

CARMELETTER

Principal's Letter

Dear El Carmelo parents,

News Flash!!! We are bringing back Pajama Day on Friday, 12/21. Students (and staff) are welcome to wear their pajamas to school on the minimum day before Winter Break. Please wear pajama tops and pajama bottoms, and parents, please consider the weather before you decide what to let your kids wear that day.

I want to congratulate the ABC (Asset Builder Champions) readers who began reading our Project Cornerstone books in classrooms this last month. These are a group of parents that receive training to lead discussions on the books in the series (November was the book *Say Something* by Peggy Moss.) The idea is that non-parent adults can convey important values to children and build an important asset in their lives.

Our Project Cornerstone contact is Soma McCandless, and she has been training El Carmelo parents to lead discussions of these powerful books on topics of honesty, courage, self-esteem and service. The next book is *Mr. Peabody's Apples* by Madonna. Each book in this series that goes until May has a message of personal responsibility that can be applied to our students' lives. Many thanks to Katie Cicero and to Christine Hodson for their work of coordination and of course to all of the readers!



Looking ahead, the remaining books in the series this year are:

- February: *My Secret Bully* by Trudy Ludwig
- March: *Nobody Knew What to Do* by Becky Ray McCain
- April: *Chrysanthemum* by Kevin Henkes
- May: *The Recess Queen* by Alexis McNeil

Asking your children about these books could be a great opportunity to have powerful conversations with them yourself.

Happy Holidays,
--Chuck Merritt
cmerritt@pausd.org



Calendar

Thursday to Wednesday, December 13-19

Holiday Toy Drive

Wednesday, December 19
Coffee with the Principal, 8:30am

Friday, December 21

Pajama Day
Minimum Day

Monday, December 24

(Winter Break begins.)

Monday, January 7

(School resumes.)

Wednesday, January 9

PTA Exec. Board Meeting, 8:30am

Thursday, January 17

LEGO Night, 6pm

Monday, January 21

No School, Martin Luther King Jr. Day

Wednesday, January 23

Coffee with the Principal 8:30am

Friday, January 25

PiE campaign ends

Sunday, January 27

Science & Math Exploration Day, 2pm

Monday to Friday, January 28 to February 1

Book Exchange

Saturday, March 9

El Carmelo's 36th Annual Auction!!!

Most current calendar at <http://www.elcarmelo.paloaltopta.org/carmeletter.html>



Holiday Toy Drive

to benefit Invision Urban Ministry's Toy & Teen Shoppe

Thursday to Wednesday, 12/13-12/19

Bring NEW, UNWRAPPED gifts for kids of ALL ages to collection bins near office and kinder rooms.



Questions? Erich Heilman at erichheilman@gmail.com



PTA President's Letter

Dear El Carmelo parents and staff,

Last week, the PTA was pleased to sponsor Inclusive Schools Week activities at El Carmelo.

Started in 2001 by the Inclusive Schools Network at Education Development Center, Inc., **Inclusive Schools Week** is an annual event held during the first week in December. The PAUSD joined the Inclusive Schools Network last year and encourages its schools to sponsor learning and community-building activities in recognition of an increasingly diverse student population, including students who are marginalized due to *disability, gender, socioeconomic status, cultural heritage, language preference, and other factors*. More information about Inclusive Schools can be found at www.inclusiveschools.org.

This year at El Carmelo, we held an Abilities Awareness week in which a variety of activities were provided to students to illustrate some of the difficulties kids with disabilities confront in their daily lives. Children were invited each day to come to the MP Room at lunch time to participate in the following activities:

Monday: Fine Motor Skills.

Children were invited to string beads while wearing socks on their hands. They were challenged to string as many beads as they could in a small amount of time. This activity illustrates the experience of people with difficulties in fine motor skills.

