

# **WINTERBERRY CHARTER SCHOOL PQR**

## **FEBRUARY-MARCH 2013**

### **INTRODUCTION**

From February 25 through March 8, 2013, the Winterberry Charter School (WCS) Faculty were observed teaching main lessons and specialty classes and subsequently participated in a series of individual interviews as part of a comprehensive program quality review (PQR) conducted by Hoeffcker Burgess Consulting (HBC). Parents, administration and staff members were also interviewed as part of an all-day workshop on March 2 and subsequent individual interviews during the week of March 4. An Appreciative Inquiry (AI) approach was selected as the review methodology. Five (5) key result areas (KRAs) were examined:

1. Educational and Program Excellence
2. Leadership and Governance
3. Community Stewardship and Development of School Culture
4. Site Stewardship
5. Financial Sustainability

### ***1. EDUCATIONAL AND PROGRAM EXCELLENCE***

Educational and Program Excellence and Site Stewardship were the focus areas for HBC's faculty observations and interviews. Seven (7) out of eight (8) class teachers; the sole kindergarten teacher; three (3) specialty teachers (the Russian language and folk dance teacher, the movement and music teacher and the handwork teacher); and the school's reading specialist (RTI ) were observed and interviewed by HBC. Feedback sessions with individual teachers were conducted after each observation.

The interviews that followed as part of the debriefing were informed by "positive topics of inquiry" designed to surface faculty experiences in the targeted KRAs during the 2012-13 school year which were:

- *successful matriculation by WSC's teachers through Rudolf Steiner College's hybrid Master's Degree Program or another certified Waldorf teacher training program*
- *academic and intra-collegial norms inspired by rigorous pedagogical standards*
- *intra-faculty support and sharing of skills*
- *strong pedagogical relationship between class teachers, specialty subject teachers and resource specialists (special education, RTI) and heightened awareness of the children's experiences in special subject classes*
- *effective utilization of teacher assistants for greater student success*
- *clarifying the distinction between the practice of faculty "coaching" and that of faculty "mentoring"*

The reflections and recommendations below are based on the direct observation of teachers, interviews with teachers and interviews with parents, administration and staff.

***“...WCS’s teachers receive their Waldorf certification by successful matriculation through Rudolf Steiner College’s hybrid program...”***

WCS governance and administration set a goal for themselves to have all of their class teachers fully trained Waldorf teachers by the end of the 2012-13 school year. With the extraordinary fundraising efforts of the Winterberry Parents’ Guild, the program was fully funded, adding no extra cost to the regular operational budget of the school. This exemplary effort represented a level of threefold governance commitment not seen at many schools. To date a total of thirty-five (35) teachers over the seven (7) years that the school has operated have benefited from the program. By the end of school year 2012-13, eight (8) current WCS teachers are expected to receive their Waldorf teaching certificate. This strong financial and organizational support for having all class teachers be Waldorf certified is, to HBC’s knowledge, unique among the forty-five Waldorf public school programs in the U.S.

***“... academic and intra-collegial norms inspired by rigorous Anchorage School District and Waldorf pedagogical standards...”***

**“In our lessons we experience over and over again that there is a connection between truth and beauty.” WCS teacher**

Several teachers shared detailed student learning experiences that one would expect from a high performing program using Waldorf curriculum and methods. For example, several teachers described how dramatic learning occurred as a result of students utilizing images from story content to learn academic concepts in both mathematics and language arts. Another expressed that “students time and time again ‘take their work home with them’ and it comes back transformed” (using time away from school to let lessons “sink in” and then recalling and applying the lesson the next day). The block method was cited a number of times as promoting deep learning through immersion. It was also recognized by several teachers as an ideal way to give students more time to figure out learning challenges on their own.

Teachers from both the lower and upper grades valued the “phenomenological method”(first the encounter then the concept) of bringing academics to the children. All the observations of class teachers revealed that each of their main lessons had distinctive Waldorf methodologies. These were mostly applied effectively, i.e., resulting in high levels of student engagement in the intended learning steps outlined in the lesson plans. Sample work books and main lesson books in language arts and arithmetic from grades one (1) through eight (8) showed, in general:

- one (1) class with at least half of the students operating in large part “below” grade level
- two (2) classes each with most students operating “at” grade level and some at “below” grade level
- two (2) classes with most students operating “at” grade level and some “above” grade level
- three (3) classes with some students “at” grade level and many students in the “above” grade level category

- the kindergarten children are receiving an early childhood program that closely resembles quality Waldorf programs observed at several other high performing Waldorf and Waldorf-inspired public schools elsewhere in the country

Compared to a year ago, WSC class teachers show a deepening proficiency over-all in conducting Waldorf-inspired main lessons. These observations showed that the teachers were:

