

Transcript of Interview with Clay Carpenter by Dakota Carpenter

Interviewee: Clay Carpenter

Interviewer: Dakota Carpenter

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Location (Interviewee): Cave Creek, Arizona

Transcriber: Dakota Carpenter based on automatic transcription by otter.ai

Abstract:

Clay Carpenter was born in Devils Lake, North Dakota and grew up multiple small North Dakota towns. He studied Elementary Education and Physical Education at the University of North Dakota, where he met Melody Carpenter, his wife. They moved to Albuquerque, New Mexico, where they work in the education system. They had a son, Dakota Carpenter, and moved to Arizona shortly after. In Arizona they continued to work as educators with Clay teaching in elementary school, middle school, and high school before becoming a high school administrator. While working in Arizona they adopted two sons, Artem Carpenter and Andrey Carpenter. Clay's long experience in the field of education as both a teacher and an administrator provides him with a wealth of knowledge, experiences, and a view of the changes made in the education system. In this interview, he reflects on the coronavirus and the affect it has had on the education system, students, and teachers.

DC 0:01

Okay, I'm Dakota Carpenter and this is an interview for History 485 history in the wild. And to get started, can you tell me today's date and time?

CC 0:12

It is November 28. And it is 12:36pm.

DC 0:18

Okay, can you let me know your name?

CC 0:20

Clay Carpenter

DC 0:21

Okay. Thank you. And where do you live?

CC 0:24

I live in Cave Creek, Arizona.

DC 0:26

And that's where we're doing the interview today. Correct?

CC 0:29

Correct.

DC 0:30

Okay. So, can you explain what you do for work and where?

CC 0:34

I'm an assistant principal in the Peoria Unified School District at Sunrise Mountain High School.

DC 0:42

Okay. And how long have you been there?

CC 0:44

I have been there. This is my 15th year at Sunrise Mountain High School.

DC 0:52

So would you say you're familiar with everything that goes on day to day?

CC 0:56

Yeah, I work day to day with whether it be I mainly do attendance and discipline, but I also do staff evaluations, curriculum work, staff development, little bit everything.

DC 1:13

Okay. So moving a little bit towards the pandemic? Have you ever experienced anything like this before?

CC 1:22

No. And this is my, actually my 37th year in education. And I have never had anything slightly resembling or remotely resembling this pandemic.

DC 1:38

Hard to imagine anybody has really. So, when did, about when did you first learn about the pandemic and the Coronavirus?

CC 1:48

Really, I first started hearing about it in, you know, middle end of January, beginning of February, you know, started talking hearing about it and talking about it a little bit.

[Dogs Bark and recording paused]

DC 2:07

So, when you first heard about the pandemic, and the coronavirus and everything going on, what did you think?

CC 2:14

You know, we started talking about it as administrators at school and we didn't really know what to expect. We didn't you know, there were reports it was going to be really bad there reports that, you know, it's going to pass quickly. So we, you know, we just kind of really took a wait and see attitude, we've had to, you know, kind of wait for some guidance from our district office from the state, kind of what we want to do with it at that point in time.

DC 2:47

So, what did you like, personally, think about it? Did you think it was going to have such a huge impact on daily life for not just students, but in general? And did you think was going to last as long as it has so far?

CC 2:58

When it first started, I, I didn't think it was going to impact the students and staff as much as it did. Again, I had no idea really, what it consisted of. But my thought was, it was going to be something that would maybe run six, eight weeks and be gone. I had no idea. I didn't know what the extent of it was at that point.

DC 3:32

How do you think your opinion has changed about the Coronavirus since you first heard about it?

CC 3:38

Since I first heard about it, I have changed my thoughts is I don't know when it's going to end. Even with a vaccine coming out. I- I don't know what that's going to do. How many people are going to want to take it, how many aren't going to want to take it. You know, wearing a mask at, is become a part of everyday life. Any place I go any place at school, all students and staff have to be wearing them at all times unless they're eating. You know, we've things I never thought would ever happen. We have arrows in our hallways directing going in one way, door's locked so they can't enter another way. Just social distancing, plate placards put on our floor in the cafeteria, so they all stay apart, social distance when they're in line to get food. We've had to set tables up so they were sitting every other seat. And then on the opposite side, they were on the every other seat just opposite of that, you know, so that no one was directly facing one another sitting right beside one another. That's inside. Outside, we have tables built for eight. We only allow four people at each table now. Spread the tables all over the place. It's really impacted how we work at school. We have staff that don't want to use any paper at all, because they don't want things that kids have touched. They still, you know, take things turned into them electronically. We have teachers that have basically built a bubble around where their desk is or their teaching area with, with ship- clear shower curtains, plexi glass, you know, and they made hand sanitizers, so they- were they can add a PVC pipe, where they can step on it to use so they don't have to touch it to get hand sanitizer. I mean, things have just things that we bought for the school, you know, extra power cords, so that they can charge their laptops at school when they're working.

