

Newsletter

Making a Difference

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- Vitals & ER Treatment Lab
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- Melody in The Music Room
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- 5th grade Technology - 3D printer
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- Science Fairs
- Elementary Author Visit (partner with Horizon Bank)
- MSU Seeds of Science 3 day Field Trip

For over 40 years, the Okemos Education Foundation (OEF) has proudly partnered with the community to financially support excellence and innovation in the classroom as demonstrated above.

What's Inside...

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- Update From the Superintendent
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- Meet Our New Director of Safety and Security
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- Financial Report 2022-23

Funded by your donations, we have been able to positively impact classrooms through various grant opportunities for teachers, as well as provide special programming to enhance the educational experience of our students. In this publication we have highlighted some of these classrooms and programs which illustrate the benefits of this partnership for our students.



OEF Chair - Sue Hallman

As a part of supporting excellence it is also important that we celebrate and recognize that excellence within our district. Each year we host a Commitment to Excellence banquet, this year on Wednesday, November 15, when we honor teachers, support staff, a parent volunteer and an outstanding alumni. (See separate article.)

We take this time to honor those who have contributed in making Okemos Public Schools the amazing district it is. While this evening individually recognizes a handful of staff and others, it is truly an opportunity to celebrate ALL of our Okemos School District family.

As you read through this newsletter, please reflect on how you can provide assistance to the Foundation. While the OEF is fortunate to have many individuals and businesses who support the foundation from amounts as little as \$25 upwards of \$10,000, we cannot continue our mission without help from ALL of our community. If you are already a regular donor to the OEF - THANK YOU - your support is greatly appreciated. If you have not donated in the past, please consider doing so today. OEF donations support Okemos students in EVERY building at EVERY level in EVERY subject matter. Donate today using the form on the back of the newsletter, going online at oefsite.org/donate or accessing the QR code found in this newsletter. Your gifts will help support excellence in the classroom and throughout the Okemos District. They will help the District “*educate with excellence*” and “*inspire learners for life*.” Join us in being part of the Okemos “*together*.” The children of the Okemos community will be your legacy.

On behalf of the Okemos Education Foundation, thank you for your support. Your generosity truly makes a difference for our students. Okemos is strong but we are stronger together.

OKEMOS EDUCATION FOUNDATION 2023-24 TRUSTEES

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IN MEMORY Dr. Lee Gerard

On October 4, 2023, Dr. Lee Gerard, a man who embodied excellence in education, passed away. Dr. Gerard came to the district as Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction. When Dr. Wertz retired as Superintendent, Dr. Gerard was asked to step in on an interim basis. After working with him in this role, staff and parents alike urged him, and the district, to make the position permanent. He agreed and served in that capacity for two more years before retiring.

Lee, as he told everyone to call him, was a one of a kind person. He was selfless, caring, a listener, patient, wise, empathetic, and he maintained a collaborative culture of trust and respect. To know him was to know a truly great man. Lee was well loved in the community and I can say with almost complete certainty that no one had an unkind word to say about him.

In honor of Dr. Gerard, the Okemos Education Foundation named a professional development grant after him. The Lee Gerard Professional Development Grant was created a number of years ago for the express purpose of educators engaging in collaborative PD work to better support learning in the classroom.

Dr. Gerard, we thank you for your exemplary service to this district and to other educators. You were an amazing educator, administrator and person and we are grateful that you chose to work in the Okemos Public Schools.



Dr. Lee Gerard

EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES THROUGH OUR OEF GRANTS!

The OEF focuses on enhancing educational opportunities in the schools by providing grants to staff to support excellence and innovation in their teaching. Last year the OEF committed over \$20,000 in grant money for that purpose.

Seeds of Science

Each year the OEF provides financial support, which includes transportation and admittance, for every fourth grade student to attend MSU's Seeds of Science field trip. This is a hands-on experience that aligns with our fourth grade science curriculum.

At the heart of Seeds of Science are curiosity and wonder. Everything that happens before, during and after the field trip to the 4-H Children's Gardens is designed to come from curiosity and wonder. It is our firm belief that if we can generate and encourage curiosity and wonder in our visitors, the specific content knowledge will follow. Students that are curious and wonder about the activities they are engaged in will meet and exceed our expectations. They will make connections that we have not thought about and they will connect science to their daily lives in meaningful ways. Basically, they will be scientists.

- **Everything starts with questions and then students are encouraged to explore to find answers**
- **Extended time in the garden. Seeds of Science visits last all day and are three visits long.**
- **Students do "authentic experiments" - experiments that are the same as, or very closely modeled after, the experiments that scientists at Michigan State University are doing.**
- **Elegant technology integration. We use a variety of technologies to enhance and expand the hands-on experiences in the garden.**

This is a shift in how many have experienced science and in our understanding of what science is. Science arises from student interests and questions, science is important to their daily lives, science is interesting and fun and students can connect directly to university scientists. Science becomes practiced doing and learning together.



Thank you to the Okemos Education Foundation for your generous support!

Bell Kits

With the help of the Okemos Education Foundation, Cornell Elementary was able to purchase a class set of bell kits for the music room! This allowed every student to have an instrument to play and they had so much fun using them! The bell kits helped students learn new songs and practice for their spring music performances. Students were also able to use the instruments during small group work. The bell kits will continue to be used to help students with music reading and performing skills. Thank you OEF!

Kelly Chase - Cornell



Active Calming Center

Thank you to the Okemos Education Foundation for providing Cornell students with our wonderful ACTIVE CALMING STATIONS! These stations are utilized by many students daily for sensory breaks, calming activities to proactively address unsettled feelings, and as a reset opportunity that students can use to get back on track during the day. There are 9 stations available for student use, and they are available for ALL students! We appreciate your support in providing students healthy ways to handle their big feelings.

Nikki Mann & Cornell staff



We Love Puzzles...

Dear OEF,

Thank you for our grant to purchase puzzles for our classroom. We are so excited to now be working on 200-piece puzzles in our Puzzle Spots with our Puzzle Partners. Below please find a list we created to show why we love puzzles and how they are important to our growth and learning. As promised, we shared the good news of our OEF Grant in our classroom newsletter to Room 106 families and in the newsletter shared with all Bennett Woods families. Thank you for supporting us in so many ways.

With Much Appreciation,
The BW Room 106 Second-Graders and Ms. J



"When the puzzle is finished, it looks so realistic."

"You have to put lots of pieces together and then you make a beautiful picture."

"Puzzles help me focus and enjoy what I am doing."

