



## ***2023-2024 School Report***

# Head of School Letter

Dear DBA Friends and Family,

The past year at Dietrich Bonhoeffer Academy has been filled with historic achievements. A particular highlight was the celebration of our first ever class of graduating students in May. These five young people demonstrated the courage to embark on a journey at a new middle school, and they have laid a strong foundation for the future of DBA. We are proud of their accomplishments over these last two years and look forward to seeing them thrive at several outstanding high schools in Houston.



What is it that makes DBA different? First, we offer a dynamic and engaging learning program specifically focused on the unique needs of middle school students. Second, we provide intentional instruction and practice in building strong social and organizational skills for success in high school and beyond. Third, we support students with exceptional classroom teaching and individual coaching in a small and caring environment. As a result, our innovative and effective approach is already changing the lives of students.

Please enjoy the highlights from the past year at DBA on the pages that follow. From memorable classroom activities to an unparalleled school trip, these experiences helped our students grow in mind, body, and spirit. Through it all, our learning environment challenged them to develop the perseverance and character needed to overcome obstacles in both academics and life.

On behalf of our teachers and students, I wish to express our sincere thanks for the generosity shown by all our supporters. We have been blessed with parents and family members along with members of the larger community who have given richly of their time, talents, and treasure to make DBA a success.

As we look ahead to the future, we are overjoyed about the continuing opportunities to reimagine middle school learning. Thank you for helping to write another chapter in this amazing story.

Best Regards,  
Eric Lerch  
Head of School

## Class of 2024

This year marked the very first graduating class in DBA history. Beginning last summer, we worked with our 8<sup>th</sup> grade students and their families to guide them through the high school admissions process, including selecting potential schools, completing applications, and preparing for the Independent School Entrance Exam (ISEE). In March, our students received the wonderful news that they had been accepted to a variety of strong college preparatory high schools.

On May 18<sup>th</sup>, we celebrated the accomplishments of these students in a special ceremony in the sanctuary of Faith Lutheran Church. Each student participated in the service, and Head of School Eric Lerch shared the story of each graduate's journey at DBA. The event concluded with a joyous reception together with family and friends.



**Thomas Cade Eixman** started with us for 7th grade in the fall of 2022 as one of our original students. The biggest lesson he took away from his time at DBA was the value of communication with his teachers. His favorite lesson was a history game where he played a 19<sup>th</sup> century British merchant. Cade will be going to St. Thomas High School in the fall.



**Lorelei Goldman** joined us at DBA in January of her 7th grade year. At our school, she rediscovered the joys of learning and thoroughly appreciated the small, close community. Her best memory was hosting her classmates at the family ranch to see the total solar eclipse. Lorelei will be attending the Emery/Weiner School next year.



**Phillip Goodman** started with us for 7th grade as one of our original students. Here, he came to appreciate the blessings of a quality education and the importance of using his talents to help others. His favorite academic activity was designing and building a bridge for a STEM project. Phillip will be joining the Emery/Weiner School in the fall.



**Dexter Scott** started with us for 7th grade as one of our original students. The most important lesson he learned at DBA was perseverance. His favorite academic activity was reading ELA books, and he enjoyed *The Outsiders* this spring in particular. Dexter will be attending Westbury Christian next year.



**Colt Voelte** joined us this year for 8th grade. During this time, he learned the importance of a positive attitude and grit. His favorite academic activity was gathering data and doing probability calculations for the March Madness Math Project. Colt will be attending St. Francis Episcopal School for high school.





## Launching Another Year

Dietrich Bonhoeffer Academy opened for its second school year on August 15<sup>th</sup>, 2023. Our growing community added another classroom and divided into separate learning groups for 6<sup>th</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades. The fall semester was filled with a variety of energizing activities both inside and outside the classroom. In science, the 8<sup>th</sup> graders dove into Integrated Physics and Chemistry with experiments such as putting Mentos in diet cola and a STEM project to construct a bridge. The older students also enjoyed simulations in United States history on the settlement of Jamestown and an unsuccessful attempt to traverse the Oregon Trail. In 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade, students explored interdisciplinary connections as they completed constellation projects in astronomy while reading the science fiction novel *A Wrinkle in Time*. Studies in Greek history and mythology included reading a graphic novel version of Homer's *Odyssey* and creating a humorous short film of scenes from the book. Off campus, we visited the Houston Museum of Natural Science for a planetarium show and the special King Tut exhibit. In the end, whether it was honing organizational techniques or playing at recess, students strengthened their academic and social skills while enjoying life at school.







## Spring Forward

The spring semester brought an assortment of new and exciting learning experiences. The 8<sup>th</sup> graders were moved by powerful lessons, reading *Unbroken*, the story of American World War II hero Louis Zamperini, and exploring pivotal moments in the history of the Civil Rights Movement. The younger students were treated to a virtual tour of several famous national parks to study Geology. Multigrade learning also occurred in United States Civics, which was highlighted by lively current events conversations each Wednesday. For field trips, the students enjoyed visiting Space Center Houston and attending a minor league baseball game. The year concluded with impressive projects by both groups. The 8<sup>th</sup> graders completed an oral history essay based on an interview with a retired relative or neighbor. The 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> graders created fascinating crafts and informative posters from their research of historical artifacts from African, American, and Polynesian cultures. As we said farewell to our graduates, we paused to reflect on the growth that had taken place over the last two years. To show their appreciation, each 8<sup>th</sup> grader gave a formal speech in our final Chapel service on what their DBA experience meant to them.







