

# Muskegon Opportunity MESSENGER

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## From the Coordinator

We want you to be in the know, so we plan to devote the next three editions of this newsletter



to each of the broad topics our subcommittees continue to address: parent engagement, business engagement and dropout prevention. We

hope to share any progress the subcommittees are making, any obstacles they are encountering and, of course, any successes they are achieving.

We are kicking off this effort with parent engagement, a topic near and dear to my heart.

Before you dive in, however, I'd like you to ponder the following and contextualize the collective impact we can have on parent engagement through coordination of the programs and services our individual organizations offer to local families:

"Parental engagement is more than an object or an outcome. Engagement is a set of relationships and actions that cut across individuals, circumstances and events that are produced and bounded by the context in which that engagement takes place... Parental engagement is a desire, an expression and an attempt by parents to have an impact on what actually transpires around their children in schools and on the kinds of human, social and material resources that are valued within schools."

(Educational Researcher, Vol. 33, No. 4, pp. 3-12, May 2004)

*Marissa*

Marissa Higgs, coordinator

## Parents get homework, head start on college talk

By Kayla Bunge  
Special to Muskegon Opportunity

**MUSKEGON**—Matt Goebel believes it's never too early to start talking about college and careers with students—and it's never too early for parents to start setting expectations for their children.

"(Obtaining) some sort of post-secondary education is key in the world we live in," the Orchard View Elementary School principal said.

"(Having parents) ask simple questions, like 'What do you want to be when you grow up?' or 'What college are you going to?' assists us with helping our students

reach that expectation of post-secondary education."

Goebel focused his open house before the start of the school year on parents of kindergartners and first-graders—engaging them in their children's education and helping them understand the importance of starting college and career talk early.

"Not only did we want to inform parents of the importance of supporting their

children at the kindergarten and first-grade levels, but also give them an understanding of how to support their children's dreams by setting weekly, career readiness exercise.

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## College Knowledge

### Eight College-Planning Tips for Parents

1. Start saving money for college as early as possible.
2. Help your child make school count and make his or her schoolwork relevant.
3. Explore your child's potential career options based on her or her interests, skills and talents.
4. Meet with your child's counselor to help determine the right academic fit for him or her.
5. Gather college information, such as programs of study, cost of attendance and financial aid availability from the schools in which your child is interested.
6. Help your child make trips to college events count; for example, turn a trip to a basketball game into a tour

See **KNOWLEDGE** on Page 2

## Program Updates

•**House Family Foundation grant:** Muskegon Opportunity recently learned it was awarded \$20,000 a year for three years from the foundation. The organization intends to use the funds to not only sustain current programming, but also to develop additional programming that will reach younger students.

•**RWJ grant:** The Grand Rapids-based Alliance for Health has

identified the Muskegon Community Health Project as the lead local agency for a project that links community health indicators to policy changes. The group has chosen to pursue high-school graduation and post-secondary attainment and has asked Muskegon Opportunity and the Muskegon Area Intermediate School District to help facilitate the education compo-

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## Save the Date

- Wednesday, Dec. 7:** FAFSA: Essentials and Updates webinar—2 p.m., online (register [here](#)).
- Wednesday, Jan. 18:** Financial literacy workshop—5 p.m., 1200 complex, Stevenson Center for Higher Education, Muskegon Community College.
- Friday, Jan. 20:** Advisory committee meeting—8 a.m., TBD.

# MESSENGER

## HOMEWORK/Parents encouraged to start early with college, career talk

monthly and annual goals,” he said.

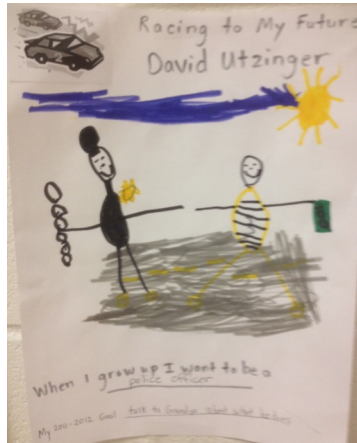
Goebel encouraged parents to take small steps, such as taking their children to see a job they might want to have someday or reading a book about a career.