- utilizing the method of expansion and contraction (students given the opportunity for activity and repose) within the two-hour lesson
- demonstrating more examples of transitions being artistically planned and executed between various elements within the lesson
- facilitating student transitions from class to class, as well as throughout the school, that are generally more orderly, relaxed, safe and reasonably quiet
- demonstrating stories that were being told from memory and that images from the story were being used to inform student recapitulation
- the utilization of recapitulation as the springboard for the lesson's academic content is becoming standard practice
- effectively making use of main lesson books to capture a record and sample of the children's best work

**"It's ok to love the students here at Winterberry" WCS faculty member**

During the teacher interviews, teachers universally valued the deep teacher-student relationships that can be fostered within a Waldorf styled program. The practice of staying with one's class for eight years, or as long as possible, was highly valued by the faculty. The handshake at the beginning of the day between students and teacher was also frequently mentioned as a highly valued practice.

Teachers universally valued the practice of allowing children to develop at their individual pace and allowing the children to "figure things out for themselves" rather than have ready-made answers or concepts merely given to them. Several teachers also expressed their deep appreciation for being able to teach "the whole child" and their colleague's willingness to look at social, emotional, psychological, and physical issues of the child as well as his/her cognitive/academic development.

During several informal, brief conversations with individual students throughout the PQR process HBC noted that a common thread emerged: students said they felt safe at the school and that they felt trusted by their teachers and the Principal.

**"Waldorf gives permission to make learning fun!" WCS faculty member**

In conversations with individual faculty members it became clear that additional core norms especially inherent in the Waldorf approach are strengthening within the group, such as:

- that any given child brings individual gifts to the world and it is part of the teacher's task to discover what those gifts are and to help the child actualize them
- that all student discipline practices at the school need to subscribe to positive discipline methodologies and have a pedagogical purpose and that "connection before correction" describes a fundamental tenant between teacher and child when intervention is needed

- that the compassionate communication practiced with the children needs to be modeled throughout the school organization and school community
- knowledge of the temperaments can deeply and positively inform the approach a teacher takes with a child
- the value of carefully developed observation skills on the part of faculty
- the frequently expressed sentiment among faculty that their class is “like a family”
- the shared value among faculty for the integral role the parents play in the life of the student and of the school

**“In my class, the parents are my partners.” WCS Faculty member**

***“...intra-faculty support and sharing of skills...”***

The afternoon weekly faculty meeting throughout the year is one of the prime venues for building collegial support and the exchange of best practices and ideas. The faculty continues to demonstrate high-level group skills at these meetings especially in the area of problem-solving, consensus building and influencing organizational direction and the development of school culture. Child studies are pedagogical studies also can and do take place during these meetings. The meetings agenda is carefully created each week through a collaborative model led by the Principal and the Faculty Chair. One specialty subject teacher and the school’s RTI teacher typically attend in addition to the kindergarten teacher and all eight (8) class teachers and the Principal. There are minutes taken and kept on file.

Teachers frequently expressed a desire to:

- have more opportunity to visit each other’s main lesson classes
- celebrate their collective and individual successes more often
- play together more and create more social time together outside of school

***“...strong pedagogical relationship between class teachers, specialty teachers, and special education...”***

The majority of the teachers interview expressed a need to become significantly more aware of the experience their students were having in specialty subject classes and during their special education services. Often it was expressed that more consistency in approach, especially around shared knowledge of learning styles and preferences and successful discipline interventions, would strengthen the overall program and give specific students a greater sense of being “held by the whole school”. Only the reading specialist and the movement/music teacher regularly attend faculty meetings, due to contracted time agreements.

The acknowledgement of this need by the class teachers is reciprocated by the specialty and special services staff. In interviews with them, concern that class teachers need to be more involved in helping to shape student action plans emerged as a common theme. One special educator stated that the main lesson story content could be used more effectively in remedial work with individual students. Some teachers stated that they are experiencing a move among the staff toward more integration between the various disciplines and all interviewed expressed a strong hope that more interdisciplinary collaboration could occur; one teacher stated, “...more integration will result in greater teacher buy-in to the IEPs”.

There is a perception of strong collaboration and mutual support between the RTI and the special education team. Along with this there is a concern that student growth and student needs are too often shared “on the fly”. More planned conversations were hoped for with one teacher expressing the desire to have regular “coffee hours” with students’ core resource team members to discuss successes and refine strategies.

***“...effective utilization of teacher assistants for greater student success...”***

There are three full- time (3) teacher aides at Winterberry. One is assigned to the kindergarten in the morning and grade 1 RTI/grade 5 math support in the afternoons. The second fulltime TA is designated to work with the teachers to present the Handwork and Drawing curriculum. The final part time TA is used to support the upper grades (4 and up) Special Education students as well as to offer afterschool tutoring and enrichment in the area of mathematics. Their duties are in the process of becoming more clearly articulated.

