From the classroom to the world

Carson City School District
Hello, and welcome to the Carson City School District. Whether you are new to our area or a long-time resident, I invite you to look through this booklet and learn about some of the exciting programs and people that set Carson City School District apart.

With the nicest people anywhere, a vibrant economy, abundant recreational opportunities and a nationally recognized school district, Carson City offers an unrivaled quality of life. Carson City School District is special because of its people. Our philosophy about education is driven with a non-negotiable expectation that every student will leave our schools equipped with the necessary tools to contribute positively to our fast-growing state. In order to do this, Carson City School District believes in a “learner-centered” model that focuses instruction on what the individual student needs to know and be able to do.

With our dedicated staff, a sophisticated student data system and a guaranteed curriculum and assessment process, we expect every student to be successful. This attitude is not only espoused by our professional staff, but by our citizens as well. They believe that they, too, have a civic responsibility to contribute to the learning of our students. As a result, our community empowers tomorrow’s innovators, leaders and thinkers by embracing the future with the same pioneering spirit that made our city the capital of Nevada and a thriving hub of business, industry and culture.

Carson City School District is much more than a collection of schools. It is a community vision to establish extraordinary schools and develop productive citizens. Our district is large enough to offer unique and specialized programs but small enough to maintain the personal touches that make our schools so inviting.

Carson City truly offers the traditions of our Western roots with the promise of an enlightened future for our children.

Richard Stokes
Superintendent
What sets the Carson City School District apart? Located in Nevada’s capital, the Carson City School District boasts many successes — impressive graduation rates, strict safety measures, programs for gifted students and advanced-placement classes, among several others.

However, one of the things that makes it most unique is its collaboration with the community and business leaders when it comes to setting the direction for education.

“In today’s world, you can’t be limited. None of us has all the answers,” said Ron Swirczek, president of the Carson City School Board. “We may be well-intentioned, but other people in the community see things differently and can add to that.”

How does that collaboration work?

School board trustees organized a series of town hall-style meetings where hundreds of members of the community — parents, teachers, business people and leaders — participated in discussions to craft the district’s vision statement and strategic plan.

The ideas were compiled into a plan highlighting five key areas to help students achieve academically and become college and career ready:

- Creating partnerships with the community as a means to connect every student with learning beyond the classroom.
- Encouraging engaged parents
- Fostering healthy generations
- Creating curriculum that matters
- Exceptional staff

Those key areas will be further explained in the following pages. To read the complete strategic plan, go to carsoncityschools.com.

Who pays for it?

The Carson City School district was awarded the highly competitive federal Race to the Top grant, given to school districts with ambitious yet achievable plans. With the help of the grant, the school district put into place a system to bring the community’s ideas to fruition.

“We really bought into the community’s vision for our educational system and the belief that every student should have the opportunity to meet his or her academic and professional goals,” said Steve Pradere, transformation office director for the Carson City School District.
Connecting school to career

Mariah Gutteter, a software engineer for IGT, heard a group of Carson High School students was working on a project to repurpose a slot machine, and she was curious.

When she realized the group was made up of all girls, she committed to helping.

“When you can make something cool and not have it be a boys club, that’s a big deal for someone like me,” she said. “There’s a lack of gender diversity in this field, and hopefully things like this will help fix it.”

As part of a project for SkillsUSA — a partnership of teaching and industry — the four students took a used slot machine and refashioned it into a kiosk to display photos and historical facts about the organization.

“I’ve been working with new programming,” said Jessica Basa, 17, a senior at Carson High School. “These are the things they actually use at IGT. It’s pretty cool.”

Allen Gosselin, the high school’s community engagement coordinator, said that is the value of bringing in business leaders to partner with students and teachers.

“It adds authenticity to what we do,” he said. “Students make those connections between school work and the world of work.”

Basa said being exposed to the industry has informed her decision to study computer science after graduation.

“Before, I didn’t know what I wanted to do at all,” she said. “Then I took the web design class and I really liked doing it.” Carson High School web design teacher Sherri Kelley has students who have won gold medals at the National Skills USA Competition in 2007, 2008 and 2009.

