



Special Edition Newsletter

Next Year's Calendar and Daily Schedule

The calendar for the next school year has been finalized, and we will have a copy of the calendar available in the near future. In the meantime, we can provide you with the following information:

Sept. 6

First day of school

Nov 10 - 11

Remembrance Day Break

Nov 19

Winter Fair: (Early dismissal the day before)

Nov 25

Parent Teacher Conferences:

Dec 17 - Jan 8

Winter break:

Feb 20 - 24

Conference week (school closed)

Mar 17

Parent Teacher conferences:

Important Updates from our Head of School

Dear Parents,

I want to begin by thanking each of you for all of your many contributions to our school as we could not have the vibrant, thriving community that exists at Sunrise without you . . . and, of course, your beautiful children.

We are constantly striving to assess our programs and evaluate ourselves as a school, and the faculty, board and administrative staff will be spending time this week continuing to look at improvements that can be implemented for next year. As we end the school year, we are working hard to ensure that Sunrise will continue to provide an excellent Waldorf education for your children as we have through our 36-year history. I'd like to update you before we head into summer of some of the details of how we plan to transition to the 2016-17 school year.

I will start by acknowledging some of the challenges that we have faced this year: the delayed arrival of our wonderful new Grade 1 and Grade 3 teachers, Hans Tholken and Janet Jewell; the announcements late this year that three of our teachers (Ms. Fichter, Ms. Markovich and Miss Anisa) have made personal decisions to pursue other opportunities; and a drop in enrollment following the 2014/15 school year that has had a serious impact on school finances. Despite these challenges, we are confident and excited for what the future holds for you, your children and SWS.

Kindergartens

Our Kindergarten programs have been remarkably stable over the years, especially in the Shining Star Kindergarten where Miss Ruth and Miss Mima have welcomed the children with warmth and

Apr 1 - 17

Spring break

May 6

Mayfest

Jun16

Last day of school

Thursday Dismissal

For most of our history, the grades school has been dismissed one period early on Thursday afternoons in order to accommodate our weekly faculty meetings. For this year, we made a change and ended school each day at 3:10 pm, including Thursdays. After consideration of many factors, we have decided to return next year to an early dismissal (2:15 pm) on Thursdays. However, in order to accommodate parents who are unable to arrange for an early pick-up, we will offer teacher supervision at no additional charge for those children who cannot be picked up until 3:10 pm. More details about this new program will be provided before school resumes in the fall.

love each fall for many, many years. Similarly, in the Bright Angel Kindergarten, first Miss Katy and Miss Filipa, then for the past four years, Miss Filipa and Miss Anisa have provided a consistent, nurturing Waldorf kindergarten program.

With the announcement of Miss Ruth's retirement, the landscape in our kindergartens will be forever changed. She has been a guiding light for the school and for our ECE programs since the very beginning. Although we hope that she will continue to be present at our school for many years to come, Miss Ruth will no longer be a daily presence in the Shining Star Kindergarten. We are pleased, though, that Miss Mima will be joined next year by Miss Angela, who, of course, was with the class in a part-time role this year and has brought a very kind and loving presence to the children. With these two teachers, we believe that this program remains in excellent hands.

We are facing a more challenging transition in the Bright Angel Kindergarten as Miss Filipa, after many years of teaching service at the school, will be taking a leave for one year to visit her native Portugal. Miss Anisa has also recently made the decision to pursue her passion as a remedial teacher and won't return to Bright Angel. Anisa has extensive remedial training and has always wanted to transition to full-time remedial work. We feel very fortunate that we will continue to see Anisa at the school regularly as we definitely plan to engage her for her remedial services throughout the year for the benefit of our students.

Although the Bright Angel program will not be the same without our familiar teachers, sad endings are openings for wonderful new beginnings. We are excited to announce that on the last day of school, Dorota Ignaszewska accepted our offer to lead the Bright Angel program next year. Dorota is an experienced Waldorf teacher both in the grades and in Waldorf kindergartens. For the past two years, she has taught Grades 1 and 2 at Whistler Waldorf School, but said that she feels called to return to her friends on Vancouver Island. She was a class teacher and Music Program Coordinator at Sunrise for five years starting in 2002 and told me yesterday that she feels like she's coming home. Dorota completed five years of studies at the Faculty of Philosophy (equivalent to a Bachelor's degree) at the Catholic University of Lublin. She completed her Bachelor of Education degree at UVic and has completed Waldorf Early Childhood Teacher Training and Waldorf Foundation training. She is a BC certified teacher.

Dorota (I imagine we will soon refer to her as Miss Dorota) has already arrived here over the weekend and will be meeting early this week with Miss Anisa and Miss Filipa to hear about the children who she will be welcoming in the fall. We will make plans for the Bright Angel parents and children to also meet their new teacher very soon. We will let you know as soon as possible when that will happen and, of course, will keep you apprised of other developments as they are finalized.

Grades

As you may already know, two of our Grades teachers, Sietske Fichter (Grade 5) and Vivian Markovich (Grade 2), notified us late in the school year that they will not be returning to Sunrise next year. My understanding is that they are planning to start a new Waldorf-inspired school initiative in the Valley and I understand that this information is now commonly known in our community.

I imagine that this news may have caused some confusion for some Sunrise families. I will tell any parent that asks that we fully support a parent's right to make the best decision for the education of their children and will never discourage you from exploring other alternatives. We believe that Sunrise Waldorf School provides a wonderful education, and I think the Grade 8 class that graduated this week provides strong evidence of that, not to mention our other recent graduates who I see thriving at local high schools and in

university. Still, you are the ones responsible for choosing what is best for your child and we are happy to support your decisions about your child's schooling.