***“... clarifying the distinction between the practice of faculty “coaching” and that of faculty “mentoring...”***

The topic of the difference between a “coach” and a “mentor” within the context of a Waldorf methods charter school was explored at a faculty meeting the first week of the PQR. There dialogue on the proposal to establish the position of Pedagogical Director (PD) at the school took place. HBC attended that meeting. Staff had expressed at a previous meeting a strong preference that along with the many other duties assigned to the position the PD also assume a confidential mentoring function. HBC recommended that the PD not be a mentor as that term is commonly used. Mentors traditionally are advisors, privately funded (usually by the teacher or an educational foundation) that work with individual teachers and guide their professional development, hear questions that arise and maintain a confidential relationship with the teacher.

The role of a Pedagogical Director has an administrative function with at least some staff oversight responsibilities, especially with regard to pedagogical interpretation, standards and implementation. HBC contends that the role also has some staff evaluative responsibilities. For example, what the PD experiences during official observations needs to be communicated to the faculty member being observed but also may need to be communicated to the administration as well. This is particularly important when a teacher is struggling and the administration needs specific recommendations from the PD to be included in a formal staff development or improvement plan.

In schools where the position functions well the PD coaches staff toward developing improved teaching skills and deeper pedagogical understanding. The PD needs to be free to share openly with both the individual teacher and the administration. Mentors are there solely for the teacher. Pedagogical Directors in some schools are called “program directors”. For the role to be effective it needs to have a supervisory (administrative) function as they provide expert curricular support for overall program efficacy and help to ensure quality learning experiences for the children.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Develop a contractual agreement with teachers to become Waldorf certified with the understanding that the Winterberry Parent Guild (WPG) will assume responsibility for the cost of their certification on a pro-rated schedule. For example, if the teacher remains with the school for eight (8) years the entire cost is assumed by the WPG. If the teacher stays with the school for seven (7) years, then 7/8 ths of the cost of the certification is assumed by the WPG ; if only six years then,  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the cost would be assumed.
2. HBC supports the proposal to add a Curriculum Specialist (CS) to the staff of WCS. Now that WCS teachers will soon have their Waldorf teaching certificate, deepening of understanding and application of the curriculum can be greatly accelerated through facilitation of staff pedagogical goals, coaching and ongoing observation. The Curriculum Specialist role in other highly successful Waldorf-inspired charter schools has significantly strengthened their programs. SunRidge Charter School and Golden Valley Charter School (both CA charters) are just two examples. The role also provides practical assistance to the Principal in supervising, supporting, and evaluating staff as they practice curriculum implementation. **The position also can serve an invaluable support for Waldorf-specific input at Student Success Team (SST) meetings, Individual Education Plan (IEP) meetings and faculty “child studies”.**

As the school grows, it will be important to continually search for ways to align Waldorf curriculum and methodologies with state and national standards without losing its spirit, vitality, and core methods. A staff of certified Waldorf teachers working collaboratively with a Waldorf trained curriculum specialist could help to strengthen WCS’s ability to provide a quality Waldorf-inspired program to the children and families of Anchorage.

3. As the children and staff live into their new surroundings continue to place strong emphasis on beautifying the physical environment. New habits need to be established for “a place for everything and everything in its place”. The establishment and maintenance of beauty and order will be necessary to help the students (and faculty) “en-soul” the new school. Much emphasis needs to be placed on this.
4. A campus-wide positive discipline model needs to be considered for the school such as Kim Payne’s explicit/implicit restorative discipline approach Anchorage Waldorf School. Perhaps a faculty member or some one else from the leadership team of that school could attend a WCS faculty meeting and share how the social inclusion/ “compassionate campus” model is working at their school.
5. Lesson plans that identify the academic learning step for the day’s lesson need to become a norm for the teachers. This would help to strengthen the rhythmic quality of the main lesson which is especially important in the lower grades. It also provides a map for teachers trying to artistically support refined transitions within the lesson. Each main lesson ideally contains a section for recapitulation in the middle of the two hour period. From that element, the concepts for the new academic learning can be derived and then worked with by the students. HBC recommends that the school become more consistent in developing lesson plans that provide for these key Waldorf teaching strategies.

