

The Oak Grove Owl

A Newsletter and Annual Report for the Oak Grove Community

2024



THE CHILD



THE STUDENT



THE POTENTIAL

EXUBERANT ENGAGED EAGER



Thoughts from the Head of School

Dear Oak Grove Community,

It has been a joyful first semester here at Oak Grove Montessori School. In coming to Oak Grove, I was immediately struck by the kindness, caring, and genuine interest that our community members have for one another. Oak Grove is first and foremost a place for children to thrive. It's centered around the child's experience and built on a strong foundation of Montessori principles and philosophy. This care for the child brings all the adults involved in our school together in a very special and committed way. It sets Oak Grove apart as a space dedicated to what is best for the children in our community as a grounding principle for decision making, creating a space that is nurturing and homelike in its warmth, where we preserve childhood, and in which we create strong relationships to support each child in reaching their fullest potential. Within this type of environment, children are free to explore their curiosity and also to be challenged and supported by loving adults.

Families who have had their child enrolled in Oak Grove know the dedication the teachers have for their teaching practice and moreover for the care and education of the whole child. In speaking with faculty, staff, and parents, I find myself remarking "how lucky our children are" whether it has to do with the time afforded to outdoor play and learning, the deep dives children take in researching topics of interest, the compassionate way children are spoken with and cared for by fellow teachers and office staff, etc. But it isn't luck at all. It's the combined commitment of home and school. We can certainly feel fortunate to have it, but I have to acknowledge the shared work of our families, faculty, and staff in making it a reality. Oak Grove families make a conscious choice to be a part of this community, to support their children's education, and to reinforce community values of caring, intrinsic motivation,

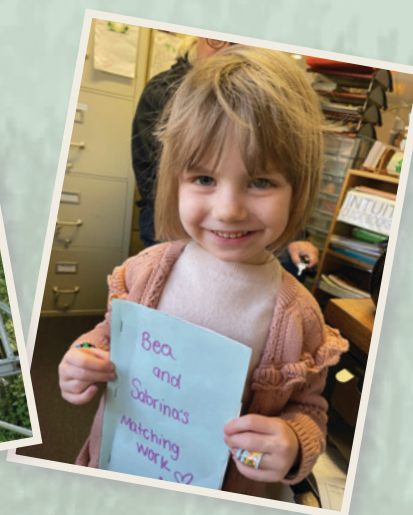
and collaboration. Our alumni families and school champions have given and continue to give each year to help us realize the vision of our school and even more importantly recommend our school and share their positive experiences with prospective families. Our faculty and staff are mindful about being present in their interactions with children and other adults while also balancing their plans for the day, week, months (and even the next year) ahead. They pay attention to the details and carefully communicate with everyone and still allow time for the spontaneous learning and joy that makes being part of a school community delightful.

In thinking about the past half year here on campus, I feel grateful to be a part of this community and proud to serve the children, families, and faculty. This semester has flown by, but I look forward to following the good example of my colleagues in being fully present in these moments, finding and naming joy, and planning for the weeks, months, and years ahead!

With gratitude,



LEELA PAHL, HEAD OF SCHOOL



...Where are They Now?

For over 40 years, Oak Grove has educated hundreds of students. These alumni leave our school and join a talented group of individuals that are leaders in so many different fields. Time and time again, we hear from our alumni how their Montessori education, at Oak Grove, prepared them with the skills needed to greet the next chapters of their lives. Most notably, they recognize that Oak Grove's curriculum and environment fostered essential communication skills, time management skills, and collaborative work abilities that contribute to their ongoing success.

The research continues to demonstrate, unequivocally, that an educational setting based on student-centered learning, high levels of engagement, peer-teaching, collaboration, and problem-solving, yield the most positive long term results for students. The multi-aged Montessori classroom and three-year cycle offer a curriculum that prepares our children with the skills they need to greet their futures with excitement and anticipation.

