

Foundational Principles

The intent of this document is to describe the ideals that brought Windsong School into being. These are the ideals that invited the interest of the spiritual beings that helped usher Windsong School into existence and allow it to continue. When the school started, these ideals “lived” in the group that was working on the school’s behalf. With the school’s growth, having these ideals written down is necessary for the work to continue and to have a foundation to reference when needed. It is still a work in progress, however, it can serve as a guide for new potential staff and faculty to better understand the work that they are embarking upon. It can also serve as a guide for parents to better understand the school that they are choosing.

History

Before Windsong’s beginnings, it had been said that Spokane had been waiting for a Waldorf school for years. A group began to form around the idea of beginning a school, drawn together by an article Pat Hughes had written for the Peace and Justice Action League, and an “interest group” formed that included many of the founders of the school. That same year, an interest group member, Eve Bowers checked out a Steiner book from the library and when she went to renew it, found that someone had it reserved, so a note was tucked inside the book containing a wish to connect regarding Waldorf education. The person who checked it out next, Christine Pomeroy, was active in the Waldorf homeschooling community and contacted Eve to tell her about a beautiful place near Holy Names Music Center that would be a perfect place for a Waldorf school. The place she was referring to was the very place that Windsong sits today.

Through a series of events, a Waldorf initiative group was formed in 2010 and came together each month to learn more about Waldorf education. These groups were held at the Unity Church on the South hill. There were regularly 25 or more people who gathered. In late 2010, as the initiative group was coming to a close, a survey was handed out to ask attendees to provide feedback as well as indicate their continued interest in starting a Waldorf school. From the results of those surveys, a focus group was formed in February 2011 to begin tackling the job of starting a school

That group, consisting of Renee Rahn, Pat Hughes, Michele Burkey, Melissa Wright, Eve Bowers and Lauren Bergstedt, incorporated the non-profit corporation, Spokane Waldorf Education Association. In March, paperwork was filed to become a 501(c)3 and the search for a site began. In July, we signed a lease for the early childhood building on the Mukogawa campus and began the work of preparing for the very first students of Windsong School. Windsong School opening its doors for the 2011-2012 school year with a kindergarten, 3-day nursery, 2-day nursery and parent toddler class. That first year saw the enrollment of 20 total families.

The Foundational Principles of Windsong School

The impulses that ignited and sustained the founding of our school are essential. They illuminate the strengths and unique qualities of Windsong School. Understanding the

foundational principles that guide our school brings clarity to our mission and helps prevent confusion for both teachers and parents.

From the beginning, the founding of our school was supported by spiritual beings who took an interest in the work because those involved made sacrifices and allowed ideals and principles to guide them. These principles are not presented as objectively “correct,” but they are what brought Windsong School into existence and have sustained it over time. If our school is to remain successful, the impulse of sacrifice—or selflessness—and a dedication to ideals and principles must always be present in our work. Acting from these principles will continue to strengthen what we do

The Pillars of Windsong

Discipline

Collegueship

Selflessness

Idealism

Courage

Trust in the Spiritual World

Anthroposophy

Our school exists because of Rudolf Steiner and Anthroposophy. From our beginnings, we put ourselves out on a limb, so to speak, not only in starting a school with all the many aspects involved, but in starting a Waldorf school. Waldorf education has at its basic foundational principles Anthroposophy—the work of Rudolph Steiner - very simply defined as humanity’s wisdom to transform itself and the world through one’s own spiritual development.

Anthroposophy lives in the forefront of our school as the truth. To hide or conceal that fact is a disservice to our students and their families, our faculty and our community at large. Spiritual development can be defined in many ways depending on your perceptions, prejudices, life experiences, etc. When we speak of our spiritual development at Windsong, we are defining it as the intention of seeking meaning, purpose and fulfilment to life through a living, moving model of education. Our curriculum, pedagogy and teaching methods are designed to bring out each student’s individual purpose in their life and their spiritual nature within it to serve humanity and the world.