6. WSC faculty need to decide on a standard approach to keeping records on the progress of the children. Progress note journals are one method. Weekly notes, even if they are brief, documenting something that each student learned that week and a thought for future learning are necessary to keep track of the efficacy of the program. Specialty teachers would have access to these journals and record in them as needed.
7. HBC recommends the establishment of a special services manual for each class. Each class teacher could then have available for reference a copy of the IEP, SST, 504, and RTI goals for each student enrolled in any one of those special programs. The class teachers, as well as any other teacher who works with a child engaged in those programs need to know the specifics of each student's plan. **HBC views this as a priority.**
8. Essential to the deepening of the skill base of the WCS staff is the ability of the staff to regularly observe one another teach. New class teachers would benefit greatly from observing seasoned teachers conduct lessons and vice versa. It is also important that special education and special subject teachers have the opportunity to observe class teachers teaching main lessons at least occasionally. If this is accomplished it will strengthen the movement toward an "interdisciplinary" approach and away from a "multi-disciplinary" approach.
9. "Differentiated decision-making" is clarifying the flow of information at WCS: "what" needs to be discussed "when" between the faculty and the administration. As a result of this streamlining, HBC recommends that more time become available at faculty meetings for regular faculty artistic and study work, conversation about pedagogical values and challenges, child studies, and intra-faculty sharing of skills and best practices. Including special subject and special education teachers when these opportunities arise is an important goal to strive for even if it can only occur twice a semester. Special education teachers and specialty subject teachers can easily feel separated from the "core team" (class teachers) and fall out of alignment with stated shared curricular values of the school as well as lose a sense of connection to the Faculty. This is a tendency at most schools and needs to be mitigated in order to preserve staff cohesiveness and reap the benefits of a truly interdisciplinary approach to meeting the needs of the children. Find ways for the children to contribute to the neighborhood by expanding "project-based learning" opportunities and providing community service opportunities for the children.
10. Each assistant needs a clear, explicit job description with expectations of the role very clearly understood before engaging in the particular assignment. These duties need to be developed in collaboration with teachers who will benefit from the services.
11. We recommend that coaching and supervision be seen as part of the same leadership function and have a direct connection to staff evaluations. Mentoring is then treated as a confidential relationship between a teacher and a self-selected, trusted practitioner who can help individual teachers along their professional path. While coaching and supervision are part of the administration of the school and therefore included in the school's operating budget, mentoring is either privately funded by the individual teachers or supported by fundraising generated by the Winterberry Parent Guild (WPG).

## **2. LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE**

Members of the Winterberry Charter Council (WCC), Winterberry Parent Guild (WPG), and standing administrative committees (such as the Site Committee and Moving Traditions Committee) were interviewed concerning their participation in leadership and governance at the school. Included in the interviewing process were the Principal of WCS, administrative and janitorial staff and staff of the Winterberry Enrichment Program (administered by the WPG). HBC inquired into the interviewees' experience in several facets of leadership and governance that are key to a well-functioning Waldorf-inspired school organization:

- *Satisfaction of volunteers in leadership positions in working within their council/committee to carry out their duties; satisfaction of staff members in fulfilling their roles*
- *Successful collaboration between different councils, committees, and staff members to produce desired results*
- *Successful working of Winterberry's Threefold Governance Model to achieve and implement important decisions*
- *Clarity concerning mandates and authority for their council/committee/role*
- *Effective self-assessment.*

***"...satisfaction of volunteers in working within their council or committee to carry out their duties..."***

Interviewees identified several factors that contributed to enthusiasm and satisfaction in working within their leadership group:

- Utilizing training in NVC and "deliberate decision-making" (D1, D2, D3 process) in their meetings  
***"We were working *through* the issues vs. issues 'stopping us'."*** (WCC member)
- Becoming more knowledgeable about the process of consensus and more skilled at coming to consensus
- Working on a clearly defined project, e.g., WCC bylaws revision, with focus and constructive deliberation over a series of three meetings and reaching a consensus decision. Also, working together with a small group *outside* of regular meeting time on a limited, focused project.
- Being part of a decision-making process as a member of the WPG (site decision) that had widespread input from throughout the community
- Serving the group in a clearly defined role where the contribution is evident, e.g., as one of the officers.
- Working within a group (WPG) where information is shared well with new members (new class representatives).
- Working within a group (WPG) where there is both continuity (long-standing officers) and regular influx of new people (new class representatives) and ideas

***"...successful collaboration between different councils, committees and staff members to produce desired results..."***

Many interviewees pointed to the decision-making process on the move to the new site as being a very successful example of collaboration between formal administrative



committees (Site Committee), the parent community, and the WCC, WPG, and Faculty Council. This was also chosen as one of two examples of the successful working of the school's Threefold Governance Model (see next section).

In addition to the qualities of this process (see next section), other elements that led to successful collaboration were identified:

- Communicating in a spirit of trust and listening deeply to other groups
- Being clear about roles and responsibilities of each party
- Identifying, writing down, and following "P2's" (policies and procedures) that are appropriate to the situation
- Writing down and tracking what each party is responsible for following through on

***"...successful working of Winterberry's Threefold Governance Model to achieve and implement important decisions..."***

Almost all interviewees pointed to the process of selecting a new site as an example of the Threefold Governance model working well to arrive at a very important decision for the school that was widely embraced and very successfully implemented. There were a number of aspects of this decision-making process that were identified as contributing to its success:

- After deliberating within their own councils, Faculty, WCC and WPG came together for a "three-body meeting" in which all voices could be heard, including parents not on any of the councils.  
**"everybody was in the room" (WPG member)**
- Information about site options had been shared in a variety of ways with the community prior to this meeting.
- Professional facilitation was provided for this meeting so that everyone in the school community could be an active participant and be heard.
- There was honest discussion of the issues and "all parties handled contentious issues well." (WPG member)
- At the beginning of the meeting, Shanna reiterated the process of arriving at consensus that the Winterberry community has agreed to use and this model was used successfully at the meeting.
- The WCC took a legal vote *after* consensus had been achieved.
- The widespread participation in the decision-making process led to a sense of ownership for the choice that was made and momentum for implementing the decision.

