Be the Light for Others

Dear Friends,

The 2020-21 school year was quite the year! We navigated so much as a community, from the incredible uncertainty of the coronavirus pandemic and our school year of distance learning to our first virtual celebration of the Annual Scholarship Benefit in honor of our 20th Anniversary. Our students and graduates persevered, demonstrating resilience and strength, while the encouragement and support of the De Marillac community sustained us all.

Thank you for your role in our mission, whether as a family member who supported a student during distance learning, a faculty member who showed up on screen each day for their students, a community partner who provided enrichment programming, or a supporter who maintained, even increased, your support during this milestone and unique year. The following pages detail some of the highlights from this past year, and our impact as a community.

In August, we returned to campus for full in-person instruction, and it was electrifying to be in the presence of students and families. Our theme this year is “Be the Light,” and we anticipate many moments of lightness as we move out of the darkness experienced during the pandemic. As a Lasallian Vincentian Catholic organization, we are called to live out the Gospel and celebrate the light within each of our students and graduates.

De Marillac Academy is blessed to have such vibrant support of our mission. Over the years, our academic, enrichment, and graduate support programs have grown. We have strong enrollment. Our students and families are committed, and our alumni remain connected. We have dedicated faculty, staff, administrators and Board members. Our relationships with community partners continue to deepen and expand, and our donors are generous. De Marillac Academy is in a very good place, and this year we are engaging the community in strategic planning to ensure our bright future.

Thank you for your support this past year and over the last two decades. We invite you to continue to be a light for the mission as we write the next chapter.

In gratitude,

Theresa Flynn Houghton, President
We are DMA

230 graduates served by the Graduate Support Program

93 graduates in high school

312 families served

4 counselors

109 students served

27 community partners

24 active volunteers

370 students have graduated from DMA

0 days missed in transition to remote learning.

1,307 hours of 1:1 counseling

12:1 student to teacher ratio

28 Faculty & Staff Members

3 teaching support volunteers

577 Individual & Institutional Donors

22 members of the Class of '17 graduated high school in 2021

130 professional development hours
There wasn’t much time to prepare when the word came in March 2020 that the school would be closing and our classes would be going online. I was grateful that all the students had access to a Chromebook which would make the transition easier. They would be taking their sketchbooks home too but I couldn’t count on there being any other art supplies at home besides a pencil. We were all entering this new experiment together, students, teachers and staff.

After the first couple of weeks it became apparent that the amount of screen time everyone was dealing with was emotionally and physically draining. Being on camera for most of the day was very different from being present in person, and teachers and students alike could feel exhausted at the end of the day. I intentionally moved the art classes to a format where students did not have to be on camera. I wanted to give their eyes and brains a rest and create a more meditative experience.
where they could work at their own pace without pressure to perform. I had no idea if this novel approach would work but it was worth a try.

The result was an incredible amount of beautiful, thoughtful artwork. Even though the students were limited by the materials they had on hand, they were not limited in imagination. Art became a way to escape from the pressures and uncertainty swirling all around us at the time. Students sent me pictures of themselves curled up on bunk beds, at crowded kitchen tables and even in closets proudly holding their art up for the camera. Their desire and capacity to create under stressful and sometimes very difficult circumstances continues to inspire me to this day.

You might think after a year and a half of online learning that interest would falter and quality would diminish, but that didn’t happen. De Marillac students proved their grit and perseverance by continuing to use art as a means of self-expression, exploration, and skill building. They won top honors and prizes in local and national art competitions and contributed to a sold out art auction at our Annual Scholarship Benefit.

We are all happy to be back to learning in person again. The art studio is once again bustling with paint and glue, markers and construction paper, and young hands and minds in the act of creating. Although our time away from each other was often trying, we learned new things about ourselves. We came to acknowledge our resilience and our capacity to embrace change. We explored new ways of learning and supporting one another. And maybe the most important thing of all, we came to better understand the very human need to find beauty, connection, expression, and meaning in our lives even in the face of adversity.
Supporting Educational Equity

The Academic Resource Program (ARP) supports the mission of De Marillac Academy to work towards equity in education. Statistically, students with learning disabilities can have grim outcomes in terms of graduation rates and workplace success. The ARP program provides individualized instruction and support for students to maneuver their academic work as well as feel safe, comfortable, and supported.