"Puzzles are very relaxing."

"Puzzles are fun because the pieces are all shapes and sizes."

"They help us learn to get along with other kids"

"We started with 100-piece puzzles, and now we are able to do 200-piece puzzles."

"Puzzles are fun but hard."

I remembered 'The Power of YET' when puzzles were hard at first. I couldn't do them very well... yet. Now I can!"

"You can strategize like doing the border of the puzzle first."

"It's nice to get a new puzzle partner and make a new friend."

"Puzzles teach you how to be patient."

"Puzzles help us learn problem solving."

"Working on my puzzle first thing in the morning wakes up my brain."

Kinawa Science Night

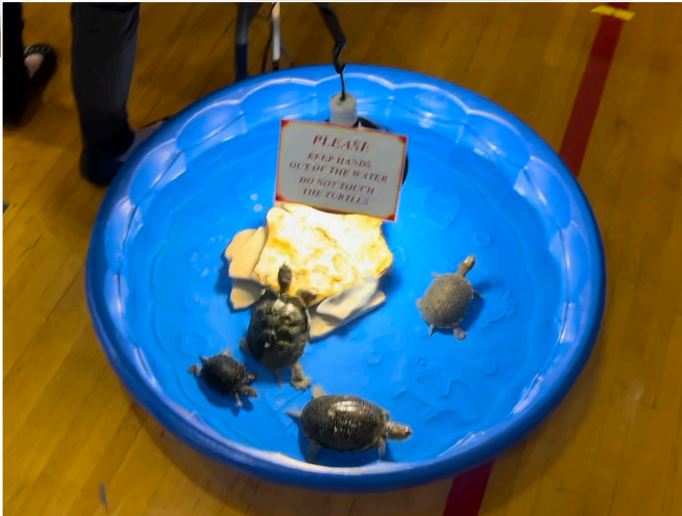
Kinawa had a great turnout for Science Night. Students enjoyed multiple experiences from many groups. Some that came are:



1. MSU Neuroscience Outreach
2. MSU Herpetology Club
3. MSU Biomedical Laboratory Science
4. MSU Geology Club
5. MSU Physiology Club
6. US Fisheries and Wildlife
7. OHS Robotics Club
8. MSU Women in Engineering
9. Meridian Township Fire Department
10. Nature Discovery, Williamston
11. MSU Facility for Rare Isotope Beams
12. Haslett Robotics Club
13. Nature Discovery
14. And Many more.

Additionally, we had over 75 students present their own science experiences.

Thank you to the OEF for supporting this event!



DeltaMath

I received an OEF Grant to purchase the Integral Version of DeltaMath to use with my students last year. The students loved using the program! One of the hardest parts of completing math homework is not being able to check your answers and know if you are correct in your calculations. Another difficult part of homework is that students always say they can do it while in class with the teacher, but once they leave the room, they forget or get lost easily. Deltamath solves both of those problems!

Students get to have their answers checked as soon as they submit it and if they need more explanation before submitting an answer, there are step by step examples and videos of similar problems to remind them of what they have to do. I saw an increase in performance on assessments after using Deltamath for the assignments and students felt more confident! Thank you OEF for making it possible to use this program with my students!

Jane Halcrow-Reynolds - OHS

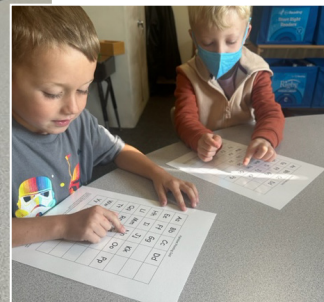
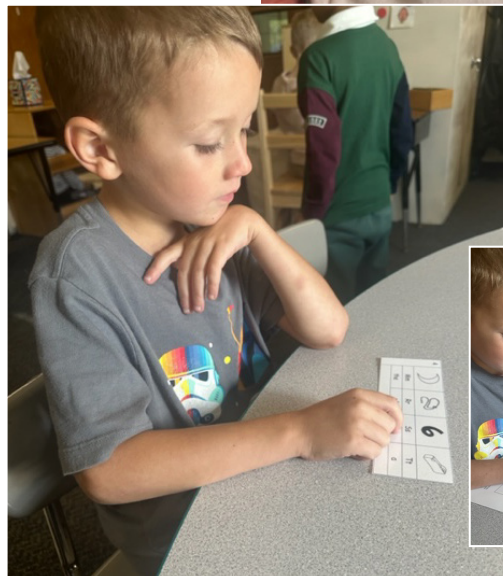
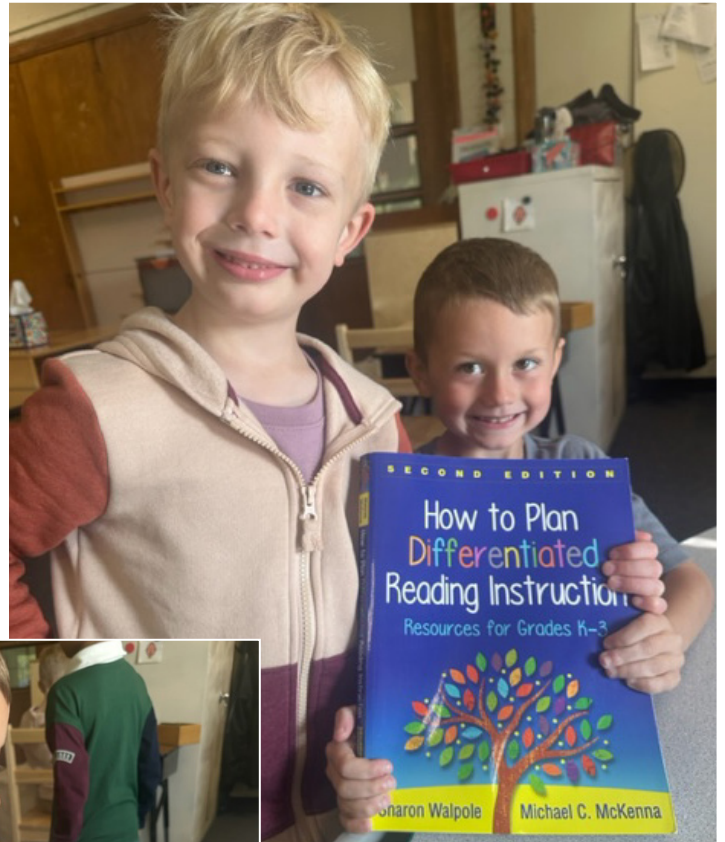
Literacy Instruction and Intervention Materials

The Pre-Primary/Kindergarten teachers at Okemos Public Montessori would like to thank the OEF for awarding a mini grant for the purchase of literacy instruction and intervention materials developed by Sharon Walpole and Michael C. Mc Kenna, *How To Plan Differentiated Reading Instruction*. The instructional materials include complete lesson plans and student materials including specific criteria for advancing students from one level of instruction to the next including lesson sequences for high ability students.

