Living our mission every day as an inclusive community of learners
Carroll School
Mission Statement
Message from Dr. Renée Greenfield, Head of School

Carroll School has long been a champion of educational diversity: we empower students who learn differently to become lifelong, passionate learners.

We want our students to enter the world with confidence, self-advocacy skills, and a willingness to embrace all the opportunities life has for them—and our alumni are dynamic proof that our approach works, and has worked for more than a half-century.

Today, we recognize and acknowledge there’s much more we can do as a community to engage in our inclusion, equity and diversity practices at Carroll. We are a school with long-standing and innovative ways to educate students with dyslexia, and we are able to do so through a social justice lens.

We want our students to have all the opportunities available to them, including the civil rights that come with being able to read, write, and communicate. We want them to be prepared to engage in critical, complex conversations, in order to better understand others’ perspectives.

We use our mission to guide all that we do at Carroll. This mission is a symbol of our intentional and thoughtful journey over the last five years, including welcoming Osamagbe Osagie as our Director of Equity and Inclusion, and creating a more culturally, ethnically, racially, and economically diverse community.

Further, our educators engage in professional development, open dialogue, and develop teaching and learning experiences that integrate DEI practices. Our mission guides us along, as we learn and grow as a community.

As the new Head of School, I am committed to our community, which values, appreciates, and celebrates difference on every level—not just in how we think and learn, but how we live as a supportive, inclusive community. The integration of diversity and equity into our existing mission shows our commitment to this work.

I’m honored to be a part of this incredible community, and to share all the ways we’re putting our mission into action—with the goal of truly giving every child what they most need.

We are a school with long-standing and innovative ways to educate students with dyslexia, and we are able to do so through a social justice lens.
In the third grade this year, we’re focusing on concepts of identity in our new bi-weekly “Team Time” block. “Team Time” is dedicated to a series of all-grade group projects and diversity, equity and inclusion activities—part of the larger work we’ve been doing on DEI at Carroll. We began with identity because having a sense of both personal identity and group identity provides children with a sense of belonging—an essential step in setting our students up for academic success.

Osa Osagie, Director of Equity and Inclusion, shared with us that, “for 53 years Carroll has done a great job of looking at DEI through the lens of learning, access to education, reading, and the power of literacy. But we also need to understand that our learners come from a variety of different cultural, racial, and ethnic backgrounds, various family structures, and lived experiences.” This helped me focus on how best to meet the diverse needs of our students: their language-based learning differences and their distinct backgrounds.

The identity curriculum includes six units, each linked to a children’s book. We started the year by exploring external factors of identity: ourselves, our family, and our community. We read the story Amazing Grace by Mary Hoffman, and considered ways to describe ourselves and our families. For younger students, it’s too complex to jump directly to speaking about personal identity. Instead, we start off with very concrete external examples of identity—what things look like, our skin tones, hair type, family structure, etc.—and then build from there.

In the second half of the year, we’ve focused on internal concepts: not simply what people, families, and communities look like physically, but how they are unique internally. We may look the same on the outside, but we’re different on the inside—and conversely, we may share common experiences or similar internal qualities, despite appearing different on the outside.

We wrote our own learning stories, which we began by reading and listening to the stories of people from different walks of life. I have dyslexia, so I shared my personal learning story with my class, and what dyslexia looks like for me. The students then wrote and illustrated their learning stories, sharing key things that shaped their experience along the way.

Our goal is to build empathy: when students understand who they are on the inside, what can shape them on the inside, and what creates bonds between them, we can guide them through perspective-taking—a process they will hopefully continue in future grades, and for the rest of their lives.
“Team Time” is when we think about our community, and the communities around us. Ms. McKeever has an awesome collection of books that we read, and then do a project on each one. We talk about different perspectives and putting ourselves in other people’s shoes, to see things from their point of view. It’s important to have diversity—life would be boring without it!