Hand sanitizer stations that mount on the wall in every single classroom. It's- we have just received now at our school air purifiers for every classroom. You know, it's just things that we continue.

DC 6:14

So those- once the pandemics over are those things going to stay in place? Are you going to maybe think about moving them into storage? And then bringing them back out? If you need be? Or is it just kind of one of the things you weren't sure about yet?

CC 6:26

Well, the- I mean, the hand sanitizers, those will keep it, we mounted them to walls, we'll keep those in every classroom, whether they're always filled or not. I don't know, the directional arrows in the hallways, I mean, we just put them down with painters tape, so they come up real easy. But it- I mean; the flow of students has really been good. I mean, granted, we have a third of our school, staying online and not on campus. So, we only have 1500 now instead of 2000, which makes a big difference. Cafeteria? Yeah, well, you know, we'll let them sit together again, you know, that kind of stuff. But a lot of the things that we've done will probably just stay in place, because it's becoming commonplace right now.

DC 7:16

And it's not, they aren't necessarily big, huge changes that you'd have to adjust to afterwards. It's just like, well, we'll follow these guidelines all the time and hopefully, prevent stuff, or we'll have hand sanitizer available all the time. Hopefully, it keeps sickness down in general.

CC 7:34

Yeah, I mean, it really it hasn't. I mean, the initial startup cost was expensive. But we were fortunate enough that, you know, the district got grants that were able to take care of those things. I mean, one of the- a big impact that's been is athletics at the high school. [Coughs] Excuse me. Our football team, for example, I mean, we used to play before a stadium that would probably have, on the average 4000 fans, a home game. Well, right now, we're allowed for the home team to have- each player gets two tickets that they can give to whether it's parents, friends, whoever, and each visitor, they get two tickets for each player, our band gets two for each parent, and our cheer squad gets two for each parent. So, we're looking at maybe 500 people in the stands. From going 4000 down to 500. It's- [Unintentional talking over each other]

DC 8:42

So, you got like a fraction. You have a fraction of the people and empty stands pretty much every game.

CC 8:47

It's empty stands and kids are, you know, they're playing for their friends, a lot of them out there. And you know, and, and those- their friends that the students don't get to see that we do because we just, we want to try and keep everyone as safe as we possibly can.

DC 9:02

I mean, that's the that's the big thing is keeping everybody safe and still trying to allow these things to happen. And speaking of your football team, you've made the state tournament this year, and with a very good run, and a good chance of winning. How do you expect the Coronavirus to, and the pandemic restrictions to affect that?

CC 9:22

Well, you know, the funny thing is, is we've had our limited number of fans allowed at the game. For example, last night was the first night of the playoffs. And we actually had almost 1000 people there because well, let me rephrase that we had 1000 tickets available 600 for our side because that was at 25% capacity and 400 for the visitor side which was 25% capacity. Our side sold out their 600. I'm not exactly certain what the other side but it wasn't 400 people, I know that. So is the largest crowd we've had all year.

DC 10:04

But it's still, again, a tiny amount compared to your regular season games.

CC 10:08

And it's Yeah, and, you know, for example, I don't know if you've ever been to football games at a high school, but the kids cheering, the band playing and the cheerleaders. That's a big part of what goes on. And with the pandemic, our marching band doesn't get to march on the field. Like the game last night, we didn't even have a pep band there. And the game before, we didn't have a pep band, just because the pandemic has affected band members, so that they can't perform because of the- they may not have it, but they were close to somebody who did. And all of a sudden you do the social distancing, and you do the, the tracing of everybody. And we didn't have enough to have a band even. So, we've gone two games without any band. And it really, really makes an impact of a game without a band.

DC 11:09

Not just from the stand and the fan perspective, but for the players too.