Because these lesson plans and instructional materials are used by our Learning Center intervention team, for struggling learners, we have had the opportunity to collect data that is consistent between the intervention team and the classroom. Data collected in our first year demonstrated significant growth for those students.

We are grateful to the OEF for our micro grant award. Thank you!

PPK Teachers - Okemos Public Montessori



Study Skills Material

The Okemos Education Foundation granted Mrs. Fletcher's College Prep. and Study Skills classes a microgrant to cover the cost of binders, tabs, and student planners. We used the materials to increase our organizational skills in order to be more successful in school. Thank you OEF!

Shelby Fletcher - OHS





Lab Materials

Thank you to the OEF for their generous contribution to the high school anatomy course, vitals lab. With these materials students are able to learn how to take blood pressures, listen to heart beats, and analyze pulse oxygen levels in a hands-on learning environment.

Danielle Tandoc - OHS



Classroom Student Library

I was so excited to use my OEF award funds to update my student library with current, popular 2nd-grade series to increase the desire to read. I also wanted to enrich their studies with diverse biographies of people who have made a difference in our world. Having new and current biographies would hopefully spark interest in research and book reports to extend their learning.

Thank you to the OEF for making this possible!

Megan Malkus - Cornell



State and National English Conferences

The Okemos High School English department applied for and received a **Lee Gerard Professional Development Grant**, and an Okemos High School English Language Arts Grant, the latter donated by former OHS English teacher Marcia Tanner and her husband, Bruce Tanner. With this grant funding, members of the English department attended the Michigan Council of Teachers of English (*MCTE*) conference in East Lansing, Michigan in October, and the National Council of Teachers of English (*NCTE*) in Anaheim, California in November and presented at both conferences.

Their presentation talked about the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion journey the department has been on, as they work to provide texts and learning opportunities for all Okemos High School students. The English department at the high school also wrote an article, published in the Language Arts Journal of Michigan (*Volume 38, issue 1*), about their journey, the work they have done, and the work they have yet to do. These professional development opportunities would not have been possible without the OEF and the generous donation by Marcia and Bruce Tanner.

Sharon Murchie & English Department - OHS



Bennett Woods Science Night

We held our Science Night at Bennett Woods on Thursday, February 16, 2023. Over 500 people attend this event along with 17 exhibitors - including MSU CVM, Michigan Lapidary and Mineral Society, Meridian Township Police Department, Abrams Planetarium, MSU Women in Engineering, CADL Okemos, Lansing Makers Network, MSU Physical Therapy, Nature Discovery, Camp Invention, Food Science Club, MSU Genetics and Genomes Sciences Program, MSU Neurology and Ophthalmology, MDHHS Explore Lab Science Program, Soccer Kickers, MSU Vermicomposting, MSU Biomedical Laboratory Diagnostics.



Bennett Woods Science Night Continued...

We had 74 presentations by students representing science experiments this year on display in the gym. The Kindergarten and 1st grade classes all participated in science on a plate as well, which were on display in the gym.

To help build excitement for Science Night, we had Dr. Shannon Schmoll bring her wonderful inflatable planetarium to our school on two separate days for an "in school field trip" to the planetarium. Every single classroom had the opportunity to visit the planetarium that was set up in our gym, for a 20 minute show. The kids loved it, it was a wonderful opportunity for our school community.

Thank you to the Okemos Education Foundation for your support!



Holocaust Speaker

We were so excited to invite Judy Sima to Chippewa to share the story of her mother's escape from the Gestapo, including a detailed visual presentation about her research to create the tale. Mrs. Sima is a storyteller that we have been lucky enough to have visited our 8th graders every spring for several years to extend their unit on the Holocaust. Storytelling is such a power tool and the support of the OEF and the MI Humanities Council allows students vivid interaction with the topic and brings potent stories to life. We appreciate the OEF ongoing support to bring all forms of literature to our student body.

Cyndi Webster - CMS



SPECIAL Projects

Solar Car

The students work all year to build their car and race in Texas. This past year the race went exceptionally well as they took home the 1st and 3rd race day trophies (which meant that they had driven the most solar car miles on those two days in their division).

They would like to thank each and every one of their sponsors, including the OEF, as well as community members who made this year's victory possible and provided them with an unforgettable and valuable experience.



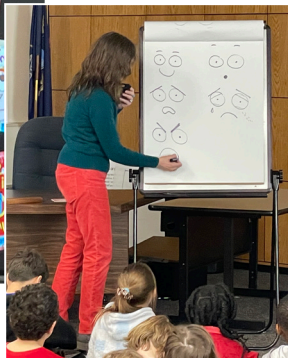
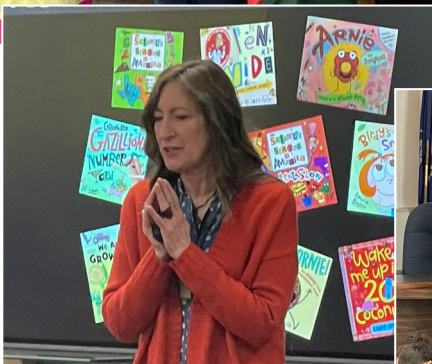
AUTHOR Visit

Laurie Keller

Each year the OEF partners with Horizon Bank to bring a well-known author to speak at each of the four elementary schools. This is a highlight of March is Reading month as the students love seeing and hearing someone who has actually published a book that can be found in a bookstore, something that seems very daunting to most of them.

This past spring, we were fortunate enough to have Laurie Keller, both an author and illustrator who grew up in Michigan, visit the schools. Ms. Keller's first book, *The Scrambled States of America*, was published in 1998. Since then, she has written a number of other books including *Arnie the Doughnut*, *Do Unto Otters: A Book about Manners*, and *Open Wide: Tooth School Inside*. Not only did Ms. Keller speak about her books but as an illustrator she showed the students how simple it is to make inanimate things come to life. The students loved it!

Thank you, Ms. Keller, for sharing your books and your story. Thank you to Horizon Bank for partnering with the OEF to provide this wonderful opportunity for ALL elementary students!





FIRST Friday!!

