

October 1, 2015

To Students and Parents,

I am so glad to be able to introduce you to the Close Up Program at Oakridge High School. My name is Bob Wood. I have been taking students to Washington DC with Close Up since 1993. I have been teaching Economics, Government, and Senior Current Issues at OHS since 1990.

In 2016 we will be in Washington D.C. from April 30 to May 6 .

The Close Up Program is just about as good as it gets when it comes to learning and living and understanding the world. In Washington D.C. students meet with Senators and Representatives from Michigan. They tour governmental buildings - including the Capitol, Smithsonian, White House, and Supreme Court, as well as the famous monuments of D.C. Workshops highlight everything from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, to the Syrian refugee crisis, to the struggle for human rights, to diplomatic studies to various foreign embassies. The trip is filled with challenges and learning situations. It will also be a LOT of FUN. Kids room with and get to know students from all over the United States. And every year we go during “Deaf Week” where about one third of the students on program are deaf. Oakridge kids love the added diversity “Deaf Week” brings to the program. Some have even taken up signing upon their return from D.C. In the end - the best part is always the kids that we live with and eat with and share with and travel with for the week.

In addition Close Up entertains. We attend a play at one of Washington’s fine theaters, a farewell banquet and dance are held, and hundreds of opportunities are presented for Oakridge students to mix with kids from all over the globe. Supervision and security is tight. Night monitors and curfews are strictly enforced. The entire experience is done totally first class. Close-Up is literally a chance of a lifetime.

Each year the Oakridge Close Up groups adds an extra day. While the conference officially begins on Sunday at 5:00 PM, we will be there by noon on Saturday. We spend all day Saturday just us, out on the town getting to know D.C. In the past we’ve toured Mount Vernon, visited European or South American embassies, we’ve spent time at the National Cathedral or just hanged out at Dupont Circle. Saturday night we head out at 10:00 PM to walk the Mall. The Mall is lit only by the monuments - it’s quiet and reflective. We walk them all; Washington, Jefferson, Roosevelt , and Lincoln; we are out til 2:00 AM; its a fantastic way to start the week. Saturday night, we spend at a hotel in Dupont Circle (paid for in the past by Oakridge High School) and then on Sunday we are back at it again out on the streets all day long.

Until Program begins at 7:00 PM on Sunday evening...and you meet everybody else.

Close-Up does however have a price tag. The total cost of the trip this year is approximately \$1324.

Last year with our group fundraisers we cut the cost to about \$850

That does not include airfare. However, since we will be setting up our own transportation, we usually get a pretty good group rate. In the past airfare has run a low of \$185 to a high of \$250 per person. However, each of the past eight years Muskegon Intermediate School District has given every student between \$175 and \$250 based on the number of students in the county who go. Last year the donation from MAISD paid for our airfare. We expect that support to continue; and it should come close again to paying for the flight.

In the past the High School has budgeted for the extra night in the hotel (and paid for it); hopefully that will continue at least for a portion of the cost. Money wise that's about it. Food and transportation is covered for the Program beginning Sunday night. All you have left souvenirs and food on Saturday.

In 2000/01 we received over \$2000 in corporate donations. Since then we have not earned as much from local businesses, only because students did not get out there and dig. Close Up is a 501C3 organization; all donations are tax deductible...but you need to go hit up the businesses. They want to help you - they just need to know how they can.

Fellowships are awarded to Close Up participants based on family income. If a student qualifies for free or reduced lunch, they qualify for this fellowship as well. If we take ten students Oakridge receives minimum of one \$900 fellowship to split among all qualifiers. If we have more than three students who qualify we will request another fellowship. We've gotten as many as three fellowships on a trip in the past. We will not know how many we will get until we finalize how many students are actually going. If we have ten travelers we are in pretty good shape here.

As for individual fundraisers we will also have those. Lunch time bake sales, pop bottle collections, any other ideas that you have are all doable. I help students to create their own personal flyer that will outline Close Up and what they want to accomplish that week in Washington. This is a really good way to convince people that you are serious about the program, consequently they'll be more apt to support you. Check the blog for examples. These personal flyers come in handy when going out to get donations. Instead of asking for donations you use the flyers to convince businesses and adults, relatives, friends, and church members that their donation is an investment in the future of this nation - the flyers help you make that case. Students just need to stop into my room anytime after school and we can plan.. Pop can collections, savings from work, baby-sitting money - in the end - where there is a will there is a way. Close Up is doable - and it is certainly worth the cost.

Go to Mr. Wood's blog (thebuddhasaidiamawake.com) / and check the Close Up Page at the top for up-to-date information

The last two years we kicked butt on our on-line Silent Auction and Spaghetti Dinner. Students last year did a great job with the Silent Auction. We raised over \$2500. Each traveler got over \$400. It was fun. And a lot of work. We'll need to get out there again this year and secure donations that we can use to auction off in the Spring. We do both the Auction and Spaghetti Dinner in conjunction with OHS Drama Club's Spring play.

Any ideas that you have for group and personal fundraisers - I'm open to them, if they work. And you do too!

In order to earn the opportunity to represent Oakridge High School in Washington D.C. participant guidelines must be met. While some school treat Close Up as an AP or Honors Program, at Oakridge I want enthusiastic and dependable people. You do not have to be an "A" student to go. However, I need to be able to trust you and know that in the classroom here and there, and that on the road in D.C. you will conduct yourself with class. I have attached a participant form with this letter. Take a look; parents and students. Students cannot be a member of Close Up unless this form is signed and adhered to. It is essential that you realize Close Up is a privilege not a right. I have worked hard to set appropriate goals for this program. If a student does not abide by these guidelines they will be asked to leave the Program, whether or not they have paid deposits. Moneys collected and refunded by the Close Up Foundation will be returned. Those that cannot be refunded by Close Up will not be returned to the student. We have expelled students in the past for issues ranging from failing grades, to poor attendance, to violations of school policy on and off campus. In order to keep this a class program we are prepared to do the same in the future. Consequently, the Oakridge Close Up Program is a foundation of learning in the Oakridge School District.

In October we will have a mandatory parent student on a weekday, sometime after dinner from 7:00 to 8:00 PM - I will announce the date and time. It's important that all of us - myself, parents, and students are on the same page. We will cover all aspects of Close Up. Stay tuned on the blog for details.

I think it is a good idea for foreign exchange students to send the blog link to their home country to inform their real parents. We want *everybody* on board.

If you have any questions give me a call at school (788-7300) or home (616) 402-8668. Or e-mail me at bobwoodmsu@gmail.com I look forward to inviting you all to get involved in a truly fine learning experience. Thanks!

Sincerely,
Bob Wood