



# Thurgood Marshall Academy

Washington, D.C. | Alexandra Pardo, Executive Director

Grades Served: 9-12 ■ Enrollment: 395 ■ Year Opened: 2001-2002

Instructional Strategies: Law themed

Student Demographics: 99% African American, 73% FRL eligible, 13% Special Education

## A Mission to Serve

Thurgood Marshall Academy (TMA) Public Charter was founded by law students and attorneys at Georgetown University Law Center’s DC Street Law clinic who wanted to offer underserved students more academic and social development opportunities. The school’s mission is to prepare students to succeed in college and to actively engage in our democratic society. Its challenging academic curriculum is infused with the theme of law and justice. The foundational legal skills—argumentation, negotiation, critical thinking, research, and advocacy—will prepare students for success in any career.

TMA offers specialized programming, including: a Summer Prep program to help transition 9th and 10th graders from other schools to its rigorous academic environment; an annual portfolio assessment process that requires students to examine their academic achievements and struggles and present their plans for the future to a panel of teachers, staff members, volunteers, and parents; and a year-long Senior Seminar with intensive coaching on the college application process.

## From Vision to Reality: How CSP Funds Enabled Thurgood Marshall Academy to Open

It is important to remember that for public charter schools, funding from the local government does not kick in until students are enrolled in the school. As Dr. Alexandra Pardo, the school’s Executive Director, notes, “When we got our charter, what we had was a piece of paper. What we didn’t have was a building, furniture, textbooks, any resources for our students. And that’s when CSP funds became critical for TMA.”

Thurgood Marshall Academy received a \$540,000 startup grant in 2001 through the federal Charter Schools Program (CSP). These funds were used for mission critical, yet basic, operations—like purchasing a curriculum and textbooks, hiring staff, partially funding facilities, and equipping the school with desks and whiteboards. Without CSP funds, the founders would not have been able to build a school from the ground up.

Thurgood Marshall Academy opened in the 2001-02 school year in the annex to the Congress Heights United Methodist Church. The school immediately knew that to operate a full high school program, it would need new facilities.

In 2005, TMA acquired and renovated the long-vacant Nichols Avenue School, a historic building in southeast D.C. The new facility opened in 2005, and over the years, TMA has raised an additional \$13.5 million in grants and loans from the D.C. government, businesses, and foundations for full renovation.

## IN THE COMMUNITY

- 100 hours of service required to graduate
- Partnerships with 5 law firms to host Law Day (9th grade) and Law Firm Tutoring (11th grade), two signature programs that introduce students to legal concepts, a professional environment, and mentors from the city’s law community
- Dual enrollment arrangements for junior and senior students to earn college credit
- TMA’s Green Club maintains the largest school garden in the District

*“We have people outside the building who are invested in our kids with their time and resources, so it truly is a community effort.”*

— Karen Lee, Social Studies Department Chair



## Principal's Office

Dr. Pardo was drawn to TMA due to its mission and its ability as a public charter school to have the flexibility to make choices for its students that have immediate impact. She notes that the most rewarding part of her job is, "Seeing our students every day in the hallway, seeing their struggles, seeing their success when they hold a Thurgood Marshall diploma. And most importantly when they hold a college degree four years after leaving us."

Dr. Pardo believes that Congress plays an integral role in supporting public charter schools. First, this is done through its protection of charter school autonomy at a national level. The second piece is looking at equal funding for charter schools. On national average, charter schools receive 20 percent less funding than district schools. As more and more students enroll in charter schools throughout the country, Congress can ensure equity between charter and district school funding because they are all public school students.

## Heard in the Halls: Teacher and Student Perspectives



"Our students come from challenging histories, but they are resilient and forward-thinking. It gives me hope for the future and these kids become our leaders in the states and globally. It makes me feel like the world is in good hands."

— Karen Lee, Social Studies Department Chair



"Thurgood Marshall Academy has proven that schools serving the students most at risk can be successful when we lift up all the excuses and barriers."

— Dr. Alexandra Pardo, Executive Director



"Receiving an education helps you answer all your questions. When it's a great education...you can explore for yourself."

— Sydni Foshee, 12th grade



"We offer our students the opportunity to recognize that anything is possible with hard work. You don't have to settle for the choices that might be given to you despite your circumstances."

— Sanjay Mitchell, Director of College and Alumni Programs

## STATEWIDE IMPACT

- 100% college acceptance for all 10 graduating classes
- Top-performing charter high school in D.C.

*"TMA has high performance among public schools. You represent a place—so I believe I am important to the success of TMA, and I want the school to perform well as a reflection of who I am."*

— Sydni Foshee, 12th grade