## The Trip of a Lifetime

From April 7<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup>, the students of DBA embarked upon a memorable adventure through the state of Texas. Departing from campus on Sunday afternoon, we drove to the Hill Country, where we were hosted by the family of Lorelei Goldman '24. On Monday, all eyes turned to the sky to watch the historic solar eclipse, witnessing four full minutes of totality. This was followed by a challenging nature hike through the backwoods that was rewarded with breathtaking views of the countryside. The following day, we drove to Austin, stopping at LBJ State Park to learn about the life and legacy of the former president. On Wednesday morning, we toured the Texas State Capitol, where the students appreciated the enthusiasm and knowledge of our guide. The rest of the day featured fun recreational activities like a kickball game on a blustery afternoon and a delicious Tex-Mex dinner on San Antonio's River Walk. Our journey concluded on Thursday with a visit to the Alamo in the morning before making the drive home to Houston. In reflecting on the trip, the students highlighted the special times together rocking out to music during car rides and hanging out in the hotels. Overall, the amazing memories and learning experiences were made possible thanks to our small, close community.





## **Leave Your Mark - DBA's First Yearbook**

One of the year's most successful projects was the creation of the school's first yearbook. Students collaborated using an online platform to plan, design, and edit an original record of DBA's first two years in operation. Phillip Goodman '24 served as editor, and the student staff members were ably guided by Yearbook Coordinator Mrs. Kathi Lerch. Congratulations to all the students for their contributions and a job well done!

## **Academics in Focus - Oral History Project**

For our graduates, one of their most meaningful learning experiences was also their last. As a culminating project in United States History, the 8<sup>th</sup> grade students became historians themselves to tell the life story of an older family member or friend. Each student conducted an extensive interview with their subject, inquiring about the individual's life and their impressions on major historical events they experienced. After organizing the raw material into a coherent outline, students created both a classroom presentation and biographical essay. The entire process of research and writing stretched over the entire spring semester.

While showcasing several key skills they had developed during their time at DBA, this project came to mean so much more to the students. The stories they gathered were truly inspiring. A single mother who started her own business dedicated to helping people improve their mental health. A career member of the armed forces whose activities provided immense service to his country. A Russian academic who came to America after the fall of the Iron Curtain and promoted strong international relations in her field. An attorney who grew up roving the streets of New York City and worked his way up to represent companies in cases all over the world. An electrician who helped build the vital telecommunications infrastructure that powers the information highway in Houston. All are civic role models who have made positive contributions to their communities. Now, the valuable lessons encapsulated in these lives have been passed down to the next generation.



## **Special Events**



### **DBA Friends Day**

On Friday, November 10<sup>th</sup>, DBA welcomed grandparents and family friends to campus for a special celebration. Students presented on their academic work to our visitors and guided them through a sample learning exercise. After the classroom activities, students and guests enjoyed a special lunch together. DBA Friends Day provides a unique opportunity for students to share their educational experiences with family members who have had a meaningful influence on their lives.



### **DBA Go Texan Day BBQ**

On February 23<sup>rd</sup>, DBA hosted a barbecue through the generosity of Tetra Land Services thanks to Gina and Steve Eixman, parents of Cade Eixman '24. In addition to the delicious food, we also welcomed prospective students and their families to this fun event. We look forward to this gathering continuing to be an annual staple of the DBA calendar for years to come.



## Supporting DBA

Since our founding, DBA has been blessed by the generous contributions of many individuals and families committed to supporting our efforts to transform middle school learning. We are grateful for these donations which make the life changing work that takes place at DBA possible.

### \$10,000 and more

Robert and Jo Ann Fry  
Brad and Anya Goodman  
The Julian Family

### \$5,000 - \$9,999

Dr. Paul Christesen  
Phillip and Karey Dye  
Brian and Erin Goldman

Ryan and Kathi Lerch  
Craig and Dara Weinstock  
Friend of DBA

### \$2,500 - \$4,999

Will Edens  
Eric and Courtney Lerch

Tanya May  
Mac and Anne Rowe

### \$1,000 - \$2,499

George and Judy Adams  
Elizabeth Dye  
Kevin and Courtney Voelte

### \$500 - \$999

Benjy and Allison Boxer  
Neal and Kathy Davis  
Steve and Gina Eixman  
Rafael and Gloria Navo  
Mike and Jen Wollner

### Additional Gifts

Michele Beavers  
Lucy Bertsch  
Alan and Sarah Bradshaw  
Alice Davidson  
Avery Edwards

John Flanagan  
Peggy Haney  
Marilyn Harkness  
Travis and Erin Larsen  
Ray and Marisa Mendoza

Larry and Lydia Oleksy  
Roger and Patricia Walck  
Byrom Wehner  
Harrison West  
Margaret Young



## **Vision**

Dietrich Bonhoeffer Academy is an independent middle school committed to providing students transformative learning that cultivates reflective minds and compassionate hearts. We seek to be a leader in emphasizing teamwork, imagination, and courage to help young people achieve a superior education.

## **Overview**

Dietrich Bonhoeffer Academy was founded in October 2020 with the goal of developing an innovative middle school in southwest Houston to meet the needs of the next generation of students. After two years of planning and preparation, DBA opened its unique classroom for the 2022-23 academic year. The school serves students in grades 6-8 and is currently housed on the campus of Faith Lutheran Church in Bellaire. Dietrich Bonhoeffer Academy is administered by the Board of Directors as a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization.

## **Namesake**

The school is named in honor of the German pastor and theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who gave his life resisting the evils of Hitler and the Nazi regime. Inspired by his example, we operate as an ecumenical Christian school that emphasizes respect and understanding in caring for each other and our neighbor.

## **Board of Directors**

Judy Adams, President

Dr. Paul Christesen  
Elizabeth Dye

Preston Julian  
Ryan Lerch

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