

To Students and Parents,

I am pleased to be able to introduce you to the Close Up Program at Oakridge High School. My name is Bob Wood. I've been taking students to Washington D.C. with Close Up since 1994.

2020 Close Up will be in Washington D.C. from Sat May 2 to Friday May 8



Take Education, Government, Travel, and an eclectic exciting urban setting, pour it all into a D.C. blender and push liquify. Add kids, many of whom are deaf, from all over the world, shake it up - that's Close Up. I absolutely love it. All of it. Washington D.C. is gorgeous in May; it's sunny and blue and warm. Flowers are in full bloom. The Program itself is dynamic. The kids that we meet are diverse and engaging and fun. Politics is in the air, and in this election year will be even more so. Add to this, that we get an extra two days in addition to the Program to do our own thing, and its kind of like a cherry on top of the sundae. There is a buzz that comes from a week of Washington D.C. Close Up, that I've seen spark in a young person a change that carries them on and into citizenship, college, and careers. This Program is truly a unique and vital opportunity.

So what exactly is it? Two trips in one is the best answer. The official Program begins at 6:00 PM of that first Sunday night. Kids from all over the country, meet at our assigned hotel (usually a Marriott in Northern Virginia) for dinner. They break into various groups and get to know one another, their roomies, for the following week. That week is packed with learning and life. The educational portion includes tours into the city, meetings with Congressional representatives, Neighborhood and Embassy visits, monument studies and seminars that take on topics of relevance in today's society. And all along the way you are meeting people, and learning about their lives and their thoughts about government, the world, and life. You are sharing pizza with them at 11:00 PM in your room. You're learning how to say "How you doing today." and maybe a whole lot more in sign. Who knows, you may be building the bonds of friendship that last your entire life. In the end this thing is real and it is fun! And just so you and your parents know, the entire program is strictly monitored.. It is organized and safe.

Deaf Week - each year we go during "Deaf Week." About 30% of the kids on Program will be deaf. You'll explore with them, eat with them, dance with them, room with 'em, and learn how to talk to them. This additional discovery, adds another fascinating layer to the experience.

If the official Close Up Program was all we did and we came home on Friday, the trip would be a success. But we do so much more. Because I've been going to Close Up for so long and I know the city, and because Mr. McVoy supports us by paying for a Saturday night hotel, we fly out on Saturday morning. We arrive in D.C. by noon and have two full days to roam on our own prior to the start of Program. In those two days we hit the bricks. We visit neighborhoods and flea markets. We go to coffee shops and festivals. We live on the subway. If the Washington Nationals are in town we go to a ballgame. And on Saturday night every year from 9:00 PM til after midnight we walk the monuments on the Mall. Somber and silent, in the dark, the journey is reflective. It's a soft and memorable introduction to the week. Sunday afternoon we're back at it, up at the Eastern Market on Capitol Hill, eating food, listening to music, and chilling out, until its time for 6:00 Dinner at the hotel. Both trips, are cool.

Close Up has a price tag. However, the organization has kept things reasonable; since 2013 the cost has held fast at \$1334. While this does not include airfare, each year the MAISD provides us a per pupil stipend. The final amount is based upon the number of kids in the County that attend Close Up. We are the only school that goes each year. Last year our per pupil stipend was \$250. Instead of allowing Close Up to organize our flight, we set it up ourselves - which is just about covered by the MAISD stipend. As for our first night in town, Close Up doesn't pay for that, but Mr. McVoy does. We stay in the same hotel where we spend the rest of the week. As for Program - hotel is covered, meals are covered, as is transportation. So, at the end of the day, students need to pay for food before Program begins on Sunday, subway rides for that time, and any spending cash they want to bring along. The rest is part of the Program. \$1334 is a pretty good deal.

A \$400 non refundable deposit will be due before Christmas. You may use Poinsettia profit for this deposit.

This brings us to the fundraisers. We do three. Each has proven successful over the years. **#1 Poinsettia Plants for Christmas.** We've sold them for four years. The plants are sharp. They come in a gift box. We add Christmas cards and delivery. In 2017 we sold 612 for a \$3200 profit. Profit is all individual. We'll kick off the Poinsettia sale first week in November. **Fundraiser #2 is the Silent Auction.** We will head out into the community sometime after Christmas and start rounding up donations. We take everything, from gift cards to Starbucks Coffee mugs to Best Buy TV's to Kayaks and Mr. Shoquist's shop projects. For three weeks in March we run an Online Community Silent Auction. In 2017 we auctioned off over 240 items for nearly \$5000. **Finally, Fundraiser #3** the night prior to our Spring Musical, for the past five years Oakridge Close Up has sponsored a Spaghetti Dinner. We make money and have fun; we split the profit. The three fundraisers are substantial. Some hard working kids have swung the entire cost of the trip on those three fundraisers.

Generally, students have been able to whittle their \$1334 down to \$600 or \$700 with the Close Up sponsored fundraisers. For the rest, kids work, they babysit, they get help from family members, and collect pop cans, anything really to pay for the trip. A good idea is to create personal flyers that outline the trip and a student's financial responsibilities; I'll help. In addition, if Oakridge takes at least ten students, Close Up provides a \$900 Fellowship to be divided up among free and reduced lunch qualifiers. If we take more than ten, there's a possibility that we can grab another Fellowship. These funds go only to students who qualify financially.

As for participation - Oakridge Close Up is open to tenth, eleventh, and twelfth graders. It is not an Honor's Program. Good citizens come in all shapes and sizes and grades. In this country we need citizens who care, young people who are Woke, individuals who think for themselves but act with their fellow citizens in mind. That does not come in the guise of a GPA. However, if you are traveling with me in Washington D.C, I need to know that I can trust you. You prove that with your actions day to day in the school. I'm not going to take anybody who is a school behavioral problem. While the week in D.C. is sanctioned by OHS, and absences are excused, you'll be gone for five days. Students with excessive absences will not be invited to attend. And grades will be monitored regularly. If you are an A student we expect you to produce A's. If you are B students work towards being an A student. If you get C's, try for B's. You have an occasional D? fix it with hard work. Grades matter. Always. They reflect effort more than anything else.

Oakridge Close Up has done great things over the years. We have alumni who have gone on to solid careers, some in government. Our students go to Washington D.C. I believe more awake than most - and come home even more so. You'll meet young people from all over the globe. You'll think about and talk about things that matter. You'll eat great food. You'll smell flowers and feel a city with beautiful neighborhoods. You'll talk to deaf kids with your hands. And you'll have a great time...the opportunity is yours. I'll be in D.C. the first week in May. Come along and have some fun.

Welcome to Close Up. Let me know how I can help you make this happen.

Sincerely, Bob Wood (616) 402-8668 / bobwoodmsu@gmail.com

Special Circumstances in 2020...The Choir and Band Trip to Disney World - deserves special notice here. Several students have asked if we could switch the dates of our trip in order to include them in both Close Up and Disney World. I tried. The following week in D.C. is not available to us. The week prior is more expensive. Changing the week won't work. However, I've an idea. If parents agree - students in Florida who want to attend Close Up the following week - could fly up from Orlando to D.C. on Saturday and meet with our group there. We'll get to town sometime early in the day. You all would coming in later, however the D.C. airport - Reagan National is easy. it's right on the subway line - its close to the hotel - we could meet - and you all could be on back to back journeys with out really missing a beat. The flight from Orlando to D.C. would probably be pretty reasonable as well. So, if you feel like this works for you - let's talk.