

*We are what we  
celebrate.*



2023-24

# IMPACT REPORT

**“We are what we celebrate, and when we celebrate excellent students and educators, we renew our commitment to excellence in education.”**

**– Rebecka Peterson**  
2023 National Teacher of the Year  
Union High School



PHOTOS BY AJ STEGALL PHOTOGRAPHY

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# Letter from the Executive Director

Dear Friends and Supporters,

Celebrations are a powerful way to honor, uplift and inspire. They allow us to pause, reflect and appreciate the efforts and achievements that shape our communities and our future. For more than three decades, the Oklahoma Foundation for Excellence has been committed to celebrating the academic excellence of public school teachers and students across our state. These celebrations are not just moments of recognition; they are affirmations of the vital role public education plays in our society.

At the 2024 Academic Awards Celebration, we had the honor of hearing from 2023 National Teacher of the Year Rebecka Peterson, who eloquently reminded us of the importance of celebrating. Her words resonated deeply, reinforcing the idea that by lifting up our students and educators, we reaffirm our dedication to fostering a bright future for Oklahoma.

As you explore this report, you will discover how we celebrated those who exemplify the highest standards of academic excellence. We are also pleased to share how we expanded our celebration of excellence by elevating the recognition of honored teacher guests and public school foundations at the Academic Awards Celebration. Additionally, we continued our new tradition of recognizing Medal for Excellence honorees in their communities, where we celebrated them in student-filled auditoriums, cafeterias, classrooms and boardrooms.

We are deeply grateful to our trustees and donors who join us in celebrating academic excellence and for their unwavering commitment and investment in supporting academic achievement in Oklahoma public schools. Their generosity makes it possible for us to continue celebrating and encouraging excellence in education. Thank you for being an essential part of our mission.

With sincere appreciation,



Elizabeth Inbody  
Executive Director



**Recognizing  
and encouraging  
academic excellence  
in Oklahoma's  
public schools.**



# Academic Awards Program

The Oklahoma Foundation for Excellence's prestigious Academic Awards Program honors exceptional achievements in Oklahoma's public schools. Each year, the foundation hosts the Academic Awards Celebration. This inspiring event highlights the honorees of the Academic Awards, which are the state's premier awards program highlighting academic excellence, innovation and leadership within the public education system.

On May 4, students, educators and supporters filled the Embassy Suites Hotel & Conference Center in Norman, eager to celebrate the 2024 Academic Awards recipients.

- Highlights of the 2024 Academic Awards Celebration:
- **100 high school seniors** were honored as Academic All-Staters, recognizing their outstanding achievements.
  - **Five educators** received the Medal for Excellence, acknowledging their innovative teaching methods and commitment to education.
  - **Three public school foundations** were awarded the Outstanding Program Award for their exceptional contributions to enhancing education.

The night produced many unforgettable moments, especially in the moving speeches from the Medal for Excellence recipients. These educators shared



**Medal for Excellence recipient Jennifer Goldner celebrates with friends, family and colleagues at Jay Upper Elementary School, where she teaches fifth grade science.**



**From left, Kevin Hime, Jennifer Goldner, Dr. Sapna Das-Bradoo, Jill Andrews and Dr. Greg Burge were the 2024 Medal for Excellence recipients.**

insight into their teaching philosophies and spoke of the profound impact their students have on their careers.

“Every day that I have the privilege of working with teenagers, I am inspired by their curiosity, their intelligence, their grit, their joy, their energy, and their potential to change this world for the better,” said Jill Andrews, an English language arts teacher at Claremore High School who received the Medal for Excellence in Secondary Education. “My students make *me* a better teacher every single day.”

The Academic Awards Program not only recognizes individual achievements but also serves as a powerful force for promoting educational excellence. The program encourages a culture of academic rigor and innovation, benefiting Oklahoma’s public schools and communities.