Tuesday: Visual

impairment. Jessamyn Tardif, a Vision/Orientation and Mobility Specialist, brought several goggles that simulate different visual

impairments, for example, astigmatism, cataracts, or tunnel vision. The kids were asked to wear the goggles and toss a soft ball to each other. While tossing the ball was not very challenging, the kids experienced something quite different when it was their turn to catch the ball and realized how much they rely on their vision to protect their bodies.

Wednesday: Lack of vision.

Kids used a bandana to cover their eyes and made a cat or a dog with playdough. They were really surprised with the way their sculpture turned out when they took out their bandanas! They also realized how much more effort it is for someone without vision to comprehend the world around them.

Thursday: Auditory

Processing. Kids listened to a recording containing instructions for doing a dot-to-dot activity that also contained lots of background noise. Some children expressed frustration with the inability to comprehend the instructions and understood what it would feel like to have that difficulty all the time.

Friday: ADD/ADHD and

Autism. Our Principal Chuck Merritt showed a Brain Pop video on ADHD and an Arthur video on autism. Mr. Merritt also led an interesting discussion afterwards on the struggles, as well as the strengths, that people with these conditions have.

In addition, during the entire week, Ms. Bell read stories in the library to all children about



people with special needs. Also, Mr. Merritt made a video of kids in the Leadership Team doing an activity to illustrate the difficulty kids with dyslexia face. In this activity, kids wrote their names using a mirror box, in a way that the name would show correctly on the mirror.

After the activity, students were interviewed and expressed what they felt during the activity. Teachers showed this video to their classrooms and led a discussion on the topic.

Throughout the week, kids learned, discussed, and thought about what it would feel like to have a learning difference and how they can help and support friends with these differences. *They learned that everybody has strengths and difficulties, that anybody can be successful, and most importantly, different people can be good friends.*

Talk to your children about what they learned in school during Inclusive Schools Week and you may be surprised at what they have to teach you!

Best wishes for a wonderful holiday season!

--Tais Schmitt
thschmitt@pacbell.net



PAJAMA DAY
Friday, 12/21



A PARENT'S PERSPECTIVE - THE PROJECT CORNERSTONE WORKSHOP

Written By Judy Priest, jypriest@yahoo.com (an El Carmelo parent)



I am a parent of three El Carmelo kids, two are alumni who have moved on to JLS, and our youngest is in 3rd grade. I took time out of my more than full time job to attend the last Project Cornerstone Workshop offered at JLS.

The best part of the workshop for me was the focused learning - gaining new tools, accessing relevant resources, analyzing local student data, and hearing experiences from other parents.

Six weeks may seem like a significant time commitment, but the time spent was a worthwhile investment. When was the last time you dedicated 9-12 hours just thinking about what you can do to maximize your child's opportunity to thrive, much less learning how to achieve that end? Is there a nobler learning goal? Is there a better investment of your time?

The quick sound bites on 41 Assets do not do the program justice. The 41 Assets are a combination of influences that factor in to establishing a strong foundational basis for our children to grow into happy,

productive, resilient, present, and caring adults.

Are we doing everything we can as a Palo Alto community, school district, neighbor, and parent to build these assets? We may think so. Unfortunately, the student surveys say differently. Did you realize our children start out with more perceived assets in elementary school and they incrementally but systematically diminish as they become adolescents in middle school and high school?

The workshop is information for all of us to build a stronger family, neighborhood, and community. It's relevant to OUR kids, not some statistical national average, and impacts kids of all ages.

Take the workshop.

Let's get a common vocabulary, keep the communication channels open and dialogue ongoing. Please feel free to contact me at jypriest@yahoo.com if you want to discuss the details if you are on the fence. Even more, I'd love to hear from you after you've taken the workshop, as each class changes and a different facilitator brings out new information and creates a unique experience. **We are all working toward the same goal of raising happy kids into thriving adults.** Take this easy first step.

The next workshop starts January 14 and is even on our campus!



Project Cornerstone's "Take It Personally" Asset Champion Workshop

This six-session workshop helps adults understand and make a stronger commitment to supporting young people and provides tools, exercises and strategies to help participants fulfill their commitment.

