

# Carlson Elementary

## School Design Blueprint



CARLSON ELEMENTARY  
SCHOOL



CLEAR CREEK  
SCHOOL DISTRICT RE-1



# Carlson Elementary: A community of joyful learners

**Carlson Elementary** is nestled in the heart of Idaho Springs, Colorado. We cherish the vibrant backdrop of downtown life and the stunning mountain views that surround us. Our close ties with local businesses and community partners help define our identity, reflecting the deep roots many of our families have in Idaho Springs.

This fall, we will move into a newly renovated building, thanks to Clear Creek voters who passed a bond in 2021 to support our district. This new home will give us a physical space that matches our aspirations for our learning environment, including more outdoor learning space and the opportunity to forge deeper community partnerships.

While our small student body fosters a familial atmosphere and keeps class sizes intimate, we recognize the challenge created by a declining enrollment over the past two decades in our district. The shifting demographics, marked by a graying community and more second homeowners, mean fewer students. We acknowledge the changing economic landscape, as mining becomes a smaller part of our local economy, and tourism continues to grow and flourish. All these changes offer us both opportunities and challenges.



# Carlson Elementary: A community of joyful learners



**In addition to** shifting demographics, Carlson is still recovering from the impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic. More than ever, we need to tend to both the academic success and emotional wellbeing of our students. Only 52% of our students are reading on grade level, and 53% are meeting expectations within math, based on our Istation benchmark results from March 2024. As the world is rapidly changing, we know that students need an even wider range of knowledge and skills to be successful in their futures; a future that we hope for many involves contributing to the long-term vibrancy of Idaho Springs.

Yet, amidst these changes and challenges, our community remains steadfast in its support for Carlson Elementary. We hear the desire for deeper connections and a belief in the innovative work happening within our school. Our local business owners are deeply invested in our success. We share a vision of Carlson becoming a model of innovation, grounded in experiences and connections to our local establishments, crucial in retaining young families and bolstering our local economy.

With our unique position, supported by community partnerships, trust, and visionary leadership, we are poised to lead the way in shaping the future of education. As we navigate challenges and seize opportunities, we stand united in our commitment to providing the best possible education for our current and future students.



# Our Journey to reimagine Carlson Elementary School

At Carlson, we have been on a multi-year journey to redesign our school model. These are our major milestones:

## 2020

The Clear Creek district team crafted a district-wide learning profile in partnership with CEI

## 2021-22

We began our design journey with Transcend. We learned deeply with our community, and crafted our high-level design and began testing aspects of it.

## 2022-23

With our high-level design sketched out, we began implementing EL's ELA curriculum as well as Crew. And, we began testing the Gift of Place experience through fieldwork and experts.

Simultaneously, the Clear Creek District office started their design journey, as did the Middle + High Schools, building off of the foundation we began at Carlson.

