

FALL 2019

The Oak Grove Owl

A Newsletter and Annual Report for the Oak Grove Community



Nurture the child. Empower the student. Unleash the potential.

Thoughts from the Head of School



Dear Oak Grove Family:

As I reflect on my first semester as Head of School at Oak Grove Montessori School, I feel that in some ways, I have always been here. As graduates of OGMS report: Oak Grove was a second home. I, too, have come to think of Oak Grove as my second home.

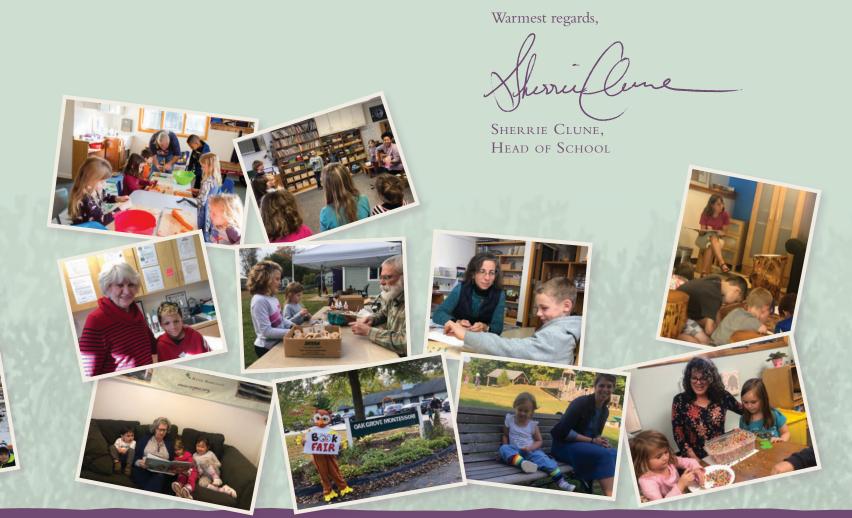
Oak Grove's exceptional people are the reason OGMS has a warm home-like feeling; everyone looks out for one another and treats one another as extended family. The children benefit from a heartwarming, home-like environment in which our dedicated faculty and staff nurture them. While the Montessori curriculum is comprehensive and rigorous, a wise educational researcher once told me that the single best predictor of student success is how happy the child is at school. At Oak Grove, the laughter of the children fills the classrooms, the corridors, and the outdoor space. You can also hear them chattering about their latest projects, playground adventures, and nature trail discoveries.

With happiness as our guiding principle, we work with each student, as an individual, to help them achieve their fullest potential. We meet them where they are academically and progress them through the curriculum at a rate that is both challenging and supportive. In addition to our planned curriculum, we nurture

their interests in a variety of subject areas. We encourage them to recognize that the world is their classroom and that everything is meant to be studied. As we guide them, we are coaching them to be life-long learners that seek to involve themselves in work that will benefit the greater good. At Oak Grove, we embody our mission statement by making all of our decisions based on what is best for the children.

We also open the world to our students at an early age, fueling their independence, imagination, and innovation; we inspire each child to find their passion in life. As educators, we cannot predict what field each student will be interested in, but we offer bountiful seeds of knowledge that they plant and cultivate now and in the future. We are very proud to feature our graduates each year in our annual report, *The Owl*. We are glad our graduates agree that Oak Grove is an extraordinary place for educating the human potential.

Thank you for your continued support of Oak Grove; together, we are an engaged and supportive family for our children.



... Where are They Now?

For over 38 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?



Ariel Swartz



Profile

Ariel Swartz graduated from Oak Grove in 2009. Last May, she graduated from Wesleyan University with a degree in English and Dance and spent the summer as Program Director at a progressive, Jewish summer camp in Pennsylvania. Right now, Ariel is living in New York City as a part of Avodah's Jewish Service Corps, a year-long, justice-

oriented fellowship. Through this fellowship, she is working as the Program Associate at a non-profit organization called Footsteps, which helps folks who are transitioning or interested in transitioning from restrictive, insular Ultra-Orthodox communities into the secular world. In Ariel's free time, she enjoys exploring the city (especially the public parks), and she is working on finding more opportunities to dance. In the future, she is hoping to attend graduate school to become certified to teach middle or high school English.