In my favorite project, we made self-portraits with words that describe us. It was a “flip-up”: first, you see a portrait of me, then you flip the page to see the words that describe me, followed by a hand drawn portrait of me. We talked about invisible and visible traits, so I described myself as kind, caring, dyslexic, intelligent, and loving—and I love music.

In the book, *The Oldest Student* by Rita Hubbard, we learned about a woman who lived to be 121 years old. I love her life story. She started in slavery, then she became free and learned to read. It was one of my favorite books so far. I like the collage art in the illustration, too—it’s very poetic.

We have been learning a lot about slavery in class, and I’ve been telling my mom how awful slavery is. I wanted to express myself, but I felt like it wasn’t enough. Ms. McKeever told us that she entered a poem into a contest when she was young and won, and that inspired me to write a poem about slavery called “Black Rose.”

**Black Rose**

The trees in the forest and the trees in the meadow all sway to our rhythm as we protest. The soft light of freedom flickering like that of long ago. Like the sound of a wild rose in the ever so soft wind. It sways in the direction of north where slavery is against the law. And so, we protest, we protest a peaceful protest. We are torn away from home. Today true home is just a memory. Like that of the black rose

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**Perspective-taking**

The ability to understand how a situation appears to another person, and how that person is reacting cognitively and emotionally to the situation.
What is a DEI Coordinator?

Why is this work personally important to you?

LIVING OUR MISSION IN THE LOWER SCHOOL
How does your work as a DEI Coordinator play out in the classroom?

What have been some highlights of your role as DEI coordinator?

How do you see the school’s mission in this work?

What do you love about this work?
INCLUSION

ways we should act in a community with one way to concretely talk to students about the ways we should act in a community with one another. We introduce these values throughout the school year through books, videos, and engaging activities that help define what each value means, and what it looks like in action.

Elizabeth described, “One of my favorite books is The Invisible Boy by Trudy Ludwig, which touches on kindness and inclusion. At the start of the story, the boy is drawn in gray because everyone is leaving him out. When the other kids start including him, the illustrations add a little more color each time someone does something nice for him. Visually, the story really clicked with my students. They could see the images change but also see the different ways the boy was being affected by the other kids’ actions.”
Michele shared, “Recently, my 4th Grade class has been talking a lot about tone of voice, and being aware of those you are interacting with. We showed videos to the students with the sound muted, asking them to describe people’s body language and facial expressions. In one video, two people were saying the same exact words but their tone and body language portrayed an entirely different meaning. This work all lends itself to another activity we’ve been doing this year: the Caught Ya! Board.”

Elizabeth started the Caught Ya! Board last year in Mrs. Holland’s 4th Grade class as part of a graduate school inquiry project. Her goal was to solve a problem, or find an area where Carroll could grow. “I thought it would be great to focus on activities that reinforced the ERIK values. What do these words actually mean? How can we teach students about these values in an understandable way?”

We opened it to the whole grade this year as a way to both teach ERIK, and to build our community. Each day, a student in each 4th Grade classroom is chosen to “notice” ERIK happening throughout the day. They complete a Caught Ya! card for a fellow student they see displaying empathy, respect, inclusion, or kindness. This could mean picking up a classmate’s jacket at recess, helping a teacher, including a classmate in play—or whatever they recognized as being part of the ERIK values.

At the end of the day, the “noticers” present the Caught Ya! Cards to the students they witnessed showing ERIK. Often the kids receiving kudos don’t even realize what they did had such an impact on those around them.

While it’s easy to recognize your best friend, part of this project is to help students to look beyond those they have already befriended. Michele shared, “A few months into the year, there was a boy who was really struggling, and at one point he asked me, ‘How come I never get any Caught Ya! cards?’ Another student overheard, and began to watch this student really carefully throughout the day. At the end of the day, she gave him a card. It wasn’t something I asked her to do, but it was a perfect example of ERIK shining through.”

After the cards are presented to the students, they get added to the Caught Ya! Board in the 4th Grade hall. “The kids love seeing their cards displayed. And it’s really nice for the community,” Elizabeth said.

