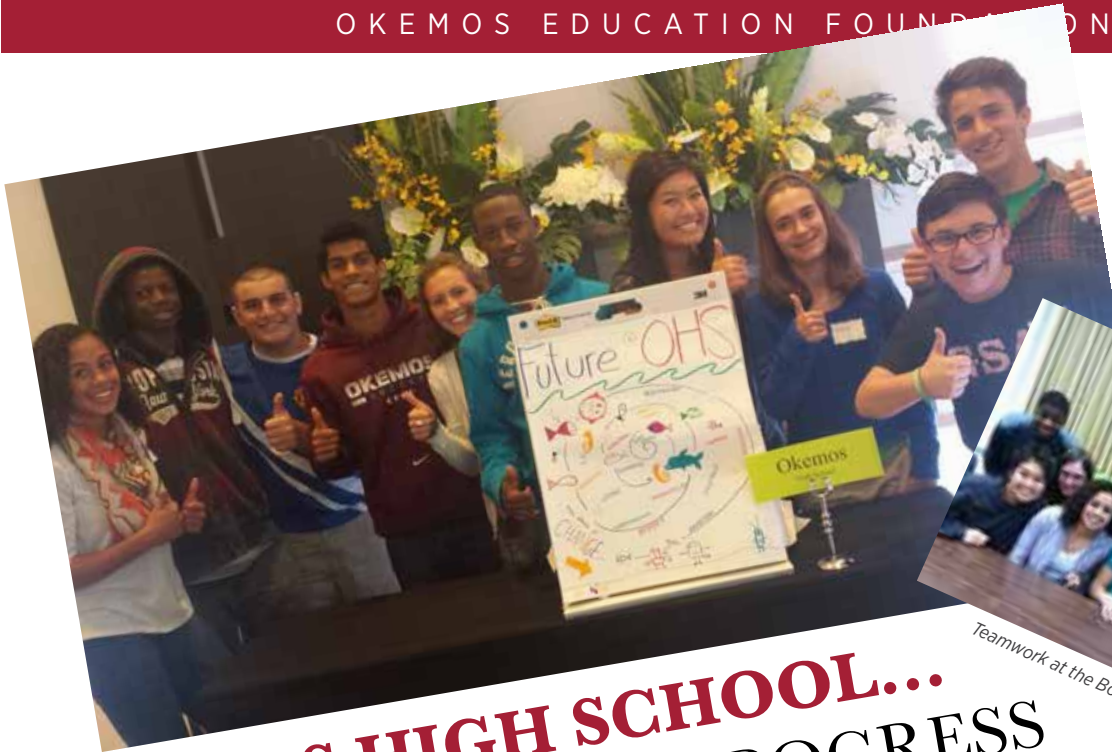
**Note:** *Dr. Dorinda Carter Andrews and Ms. Teresa Bingman, Esq. will be facilitating our efforts as we move towards a more culturally competent and responsive school environment. Dr. Carter Andrews is an associate professor in the Department of Teacher Education at Michigan State University where she teaches courses on racial identity development, urban education, critical multiculturalism, and critical race theory. Ms. Teresa Bingman is founder and CEO of THE BINGMAN GROUP, LLC. She is an attorney with expertise in program and policy, as well as developing outreach plans, strategies, and plans of action designed to enhance organizational operations.*

Please join us in making a commitment to examining our own values, assumptions and behaviors; consciously building our cultural competence and responsiveness; engaging in courageous conversations; demonstrating our continued commitment to helping all of our students experience success; examining our schools' and district's policies and practices; creating a system and a community that allows all students to thrive, to reach our high expectations within an environment that breaks down the barriers.

I am grateful that we have the trust, the mutual respect and a shared vision for the success of all of our students, allowing us to engage in these courageous and sometimes emotional conversations, to truly impact the "system". Our culture of collaboration and "together" will certainly serve us well, as we consciously engage in this transformative work. It's not personal, but it is imperative!

***In 2014-15, The Cultural Diversity Advisory Committee was established, comprised of members with diverse perspectives or cultural lenses. Their purpose is to inform meaningful and relevant action. One such action was the creation and distribution of diversity surveys for 7-12 students, K-12 parents/guardians and K-12 staff to help us understand our "current reality" and to inform the development of an equity plan.***

***Another outcome: the identification of additional and effective strategies to proactively generate a quality and diverse candidate pool for vacancies throughout the district. This committee will continue their oversight of our efforts in this area.***