The partnerships with the community, Gosselin said, give context to what students are learning in school.

“They give testimony to the importance of school,” he said. “And it extends the curriculum. It not only confirms the work we’re doing but adds to it.”

Gutteter, 24, who graduated from high school in Wisconsin, said she spent years in college trying to determine her major.

“If I had had an experience like this, I would have known right away what I wanted to do,” she said.

The techniques she taught the students, she said, will prepare them for the business world.
Dads, granddads help out at schools

Jerry Garrett left a changed man after volunteering in his granddaughter’s classroom at Fritsch Elementary School. “It was just different than anything I had ever been exposed to,” he said. “The way the teacher conducted the class, just the whole ambiance, was amazing. It just really stuck with me.” He continued to volunteer, now with two grandchildren at the school, eventually joining the school’s parent-teacher association.

“I realized this is a really good group of people, hard-working people,” he said. “But I was often the only male who ever showed up to PTA meetings.”

So he was intrigued when in 2012 a mom told him about a national program called Watch DOGS — Dads of Great Students — which encourages and provides a system for fathers and grandfathers to get involved in schools.

“I quickly learned about Watch DOGS and got it started,” he said. “That first year, 30 dads got involved. So it was pretty successful. The second year was more successful.”

Participants are encouraged to spend a day at the school, helping out where needed in the classroom and spending time with students during recess and lunch breaks.

He said the children often form fast friendships with the volunteers, confiding their hopes and disappointments.

“It’s heart warming and sometimes heart breaking,” Garrett said. “It’s just a feeling you don’t get anywhere else.”

Now his grandchildren, Hailee Whitten, 13, and Bailey Garrett, 11, are both at Carson Middle School, so Garrett has moved on to get the program started at that school.

It continues going strong at Fritsch and other elementary schools in the district.

Ted Rupert, father to Jett, 8, and Keela, 9, helps keep the program active.

“At first, it was a way for me to spend more time with my own kids,” he said. “Then I realized there’s a lot of kids who need a strong male figure. It made a huge difference just being there, kicking the ball, throwing a ball, giving them a sticker. It makes their day.”

Jett said he and his classmates are always happy to see his dad.

“I love it,” the 8-year-old said. “He helps a lot. It makes us really happy.”

Ted, general manager of Rupert’s Auto Body, said he feels the same way, looking forward to the last day of school when the volunteers grilled hot dogs for students and their parents.

“I couldn’t wait to tell the guys at the shop I was coming here,” he said. “You just walk around handing out stickers and high-fiving. Being a Watch DOG is the best job.”

Jerry Garrett poses with his grandchildren Bailey Garrett, 11, and Hailee Whitten, 13, at Carson Middle School. Garrett launched the volunteer group Watch D.O.G.S. after finding a need for male role models in the schools.
Free full-day kindergarten is offered at each elementary school even though kindergarten attendance is not required in Nevada.

The United States Department of Education awarded $10 million to the Carson City School District through the Race To The Top grant to develop our learner-centered education model. The school district finished No. 1 in the national application process.

Nearly 23 percent of juniors and seniors at Carson High School enroll in Advanced Placement courses. Of those, an average of 68 percent score high enough on the exam to receive college credit, compared to 61 receiving a passing score nationwide. It saves them nearly a quarter million dollars in tuition costs.

The Carson City School District distributes about 5,600 mobile devices to students for use in grades 3 through 12.

Carson City School District buses travel an average of 267,000 miles on regular routes and carry 72,450 student passengers every school year.

More than 7,500 students are enrolled in the Carson City School District.

Of them:
- 51 percent are Caucasian
- 41 percent Hispanic
- 2 percent Native American
- 2 percent Asian
- .65 percent black
- .25 percent Pacific Islander
- 3 percent claim two or more races
In a joint venture with Western Nevada College, the Jump Start College program allows students to complete their senior year of high school and freshman year of college simultaneously. In its first year, 100 percent of Carson City School District seniors enrolled in the program passed their math and English courses.