In recognition of the outstanding work of ALL Okemos staff, the OEF provides First Friday (of the month) treats to ALL staff - admin, instructional staff, support staff, tech, transportation, etc. - over 500 employees! We would not be the district we are without the dedication of ALL staff to ensure our students are able to learn in a safe, positive, and creative atmosphere. THANK YOU FOR ALL YOU DO!!!

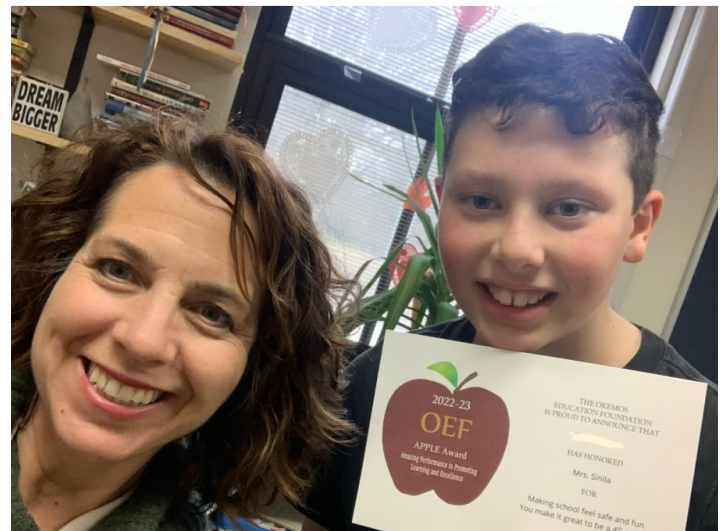
You can always count on a delicious donut
AND the Okemos Education Foundation
to make things better!



APPLE Awards!!

Parents/guardians are invited to celebrate the excellent staff throughout our district by purchasing an APPLE Award. The **APPLE Award (Amazing Performance in Promoting Learning and Excellence)** offers an opportunity for parents/guardians to communicate their appreciation for someone who has positively impacted their child(ren).

Any time throughout the year, you can visit the OEF website (oefsite.org) and purchase (\$20 donation) a 5 x 7 certificate. A personalized message can also be included and is encouraged. Staff are genuinely touched when they receive such an impactful gesture which acknowledges their impact. It is a simple but wonderful way to say thank you!



2023 Award Recipients

Outstanding Educators in Okemos Public Schools

Commitment to Excellence Award-

Trisha Garvey

Commitment to Excellence Award, Second Grade Hiawatha



Trisha graduated from Michigan State University excited to start her life as a teacher. She completed her internship at Central Elementary with Debbie Stolz and then taught 1st and 2nd grade at a wonderful school in Marshall, MI for four years.

When a position opened up at Hiawatha in 2012

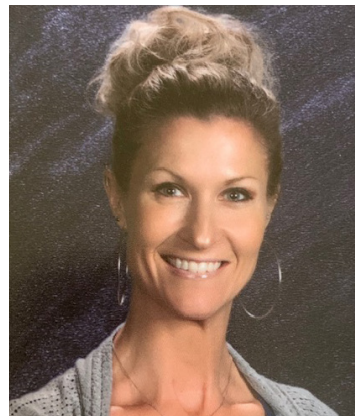
everything fell into place for her! Trisha feels so blessed to be surrounded by such amazing educators, students and families there! Coworkers have become family in those halls.

She lives in East Lansing with her husband Brandon, and their three beautiful daughters, Sutton, Rowan and Breckin. They love to be outside, be adventurous and just be together!

Elizabeth McNeil

Commitment to Excellence Award, Spanish OHS

With a B.A. in Spanish and an M.A. in Curriculum and Teaching, both from Michigan State University, Elizabeth begins her 23rd year as a Spanish teacher at OHS. This is the only district that she has ever worked for, and it was her top choice as well! Having been in the Lansing area since her freshman year of college, she always heard so many positive things about the Okemos School District and was thrilled to get the opportunity to be a part of it.



Elizabeth loves the Spanish language and has enjoyed being able to teach all levels at OHS. A definite perk to her time with students in the classroom, is the ability to travel abroad with them. She has been able to either lead or chaperone trips to Costa Rica, Cuba, and Perú and is excited for the upcoming trip, in June, to Ecuador. In addition to Spanish, Elizabeth has also taught English at OHS.

In her free time, Elizabeth is also a part-time instructor for Michigan Virtual. She is in her fourth year with Michigan Virtual where she primarily teaches Spanish.

Elizabeth's husband is a 3rd grade teacher in Mason, where they live. They have three children, Jack, Sydney, and Alex. All three kids are Okemos Wolves, two at OHS and one at Chippewa. Next year, they will all be at the high school together with Mom!

Commitment to Excellence Award continued...

Dawn Reed

Commitment to Excellence Award, English OHS

Dawn Reed is currently in her 19th year as an educator. She believes that stories and words matter. She is continually inspired by our amazing OHS students!



At OHS, Dawn has worked with students beyond the classroom as an advisor to Key Club and Students Against Destructive Decisions. She has also served as Area Coordinator for the English department and as a leader on the School Improvement team.

Dawn's passion for teaching led her to serve as a co-director of Red

Cedar Writing Project at Michigan State University, a site of the National Writing Project. Dawn writes about education and literacy; she has numerous publications, including two co-authored books. Dawn supports educators through professional development instruction and leads summer programming for young writers. In appreciation of her excellence in teaching and leadership in the field of English education, Dawn was honored with the Ray Lawson Award in 2018 by the Michigan Council of Teachers of English.

Dawn values the relationships she's made within the Okemos community; she is grateful for our OPS community's dedication to education. In her free time, she enjoys spending time with family and friends, reading, writing, kayaking, and staring at the stars.

OEF Annual Commitment to Excellence Award Banquet

Wednesday, November 15, 2023

5:30 p.m. | Kellogg Center



Tickets available at all schools or online at oefsite.org

Joe Thornton

Commitment to Excellence Award, Bennett Woods

Joe Thornton is in his 8th year of teaching. He spent three years teaching 4th grade in Waverly before coming to Okemos where he is in his 5th year teaching 2nd grade at Bennett Woods. Joe graduated from Michigan State University in 2015 with a Bachelor's degree in Elementary Education with a focus in language arts. He also studied Spanish. This past spring, he graduated with his Master's degree in Teaching and Curriculum with a Literacy and Language specialization and is a certified Reading Teacher. It's safe to say he is a Spartan.