"Following my time at Oak Grove, I was worried about getting lost in Windham Middle School and did not like some of the other charter and magnet schools I was exploring so, after talking with my parents quite a bit, I chose to homeschool for my 7th and 8th-grade years. As a less-mathematically inclined student, I had a bit of catching up to do in math; however, when I got to high school, Classical Magnet School in Hartford, CT, I found myself academically aligned with my peers. I ended up graduating, top of

Because I homeschooled during the two years after OGMS, my social transition was very different from many students who go to a public school after Oak Grove. During those years, I retained several of the closest friendships I had at Oak Grove. My social transition into high school was a little more difficult, but it didn't take me very long to find a few close friends and, from there, to grow my circles even wider."

Real-World Vision

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

That is such a hard question to answer because there are many aspects of our world, right now, that I would love to change. One thing, however, which feels especially essential, is equal access to empowering education. I've been so inspired, of late, by the many young activists spearheading the climate change movement and genuinely believe that every person, every child, should have access to an education that empowers them to act autonomously and speak up for the good of the world. If I could change one thing, I would want to give everyone access to an educational foundation that would allow them to feel empowered and to advocate for themselves and others.

Impact

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

Related to my vision for a better world, I think some of my strongest beliefs about education trace back to Oak Grove and the autonomy and support we received, as students, to follow our interests and to learn for the sake of learning. There is no doubt that the high value I place upon education traces back to OGMS. I'd also like to think that my, now relatively refined, organizational skills trace back to pouring water and scooping beans in the 3-6 classroom.

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

Oak Grove's philosophy around respect, independence, and engagement guides how I think about education and social justice and how I relate to others. From a very young age, the environment at Oak Grove helped me to understand the value of every human, no matter their age or identity; it is a value that continues to guide me today.

What defines the OGMS experience?

For me, the OGMS experience is defined by the many immersive projects I took part in and the special care that the teachers gave me. We participated in project fairs that fully immersed us in learning about diverse cultures. Additionally, I appreciated the support I received from my teachers to complete my senior project as a 6th-year student; Oak Grove's teachers, along with the Montessori philosophy, create a holistic and supportive learning environment.

Abram Doubleday-Bush



Profile

Abram attended Oak Grove until 2005. He graduated with a degree from Clark University in 2016, with a major in history and a minor in film studies. Currently, he wears many different hats at a Worcester restaurant called Peppercorn's – he works as a food server, a host/maître d', and a catering delivery person throughout the week, and the variety always keeps things interesting!

informs his hobbies, as he does his best to stay up to date on books and scholarly research in his field. His research focuses on the history of American movements, including abolition, trade unionism, and civil rights. Abram is also a voracious viewer of old films, from classic Hollywood to the cinema of Japan, France, and Italy, among others! He also loves games (board and video) and science fiction novels.

"I attended OGMS from 1st-5th grade and transferred to a Catholic School (St. Bernard Academy in Uncasville, CT) for 6th-12th. The experiences and educational philosophies could not have been more different! There was definitely a learning curve to that transition, as I moved from the Montessori mindset to a very different style of private education, but I'm tremendously grateful for it. OGMS set me up for success in high school, where the academic rigor was great for my OGMS-trained brain; and college, where social skills and values I picked up in Montessori helped me make friends and pass classes alike.

Academically, I credit my time at OGMS with helping open my mind to different teaching and learning styles, which was helpful in middle and high school but tremendous in college. Socially, the transition from the warmth and heart of OGMS to a fundamentally different style of middle and high school was difficult, and I missed my friends badly. But the values I learned at OGMS and the friendships I made are things I am very grateful to keep close to me today!"

Real-World Vision

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

There is a lot about the world that I would change – I believe that OGMS equipped me with an essential set of positive values that can be at odds with the inequality and unfair treatment we see in abundance today, in America and abroad. Wealth inequality is, in my opinion, the single most significant issue plaguing our world today. Marginalized people, including the poor and differently-abled, are not given a fair shake in a winner-take-all-economy. OGMS taught me well that sharing resources, making friendships with people from different cultures, and building mutual understanding are cornerstones to health and happiness for all people! I would give the whole world the gift of an OGMS education to fight the disease of greed.