The most meaningful way to know about the outcomes of an Oak Grove education and experience are to hear directly from our graduates themselves. We asked three more graduates to share some thoughts about their time at Oak Grove. We asked about their lives after Oak Grove, their hobbies and interests, their real-world vision, and about how their time at Oak Grove has influenced their journey.

PROFILE *What are our graduates doing now?*

REAL-WORLD VISION *What is important to our graduates?*

IMPACT *What habits, skills, character qualities do our graduates trace directly back to their time at Oak Grove?*



“Children are human beings to whom respect is due, superior to us by reason of their innocence and of the greater possibilities of their future.”

— Maria Montessori

Former students and families are vital to the stewardship of the Oak Grove community. You serve as an integral support system for the school and help us paint a vivid picture of success for our current and future families. We are committed to broadening and building alumni relationships; we want to hear from you and want to know what you are doing now! Please email, call, or stop by. We would love to swap stories and keep you connected.



Sarah Boulay

Where are you now?

I live in Baltimore with my husband and two children who currently go to Greenspring Montessori in Lutherville, Maryland. I recently resigned from teaching 8th grade Math at an inner-city public school in Baltimore. My choice to resign was due to the lack of individuality the administration and entire district wanted to implement in the classroom. Very little room was given to meet the child's needs which goes against my morals in teaching children.

If you could change anything in the world, what would you change?

Our individualized outlook on life. In America we do things for ourselves and as much as we like to help others, and believe we are willing, our life-style focus tends to be on the immediate family. I am guilty of this. I would like people to make choices, not only because of personal consequences, but also with the understanding of how our choices and lifestyles affect others. I think if we consciously made more choices thinking of others, as much as ourselves, we would naturally change into a more community-based culture. Less about having our own and reaching out to others but including others in our own.

What habits, skills, and character qualities do you trace directly back to your time at OGMS?

Being open-minded and willing to try new things. Having the ability to put myself in other people's shoes. I am hard working, passionate and I will always love to learn.

Academic Transition

The hardest part was having to follow rules that didn't make sense. You are often given flexibility and freedom to make your own choices in a well-led Montessori environment but in the public school system, where I went after Montessori, rules were in place to better manage large groups of students doing a singular activity. These rules were hard to adjust to, especially since I struggled sitting at a desk all day.

Social Transition

I am not an overly social person but I think I managed to make friends easily in my transition.

What defines the OGMS experience?

OGMS was for me a place to independently foster my love of learning. My best friend and current employer was also a student at Oak Grove Montessori. My peers from our tightly-knit community at OGMS have grown up to choose a variety of different professions. I think being at OGMS gave us the privilege to truly understand who we are, and through learning, gave us an advantage as adults to follow the paths best suited to us. The thing I value the most, as different as we all are as adults, is that we try to find ways to give back to the community and do our best to care about how our lives affect others.

“Free the child's potential, and you will transform him into the world.”

— Maria Montessori

Valerie Boulay

Where are you now?

After my years at OGMS, I finished elementary and high school in Chaplin, CT. I then went to Three Rivers Community College for pre-requisites and graduated from Johnson and Wales with a BSN in Equine Business Management.

I successfully applied all this education to various jobs in CT and NY State. However, I reached an upper limit in my job working for the town of Wellsville. Meanwhile I have been, and continue to be, fully committed to riding and *Eventing* in the world of horses. So as a self-directed lifelong learner, I went back to school to become a nurse. I am an ICU nurse in a rural hospital in upstate NY As well as a competitor, teacher and lifelong learner in the world of horses. I believe this journey has been just right for me and brought me to be doing exactly what I was meant to do.

If you could change anything in the world, what would you change?

As a nurse we are able to treat each person individually, finding what they need to get well without judgement or prejudice. The whole world could benefit and learn from that model. We think, collaborate and strategize based on people's needs and strengths in a non-biased and non-judgemental manner.

What habits, skills, and character qualities do you trace directly back to your time at OGMS?

I am willing to take initiative and start new tasks and it is important for me to understand why I am doing things. Having been encouraged to ask questions and choose tasks helps me be more effective in everything thing I do. Many people I have worked with over the years carry on without questioning, taking initiative, or growing. They lose sight of their goals and solely follow minimum expectations. Sadly, they do not have the love of learning I still carry from my Oak Grove years.

