

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

February 24, 2009

TO: Board of Trustees  
FROM: E. Schmidt, Superintendent of Schools  
SUBJECT: Waldorf Alternative Program  
ORIGINATOR: D. Barrett, Assistant Superintendent  
RESOURCE  
STAFF: Gloria Chalmers, Sandy Forster, Veda Lastiwka, Bob Morter

RECOMMENDATION

That an elementary Waldorf Alternative Program be re-approved for implementation in September 2009.

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**Background:** A Waldorf alternative program was approved in June 1979 for implementation in September of that year. It operated successfully for many years and in the 1985-1986 school year had an enrolment of 208 students. That year a group of parents desiring greater control of the program established a private school in the fall of 1986. This had a negative impact on enrolment in the District program, leading to a recommendation to board in December 1990 to close the program effective June 30, 1991.

The District has continued to maintain cordial relations with families interested in a Waldorf approach to teaching and learning. Many of these families have been and are continuing to be supported through the District's Argyll Home Education Centre.

Over the past year, staff from the Programs and Planning units has been meeting with representatives of the Waldorf Education Society of Edmonton (WESE) to explore the re-approval of an elementary Waldorf alternative program for offering in the District.

**Rationale for Recommendation:** Previous district experience with offering Waldorf-based programming, and the existence of approximately 1,000 Waldorf schools worldwide, including one in Calgary, demonstrates that provision of the prescribed provincial curriculum is possible using the Waldorf philosophical/pedagogical approach. Waldorf education is "based on the understanding that the key to developing critical thinking is an active and creative imagination." The intent is to engage the head, heart and hands in learning, as well as encouraging parents to take an active supportive role in the program. It provides an option for parents seeking a holistic learning option with significant opportunities for parent involvement. To date, without program approval, the WESE has indication of sufficient parental interest for a kindergarten class and continued interest in their pre-school offerings.

**Proposed Program:** The proposed program (Appendix I) offers the Alberta Program of Studies through a Waldorf pedagogy which places additional emphasis on handwork, eurhythmy, music, drama, painting/drawing and foreign language instruction. It supports the changing abilities of the growing child by pacing based on a particular interpretation of developmental levels. Thus, certain mathematic concepts are introduced earlier but reading and writing are introduced more gradually. The difference in pacing between Waldorf and mainstream approaches are reconciled by the first standardized Provincial Achievement Tests in Grade 3. Students in the program will write the Provincial Achievement Tests and be provided with written appraisals of student progress three times a year, the assessment in the program de-emphasizes testing and relies more heavily on the child's main lesson books, daily behaviour, participation and regular and frequent parent-teacher conferences.

**Fees:** The provision of the program entails some additional resources related to the areas of emphasis. It is anticipated that fees of approximately \$40 to \$100 per year (or \$4 to \$10 a month) may be required. Additionally, WESE would provide periodic access to specialists (e.g., Eurhythmists) as part of their support to the program.

**Staffing:** As with all district alternative programs, staffing would be coordinated through Personnel Services. The principal would be responsible for the selection of staff but WESE would have input into the principal's process. There would be an expectation that staff in the program would meet district hiring criteria and teachers in the program would have or be willing to acquire Waldorf training. WESE has advised of current district teachers who are Waldorf trained and who are interested in teaching in a Waldorf program. A current staff member with advanced Waldorf training has indicated a willingness to mentor teachers. As well, WESE has been providing Waldorf training opportunities to staff in their pre-school programs and has identified training opportunities with Waldorf programs in other locations. WESE is prepared to assist in providing staff formal part time and summer opportunities at recognized institutes in Western Canada.

**Plans for Implementation:** In consultation with Program Distribution, school staff and WESE, it is recommended that should the proposed alternative program be approved, it should be located at Avonmore School. Implementation will be dependent on sufficient enrolment during the registration process. It is intended that the program would begin at Kindergarten (or Kindergarten and Grade 1) and expand one year at a time. As well, the District will lease space to WESE for the provision of Parent-Tot groups and a Waldorf Nursery School program.

Avonmore School is the recommended site for a number of reasons. It is situated in the south central sector, and ideally located to serve both this sector and the south east sector. The existing Waldorf preschool programs are located in this sector. These programs are well attended with the majority of the participants residing in the sector, and these children will form the core of our initial enrolment. Avonmore School currently has a Kindergarten to Grade 6 regular program, the Nellie McClung program for Grades 7 to 9 and is a site for Community Learning Skills and Community Learning Skills/Behaviour and Learning Assistance. The provincially rated capacity of the building is 633 students and there are currently 300 in the existing programs. Given the size of the facility, it is an ideal site for multi-track programming.

**Program Establishment Costs:** Establishment grant funding for the elementary Waldorf alternative would be consistent with other alternative programs. New alternative programs receive a one-time establishment grant of \$319 per student in the first year, plus \$319 per student for enrolment growth in the second year.