Studying Anthroposophy is not a requirement to attend our school. We do not expect parents of our students to work with the ideas of Anthroposophy, but we do expect them to recognize and respect that they have chosen a school that does.

Why was a school created?

Windsong school was created to change the face of education, and to be a “hot spot” for social renewal. The importance of education was ever at the forefront of the effort to create a school. Windsong was not created to be an alternative to public education, but rather to give families who are seeking Waldorf education the support needed to raise a family in our times, and to deeply and broadly educate the rising generation. Our staff were, from

the start, highly educated and highly valued education. Our wish for our students is that they can fulfill their destinies and become people of good intention who think clearly and flexibly, and who can discern and act. We hope to help raise people of conviction and courage. We want our students to inherit our willingness to sacrifice and to be resilient people who can find joy around every corner.

Child Development

Child development as seen in the light of Anthroposophy is the basis of all our pedagogical decisions. We also highly value and engage in current educational and neurological research and, as according to Steiner's own urging, use these ideas to put our current ideas to the test, and to continue to evolve.

Child development out of the stream of anthroposophy as well as the art and discipline of observation is our ultimate touchstone for our teaching. Mindful observation is part of moment-to-moment meditative practice and is the daily task of being a teacher.

Ideal of accessibility

Windsong is not created as a private school, but rather an independent school. From the start we committed to avoiding wait lists and to keep tuition as low as possible, and to make true the statement that, "anyone can send their child to Windsong."

Professional Development

Study, study, study, study. Our founding impulse is that to teach we must first and foremost be students. Continual development is the lifeblood of our school. For this reason, we dedicate time to development in faculty meetings and prioritize teacher attendance to professional development courses.

Social renewal, competence and resilience

Social renewal cannot come without the ability to engage in authentic relationships with others. Authenticity in a relationship takes many different forms, unique to each person. We believe that we all have something to learn from one another and that everyone comes into our lives with something to teach us or receive from us.

We value authentic interaction and allow children to experience conflict because we are committed to helping children develop social and emotional competence. We have respect for the fact that relationships are highly personal, and our students have a right to form relationships in ways that work for them. When conflict arises, or what may seem to be unhealthy relationship patterns, teachers monitor student interactions and carefully step in when students cannot make headway with a situation.

There are definitely behaviors that are categorically not allowed. Students are not allowed to swear or to hurt other students. Students are expected to treat classmates, and all people, with dignity. Students are expected to respect school property and the property of students and staff.

Our position is that all students try on the roles of victim and aggressor (among many other roles), and understand that as teachers *we do not have the power to prevent this natural occurrence in development*. We understand that children try on roles because it supports the development of empathy. Our position is that students make mistakes, and that relationships are complicated. We understand that relationships, to reference Kent Hoffman's idea, are strengthened by rupture and repair, and that this process is vitally human and preferable to relationships in which no rupture ever happens. Our Anthroposophical viewpoint holds that as human beings we have intentionally brought about a rupture with the spiritual world in order to have the opportunity to repair, and that all human evolution depends on our ability to do this. The macrocosm is the microcosm.

We do not get in the way of student learning, whether it be in mathematics or the social realm. We try our best to embody the gesture of support, accompaniment, measured guidance and non-reactivity. We know our own personal issues can be triggered by student behavior, and that this is dangerous ground - we may do great harm if we act unconsciously. We try very hard to be humble and know that when we feel most "sure" of something, we may be most prone to blindness.

We allow consensual rowdy play for the sake of sensory integration, for the bonding it provides, and for the opportunity to allow for children to practice setting and respecting boundaries. However, we do not have a "hands off" or non-intervention policy - students may not make another student feel uncomfortable. If a teacher feels play is too risky or is disturbed by an activity - the teacher should heed the prompt of intuition and shut down the activity. Teachers may act out of authority and do not need an immediate reason to stop a game or otherwise take action. The teacher is the final authority, and our responsibility to provide time for self-directed activity and authentic social interaction is balanced by our responsibility to guide and protect children.