## 2023-24

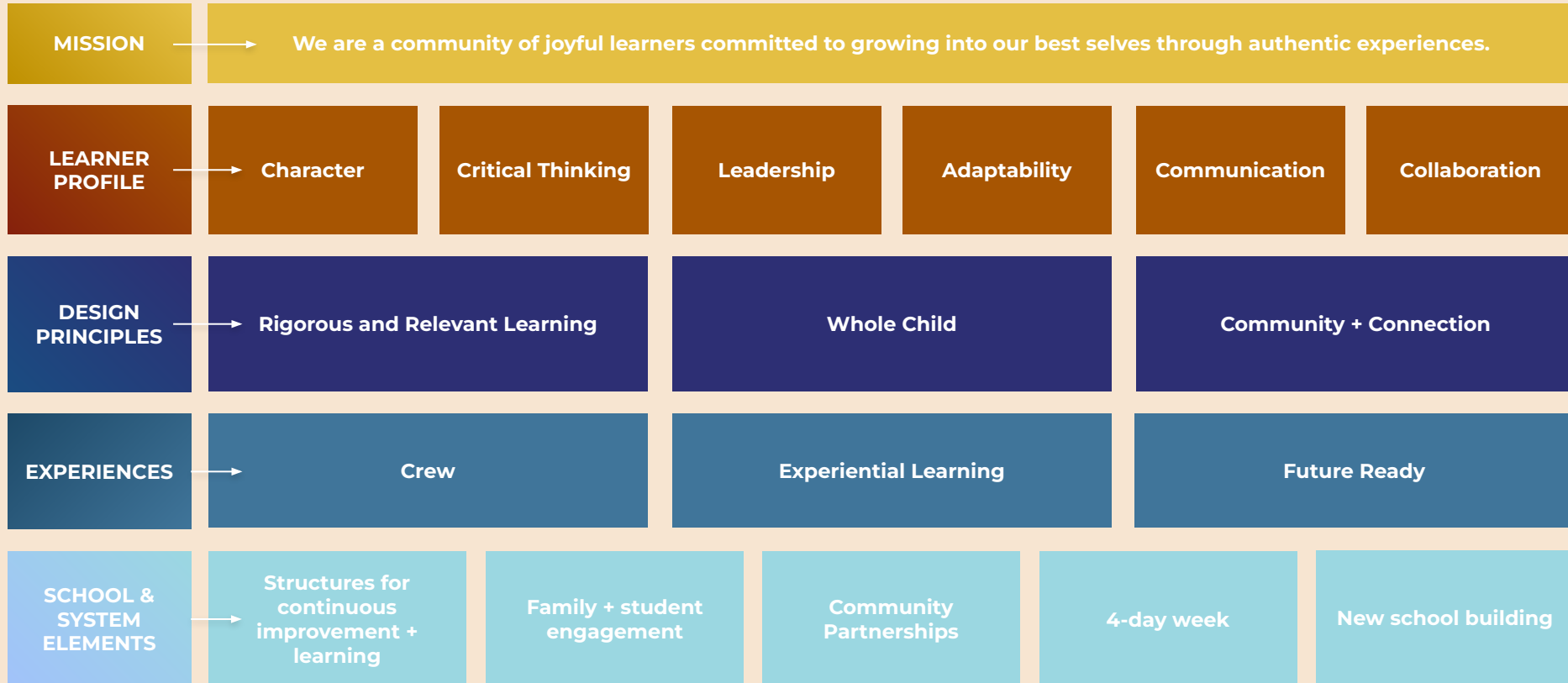
With a strong ELA implementation year under our belt, we began testing + implementing the Eureka Math<sup>2</sup> curriculum. We also began implementing and improving our vision for experiential learning. And, we broke ground on our new school building!

## 2024-25, and beyond

Next year, our focus will be on differentiating within our experiential learning model, increasing both rigor and relevance for students. Our new building will be open, which means we can further strengthen our implementation of Gift of Place and lean into our community partnerships.



# Our school design at a glance





**CLEAR CREEK**  
SCHOOL DISTRICT RE-1

## Our Mission

The mission of the Clear Creek School District RE-1 shall be to educate and inspire all learners in a safe and challenging academic environment to go forth and share the best they have to offer to the world.

## Our Vision

**Best Educators.**

**Empowered Learners.**

**Visionary District.**



**CARLSON ELEMENTARY**  
SCHOOL

## Our Mission at Carlson Elementary

We are a community of joyful learners committed to growing into our best selves through authentic experiences.

### **Carlson Elementary Collective Core Values:**

Experiential Learning

Individualized High Expectations

Inclusive Environment

Respect for the Whole Child

Diversified Deep Thinking



# Clear Creek School District RE-1 Learner Profile

By the time they graduate from 12th grade, Clear Creek learners will have achieved the following aims. With these skills, Clear Creek Gold Diggers will be prepared for their futures with hope and confidence. The work learners do at Carlson Elementary sets the foundation for developing these aims.

## CHARACTER

Learners exhibit empathy and inclusiveness of others. They demonstrate integrity and accountability through personal, professional, and civic actions.

## CRITICAL THINKING

Learners approach difficult challenges creatively and fearlessly. They explore solutions to complex challenges strategically.