The Caught Ya! Project, our ERIK principles, and our work to help students understand different perspectives are all critical ingredients in making Carroll a safer place. We’re reinforcing values that are essential to who we are as a school community—and our students will take those values into the rest of their lives.
Needs for the Development of Professional Education in the Middle School

Today's educational landscape, especially in the face of the pandemic, has necessitated a reevaluation of teaching methods and educational content. We have developed a core professional development course at Carroll Middle School, focusing on teaching pedagogy and providing courses for educators. Middle School, in particular, has been involved in developing and refining these courses over time. Educators are encouraged to engage in professional study each year, which includes attending workshops, seminars, and training sessions. These courses are designed to meet the evolving needs of the educational environment, preparing teachers for the different aspects of teaching. The goal is to ensure our students, and all the ways an educator can meet those needs. We looked closely at how to improve content to meet these needs.
The teachers at Carroll will advocate for you and they are very engaging. They help you if you need help and the projects we do make learning fun. It’s not like they just hand you a piece of paper and you do work; there are fun projects like the cell project we’re doing in science.”
Every grade at Carroll forms a really nice community amongst themselves, but I had noticed there was not a lot of interaction between our grades. We have so much wonderful space on campus, and the ability to adjust our schedules to create time for meaningful activities and pursuits to educate the whole child—and I saw an opportunity.

That’s how the HAWKS Nest project came to be.

I had a meeting with Mike Copacino, the 6th Grade Team Lead, to brainstorm ways to connect our 6th and 7th Graders. We asked ourselves, “How can we make sure the sixth graders in the Copacino building are engaged and part of the same community as the seventh graders in the Storrow building?” We decided to become more deliberate about forming those connections, and growing the mentoring skills of our 7th Graders.

It’s developmentally appropriate for adolescents to be very inwardly focused, in their own bubbles, but now we’ve built in time to discuss what community means and what it means to be part of one—a springboard to the work Carroll is doing around perspective-taking and inclusion.

Building on Carroll’s popular hawk mascot, we created the HAWKS Nest. We paired small cohorts of 6th and 7th Graders together to collaborate, to design, and to solve specific challenges. Through the process of working together, we hoped students would get to know each other, and then find a few more faces around campus to say “hi” to during the day. For the 6th Graders, we hoped it would help them see themselves as peers to the older students—and in turn, the 7th Graders would have an opportunity to mentor and build critical leadership skills.

Our pilot HAWKS Nest program included three challenges, one per trimester, that last 2-3 days in length. For the first challenge, the students built hawk nests using a specific set of materials in small, mixed-grade groups of 4-5 students.
What I’ve liked about HAWKS Nest is being able to see 6th Graders and to talk to them personally and hearing how their first year of middle school is going—how they’re feeling and what’s working out for them. One thing I learned about myself is that I enjoy helping and mentoring the younger kids.”

Mateo Saldana • 7th Grade Student

The first day, the students introduced themselves, got to know each other, and brainstormed ideas for how they might approach the challenge. On the second day, the groups gathered on the lower fields to build their nests.

We purposely designed the challenge to be physical—no computers—and to have lots of space for ideas, making mistakes, and learning through communication. We hoped that it would provide opportunities for students to take on different roles, like being a leader or an idea generator, and to work together and form connections with others. It wasn’t about the end product—it was about building skills.

The challenge ended with a set of questions designed to guide reflection: What went well? What surprised you? What would you do differently next time? What roles did you take on? Did everyone participate? How can you help others to participate? We were thrilled with what we saw and heard, and hung the hawks’ nests around campus as a symbol of a unified, connected community.

For the second activity, the students were challenged to use a string “grabber” to pick up and reconfigure plastic cups into multiple different structures, with each participant holding an end of the string during the whole challenge. Students stayed in their same groupings, and by building on the connections they’d started and being connected physically, we saw the barriers fall even more.

On Day One, they were a bit reserved and shy as the students became reacquainted. On Day Two, they encouraged one another, they shared stories, and they showed more openness toward one other.

