

# #WeAreCarmelUnified

August 22, 2017

Let me extend a warm welcome to you and your children as you begin the 2017-18 school year with us in Carmel Unified School District! Now that we are “two weeks in” and beyond “Car Week”, I am sure you are settling into the normal family routines of getting your students up and out the door in the morning to get to school on time and welcoming them home in the afternoon! I hope it has been a smooth start for you this year thus far.

Most of you know that I am new this year. Let me first say how very excited I am to be your new superintendent, working with an experienced Board of Education, leading alongside an excellent administrative team, all in support of terrific teachers and staff who (in their various ways) are committed to help your children learn and grow each day!

As a newcomer, I am very aware that I am joining a Story in progress. We are a district whose reputation for excellence is well known. I know that I am blessed to become part of that Story. What I thought might be interesting to periodically share with you -- particularly in this first year of my tenure--is what I am discovering about US. Remember that everything right now for me is New and somewhat Amazing. If you have been in the district awhile (or only lived in Carmel), it is entirely possible to miss our “distinctiveness.” I want to use this opportunity to share my discoveries, highlighting big and small programs, activities, achievements, and invite you to revisit your notions of Who We Are through

my newcomer eyes. When I would welcome friends to my hometown of Chicago for the first time, joining them on the architectural tour downtown or going with them through the amazing Art Institute, I found myself seeing my city with new eyes, refreshed by insights of my friends. Usually I was filled with pride, though sometimes I was guided to see what could be improved upon. I am hoping that my personal revelations particularly this first year can do that for all of us, or that at least you will--with me--learn about some aspects of the district of which you were unaware.

**So welcome to the first edition of  
#WeAreCarmelUnified**

Continue reading to learn about Carmelo, our pre-K program and transitional Kindergarten!



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## ***Carmelo: Where It All Begins***

I want to start by writing about where it all starts for many of your children and that is at Carmelo, or CCDC (Carmelo Child Development Center). I have been enjoying each site's Back-to-School Night this month, but last night, I attended the Carmelo Back-to-School Night and was so impressed with what I learned and observed. First, please realize that it is not every district that even has a pre-K educational option for students. To have such a well-organized program as Carmelo is a gift for our children who receive a solid foundation preparing them for the serious business of becoming a student in our elementary schools and beyond. I know that any success I had as a high school English teacher was built upon the early preschool experiences my students had many years before. Carmelo is how we launch our students!



Last night, just about in every classroom, I heard teachers talking passionately about

their implementation of *Tools of the Mind*, a research-based program that “gives teachers the tools to ensure every child becomes a successful learner, developing the cognitive, social, and emotional skills needed to reach his or her full potential.” Our staff has been trained in this methodology and they are loving it. It combines what we know about how children learn from the latest neuroscience discoveries coupled with Vygotskian theory. You can learn more about the program at the website [toolsofthemind.org](http://toolsofthemind.org).

*Here are some of my random takeaways from dropping in and out of several classrooms last night!*

\*Teachers can support students in their growth as learners through an artful and intentionally designed use of their PLAY.

\*Even when children play, they can be guided to think and plan their play time, to reflect and process, and to solve problems that may occur. These executive functioning skills are so important throughout life and are what often ensure success in later years of school.

\*Whether they realize it or not, children “at play” are learning how to work with their peers, complete and monitor tasks, and regulate their emotions. Our skilled teachers are helping them develop more tools in their social-emotional toolboxes.

\* Our teachers are skilled at identifying those natural teachable moments for individual students.

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\*Children at play are naturally encountering math, English, social studies, science, music, art--it is learning across the curriculum without the artificial divisions school sometimes may create.

\*I heard teachers talking frequently about starting with students where they were and helping them make progress from that point to the next. True differentiation! They "know every student by name and need."

\* I learned about how teachers with their children co-create themed settings, inviting students to use their imaginations about what roles they would play in those settings and what activities might be occurring. Student engagement is not a problem with this instruction that honors the imagination!

\*Skilled teachers are aware that transition points in the day's schedule are important. I loved learning about a ten minute calming--but fun --activity in which students are invited to rhythmically draw in response to a story prompt, against a backdrop of classical music. After this they are focused and have a mindset ready to move on to the next learning activity!

\*And last but not least is my favorite takeaway which I intend to personally use this year. (I also invite you to consider it as a helpful tool). When overcome emotionally by a conflict or situation, the teacher helps the child stop and ask: "Is this an Elephant Problem or a Mouse Problem?" Usually, as we all know, our problems seem in the moment like Elephants, but often are more of the Mouse variety!

Carmelo is one of Carmel Unified's truly distinctive programs and one reason we are who we are. You can learn more about it and the highly qualified staff at our NAEYC accredited program at [this link](#).

## **Our incredible staff at Carmelo include:**

Laura Dunn (Site Director),  
Stacie Crane, Marie DartNewell,  
Samantha Borba, Kerry Clausen,  
Theresa Curatolo, Erica Daniels,  
Holly DeStefano, Talia Elazar,  
Leslie Ferrante, Susanne Libby,  
Sarah Maloney, Lisa Mowry,  
Debbie Pearson, Janelle Pearson,  
Angie Schauer, Molly Stafford,  
Antoinette Tracy, Gina Wolcott.

## **Co-Op Preschool**

Tracey Myrick

## **Transitional Kindergarten**

Paula Terui and Trish Hastings

I am learning so much about our programming by attending the Back-to-School nights. Hopefully, you, too, have made it a priority to attend your site's Back-to-School Nights to start this year!