



Villa Marie Home and School for Exceptional Children Annual Report 2024 - 2025

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, socially, and physically 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 2024 – 2025 School Year:

- Mrs. Anena Rolofson joined our team in August as a Special Education Teacher, replacing Doris Dermann, who retired.
- Mrs. Shawdee Wimmer was hired as our new Office Manager, replacing Dianne Kalita, who retired. Shawdee started working in June.
- Ms. Meagan Heimbrecht started working in August as our new part-time Office Assistant, replacing Sheila Linder, who retired. Meagan also co-taught music.
- Sheila Linder stayed on as our volunteer librarian, helping out two days per week.
- Ms. Rachael Huxley was hired as a new after-school helper, and co-taught music with Meagan.
- Sasha Kelly was hired in September as our new Development Director.
- Sam Kluck was hired in October as a part-time para, helping in Mrs. Faith's classroom.
- Ms. Maria Waddle resigned from her para duties in February to take another job. Sam and Rachael then both worked as part-time paras in Mrs. Kluck's classroom to replace Maria.
- Mrs. Jessica Kluck increased her time from three days to four days per week, working as a teacher in Sr. Jeanette's classroom, so that Sr. Jeanette could focus on principal duties.

- We welcomed 6 new students in August and another new student in January, bringing our enrollment to 19.
- We were able to have a Licensed Mental Health Practitioner, Jennifer Schrage, on site once again for 20 hours per week during the 2024 – 2025 school year.
- Sheryl Jedlicka, a retired SLP who came as a volunteer to provide speech services for two of our students, passed away suddenly in the fall.
- Ruth Burbach was a new classroom volunteer, starting in the spring.
- A Women's Ambassadors group was started by Sasha Kelly, to help with events and spread the word about Villa Marie.

Students, Staff, and Academics:

- Villa Marie had 19 students enrolled during the 2024-2025 school year. Twelve of them were Catholic.
- Seven of our 19 students were boarders.
- Our students came from Lincoln, Beatrice, David City, and Omaha.
- Villa Marie is ungraded. Our students ranged in age from 6 – 18.
- Our 2024 – 2025 staff consisted of a Chief Administrative Officer, a principal, 2 full-time teachers (both certified in special education,) 2 part-time teachers (both certified in special education) 2 full-time paras, 2 part-time paras, school counselor, office manager, office assistant, food-service manager, housemother, 3 after-school helpers, chief maintenance officer, and a development director.
- Numerous volunteers helped us in many ways during the school year by working in the classrooms and library, cleaning, organizing, and doing lots of miscellaneous jobs.
- We have 2 therapy cats, Ice Cream and Butterscotch. Chief, an emotional support dog, came to school every day with our para Maria during the first semester.
- 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 rotated in celebrating Mass for us during the 2024 – 2025 school year.
- Daily religious instruction is provided by the Sisters to all students, both Catholic and non-Catholic.
- Villa Marie students have daily classes in Reading, Writing, Spelling, and Math, which are tailored to their individual needs and IEP goals, as well as daily Religion and P.E. classes. Students also take Science, Social Studies, Art and Music classes, and those 14 and older are enrolled in a Transition Class. Students participate in Literature Groups according to their reading level. Cooking, Sewing, and Computer classes are also offered, as well as daily job time and opportunities to learn and practice social skills.
- Villa Marie partners with Voc Rehab to help our students ages 14 and over prepare to transition to the work force. Blaine Harvey came once a month to meet with our students in Transition Class, assisting them in learning job skills and preparing for the future.
- Five of our high-school age students attended classes at Pius X High School during the second semester. They took Art Fundamentals, Women's Choir, and Small Engines. Our students in Women's Choir performed in two concerts. We were blessed with many volunteer drivers who transported the students to and from Pius.

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. IXL Assessments in Math and Language Arts are administered at the beginning of the school year, at the end of the first semester, and at the end of the school year. Students generally make significant progress in all areas, due in a large part to the individualized instruction that Villa Marie is able to provide.