Participants are encouraged to continue meeting after the formal workshops end to support each other's efforts and work together to create new opportunities in their schools, neighborhoods, etc.

Ongoing follow-up coaching and consultation are provided to help individuals and groups to reach their goals.

Mondays, 8:30-10am, starting January 14 (1/14, 1/28, 2/4, 2/11, 2/25, 3/4) at El Carmelo!!!

To sign up, email Soma McCandless at soma@projectcornerstone.org.



People of El Carmelo

Meet 3rd Grade Teacher Michelle Haughney



Her dad worked most of his career for United Airlines. **"That was fun because we got to travel a lot,"** Ms. Haughney said.

EDUCATION

Ms. Haughney moved to California for college. She went to Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles and stayed in the L.A. area for ten years.



CAREER

"I always wanted to be a teacher. I would help my mom all the time in her classroom, and I knew it was what I wanted to do."

Ms. Haughney's favorite things about being a teacher at El Carmelo are the students (**"I love the students"**) and all the wonderful families she has worked with. She also has fun working with people she enjoys.

HOBBIES

Ms. Haughney loves to spend time with family and friends,



doing things outdoors, reading, watching movies, going to sporting events, and finding fun projects to do around the house.



FAMILY

Ms. Haughney is married to a high school teacher.

Their first baby (a boy) is due on January 19th! 



Ms. Haughney was interviewed by 4th grader Madeline S.

CHILDHOOD

Ms. Haughney had a **"great childhood."** She moved a lot when she was little, but most of her growing up took place in Issaquah, Washington, a suburb of Seattle.

For fun, Ms. Haughney loved playing outside with her sister and friends. She also played soccer and read a lot.



Because her mother is a teacher, Ms. Haughney and her sister spent hours playing school.



Ms. Haughney's mother still teaches junior high in Washington.



Does your child want to interview her/his favorite teacher for the Carmeletter?
It's fun and easy.
Email carmeletter@paloaltopta.org.

LIBRARY NEWS



Last week, we celebrated **Inclusive Schools Week** by reading and discussing books about people with special needs.

Over the next few months the primary classes will be hearing the **California Young Reader Medal (CYRM) Books**, and the intermediate level classes will be focusing on **Internet Safety**.



We now have a great selection of **Parent Resource books** in the library. You are welcome to come in and check them out.

The **Sponsor-A-Book** program and **Scholastic Book Fair** have provided funds for a big order of new books which will be arriving in the library! Thank you to all who have contributed to these programs!

Enjoy the Winter Holidays,

--Leslie Bell (Librarian) lbell@pausd.org





WHY I'VE STOPPED BUYING GIFT CARDS

Written By Patricia Campbell, campbell.noroian@gmail.com (an El Carmelo parent)



They're just so darn convenient. That's why we buy them. The perfect way to show appreciation to your child's teacher or soccer coach, birthday presents for kids old enough to love iTunes (i.e., anyone over seven), Starbucks cards for stocking stuffers. The list goes on. I even get them instead of cash when I return things to stores these days. I think the stores must realize that many of these end up getting lost and therefore never redeemed.

The problem is, gift cards (and credit cards, debit cards, and affinity cards) have one huge drawback: they are all made out of PVC plastic. It's the perfect plastic for cards because it's easy to produce, and just rigid and flexible and durable enough to stand up to repeated use. But PVC is also the most polluting plastic on the planet, and using it

for gift cards, which are typically used once and then thrown away, makes no sense whatsoever. **No, they can't be recycled**, no matter what the nice cashier at Target has told you.

PVC, or polyvinyl chloride, contains chlorine as one of its chief ingredients. When incinerated, it releases dioxins and furans, two of the most carcinogenic compounds known to science. That's why PVC is known among environmentalists as "Satan's Resin."

No, you won't get cancer just from handling these cards; we'd all be dead already if that were the case! But the current profusion of PVC cards is a real problem. If they shouldn't be incinerated, they end up in landfills, where they will be with us for decades, or even centuries, to come.

