



# DIFFERENT NO MORE

*Sisters & Scholars bridges the gap for students with learning differences*

BY SAMANTHA LEAGUE

## “You won’t graduate high school.”

This is what Mariana Frangos '19 was told a few weeks before her first day of freshmen year, by a doctor who had just diagnosed her with an auditory processing deficit. “I remember walking away crying, thinking there was no hope,” Mariana said.

Despite the callousness of this statement, Mariana’s doctor made a prediction that too often comes true for students with learning differences. According to 2013 statistics from the Department of Education, 19 percent of high school students (aged 14-21) who were receiving treatment for a diagnosed learning difference dropped out, compared to the national dropout rate of 6.5 percent.

Learning differences can range from learning to physical discrepancies, and treatment plans depend upon the individual student, educational environment and assisted technologies available. Further, while public schools are required to have programs that accommodate students with learning differences, private Catholic schools are not. Without a mandate, it is a teacher’s decision to allow and provide accommodations.

Luckily, Mariana chose OLP and immediately applied to our Sisters & Scholars program, which provides accommodations for students with diagnosed learning differences.

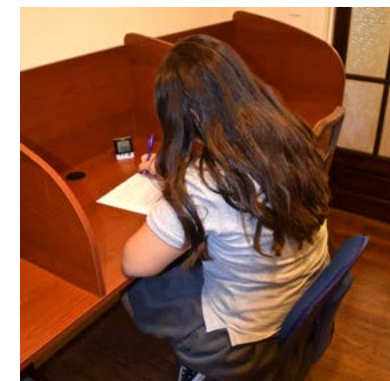
Encouraged by the current administration, the **Sisters & Scholars program** was created three years ago and is managed by OLP Counselor Jill Hicke. When students are first accepted into the program, Jill meets with them and their parents or guardians to discuss their diagnosis and needs. Jill continues to check in with the girls every semester until they graduate.

*“I remember talking to Mrs. Hicke and making a plan and thinking, ‘yeah, there’s hope!’” Mariana says. “I feel like [this program has] definitely given me the confidence to overcome this... there’s nothing I can’t do that everyone else can do.”*



Before Sisters & Scholars, Jill tried to help individual students in any way possible. For one student with dyslexia and ADHD, this meant sitting with her while she took tests in order to give her a few extra minutes under supervision. When Sisters & Scholars became an official program, the student was finally allowed the extra time she needed. “Her GPA increased a lot,” Jill remembers. “It was a very simple thing, just giving a little bit of extra time to someone who struggles through reading and loses focus in the middle of a question.”

These small accommodations mean the world to students who would otherwise struggle without them. “I feel like I have an extra second to breathe,” Grace Kotnik '19 says. “Being separated [while taking a test] gives me more room to think with fewer distractions.”



While many girls only need extra time or a separate space to test, others rely on assistive technologies in the classroom. For example, Mariana’s teachers wear a microphone (seen above being used by her teacher, Mrs. Devereaux '00) that cancels out background noise. This device, coupled with Mariana sitting in the front and away from the door, has been so successful that Mariana is getting better grades now than she did in elementary school.

On average, the GPA of a Sisters & Scholars student improves by 0.26 points after just one semester. Another unquantifiable result is that the girls are less stressed and more confident about not only their academic performance, but their lives in general. *As Grace puts it, “I literally couldn’t do life if I didn’t have Sisters & Scholars. It’s been such a great help to me this year and last year. There’s confidence in knowing that whatever you’re diagnosed with, you can overcome it.”*

Our Sisters & Scholars do overcome their obstacles: Sisters and Scholars from the Class of 2016 ended up at Cal-Poly Pomona, Trinity College, Columbia and Boston College, to name a few. Some girls even fall in love with the subject they’ve struggled in as a result of receiving the accommodations they need.

“[This program] makes OLP accessible to students who would have never been able to apply and attend here,” Jill says. “It is that aspect that is most rewarding.”

After one semester of Sisters & Scholars, GPAs rose by an average of

**0.26**

CLASS OF 2016 SISTERS & SCHOLARS WENT TO:

- Boston College
- Cal Poly University, Pomona
- Columbia University
- Gonzaga
- Humbolt State
- Liberty University
- Santa Clara University
- Sonoma State University
- Trinity College

*What is the application process?*

GIRLS MUST:

Have a diagnosed learning difference by a doctor

Have gone through psychoeducational testing within the last three years

Fill out a Sisters & Scholars application with their parent or guardian

According to the National Center for Learning Disabilities, about 5 percent of our nation’s school-age population has been formally diagnosed with a learning difference, and an estimated 15 percent are believed to be undiagnosed and not receiving treatment.

*To learn more about our Sisters & Scholars program or to apply, please contact Jill Hicke at [jhicke@aolp.org](mailto:jhicke@aolp.org).*