For the final challenge of the year, the students will be sharing ideas as a way to help them be invested in the experience—and we can’t wait to grow the program further. Some of the ideas we’re exploring are integrating smaller, less structured activities—during lunch/recess, and so on—to allow students to hang out, see each other casually so those friendships can form more fully. That’s where relationships are built.

The Middle School values HAWKS:

Honesty
Accountability
Work Ethic
Kindness
Safety
In the AOG class, students are learning the underlying structure of language, which is important for comprehension whether you’re in sixth, seventh or throughout life. They are acquiring strategies for when they encounter unknown words, so they’ll have a whole arsenal of ways to understand that word.”
I’m definitely seeing progress in skills development with my Advanced OG students, without question. The other positive outcome of this new class is deeper collaboration among AOG teachers and tutors, who share their expertise and ideas for developing lessons; and deeper collaboration with other content-area teachers.”
The beauty of Orton-Gillingham is that it’s not just the technical part of learning that we focus on; we want to unlock the English language, and the potential for reading as a transformative thing. My hope is that exploring these ideas in the midst of tutoring right now will open my students’ minds—for life.

Carroll’s diversity and inclusion work is deeply important to me, both in my work as an educator, and personally.

When I began working at Carroll five years ago, the school was just beginning DEI training with faculty. Recently, the Middle School has moved towards integrating that work in the classroom with the Foundations for Brave Conversations curriculum. As an advisor and homeroom teacher leading these conversations, it inspired me to think about how to incorporate more diverse books into my tutorials.

Reading is a transformative way to learn about different people, different perspectives, and different places in the world. I have seen how reading helps people become critical thinkers who understand diverse ideas, who empathize with issues that people face, and who can consider perspectives outside of their own.

One challenge tutors face is selecting books that offer a high interest level, but also are at...
the appropriate reading level for our students, are appropriate for a school, and are not going to take the whole year to read. Once a book is chosen, we’ll pull out vocabulary and dialogue from each book for the fluency part of our lessons. Because we’re tasked with planning multiple lessons per week, we often let students choose books where this work has already been done.

With the heightened interest in the tutoring department to diversify our library, and with the incredible support of Osa Osagie to help us identify relevant and relatable books, I set out to create lessons around three diverse books and authors that included tutorial materials and supporting resources.

I started with *Ghost*, the first book of Jason Reynolds’ Track series—a story told from the point of view of one member of an urban track team. I chose Jason Reynolds not only because he is an award-winning young adult (YA) author of color but also because of his life experiences. The lesson includes videos from Jason Reynolds talking about his experiences as a student, which helps our students relate more personally to what they’re reading.

In one video, Reynolds shares that he never completed a fiction book until he was 18 years old because he felt the books in school didn’t have much to do with his life. As a writer today, he has a rule that his stories must capture kids’ attention in the first few pages. When you only have 20 minutes of time devoted to reading during tutorials, capturing the student’s attention is an important factor!

The book is written in a conversational style that alternates between long and short sentences. In creating the fluency part of the lesson, I pulled out the long sentences and broke them into shorter phrases, as well as fluency phrases for students to practice. This experience with modern, everyday dialogue gives our students the tools and strategies to use when they encounter it in the young adult books they’ll read in high school, or for fun. I also added discussion questions to gauge understanding, and to encourage conversation. Now I see my students asking more questions, especially about the perspectives of the characters, and they’re more engaged in the lessons.

