

Friday, March 1, 2013 - Parent Council Minutes

8:45 am – Opening Verse from Rudolf Steiner’s Calendar from the Soul

8:50 am – Restorative Practice Connection Circles

Jenny Thompson brought two light-hearted, fun connection circles as part of the community’s commitment to try implementing restorative practices. The purpose of the connection circle is to build and strengthen relationships with one another early, so that we have a basis of mutual friendship and respect to be able to handle conflict when it arises – very helpful in a Waldorf school setting that makes decisions by consensus-building and the will of the group.

9:05 am Mr. Michael Baker, DWS Woodwork Teacher and Representative of The College of Teachers on Easter Celebration at Waldorf Schools

Mr. Baker said the school doesn’t really celebrate Easter outwardly. However each class and teacher attempts to find age-appropriate cosmic pictures for the children to convey what is happening in nature.

Inside, the children have a cabin fever of sorts and so they want to be outside more. We are trying to counter-balance the Spring Fever inside their bodies. Nature is pulling us out of ourselves, out of our heads. We are trying to find pictures and moments with the children to bring them back into themselves. Waldorf education really tries to pay attention to the children’s inner life. The teachers have their own esoteric pictures of the children. In the Early Childhood Education classes the children are making beautiful woven baskets with earth and wheat grass, giving the children a beautiful picture of life birthing forth. As adults we struggle to figure out how to live that beauty inwardly and how to connect with that natural birth and rebirth cycle.

In Woodwork, I can show the children a piece of wood and look at the rings and see the spring monsoon system and see that spring growth ring on the wood. That renewal cycle is a part of us and it’s a part of nature, that cycle of asleep and awake. As teachers we are challenged: How do we as artists show pictures to the children that reflect what is happening to them inwardly, thereby validating what is going on for them at each stage of development.

9:20 am Simplicity Parenting Tip: Meal Planning – Parent Council Co-Chair Mary Salfi

Mary brought the importance of creating a meal plan to give children a rhythm for the week. She said the Kim John Payne book, “Simplicity Parenting” suggests a meal plan is one of the many things you can do for your children when your kids are young to give children a rhythm they can count on. No matter what is

happening in their day, they know that Monday is pizza night, for example. Mary brought her own meal plan as an example. She said she does meal plans for snack and dinner only, because that works for her family. She encouraged everyone to do what works for theirs.

SNACK

Mondays – sushi

Tuesdays – chocolate croissant

Wednesdays – Lebanese thyme spread with olive oil

Thursdays – bacon

Friday – pizza

DINNER

Mondays – meat

Tuesdays – Chicken

Wednesdays – Pasta

Thursday – Fish

Friday –Open

On weekends, Mary gives herself freedom to be spontaneous. Mary said she has found that since she implemented her meal plan, shopping is easier on Sundays, her grocery bill has gone down, her anxiety level surrounding meals has gone down. She said her meal plan falls apart during vacations and she finds life gets less stressful when she gets it back up and running again.

Mr. Baker complimented the meal plan idea. He said the children are constantly reminding us of our own childhood and how difficult it can be for children to navigate through this adult world. Every anchor in place is another comfort to them. Other parents agreed a meal plan is a worthy goal.

Mary said another thing she has done is set her dinnertime at 6:30 pm and no matter what happens, that's dinnertime. Even if her husband has to go back to work later, that's the family dinnertime. Mary said she also got rid of her rectangular table and now has a circle table so the entire family can sit beside each other.

Mary said because of Waldorf education, her sons bring wonderful blessings at the table, including Norse blessings from Grade 4 studies.

Another parent said she too had a meal plan but let it fall apart and she is now inspired to start it up again. She said she remembers her children really getting excited by it. Another parent said she heard that uncertainty and fear go hand-in-hand. Humans would rather have physical pain rather than uncertainty and children feel that way.

Another parent said adults can only make 27 effective decisions a day so we need to stop asking children what they want and provide that safety and security of

decision-making for them. Another parent said Miguel has certain ethnicities every day for the Organics Delivered hot-lunch program. Another parent said one ritual they have is singing a song before the meal. She laughed that even if they have guests over her young daughter demands they sing together and hold hands before the meal.

Mary said the 4th Grade teacher Todd Matuszewicz talks about one great thing that happened in their day. Jennifer Parker, the Community Dev. Coord., said President Obama plays a similar game with his family at mealtimes called “Roses and Thorns” where everyone brings to the dinner table one great thing and one not-so-great thing that happened throughout the day.