A second example was given of the three councils all participating in a decision that had school-wide impact: establishing an early-release day for faculty meetings. Unlike with the site decision, the three bodies did not meet at the same time. The Faculty requested ratification by the WCC of their decision to create an early-release day and they requested support from the WPG in helping to provide after-school care for any children who might need it as a result of the decision. One interviewee expressed that dialogue between the faculty and WPG on what day to choose for early-release and more information on the need for after-school care would have been helpful *prior* to the faculty approaching the WPG for help with implementation of the decision.

***"..clarity concerning mandates and authority for their council/committee.."***

Members of the WPG, WCC, Moving Traditions Committee and Site Committee who were interviewed generally had a clear sense of their council's or committee's mandated or legal responsibility and authority. A few areas were mentioned where greater clarity was desired:

- A desire was expressed for all three councils to be in alignment on establishing a policy for 8<sup>th</sup> grade trips in the future, but the process for making this decision was not clear to the interviewee.
- How does the WPG get the necessary financial information and ongoing input from the WCC to make informed decisions about building management expenses and what they charge the WCC as their landlord?
- Do the WCC bylaws need to be reviewed to ensure that they accurately reflect what the Council does in practice?

When asked how decisions and actions get communicated back to "the whole," the newsletter established by the MTC was repeatedly cited as an extremely helpful vehicle for keeping the community informed.

***"It communicates coordinated, thoughtful and necessary information." (WCC member)***

Appreciation was especially expressed for the regular column summarizing WCC meetings and actions.

### ***"...effective self-assessment..."***

WCC members conduct an annual self-review of the Council's work, individually, and then come together to share review results and develop goals for the coming year. It was mentioned that the same "areas of improvement" and goals seem to be identified year after year. It was not clear that progress on accomplishing these goals was being effectively evaluated. Interviewees suggested some ways in which the WCC self-assessment process might be improved:

- Select just one or two goals that the whole WCC focuses on for one year.
- Develop a process for tracking progress on achieving these goals. Evaluate this progress as part of the WCC annual self-review.
- Review the WCC self-evaluation rubric to make sure that it reflects actual practice.
- Remember to celebrate successes!

The WCC also conducts an annual evaluation of Shanna Mall, the Principal of Winterberry Charter School. Ms. Mall then aligns this evaluation with the administrative standards that are set by Anchorage School district. Based on the WCC's assessment of her performance and the ASD standards, she then selects professional development goals for the next year. Ms. Mall shares these goals and the WCC evaluation with the Anchorage School district.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- HBC endorses the suggestions listed above for improving the WCC self-assessment process.
- HBC recommends that the WCC review the job description of the Principal to make sure that it is up-to-date and reflects both desired and actual practice for this position at WCS.

### ***3. COMMUNITY STEWARDSHIP and the DEVELOPMENT of SCHOOL CULTURE***

An especially challenging time for any school community occurs when the school takes the major step of transitioning from being a renter at the physical location of its pioneering years to being a landowner and building its own facility at a site of its own choosing. To sustain and build on the vibrant, successful community life that had been established by the Winterberry staff and parents and children during its first seven years it is important to recognize that, while the WCS *vision* changed to meet the realities of their new physical setting, the *core values* of the mission of the school and *guiding principles* of the councils and committees and traditions remained constant. The ad hoc “Moving Traditions Committee” was created to help shepherd the community’s shared values and traditions through the transition to the new site and to help facilitate their reestablishment in the light of the new setting.

Winterberry moved to their new site over the summer of 2012 and opened the doors for classes in late August for the 2012-13 school year. This quick turnaround was the result of a highly successful collaboration between the builders, architects, administration, faculty, school councils, the Site Committee(SC), the “Moving Traditions Committee”(MTC), and a host of parent volunteers.

During the PQR, members from the parent body were interviewed to share experiences about what they valued most about the education that WCS offered, the community life and its traditions, parent educational opportunities and wishes for the future. The two KRAs targeted in the interviews were:

- *parents’ values aligned with WCS mission, values, and vision*
- *parents’ understanding for, and support of, the Waldorf educational approach*

**“When the community comes together group learning takes place” WCS parent**

***“...parents’ values aligned with WSC mission, vision, and values...”***

WCS expresses in its charter documents that the school values collaborative leadership and school life as a learning opportunity for the whole community. Many parents expressed their support and appreciation for these values and indicated that they see evidence of them living at Winterberry on a daily basis. Parents frequently expressed deep appreciation for the rhythmic quality of community life, throughout the day, the week, the month, and the year seen in such events as the school’s festivals, assemblies, field trips, work parties, and seasonal sporting events. Parents frequently mentioned how deeply they valued the daily rhythms such as the principal shaking each child’s hand at the beginning of each day as they arrive at school and the handshake by the class teacher that greets each child as she enters her classroom. Some noted that the school’s value of inclusion is embedded in the welcoming way the entrance to the new school is designed and by the warm greeting coming from the staff at the front desk.