Ultimately, our approach to social-emotional development has been a priority and a strength of the school since its founding, and requires courage and support from colleagues and parents to uphold - it is much easier to relinquish the need to discern and act, or to have patience and trust, than it is to set down rules and punish those who break them. However, our dedication to truth and authenticity require we go deeper than what might feel good on the surface - this way is more difficult, but we are sure it is of great value to our students.

Students are children

Students are becoming who they will be. They shape themselves best when they are accepted for who they are and given the freedom to grow. Freedom means recognizing that children are children—that they do not yet have the life experience that adults do. Behaviors that may be unacceptable for adults can be completely appropriate for children. We must honor childhood by allowing children to make mistakes without imposing adult thinking or judgment on them. Doing otherwise would hinder their development. This enters the moral realm, and it is wrong to view or characterize children's behavior in adult terms.

Cohesiveness

The founders of the school came together as individuals in order to create an ever renewing shared understanding of our work. Through study of anthroposophy, child development in the light of anthroposophy, Waldorf education pedagogical tenants, mainstream current research and intense collaboration we sought to bring our programs into cohesiveness. This is in contrast to teachers working out of individuality. The reason for this was our commitment to true social renewal. We must live it for the children. Debate and burning interest in one another's work and ideas are key. Coming to shared practices based on mutual understanding is preferred to "go it my way" thinking.

Child Observation

Child study, as a practice in observation, is strongly held as an opportunity for teachers to practice objective, deep, and compassionate observation and to share these observations with colleagues. We offer our observations to our colleagues in the hopes that they will pull the child in question into their heart space, and to stimulate further observations and research into child development and modern childhood. We do not seek to change the child, but hope only to increase our understanding. We try to cultivate humbleness and understand that the child's guardian will only let us approach if our motives are selfless. We are not called upon to offer the child's teacher or parents advice, or to think we "know" what is happening with a child. We understand that the "other" is a mystery, and human beings are complex.

Direct Communication

Direct communication is two-way participation – it takes both giving and receiving. The person speaking must be courageous and willing to speak their truth, to say what they feel and mean. The listener must be open to hearing what the other person has to say

Direct communication must be used to clear up misunderstandings, to bring concerns/frustrations or even anger to each other. Individuals must be willing to engage with each other even if their own personal preference is to avoid confrontations or to work through indirect channels to resolve conflict.

As colleagues, we are striving to ensure that we are engaged in direct communication. We will redirect parents, staff and colleagues if direct communication isn't being used and shoulder the responsibility to be models within our community for direct communication.

Institutional structure

Windsong is a teacher led institution. The teacher-led institution is a new model. That is why it is hard at times and isn't perfect. But the effort is worth it. Selflessness, and a willingness to contribute draws the attention of the spiritual world. Windsong is a "give it all you've got environment" - we work hard and our students are inspired to do likewise. This mindset is part of the cellular fiber of the school. The work is truly a vocation. This way of working isn't for everyone because it requires tremendous commitment and discipline, and yet, through our service and dedication we grow our capacity for the courage to give beyond what we thought we could give. A foundational attitude was that we trusted each others' experience and motives. We were willing to contribute to the

whole, and to trust in the spiritual world.

Windsong, like most Waldorf schools, is structured very differently than other private and public schools. Our teachers are the heart, soul and leaders of our school. Consensus is our model for decision making, allowing everyone the opportunity for participation and responsibility in his or her own work and the work of the school as a whole. We have no “principal” or “head master” who makes final decisions on issues or problems that arise. Instead, we work out of freedom to bring our best selves to serve the school and all individuals within it with respect, trust and humility.

Our institutional structure, when looked at from “the whole” can be compared to the structure or model of a plant. When taken apart you are able to see the individual roles of each part and how the health or disease of each can affect the whole plant. Unless all are working together healthfully, there will be breakdowns, disorder or chaos, and eventually death or failure.

