

August 22, 2019

# #WeAreCarmelUnified

From the Office of the Superintendent Barb Dill-Varga, Ed.D.

**Welcome Back to the 2019-2020 School Year!**



## The Power of One

Most of us know the sixteenth-century proverb “He can’t see the forest for the trees” which is a way of saying someone is too focused on the details to really look at the situation as a whole. It’s an argument made to focus on the Big Picture. Recently I spent some time thinking about this proverb and some of the limitations of what I will call *A Forest View*. What follows is a summary of what I shared with all staff at our Welcome Back Breakfast on August 7.

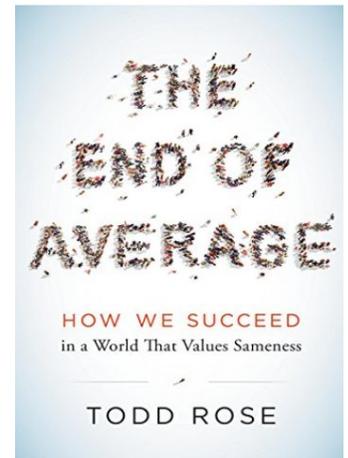
Focusing on the *Forest View* seems to be what we all crave in today’s world. We want the headline, the sound bite, the snapshot, that gives us a quick summary to digest. In our fast-paced world, we thrive on these “idea digests” that help us quickly measure progress. The education world is not immune to this as just about every state now publishes a dashboard of high stakes test scores and other measures of student achievement. As you know, California has the California School Dashboard.

Popular websites like *Niche* are a real estate agent’s dream as they grade a district “A+” and so forth. Our media loves the forest view, too, for it helps them tell a sensational story, devoid of nuance. No one seems to have time anymore for understanding the complexity of a situation hidden beneath the headline. I wonder if phone apps like “The Daily Skimm” or books like *How to Skimm Your Life* are

actually diminishing our ability to think deeply and make meaning?

As I see it, there are multiple problems with focusing on just a *Forest View*. First, a *Forest View* is built from averages. In reality, there are few items or people who actually match the attributes of “average.”

Todd Rose’s book *The End of Average* starts with a fascinating story about what happens when averages are used to determine airplane cockpit design. As he tells it, the US Air Force was trying to understand in the 1940–50s why so many air force plane crashes were occurring. After eliminating other factors, the investigation began to circle around pilot error. They hired an expert to study the design of the aircraft — specifically the cockpit — to see if that might have an impact.



He first started by measuring over 4,000 pilots to see what their critical physical dimensions were (length of arm, length of leg, height, girth, hand size, etc.). He gathered data on 10 different dimensions for these 4,000 pilots and calculated the shape and size of an “average” pilot. Almost as an afterthought, he reviewed his data to see how many of the over 4,000 pilots were “average” on these 10 attributes and to his shock and dismay, zero pilots were average, and only 3.5% of the 4,000 pilots were average on just 3 of the 10 dimensions!

This realization led the Air Force — who had previously clung to notions of standardization — to embrace a whole new philosophy to inform a cockpit design change. It can best be stated as “Fit the system to the individual, rather than fitting the individual to the system.”

This new design is likely why our cars today have adjustable seats that move in multiple directions to fit the differently sized drivers that must operate safely in that compartment space. Incidentally, with the changes they made to cockpits, 5–95% of those 4,000 pilots were able to comfortably reach and work controls which greatly aided the safe operation of the planes!

This is an important lesson for a society that bows down to the “Average” and we should recognize that educational systems are not immune. Grades and rankings, college application admission processes, teacher evaluations — are all subject to comparisons against an average. Beyond schools, we all know our credit scores, marketing decisions, and the like depend on these comparisons, too. The disturbing part for educators, however, is that we are not in the business of producing widgets. We are working with individual students in our classrooms, and *an overemphasis on the average can cause us to miss the particular signals we need to help each child thrive.*

So here’s my proposal: What if we turned the proverb on its head? Instead of “He can’t see the *forest* for the trees?” we instead admitted that, “He can’t see the *tree* for the forest?” That would lead us to focus on the Individual Student. While this may seem to be an overwhelming task for teachers, I challenged each employee at the breakfast this year to FIND ONE STUDENT and to make a conscious decision to BE THEIR PERSON.

Our small school district has 2500 students in it, but we are blessed to have 430 employees

— classified and certificated. If each of us just found ONE student this year, that would be 430 students that received our extra attention and individual care. That’s over 17% of the student population!

Once we have found that ONE STUDENT, it is not enough to just know their name. I am challenging each one of us to KNOW HIS OR HER NEEDS and to be their advocate. Each student may have needs that are academic, behavioral, or economic. Each may have language barriers or parents who have little experience with the intricacies of the educational system. We should find out if they are homeless or lack connectivity to resources and the internet. Are they in families that have access to nutritional food? Are they given opportunities for enrichment? And once we learn these things, we should ADVOCATE, SUPPORT, and ACT.