Academic Transition

The transition was definitely a shock but luckily, I already knew some of the kids in my grade. The curriculum felt easy, especially the math. However, I quickly learned that asking questions with curiosity might be considered something called “talking back”. Asking why was no longer a good thing. Initially, I thought receiving stickers as rewards was so cool. My enthusiasm died out quickly on that. I was also surprised that multi-aged students weren't encouraged to collaborate. But again, the curriculum and workload were never a challenge.

Social Transition

The social transition was definitely a change, but one I enjoyed. I liked meeting lots of different people. At this point in life I still keep in touch with some of my OGMS friends and college friends, so I feel like we made some strong friendships at a young age. Although I felt more like I could be myself at OGMS, public school prepared me for another social reality which was valuable.

What defines the OGMS experience?

OGMS taught me to love learning, make choices, try new things and that it is ok to be myself. What more could you ask?

Teagan Mabrysmith

Where are you now?

Right now I am a Sophomore at Colgate University majoring in Molecular Biology and minoring in Psychology and Spanish. At Colgate I am involved in a plethora of activities! I work on campus as an EMT and as a research assistant in an Ecological Science lab. I am a committed member of the Colgate Women's Rugby team and loved finding a great sports community on campus! I also enjoy attending Bingo nights and Crafter's Club meetings, which Oak Grove well prepared me for. In the future, I hope to gain more worldly experiences while I travel abroad and look to broaden my horizons with more research opportunities on campus.

If you could change anything in the world, what would you change?

I truly believe that if every child had the opportunity to receive a Montessorri education the world would be a much better place. I find a lack of empathy and curiosity across the board to be heartbreaking and I am thankful every day that Oak Grove reinforced these values within me.



What habits, skills, and character qualities do you trace directly back to your time at OGMS?

I was a very passionate child who was known for being go, go, go! Oak Grove helped nurture my boundless energy and curiosity, turning it into self-motivation. The Montessori method also helped me to establish a strong sense of accountability for my own learning style and time management.

Academic Transition

Academically I found myself in a comfortable position, well-prepared for the rigor of public school. My self-motivation and curiosity helped me maintain good grades without the burnout seen by my peers.

Social Transition

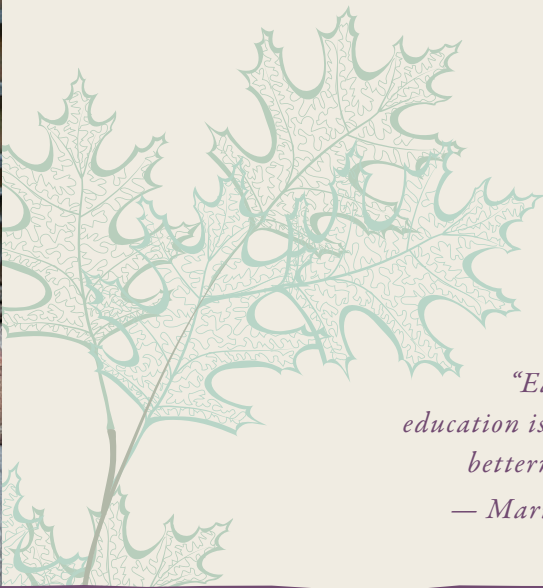
My social transition took more effort than my academic transition. I learned that the culture within Oak Grove was not the norm in other places and I had to actively seek out like-minded individuals. While my high standards made it more challenging to find close friends, in the end it paid off.

How does the mission and philosophy (Respect, Independence, Engagement) of OGMS still guide you today?

I think I carry these words with me everywhere I go to this day. I learned respect for my peers but also for myself as a voice that deserves to be heard and this has allowed me to have the confidence to enter spaces that others might shy away from. My skills as an independent learner have propelled me to be self-sufficient and impact the personal satisfaction in the work I do and how I can impact the world around me. OGMS taught me how to have a positive impact on those around me and engage with my community on a holistic level which has allowed me to make connections that I expect to last a lifetime.