Impact

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

I owe a great deal to OGMS, but what comes to mind first are two things: community and curiosity. The amazing teachers I met during my time at OGMS did a fantastic job keeping me in line (because I definitely had some wild times, as all kids do!) The teachers expertly and effortlessly refocused my energy into creative, positive outcomes. They taught me it is never a bad thing to be curious and ask questions, big or small. Another valuable lifelesson they taught me was how the classroom is a shared space that shouldn't be domineered by just one person's questions, comments, and perspectives. But instead, it should provide a collaborative and comfortable space for everyone! I have tried my best to bring that community-building mentality with me into classrooms and workspaces alike.

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

The OGMS mission is fundamental to my life's journey, as I've touched on briefly in previous responses. Respect and Engagement: the inspiring teachers at OGMS - especially Willa, Nancy, and David - opened my mind in many ways and taught me a great deal. But maybe the most crucial aspect of their pedagogical style, for me, was the respect they showed for students and student perspectives. They ALWAYS treated respect as a two-way street: they treated other OGMS students and me as human beings worthy of respect and earned our lasting respect in turn. The grace and courtesy, fundamental to their teaching style, stays with me today, and I strive to emulate them in my interactions with small children. Independence: I have a bit of an 'independent streak,' so maybe I took this one a little TOO much to heart! Just kidding - I wouldn't trade the independence we were given in the Montessori classroom for anything. From the creation and execution of fascinating independent projects (an amazing learning experience) to the choice of activities in leisure time (a great social experience), I see freedom as something beautiful and fundamental to the OGMS experience, which leads me to the last point:

What defines the OGMS experience?

I believe respect for each student and recognition that each learner has a unique path to their full potential is fundamental to the OGMS experience. The teachers are incredibly hard-working and stupendously intelligent, both intellectually and emotionally. I felt comfortable to reach for my educational and social potential, secure in the knowledge that even failure would be gentle and provide positive lessons to learn. OGMS was a place where I felt safe and felt at home as a kid.

What defines OGMS?

In one word, love! Love for oneself, fundamental to our growth as individuals, and love for one another, fundamental to our social role as members of society. Thank you, OGMS!

Maya Kalonia



Profile

Maya graduated from Oak Grove in 2003. She currently works at the United States Senate in Washington, D.C., for Senator Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) as a policy advisor. Maya handles the Senator's legislative work for energy, environment, agriculture, food, and consumer protection, among other issues. In her free time, she likes to get off the grid and

away from politics by traveling, camping, rock climbing, playing tennis, reading, and cooking.

"I was a student at OGMS from kindergarten through sixth grade, and I would not have changed any of it for a second. I am the strong, independent, and caring person I am today because of Oak Grove. OGMS allowed me to grow up in a very supportive and free environment. Unfortunately, the real world is not always as kind and nurturing.

I was well prepared academically and tested out of the classes for my age range. However, the adapting came with larger class sizes and fewer hands-on teachers. Socially speaking, the students around me had more traditional upbringings, so naturally, I felt a bit different, but that was likely due to my home life (growing up in an international, multi-racial family) as much as attending a Montessori school."

Real-World Vision

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

This is a tough question because there are so many problems that urgently need to be addressed in our world. If I were to pick two things to work on in the United States, I would focus on campaign reforms and food systems. It is crucial to reform campaign finance laws so that our government better reflects the needs of the American people rather than corporations. It is also essential to overhaul our food system to address climate change and reduce waste while making sure that healthy, nutritious food is accessible to all.

Impact

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

A large part of my job is being creative and independent when developing strategic responses to the issues of our time. From a very young age, OGMS encouraged me to be both of these things, as well as a level-headed problem solver. I also developed a deep compassion for people and the environment, which has launched me into a career in public service.

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

I still follow the OGMS mission and philosophy to this day. Without a doubt, I am an engaged member of society—my entire life is about making the world just a little bit better for those that are often forgotten or left behind. I respect the environment and all people, regardless of background or identity. Lastly, I am fiercely independent, and I am grateful that OGMS gave me the strength to follow my own path and to be my own person.

What defines the OGMS experience?