Susan Freinkel, in her excellent book, *Plastic: A Toxic Love Story*, estimates that we throw away more than 75 million credit cards each year. And those figures don't include the much greater number of gift cards, hotel

keycards and other plastic cards we routinely discard. According to Freinkel, there are more than 1.5 billion credit cards in use in the United States today. A stack of them all would reach more than seventy miles into space!

So what seems like a harmless little convenience is, in the long run, not so harmless. That's why I've made the choice to just stop buying them. Starbucks cards can be reloaded online. Amazon sends gift certificates by email. And, trust me, teachers and soccer coaches are more than happy to accept cash.



Patricia Campbell is a parent of a 3rd grader at El Carmelo. In her free time, she likes to find creative ways to re-use plastic.

EL CARMELO'S ANNUAL BOOK EXCHANGE

El Carmelo's Book Exchange is just around the corner, providing a perfect opportunity for trading outgrown books for wonderful new titles.

Students can bring gently used books of any reading level to their classrooms Monday-Thursday, January 28-31. The books will be collected by our Leadership Club and sorted by parent volunteers. On Friday, February 1, a box of grade-appropriate books will be delivered to each classroom for redistribution. Each child may choose one "new-to-you" book for each book donated, up to five. *Every student, even those who cannot donate, will be able to choose at least one "new-to-you" book.*

Please look at your family's collection of children's books to see if there are any you are ready to pass on to new owners. **All donations are welcome, but books for older (4th/5th grade) students are especially appreciated.** Books remaining after the Book Exchange will be donated.



More Book Exchange news to come in Friday folders in January! If you have questions, would like to donate books, or would like to volunteer to sort books, please contact Maria Derrick at wesderrick@mindspring.com.



EL CARMELO'S 36TH ANNUAL AUCTION - WE NEED YOU!

The PTA Auction is the main source for funding activities that enrich our children's education such as noon art, PE and recess equipment, field trips, buses for field trips, library fund, California Explorer, Revolutionary Play, Tall Ship, school site improvements, various social events... and many more.

Every year we are amazed at the support from our parent community.

We need you again this year to make the **Rock 'n Roll Auction** on Saturday, 3/9/13 a success!



You can donate in two ways:

- (1) offer your services such as landscaping, accounting, legal, housekeeping, babysitting, etc.
- (2) put on an event



We highly encourage you to host an event. You'd be surprised how fun and easy it is to do. It's one of the best ways to meet other parents. Your event doesn't have to be a huge party *a la Martha Stewart*, but it can be a smaller event like lunch for 8. Many times parents are afraid to host an event... **so, the Auction Committee is here for you if you need ideas or help in getting a group of hosts together and planning.**

It's easy to donate, go to <http://tinyurl.com/2012elcarmeloauktiondonations>. Check it out, or create your own fun event. Questions? Email Cynthia Tham at cynthia.tham@gmail.com or Kristine Mostofizadeh at kgmostofi@gmail.com.

SITE COUNCIL

The School Site Council is an elected group of parents and staff that work with the principal to develop and evaluate **school improvement programs** and the **school budget**.

El Carmelo's Site Council meets the second Monday every month to discuss a wide range of issues. *Parents are encouraged to attend the monthly meetings and address the council during open forum.* (See the El Carmelo website for meeting dates: [http://](http://elcarmelo.pausd.org/wordpress/?page_id=37)



elcarmelo.pausd.org/wordpress/?page_id=37)

In addition to reviewing school-wide initiatives and performance measures, the council will discuss the **Safe School Plan**. Topics are:

- December: Buildings and Grounds,
 - January: School Climate,
 - February: Traffic and Safety,
 - March: Emergency Preparedness,
 - April: Update and Approve Safe School Plan.
- Questions? Email Kori Shaw at korivan@gmail.com.