CC 11:15

Oh yeah.

DC 11:15

That's like a big- hearing the band playing, hearing the fans cheering for you, it's a big motivator, you want to go out and win the game, not just for yourself and for your team. But for everybody watching and supporting you too.

CC 11:28

For example, every time the team would do something, whether it's a, you know, an interception, or stopping them on third or fourth down or scoring a touchdown or field goal, the band plays,

they get that excitement, they get everybody going. And when you don't have that it really, really makes a difference.

DC 11:45

Especially when you're so used to it.

CC 11:47

Yeah.

DC 11:47

And that's probably a big thing is these kids are all used to hearing the, hearing the band play, when they get an interception, hearing the fans scream when they when they get a touchdown.

CC 11:59

As one of the seniors last night at the game, came up to me and said, you know, Mr. Carpenter, I really miss seeing you at school every day. It's you know, with this pandemic, he said, I just I miss seeing you because I, I always stopped by your office, or you saw me on campus. And I really miss seeing you every day.

DC 12:18

Oh, and because you mentioned it kind of before we started recording. Your football team is almost entirely online. Because your coach didn't want them to take the chance of being sick and being out for the game- for a game or two or season depending on what happens. So, they transitioned almost entirely online to try to avoid that.

CC 12:38

Yeah, I think there may be four or five of our football players that are on campus for classes, the rest did all go virtual, just because of- not that they were afraid they were going to get the Coronavirus, but they were afraid someone else that's in one of their classes, they may be sitting by or whatever would get it. And then when we do the tracing back, they were too close. That means they're going to be quarantined for 10 days, and you know, you missed, there's two weeks football you missed. Right now, there's two weeks of football left, so if one of them came in contact or that their season would be done at this point.

DC 13:17

And it's- I mean, a lot of these players are lucky to even have a season at all, some of the way things were starting off and how late season started in a lot of different places. So, for some of these players that are seniors, they would have missed out on their senior season.

CC 13:33

And our, our football team has 28 seniors so it's- Yeah, they would have missed a lot that their final season. Yeah, it would have been a lot. You know, there's one of the teams in the five eight playoffs right now that had to forfeit the first game. So, they're eliminated because of the

pandemic. You know, there's a lot of teams that weren't able to play at all this fall because of that pandemic. You know, we're knock on wood, [knocks on table] fortunate that we're able to do that right now.

DC 14:02

Yeah it's- so these changes are- this pandemic in general and the Coronavirus has definitely really affected these student athletes- students and student athletes, especially because they have their regular school commitments, and then after school commitments with sports and stuff. And you've mentioned- kind of some of the changes that were made for sporting events like capacity limits and stuff. What other kinds of changes were made to insure the safety of not just those students like the student athletes, but students in general, you kind of listed some of the, like things you brought in and some other changes. Are there any other?

CC 14:44

You know, we have a lot of the classrooms that- I mean definitely utilizing their space more efficiently, you know, spreading desks out because the way we had our schedule set this year is our teachers are teaching virtually and in person at the same time. So their class may have 30 kids on their roster. But majority of the classes only have between 20 and 25 students in them, because the rest are still online. So, it allows them to spread the desks out, have them facing one direction trying, you know, do as much so-social distancing as possible in the classroom.

DC 15:28

So, while the class sizes in general aren't smaller, there's less people in them.

CC 15:32

Yes.

DC 15:33

And that's pretty much across the board for most classes.

CC 15:36

Yeah. And, you know, for most of the students that are online or virtual, they are very successful, if they want to be, I mean, our teachers, they definitely give the resources, the lessons for them and the things to do. But especially freshmen, sophomores, it's really difficult to have that discipline to sit at a computer to watch a teacher- watch a lesson, go through it, ask questions through Microsoft Teams, those kinds of things, it's very difficult for someone at that age to be focused enough to do that, unless you are a true student who's really wants to work in, you know, you probably have 80% of your students will do that and will work hard, but that 20% you know, with the D's or F's right now, if they were in person, that would probably be a 10%.

DC 16:32

So it's still like a lot of the ones who maybe aren't necessarily succeeding as well, probably- there's a lot of those probably wouldn't necessarily succeed as well in person, but you'd be quicker for the feedback and to make sure they do listen to turn it around.