Goebel also gave parents homework: to sit down with their children and discuss their career aspirations and set at least one goal for the year that would help them realize their dreams. He asked them to help their children draw a picture of their dream job and write down their goals.

“We had very good participation,” he said. “I thought it was important to communicate to parents that I have two small children myself...and that I have dreams for them and that I have expectations that support those dreams...”

One student—with the help of his parents—wrote that he wants to be a veterinarian and his goal for the school year is to learn to read. Another student wrote that he wants to be a police officer and his goal is to talk to his grandfather about the job.

The pictures now hang in the



Pictures, such as this one of a police officer now line the hallways at Orchard View Elementary School.

hallways of the school to remind parents and students of their dreams and that they have to work hard to achieve them.

The school has continued to engage parents in their children's education, including discussing with them during conferences a college readiness to-do list developed by Muskegon Opportunity.

“We wanted to make sure that we did activities throughout the year to support a culture change in expecting career and college readiness,” Goebel said.

## WayPoint hits parents, boosts attendance

By Kayla Bunge  
Special to Muskegon Opportunity

**MUSKEGON**—WayPoint Academy has come a long way in the last few months.

Prior to April, when One Plus Management took over administration of the charter school, parents hardly ever stepped foot in the school, let alone talked to teachers, and students hardly came to school on a regular basis.

But over the last several months, the management company made some changes to engage parents and get students to school.

WayPoint now has four school buses and provides transportation for every student (more than 250) at the school.

“The truancy issue was directly related to parents not having the ability to get their children to school because of transportation issues,” said Karen Buie-Jenkins, transitional director at WayPoint. “The majority of the students were using public transportation to get to school.”

WayPoint also hosted a carnival-

themed meet-and-greet event for parents as well as a two-day orientation for families this fall.

“These events allowed parents to network with the staff in a relaxed atmosphere that also promoted family interaction,” Buie-Jenkins said. “The parents were impressed that the school invested so much time and energy into providing a social event designed specifically for them to feel welcomed and like an integral part of the school's environment.”

WayPoint also formed a parent-teacher organization to give parents a chance to get even more involved with school activities and have input on important subjects, such as academics.

The changes ultimately have resulted in much better participation on the part of parents and much better attendance on the part of students, Buie-Jenkins said.

“We recently held conferences, and we had a 90 percent turnout for parents,” she said. “And through all of these combined efforts, our daily attendance rate has remained at 97 percent.”

## UPDATES/Hundreds receive TIP funds

nents of the proposal. The group recently learned it was awarded the grant, and Muskegon Opportunity will receive \$13,000 a year for two years to help carry out the work of the proposal.

### •Tuition Incentive Program:

All schools recently received their screened student lists. More than 2,000 students were screened; of those, 305 are eligible for TIP funds and 358 need to complete applications. Also, 302 students received TIP funds for a total amount of about \$418,000.

•**College information requests:** Every high-school junior who saw the KnowHow2Go

Road Show this fall was given the opportunity to fill out a college information request to receive information from our partner institutions and others. More than 1,100 students filled out cards and requested information from more than 150 colleges and universities across the country.

•**Dave Yerkie:** Dave Yerkie, an early member and supporter of Muskegon Opportunity and contributor to the Promise Zone legislation, recently died after a battle with brain cancer. Muskegon Opportunity donated \$100 to the college access endowment at the Community Foundation in his memory.

## KNOWLEDGE/Parents: Lend a hand

of the campus—classrooms, libraries, residence halls, dining facilities, etc.

7. Help your child with college applications, financial aid applications and scholarship essays. Do not be afraid to call your child's school counselor or a college academic or fi-

nancial adviser to ask for help.

8. Consider grants, work-study programs and scholarships as ways to help pay for college.

Source: *College Access & Opportunity Guide, Center for Student Opportunity.*

## Coming soon!

The subcommittees tackling parent engagement, business engagement and dropout prevention are hard at work.

Their work will be featured in this newsletter every month from November to January.