

## **Thriving at Mount Diablo High School**

Mount Diablo High School (MDHS) takes pride in providing an inviting campus where students feel safe, respected, and heard. No easy feat, considering that it serves about 1,500 ethnically diverse students from Concord, Bay Point, Clyde, and Pittsburg. Upon arriving on campus for an annual planning meeting with school officials, RSF trustees Mariann Kessler and Melody Silberstein immediately noticed the tangible sense of warmth and camaraderie.

Nearly 35 percent of MDHS students are English language learners, 70 percent participate in lunch programs available only to financially disadvantaged families, and 70 percent are bused into the area since their neighborhood has no local high school. Adding to these challenges, the students often lack the resources, materials, and opportunity that middle-class kids take for granted. Many students must also balance homework and study time with tasks like caring for younger siblings and/or working to help augment the family income. Additionally, many live with single parents who work multiple jobs, severely limiting parenting time. All these challenges add to the stress and hectic pace of day-to-day life.

Accordingly, MDHS focuses on helping students develop the determination, resourcefulness, and resilience necessary to reach their goals. Leading this charge are Erika Ramos (College and Career Counselor) and Dr. Markell McCain (Principal). They firmly believe “that anyone, no matter their background or where they happen to live, given guidance and structure can attain their goals.”

Ramos, a graduate of the UC Berkeley, is an MDHS alum and a 2018 Rossmoor Scholarship Foundation (RSF) scholarship recipient. Growing up with similar goals and aspirations, she’s the perfect role model and mentor for these students. Coaching them on applying for the same scholarship she received is a full circle moment. “I’m living proof that if one person can do it, they all have the opportunity.” She loves her job and makes it very clear that student success is not about her hard work, it’s about championing their hard work and being their cheerleader.

McCain, who received his PHD from Cal State East Bay, indicated that these kids represent his background and where he came from. When speaking to him one can hear his pride in MDHS students and see how invested he is in helping them develop, dream, and achieve. Great people mentored him and helped him succeed; he now wants to be the springboard that provides this opportunity to MDHS students.

After graduating from DVC with a 3.9 GPA while working full-time, Joseph Co, a 2019 MDHS graduate, class valedictorian, and an RFS scholarship recipient, transferred to UC Berkeley, where he studied Economics and Business Administration. Due to his hard work and high GPA Co graduated in under 4 years with no student debt. He now works with JP Morgan Chase in Wealth Management. “I want to thank the Rossmoor Scholarship Foundation; you all are making a huge impact on every recipient’s life. This foundation invested in my future, and I will never forget that!”

Submitted by: Melody Silberstein, RSF Trustee