Among the most frequent themes was the deep appreciation for the many adult education opportunities available at the school “promoting a love of learning for all”, as one dad stated. Friday morning crafting groups, Wednesday walks with the kindergarten, family skate and ski events, the Winter Faire and the “Lantern Walk” were cited as examples of

activities that both build community and deepen understanding of the pedagogy and principles underlying the mission of the school.

Some core factors mentioned that give strength to the school were: the value placed on accurate observation; clear communication; compassionate communication; connection to each other fostered through gatherings and conversation; interest in and respect for each other; tolerance for diversity and the avoidance of “group think”. HBC observed early in the process that the Winterberry community is successfully *reaching out* to inform the parent body about core values of the school in a way that is inclusive and respectful of individual differences and *reaching in* to ensure that there is a widespread deepening of the knowledge of the school’s core community values. One parent deeply involved with the school culture expressed it this way: “We exist in relationship *to* and in collaboration *with* each other.”

Some parents suggested inviting more people from the general public to school events and for structured school visitations, especially other educators and public policy leaders. There was also an expressed willingness on the part of several interviewees to embrace and work with Winterberry’s weaknesses regarding community life and to talk about those weaknesses, be transparent and become stronger as a result. Some examples of what some parents wanted more of:

- more sensitivity to family needs for time away from the school was voiced by some of the parents; more honoring of family time
- even more and deeper orientation for new parents on the core values of the school and core principles of Waldorf education
- reaching out to new parents even more effectively to orient them to and include them in community life
- more systematic exit interviews to capture important lessons learned
- paid development director (in-reach and out-reach professional)

**“At Winterberry we are a group with diverse minds yet common goals.” WCS parent**

### ***“...parent’s understanding of and support for the Waldorf educational approach...”***

**“As a long-time member of the school community I am continually trying to find ways to connect new parents to the pedagogy.” WCS parent and committee member**

A common observation from the many parents that were interviewed was that community seems to arise naturally out of Waldorf education. From the PQR experience, HBC could see that a considerable amount of energy is devoted to the creation and development of “community”. For example, class parent evenings were mentioned as a prime avenue for parents to learn about the Waldorf curriculum and its methodologies. Several parents reflected that they benefited greatly from guest speakers coming to speak about Waldorf Education, home and school partnerships, “Day in the Life” events, and roundtables on the “needs of the adolescent”. Results from the parent interviews surfaced commonly mentioned aspects of the educational approach at Winterberry that appear to be well understood and deeply appreciated such as :

- the many outdoor explorations that relate to the main lesson
- main lesson approach
- block method which allows the students to take a deep dive into a subject

- each child is allowed to develop at his or her own pace
- the relationship between the teacher and the child; the children are known and loved
- children participate in class plays regularly and learn how to make presentations in front of an audience
- the children learn a foreign language
- kindergarten as calm, supportive atmosphere
- opportunity for creative expression for children and adults
- integration of the arts with the academics and the use of the child's imagination
- music as core to the learning
- the importance of handcrafts in the education of the children
- integrated curriculum educating the whole child
- festivals as part of the educational experience
- Waldorf's approach to literacy
- teacher's role in creating a classroom community

Considering that many of the elements listed above were common to multiple interviewees it would appear that the leadership at WCS is being fairly successful in its efforts to educate the parent body about at least some of the core principles and methods of Waldorf education. As the staff becomes more trained and skilled in Waldorf methodology and curriculum implementation, even deeper intra-community program congruency could be expected.

**"At Winterberry the teachers are about nurturing the child versus nurturing just the ideas they want to impart" new parent at Winterberry..."**

### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. HBC recommends that a standard number of class parent evenings be set throughout the grades and kindergarten with a minimum of four per year and that all of the evenings have at least some time devoted to deepening parent understanding of the pedagogy and the curriculum. Several interviewees expressed that community capacity strengthens as a result of a deepening understanding of the pedagogy.
2. Establish a speaker series that takes place over the course of the year. One school that attracts excellent parent participation holds their speaker series at 9am on Thursdays once a month: light refreshments are served; the topic is usually related to Waldorf education, the methods, or a school-home partnership subject; time is given for question and answer. Another effective model is to offer a morning and an evening presentation on alternating months.
3. Create a consistent format for "exit interviews". Consider an appreciative approach that asks not only "what was valued most in the parents' (and students') experience?", but also "what was needed in greater measure?"
4. Take student musical and dramatic events into the community as often as is practicable.
5. Consider making the "Moving Traditions Committee" a standing committee with the goal of helping to "maintain traditions and improve traditions". (MTC member) A name suggested by a member of the MTC was: Winterberry Traditions Committee. Continue the much-appreciated newsletter created by the MTC.