## LEADERSHIP

Learners model behavior that is professional and inspirational. They listen to various opinions and empower others.

## ADAPTABILITY

Learners demonstrate resilience through courageous risk-taking and learning from failure. They think flexibly to adjust to changes, recognize options, and be confident in choosing an alternative pathway.

## COLLABORATION

Learners recognize and respect the differences in values that may exist between people from varying social and cultural backgrounds. They work with others respectfully with a we-rather-than-me approach and know this teamwork may lead to action for change.

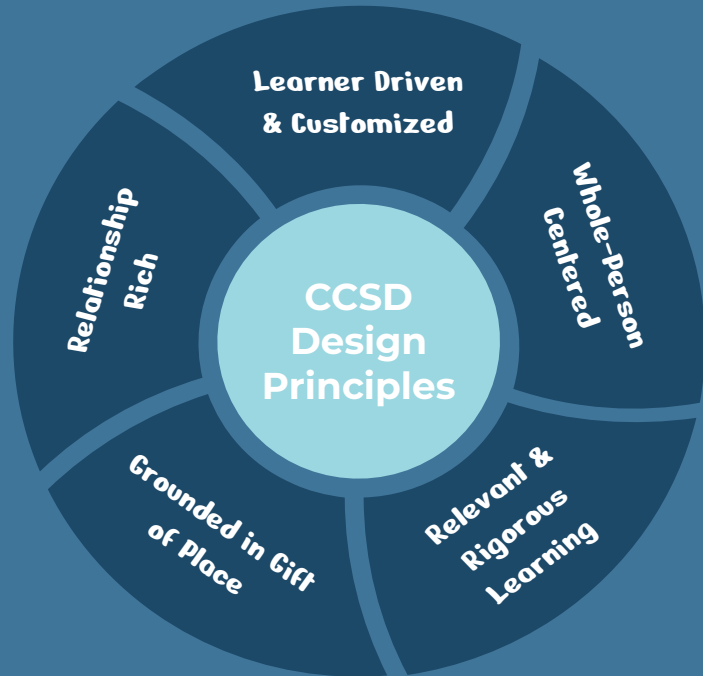
## COMMUNICATION

Learners express thoughts and ideas clearly using multiple mediums. They adjust messages according to the needs of the audience, context, and purpose.

# Clear Creek School District RE-1 Design Principles



Building off of the initial design principles that the Carlson team drafted, the District developed the following district-level principles. These principles are present throughout student experiences at the Elementary, Middle and High Schools across the district. They are the guardrails that help us to make decisions about the design of our learning environment.



**Learner Driven & Customized:** Learners take charge of their learning, engaging directly with concepts while receiving guidance from adults and peers. They have a say in what and how they learn, fostering agency and connecting with their interests and prior knowledge. Learning is personalized, adapting to each learner's identity, knowledge, and learning style, ensuring everyone has the support they need to succeed, with additional assistance for those who require it.

**Whole-Person Centered:** Learners engage in experiences that nurture the totality of cognitive, emotional, spiritual, social, and physical factors that impact their learning, development, character, and overall health and well-being.

**Relevant & Rigorous Learning** Learners pursue interests within and beyond their communities, solving real problems. They employ critical thinking to grasp diverse concepts and are evaluated based on their creative application and analysis across various contexts.

**Grounded in Gift of Place:** Clear Creek offers opportunities for learning in the natural world, within, and beyond our community. Meaningful learning occurs when the unique gifts of our mountain community are integrated into our students' experiences and connected to global contexts. Community members are active collaborators. Students contribute to their community, and our outdoors provide inspiration and relevance for our learning.

**Relationship Rich:** Learners are deeply known and respected by a variety of adults and peers. They collaborate closely and form meaningful relationships across lines of difference. Interpersonal skills develop and flourish while the relationship-rich environment nurtures empathy, fosters belonging, supports well-being, and builds social capital.



# Clear Creek School District RE-1 Student Experiences



## **Crew | Connect Communities:**

Crew | Connect is a structure that supports our culture of community building and belonging. The Crew & Connect experiences are designed through our unique gift of place to develop the learner profile, foster relationship building, enrich learner-driven experiences, and nurture the whole-person.