Carson City School District celebrates the arts by gathering more than 700 band students from grades 5 through 12 at the annual Band-O-Rama for a community concert.

Molly Walt, Digitorium Coordinator at the Carson City Library, works with students in Carson High School's freshmen transitions program on a multimedia project. The library is one of dozens of public and private community partnerships the school district has created in accordance with its strategic plan.

Carson City School District has 6 elementary schools, 2 middle schools, 1 alternative high school and 1 comprehensive high school.

Carson High School offers an innovative engineering program with state-of-the-art equipment and instruction as part of the multiple pathways available for career and college readiness.
Penny Reynolds works with students in the Culinary Arts program at Carson High School. An award-winning teacher, Reynolds is an example of the exceptional staff employed by the Carson City School District.

Among her colleagues, Penny Reynolds, culinary arts teacher at Carson High School, is a standout.

“This woman defines the spirit of teaching and education,” said Laura Hurtung Roberts, a fellow culinary teacher at North Tahoe High School. “She’s a lifelong learner, a dedicated teammate, a consummate innovator, a fearless crusader and has an unceasing pursuit to bequeath her knowledge and gifts to anyone interested. She is a true original, a bright beacon for students and future teachers alike, and a confidante and mentor to many.”

For her students, she’s even more.

“She was definitely a second mother to me,” said Genoa Donaldson, who graduated in 2014 before attending Johnson & Wales University in Rhode Island. “She’s there for you no matter what.”

Reynolds, a 1979 Carson High School graduate, started her career in the food industry, working as a bartender and restaurant manager, but found it wasn’t the right fit.

She went back to the University of Nevada, Reno to receive her teaching credential, and got a job as a home and career skills teacher at Eagle Valley Middle School in 1985. In 1996, she came to the high school with the plan to create a culinary program.

In 2000, the school opened its own restaurant, which serves lunch four days a week.

She has received a stack of awards, including the 2004 Nevada ProStart Teacher of the Year and the Nevada Skills USA Advisor of the Year in 2009.

But the accomplishments Reynolds is most interested in are those of her students.

“It’s amazing for me to see their growth and progress,” she said. “There’s legitimate work out there for these guys. I’ve literally had a student working on every single continent, including Antarctica.”
Natalyn Wakeling’s favorite game in her physical education class at Bordewich-Bray Elementary School is octopus tag.

“One person is in the middle,” she explained. “They run around and try to tag you. If you get tagged, you become part of the octopus. You can’t move, but you can still tag people.”

For the 11-year-old soccer player, it is the perfect game. “You get to run a lot, and it’s kind of a challenge,” she said. “And I really like to run.”

Teacher Linda Hurzel says that’s the key, finding activities that kids enjoy. “It’s not just dropping and doing push-ups or doing pull-ups,” she said. “It’s playing a game. It’s going swimming or going for a hike. Here in Carson City, we live in one of the best places in the world for exercise. We’ve got mountains, we’ve got lakes and really nice bike paths.”

She emphasizes to her students that P.E. isn’t just a class in school, but an introduction to a variety of activities that they can explore at home in the future.

“It’s important to have a healthy, active life, not just in elementary school but throughout their whole lives,” she said. “How are you going to be a healthy, active adult?”

Through the district-wide curriculum, students are taught basic skills, such as dribbling or throwing a ball and balance and coordination, to build the foundation for team sports.

They are also exposed to individual sports, including frisbee golf, golf, bowling and tennis.

Laura Valley, physical education teacher at Fritsch Elementary School, teaches her students archery, snowshoeing and bicycling, among other activities.

“I’m really trying to teach the lifetime sports. In life, you need to be able to pick up a tennis racket or a golf club. We want them ready for life.”

-Laura Valley, P.E. teacher

“I think you can have hope if you stay active,” she said. “When you start young, you’ve got that chance, that hope to keep going. The love of it. You know you can persevere so you can stay healthy.”