6. Find ways (AI approach?) to bring “biography work” into the general parent body
7. Conduct a brief AI at the end of each school year where 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Grade parents would interview each other on “best experiences”, for example, in the areas of:
  - volunteering on committees
  - volunteering in governance
  - volunteering in the classes
  - community life
  - pedagogical experiences
  - what is needed for the future
8. Establish a buddy system between veteran parents and incoming new parents in the fall to help welcome and orient new parents.

#### ***4. SITE STEWARDSHIP***

Parents, staff and teachers were asked what has been working well for them in the new site and what they appreciate most about Winterberry’s new facilities. Responses to those questions appear below. They were also asked what improvements they would like to see. Responses to those questions are found in the “three wishes” section of this document.

##### **Parents/staff:**

- Larger classrooms
- Classrooms with kitchens in lower grades
- Water/sinks in all the classrooms
- Bigger hallways
- Bigger bathrooms
- Edwin’s big sink
- Feeling of spaciousness
- Light, airy, /\*\*\*
- Beauty/beautiful colors/\*
- Entry space has a spacious, calm feeling/\*\*
- Greeting area works well for the Administrative Assistant
- Less clutter; a place for things/\*
- Our own parking lot-free!: makes it easier to stay for drop off and pick up; easier to connect with others/\*\*\*
- “We can stay longer for pick up and drop off-we have our own place to be.”
- We own the site; no adversarial landlord
- Attached playground
- Access to the woods
- Our own outdoor space for fairs and gatherings
- Connectivity between upstairs and downstairs; flow of building/\*\*

- Break out spaces; nooks/\*\*
- Building designed to be easily maintained

### Teachers:

- Proximity of park, trails & APU/\*\*\*\*\*
- Connected outdoor play space/\*\*\*\*\*
- Freedom to teach without lawyers upstairs/\*\*\*\*\*
- Design of building: light, windows/\*\*\*\*\*
- Larger classrooms/\*\*\*\*\*
- Full kitchens in the lower grades/\*\*\*\*\*
- Running water in the classrooms/\*\*\*\*\*
- Elevator/\*\*\*\*\*
- Staff room/\*\*\*\*\*
- Staff bathroom/\*\*\*\*\*
- Uniformity of classrooms/\*\*\*\*\*
- Beautiful colors on the walls/\*\*\*\*\*
- Cabinets/\*\*\*\*\*
- Lots of chalkboard space/\*\*\*\*
- Flat play area/\*\*\*\*
- Parking/\*\*\*\*
- Being away from an urban feeling/\*\*\*
- Safety/\*\*
- Control of the space by faculty, parents, community/\*
- Simple, clean, everything works
- No standard playground; opportunity to be creative
- Washer, dryer, shower, dishwasher
- Nice looking floors

# **WINTERBERRY CHARTER SCHOOL PQR MARCH 2013**

## **"THREE WISHES"**

(\*astericks indicate additional responses for the listed wish)

### **General Parent Body~Wishes for the School:**

- 
- Continue to grow as a Waldorf community
- Bring in forums on Waldorf education and what other schools are doing
- Develop a comprehensive Waldorf parenting skills class
- More parent engagement
- Teacher retention; find ways to keep teachers
- Bigger impact on the greater Anchorage community (third seven years)
- Level out the ups and downs by keeping the vision alive
- One person as communications person for the school
- Parent coordinator: a "shining star"; half time position/\*
- Handwork teacher supported with more hands on help
- Some vehicle to help parents get to know each other better
- Create ways for alumni students and parents to stay connected with the school
- Ms. Drinen stays through 8<sup>th</sup> grade!
- Reach out and make connections with the greater community/\*
- Reach out to one another and be more welcoming; \*continuing to develop community warmth
- Broaden volunteer base
- Keep building on the founding vision
- More racial diversity
- Continuity in staff
- Continue the excellent educational support for staff (continuing staff development)
- Shanna stays as leader of the school
- High school development plan/\*
- Create a strong foundation for a successful high school
- To embrace our weak areas; talk about them; put energy into improving them
- Continue becoming more transparent in our communication
- Encourage further growth in parent body's knowledge of the pedagogy
- The school honors family time (special family trips and time together away from school)
- New teachers commit to taking children through the grades
- Honor all the diverse ways that parents contribute to the life of the school (not just financial)
- Eurythmy program
- Development coordinator
- Strategic plan to help focus on top priorities
- Cultivate esprit de corps among the teachers so that they can be "cohesive instruments of the same mission"
- All teachers complete the grades cycle with their children; find a way that parents can help this to happen
- Children experience a successful transition into 9<sup>th</sup> grade
- Develop a Lifeways Program



