

**MAEO**



**Congratulations to all 2024  
nominees and winners!**

**PLEASE CONSIDER NOMINATING NEXT YEAR!**

**MAEO**

**Recognition  
Awards**

**2024**

**and the winners are...**

**Michigan  
Alternative**



**Education  
Organization**

Congratulations!

I want to give a massive shout-out to all of you who took the time to nominate your incredible colleagues for the 2024 MAEO Recognition Awards. As someone who's been in the Alt Ed world for a while, I know how rare it is for us to get a pat on the back for our hard work. That's why these awards mean so much to me and our organization. We absolutely love celebrating our rock star members and everything they achieve. Having been honored with an award myself back in 2019, I can tell you firsthand how amazing it feels to be recognized by your peers. So, just like we cheer on our students' successes, let's make sure we're doing the same for each other. A huge congrats to all the remarkable 2024 MAEO Recognition Award recipients - you make us proud!

Sincerely,



Sarah Orr President/Conference Chair Michigan Alternative Education Organization

# M.A.E.O.

Michigan . Alternative . Education . Organization

**Outstanding Support/Advocate**

**Outstanding Program Component**

**Outstanding Administrator**

**Outstanding Teacher**

**School of the Year**

# 2024

**and the winners are...**

# School of the Year

## | Crooked Tree High School |

EMMITT ISD: CHARLEVOIX MI

*Crooked Tree is a small alternative high school that has been around for over 25 years. In this setting, students earn their high school diploma by completing online courses, but also participate in many life skills activities, field trips, and community service opportunities.*

*Over the years, students have worked with Manna, our local food pantry, to sort and box supplies for those in need. They also run their own individual food pantry right at the school for students and their families. Within the building, students plant and manage a vertical herb garden and use the herbs in cooking. They also dehydrate food, like apples, and make their own venison jerky. Speakers love to come and present information, and they have had many over the years.*

*While the bulk of their schoolwork is done online, students have other opportunities for something outside the computer. One is 30 minutes of reading per day, that is recorded and reported for a grant that provides funds to purchase books to the school each year. Another is life skills class where they learn about how to live in the real world. Of course one highlight of the year is the annual Thanksgiving meal. Students and staff work together to prepare a wonderful holiday meal for our family and friends.. Outside, students have taken field trips to different job sites including a visit to the recycling center and the local casino.*

*The staff at Crooked Tree is amazing! Don, a past recipient of Teacher of the Year, runs the show. He is director, teacher, confidant, history buff and friend. Angela, teacher's aide extraordinaire, is Don's right hand. Don and the students would be lost without her. She keeps them in line and focused on their work. JT is the brainy, resident math tutor, available to help with anything from pre-algebra, to geometry, to personal finance and beyond. Finally, there is Joanie, an amazing counselor and life skills teacher, who with her sidekick, Mac the classroom dog, helps keep kids on the right track emotionally.*

  
**Char-Em**  
CHARLEVOIX - EMMET ISD

# Outstanding Teacher

| Eric Flessa |

TROY COLLEGE & CAREER HIGH SCHOOL

TROY PUBLIC SCHOOLS: TROY MICHIGAN

*"Mr. Flessa is the only AP teacher at our school, the only alternative education school to offer an AP course in Michigan. With this AP class he selects students with untapped potential and the ability to be pushed to their academic limits. He has created a family within this AP class that gets to select the next year's AP course and even suggests promising underclassmen to join the family."*

*"My first interaction with Mr. Flessa was 3 years ago at the start of my sophomore year. I was a troubled and angry young man who thought he should challenge authority and question everything for the sake of argument. I am now a class leader and school board representative who just got accepted to Central Michigan University hoping to pursue teaching to follow the path Mr. Flessa has shown possible. A far cry from what my path was initially, I am eternally grateful for having a mentor figure like Mr. Flessa in my life"*

*"Mr. Flessa's employment of a group messaging app for classroom updates significantly benefited my daughter's learning experience. Even in his absence, she felt well-prepared for upcoming lessons, thanks to his proactive communication approach."*

*"He cares a lot and does so with grace. The energy he devotes to getting to know and building relationships with students is something that will stick with me for the rest of my life, and it pushes me and many students to come to school each day."*