PARTNERS IN EDUCATION (PIE)



Palo Alto Partners In Education (PiE) conducted their second donation campaign between November 9 to November 16. At El Carmelo, our goal that week was to collect donations from 50 families who have not donated so far this school year.

During this time, the El Carmelo community showed phenomenal support to PiE on campus. El Carmelo parents

Why is El Carmelo so excellent?

Because PiE pays for:

- Teacher Aides
- Science Enrichment
- Arts Instruction

and teachers wore blue PiE t-shirts and carried PiE signs; kids waved blue pompoms; and Mr. Merritt actively emailed and tweeted about the campaign.

That week, we collected 28 new donations from El Carmelo. We want to meet and exceed El Carmelo's donation

goal this year, and we want to remind everyone to donate to PiE. **Every El Carmelo family can donate an amount that is comfortable to them.** We are a community, and *everyone* should pitch in to help our kids. Click here to donate: <http://www.papie.org>.

All donations are completely tax deductible, and our children will thank you for making this very important contribution to their education and future!

THANK YOU from the PiE team!
Faiza Zarroug, fazarroug@gmail.com,
Kanwal Raza, kanwalsraza@gmail.com,
or Medha Nana, medha_00@yahoo.com

MAKE MONEY FOR EL CARMELO... AT NO COST TO YOU!!!



Do you shop online?

Then, you can raise money for El Carmelo... and it won't cost you a cent! Here are 2 ways:

1. Before you shop at Amazon, simply use the link <http://www.tinyurl.com/ElCarmeloAmazon>. You

can shop as usual after using this initial link. *All your account settings will stay the same, and the site will look the same.* **Bookmark this link now!**

The Amazon School Rewards Program donates between 2 and 15% of your purchase price to the El Carmelo PTA.



2. Sign up once for eScrip at <http://www.tinyurl.com/ElCarmeloEScrip> and enter "El Carmelo PTA" as the group name, click search, and click on the found El Carmelo PTA group. Then follow the steps to sign up. Once signed up, every time you shop at a store that you registered (e.g., your Safeway club card or such), the store will donate a percentage of your purchase price to the El Carmelo PTA. Also, visit the [eScrip Online Mall \(http://www.tinyurl.com/ElCarmeloOnlineMall\)](http://www.tinyurl.com/ElCarmeloOnlineMall) and shop with over 700 merchant partners.



If you have any questions, contact Grit Denker at grit.denker@sri.com or (650) 269-1034.

DECEMBER'S DEVELOPMENTAL ASSET OF THE MONTH: FAMILY LIFE PROVIDES HIGH LEVELS OF LOVE AND SUPPORT.

Family support refers to the ways that parents, siblings, and extended family show love, encouragement, and comfort to each other. Families are the cornerstone of the social support system for youth.



The 2011 survey of Palo Alto youth reveals that while younger youth generally experience and are aware of family support, teenagers do so much less often: 89% of PAUSD elementary school students, 84% of our middle school students, and 66% of our high school students reported this asset, based on their responses to the following statements:

- I get along well with my parents.
- My parents give me help and support when I need it.
- My parents often tell me they love me.

Because adolescents require greater autonomy and independence than younger children, effective family support for older youth takes a different form than in earlier years; however, their need for their families is still strong. Adults are challenged to find a balance between giving youth the love and support they need to navigate their adolescence and the independence they need to develop as individuals.

The following discussion topics can be used to open a dialogue with young people about the ways that they experience family support:

✓ Does your family provide support in a way that's meaningful and easy for you to recognize? Why or why not?

✓ Do you and your parents treat each other with the same kindness and dignity that you'd expect from your friends?

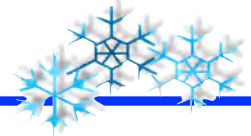
✓ Does your family do things together on a regular basis? Are there any activities that you'd like to share (or be willing to share) with your family?

Winter break provides families with a chance to spend more time together. We hope you enjoy your time together and let them know you love and support them. For some resources and activities to try together, visit: http://www.projectcornerstone.org/pdfs/December_FamilySupport_ResourceKit.pdf.

