

Waldorf Schools:

Strong Foundation of Knowledge Through Experiential Learning

by Julie Peterson



“I am struck by the fact that the more slowly trees grow at first, the sounder they are at the core, and I think that the same is true of human beings. We do not wish to see children precocious, making great strides in their early years like sprouts, producing a soft and perishable timber; but better that they expand slowly at first, in contending with difficulties, and are then solidified and perfected. Such trees continue to expand, with nearly equal rapidity, to extreme old age.”

— Henry David Thoreau

The Waldorf educational movement began in Europe nearly 100 years ago. Today, there are nearly 1,000 Waldorf Schools all over the world. They share a common philosophy, methodological approach, and a basic curriculum.

Locally, there are two Waldorf Schools—the River Valley Waldorf School in Upper Black Eddy, Pennsylvania, and the Princeton Waldorf School in Princeton, New Jersey.

The River Valley Waldorf School campus includes more than seven acres of forest and grassland for students to explore and enjoy. It is situated ½ mile from the Delaware River in Upper Black Eddy, minutes away from Milford and Frenchtown, in New Jersey, and Riegelsville, Erwinna and Point Pleasant, in Pennsylvania. Many families attend the school from nearby smaller Bucks County communities and from larger communities that are ½ hour

away. Renee Goodyear, Outreach Coordinator at River Valley, says that many people don't know about the campus since it is off the beaten path, although the convenience of the location to many communities is obvious. “We like to say we are centrally isolated,” says Goodyear.



Waldorf School of Princeton is located on 20 scenic acres of property filled with streams, rolling hills, and forest. The school is about five miles from Princeton University, and draws many students from the nearby Princeton community as well as from communities further away.

Because parents may be unaware of everything Waldorf Schools offer and where they are located, the two local schools offer open houses and observation days. The Princeton Waldorf School has its next Open House on Saturday, January 23, from 10am-noon. Parents and children are welcome to attend to meet some of the 38 staff and faculty members, tour the school, and view work by some of the 176 students currently attending the school. Early grade and middle school teachers will be available to meet with guests and information sessions will be held throughout the morning. Children accompanied by a parent may also participate in hands-on activities.

River Valley will be conducting an open house on January 30, 9am-12:30pm. It is designed for parents to experience a main lesson in the grades or experience the rhythm of pre-k & kindergarten classes, by sitting in the classroom as students. These workshops are for parents only, but childcare will be available. Goodyear says, “It's a pretty fascinating experience to see how the teachers combine the main lesson content with an artistic activity or movement.” There will also be panel discussions from teachers, parents, and alumni and a tour of the school. Registration in advance is requested. Both schools also provide “observation mornings” for parents to come to the school and observe teachers and children while school is in session. At Princeton, observation mornings are Wednesdays, with a tour beginning at 8:45 a.m. Registration is requested. At River Valley, the next observation mornings are January 13 and February 10 from 9:30-11:30am. Parents can step into a classroom and watch the teachers interact with kids.

These opportunities to observe the Waldorf Schools in action are important because it is a different type of education for children in grades K-8 than most schools offer. Goodyear points out, “We're not just looking to educate their minds we're looking to educate the whole person.”

Diane Barlow is Director of Admissions and Development at Princeton Waldorf. She says, “What makes Waldorf Education so unique is that it is based on the developmental needs of a child – this means that *when* a subject is taught

is just as important as *what* is taught. The fact that a child's needs are understood so deeply, and that the curriculum has the arts-infused into every aspect makes a Waldorf School a wonderful place to be for a child." She adds that it also results in children who want to learn.

The intention to provide the right experience at the right time, when a student is physically, emotionally, socially, and intellectually ready is one of the primary cornerstones that differentiates Waldorf from public and most other education systems. With careful attention to what is taught, and when it is taught, the Waldorf curriculum is attuned to the natural developmental stages of childhood and adolescence, in a way that provides the appropriate and necessary experiences that will safely guide each student through each stage of development.

Goodyear adds that students learn with their "head, heart, and hands." This experiential way of learning nurtures healthy emotional development. The belief that education is an artistic process lies at the heart of Waldorf philosophy.

Today's children belong to a future that is changing rapidly. They will need to be dynamic, resilient individuals with an ongoing thirst for learning. From the idyllic early childhood classrooms to the rigors of the middle school years, Waldorf Schools prepare students to meet this future. Using the comprehensive, multidimensional Waldorf curriculum, the skilled faculty foster intellectual achievement coupled with the creative thinking and emotional intelligence necessary to guide students through the complexities of the future.

The curriculum also promotes physical vitality and the will to persevere in the face of adversity, as well as development of spiritual and moral depth, filling students with the sense of respect and responsibility to effect positive change.

The Waldorf curriculum introduces learning gently and aims to build a foundation that is deep, broad, and sturdy. One cannot build a skyscraper, let alone a house, that can withstand the winds of time, without a strong foundation.

For more information on Waldorf Schools see WhyWaldorfWorks.org. Contact Princeton Waldorf School at 609-466-1970, MHanan@PrincetonWaldorf.org, PrincetonWaldorf.org or 1062 Cherry Hill Rd., Princeton, NJ 08540. Contact River Valley Waldorf School at 610-982-5606, ReneerVWSchool@gmail.com, RiverValleySchool.org, or 1395 Bridgeton Hill Rd, Upper Black Eddy, PA 18972.

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The Naturopath L.L.C.

The Science of Nature

Dr. Nikki Conte has been practicing naturopathic medicine for ten years after receiving her doctorate from Bastyr University of Naturopathic Medicine.

She believes in treating the whole person, not just the part that's sick.

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