Consensus

Consensus is the working model for decision-making. This means that groups who are responsible for decisions utilize consensus, but it does not mean that every stakeholder in the school weighs in on every decision. Consensus at Windsong is not about personal satisfaction with decisions, but rather about one’s ability to support choices that serve the school. One can find a way to support decisions one does not favor by understanding that the full spirit of consensus is to avoid satisfying our ego’s desire to “get its way”, and to rather focus on the process of decision making.

When we look at the experience, integrity, work history, training, and diverse make-up of our decision-makers, we can find reason to trust them. When we look at the process these groups follow, we can find reason to trust them. Every faculty member holds power in our school. If a faculty member does not think a decision is in the best interests of the school, they may voice their concerns. We must keep in mind that if our concerns are heard and nothing changes, there is a possibility that the group and process came up with a good decision. There is also the possibility that there are many acceptable decisions, and another idea may be as good as our own.

The consensus model means that every faculty member is able to stand behind school decisions. Working this way requires colleagues to trust one another and requires that faculty members keep themselves informed. Each faculty member bears responsibility for testing our assumptions in reality, for paying attention during reports and to written communications, and for creating an environment that supports the work of our colleagues when they are tasked with decision-making. Open mindedness is probably the most helpful attitude to keep in mind as a member of the faculty.

Inner work allows us to come to consensus. It allows us to work with our own ego and make space for the broader picture.

Dedication to early childhood as the foundation of the school and life

We strongly recognize that the Early Childhood program is the foundation of the school. Our early childhood staff are highly educated, both in general and regarding child development, and participate in professional development that keeps them fresh by cultivating a keen life of the mind. The parent work done in Parent Child, and the early-years work done in the EC are crucial and require highly skilled staff. The early elementary years serve similar foundational development for the feeling, or astral, realm, which rests upon and is only as healthy as the lower realms of the physical and etheric cultivated in the first seven years of life.

Dedication to life at home

Our choice of school hours is intentional and reflects our founding commitment to the home. We seek to balance time at school with time at home, and value the time children spend at home. We do not see school as being more important than the home. Time at home allows children to learn from family members, to participate in and so learn to value the life of the home. It also allows time digest what has been experienced during the school day.

Spokane Waldorf School

As part of our founding we studied other schools and realized we wanted to be a school for Spokane. We chose to prioritize training and hiring teachers from Spokane, and we seek to avoid the pretentiousness that can sometimes bloom in a mission-driven setting where philosophies are in place that seem “right”. We wanted to be humble, work hard, avoid judgement and serve all of the people in our community equally. This led to a steadfast commitment to tuition reduction efforts.

Risk taking

Students are allowed to engage in risk taking at Windsong. In early childhood, this most often presents itself as physical risk - climbing trees, jumping off high platforms, attempting to walk along logs, building huge structures etc. Not only does physical risk taking allow a child to incarnate into their physical body more deeply, but it also satisfies the human need for challenge and to find a “breaking point”.

If the need for physical risk taking has been satisfied in early childhood, once students move into the elementary school years, they move into the feeling realm of risk taking. This most often occurs in the social realm and is very tumultuous. The teacher accompanies students through the hard work of birthing the astral body and the social emotional development that ensues.

During one’s life on earth, risk cannot be avoided. If children aren’t able to satisfy this human need in the physical and emotional realms in childhood, they will do so in adolescence or adulthood, when the implications for failure are much greater.

Making an offering

Our school is founded on the premise that we will craft an educational offering for our community. When the school was first founded there was pressure to make it work for

everyone - to somehow make a school that would be everyone's perfect school. We realized that if we tried to make a school that fulfilled everyone's preferences, the education would be shallow, disjointed and untethered. Instead, we decided to create a cohesive, clear offering, based on following our principles, and to make that offering as clear as possible, so that people can choose whether it will meet their needs. We saw that responsiveness is different from catering to people.

