

The Oak Grove Owl

A Newsletter and Annual Report for the Oak Grove Community

2025



EXUBERANT ENGAGED EAGER



Thoughts from the Head of School

Dear Oak Grove Community,

“Free the child’s potential and you will transform them into the world.” - Dr. Maria Montessori

When visitors and new families come to our school, they frequently comment on the kindness, caring, and genuine interest that the children have for one another. Oak Grove is an exceptional place for children to thrive because we believe in the possibilities of children. Our school is 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.

“The greatest gifts we can give our children are the roots of responsibility and the wings of independence.” - Dr. Maria Montessori

I want to acknowledge the shared work of our families, faculty, and staff in making Montessori’s vision and that of Oak Grove 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, carefully communicate with everyone, and still allow time for the spontaneous learning and joy that makes being part of a school community delightful.

In reflecting on my second year here, 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.

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.

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

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

— Maria Montessori



Hannah Moore

Where are you now?

I live in Mansfield and work as the Financial and Administrative Manager for an environmental consulting firm specializing in lake management. I have been passionate about environmental science from a young age and studied Environmental Politics, Policy, and Economics at Mount Holyoke College. It's incredibly rewarding to be able to apply both my interests and my education in my day-to-day work. In my spare time, I enjoy sewing and embroidery, which give me a creative outlet.

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

I would love to see a shift back to more community-oriented societies, where people are more connected to one another in their day-to-day lives. While technology has many benefits, I think social media has taken away from meaningful, real-world interactions. More genuine, face-to-face connections would strengthen communities and help pull us out of the increasingly divided world we are living in.

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

One of the qualities that I value most in myself, and that I tie directly back to my time at OGMS, is my independence in school, work, and life. OGMS helped me develop autonomy and confidence in my abilities, which set me up to succeed in demanding high school and college courses, especially those that required personal motivation, time management, and self-direction. These skills have continued to benefit me in my career, where I value autonomy in my work and do not rely on management or oversight to stay organized, motivated, and effective.

Academic & Social Transition

When I transitioned from Oak Grove to public middle school, I adapted fairly quickly to the new culture, with changing classes, homework, larger class sizes, and an overall different way of teaching and learning. I will say that while I was a good student, I did not initially enjoy public school – I much preferred Oak Grove and the Montessori approach. I began to enjoy school more as I made friends and became involved in extracurricular activities. I was lucky enough to have a wonderful teacher who invited me to join the school's Earth Club, which gave me a sense of belonging and project-based learning that I had enjoyed at Oak Grove. I continued this by starting an Earth Club in high school, where I served as president. This was the highlight of my time in high school because it gave me a sense of purpose, independence, and self-directed learning that I had come to value from my time at Oak Grove.

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

I am strongly guided by these values in my personal and professional life. I believe respect for others and engagement in community are more important now than ever. OGMS instilled in me a respect for nature, people, cultures, and differing perspectives, as well as the importance of active community engagement. I try to engage in the community and our greater society through being vocal about issues I care about and, recently, serving on the board of a local organization.

What defines the OGMS experience?

I believe what defines the OGMS experience is that children are trusted and respected. Children are met where they are at, while also challenging them to reach their full potential. That balance of support and challenge fosters confidence, independence, and a love of learning.

Atticus Burrello

Where are you now?

Hello everyone! I now go to Carnegie Mellon in Pittsburgh Pennsylvania, and I am a senior studying acting. I am about to graduate and go into the industry, along with my class of only 23 kids! I am planning to be on your screens and stages soon, and have really embraced being an artist in college. I am waiting for my New York and Los Angeles showcase to decide my immediate future.

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

Oh gosh, so much. I wish everyone would choose kindness and get off their phones. Life happens around you, not on your device, and especially for my younger friends, explore your interests! People quit so often now, because they feel the world is watching them on their little screen, when in fact no one cares! Do your thing! And also vote for just and fair leaders, because we are the generation to fix things :)

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

The ability to take projects on my own, develop them, and then be able to communicate to an audience what my curiosity had led me too, has been a foundation of my entire acting journey. Being able to have free rein of the classroom, and then be able to explore every nook and cranny of my interest with no inhibition, but with encouragement has set me on the path I am on now. I've been in every different kind of school you can image, and Oak Grove gave me the inner strength and belief that I was smart and creative to find a way to adapt and survive in all these different climates. It's the care and personal time students get that is something never encountered in the rest of my academic experience until college, another free learning environment.

Academic & Social Transition

I can't lie, the transition out of this place is hard, and swift. Public school is not like Oak Grove at all, as I'm sure many people know. I will say that the bubble, once burst, is quite a shock to the system if one isn't prepared. I don't know the best process to prepare for homework, lots and lots of peers with opinions, language you've never heard, and raucous atmosphere that Oak Grove doesn't have. I think, when I remember back, taking the gifts, and accepting the changes that would come was the difference in my high school and middle school education, when I went to a local public school.

