



STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
LANSING


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GOVERNOR

MICHAEL F. RICE, Ph.D.
STATE SUPERINTENDENT

MEMORANDUM

DATE: March 14, 2024

TO: Local and Intermediate School District Superintendents
Public School Academy Directors

FROM: Dr. Michele A. Harmala, Deputy Superintendent
P-20 System and Student Transitions 

SUBJECT: 2024 Dr. Chery S. Wagonlander Early Middle College
Excellence in Practice Award Recipients

The Michigan Department of Education's Office of Career and Technical Education (MDE-OCTE), in partnership with the Michigan Early Middle College Association (MEMCA), is excited to announce the 2024 Dr. Chery S. Wagonlander Early Middle College (EMC) Excellence in Practice Award recipients.

Nominees for the awards may include secondary and postsecondary educators.

1. The Dr. Chery Wagonlander EMC Excellence in Practice Award criteria for secondary nominees include the following categories of service: EMC leadership, contributions to state and national EMC efforts, planning and opening of an EMC, student recruitment, student outcomes, student mentorship, and innovative EMC programming.
2. The Dr. Chery Wagonlander EMC Excellence in Practice Award criteria for postsecondary nominees include the following categories of service: EMC leadership, contributions to state and national EMC efforts, planning and participating with EMCs, provision of student connections to the college campus, student mentorship, and innovative EMC programming.

The secondary award was presented to **Dr. Ellen Fischer**, principal of Early College Alliance at Eastern Michigan University (ECA @ EMU). Dr. Fischer exemplifies the qualities of the Dr. Chery S. Wagonlander Award through her involvement in the EMC movement since 2008. She helped design one of the first early colleges on a university campus and worked diligently to get Early College Alliance (ECA) certification as an MEMCA EMC in 2009.

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Dr. Fischer is an “innovative and visionary leader,” according to her colleagues, and she provides an extraordinary amount of mentorship to her colleagues and other members of the EMC community across the country. She is passionate about student outcomes and uses data regularly to analyze the outcomes of her students at ECA and students across the state. She led a transcript work group to help understand how early colleges transcribe their classes. This effort resulted in recommendations for all EMCs in the state. Dr. Fischer is a member of the MEMCA Leadership Council and the MEMCA Planning Team.

The postsecondary award was presented to **Robin Sterk**, director of High School Partnerships at Grand Rapids Community College (GRCC). Director Sterk exemplifies the qualities of the Dr. Chery S. Wagonlander Award through her work at GRCC, as well as her past work at Allegan Area Educational Service Agency and Lake Michigan College, where she developed and implemented their dual enrollment and early middle college programs. One of her key achievements was working with all the departments at GRCC and passionately advocating for dual enrollment and for EMC students to be able to access all of the course catalogs as long as they met the prerequisites. Director Sterk helped to develop a program of study for each of GRCC’s programs. Her colleagues describe her as being a “passionate professional who excels in collaboration and communication” as well as “an expert at removing barriers for students so they can complete and succeed in our programs.” She is an active member of the MEMCA Leadership Council and Planning Team as well as co-founder of the Higher Education Liaison EMC Network (HELEN) for higher education leaders in the EMC world.

The namesake of these awards, Dr. Wagonlander, retired on December 31, 2021, after more than 40 years of service in education as a teacher, counselor, administrator, founding principal of Mott Middle College, and founding director of the Michigan Early Middle College Association.

Congratulations to both recipients for their well-deserved honors.

Early Middle College supports [Michigan’s Top 10 Strategic Education Plan](#) to:

- Improve the health, safety, and wellness of all learners
- Expand secondary learning opportunities for all students
- Increase the percentage of all students who graduate from high school
- Increase the percentage of adults with a postsecondary credential

Please direct questions to Dr. Stacey Stover, early middle college manager, at StoverS@Michigan.gov.

cc: Michigan Education Alliance
Confederation of Michigan Tribal Education Departments