Joe grew up in Somerset, Michigan with his parents, brother, and most of his family close by. After attending MSU for undergrad, he pretty much never left the area. He thoroughly enjoys the ins and outs of teaching, but is very adamant about a consistent exercise routine with a 4:15 am alarm for weekdays. When not at school or working out, you can find him catching up on TV shows or reading picture books. He is a certified #bookpusher and has recommendations for everything!

When asked why he enjoys teaching in Okemos, his answer was relationships and community. "I love my BW crew. They are THE best and never fail to amaze me with dedication, confidence, and humor. Without them, I wouldn't be receiving this award. My experiences in Okemos in such a short period of time have been wonderful. The inspiration is unending! The families I have been honored to work with are unforgettable. Through virtual teaching, grad school, and beyond, I am forever grateful for my students and their families."

*Congratulations to all of our 2023
Award Recipients!
Your commitment to excellence in all you do is
recognized and appreciated!*

Commitment to Excellence Award continued...

Kortney Whitmyer

Commitment to Excellence Award

U.S. Government and AP U.S. Government & Politics OHS



Kortney Whitmyer grew up down the road in Williamston. He earned two degrees from Michigan State University, first a B.S. in Social Science and Political Science, with a minor in Psychology; then an M.A. in K-12 Educational Administration and Leadership. Kortney never got very far away from the area, as he was offered the opportunity to teach at Okemos

immediately after completing his teaching internship.

Now in his 19th year as a teacher at OHS, he enjoys being able to teach in a community that possesses the necessary resources to support its students and schools. He feels undeservedly blessed to be an educator in a place that allows teachers to learn, grow, and thrive, next to great colleagues, and work for absolutely incredible young people.

Kortney's wife Jessica is a 2nd Grade teacher in the Holt district. Together they have four children Fiona (15), Charlie (13), Max (9), and Tyson (3).

Outside of school Kortney stays extremely busy being a father and pro-bono Lyft driver for his kids to their various activities. He loves supporting the Spartan football and basketball teams. He works to create a home where rock music isn't dead. And, he enjoys unashamedly fulfilling countless stereotypes of a social studies teacher such as: devouring political news, reading mostly non-fiction books that earn eye-rolls from his family, and proposing a trip to Washington D.C. for every single family vacation!

Ashley Wilson

Commitment to Excellence Award

EI Teacher Chippewa Middle School

Ashley Wilson is beginning her 11th year with Okemos Public Schools, and her 18th year as a self-contained Emotionally Impaired Teacher. She earned her Bachelor's Degree in Special Education with an endorsement in Emotional Impairments from Hope College. Her teaching career began at Clinton County RESA, where she taught in an elementary and middle school self-contained EI setting. Ashley continued her education by earning her Master's Degree in Reading and Literacy from Marygrove College. In the fall of 2013, Ashley joined the Chippewa staff as the self-contained EI teacher.



Ashley met her husband, Philip, when attending Hope College. He is also a special education teacher and is now teaching at Chippewa. They have two children, Brayden (14) and Landen (11), and one family dog, Barkley. They also have an exchange son, Shion, and an exchange daughter, Rin, from Japan. Shion and Rin are biological siblings and chose to come to America for a year abroad. Rin is currently living with their family for the 2023-2024 school year. In her free time, Ashley enjoys spending time with friends and family, playing games, reading, and watching her children play sports.

As an educator, Ashley strongly believes building relationships within the school setting creates a safe, positive learning environment. From a young age, Ashley knew she wanted to be a teacher because she loved being around children. While attending Hope, she had a professor who inspired her to go into special education to work with students with social-emotional challenges. To this day, Ashley continues to enjoy impacting her student's lives, as she watches them grow socially, emotionally, and academically.

Special Recognition Award

Debbie Doss

Special Recognition Award, Okemos Public Schools



School year 2023-24 is Debbie Doss' 21st year serving with Okemos Public Schools. Her previous career had been one of learning her trade in commercial print shops and weekly newsprint publications. Those encompassed everything from the creation, typesetting, production and distribution of print materials to overseeing day to day operations and

bookkeeping. This preparation has served her well in her role as the "Okemos Print Shop Lady".

When she's not in the shop Debbie enjoys spending time with her husband Roger, their 3 adult children Melissa, Rodger, and Roxanne, their significant others, and their 4 grandchildren Desmond, Donovan, Dylan, and Arlo. Her dogs Zevon, Zimmy, and Zappa, have been close companions. *Bonus points offered if you catch the theme in the naming convention!

In her free time she crochets, knits, diamond paints, reads, collects and occasionally completes jigsaw puzzles! On a Saturday you can usually find Debbie with her mother scouring yard sales in search of winter wear for the annual Coat Drive.

Being behind the scenes, but still very much a part of the team, of the learning process, is exactly where Debbie likes to be. "One of my favorite things is the handmade poster Christine Batora's class gifted to me shortly before Covid. It reads 'We appreciate everything you copy' and is signed by all of the students. The poster still hangs in the shop where I can see it daily and remember why I do what I do".

Over the years Debbie has formed many strong relationships with the teachers and staff of OPS. Some of these have lasted far beyond retirements and location changes. In her own words, "It's been my privilege and honor to work with and alongside the most dedicated and talented group of educators, staff and colleagues around, the people of Okemos Public Schools".

Renée Schwienhorst

Special Recognition Award, Okemos Public Montessori Office Clerk

Renée has been a lifelong Michigan resident. She is an Okemos Public Schools alumnus, beginning 2nd grade at Cornell Elementary School, followed by Kinawa Middle School, and graduating from Okemos High School in 1990.



From there, she attended Michigan State University, in the College of Education, and earned her Bachelor Degree, with the intent to teach high school.

Renée began substitute teaching at Okemos Public Montessori 16 years ago when her children began PPK there. Needless to say, she fell in love with the program and has remained, in various capacities, ever since. In addition to

substitute teaching, her past roles include Kids Club Childcare Director, ASD paraprofessional, and PPK paraprofessional.

Since 2022, Renée has served as OPM's office clerk. Her favorite part of her job is interacting with children and their families, her colleagues, and fostering the positive relationships and environment that make Okemos Public Montessori such a great place to be!

Renée is married to the love of her life, Reinhard, who is a physicist at MSU. Go Green! She has two adult sons, Alex (21) and Andrew (19), both of whom continued the Okemos Public Montessori program through 8th grade, and graduated from Okemos High School. She has a Golden Retriever named Samson, and a chiweenie named Rosie. She also has a grand-dog named Louie.