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

Well damn, when I see them up there, it is the words I live by, and I find are most pertinent to my personal mission so far. I move around the world with tremendous respect for the world and its people, all with incredible independence and I can't believe that I forgot those terms, and they are pillars of my character and experience. Engagement is my key as an actor. I am pretty engaging to watch, and can connect, positively or negatively, with my audience, no matter what. These pillars seem like terms when you're six, but when you're twenty-two and looking back on the educators and the independent learning I experienced, everything I do now is built on the lessons instilled every day for the five years I attended Oak Grove.



What defines the OGMS experience?

As I've said already, Respect, Independence, Engagement. Not just with the education, but with the world. I don't really know how much it can apply to everyone who graduates or every way of life, but for me, an artist who hopes to be on Broadway very soon, this place gave me the big bang of creativity at a young age to further that mission. I got my first role while in this school, and the encouragement of the school, along with my own tools built up at Oak Grove, allowed me to thrive in those first couple of shows, starting the journey that would become my life. Oak Grove is a gift I am so thrilled to recount, and I hope that all reading will enjoy this beautiful space of time while it lasts, because the real world is harsh out there, I can't lie. But if the lessons are taken and embraced, then the path is wide open for a life of fulfillment with engagement in people, nature, curiosity, and life.

"Early childhood education is the key to the betterment of society"
— Maria Montessori

The Seth Brody Memorial Scholarship Fund

Matsu, Jonagold, Empire, Cameo & Fuji, oh my!

At the Hibernation Festival, we celebrated Apples to honor the memory of our beloved classmate, Seth, who also loved apples.

The event featured a sampling of dehydrated apples that was prepared by the Upper Elementary Class. Taste-testers were invited to vote on their favorite apple. The most popular variety was Matsu. A Fall farmstand featuring bags of apples, pumpkins, gourds, and daffodil bulbs was enjoyed by everyone. Everyone enjoyed a competitive and spirited raffle with lots of fun prizes, including one of Cindy's famous apple pies! All of the proceeds went to the scholarship fund. Many thanks to the generous contributions from our friends at Orchard Hill Farm in South Windsor and Ladds Garden Center in South Windham for helping to make the event a big success.



EVERY YEAR, the Seth Brody Memorial Scholarship Fund supports students who would not otherwise be able to attend Oak Grove. We are grateful for the generous support of Seth's grandfather, David Miller, from the S. Rubenstein Family Foundation and Rich, Carrie, and Savannah Brody for their ongoing commitment to making a Montessori education accessible for more families. Individual contributions to the fund are also welcome and greatly appreciated. If you would like to contribute to the scholarship fund, please contact the school office or visit the website at OGMS.ORG/SUPPORT.

Reflections

from the Board of Trustees

"Serving as a board member has given me a deep appreciation for how thoughtfully the school nurtures each child's curiosity, confidence, and love of learning. I'm continually inspired by the dedication of the educators and families and the meaningful role Oak Grove plays in strengthening our broader community."

- Brandon St. Jean, Board Treasurer

"As both an Oak Grove parent and Board Chair, my gratitude for this community deepens each year, with humility, awe, and renewed wonder. My understanding of its essential place in preparing future generations grows in both complexity and clarity. Moments like seeing children confidently lead their families past Seth's orchard, down the nature trail to the vernal ponds, while Joe quietly tends the fire pit nearby, captures what Oak Grove Montessori School makes possible - for our families and beyond. This work feels both grounding and hopeful, and reminds me that nurturing the whole child is one of the most powerful contributions we can make to the world."

- Katie Roy, Board Chair

"The complexities of my role in higher education can too easily cast a shadow over the simple beauty of learning itself. Serving in a board position at OGMS has rekindled that joy for me, reminding me what it looks like when curiosity is protected and growth is allowed to unfold in real time. Watching young people engage, question, and discover with hope and wonder is, at its core, deeply individual and a cornerstone of humanity."

- Lara Chiaverini, Board Trustee

"Serving as a board member has been especially meaningful through involvement and volunteerism at our community events, the April road race being a new one, an event designed not just to raise funds, but to reimagine how families come together around Oak Grove. Events like this allow us to witness and share the



2025-2026 Board of Trustees

Katie Roy, *Chair*

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Matt Coolbeth, *Secretary*

Brandon St. Jean, *Treasurer*

Rachel Goldberg

Jocelyn Santiago

Lara Chiaverini

Emily Potz

Leela Pahl, *Head of School, Ex-Officio*

beauty of Montessori education beyond the classroom by fostering connection, joy, and a sense of belonging for children and adults alike. As Maria Montessori reminds us, "The child is both a hope and a promise for mankind." It is an honor to help foster family-centered experiences that reflect this belief and strengthen the bond between Oak Grove and the broader community we belong to."