- Offer additional foreign language (French, Spanish)
- More science equipment
- Contribute to the neighborhood; invite them to events
- Increased orientation for incoming parents in the philosophy and practices in the school
- High academic standards, especially in science and math
- Increased parent participation through more parent education in W. E.
- More money that could support more faculty
- Eurythmist
- Second language
- Develop even higher student expectations and outcomes in Special Education
- Better integration between Special Ed services and classroom teaching methods

**General Parent Body and Members of Leadership~Wishes for the Site:**

- Designated science room, especially for science equipment
- Assembly room/\*\*\*\*\*
- Mitigate the blind spot at the corner of the parking entrance
- Garden, capable of food production/\*; make all planters into edible gardens
- More space
- Continue to invest in landscaping to soften the look of the school/\*; ensoul the site with trees
- Improve safety of traffic, especially in the parking lot
- Mitigate serious drainage problems/\*
- Reduce noise from the second floor (scraping of chairs, etc.)/\*
- Ovens, stoves and fridges in all the classrooms
- Designated spaces for specialty teachers/\*\*\*\*; music room/\*
- More storage/\*
- Install dirty electricity filters
- Minimize wi-fi in all new structures by using ether net
- Teachers park under the high voltage wires
- Full-spectrum lights
- Structures for rock climbing
- Rope swings
- Yurt as a “great extra room”; yurt for specialty classes and assemblies
- Deal with the mud around the school
- Private space for meetings
- Shielding from EMF's
- Larger play area
- Maintaining our shared spaces and keeping them beautiful
- Develop site outside with the same beauty as the site inside
- Clarity about how to be on the outdoor committee
- Privacy for meetings, etc., especially with parents
- Farm animals
- Mindful approach to developing outdoor space
- Wish there were no tradeoff between a community space and adequate outdoor play space
- Designated space for student break out sessions
- Indoor movement space with storage
- Parent room
- Playground equipment

- Benches with built in storage in the stairwell spaces
- To further ensoul the space
- Space for gardening *and* elevation contours in the playground
- Install labs/"science room"

#### **Faculty~Wishes for the Site:**

- Spaces for specialty teachers and Special Education and support staff/\*\*\*\*\*
- Multi-purpose room/\*\*\*\*\*
- Faculty lounge that is not a multi-use space/\*\*\*\*
- Less clutter/more organization in staff room and back of office
- Greenhouse & community garden/\*\*\*\*
- Carpeting in KG and lower grades/\*
- Play equipment/\*
- Direct drainage in play yard away from the building
- Small gate through fence to the woods
- Improvements that can help grounds to be attractive & usable during mud season
- Improve safety of right turn before the parking lot
- Noise reduction (from moving tables and chairs)
- Reduce buzzing and vibration in 7<sup>th</sup> grade classroom
- Give the front desk a more "finished" look

#### **Faculty~Wishes for the Faculty:**

- Watch each other teach more often/\*\*\*
- Enough resources to have a full specialty subject curriculum, including two languages/\*\*
- Keep our commitment to building strong relationships with each other and to keeping the education *alive*/\*\*\*\*
- Eurythmy/\*\*
- On-site pedagogical expert/\*\*
- More follow through on process (P2's) with key decisions
- Get everybody on board with Waldorf training
- Find ways to study Waldorf education together/\*\*
- Observe other master teachers at work at other schools
- Become even more skilled, as a faculty, with NVC, AI, and the "U Process", especially open communication without blame
- Create a joint vision of the curriculum, including approach to discipline
- Evolve faculty meetings to an even higher lever of productivity, collaboration and fun/\*\*\*
- Figure out how to hang out together in order to deepen our relationships/\*\*
- More opportunities to connect with one another during the week
- Coffee or tea hour: informal discussion about needs of children
- Integrate Special Ed teachers and specialty teachers more fully into the whole team
- Create physical space for specialty teachers and Special Ed/\*\*\*\*
- Establish lesson plans ahead of time for subs and Special Ed teachers (especially goals for blocks)
- Even more attention given to beauty and order within the physical space
- Include substitutes in faculty training
- Information about what it means to be a sub given to parents during class parent evenings
- More faculty leadership to educate the parents about W.E., especially about how to support the education through what they do at home

- Faculty makes choices for training that they truly value-feeling good about going and appreciating the opportunity because they have made a free choice
- More opportunity to work with mentors
- Greater professional networking outside of WCS
- Deeper understanding of who we are through doing biography work to find out such things as: how I work and good ways to approach a colleague
- Lifeways Center at the school
- Greenhouse
- Clarify handwork curriculum for 6,7,8
- More continuity between handwork and the class teachers
- Ways to hold 6,7,8, students accountable for their handwork projects
- More Waldorf training, especially around classroom management: balance between “strictness” and “forgiveness”?
- Parents continue to become involved in the WEP

***Submitted by:***

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