



Villa Marie Home and School for Exceptional Children Annual Report 2022 - 2023

CAO: Msgr. John Perkinton

Principal: Sr. Jeanette Rerucha

Mission Statement:

The mission of Villa Marie Home and School for Exceptional Children is to form the students spiritually, intellectually, emotionally, in partnership with the parents and in harmony with the specific gifts given by God to each student. In order to fulfill this mission, Villa Marie is committed to integrating the Catholic Faith with the best educational practices for qualifying children in need of special education services.

What is unique about Villa Marie?

Villa Marie Home and School for Exceptional Children is the only facility of its kind in this region. We provide a Catholic education to students with special needs, including autism, Down Syndrome, mild to moderate mentally handicapping conditions, developmental disabilities, and other health impairments that impede learning. Each of our students has a current IEP. Our enrollment is anywhere from 15 – 24 students; therefore we are able to provide individualized and small-group instruction according to each student's IEP goals and objectives. What makes us really unique is that we are also a boarding school, so students from outside of Lincoln and its surrounding area are able to attend Villa Marie. However, many students from Lincoln also board during the week. Our boarding program provides the structure, routine, and consistency that are so essential for students with special needs; in addition, boarding helps us to create a family atmosphere. In this environment, our students form lasting friendships with each other. Villa Marie was founded by the late Msgr. James Dawson in 1964, and has been staffed by the Marian Sisters of the Diocese of Lincoln since the beginning.

New during the 2022 – 2023 School Year:

- Lillia Koenig, a 2022 graduate, was hired as a para for 2022 – 2023 school year. She was full-time during the first semester and part-time during the second semester.
- In January, the Catholic Center hired a new maintenance man, Bevan Flynn. He works at Villa Marie on Thursdays and is a wonderful addition to our staff.
- With the hiring of Bevan as a maintenance man, we were able to hire Jeff Hamilton, our former maintenance man, as a full-time para at Villa Marie. He helps Mrs. Dermann in her classroom.
- Mrs. Jessica Kluck was hired in the spring as a part-time teacher in Sr. Jeanette's classroom, so that Sr. Jeanette can focus on principal duties.
- We welcomed 2 new students in August. In January, two more students joined our Villa Marie family. Another student enrolled in the spring.
- We added some new classes, Keys to Success and Interoception. We also started a Transition class during the school day for our students 14 and older.

- We were able to have a Licensed Mental Health Practitioner, Jennifer Schrage, on site for 15 hours per week during the 2022 – 2023 school year. EANS funds made this possible.

Students, Staff, and Academics:

- Villa Marie had 17 students enrolled at the beginning of the 2022-2023 school year. Six of them were Catholic. Ten of them were boarders.
- Our students came from Lincoln, Beatrice, Bellevue, Nebraska City, and Hastings.
- Villa Marie is ungraded. Our students ranged in age from 8 – 18.
- Our 2022 – 2023 staff consisted of a Chief Administrative Officer, a principal, 3 full-time teachers (all certified in special education,) a part-time teacher (certified in special education, who has been teaching for 56 years,) 2 full-time paras, 2 part-time paras, office manager, office assistant, food-service manager, housemother, 3 after-school helpers, and a development director.
- The curriculum at Villa Marie is guided by each student's IEP (Individualized Education Plan.)
- Daily Mass is celebrated at Villa Marie. Approximately 20 priests rotate in celebrating Mass for us.
- Daily religious instruction is provided by the Sisters to all students, both Catholic and non-Catholic.
- Villa Marie partners with Voc Rehab to help our students ages 14 and over prepare to transition to the work force. Blaine Harvey comes once a month to meet with our students ages 14 and up, assisting them in learning job skills and preparing for the future.

Student Performance:

Each student at Villa Marie has an IEP, which is reviewed and revised annually. Student progress is evaluated by assessments conducted by the classroom teachers in reading, spelling, writing, and math, according to each child's ability level. Students generally make significant progress in all areas, due in a large part to the individualized instruction that Villa Marie is able to provide.

Some of the students took the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) tests at the grade level at which they are currently working. Many of them scored at or above this level.

Events during 2022 – 2023:

- The students who participated in 4-H did very well on the projects that they took to the Lancaster County Fair during the summer. Several of our students joined the Villa Marie Eagles 4-H Club which is in its second year. Mrs. Faith is our leader. Msgr. Perkinton assisted by teaching woodworking to about 8 of the students. Mariann Kozisek is our sewing teacher.
- Field trips are an integral part of our educational philosophy at Villa Marie. These are some of the places we went:
 - State Fair
 - Vala's Pumpkin Patch,
 - Plum Creek Literacy Festival.
 - Cristo Rey Church to view their very intricate Nativity scene
 - State Capitol, at which we participated in the Ag Sack Lunch Program and met our State Senator, Robert Clements
 - UNL Women's Basketball game

- Lincoln Stars Hockey game
- We were able to attend two performances at the Lied Center, made possible through a grant from the Nebraska Arts Council.
- The Nebraska Arts Council also sponsored two visiting artists:
 - Liz Shay-McCoy taught the students a textiles unit and they each did an original screen-printing on a t-shirt.
 - Catherine Witt did a pottery unit and each student was able to use the pottery wheel to create a unique piece of art.
- One of our students and his younger brother were baptized on May 5th, and our student made his First Communion at that time. It was a glorious day, as this fulfilled a desire that he had had for a long time.
- Bishop James Conley conferred the Sacrament of Confirmation upon three Villa Marie students on May 9th.
- We had our annual Non-traditional Thanksgiving Feast on November 22nd. Each student prepared his or her favorite food for the feast.
- Our students did a fantastic job in their performance of our Christmas play, “The Last Shall be First.” The play is an annual event. Sr. John’s School graciously allows us to use their gym and stage for the performance.
- Our annual Villa Marie Dance and Fundraiser, “Shine Like His Stars,” held on January 27th, 2023, was a tremendous success.
- Catholic Schools Week was celebrated at Villa Marie with lots of activities.
- Our students participated in the annual Pro-Life poster contest.
- Our 4th annual Science Fair was held in the spring. All students in both basic and advanced science presented interesting and educational projects.
- We participated in an Embryology project and hatched baby chicks in the spring.
- The Band of the Strong came out to Villa Marie twice to minister to our students through art and music. The students painted guitars, shared their stories, and created some community artwork together.
- The St. Michael’s 8th graders came out to do Christmas, Valentine’s, and Easter parties with our students.
- The Knights of Columbus continued to provide for our students through financial donations; paper products, a picnic and the day at Vala’s donated by the Gretna Knights; new coats provided by the St. John’s Knights; Tour of Lights and a cookout provided by the Cathedral Knights; and Project Lori, spearheaded by Connie Richardson, wife of State Deputy Matt Richardson, which provided lots of Christmas gifts for the students and the school. We are indebted to the Knights of Columbus.
- Villa Marie participates in Bowling, Basketball, and Track as part of Special Olympics. Many of our athletes qualified for the State Competitions in Bowling, as well as in Track and Field, bringing home several medals. In Basketball, our Villa Marie Eagles Team won the gold medal once again at the State Competition.
- Two students graduated on May 25, 2023.