The OGMS experience, to me, is allowing kids to be kids that are respected, valued, and encouraged to grow independently of outside distractions or pressure. The OGMS experience is also introducing children to the world around them in a compassionate, thoughtful way.





Pictured (left to right): Lindsey Baah, Dan Polhemus, Ricardo Trindade, Sherrie Clune

2018-2019 Board of Trustees

Ricardo Trindade, Chair Bill Piotroski, Vice Chair Bob Powell, Treasurer Tiffany Blumenstein, Secretary Dan Polhemus, Member at large Sherrie Clune, Head of School, ex-officio Lindsey Baah Bill Covey

Mike Gnazzo

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Amy Lambeck

Dear Oak Grove Families:

It has been an exciting year for Oak Grove. We created a strategic plan, hired a new Head of School, and were re-accredited by the Connecticut Association of Independent Schools (CAIS).

In the coming year, we are focused on supporting Sherrie as she works on getting to know us all and making our little school the place we all want it to be. Already this year, Oak Grove has expanded school programming, strengthened our music program, and enhanced field trip opportunities for the children.

All three of my children have gone to Oak Grove. Stella and Lucy are current students, and Julia graduated in 2018. My wife Roxana is the assistant teacher in the 6-9 classroom, under Willa. We all consider Oak Grove our second home, and our family has committed fully to caring for the school.

Oak Grove has a great dedicated team, working to make this school the best it can be. Starting with our amazing teachers, a professional and capable administration staff and, lastly, the Board of Trustees, whose mission is to provide long term planning and to help provide financial stability for the school.

Each one of us contributes to what makes Oak Grove so special; it is a place where our children feel secure to be their authentic selves. Our children are engaged, respected, and loved. Oak Grove truly lives up to its motto: "Nurture the child, empower the student, unleash the potential." Our entire community gives every ounce of themselves to our school with gifts of time, resources, and talent.

Thank you for your continued support of Oak Grove. We look forward to continuing our thirty-eight-year tradition of offering an authentic Montessori education to children in Mansfield and beyond.

Sincerely,

Ricardo Trindade Chair, Board of Trustees

"Oak Grove is a place where my child can blossom surrounded by people whose primary goal is to support children in finding their passions, developing their strengths, fostering independence, and encouraging respect and genuine care for others."

Amy Lambeck



Oak Grove is a community where my sons can ignite own motivation and develop

Dan Polhemus



"At Oak Grove, my child can be herself and develop at her own pace. Oak Grove is a place where each child gets treated as an individual."

Ricardo Trindade

Thank You All for Enriching Our School with Your Generosity

THANK YOU, parents, grandparents, alumni, staff, board members, and friends, for your tremendous support over the 2018-2019 school year. Like all independent schools, Oak Grove relies on philanthropic support to help provide for the projects and programs that assist us in nurturing the children you have entrusted to us. We received 100% participation in the Annual Fund by both board members and staff. We also received excellent participation from our current parents and guardians. We strive for 100% participation from current families, staff, and board members. 100% participation demonstrates the dedication and vitality of the school community and inspires larger donors and foundations to invest in Oak Grove. #powerofparticipation THE OAK GROVE ANNUAL FUND 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!

2018-2019 Annual Fund Donors

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David Miller and the Brody family

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This report gratefully acknowledges gifts received between July 1, 2018 and June 30, 2019. Donations to the "Raise Your Bid Card" auction item are included in the Annual Fund as well. Great care was taken to ensure accuracy of this report. If there are any errors or omissions, please accept our deepest apologies and notify Sherrie Clune at sherrie@ogms.org.

This year's Annual Fund helped directly support:

- OGMS Music Program and Concerts
- Professional Development for Staff
- Building Safety and Security Enhancements
- Elementary Classroom Field Trip and Experiential Learning Days
- Supplement Our Operating Expenses



their curiosity, find their a passion for learning."

2019 Gala & Auction

On Saturday April 6, 2019 the Oak Grove extended community came together for our Annual Gala and Auction. With a tropical twist, we *Flamingled* the night away! What a fun night of celebration for our commitment to Oak Grove. Over \$50,000 was raised for Oak Grove through the silent and live auctions, the raffles and the sponsorships.

Thank you to entire Auction Committee for the tireless hard work throughout the year. Thank you to everyone who helped to make this evening so much fun and such a huge success!