In her spare time, Renée enjoys relaxing, grilling and spending time with her family in their backyard along the Red Cedar River. She loves to travel in Michigan, particularly to the many Great Lakes. She also enjoys traveling to Germany to visit family there.

Dean Bolton Volunteer Award

Sharon Basil

Dean Bolton Volunteer Award

Sharon lived the first 71 years of her life in Ohio. After the passing of her husband Bruce and youngest daughter, Tracy, she decided to move to Michigan to be closer to her daughter, Amy Petersburg, and her family.



While living in Ohio, when her daughters were in elementary school, she served as President of their school PTO. She was also a cheerleading advisor, 4-H advisor, and Sunday School teacher. She was an Administrative Assistant for the YMCA Child Care Center in Findlay, Ohio for 20 years.

After moving to Michigan, Sharon wanted to volunteer at Cornell Elementary

School where her daughter Amy Petersburg is a Kindergarten teacher. She met Dorothy Rush who was a Foster Grandparent in Amy's Kindergarten classroom and Dorothy recommended Sharon become a part of the program. Sharon knew she wanted to volunteer in Christena Sinila's 4th grade classroom. She was excited when Christena said she would be happy to have her help in her room. Sharon started in the Fall of 2019 and now volunteers 15 to 20 hours a week. During Covid she worked with the children on math, reading or whatever they needed help with while holding class on Zoom.

Sharon says she enjoys reading the students' Monday morning journals as she learns so much about each one of the students. It helps her be able to connect with each child on an individual basis. She loves being able to play games with them during Catsup and Pickle time. Last year one of the students was teaching her how to play Chess. Sharon believes you are never too old to learn.

In addition to working with Mrs. Sinila's classroom she helps students in all 4th grade classrooms. She is known as Grandma Sharon by everyone at Cornell Elementary School.

Sharon is also active with Williamston Area Senior Center. She works the front desk on Thursday mornings and serves on the board.

During the week Sharon can be found attending sporting events of her grandsons and their friends. She also loves attending dance recitals, choir concerts and musicals that her granddaughter participates in.

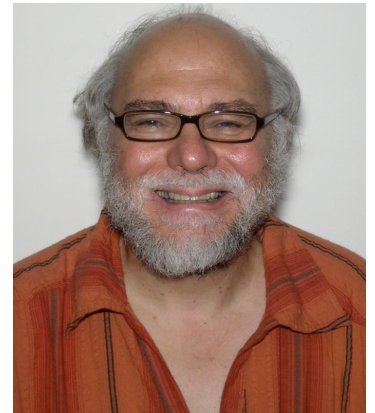
Sharon says volunteering with the students gives her purpose in life and makes her feel needed. It is like one big happy family at Cornell Elementary School, everyone is so friendly and kind. Grandma Sharon says being a part of Cornell has been a highlight of her move to Michigan and one she will treasure forever.

Distinguished Alumni Award

Dr. Mark White

Distinguished Alumni Award

Mark White shares his story in *Life of a Disease Detective* which combines the memoir of his medical school experience with a revised version of the memoir of his work for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, including seven years in the Philippines and two in Uganda.



Mark's humor is legendary as demonstrated by the stories he shares. During his medical school and residency, he sat in the front row of a Tina Turner concert and enjoyed the mist of saliva. Twice, professors tried to have him thrown out, but the school kept him in.

At CDC, Mark and Budsy, his Filipina wife, were assigned to Manila in the early days of the People Power revolution. With their students, they investigated epidemics of the Ebola virus, typhoid, malaria, and other tropical diseases. They were on the slopes of Mount Pinatubo when it erupted, blasting so much ash into the atmosphere that the global temperature dropped by two degrees C for two years.

Returning to Atlanta, Mark was named Director of the Division of International Health in the Epidemiology Program Office, which supervised global training programs. He created programs in China, Central America, Central Asia, and several other countries.

Budsy and Mark were married for 13 years when she died of breast cancer after a long battle. A year later, he married an old friend, Shelly Ahmann, a breast surgeon. They've been happily married for 24 years.

Mark hopes you enjoy the story of his life.

The Okemos Education Foundation was excited to host their First Annual Golf Outing Fundraiser on June 3, 2023 at College Fields. With the support of our many sponsors (see donor pg) and 68 players, over \$20,000 was raised to support excellence and innovation in the Okemos Public Schools! For the players who joined us, the day was gorgeous and the energy of the day was exciting.

Given the success of this event we are hoping to build upon it next year. Mark your calendars for June 1, 2024. If you are interested in being a sponsor or know of someone who might be interested please email chair@oefsite.org We have a variety of sponsorship levels to meet everyone's interest.

Thank you to our golfers, volunteers, sponsors and College Fields. It was a wonderful day for a worthwhile cause - supporting excellence and innovation in the classroom! Hope to see many of you next June 1, 2024!

IT WAS A BEAUTIFUL DAY FOR...GOLF

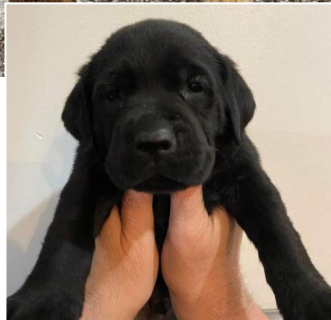




MEET THE WOOF PACK

In January of 2022, CeCe started attending Okemos High school. The students loved CeCe, after all who wouldn't love a dog visiting them daily! Later that same year in August, Willow and Chip came to the Okemos schools, Willow, partnering with CeCe at the high school, and Chip going to Chippewa. Thus began the Woof Pack. In January of 2023 Phoebe joined the pack making Kinawa her home. Bolt and Charlie, both 5 months olds, will join the pack this year at Bennett and Hiawatha. Cornell, Okemos Montessori and Edgewood will get their puppies next year.

The Okemos Woof Pack has been quite active recently, engaging in various community events and initiatives. They visited Mason High School and Michigan State, as well as taking part in the Secure Our Schools program and the Okemos High School Homecoming Parade. The funds donated by the Okemos Education Foundation (OEF) have played a crucial role in supporting these activities. The funds have been used to cover essential expenses, such as vet bills, trading cards, dog treats, and other necessary supplies. Thanks to the OEF's generosity, the Woof Pack has been able to continue its mission of bringing comfort and joy to various events and locations in the community, while also ensuring the well-being of their furry companions.



UPDATE from the SUPERINTENDENT

by **John Hood**, Superintendent

2022 Bond Program Update

Okemos Public Schools' celebrated the beginning of a significant renovation effort of buildings and grounds in the district made possible by the 2022 bond program with a ribbon cutting ceremony that occurred just before the Wolves's Varsity Football game against Dewitt High School.