## Medal for Excellence Recipients

- **Elementary Teaching:** Jennifer Goldner, fifth grade science teacher, Jay Upper Elementary School
- **Secondary Teaching:** Jill Andrews, English language arts teacher, Claremore High School
- **Administration:** Kevin Hime, superintendent, Lawton Public Schools
- **Regional University & Community College Teaching:** Sapna Das-Bradoo, professor of biology and interim chair of the department of natural sciences, Northeastern State University Broken Arrow
- **Research University Teaching:** Greg Burge, economics professor and department chair, the University of Oklahoma in Norman



**“Receiving this box of treasures in the mail last week was one of the best gifts I’ve ever gotten.”**

**— Joe Black  
All-Stater from  
Moore High**

## **MEDAL FOR EXCELLENCE**

The Medal for Excellence recipients were honored not just at the Academic Awards Celebration but also at their respective schools, where OFE Executive Director Elizabeth Inbody and Communications Director Hayley Riggs McGhee presented the honorees with their awards and \$5,000 checks. These ceremonies provided a personal and meaningful recognition, allowing the honorees to be celebrated in front of students, colleagues and often friends, family and other guests.

Celebrating educators within their school communities brings a deeper meaning to the foundation’s work. It allows students and colleagues to witness the recognition of excellence, reinforcing the value of education and the positive impact of dedicated educators. These celebrations foster a sense of pride and inspiration within the school, encouraging others to strive for excellence.

## **ACADEMIC ALL-STATE**

For the 100 Academic All-Staters, the journey of celebration begins the moment they receive news of their selection for this prestigious honor, which recognizes exceptional academic performance, leadership and contributions to their school and community.



**Joe  
Black**



In addition to a \$1,500 award, the Academic All-State experience includes:

- **Recognition package:** Students receive a special box filled with gifts and congratulatory messages.
- **School celebration:** Schools are notified of the students' achievement and encouraged to honor them, fostering a sense of pride throughout the school community.
- **Networking opportunities:** On the day of the Academic Awards Celebration, All-Staters spend time networking with past All-State honorees and Medal for Excellence recipients, gaining valuable insights and inspiration.
- **Stage recognition:** During the ceremony, All-Staters take the stage with their teacher guests, who present them with medallions in recognition of their accomplishment.
- **Lapel pin tradition:** All-Staters receive lapel pins that they gift to their teacher guests, symbolizing the special bond between student and educator.

The Academic All-State Award is more than just a recognition of achievement; it serves as a powerful motivator for students to continue striving for excellence in all aspects of their lives. This honor inspires not only the recipients but also their peers and the broader community, reinforcing the importance of academic excellence and leadership in shaping a brighter future.



**Kamrey Rendon,  
right, with teacher  
guest Anthony  
Alvarado**

**“I spent most of the  
spring semester eagerly  
anticipating the letter  
to see if I had been  
chosen. I am very  
excited to be recognized  
for my hard work.”**

**– Kamrey Rendon  
All-Stater from  
Comanche High**

# Oklahoma School Foundations Network

Through its Oklahoma School Foundations Network, the Oklahoma Foundation for Excellence provides free resources, training and networking opportunities to new and established public school foundations.

OSFN has helped build one of the nation's largest networks of public school foundations. The state is home to more than 200 of these citizen-led nonprofits that raise millions of dollars annually to support Oklahoma public schools and encourage community involvement.

OSFN Director Lauren Dow hosts monthly online meetings foundation executive directors. These gatherings provide a forum to share information and hear from guest speakers.

Lisa Carson, Lawton Public School Foundation executive director, says the network has been instrumental in helping her grow in her role.

"It's really nice to have someone that organizes us and that leads us in collaborating and helps us find resources, and that's what the foundation does for me," Carson said.

Each year, OSFN honors innovative programs sponsored or administered by public school foundations as Outstanding Program Award

## Outstanding Program Award Winners

- Cheyenne Honors Night, Cheyenne Educational Foundation
- Healthy Thriving Schools Initiative, Foundation for Tulsa Schools
- Student Ambassador Program, Edmond Public Schools Foundation

winners. Each honoree receives a trophy and a monetary award of \$1,000.

For the first time in 2024, OSFN honored the Outstanding Program Award winners on stage during the Academic Awards Celebration.





AJ STEGALL PHOTOGRAPHY

**OFE staff and trustees present representatives from the Edmond Public Schools Foundation with an Outstanding Program Award during the 2024 Academic Awards Celebration.**



**“This recognition celebrates the impactful contributions of high school students to public education through leadership, advocacy and philanthropy, reaffirming that their efforts are truly making a difference.”**

**– Deanna Boston**

**Edmond Public Schools Foundation CEO**



# Boren Mentoring Grants

In 2024, the Oklahoma Foundation for Excellence awarded \$18,000 in Boren Mentoring Initiative Grants to help support the growth and development of K-12 mentoring programs. These grants are expected to impact more than 2,300 students across the state.