*I am only one, but still I am one.  
I cannot do everything, but still I can do something;  
and because I cannot do everything,  
I will not refuse to do something that I can do.*

Our school district has a focus on the Whole Child, but sometimes that jargon causes us

to lose focus on the individual face of that child. Our student body to outsiders may look fairly homogenous, but the diversity of need is larger than one might expect. A focus on ONE STUDENT can help us not be overwhelmed with the enormity of responsibilities that society now expects its schools to shoulder. The idea I call “The Power of One” is inspirational and impactful.

I am left reflecting on these words attributed to Helen Keller:

*I am only one, but still I am one. I cannot do everything, but still I can do something; and because I cannot do everything, I will not refuse to do something that I can do.*

My final question for all of us called to work with and for students in Carmel Unified is: “Will YOU be the person for one student you know today?”

## Wellness Committee Reconvenes This Fall on September 16

Our Wellness Committee met twice last spring and has five dates set for the 2019-20 school year thus far. **Our first fall meeting will be on September 16, 5:30-7:30 p.m. in the Carmel Middle School Library.**

The first meeting last spring focused on a review of the committee recommendations from 2017 and provided details of progress which had been made. The second meeting was a time to identify important questions this group wishes to answer under the broad umbrella topic of Wellness. The three foundational questions deemed most important after this activity were:

- 1) How do we give students the tools to be the stewards of their own wellness?
- 2) How do we weigh the importance of mind, body, and spirit when talking about wellness?
- 3) Is there an outcome of wellness? Is there a continuum of wellness or is there truly an endpoint? What does a “well graduate” look like at each of the transition points (5th grade, 8th grade, or 12th grade)?

This fall we will tackle action plans related to these questions, as well as the sub issues that have drawn members to be part of the committee, including issues related to stress and anxiety, interest in different bell schedules and start times that address issues of sleep, issues around illegal substance abuse, and issues around nutrition and food. If you are interested in joining the committee, please contact my assistant Tricia Zarevich at 831-624-1546 x 2021 for more information.

## New Board Member: Todd Weaver

Former Board of Trustee member Rita Patel stepped down from her position effective June 7, 2019. The Board followed a Board Appointment Process that concluded on August 2, 2019 with the appointment and immediate swearing in of Mr. Todd Weaver.

This appointment lasts through November 2020.

I turned the tables on Todd and asked him to share a few biographical details about himself in his own words. Here is what he shared about himself using the third person!

“Todd Weaver does a lot and seems to enjoy it; be that sand-sculpting, running a social purpose tech company, writing and directing a musical play, performing in local theater, hiking, swimming, or testifying about privacy protection regulation before California Congress; he loves learning new things. Todd is married with two daughters, one at CMS in 7th, the other at River in 5th. Todd has been active in the school district from when his daughters first entered CUSD, including president of River Dads for two terms, starting and running the River School Community Camp-out going on its 6th year, serving two terms on School Site Council, volunteering for numerous events and functions like running the Art Party, managing sound for Talent Shows, chaperoning field trips, digging ditches for landscaping, or assisting students in math. Todd enjoys everything he does, and that joy infects others.”



We are very excited to welcome Todd to our team of excellent Board Members!

## Superintendent’s First Cup of Coffee of the Day



Once a month on Fridays, I will be having a cup of coffee at local coffee shops for the sole purpose of being available to meet and greet parents and community

members! I am happy to talk about whatever issues you wish to bring to the table or just to have time for us to get to know each other better! If you are a parent or grandparent of CUSD graduates, I would also love to know where they are and what they are doing now!

Come find me on **Friday, September 6 at 7:30 am - 8:30 am at the CoffeeBank** near The Barnyard! If this seems like a good way for us to connect, I will find a mid-valley location for a date TBD in October! In case you haven't met me, look for me to be at a table with a table top tent with a coffee cup icon on it!

### School Safety and A.L.I.C.E. training

The next issue of *#WeAreCarmelUnified* will focus on a single topic: School Safety and our commitment this year to move to A.L.I.C.E. protocols used across Monterey County. Please watch for that special issue for more detail!

### How to Find Out What's Going On

- Before every board committee and regular board meeting, we send you an Invitation and Preview of Board Agenda Topics.
- Following every board meeting, we send you *#Board Connections*, a 1-2 page summary of the board meeting, with links to Agenda Online documents.
- *#WeAreCarmelUnified* is our regular newsletter with updates on issues and work going on within our district.
- Your site principal's weekly email newsletter has important information on upcoming events and reminders.
- [Here is a link to our District Goals](#) and [This is a link to our LCAP plan](#).

### Agenda Online Special Note:

We are returning to the previous release of Agenda Online because of vendor issues beyond our control. If we move to a different platform, a committee will be formed seeking input to guide this next direction.

### Important Upcoming Dates

- Next Board Meeting - September 11
- Board Facilities Committee - August 29
- BOE Wellness Committee Meetings- September 16, October 21, November 18, January 13