- Victoria Hughes Bachiochi, Board Vice Chair

"Everyday, our school's wonderful staff come together to create an exceptional learning environment for our children. By serving on the Board of Trustees, I've been able to help ensure they have the support they need to do this important work."

- Matt Coolbeth, Board Secretary

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!**

2024-2025 Annual Fund Donors

Visionaries

(\$20,000 & above)

David Miller & The Brody Family

Sustainers

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

Victoria & Steve Bachiochi

Sal & Karen DeSciscio

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Julie Giannelli

Rachel Goldberg

Erich Heinonen & Katie Roy

Maribeth Holer

Sheila Kaytis

Paloma Kunze

Clare & Kyle King'oo

IN ADDITION TO THE ANNUAL FUND, the Development Committee partnered with a variety of local businesses to offer special fundraising opportunities. More than \$6,000 was raised through these pop-up sales. Many thanks to everyone who helped to make these possible. We encourage you to support these businesses and be sure to let them know you are part of the Oak Grove community!

- Pie Sale with Granny's Pies of East Hartford, CT
- Wreath Sale with Ladds Garden Center in South Windham, CT
- Mountain Dairy Egg Nog Sale with Grounded Coffee in Willimantic, CT
- Candy Sale with Munson's Chocolates of Bolton, CT
- Plant Sale with the Andrews/Goldberg Family of Willington, CT
- Dahlias Tubers Sale with Kim of South Windham, CT
- A Lemonade Stand at 3rd Thursday with Grounded Coffee and OGMS students!



Linda Lambeck

Eileen Metzgar

Sabrina Muccino-Salgado

Nick & Mallory Stevens

O.L. Willard Co., Inc.

Debra Polucci

Emily Potz

Jeremy Schwartz & Merle Potchinsky

David Silsbee

Brandon St. Jean

Ricardo Trindade & Roxana Mocanu

This report gratefully acknowledges gifts received between July 2024 and June 2025. 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.

Hoo's Fooling Who?

2-Miler Road Race & Block Party

In 2025, we traded in our "grown-ups only" gala for a "family-friendly" event and created "Hoo's Fooling Who? Road Race & Block Party." Our premier event was a great success, drawing participation from the Oak Grove families, local racing clubs, and the greater community. The 2-mile race included 155 registered runners, along with several walkers and even strollers. There were various activities at the block party, including farm animals, lawn games and bubbles, music, a spring plant sale, and raffle prizes featuring a beautiful stained glass piece made by our own Joe Henry.

We thank everyone for a very successful event!

Committee members

Victoria Hughes Bachiochi
KC Carrancio
Sherry D'Alessandro
Adrianne DeVivo
Cindy Henry
Amy Lambeck
Charlie Olbrias
Leela Pahl
Sydney Shifrin
Brandon St. Jean

Volunteers

Tyler Brown
Heather Cleary
Matthew Coolbeth
Russell D'Alessandro
Kyle Dunnack
The Last Mile
The Goldberg/Andrews Family
Jason Henry DJ Services
Cherie Langlois
Jacob Palmeri
Jocelyn Santiago
South Windham Fire Department
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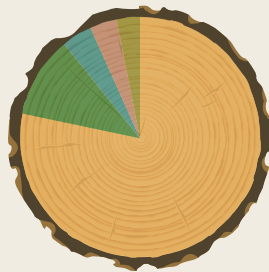
Klaus Larsen Roofing
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The Quarry Campground
TRT Dig & Rig
Villari's Martial Arts Class of 2024
Cindy & Joe Henry
D'Alessandro Family



OGMS Statement of Activities and Expenses

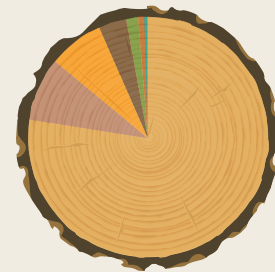
for the fiscal year July 1, 2024 through June 30, 2025

Income



Tuition	78.3%
Fundraising, Grants & Scholarships	10.9%
Administrative Income	4.1%
Extended Care	3.6%
Summer & Enrichment	3.1%
Total	\$887,726

Expenses



Employment Costs	77.5%
Tuition Assistance, Scholarships & Other Discounts	8.5%
Administration (Insurance & Professional Services)	7.4%
Maintenance, Building & Grounds	3.7%
Extracurriculars (Enrichment, Summer & Field Trips)	1.6%
Fundraising	0.8%
Supplies	0.5%
Total	\$1,014,906



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Congratulations to the
Graduating Class of 2025!



Our beloved Tilla!



*Caleb Freitas, Isla Kunze,
Radha Bance-Vidich, & Lucy Trindade*