**Next Steps:** If the recommendation is approved, the District and WESE will immediately advertise the program and consider staff for the program. The school will work with WESE to provide a smooth transition of their early learning options and to set up a Waldorf kindergarten classroom that could be used to demonstrate programming for prospective families.

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APPENDIX I – Waldorf Alternative Program Description

## WALDORF ALTERNATIVE PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Waldorf is an education philosophy practiced in approximately 1,000 schools worldwide. It consists of an academic curriculum (in this case the Alberta Education Program of Studies) augmented with artistic, physical, social and linguistic components and the Waldorf holistic teaching philosophy and pacing (see program overview in board report).

Expectations of a Waldorf education are totally compatible with provincial and district expectations. The students are expected to develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes that will prepare them for life after high school. A complete Waldorf education should allow students to:

- Demonstrate desirable personal characteristics such as respect, responsibility, fairness, honesty, caring, loyalty and an understanding of how to make decisions
- Recognize the importance of personal well-being and appreciate how family and community contribute to that well-being
- Know the basic requirements of an active, healthful lifestyle
- Understand and appreciate literature, the arts and the creative process
- Read for information, understanding and enjoyment
- Write and speak clearly, accurately and appropriately for the context
- Research an issue thoroughly and evaluate the credibility and reliability of information sources
- Demonstrate critical creative thinking skills in problem solving and decision making
- Use mathematics to solve problems in business, science and daily life situations
- Understand the scientific method, the nature of science and technology and their application to daily life
- Know the history and geography of Canada and have a general understanding of world history and geography
- Understand Canada's political, social and economic systems within a global context
- Respect the cultural diversity and common values of Canada
- Demonstrate competence in using information technologies
- Know how to work independently and as part of a team
- Manage time and other resources needed to complete a task
- Demonstrate initiative, flexibility and persistence
- Evaluate their own endeavours and continually strive to improve
- Have the desire and realize the need for lifelong learning

The additional Waldorf content extends or enriches the Alberta Program of Studies and is presented within the context of the Waldorf philosophy. The rationale and approach for each area follows:

**Handwork:** Experience in handwork (knitting, sewing, crocheting, cross-stitching, modeling in beeswax, clay and woodworking) increases mobility and dexterity in the fine motor muscles, and thus helps to strengthen the physical thought processes. With counting stitches and rows, using different colours and lengths, the handwork component supports attentiveness to numbers and flexibility in thinking. In transforming materials such as

beeswax, clay and wood, a shaping of space and a metamorphosis of form is undergone which molds thinking processes. The training in concentration goes far in supporting problem-solving abilities in later years. In addition, children are encouraged by the sense of self-esteem that arises as a result of having made something practical and beautiful.

**Eurhythm:** The element of eurhythm in Waldorf education seeks to bridge the experience of movement and the experience of knowledge in the mind. There are many exercises in eurhythm which foster the differing stages of a child's development – from simple clapping and walking in different rhythms to group exercises. A number of exercises are specially designed as social education, to make the children aware of each other.

**Music:** Music plays an important, daily role in Waldorf education. The day begins with singing and recorder playing, bringing the children together in a focused activity that requires all to listen and tune into themselves and the group. Through studying and making music, children learn about the world and themselves. The elements of music teach about time, order space and sequence. The words and sounds help children to experience their feelings and thoughts in deeper ways. Through making music together, they are challenged to learn the social graces of expressing themselves thoughtfully, sensitively and with the right timing.

**Drama:** In learning a part and going on stage with it, abstract ideas and feelings can speak to the student indirectly through concrete experience. The main lesson or language studies provide the material for drama performances, recitations and the practice of speech. The task of working on a play together contributes to the social dynamic of the class. Every child moves and speaks, however small the part, in a Waldorf school play. Completion of the performance leads to a shared experience of pride in accomplishment, an experience that strengthens the bond among the students of the class.

**Painting/Drawing:** Especially in the early grades, the emphasis in painting is on cultivating a sense for colour and form. Students have a chance to express the experience of their main lessons in this format, allowing them to incorporate what they are learning in both an intellectual and artistic manner. Gradually they work more from their own fantasy, as their thinking process and individuality develops. Form drawing is presented as an introduction to and evolution of writing. Early grades develop straight and curved lines into letters. As the student progresses in age, so their drawing takes on more complex forms and shapes, eventually developing perspective, mirroring their own experience in evolving personality.

**International Languages:** The purpose of the study of languages is to develop the ability to communicate. This raises one's social conscience and fosters an important objective of Waldorf education: to cultivate an interest in others, which will inspire students to share their knowledge, abilities and experiences. International languages in Waldorf programs are an integral part of the program. Ideally, two languages of different origins are taught from first to twelfth grade. Each language, with its particular music, rhythm of intonation, articulation and the structure of its parts, offers a special experience to the child. It is up to each program, in accordance with local needs and circumstances, the languages that are taught.

The intent is to begin with French as a second language beginning Kindergarten or Grade 1 and to investigate possibilities for a second language.