Our Academic Resource Program teacher Ms. Rebecca Unruh is a beloved member of DMA’s faculty. Below is an excerpt from a conversation with her and Shirmila Cooray, DMA’s Director of Development.

Tell us about your professional journey and what brought you to De Marillac?

I’m a San Francisco native and attended a Catholic high school in the city. After graduation I became an associate teacher at Mission Dolores Academy while I was getting credentialed at the University of San Francisco. I struggled with teaching literacy to kids but found it very rewarding so I got my Master of Arts in Teaching Reading which means I am a certified Reading Specialist and Literacy Coach. I also taught at Bret Harte Elementary in the Bayview, an experience that humbled and challenged me, as I met students in the 3rd grade who weren’t able to read yet. I was drawn to De Marillac’s mission, the passion of our Principal Chelsea Rivera, and the opportunity to focus on my specialty of literacy development for struggling students. I continue to grow my professional development through DMA and personal classes on topics like restorative justice.

What’s your superpower as a DMA teacher?

My own journey with a neurological difference, ADHD, has strengthened my ability to support our students. Because of my own struggles in school, I can give our students a different level of empathy and understanding based on my own experience as a student. I can spot trouble coming a mile away, and I can think creatively and compassionately about how to intervene early and problem solve. Sharing my own journey with my students helps them feel comfortable with their own struggles and disabilities. It also helps them envision their own path forward, what they could achieve as an adult, and how to advocate for themselves.

Something that sets our ARP program apart is that we’ve removed the stigma around having a learning disability. Our ARP students are a close-
knit community across grade levels. They have pride and confidence in their identity. That’s not something you see often.

What does a day in the life of an ARP teacher look like?

On a given day I have 11 literacy intervention groups where students are placed based on their reading levels. I see 4-6 groups a day for 45 minutes. I also spend time in the classroom to support the students and teachers. Often, we place a lot of focus on students with disabilities but training and support for their primary teachers is essential. I go into every classroom in the school once a week. The Associate Teachers at DMA also provide support for ARP students in the classroom.

How do you define or evaluate who needs ARP support?

De Marillac’s admissions model means that 1/3 of our class enters DMA a year or more behind grade level so the chances of them having a learning disability is higher- currently 40% of our student body is served by the ARP program. There are others that face additional challenges like past trauma, being an English language learner, or are coming from a school environment that has not been supportive. Response to Intervention (RTI) screening is important to identify students with learning and behavior needs in a general education classroom.

What are you most proud of this year at DMA?

Teaching during the pandemic was so challenging. We had shorter school days during COVID and had to do our reading online. While standardized testing isn’t our only measure of success, I was heartened that students stayed at the same level or made a little growth. However, kids have made exceptional progress after returning to campus. The students are so much more engaged, and it’s easier when we practice reading with print books rather than on screen.

My lowest reading level 4th grader and 7th grader have made 8 months of progress in 2.5 months. Both were two years behind grade level when they started with us. Every one of my students has made at least one level of growth. I had hoped and expected it, but it’s still so gratifying.

What continues to inspire your work?

There’s a lot of joy here among our students. In my past experience, and for many of our students prior to De Marillac, school hasn’t felt joyful. It has felt punitive and frustrating. When I was interviewing at De Marillac, I got so emotional hearing laughter in the hallways and thought, “this is what school should be like.” Our students smile and are happy when they walk in our doors, they truly feel cared about by all of us.

I also am inspired by our amazing families who are dedicated, resilient, and committed to their child’s success. I’ve been able to build strong relationships with my ARP parents and caregivers even when we don’t speak the same language. We share the same belief that education is a pathway for our students to become resilient and successful adults.
Graduates Return to Campus during Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic brought about many unprecedented changes in our daily lives. For the DMA community, it impacted the way we support and interact with our students and their families into a virtual world of distance learning. Most notably, a group of DMA alumni returned to support the academy, while navigating their own lives and commitments.