Even in the short term, said Eddie Tierney, 11, he can see the benefits of breaking up the academic day with physical exercise. “When we’re working, our heads get all mixed up,” he said. “When we get in P.E., we can let loose and have fun.”

It’s more than just a break, Hurzel explained. “There’s a lot of research out there that physically active kids do better in school,” she said. “We’re lucky here in the Carson City School District that we have physical education. It’s an important part of the whole child. We want well-rounded children.

“If you don’t have your health, you can have all the education in the world but it might not do you any good.”
Turning curiosity into curriculum

They spent the morning cleaning tables. Then they made homemade ice cream and went outside to play in the spring sunshine.

The warm May weather meant more than freedom to run and climb on playground equipment, it signaled the end of their pre-kindergarten year.

When they came back inside their Mark Twain Elementary School classroom, teacher Paula Baum read “Look Out Kindergarten, Here We Come,” to prepare her students for the transition.

Daysha Tomaroy, 4, understood the seriousness of it. “I’m going to need one marker,” she said, gravely. “I think I’ll miss my class. We play with blocks.”

Baum, who spent 10 years teaching kindergarten before moving to pre-kindergarten, said she sees tremendous growth in the 4-year-olds over the course of the year.

She said they come in not knowing how to hold a pencil, recognize letters or even stand in a line.

She uses a puppet, Curiosity the Cat, to introduce new concepts and themes each day.

“They learn social skills, how to sit in a group, how to get along, how to solve a problem,” she said. “Now they can pick up a letter and tell you what sound it makes. It’s fun to watch them develop.”

The skills they’re learning, she said, are necessary to prepare them for kindergarten the following year.

“Kindergarten today is very academic,” she said. “Kids who don’t have that foundation, they’re lost. Kindergarten is so rapid, they’re reading by Christmas.”

Valerie Dockery, grants and special projects coordinator for the Carson City School District, said the pre-kindergarten programs have proven effective.

In 2013, the state set a goal to have 80 percent of students enrolled in pre-kindergarten programs show improvement in vocabulary over the year. In Carson City, 92.2 percent of the students improved, making an average gain of 16.5 points. The statewide goal was to gain eight points.

In expressive comprehension, 97.35 percent of the Carson City School District pre-kindergartners improved, surpassing the state’s goal of 90 percent.

To the students, however, they’re just having fun.

“I like to play games a lot,” said Dulce Garcia, 5. “And writing.”
Exceptional Staff from page 8

Over the years, her students have earned millions in scholarship dollars and taken home numerous state titles and placed as high as the top three in national competitions.

Andrea Davis, 19, also completed her first year at Johnson & Wales University, which specializes in the culinary arts.

“Ms. Reynolds prepared us a lot for college,” Davis said. “We have a lot of trade school kids at college and even they didn’t have the kind of experiences we had.”

Reynolds has also worked as a peer mentor in the school district, guiding new teachers through their first years of teaching.

“It’s a safe, nonjudgmental place for them to get information,” Reynolds explained. “We don’t evaluate them. We’re just here to provide support and guidance.”

Hurtung Roberts said teachers would be wise to follow her counsel — and Reynolds’ example.

She either has a friend, knows a friend or makes a friend wherever we go,” she said. “If there is a soul in need of a friend, she will welcome and include them right into the mix. This skill is the work of a master teacher.”

Exceptional Teachers

The Carson City School District employs a number of exceptional teachers, administrators and staff who have won several local, state and national awards.

Recent recipients of the Nevada Teacher of the Year award are:

2013: Adam Whatley, English and technology teacher at Carson High School.

2011: Cheryl Macy, English teacher at Carson High School when named. She is now a student dean at Carson High School.

2008: LeAnn Morris, technology teacher at Empire Elementary when named. She currently works in the school district’s Mobile Device Initiative, putting a mobile device into the hands of every student.
Carson High School students walk in the 2015 graduation ceremony. The school has an 86.20 percent graduation rate, compared to the state rate of 70.86 percent.