What defines the OGMS experience?

The OGMS experience can be defined as a crucial time in a child's life where they can learn about the value they contain as a human being and how they can make a difference in the world around them. Feeling empowered at such a young age led me to be a confident young woman who does not shy away from society's challenges, but rather engage with my community in a curious and empathetic way.



*“Early childhood education is the key to the betterment of society”
— Maria Montessori*

The Seth Brody Memorial Scholarship Fund

EACH YEAR Oak Grove is very grateful to Seth's grandfather, David Miller, from the S. Rubenstein Family Foundation, and Rich, Carrie and Savannah Brody for supporting this fund in Seth's treasured memory. Because of this donation, we have been able to offer additional financial support to students who could not attend Oak Grove without this assistance. If you would like to donate to the Seth Brody Memorial Scholarship Fund, you can contribute on our website, **OGMS.ORG** or send a check to us noting that it's specifically for Seth's Memorial Fund.



Our Willow Tree

Sadly, we lost our big, beautiful willow tree on the playground in a summer storm. We all helped to plant a new one and each of us added a shovel full of soil at the ceremony. We're excited to watch it grow!



Reflections

from the Board Chair

Dear Oak Grove Community,

This academic year came with new leadership in both the Head of School and Board Chair roles. An inflection point for our legacy, it seemed we grounded into our deep, healthy roots while our branches budded with new growth. I can't help but write in imagery as I reflect on the vibrance of this community and the reverence I have for it.

Our former Board Chair and Vice Chairs Beth Acly-Gnazzo and Megan Burnett passed the torch this year, paving the way for Victoria Hughes Bachiochi and I with their grace and unwavering vision for our school's future. We also welcomed new board members, bringing with them fresh perspectives and vital skills. Emily Potz, Mallory Stevens, and Brandon St. Jean are now integral members of our community and have already profoundly impacted the work of our committees. We continue as a full board to ensure the fortitude, stability, and growth of our school in Leela's vision. As trustees, we are deepening our own mission and skills and honing our voice as stewards of Oak Grove in the greater community.

I have been a part of Oak Grove as a parent and board member for the past four years. From my vantage point, each year has been unique in interesting ways, while deeply rooted and steadfast in others. Due to my own natural disposition and my background in healthcare, I experience shifting needs with a slowed lens and sense of curiosity. I also have an intrinsic sense of hope and trust in humanity. As our community of families, teachers, staff, and board members continued to care for one another and our school through transitions the past few years, we seem to have settled into beautiful rhythm and harmony. This year felt like it whispered in on a warm breeze as Leela, Cindy, JoAnn, Sherry, and our beloved teachers welcomed us back from the heat of summer. The ice cream social just before the start of school, in its simplicity and sweetness,

2024-2025 Board of Trustees

- Katie Roy, *Chair*
Victoria Hughes-Bachiochi, *Vice Chair*
Rachel Goldberg, *Treasurer*
Matthew Coolbeth, *Secretary*
Angela Fournier, *Member At-Large*
Leela Pahl, *Head of School, Ex-Officio*
Clare King'oo
Paloma Kunze
Emily Potz
Mallory Stevens
Brandon St Jean

affirmed that the year could feel just that. The Hibernation Festival this Fall embodied the creativity, whimsy, and joy that is possible at the hands of happy, nurtured, Montessori kids. We are so looking forward to more fun together at the Hoo's Fooling Who Road Race April 5 thanks to all of the creativity and collaboration of the Development Committee and volunteers. Your support sharing this event and throughout the year with our inspired fundraisers continues to help our community thrive.

It is an honor and joy to serve our children, our school, and our community in this role. In a world that is constantly evolving, where technology, culture, and global challenges shift at an unprecedented pace, Oak Grove nurtures self-confidence, adaptability, empathy, and purpose. Maria Montessori reminds us that *"we must cultivate the spirit of the child, so that he may feel the call of humanity and respond with love and understanding."* Thank you for being partners in this shared commitment to nurturing a happy, compassionate future!