Events during 2024 – 2025:

- Villa Marie was voted a “Superstar Catholic School” in a contest sponsored by Spirit Catholic Radio for the second consecutive year. We were presented a banner, trophy, and \$1,000 worth of air time.
- The students who are members of our Villa Marie Eagles 4-H club did very well on the projects that they took to the Lancaster County Fair during the summer. Msgr. Perkinton assisted by teaching woodworking to four of the students. They made old-fashioned wooden tops. Sr. Jeanette was our sewing teacher. Mrs. Deb Faith is the leader of our club, which is in its fourth year.
- 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
 - Tree Adventure in Nebraska City
 - Cunningham School House and Pioneers Park Nature Center
 - Kiewit Luminarium in Omaha
 - Morrill Hall
 - State Capitol as part of the Ag Sack Lunch program
- Two visiting artists came to Villa Marie and did art projects with the students. Their visits were made possible through a grant from the Nebraska Arts Council.
- We had our annual Non-traditional Thanksgiving Feast on November 26th. Each student prepared his or her favorite food for the feast.
- Villa Marie students went Christmas caroling to the retired priests at Bonacum House and to the residents of the Waverly Care Center.
- Our students did an outstanding job in their performance of our Christmas play, “The True Throne.” Several students showcased their musical talents by performing solos, duets, and accompanying music on the keyboard. 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 was held on February 7th, with a “Hoedown” theme. Thanks to the generosity of our donors, sponsors and benefactors, the proceeds from the dance exceeded the amounts raised in previous years.
- Villa Marie partnered with the 8th graders from St. Michael's School, learning and performing a line dance for the Hoedown. Some members of the Pius X Dance Team taught the dance to the students during several practices held at St. Michael's.
- Catholic Schools Week was celebrated at Villa Marie with lots of activities, including going to St. Patrick's School to play BINGO with their students.
- Our 6th annual Science Fair was held on March 14th. It had to be rescheduled due to several snow days. 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 St. Michael's 8th graders came out to do Christmas and Easter parties for us.

- Junior high students from several of the Lincoln Catholic Schools came to Villa Marie during their class retreats at Good Counsel Retreat House. Each class spent about an hour playing games and interacting with our students.
- Villa Marie participates in Bowling, Basketball, and Track as part of Special Olympics. Most of our Special Olympics Bowlers qualified for the State Competition. Every member of our Track Team also qualified for State, and brought home many medals. In Basketball, our Villa Marie Eagles Team earned first place at the Regional Competition held in Grand Island and won the gold medal once again at the State Competition. We are grateful to our volunteer bowling coach Doris Dermann and volunteer basketball coaches Matt Jilek and Greg Gibney.
- One student received his Certificate of Completion at our Graduation and Awards Ceremony on May 22nd, 2025. Every student received a unique award celebrating their accomplishments.
- Teacher Anena Rolofson retired at the end of the school year. After school helpers Hermione Lofton and Grant Jochum both graduated from UNL and moved away.

Donors and Benefactors:

- The Knights of Columbus, our oldest and dearest friends, continued to provide for our students in so many ways:
 - Very generous financial donations. Many Councils sent the proceeds of their Tootsie Roll Drive to Villa Marie.
 - A Paper products drive, a picnic in the spring, and the day at Vala's Pumpkin Patch, all donated by the Gretna Knights of Columbus
 - New coats for the students provided by the St. John's Knights of Columbus.
 - Tour of Lights, a Mass for Special Needs Persons followed by a pizza party, and a cookout provided by the Cathedral Knights of Columbus.
 - A Mass for Special Needs Persons followed by a pizza party and Bingo with lots of prizes, sponsored by the Davey Knights of Columbus
 - Project Lori, spearheaded by Sammi Lowery, which generously provided many wonderful wish list items to our teachers for their classrooms.
- Thanks to the generosity of the Dillon Foundation, we were able to use a Dillon Grant to purchase, among other items, new room-darkening blinds for the dorm rooms and new front and back doors for the garage.
- Some of the students were recipients of new shoes through the Kicks for Kids Program sponsored by Sandhills Global. Jim Hansen brought the shoes out for the students.
- Mary Frances continued to bless us frequently with cakes and other goodies, flowers, books for the library, educational materials for the classroom, sewing and craft projects, and other miscellaneous items. We are very grateful for her generosity.
- The Food Bank made deliveries to Villa Marie once a month. The food was distributed to our needy families.
- Parish "Asks" were conducted during weekend Masses at some of the parishes in Lincoln and the surrounding area. For the most part, they were well received, and people were very generous.
- Over 40 "Prayer Warriors" pray for the intentions of Villa Marie, which are sent to them once or twice a month.