CC 16:47

Yeah, exactly. Because what- when the students in the classroom with a teacher, they can see if they're participating, they can see if they're engaged in what they're doing. And they can, you know, look at it, and they can correct a mistake right away when they see it. But if they're virtual, that, you know, they make log into that lesson and be watching cartoons, they may be playing their video games, they may be doing whatever else, and, you know, kind of half in and half out, and the teacher doesn't know, they don't find that.

DC 17:17

The teacher doesn't find out until the assignments for that lesson are due a week later, or whatever.

CC 17:22

Yeah, because a lot of times when they have the students on virtually they- to ask them not to turn your camera on. and not to turn their mic on unless they're talking. And then they turn the camera on also, and they're talking, because with so many students online, and virtual, the bandwidth, it's just can't handle all of that when if you think of as we have a school of about 2100. Well, if you had everybody online, that's taken a lot of Computer Space, a lot of bandwidth, and most places can handle that at one time.

DC 17:58

But you also don't want the kid to forget he's accidentally on while, he like changes clothes or something.

CC 18:03

Yeah. You've- I've heard stories and seen that on the news where some will do that kind of thing. And it just kind of pops up.

DC 18:10

And that's something you definitely want to avoid right now.

CC 18:13

Yeah.

DC 18:14

So, you have all these changes that have been made. So do you think as a school and even as a district maybe, do you think the changes that have been made for students and even for staff and like staff have been successful in stopping the spread and preventing it within your school and within your district?

CC 18:31

I- you know, if I look at our school, I would say yes, and it has helped, because I don't know, of anyone on our campus that has actually got coronavirus from someone at school.

DC 18:49

If they have it, it was from somebody off campus

CC 18:52

All the students that we've had, which is [knocks on table] knock on wood again has been a minimal compared to the other schools in our district. It has been from someone outside, when we've had to quarantine students, it's because they were close to that student in class. So, you know, we end up having to quarantine, sometimes 20, sometimes 40, sometimes 60 kids, depending on what classes they have, where they're lo- sitting in the class, that kind of thing. But it's always- we haven't- knock on wood [knocks on table and dog barks] passed that yet. You know, we haven't had it where they've passed it from one student to another on campus. So, we've been very fortunate in that aspect right now.

DC 19:37

That's good. I mean, everyone's got to try to do their own part and you can't really control where they go afterwards and who they interact with after school.

CC 19:45

I mean, that's just it we can- we can only do so much in the classroom or in the school itself. It's and we just hope when everyone goes out, they make those wise choices.

DC 19:57

And it seems like everything you've done in school at least has been pretty effective.

CC 20:01

So far yes.

DC 20:03

And so you have an interesting- at least I think, an interesting perspective on this. You're an administrator, you work in a school, you aren't necessarily a teacher. But you see how teachers react, you see how students react, and you see how it's affecting all of them. What do you think, your perspective and your position- What kind of view do you think of the pandemic and the Coronavirus in response to it, do you think that you have that others might not?

CC 20:33

You know, I, I look at it as something that I can't really control where it's going, or what's going to happen with it. All I can do is, you know, wear my mask, social distance, do what I can do, and try to preach that to others, just it schools is to do the same thing wear your mask I mean,

going around campus, whenever I'm out about making sure get that mask on, make, it's got to cover your nose, too. I mean, more the information has come out as said that- you know, it initially said, Yeah, wear masks because it prevents you from giving it to somebody else. But now they're saying the mask may even prevent you from getting it from somebody else if you have it. So, you know, we have those believers, that man, they're going to have their mask on all the time. And there's those others that you have to keep reminding him, you know, it's not just students and staff members are the same way, we have some staff members who will say, is not going to matter, it's, it's, it shouldn't be worrying about it. And we have on the opposite side of the spectrum, or it's like, they don't want to come close to anybody, and they're afraid for their lives, that they're going to get it, you know, so, you know, we have to try and get- keep a balance and have the teachers know that we're going to do everything we can to support them as far as safety measures that we can take.

DC 22:10

I mean, I think you're probably kind of in the same boat as I am, I guess it's, I don't, I obviously don't want to catch it, I don't want to get sick. But my big concern isn't me getting sick, it's me catching it, and then spreading it to somebody else who is vulnerable, and who could be really affected by it. And I want to do whatever I can to prevent that from happening. And if that's just- if I can do that by wearing a mask and staying inside as much as possible, I'm going to do that.