Thank You All for Enriching Our School with Your Generosity

THE OAK GROVE ANNUAL FUND helps us to evolve, meet our operating budget each year, and ensures that our educational programs and thoughtful investments in faculty and facilities are maintained and strengthened for years to come. Your generosity helps us honor our commitment to uniquely nurture our children's love of learning as well as their sense of personal and social responsibility. **THANK YOU!**

2023-2024 Annual Fund Donors

Visionary (\$15,000 & above)

David Miller & The Brody Family

Sustainer (\$1,000 to \$2,499)

Bill & Pat Jordan
Leela Pahl

Ambassador (\$500 to \$999)

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Charter Oak Credit Union
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Sydney Shifrin

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Brandon St. Jean
Nick & Mallory Stevens
Bobbi & David Teva
Kathy Tuttle
Satyender Valipe & Neha Mishra
Clare Vidich

This report gratefully acknowledges gifts received between July 2023 and June 2024. Donations to the 'Raise Your Bid', 'Planned Giving' and 'Giving Tuesday' are included in the Annual Fund. If there are any errors or omissions, please accept our deepest apologies and notify Cindy Henry at cindy@ogms.org. Thank you once again for your generosity!

This year's Annual Fund helped to directly support our Financial Aid Fund & Supplemental Operating Costs.

2024 Gala & Auction

Our Auction Committee was led once again by Megan Burnett, Amy Lambeck, and Victoria Bachiochi and their tour de force committee!

The online auction in the fall was very successful followed by our in-person gala, “Spring Fling” on May 18th at Horizons in South Windham.

We thank everyone for a very successful event!

Thank You to Our Donors

All Smiles Dental
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CT Science Center
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The Camilli Family
The D’Alessandro Family
The Gnazzo/Acly Family
The Henry Family
The Jordan Family
The Lambeck Family

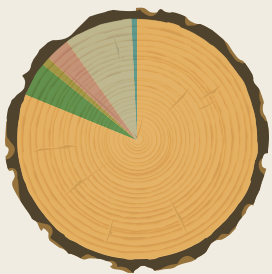
The Nericcio Family
The Wilkens Family
The Fish Market
The Hoot
The Hungerford
Nature Center
The Mark Twain
House & Museum
The New Britain
Youth Museum
The Preservation Society
of Newport County
Tide & Ture, Amanda
Hawkins
Tractor Supply Co. of
North Windham
Tre Isola Art, Paloma Kunze
Tree Trails of Mystic
Wadsworth Atheneum
Museum of Art
Walmart of North Windham
West Haven Academy
of Karate
Seth McCalaster
Willimantic Food Co-Op
Wind River Chimes



OGMS Statement of Activities and Expenses

for the fiscal year July 1, 2023 through June 30, 2024

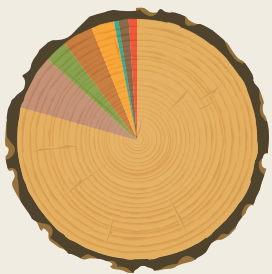
Income



Tuition	81.18%
Fundraising	4.62%
Summer & Enrichment	1.12%
Extended Care	3.26%
Grants & Scholarships	9.07%
Administrative Income	0.75%

Total \$859,314.57

Expenses



Wages & Benefits	79.41%
Financial Aid, Sibling Discounts, Tuition Remission, Scholarships	7.35%
Mortgage & Utilities (inc. SBA Loan)	3.06%
Professional Services & Insurance	4.04%
Administrative Fees & Marketing	3.1%
Classroom Equipment & Supplies	0.59%
Maintenance (Building & Grounds)	1.35%
General Supplies, Postage & Printing	1.11%

Total \$869,915.59





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Save The Date!

Congratulations to the Graduating Class of 2024!



*Madeline Lambeck, Emily Milotte, Lisa
Williamson, Alejandro Venator-Skretta,
Alexander Herzog and Jayden Jordan*