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ONEKAMA SCHOOL CHILDCARE TAKES A LEAP WITH \$50,000 USDA GRANT

Onkama, Michigan - Infants, toddlers, preschoolers and students in Onkama will climb, bike and enjoy some good old fashion play thanks to a \$50,000 grant from the U. S. Department of Agriculture, Rural Development Childcare Grant Program to Onkama Consolidated Schools.

The grant application was written by Megan McCarthy, mother of four, who voluntarily prepared the funding request to support the Onkama community's "Leaps & Bounds Early Childhood Education Program," a full-day program for infants, toddlers, preschoolers and after-school childcare designed to meet family needs. A purpose of the grant is to purchase playground equipment, tricycles, indoor climbing equipment and other materials to build the gross motor skills of children. The Onkama Leaps and Bounds program is directed by Amy Christensen.

"This fall, the Leaps and Bounds program will provide care for 8 infants and toddlers, 10 three-year old and 12 four-year old preschoolers and after school care for nearly 200 Onkama School students up to age 12," said McCarthy. "In addition to the Leaps and Bounds kids, the indoor climbing structure will be built in the gymnasium and will be available for use by over 400 additional Onkama Consolidated Schools students."

McCarthy said that school and child care personnel will also complete a safety training program provided by Everlast Climbing Industries, the climbing wall manufacturer.

"We're thankful for this grant and these facilities could not be coming to Onkama at a better time," said Onkama Consolidated Schools Superintendent Kevin Hughes. "With the completion of the Onkama School expansion and renovation this fall, the Leaps and Bounds childcare program will move to a new, larger space where equipment purchased under this grant will be used. In addition, the preschool and daycare children will have a new outdoor play space and playground equipment, purchased with USDA funding."

"This grant will enable us to make important progress toward our goal of providing educational and fitness programs for preschoolers that support their growth and development," said Christensen. "It's important for our kids, their parents, our school and community, now and in the future."

The Onkama Leaps and Bounds program is about ten years old and, among its features, enables Onkama school age children to work with infants and toddlers as part of their curriculum. The young children and infants use the school library, attend assemblies and become part of the school community as early as 8 weeks old. The overall goal of the program is to provide a safe, educational environment staffed by trained personnel.