The idea of making an offering also leads to another experience in our founding years - we came to see that our offering is not better or superior to the work being done at other schools. We saw that we did not want to promote our school at the expense of other schools. Every school is working for a positive future, and there are good things happening at every school in our community. This strengthened our idea that we are simply making an offering, and that our first interaction with parents is to help them perceive whether our offering will support them in their work.

Vision

Create a non-profit founded on the teachings of Rudolf Steiner commonly known as anthroposophy. This non-profit will found a Waldorf school beginning with early childhood and growing into the grades one through eight as well as community and parenting offerings to provide opportunities for self-development in anthroposophy.

Media & Technology

There is no appropriate use of media technology in a Waldorf elementary classroom. From the beginning we saw the need for all teachers to work with families to decrease or eliminate media in the home, and saw how important it was that teachers engage in this endeavor both personally and with their own children.

The infiltration of media into every corner of human life has profound consequences. As Waldorf educators we are called upon to shine a light on the areas of modern life that are currently out of balance. When it comes to balancing media technology, this has looked like giving parents articles, hosting parent meetings to explore media use and supporting parents in decreasing media at home. We resolved to be creative and non judgmental in how we approach the complex topic of media technology and the human being's destiny.

We hold that media technology is an important tool that has tremendous power for good. Terrible darkness is attracted to this potential. Our foundational attitude is that we are not afraid of media technology, but rather seek to introduce it to children when they are ready for it. We are definitely not "anti-media" - we are "pro" using media with all consciousness.

Because balancing media use was an important topic that contributed to the founding biography of the school, all teachers at Windsong should feel comfortable with recommending that parents not allow screen use in the early childhood years, that strict monitoring of entertainment technology be practiced in the school years with restrictions that do not allow internet "free-ranging", and that smart phones not be given until 14 years old. Teachers should also feel comfortable foregoing screen use in the classroom. Furthermore, we have always considered that media is addictive, and do not want to model

addictive behaviors for our students.

As for our attitude toward our students' media use, we will not ask parents to sign any document or make any promises about media use. Likewise, we don't have a media-free policy because allowing people to control media via their own free will is more important to us than ensuring our students are media-free. Such policies set up situations in which people might feel compelled to lie, and our stance is that policies in general can create a "rub" with the school or teachers. We resolved to approach media use directly with parents of students who are showing signs of disrupting screen symptoms. If there are negative consequences of media use that show up in the classroom, teachers will work directly with parents to decrease or eliminate the student's media exposure until the individual child's health as well as the health of the class as a whole is no longer negatively affected. Teachers should be prepared to explain to parents the reasons why they believe media use is contributing to a problem.

Community

Community is a bedrock principle at our school. We are not service oriented - we are community oriented. As Steiner once said, "A healthy social life is found only when in the mirror of each soul the whole community finds its reflection and when in the whole community the virtue of each is living." At Windsong, we think of ourselves as a living being, where each person is an integral part of the life of the whole organism. We all (faculty, parents, children) have something to give, to receive and to learn each day. Each of us is striving for authentic social relationships through the daily interchanges as this is the work that creates compassion for ourselves and others. This is not just a school where you drop off your child and expect teacher to do it all. The responsibility of the building of the community lies within us all.

Collegial Relationships

Collegial relationships are founded on a shared understanding of anthroposophy, dedicated study of the teachings of Rudolf Steiner as it relates to personal and spiritual development as well as to the practicalities of teaching. Collegial relationships are strengthened by each individual's ability to engage in and expect direct communication as well as when there is respect for and interest in one another's work.

Healthy collegialship demands that we must test our assumptions and perspectives about people as well as test our assumptions to bring our thinking into the world. We are charged to know when to test assumptions and when to ask questions and challenge one another out of a place of respect. We must be willing to meet reality rather than build stories.