2019 Let's Flamingle! Auction Committee

Beth Acly Gnazzo Sherry D'Alessandro Cindy Henry

LIPS TO SECOND

Emily Schutte Magdalene Skretta Sue Angelides A special thanks to Auctioneer Jim Turner & Photographer Teresa Bielecki

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Kolar, Graham

Kramer Portraits

Cozzolino, Jaimee

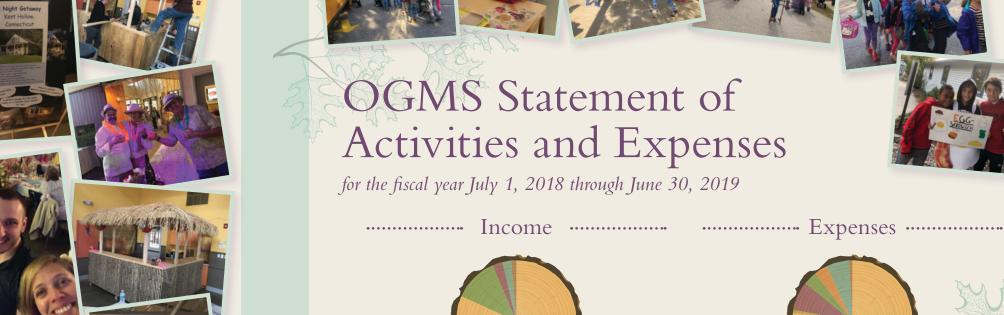
CT Concert Ballet

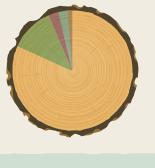
Crouse, Vicky & Peter

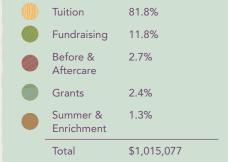
Logee's Greenhouses Lutz Children's Museum Mansfield Drive-In Theater Martin, Andy Mathnasium Melville, Scott & Myriah Mocanu, Roxana Mohawk Mountain Mohegan Sun Morahn, John Nollet, Nicole at Hair Graphics OGMS Auction Committee OGMS Lower Elementary Class OGMS Primary Class OGMS UPPER Elementary Class O'Neil-Baker, Erin Organic Valley Piotroski, Janina Pleasant Pizza Polhemus, Dan & Shannon Priam Vineyard Purring Pottery Studio Ouester's Way Rawn, Nancy & Ken Red Twig Garden Design Robert Graham Clothing Store Romaniello, Denise Cririllo

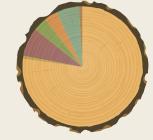
Lashes by Tay at Sun on 6

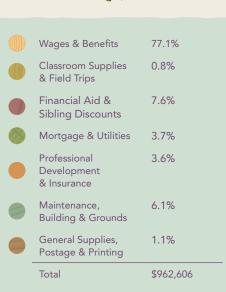
Sarah, Landry Schutte Emily Shull, Emily Silsbee, David Ski Sundown Skretta, Magdalene Sollo Bella Hair Studio Stix & Stones Florist Stone Age Rock Gym Storrs Center Cycle Susan Angelides Sword and the Stone The Fee Family The Hoot Trader Joe's Vanlandingham, Robyn Vega-Boulay, Laurie Wadsworth Atheneum Museum West Hartford Children's Museum Wicked Slice Willimantic Food Co-op Willimantic Waste Willington Pizza Windham Wine & Spirits Wireless Zone





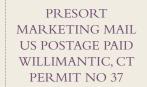




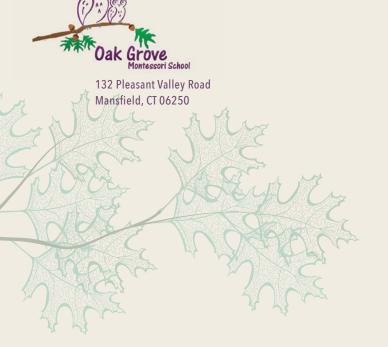












Seth's Orchard Front cover artwork by Bill Dougal



Congratulations to the Graduating Class of 2019



David Silsbee, Francesca Reigeluth, Hattie Landry, Greta Garner, Serena Laizhao, Hannah Army