9:30am New Parent Mentoring Program by Jennifer Parker, Community Development Coordinator

Jennifer Parker brought an idea to start a peer-to-peer parent-mentoring program matching “old” DWS families with new families to provide an additional layer of welcoming to new families. This is in reaction to a need discussed in previous parent council meetings for new families, who can feel disconnected to the goings on of such a big pre-K through Grade 12 school. Jennifer said Grade 8 students are matched with 1st Grade students each year, and similarly she could match “old” families willing to be new parent mentors with new families. Her vision was that the old families would perhaps call or email the new families this summer to say hello, or invite them over for tea or invite them to the Kindergarten playground at DWS for a play date.

Jennifer said she hoped parents willing to be mentors could read over the Parent Handbook to anticipate basic questions (like what time does school start, etc.) and perhaps even print out the New Parent Guide, which the Parent Council writes every year, for the new family because there is a lot of great information in the New Parent Guide to familiarize new families with the various events, committees and goings-on of the school. Jennifer said she could put a call-out in the Newsletter or Community Update for mentors, or the parent council reps could volunteer to be the mentors, or perhaps the parent council reps could suggest ways in which to solicit for mentors. Jennifer said that while she is willing to organize the program, the success of any peer-to-peer mentoring program would really rest with the families who would have to extend themselves in some way to the new families to welcome them.

A question was asked about what the goal of such a program would be. Main Office Manager Christa Gustafson said she would like retention being a goal, so that the families in the nursery/preschool/Kindergarten programs enroll in Grade 1 and beyond. Jennifer Parker said that for her, the biggest goal would be relationship and community-building to providing another layer of welcoming to new families going beyond the new family orientations and programs that the faculty and staff already have in place. Jennifer mentioned how kind veteran Waldorf parents showed her a book in the DWS Parent Library about toddlers

one day when she was talking about her own 3-and-a-half year-old. It was said that is an example to her of how community-minded the school is. Mary said she remembers Jas Smith doing something similar for her when she was investigating the Waldorf school. She said she was worried about the approach to reading and Jas completely set her mind at ease.

The group started brainstorming the goals of such a program and brainstorming whom should be a mentor. Several parents said it would nice to have a mentor along the way, once in early childhood, again in Grade 1, again in Middle School and in High School. Someone mentioned it would be hard to be “mentored” by someone else in you class.

One parent brought a story about a parent who was allowing their toddler access to cell phone games and mentioned some of the preschool/Kindergarten parents don’t understand the Waldorf approach to discouraging screen-time. Another mentioned she heard of parents not really understanding that we don’t drill on the ABCs in the early childhood education, preferring to lay the basis for writing and reading in other ways. She mentioned this could be a goal of any mentoring program.

One parent mentioned that perhaps some understanding and non-judgment is needed in this area because some parents, especially minority parents, are just learning how to be different parents than what they grew up with. She said her co-parent does show media to her child and her family mealtime doesn’t look like what Mary presented with everyone sitting down to a meal together. Another parent said no one has the ideal life and it doesn’t look perfect in any family and that we’re all trying to do better.

Another parent mentioned that at another school she worked at, the head of school knew all the names of the new families and their children and it felt more like a community. Another parent said staff members should stand out in the Kindergarten and welcome everyone each day – it wouldn’t take much, she said. Another parent said staff should contact every new family and check in. Jenifer said the admin has a plan in place to contact new families and will do so again next fall. Another parent said welcoming and indoctrination are two different things. She said she hasn’t found parent council that welcoming and was told by others that parent council is not a friendly place to be and they don’t listen to new ideas. This parent brought that new families in her class do not feel welcome.

Jennifer Parker asked whether this parent thought a new parent-mentoring program would help or not help this issue?

Another parent said she felt a lot of judgment, even in parent council about media use and lifestyle choices.

One parent asked another parent – who exactly is making you feel uncomfortable?

Jennifer asked whether we have veered off from the discussion at hand about how best the parent council reps would like to implement a new parent-mentoring program.

Another parent said she feels like when she was in Kindergarten, her teacher spelled out very clearly that parents should not be giving screen-time to their children, that we are a media free school, that we don't drill on ABCs in the early grades. She said she wishes that happened more forcefully with new families so people know what Waldorf stands for because right now we have families who are not adhering to these principles.

The Parent council co-chairs asked the group whether they wanted to continue this conversation during parent comments/suggestions. Etc. The group decided that yes, they would like to continue the conversation.

Another parent said you can't make people live in a certain way. Christa Gustafson said the cell phone issue is alive and well in the 8th grade – who has a cell phone and who doesn't becomes a “thing” for the children. It was talked about how years ago one child dressed up in a media-related Halloween costume and how that family should have been told so that child wasn't embarrassed. Another parent said it becomes very difficult to hold to Waldorf ideals of limiting media when everyone else is allowing their child to use media and talking about the latest thing. The children whose families are trying to do the right thing are in danger of being teased and this was supposed to be a safe place from that. The group discussed the use of videogames, media, cell phones, television and computers. It was said these are issues of confusion right now in our school because we don't have a hard and fast policy against media at home. The school doesn't use technology in the classroom until Grade 9.