“During the pandemic, my family and I were going through tough times like everyone around us. I had recently graduated from San Francisco State University and needed a job.” The uncertainty of the pandemic, and a call from our own Mr. Vincent, brought Marie Fernandez ’12 (photo above left) back to her alma mater, hoping to impact her students the same way her own teachers did. Marie joined as an Associate Teacher and worked alongside Ms. Kramer to teach middle school Religion class. “Although I was hesitant at first, I knew I wanted to give back to my community. I felt DMA had provided me so much support through my time at DMA and as an alumni, I wanted to do the same with the current students.”

Another alumna and recent college graduate, Arnelyn Fabia ’11 (photo above right), joined DMA during the pandemic as a Support Team Member to assist with the Front Desk, 4th Grade Class, and Development Office in various capacities. Arnelyn also worked part-time as an Elementary Summer Program Leader in Potrero Hill. Echoing Marie’s sentiments, Arnelyn attributes her experience at DMA fueling a desire to come back, “DMA has shaped me into the person I am because this school taught me to never give up as a person.” Building off her experience at DMA, Arnelyn is looking forward to grad school and pursuing a Master’s in Social Work or Education, “This is exactly what I meant to do in helping my community in the future.”

While the pandemic brought a lot of difficulty and trial into the fold, Marie mentioned that coming back together has brought renewed vigor, “My favorite memory from this experience is seeing the benefits in-person learning had on students...it is heart-melting seeing several students interact with each other for the first time.” The DMA community, students, alumni, and their families, have continued to show that we do not face obstacles alone, instead, we face them with the strength of all in the community. Our alumni, especially Marie and Arnelyn, continue to give testament to DMA’s slogan “Enter to Learn, Leave to Serve.” As they prepare to take the next step forward in their lives, DMA continues to be a key part of it, “it has been the best decision I’ve made in my life!”
Thank You
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We express our sincerest appreciation and gratitude to De Marillac Academy’s Board of Trustees, who safeguard our mission and ensure the fiscal health and future of our school and its programs.

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*Transitioned off the DMA Board at the end of the 2020-2021 school year
Partners in Mission 2020-2021

Community and partnership have been central to De Marillac Academy since our founding in 2001. We remain grateful to our sponsors, the Daughters of Charity and De La Salle Christian Brothers, and to all our partners who generously support our mission to provide quality education to the children of the Tenderloin and SoMa neighborhoods. We are pleased to acknowledge our sponsors, donors, volunteers, families, alumni and community partners for their contributions between July 1, 2020 - June 30, 2021.

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Financial Overview 2020-2021

Revenue
- Business Organizations: 17%
- Foundations: 21%
- Sponsor Subsidies: 36%
- Fundraising & Outreach: 17%
- Family Fees: 1%
- Management & Administration: 15%
- Educational Programs: 68%
- Individuals: 25%

Expense
- Business Organizations: 17%
- Foundations: 21%
- Sponsor Subsidies: 36%
- Fundraising & Outreach: 17%
- Family Fees: 1%
- Management & Administration: 15%
- Educational Programs: 68%
- Individuals: 25%
Hidden Chapters

By Lara V. '21

I see life like a book
Let everyone see the beauty you possess on the inside and out
Book full of emotion and wonder
Characters that change you
Countless adventures and experiences waiting to be discovered
When you’re too nervous for the next chapter in life
Remember there is so much more that awaits than the page you’re stuck on

My book has countless chapters
Everyone writes their own story
Except I will not set down the pen
Till my story is complete
De Marillac Academy is an all-scholarship 4th through 8th grade Lasallian Vincentian Catholic academy located in the Tenderloin, that provides educational, personal and financial support to our students and families during their years at De Marillac, through high school and into early adulthood.

Through a personalized, culturally responsive educational experience grounded in faith and family partnerships, we encourage our students’ growth and support them on their journey into adulthood.

De Marillac Academy
175 Golden Gate Avenue
San Francisco, CA 94102

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