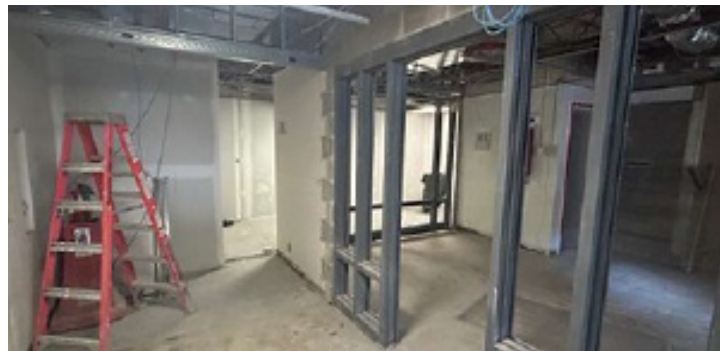


The district identified pressing needs of their facilities and grounds through a community steering committee, listening sessions and surveys, and expert-led facilities assessments. In November 2022, the community voted to support a \$275 million bond program to fund projects prioritizing safety and security, creating future-ready learning environments, and upgrading aging infrastructure.



Project Scope *(Additional Information at Okemosbond.net)*

- The replacement of three buildings that are beyond their useful lives, including Kinawa and Chippewa Middle Schools and Cornell Elementary;
- Building safety enhancements with secure entry vestibules at each school;
- Pressing needs improvements district-wide, as identified in a district-wide facility assessment;
- Improved softball and baseball complex;
- Performing arts, cafeteria, and kitchen expansion at Okemos High School;
- Hiawatha Elementary School redesign of drop-off and pick-up areas for a better traffic flow;
- Furniture replacement and technology improvements, where needed district-wide.



The renovation and additions of secure vestibule entries at Edgewood Early Childhood Center, Bennett Woods, Cornell, and Okemos Public Montessori at Central are nearly finished. The project's next phase will include secure vestibule and main office projects at the High School, the secure vestibule, main office, and carloop improvements at Hiawatha Elementary, and additional utility infrastructure improvements to Central. A refined design solution for the new Chippewa and Kinawa Middle Schools will be presented to the Board of Education in early 2024.



For continued bond updates please visit our website at: Okemosbond.net or by scanning this QR code.



Katie Diehl

MEET OUR NEW Director of Safety and Security

Balancing school safety with a positive school climate is critical for students to achieve their greatest potential. As we continue to enhance our safety and security measures here at Okemos Public Schools, we believe that having the right security personnel who can intervene early on and build strong relationships with students is critical. This is why we have partnered with SEC SHIELD to bring on a new Director of Safety & Security. For more than 10 years, SEC has worked with thousands of schools across the country to create safe learning environments.

We are proud to introduce our new Director of Safety & Security, Katie Diehl.

Katie earned her Bachelor of Arts in Criminal Justice from Michigan State University. She then went on to serve at the Lansing Police Department for over twenty years, taking on various roles within Special Operations, Investigations, Internal Affairs and Community Outreach. In 2020, Katie took on the leadership role of Captain, for both Staff Services and Patrol. In these roles, Katie provided oversight of various community projects and programs, staff training, departmental budgets and commanding over 160+ sworn officers and employees. Katie is currently finishing her MBA in Business Administration Leadership from Cleary University.

In this new role, Katie will work in collaboration with our district's leadership and administration teams to establish appropriate regulations, procedures and plans to continue enhancing our security measures already in place. As the new Director of Safety & Security, she will provide oversight for all training, events, resources, investigations, as well as serve as the district's liaison to work collaboratively with local law enforcement agencies.

We are excited for you to meet Katie this fall and welcome her into the Okemos Public School community.



Being Equitable in Okemos Public Schools

Being equitable in OPS means that we are creating fair and inclusive learning experiences for all students. Every person has opportunities to thrive and reach their potential. They all get what they need, and needs will differ from person to person. Equity is often mixed up with equality, which means that everyone gets the same support.

Here are two examples of equity:

- Because she broke her arm, the young woman wrote slower than usual; she was given extra time to take her final exam.
- A student who is not reading at grade level will be invited to summer school, while others who are reading at or above grade level will not.

Last year, several teams of students, staff, caregivers, and community members put parts of the district's equity plan into action.

Some of the highlights include:

- The Authentic Selves and Relationships team created a short video of many diverse activities that brought OPS students joy during the 2022-23 school year.
- The Instruction, Curriculum and Assessment team gathered information from teachers about their grading practices to better understand current practices. This year, the group will work on recommendations for guidelines to support the district's homework policy.
- The Policy, Practices, and Procedures team and the district-wide DEI Advisory Coalition provided recommendations for improvement of the OPS hiring process. They also examined our processes for incident reporting, which will lead to changes in how incidents of harm are handled.

Building an equitable and inclusive school district is something we must do in partnership with our community. The Okemos Education Foundation has made a commitment to equity in OPS, and they give us opportunities to learn and grow to better support our students. During the 2022-23 school year, OEF funds supported the Okemos Woof Pack, our team of facility dogs, by helping with Phoebe's costs and other program expenses. The Woof Pack continues to motivate, empower, and provide comfort to students and staff alike on a daily basis at OHS (*CeCe and Willow*), Chippewa (*Chip*), and Kinawa (*Phoebe*). This year, the Pack welcomes Bolt at Bennett Woods and Charlie at Hiawatha. Visit the Okemos Woof Pack web site (www.okemoswoofpack.com) for more information.

Here are some of the equity-related initiatives currently underway in the district:

- We are updating our process for reporting and handling incidents of harm, including bias-related incidents, to ensure that they are clear and accessible. As part of this project, we will be providing professional learning for staff on recognizing and responding to bias.
- The district continues to partner with Child and Family Charities to embed a mental health clinic within Okemos High School as part of the Expanding, Enhancing Emotional Health (E3) grant. The E3 program provides on-site comprehensive mental health services from mild to moderate severity of need with a full-time therapist based within the clinic at OHS five days a week. The therapist serves all youth ages 5-21 within the school district, but primarily focuses on the high school youth. This is not a free service. Many insurance plans are accepted by Child and Family Charities, and there is a sliding fee scale for those without insurance. If the insurance co-pay or fee is a hardship, Child and Family Charities will work with students and families to find a solution.
- Ingham Intermediate School District provides OPS with a mental health therapist who works primarily with students in grades K-8 up to three days per week. The therapist provides one-on-one counseling and group therapy.
- We continue to develop Culturally Responsive Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (CRPBIS) systems for all grade levels.
- A monthly cultural overview is sent to staff to highlight major holidays and events that are likely to connect with our curriculum. All staff have also received a calendar of religious holidays to consider when scheduling assignments, assessments, and events.
- A committee will complete an inventory of current play areas and develop a district standard for accessible play equipment and structures.
- Staff will receive training to ensure that they are familiar with the district's student gender identity policy (Board policy 5106).
- We are establishing an affinity group for staff who identify as BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color). The group will give these staff members time and space to meet one another, share common interests and challenges, and discuss their experiences in the district.