To get involved in the Palo Alto Developmental Assets Initiative of Project Safety Net, email: devassetspaloalto@gmail.com.

What are "Developmental Assets"?

They are the positive values, relationships, skills and experiences that help children and teens thrive. Young people with **high** asset levels are most likely to make healthy choices, while those with **lower** asset levels are more likely to get involved with negative or risky behaviors like violence, trouble in school, drug and alcohol use and more. (Search Institute created the developmental assets framework. For more information, visit www.search-institute.org.)



In Appreciation

A sincere thanks to the El Carmelo community...



Scholastic Book Fair: *Kate Karagueuzian-Gibbons* and *Maria Derrick* for organizing the amazing Scholastic Book Fair and to *Junko Brierley-Green, Andrea Christensen, Liz Ellis, Erich Heilman, Rosanna Jackson, Julia Jacobsen, Sripriya Kannan, Susy Kim, Tzielan Lee, Carlee Lopez, Kathy Podoll, Dana Roman, Elisa Schmit, Kori Shaw, Shannon Silva, Lucy Tompkin, Sharon Tobias, Jen Wiener, Heather Williamson, Sherwin Wong,* and *Stephanie Youngquist* provided enthusiastic All-Star help of all kinds from setup to teardown. A special thank you to *Ms. Febrenbach, Mr. Walton, Amy Love, and Maggie Schmit* who spent an evening delighting kids with stories during our traditional El Carmelo Milk & Cookies Night, to *Jerry Phok, Rickey Moore,* and *Rosario Yañez* who cheerfully tolerated a complete take-over of the MP Room, and to *Jennifer Fernandez, Ginny Nagao,* and *Mr. Merritt* for unending support before, during, and after the Fair.

PiE Donation Days: *Kanwal Raza, Medha Nanal,* and *Faiza Zarroug,* El Carmelo's brave PiE reps, along with their army of volunteers that wore PiE shirts in the school to raise awareness: *Mr. Merritt, Abby Domine, Alli Wong, Andrea Christensen, Asmita Runge,*

Carlee Lopez, Cynthia Tham, Jenny Schmidt, Kate Healey, Kori Shaw, Kshama Jirage, Lucie Thomas, Maria Derrick, Robin Morris, Susy Kim, Tais Schmitt, Yao Lu, teachers and staff.

Restaurant Night Fundraiser: *Lucinda Brommersma* and *Krissy Green,* for organizing a fun and yummy evening at Chevy's.

See's Candies Fundraiser: *Tzielan Lee,* who provided us the opportunity to order our favorite candy without confronting the long lines.

Directory: *Ram Ramkumar* who once again heroically put together the fabulously useful El Carmelo Directory, *Maria Derrick* who helped to make the Directory as accurate and up-to-date as possible, to *Carlee Lopez, Sarena Kim, Sharon Tobias, Dolly Ivanov* and *Tais Schmitt,* who helped with loose ends/proofreading, and to *Lucinda Brommersma, Medha Nanal,* and *Maria Derrick,* who helped with distribution (along with PTA Membership cards).

Inclusive Schools Week: *Maria Derrick,* who led the lunch time activities on Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday; *Jessamyn Tardif,* who led the activity on Tuesday; and our Principal *Mr. Merritt,* who led the discussion on Friday and made the video

about the dyslexia activity. Thank you also to the Leadership Team, to our librarian *Ms. Bell,* to the teachers, to aides *Paul Lazazzera* and *Ian Cole,* and to volunteers *Kate Karagueuzian-Gibbons, Gwen Fischer, Faiza Zarroug,* and *Jessie Chen,* whose children attended Inclusive Schools in Taiwan and is bringing new insights to our school.



Submissions for next Carmeletter due Thursday, 1/24/13

Email editable document to carmeletter@paloaltopta.org.

For more info, see the El Carmelo PTA website (www.elcarmelo.paloaltopta.org/carmeletter.html).

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