School should be a place that feels welcoming to all students; a place where teachers are helping students understand different perspectives that they take with them into the world. Middle schoolers, especially, are in the process of discovering who they are, what they believe, and what they care about. It’s a great time to have the brave conversations we talk about, and to explore the world through books.
Carroll alum Will Close ’11, recently shared with me that “Multis”—the arts, physical education, outdoor education programs at Carroll—helped set him on a path to become a lifelong learner. It wasn’t just writing papers or doing projects in our classrooms that activated his learning. Rather, he discovered his love of education in the Bounders Woods, in the Arts & Innovation Center, in the gym, and on the rock wall. “Using my hands, mind, and heart… that was the combination that helped me to become a lifelong learner,” he says. “It awakened and activated a passion in me for learning and finding solutions: hurdle jumping, developing confidence in my differences, and having the time and space to find my way in this non-dyslexic world.” says Will. “Bounders taught me stewardship of the land, what it means to be a member of a community, and most importantly, the ethics and passion I needed to keep learning. These are all very real things that have stuck with me.” “In public school, they told me I wasn’t good enough at writing. Every day I would go home to draw and sculpt. Getting into college to pursue my art degree was 50% writing/reading… but the other 50% was my dyslexic advantage in action: solving problems creatively, and thinking outside the box.”
I think a lot of students when they first get to Carroll put themselves down, thinking they are not smart enough or not as capable. It’s really empowering and inspiring to hear from alumni about their dyslexia journey and how they’ve reached success.”
At Carroll, DEI is all about “GECing” our students, and meeting them where they are. However, in the 8th and 9th Grade, they are still trying to understand who they are, let alone everyone else.

It’s easy for our students to forget about being open-minded, and to forget to consider who other people are, and how to engage with them. Our work in diversity has to be centered on us knowing our kids... and then “Carrollizing” how we deliver the critical work we’re doing around identity.

On one hand, we have some “social justice warriors,” while others are at very different places in their self-exploration—yet each group is exactly where they are supposed to be. That’s what I love about the DEI work at Carroll; there is no, “you need to be here on this day... or the bus is leaving without you.”

Recently in Foundations for Brave Conversations, we were talking about stereotypes and biases, unpacking the language and morphology of the words—again, “Carrollizing” how we approach this challenging topic. We discussed the biological nature of stereotypes, and how they exist in all of us as a way to make sense of the world. In our discussions, we’re not saying “don’t do it”—but rather that it’s important to be aware of your biases, and the stereotypes you embrace.

We’re reading and discussing scenario stories with our students so they can understand how stereotypes look in today’s society. In a real and authentic way, we’re also trying to teach perspective-taking... but not explicitly. We want our students to imagine being someone else, how they’re feeling, and what they would do in situations.

At one point, a student bravely shared that they often did what the person in the scenario was doing to stereotype another person. I thanked them for being comfortable enough to recognize that, and vulnerable enough to share their experience as a part of our close community.

With DEI work, you have to be willing to make mistakes, and we have a culture at Carroll that is open to mistakes; it’s how we build trust and safety. The idea that “you’re not perfect and you don’t have to be,” extends from our academic approach into the work we do to build our community—and that’s what helps our students to become their best selves, even when mistakes are a part of the equation.
We asked Upper 9 students to describe Foundations for Brave Conversations (FBC). Here’s what they told us:

**Alexander Choi:** FBC is a time to sit down and talk about really different topics that are all very relevant today. Some people might call them uncomfortable topics. But because you’re in a group and not alone in your uncomfortableness, it makes it much easier to engage.

**Peyton Brown:** I think they’re a little uncomfortable just because a lot of people try to avoid them. But by talking about it more, everyone’s in the same boat—they’re learning just as much as you are. So it gets less uncomfortable the more you’re talking about it and the more open you are with it.

**Falone Gustafson:** When we first started FBC, it was a little bit uncomfortable because of the subjects that we were talking about. It was hard. But if you need time out, the teachers always let you step outside, take some deep breaths, come back in, do whatever you need to do to help yourself to be okay, because we have to talk about these things.