We are always looking for volunteers to help us in our work - please contact **Dr. Lara Slee, Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)**, for more information (lara.slee@okemosk12.net, 517-706-5011).





Okemos Public Schools Equity Plan

PURPOSE

Provide direction for creating learning environments that are safe, healthy, and effective for everyone.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

DIVERSITY

Our students, families, staff, and community members bring with them diverse and unique identities, abilities, and strengths.

EQUITY

Each student has access to, can meaningfully participate in, and make progress in learning experiences that result in empowerment and academic success.

INCLUSIVITY

Everyone has the right to feel safe, happy, affirmed, and encouraged.

COLLABORATION

Our system must be representative of, constructed by, and responsive to all members of our community.

REFLECTION

Making continuous progress requires us to reflect on our intentions, evaluate our processed and practices, and measure our impacts.

DATA-DRIVEN DECISION-MAKING

Data from diverse sources will be routinely collected and analyzed. We will use new information to guide our decision-making and inform ways in which we adapt to the needs of our community.

AREAS OF FOCUS

AUTHENTIC SELVES & RELATIONSHIPS

Goal 1: OPS is an inclusive district in which students, staff, families, and community members accept and respect the diverse identities of one another.

Goal 2: Our relationships are built upon actions that promote and sustain mutual trust and respect.

Goal 3: We utilize effective, consistent, culturally and linguistically responsive, and honest communication strategies to build community and establish collaboration.

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE - SUSTAINING EDUCATION

Goal 4: We have developed a district culture in which students, staff, families, and community members are prepared for an increasingly diverse society & world.

POLICIES/PRACTICES/PROCEDURES

Goal 7: OPS has a clear public statement of its values and commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Goal 8: OPS policies, practices, and procedures are representative of, constructed by, and responsive to students, staff, families, and community members.

INSTRUCTION/CURRICULUM/ ASSESSMENT

Goal 5: Our district's instructional practices, curriculum, and assessment methods are responsive to and inclusive of diverse perspectives, abilities, and cultures.

Goal 6: Our students' academic assessment data show that the opportunity gaps between student groups have decreased.



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

2022-2023 OEF DONORS

(7/1/22 through 6/30/23)



The Okemos Education Foundation relies on financial donations in order to fulfill its mission. Thank you to our 2022-2023 Partners in Education for supporting Okemos students!

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Make a donation today and we'll add your name to the donor list.

**Thank you for supporting
Okemos students!**

Who Are The Okemos Education Foundation Donors?

- Parents of Okemos students
- Parents of Okemos graduates
- Okemos alumni
- Grandparents of Okemos students and alumni
- Okemos school staff
- Community members
- Area businesses

Please donate today! Use the donation form on the back page, donate online at www.oefsite.org or scan the QR code.

**Your support makes a difference in the
lives of Okemos students!**

APPLE Award Donors

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Kevin Wu

Golf Fundraiser 2023

Platinum: \$2500

Tower Pinkster
10K Hole in One
CSM Mechanical
Dinner Reception Sponsor
Christman
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Gold: \$1,000

Redwood Landscaping
Two pin flags
Berkshire Hathaway
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Silver: \$500 (Pin Flag Sponsor)

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Friend: \$50

Buddy.s Pizza
Mert's Meats
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Art Unlimited
Douglas J
Thrun Law
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2022-2023 FINANCIAL REPORT

The mission of the OEF is to support excellence and innovation in the classroom.

For the 22-23 school year we committed:

- Over \$20,000 to staff through grants
- \$5,000 to the district's DEI initiative
- \$5,000 to the Seeds of Science field trip at MSU for ALL 4th grade students
- \$2500 (partnering with Horizon Bank) to bring in an author

For the 23-24 school year our budget supports:

- \$20,000+ for teacher grants
- \$5,000 (possibly more) to support DEI in the district
- \$5,000 for special projects
- \$5,000 to the Seeds of Science field trip
- \$2500 to support an author, with a matching amount from Horizon Bank, to visit all elementary schools for March is Reading Month
- Additional needs as identified by the district

As we work with the district to identify additional needs that allow the OEF to positively impact student learning, your financial support is needed. Please consider making a donation by check to the OEF (4406 Okemos Rd), online at oefsite.org, or you can scan the QR code on the back cover.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

For more specific financial information please visit oefsite.org

BUSINESS SPONSORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

Let the OEF help you advertise your business to the 2600 families in the Okemos Public School District. Contact Board Chair **Sue Hallman** at chair@oefsite.org for more information about how your support can help our students.

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

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

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Silver Sponsors:



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Harkness Law Firm
Independent Bank

Copper:

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Gold Sponsors:



WAYS YOU CAN SUPPORT THE OEF

Make a Donation Your contribution will help to enhance the education of all Okemos students.

Sponsor an OEF program or event Let the OEF help you advertise your generosity as you help the OEF support Okemos students. Learn more at www.oefsite.org/business.

Purchase an Okemos Education Foundation **APPLE Award** to honor an Okemos teacher or staff member.

Leave a Legacy Support Okemos students with a planned gift through your will or trust.

Attend the annual **OEF Awards Banquet** and enjoy a memorable evening as we celebrate educational excellence in our district.

Volunteer your time and talents. We need help with **development/fundraising, publicity, graphic design, and website support.**

Follow the OEF on **Facebook** or **Twitter** and help spread the word about the OEF.

Contact OEF Chair Sue Hallman at chair@oefsite.org for more information.
Thank you!

Visit www.oefsite.org to support OEF



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educational excellence in our schools.
Donate today!

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Thank you for supporting the Okemos Education Foundation.

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

Name: _____
(as you wish to be recognized)

Address: _____

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Check all that apply:

- ☐ Parent/Grandparent (circle one) of Okemos student
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- ☐ OPS staff (current/former)

Please accept my gift of: _____

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