One parent said it's very important to provide exposure to these principles, not to instruct, just to provide the information and say, “this is available for you to step into.”

One parent said these painful conversations are necessary to shine light onto aspects of judgment and rules. Mr. Baker said the foundation of Waldorf and anthroposophy is freedom. He said a College meeting was highly emotional surrounding these issues of freedom and form. One example is attendance at faculty meetings, he said. Freedom is paramount. Mr. Baker said the school is wrestling with these issues and we are trying to elevate and create a new social form. We must transcend ourselves and give these bigger issues time to breathe.

ACTION ITEM: Jennifer said she wouldn't give up on trying to set up the new parent-mentoring program and would bug the parent council to put it on a future agenda. Mary said she would also make time to bring it back.

Walkathon Fundraiser on May 4, 2013 – Development Director Ben Drotar

Development Director Ben Drotar brought to parent council the plan for The 3rd Annual Walkathon fundraiser this year. He said he still needs volunteers to help various aspects of this important event to get off the ground.

What: The Denver Waldorf School Strides for Stars Walkathon Event

When: Saturday May 4, 2012, Start Walking between 8:00 –1:00 PM

Where: Cheesman Park, Denver, CO

Goal: To Raise \$50,000 of pledges/donations. (The gal is for each walker to raise at least \$200 for The Denver Waldorf School).

Registration: Individuals Walkers must pay \$25.00 each

Each registered walker receives a t-shirt (Indicate sizes during registration).

Sponsor the event: Sponsorships start at \$100.

Other Activities:

-Face Painting

-Croquet

-May Pole

-Lunch

-Chair massages and more.

Get started today at <http://www.stridesforstars.denverwaldorf.org>

A portion of the proceeds will benefit the construction of the new learning garden behind The Denver Waldorf School. To learn more and to get started with the event, go to <http://www.denverwaldorf.org/events/walkathon/> for more information.

To register for *Strides for Stars Walkathon* please go the Walkathon registration website located at <http://stridesforstars.denverwaldorf.org> and click on the *Register* link You will need to include shirts sizes for each registered walker along with other various information (i.e. address, phone number, and email address).

Once registered, each walker gets their own webpage to help gain pledges. This is your place to upload an image and express why you are participating in the Walkathon as well as your personal goals. Promote your page to your friends and family and start collecting pledges and donations.

The registration fee applies for each walker and includes a t-shirt for each walker. In order to meet our event fundraising goal of \$50,000 we are asking each participant to raise a minimum of \$200 in donations from friends, families and neighbors. The cost of the event is around \$20,000 so the school reaps a profit of \$30,000.

Our goal for this event is 100% community participation. In addition to DWS families, staff, and faculty, we welcome and encourage DWS grandparents, friends, and extended family members to join in the fun and walk to raise money DWS

If you have any additional questions please feel free to contact Ben Drotar at [303-777-0531 x 107](tel:303-777-0531) or develop@denverwaldorf.org.

National Screen-Free Week April 29 – May 5, 2013 – Jennifer Parker, Community Development Coord.

Jennifer brought that National Screen-Free week is coming up and AWSNA, the Association of Waldorf School of North America, is encouraging Waldorf schools to take part. This is a nationwide endeavor by the Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood to get families to take a break from media for one week, to get out and play, take walks in nature, play games together, puzzles, anything to connect with each other again without a screen. The president of the United States has endorsed this particular screen-free week, as have public schools across the country.

Jennifer mentioned that this fall Dr. Thomas Cooper came to our school and challenged us to take periodic “fasts” from media in order to reconnect with ourselves and our families. She said the 4th Grade class completed a media fast for two weeks and many parents reported fantastic results – one 4th grade student told Colorado Public Radio that the media fast “made her imagination fly!” Jennifer said this could be a great week to do a school-wide fast and hoped that parent council reps could encourage their classes to perhaps join in on the media fast for one week. The Walkathon, a school-wide event will be that week providing families with something other than media to do.

Jennifer asked the 4th Grade parents to discuss how the media fast went for them to encourage other classes to take part.

The group discussed the school’s position on media and many said they wished we had a clearer policy. One parent said there is no way she was giving up radio. Another parent said it’s actually screens that we’re talking about and you don’t have to do anything if you don’t want to. Others said many parents feel that they are paying for a Waldorf education but not really getting one when it comes to media. The parents generally thought the school should encourage people to take part in the screen-free week, but only if it was brought in a fun way and as a challenge. Jennifer reiterated that she brought it in the hopes that parent council reps could generate excitement themselves about the week within their classes.

ACTION ITEM: Jennifer said she would provide more information about the screen-free week in the upcoming April Newsletter. Mary

asked if everyone wanted to bring media back as a discussion item in Parent Council and they said they would.