## START-UP GRANTS

OFE awards \$3,000 start-up grants to organizations or programs in their first three years of operation. These grants are designed to encourage communities to establish quality mentoring programs. OFE awarded two start-up grants for 2024.

Grant recipient Project Get Active and Involved Now of Kingfisher focuses on youth leadership and professional development. It equips youth with knowledge and experience in leadership, innovation, fellowship and education. Funds are being used for transportation, training, equipment, supplies and other expenses.

The Putnam City Public Schools Foundation's Communities and Schools Together, which also received a start-up grant, pairs students with mentors who provide accountability, motivation and hope to pursue a successful educational career and opportunities. Grant funds will allow the program to expand its mentoring program to two additional school sites.

## OPPORTUNITY GRANTS

Eight \$1,500 opportunity grants were awarded to existing mentoring programs to help fund programming, training, materials or other needs that advance excellence in mentoring for K-12 students.

### Start-up Grant Recipients

- Project Get Active and Involved Now, Kingfisher
- Communities and Schools Together, Putnam City Public Schools Foundation of Oklahoma City

### Opportunity Grant Recipients

- Alpha Boys Institute, Oklahoma City
- Bridges of Norman
- Calm Waters Center for Children and Families, Oklahoma City
- Kingfisher Educational Foundation's Students With A Role Model
- Oklahoma City Public Schools Foundation's ReadOKC Reading Buddies and Book Club
- Operation Aware of Coweta
- Project Whiz Kids Site, Oklahoma City
- Yukon Public Schools Miller Mentors

Grant recipient Calm Waters provides focused support and compassion to children who are struggling after a traumatic loss in their life.

“With funding of \$1,500 from the Boren Mentoring Initiative Grant, Calm Waters will provide free grief support groups to 43 students in Oklahoma schools



**CAST mentor Jackie Gaines, back right, talks with mentees.**

struggling with significant loss,” said Abby Dimond, Calm Waters’ director of development and communications. “These are 43 children who otherwise might not have had access to affordable, high-quality mental health services to help them cope with their trauma.”

The Miller Mentors program pairs a positive adult with a child that needs more love, guidance and support. Mentors spend 30 minutes a week during school hours to connect with their mentee through games, crafts and other activities.

“It takes a great deal of intention to make a child feel seen, heard and valued,” said Diana Mann, volunteer programs coordinator for Miller Mentors. “The main thing is the time the mentor and the mentee spend together. I want the mentor and the mentee to feel supported, and want to give them as much as I can to help them feel that way.”

**2,300+**  
**Students impacted**



**Project GAIN**



**Mentors from CAST**

# Teacher Professional Development Partnerships

The Oklahoma Foundation for Excellence partners with two national organizations — Fund for Teachers and the Colonial Williamsburg Teacher Institute — to provide exceptional professional development opportunities for Oklahoma educators.

These partnerships empower teachers to explore new ideas, gain fresh perspectives and bring innovative learning experiences back to their classrooms.

## Fund for Teachers

Through a partnership between OFE, Fund for Teachers and the Tulsa Community Foundation, 13 Oklahoma educators embarked on life-changing journeys over the summer of 2024. The teachers explored ancient Greek wonders, attended portrait painting workshops in Rome, experienced the Olympics in Paris and visited South Africa to learn more about Apartheid.

Since 2006, this collaboration has provided more than \$3.2 million in fellowships, allowing 953 Oklahoma educators to design and participate in unique professional development experiences.


Monica Graves and Lisa Wright, educators from Sand Springs Public Schools, were among those who benefited from the program. They traveled to Greece, visiting iconic sites like the Parthenon, the Temple of Athena and the Theater of Epidaurus. The pair tailored

their itinerary to align with students' interests in subjects such as athletics, performing arts and engineering.


Graves reflected on their experience at the Theater of Epidaurus, saying, “We picked this spot for our math class because its epic acoustics and perfect symmetry show off ancient Greek geometry. Who knew math could be this spectacular—and sound so amazing, too?”



Alva educator  
Alesa Murrow,  
right, with  
Olympic champion  
Shannon Miller

A woman with curly hair, wearing a blue long-sleeved shirt and black pants, stands on a rocky peak. She has a brown bag slung over her shoulder. The background shows a vast, hazy landscape with mountains under a blue sky with scattered clouds.