## **Experiential Learning:**

Experiential Learning is an interdisciplinary approach to learning that leverages authentic, place-based learning experiences. Across all disciplines, students learn by experiencing relevant and rigorous content and concepts through a constructive approach that develops critical and creative thinking and problem solving skills. By encouraging curiosity and investigation, learner agency increases as conceptual understanding develops, supporting depth of knowledge that will serve Clear Creek learners across their lifetimes.



## **Future-Ready:**

Our learners explore and experience multiple future-ready pathways from pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade. Authentic and customized experiences create and leverage relationships with community partners. These collaborations result in skill development, opportunities for credit attainment, internship experiences and more. With hope and confidence, this will prepare our learners for their futures.

# How these experiences manifest at Carlson



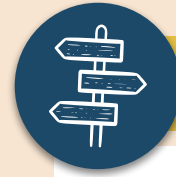
## Crew

**Carlson Whole School Crew**

**Classroom Crew**

**Service Learning**

**Epic Adventures**



## Future Ready

**Student-engaged assessment practices**

**Student-Led Conferences**

**Celebrations of Learning**



## Experiential Learning

**EL Education ELA Modules**

**Gift of Place:  
Nature & Community Based Learning**

**Eureka Math Squared**

**Field Work + Experts**

# Crew At Carlson Elementary



Crew is both a structure and a culture. As a structure, it can be similar to a regular advisory period. As a culture, it serves as an ethos of inclusion: students strive to reach ambitious goals together as a community. They are responsible for their own well-being and their classmates' well-being.

Crew Carlson is grounded in the Clear Creek Learner Profile. The attributes from this profile are woven through four interrelated student experiences:

## Carlson Crew

The entire school convenes in the cafeteria every morning for a communal gathering, fostering unity and setting a positive tone for the day's learning. This encourages interaction and mentorship among students of different grades, promotes a sense of connection with all staff members, and nurtures feelings of belonging and trust throughout the school.

## Classroom Crew

Each day, teachers dedicate time within their classroom for students to foster relationships and create a supportive community. This provides the foundation that enables them to support each other through challenges, ensuring high-quality work. Students feel part of a caring group invested in their success and well-being.

## Service Learning

Students collaborate with their teachers to find ways to give back to the community and support others several times a year.

## Epic Adventures

Each school year students engage in an epic adventure that varies by grade level. Adventures are designed to support classes as they build strong, cohesive teams.