Original team, 2013



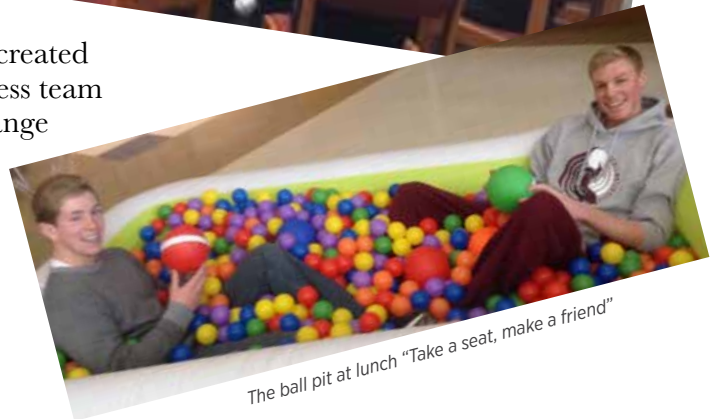
Teamwork at the Board office, Spring 2015

# OKEMOS HIGH SCHOOL... UNITED IN SOCIAL PROGRESS

In the fall of 2013, twelve students in grades 9-12 who represented the diversity of OHS were brought together to work toward increasing awareness of social diversity at OHS. During the first year, students attended workshops with other high schools in the county as well as met as a school team at OHS. They developed a team mission: “To promote the appreciation of differences and commonalities within the Okemos school family” and created an action plan. Since that time, the United in Social Progress team has implemented school-wide initiatives such as Be the Change Day in the spring of 2014 and the OHS Summit in the fall of 2014. During the 2014-2015 school year, students increased awareness through videos, posters, lunch activities and surveys on topics such as mental illness, racism, and sexism- to name a few. They have also created educational videos about diversity which offer ways for students to break down barriers and learn more about one another. Mix it up tables during the lunch hour and purchasing a ball pit with the help of the OHS Parent Group further facilitated coming together and celebrating our differences and commonalities. New members have been added each year through an application process. Our hope is to incorporate mentorship this year with students in grades 5-8. **The pride continues...**



Leading dialogue activity at OHS Staff Meeting, 2014

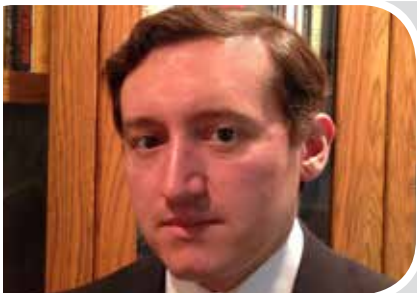


The ball pit at lunch “Take a seat, make a friend”

# Meet the New OEF Trustees



**Dr. Lloyd Bingman** is president and CEO of Brighter Day Consulting, LLC and COO of The Bingman Group, LLC. He is the proud parent of two Okemos alums.



**Dante Ianni**, an Okemos alum, is an auditor with the Michigan Office of the General Auditor and a Meridian Township Planning Commissioner.



**Kurt Jacobs** is with the Okemos branch of Independent Bank and has multiple ties to Okemos Public Schools, having been a student teacher in the PE department.



**Melissa Smith** is a Pre-Primary/Kindergarten teacher at the Okemos Public Montessori at Central and is an Okemos parent.

Learn more about the new OEF trustees at [www.oefsite.org](http://www.oefsite.org) under "About OEF"

## OEF Board Members Needed!

The Okemos Education Foundation is governed by an all-volunteer board of trustees. Are you passionate about Okemos Public Schools? Do you have time and experience to share with the OEF in support of its mission of "recognizing excellence and promoting innovation"?

**If so, we need you!** Browse the board information at [www.oefsite.org](http://www.oefsite.org). You'll find a list of board member expectations as well as a short application form.

## OKEMOS EDUCATION FOUNDATION 2015-16 OEF TRUSTEES

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Lloyd Bingman  
Dean Bolton  
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Minesh Mody  
Melissa Smith  
Ron Styka  
Angela Wilson

Ex-Officio:  
Robert Miller

## WAYS YOU CAN SUPPORT THE OEF

**Make a financial contribution**  
We exist because of the support from people like you! Use the form on page 7 or make an on-line donation at [www.oefsite.org](http://www.oefsite.org). Thank you!

**Purchase an APPLE Award**  
To honor a staff member  
[www.oefsite.org](http://www.oefsite.org)

**Volunteer your time**  
Publicity, development, web design and marketing help needed. Contact Board Chair Martha Hentz, [chair@oefsite.org](mailto:chair@oefsite.org).

**Join the OEF Board**  
We'd love to have you! We need the creativity and energy that come from new personalities and ideas. See our website under "About OEF" for more information.



[www.oefsite.org](http://www.oefsite.org)

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Supporting educational excellence in  
**Okemos Public Schools!**



The **Okemos Education Foundation** is an all-volunteer non-profit organization dedicated to supporting educational excellence at all levels of the Okemos Public School District. Look inside for news about the great things happening in **Okemos!**



*Bennett Woods teacher Marsha Kilpela received two APPLE Awards last year.*

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