

## Carmel Unified School District Carmel, California

### Creating a Sustainable Legacy

Collaboration, passion, and a lot of hard work are proving place-based, hands-on science lessons are possible and successful for the small seaside community of Carmel, California. In 1995 the Carmel Unified School District (CUSD) approved a project to turn a 10-acre property adjacent to the Carmel Middle School into a natural learning center for its students. The property was named the Hilton Bialek Habitat. Since then, the District schools have had an unwavering focus on teaching students the principles of environmental stewardship, ecoliteracy, and sustainability through the Hilton Bialek Habitat and other programs.

The District now boasts environmental-focused programs in all of their schools and is close to becoming the first school district in the nation to have all of its schools named NOAA Ocean Guardian Schools, a program that requires schools to complete a conservation project to preserve or protect local waters.

Examples of these school-run efforts include Tularcitos Elementary School students conducting trash audits at lunchtime to record the number of students bringing waste-free lunches. Carmel River Elementary School's volunteer group "Blue Crew Litter Bugs" keep the surrounding area and watershed free of trash. Carmel High School's Environmental Club sold stainless steel water bottles and placed filtered water dispensers throughout the school to raise awareness of one-use plastics. And Captain Cooper Elementary School has a partnership with the Monterey Regional Waste Management District to work on vermicomposting and paper recycling.



Photo Credit: Monterey County Weekly

Newest CUSD addition green classroom aims to educate upwards of 2,500 children a year as a "best practices" model of sustainable building, with Energy Star® appliances, solar panels and 4,500-gallon rainwater catchment tanks.

### School District Snapshot

Commitment to produce students who are prepared for their role as citizens in the global community. The District focus includes ecoliteracy, demonstration projects, and a dedication to sustainability practices and programs.

### District Climate Actions

- Established ecoliteracy programs in all schools
- Increased recycling efforts through coordination with a waste collection company, teachers, school officials, maintenance staff, and students
- Developed Habitat project to improve science hands-on learning opportunities and environmental stewardship
- Utilizes grant funding to purchase re-usable utensils and items for waste-free lunch programs
- Green Classroom completed in 2012
- Supported a living laboratory for Carmel Middle School (CMS) science classes

### School Environmental Initiatives

- Carmelo School - Incorporates waste and litter free lunch program and activities at all age levels
- Tularcitos Elementary School - Promotes waste-free lunches and audits student lunchtime trash
- Captain Cooper Elementary School - Implemented a Zero Waste Lunch program and partners with local Waste Management District on vermicomposting and paper recycling
- Carmel River Elementary School - Volunteer student group "Blue Crew" keep the surrounding watershed free of trash
- Carmel Middle School - Integrates the Habitat facility into all grade levels
- Carmel High School - Environmental Club placed filtered water dispensers around school to raise awareness of one-use plastics

### Hilton Bialek Habitat and MEarth Programs

- Summer and Winter Camps, and After School and Weekend Programs
- Community Education Workshops open to the public includes "Sustainable Homes & Gardens"
- Federal Work Study Internship Program

## How has CUSD, MEarth, and the Habitat complemented and strengthened the programs for their community?

The District and community needs resulted in a call for the Habitat to expand with more staff and programming opportunities. A non-profit organization called MEarth (pronounced Me Earth) was established in 2008 to reach the underserved areas of Monterey County. This unique partnership through the CUSD, the Habitat, MEarth, and their community partners has allowed them to blossom and provide a dynamic and diverse set of educational programs focused on the environment and sustainability, including their newly opened green building project – an eco-classroom. Today, the Habitat serves over 2,500 students a year from Seaside, Marina, Monterey, and Salinas and introduces them to lessons in sustainability, healthy lifestyle choices, organic gardening, biodiversity, ecoliteracy, and much more.

The Habitat's model programming was recognized in 2006 with a Governor's Environmental and Economic Leadership Award for Children's Environmental Education. The Habitat includes a native plant nursery, organic garden with an outdoor kitchen, and an ornithology amphitheater. Since then, they have continued to build upon a solid foundation of collaboration, education, and sustainable design. The staff at MEarth enjoy every opportunity to share their extraordinary accomplishments with their students and the community.

Since the Habitat project began, they have seen an increase in the number of bird species rise from 50 in 1995 to an astounding 185 different species in 2011.



Photo Credit: Carmel-by-the-Sea Garden Club

The Carmel-by-the-Sea Garden Club funded the plantings for the Habitat Science Project on ten vacant acres at Carmel Middle School in 1995.

“Carmel Unified School District’s schools not only recognize the importance of teaching and facilitating ecoliteracy, but they have become role models for fellow administrators and educators in other local districts.”

- Kimberle Herring,  
Public Education Coordinator  
Monterey Regional Waste  
Management District



The Green Classroom under construction.

The District is already working on their next set of goals and objectives for 2015 through increasing efficiency, conservation, and environmental literacy. Activities will include energy audits and implementing a solar solution.

Hilton Bialek Habitat



Contact Information:

Andrea Lewis, Executive Director  
MEarth at the Hilton Bialek Habitat  
P.O. Box 223702  
Carmel, CA 93922  
Phone: 831-624-1032  
[www.MEarthCarmel.org](http://www.MEarthCarmel.org)

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