**Alexander Choi:** The American Dream Game is not information I’ve never heard before, but looking through the lens of the person you’re playing, definitely adds a level of understanding. There is an emotional level to it that maybe is missing if you just have a regular conversation about it.
CONNECTIONS students' schedules and how I have the priority, in the way tutoring is built into the At Carroll, Orton-Gillingham training is a full support they needed. This year as a tutor. Here are a few of her Esther Long joined Carroll's Upper School for Students at Carroll:

IN THE UPPER SCHOOL My life experiences have prepared me for the yes, but it pays off in the long run. It takes time, trust. I spent a lot of time in the first part of experiences—connecting with them and Students come to Carroll with varied school the same priority in each student's schedule students I work with here. I have three children
I see a strong community in the Upper School. I think all the teachers are a united front, they’re always here for every kid, no matter what they’re going through. And I think that's really important to them.”
How would you describe your role as a counselor to someone who doesn’t know Carroll’s culture well?  
**Teresa:** Typically, students have a less-than-positive association with counselors, where they only meet them in a disciplinary way. At Carroll, the role is very different. There are four key responsibilities as a Carroll counselor: consultation with teachers; meeting with students one-on-one or in small groups; observing students in the classroom; and designing community activities related to social-emotional learning.

How do you get to know your students?  
**Teresa:** I check-in with each student regularly in order to build rapport and connectivity. Whether I’m working with them closely or I see them occasionally, it’s important for me to know each student so I can support them in the way that fits them best.

I typically touch on these three areas when I check in:  
1. **Social:** Are you developing friendships with others? Do you feel healthy? Do you need advice?  
2. **Personal Mood:** How have you been feeling the past two weeks? Have you been able to ward off anxious thoughts? Are you able to manage your stress?  
3. **Academics:** If you’re feeling stressed, is it because you have too much work? Are there adjustments that we can make to learning at school, or at home?

If I hear from a few students who are facing the same challenges, I may pull together a small group to work on skills to meet that challenge. In those groups, we work on listening and reacting to what others say—which is core to social-emotional skills.

What does social-emotional learning look like at the Upper School?  
**Teresa:** Our teachers and leaders incorporate social-emotional learning into the classroom in many ways.  

In my role, I try to build on the identity work we’re doing in our Foundations for Brave Conversations class. I talk to students about how we all identify as human and that one thing humans all have are emotions and feelings.
A frequent reminder I share with my students is that we all feel anxious sometimes—something that’s too easy to forget. They might be anxious about presenting in class or worried that everyone will think they are stupid—yet when I ask that student what they would think about a fellow classmate presenting, they will say they see them as “strong” and “proud.”

The realization that we all have these thought cycles and feelings—that builds connections between our students.

We also do “Community Time” events, which are dedicated to social-emotional learning as a school community. I try to take feedback from teachers about what is happening in the classrooms, and then I create activities to respond. Recently, Kate Collins led a “Man Box” group that explored masculinity—defining the traits that are traditionally considered masculine, and exploring the wider range of traits of the male students in the group.

I also worked with a 9th Grade group of female students to explore social navigation and conflict in friendships. Another group explored humor and sarcasm, and when those go too far and negatively affect other people.

If we can give our students safe, healthy opportunities to talk about where they’re at, they’ll be more open to learning where other students are at.

**Tell me about the new Affinity Groups at the Upper School.**

**Teresa:** We introduced three Affinity Groups in the second half of the year: one for individuals who identify on the LGBTQ+ spectrum, one for students of color, and one for white allies. We did a lot of previewing of the three groups in FBC. We defined affinity groups as a safe space for people who identify with a certain trait that may have been marginalized or, in terms of the white allies group, a safe space for people who want to discuss their white privilege and how to better support people of color.

Just the presence of the affinity groups, even if the students are not attending yet, matters. I know beyond a doubt, having been an LGBT teenager myself who never would have gone to an affinity group meeting, that creating the message that kids belong here and we’re here to support them... it matters.”

Kate Collins • Upper School Division Head
Carroll is looking to a bright future—a future where we continue to live our values out loud across our community.

Guided by our mission

We are a community of diverse learners who recognize the power of the dyslexic advantage—yet our diversity as a community extends beyond how we think and learn. Carroll is a place where everyone is welcomed and valued, regardless of their race, culture, identity, or socioeconomic background. With your support, we can continue having Brave Conversations, we can continue supporting our DEI journey, and we can make Carroll more accessible for families.

The Annual Fund makes all these things possible. With your support, we can do this together. Give today!

carrollschool.org/give