Selflessness

Windsong School would not exist without selflessness and sacrifice. To say that selflessness is part of the school's biography doesn't capture the way that our school relies on this quality to sustain itself. We can also distinguish between generosity and selflessness. It is clear that our school is sustained by the generosity of others, who give both time and treasure. Without this generosity (such as fundraising) our school would not be financially

viable. We are sure that, in a much deeper way, our school is sustained by the quality of selflessness. If the quality of selflessness is not willfully and consciously living in our school, our school will fade away. It will no longer be interesting to the beings who helped form the being of Windsong School. Joyful selflessness is the lifeblood of our school. Selflessness is an extremely difficult practice to maintain. It is hard to tell when one is crossing over from selflessness to something unhealthy - martyrdom, perhaps. Very early in the biography of our school, Julie McCallan presented to us the picture of our founders standing in a circle, forming a vessel. Surrounding the group were the archangels who would, if we deserved it, fill the vessel with one drop of wisdom. We are sure that, for Windsong School, to be deserving we must practice selflessness.

Festivals

The festivals at Windsong are a way for the community to come together in the social realm in a rhythmic way to celebrate the seasons. These festivals have been celebrated since the beginning of time when humans were more connected to the cosmic rhythm. In celebrating at Windsong, we strive to bring spiritual pictures into the material world. The community gathers in an artistic way to create an imagination of the festival as a sacred gathering to warm our hearts and enliven our thinking. Festivals are anchoring points for both the children and the whole community. We keep them the same year after year as students look forward in anticipation to doing the same thing. This is what makes it an anchor point. We want to keep our festivals simple and meaningful, which is why there are so few of them.

Policies

Policies have been created when absolutely necessary. We also recognize that policies can get in the way of free will and responsibility in the highest sense.

Daily Review as a Practice

Review is essential as a practice for teachers. Steiner's teachings call for us to participate in a reverse review of every day. This is a way of bringing consciousness to interactions during the day. You are the lesson – you must be doing your own self development.

Reverence

To hold in high regard, deep respect, awe, wonder are all definitions of the word reverence. However, it is difficult to condense the word as there is so much contained within it. One can experience reverence by observing an ant carry a grain of wheat to its nest, a crocus pushing through the topsoil in chilly spring or a mother singing to her babe in arms.

Every day at Windsong contains within it multiple opportunities for our students to experience reverence thus creating a sense of calm and inner nourishment to take with them into the world. From our daily rhythms and stories to our festivals and our curriculum as a whole, reverence is consciously cultivated.

The daily verses that are spoken cultivate a deep respect for many activities during the day such as morning greetings, painting time, mealtimes, rest periods, etc. Listening to stories and the rich language they have to offer, opens up a world of beauty, strife, grace, struggles

and gratitude. Rather than being “taught” science formally in early childhood, our students dig in the earth and sand, climb, build forts and make mud pies allowing them to experience and participate thus taking in deeply the world around them. Observing the seasons, growing a garden, observing birds, insects and other animals all give rise to how children see and relate to the environment.

Windsong carries this tradition of reverence and gratitude-those moments of stillness that allow the mind to settle and breathe in what surrounds us-guiding us to connecting with all that is. All these things and so much more are the gift of reverence we offer every day.

Why are we a private school instead of a charter?

We’re an independent school! We will support charters, but will always keep Windsong alive for independence - to seed the movement and to be a well from which all educators, including charter educators, can draw. If there is no independent setting, the well will run dry, and Waldorf education will cease to exist.

Childcare at Windsong

We have also consciously decided to make part-time early childhood programs our priority. We do not offer before care, after care or year round care. There are many benefits to this for both teachers and families alike which we value more so than the financial benefit such programs would provide. When our programs dismiss, the children go home with parents, friends, caregivers and/or relatives. We have seen our community strengthened as families create their own villages to care for each others children or to share caregivers. Most importantly, the children get to go *home*, which we believe is a strengthening and life giving force that is needed for today’s children.