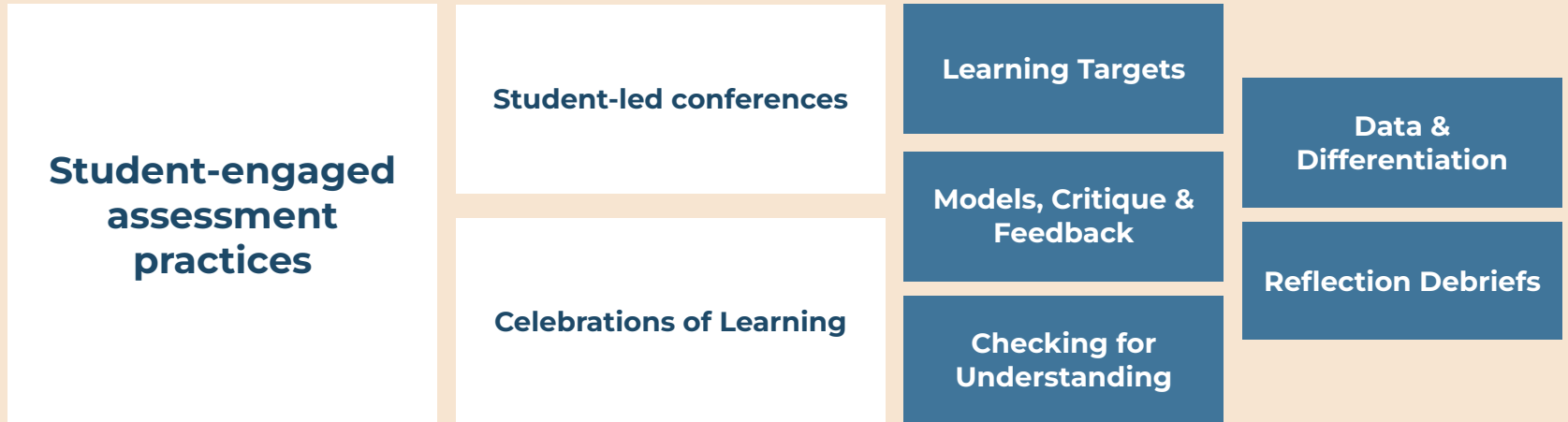
# Future Ready At Carlson Elementary



Future Ready Learning at Carlson involves the following structures:

As learners are given the tools to understand and assess their own strengths and challenges, their ability to take ownership increases. Student Engaged Assessment is a combination of practices that support learners in reflecting on their learning experiences in order to grow as a learner.

At key moments in the year, students share their learning with their families and audiences beyond the classroom through two important practices: Student Led Conferences and Celebrations of Learning. Students prepare for these moments on a daily basis by engaging with practices that give them ownership over their learning.



# Experiential Learning At Carlson Elementary



Carlson students engage in experiential learning that is rigorous, relevant and deeply connected to the community (Carlson's Gift of Place). Drawing on a strong core curriculum that is standards aligned, experiential learning at Carlson supports deep reflection, critical thinking, connection to community, and high quality work for an authentic purpose.

Experiential Learning at Carlson involves four interrelated student experiences:

## EL Education ELA Modules

EL Education modules teach and assess all grade level ELA standards through engaging 8 week projects. Modules culminate in a performance task that showcases student learning. Not only does Carlson use the curriculum to teach and assess ELA; it is a launching point for designing experiential learning that is rigorous, relevant, and rooted in Carlson's Gift of Place.

## Eureka Math Squared

Eureka Math<sup>2</sup>® is a Prekindergarten–Algebra I\* math program designed to advance equity in the math classroom by helping students build enduring math knowledge. Carlson's model of experiential learning draws on the Eureka math curriculum to connect math to real-world applications and when possible connected to community and classroom projects.

## Gift of Place: Nature & Community Based Learning

The Carlson community considers our school and surrounding nature and community in the Rocky Mountains to be a gift that enriches learning for students and educators. Carlson's "Gift of Place" is leveraged for learning through nature-based and community-based learning.

## Field Work + Experts

Students use the natural and social environments of their communities as sites for purposeful fieldwork and service connected to academic work. They are active investigators, applying the research tools, techniques of inquiry, and standards of presentation used by professionals in the field.

# Carlson's essential cross-cutting school elements



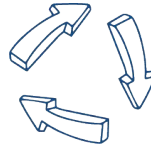
## Frequent student + family engagement

Students and families have regular opportunities to share feedback and are brought into school-based decision making about key choices in the design of Carlson's school model. This deep, direct engagement has become a part of the culture at Carlson and across the district.



## Community Partnerships

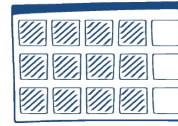
Collaboration with local organizations is an essential element of the Carlson Elementary design, enabling aspects of the model like Community-based learning, and Service learning.



## Structures for continuous improvement & learning

The following structures enable the Carlson team to iterate on the design of our school model and the key teaching and learning practices that ensure student + staff success:

- Instructional Leadership Crew
- Regular Whole School Professional Learning Community
- Monthly Friday Professional learning days
- Coaching Cycling



## 4-day week

CCSD operates Mon-Thurs, with Friday serving as an enrichment day for students. One Friday per month, teachers gather for PD.



## New school building

A new home for Carlson is under construction, opening in 2024. The new facility will include outdoor classrooms for each grade level, and space to co-locate with community partner Clear Creek Arts and Education and Clear Creek Early Childhood Center.