Amanda Austin  
used her fellowship  
to experience the  
South African  
setting of Trevor  
Noah's biography  
"Born a Crime"

A circular inset image showing a woman with long blonde hair smiling. She is in a rocky, mountainous landscape with a sunset or sunrise in the background. The sky is orange and yellow, and the mountains are dark and jagged.

"The units and materials  
I will be developing will be  
available to sophomore  
teachers throughout my  
district. These lessons  
have the potential to  
impact the learning of  
hundreds of students."

— Amanda Austin  
Edmond North teacher

Sand Springs teacher  
Monica Graves in  
Meteora, Greece



Elizabeth Golliver,  
Chandler Junior High  
history teacher

## Colonial Williamsburg Teacher Institute

Thirty-four Oklahoma educators spent six days in June immersed in early American history at the Colonial Williamsburg Teacher Institute. Since 1993, OFE has coordinated the state's participation in this one-of-a-kind professional development opportunity that lets teachers experience the rich history of 18th-century Virginia.

“This trip was truly life-changing,” said Amanda Bekkelund, a social studies teacher at Okarche Elementary School. “It will forever change the way I teach. A fire has been lit, and I cannot wait to spread this passion and excitement to students about history, but more importantly the details and experiences from this trip that make it mean so much more.”

Participants explored the restored capital of colonial Virginia — the world's largest living history museum — and engaged with historical interpreters who brought the past to life. The educators took part in hands-on activities such as rope making and debating historical issues, equipping them with new tools and perspectives to engage their students more deeply in American history.

“I learned more this week than I have learned in [any] professional development in my career,” said Shana Ramirez, an English language arts and social studies teacher at Tulsa Public Schools' Zarrow International School. “The stories and activities brought home how our history is made of real people who are not one-sided, but instead were complicated individuals.”

“This experience  
will be alive in my  
classroom, through  
hands-on activities  
and my love of  
continuing to learn.”

— Molly Gann  
Marlow Elementary  
fifth grade teacher



Chelsie Clapp,  
Kala Butler &  
Brenda Payton

# Major Donors

The Oklahoma Foundation for Excellence is grateful to our many donors for their commitment to our mission of recognizing and encouraging academic excellence in Oklahoma’s public schools. We thank the following FY24 major donors for their generous support.

Bank of Oklahoma  
 Cherokee Nation  
 The John and Donnie Brock Foundation  
 The Chickasaw Nation  
 ConocoPhillips  
 The James C. and Teresa K. Day Foundation  
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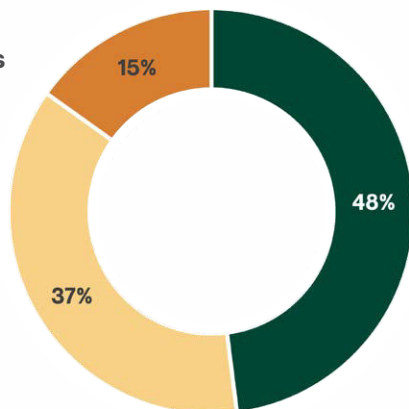
## 2023-24 Financials

The Oklahoma Foundation for Excellence is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization supported through private contributions. Depicted are unaudited financial results for the 2024 fiscal year. A summary of audit findings will be posted on OFE.org upon completion. For more information, visit [OFE.org/Financials](https://OFE.org/Financials).

### OPERATING REVENUE

**\$976,793**

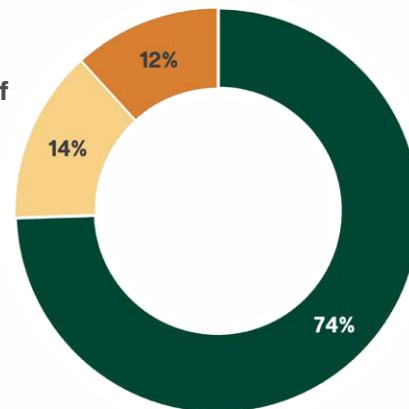
- Contributions**  
\$468,767
- Endowment**  
\$360,364
- Other**  
\$147,662



### OPERATING EXPENSES

**\$976,793**

- Programs & Related Staff Support**  
\$727,377
- G & A**  
\$134,475
- Fundraising**  
\$114,941





## Oklahoma Foundation for Excellence

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