CC 22:39

And that's- I look at it like a year from now, I'll probably still be wearing a mask- even- who knows how- that may be a thing that we do forever in education. You know, I mean, I don't know. Because there's a lot that don't want to get a shot. They don't want to get vaccinated. We have lots of don't want to get vaccinated for things we have now Here's something new, they don't really know exactly what the side effects may be. So, people are going ehh I don't want to get that.

DC 23:12

Especially with so many people now not even really believing in the virus or not believing that it's as serious as it is, really.

CC 23:21

Well. You know, it's funny, I think maybe more might believe in it now. Because there was so much before the election saying, oh, as soon as the election is done, this virus is going to go away.

DC 23:32

And now it's continuing after the election. And maybe it's okay.

CC 23:35

It's not- not getting any less at all. It's just, you know, it seems to be getting greater. I mean, now they're predicting maybe 360,000 deaths by the middle of December. It's crazy.

DC 23:50

So we mentioned- you mentioned kind of like wearing a mask a year from now. Do you think that and any- What else do you think might be a kind of long-term changes made by like, public and maybe even government mandated kind of things, because of this?

CC 24:07

I think schools are going to probably- will probably keep masks well into next school year. Just as a safety precaution to make sure we're doing everything we can to keep from spreading it. I think it's going to come to maybe government buildings, probably required to wear them. Businesses, it'll probably be an optional thing, but most businesses, if they're sensible, they're going to say, yeah, we're going to still enforce that. You know, I think it's, it's just something that's going to become a way of life. If you look at some parts of the world. They they've been wearing masks for years, for pollution,

DC 24:55

For pollution, or even just when it's like a kind of personal thing where if you're feeling sick, you throw a mask on.

CC 25:01

Yeah. You know, so they've been doing other places around the world. You know, maybe it's something we need to consider doing here all the time to. You know, not just looking out for yourself,-

DC 25:12

[Unintentional talking over each other] Looking out for-

CC 25:13

Looking for others as well.

DC 25:15

I think that's a big thing is- I think this pandemic might cause a shift in that direction. Where you don't just worry about yourself being sick all the time. You worry about how you being sick could affect others.

CC 25:26

Yeah, it's not just me. It's those around me.

DC 25:30

Yeah. At least that's something I hope will- more- grow more and become more prevalent anyway.

CC 25:37

Definitely.

DC 25:38

And so like a little veering away from work and everything else, did you have any plans for this year, that you think the pandemic kind of disrupted, like trips, vacations, anything like that?

CC 25:53

I- you know, I don't really think we really had any major trips or anything planned, but it would have been nice to get together with everybody for Easter, and you know, just getting family gatherings for Easter, Thanksgiving. I know, we're not going to for Christmas again this year. But just you know, family gatherings for those kinds of things. were nice. I mean, just going as a family going to the fair, going to the you know, here in Phoenix, Zoo lights, those kinds of things that we know, we just kind of took for granted and would go and we would do, we're not able to and that, that's something we never get back. But to make- remain safe we can't do those things.

DC 26:38

And even things like not even quite that big, just going out to eat. [Some laughter] Going out to eat now is picking food up on the way home.

CC 26:47

Yeah, it's like, we're going to go out to eat tonight. What do you want me to bring in? Out-And-In.

DC 26:52

And then so I guess kind of one final question is, this is going on almost a year- we're getting close to- is the pandemic- I'd say it's really been going on. How much longer do you think it's going to go? Whether it's just restrictions, like you're saying wearing a mask into the next year or bigger restrictions, like businesses being closed?

CC 27:15

I really don't see- I mean, I think it'll decrease from pandemic proportions. But as far as the virus, I think it's going to be here forever. How we choose to act and get vaccinated, whether we have to social distance forever- but I think- we're- it's something that's going to be- maybe it'll become seasonal like the flu. Maybe it'll be like the chicken pox where it just hits a certain few. I have no idea. But I think it's going to be here for years to come.

DC 27:56

It's, and it's really too early to make any concrete decisions or guesses, I guess, because of the way it's gone so far.

CC 28:03

And I'm not anything close to a medical professional. So, anything I would say about is just sheer speculation and guessing based on what I hear.

DC 28:15

Okay, well, thank you very much for your time, and I hope you have a good rest of your day

CC 28:20

And you do the same. Thank you very much.