



# Optimist International Launches OWLS Program to Support School Children

OWLS (Optimists Working for Learning Success) is Optimist International's newest signature program. Designed to support elementary school-aged students across the United States and internationally, OWLS will focus on helping clubs develop partnerships with local schools and classrooms to provide students with the resources they need to thrive.

First introduced by Past President Bob McFadyen at the 2023 International Convention, Optimist Clubs participating in the OWLS program will provide children with nutrition, clothing, school supplies, hygiene products, and tutoring assistance.

The program is currently being rolled out in phases to ensure sustainability. The first phase is a voluntary pilot program that will run through the end of 2024. During this phase, Optimist Clubs will be able to opt-in to participate in the program and help develop resources for other clubs.

The second phase of the program will be a national rollout that will take place in 2025. During this phase, the program will be rolled out to all Optimist Clubs in the United States and Canada.

The third phase of the program will be an international rollout that will take place in 2025-2026. During this phase, the program will be rolled out to Optimist Clubs around the world.

## Benefits of the OWLS Program

The OWLS program is designed to benefit both students and Optimist Clubs. For students, it means increased access to resources, boosted self-esteem and social skills, and improved academic performance.

For Optimist Clubs, participation in the program will bring increased community engagement and a more focused club identity. Potential new members will learn about Optimism through the program and may

join a club because they want to be part of the OWLS program's success.

For example, during the pilot program, the Dor-Wood Optimist Club in Kettering, Ohio, has exemplified how Optimist Clubs can effectively engage with local schools and youth organizations. Their success stems from a multi-faceted approach: actively recruiting members within the education sector, fostering continuous communication with school leadership to understand their needs, collaborating with schools on club projects, and recognizing outstanding students and leaders.

This strategy has not only strengthened the club's relationship with the schools, members say, but



*A police officer talks to a Galveston Noon Chicken Club at Crenshaw Elementary and Middle School as part of an anti-drug and anti-bullying program.*



Participants and volunteers pose for a photo during the 2023 TriStar Basketball Pass, Shoot and Dribble contest. Dor-Wood Optimist Club partnered with Fairmont High School's Athletic Department to make the program possible.

also ensured a steady supply of new volunteers and resources, creating a sustainable partnership that benefits both the club and the community.

Other clubs have rolled longstanding anti-drug and anti-bullying campaigns into the OWLS program. The Galveston Noon Optimist Club has sponsored CHICKEN (Cool, Honest, Intelligent, Clear-headed, Kind, Energetic and Not into drugs) clubs to local schools since 1986. The program is designed to help kids "Just Say No" to drugs through positive peer pressure, and Galveston Noon is recognized as an anti-drug leader for Galveston youth.

Other clubs are already partnering with local grocery stores and collaborating with local schools to host food donation drives as part of a backpack weekend food program. Programs like these are at the heart of OWLS, helping to not only alleviate hunger but also strengthening the bond between Optimist clubs, schools, and their local communities.

Likewise, student-of-the-month programs to recognize the positive contributions of young people can inspire a culture of optimism and achievement among students, boosting confidence and building a club's reputation as a champion of youth in its community.

### How Optimist Clubs Can Get Involved

There are several ways that Optimist Clubs can get involved in the OWLS program:

- **Research and Preparation:** Clubs can research the needs of their local schools and develop a list of volunteer opportunities that they can offer.
- **Initial Outreach:** Clubs can reach out to school principals and teachers to build relationships and discuss how they can help.
- **Implementation and Project Data Collection:** Clubs can launch their first activity or project and collect data on its impact.
- **Promotion and Documentation:** Clubs can share their success stories on social media and in newsletters.
- **Maintain the Relationship:** Clubs can keep in regular contact with schools and offer continued support.

The OWLS program is easy to implement and can be tailored to the needs of each community. Plus, it is a valuable opportunity for Optimist Clubs to make a difference in the lives of children. By providing students with the resources they need to succeed, Optimist Clubs can help them reach their full potential.

It's essential for your club to fill out the [OWLS Community Engagement Form](#) for every school-related project completed since October 1, 2023. This data is important for Optimist International and plays a key role in ensuring we can sustain and grow these valuable programs, allowing us to continue making a meaningful impact in our communities!