*"Mr. Flessa is more than suitable for this award because he isn't just Troy College and Career High School's English and history teacher; he is also proficient in sharing his knowledge of woodworking in real-life scenarios and also rose to the opportunity to be the first teacher in an alt-ed high school to teach an advanced placement course in Art History, where his students memorized many facts on over 250 pieces of art. Any average teacher wouldn't even attempt this."*

*Eric Flessa is a certified teacher in English, Social Studies, and Woodworking and started in the TSD in 2013. He was just recognized as the 2024 Troy School District High School Teacher of the year. He is a teacher, mentor to staff and students, and an innovator for alternative education. Mr. Flessa is vested in our students scholastically and emotionally which produces engagement by all. His innovation has allowed him to teach multi-leveled English classes by creating and using a competency grading rubric for his student to display mastery in his classes at multiple levels. Mr. Eric Flessa is a teacher students respect and care about, even after they graduate, they return to see him. Mr. Flessa is the model teacher to meet the needs of all students!*



# Outstanding Support/Advocate

| Loretta Williams |

RELEVANT ACADEMY

EATON RAPIDS MI

*"Her perseverance is remarkable, her loyalty immeasurable. Her creativity, passion, dedication, charisma, and general sense of care and concern is felt throughout our school. In the short two years I have been at Relevant she has been the foundation to our over doubled enrollment, increase in student attendance, increase in student success, and improvement of our reputation in the community."*

*"She has created a sense of normalcy for our students who are attending a less than "normal" school. She has created a sense of belonging for those who have felt far from connected at their old schools. And she has recreated what Relevant Academy is today. Not only does she create and execute her ideas, she has been with me every step of the way in the creation and execution of my vision for Relevant Academy. Every leader needs a Loretta on their staff, and I am so grateful to have her on mine."*

Loretta is in her 13th year at Relevant Academy. As part of the inaugural program she has watched it grow and evolve into a non traditional learning environment for all students. Her role has also evolved. In the beginning her roles at Relevant focused on staff development and curriculum. Currently she acts as the Dean of Students with focus on student and school culture, community relations, and enrollment. She attended undergrad at Michigan State University and graduate school at Cornerstone University.



# Outstanding Program Component

## | ICU EVENT by Tiffany Harris|

CALHOUN HIGH SCHOOL

BATTLE CREEK AREA LEARNING CENTER: BATTLE CREEK, MI

The program component being nominated is called the ICU Event. This full day event was designed, by Tiffany Harris, for youth and staff to develop deeper connections and create a healthier culture throughout the school. It also helps students and staff develop the skills and awareness to identify causes of trauma and more accurately and swiftly recognize the long-term impact of high-risk behaviors on their education, mental health and physical development. This event is intended to foster an atmosphere of understanding and acceptance for both teachers and students alike.

On ICU day, the facilitators from the Mylestone Project, through poetry and storytelling, share their background and experiences. They encourage openness and vulnerability that is comfortable in the space, guide staff and students to share important information about themselves to develop understanding and recognize likenesses and differences, and engage students and staff in team building activities.



# Outstanding Administrator

## | Colleen Deavon |

THE BRIDGE

BRIGHTON AREA SCHOOLS: BRIGHTON, MI

*"It is said quite often that The Bridge is the best alternative school around and that is because of Colleen and her leadership and desire to make The Bridge a safe haven for students, their families and the staff."*

*"While working in alternative education can often be a trying and relentless task, with difficult students and many moments of conflict, Colleen has an unwavering optimistic outlook for all students she encounters. She has a unique ability to reframe almost every situation to find a positive solution, or plan for students to become more successful and unlock their full potential. Colleen never loses sight of making a positive impact in the lives of the students and helps the rest of her colleagues keep the big picture in mind when working with our students."*

*"Colleen often takes time out of her day to connect with her colleagues about their personal lives and helps to ease teacher burnout by making those positive connections throughout the building. Her unwavering support, love, and friendship is second to none."*

*"Colleen's compassion for both students and staff is witnessed on a daily basis. The compassion is nurtured through programs Colleen has instituted that include Reaching Higher, Restorative Practices and Positive Behavior Intervention Supports."*

Colleen Deavon started teaching English in Paramount California in 1992. She continued to teach until she was promoted to Principal of The Bridge High School in 2011. During that time The Bridge High School has been a beacon of hope and support to all students that attend. Through her strong love of the students, staff and families she tirelessly works to make this school the best it can be. Under her leadership, The Bridge has been selected School of the Year twice.