I can also say that I know from experience how difficult it can be to manage the demands of a school-meeting strict Ministry of Education requirements, finding and managing property zoned for a school site, maintaining a full Waldorf curriculum while also meeting the BC curriculum requirements, and running the day-to-day operations. It is not an easy task and we wish Sietske and Vivian the best with their new endeavour.

As to our grades school, I know that next year's Grade 1, Grade 3 and Grade 6 parents are waiting anxiously to hear about the new teacher for their class. We are able to announce at this time two of our new teachers for the fall. Due to a few unanticipated delays, we are still working on finding the best match possible for our upcoming Grade 6 class and will notify you immediately when the right teacher has been selected.

For next year's Grade 1 class, Hans-Peter Mothes is very happy to have the opportunity to take a class all the way from Grade 1 through Grade 8. Of course, Mr. Mothes isn't a "new teacher" at all. He successfully graduated his Grade 8 class last week, having been with them since midway through their Grade 3 year. For those of you who don't know, Mr. Mothes is a very experienced Waldorf teacher, having taught previously at Kimberton Waldorf School, Hokupa'a School (a Waldorf school initiative) and Kona Pacific Waldorf School. Mr. Mothes completed a 3-year full-time Waldorf teacher training in 2004 and a full-time training as a curative educator at the College for Anthroposophic Pedagogy. We are extremely pleased to introduce him as next year's Grade 1 teacher. He is planning to arrange a class get-together soon and will be in touch with each of you.

We are also happy to announce that our Grade 3 teacher for next year will be Trisha Sveistrup. Trish has a Bachelor of Arts and Aviation diploma from the University of the Fraser Valley and a Bachelor of Education from the University of Manitoba. She has completed her Waldorf Foundation Studies with the Rudolf Steiner Centre in Toronto, and is taking her Waldorf teacher training courses beginning next week at the West Coast Institute. She has also continued to deepen her understanding of Anthroposophy and human development through various art and biography classes at Arscura, School for Living Art, in Ontario.

Trish has been a public speaker and education coach for many years, and taught English to Preschool to Grade 9 students in Korea. Since 2012, she has been closely involved with Waldorf education as the Promotions and Outreach Chair at the Halton Waldorf School and as the Co-Chair of the Board of Directors of the Edgehill Country School (also a Waldorf school), as well as working as a substitute teacher at both schools. We were all very impressed with her teaching when she visited Sunrise recently to teach lessons in Grade 1, Grade 2 and Grade 6. Personally, I was also especially impressed with the detailed lesson plans she provided voluntarily on the morning of her visit.

Trish plans to schedule home visits with each family this summer and will also arrange for a group gathering during the summer-details to be announced soon. We are very pleased to welcome Trish and her family to the Cowichan Valley and to our school.

When there is turnover in our faculty at Sunrise, I inevitably hear the question, "What is wrong with the school that so many teachers want to leave?" There are a number of complex challenges that Waldorf schools face, especially in B.C., that act as major factors in hiring and retaining capable teachers, including immigration restrictions and financial restraints (see my discussion of our PPOC challenges in an earlier newsletter-if you missed it, contact me and I'll send along a copy). I could discuss these issues in

detail with anybody who is interested, but I'll just say here that when I compare Sunrise to other B.C. Waldorf schools, I find that we actually have a more stable faculty than most of our sister schools in the province. It is a challenge for all of the Waldorf schools in this province to hire and retain good teachers and, despite this, Sunrise has been able to retain, for the most part, a really excellent faculty. I am personally thrilled with the quality of teaching we have at Sunrise even with the challenges that BC Waldorf schools all face in keeping a quality staff.

Eurythmy

So, let's talk specifically about our Eurythmy program. Our commitment has been and still is (when possible) to offer a full Eurythmy program each year for all grade levels at SWS. In the past, we have been very successful in doing so, which is not the norm at B.C. Waldorf schools-I believe that Vancouver Waldorf School is the only BC Waldorf school that currently offers a full-time Eurythmy program. However, because of the restrictive immigration laws that have made it very difficult to import foreign workers, and because there are no training institutes for Eurythmy teachers in Canada, it has become very difficult to hire capable Eurythmy teachers. There are just not that many Eurythmy teachers with Canadian citizenship or residency.

In the past three years, we have hired young Eurythmists with little or no previous teaching experience, trusting that we could help them develop into good teachers. In each case, for their own reasons, they decided not to continue at the school. For next year, we have had many applications for our open position, but not one of them was a Canadian resident or citizen and we are unable to consider their applications. Although we continue to search, at this moment, it appears likely that we will be unable to offer a full-time Eurythmy program at the start of next year. We will continue our search for a full-time Eurythmy teacher but are also now looking at options for Eurythmy blocks or other part-time programs.

Financial Challenges

Sustaining enrollment is of utmost importance to the health of our school on many levels, not just financial, but there is certainly a financial consequence when enrollment falls. Due to a drop in enrollment of 21 students (from 171 in the 2014/15 school year to 150 in the 2015/16 school year), SWS will end the year with a projected deficit of more than \$200,000. The last time the school faced a significant deficit was 2010/11 when enrollment was 130 students. Since that time, enrollment has steadily increased and the 171 students last year represented the highest enrollment the school had ever enjoyed. During those intervening years, expenses have also climbed steadily, including a long overdue revision to the teacher's salary schedule. So, our projected deficit this year is about twice as much as the deficit in 2010/11 even with 20 additional students. In response to this situation, the Board of Directors has proposed certain adjustments to the budget and presented these proposals to the faculty for feedback. The faculty has provided additional suggestions for meeting this challenge and these groups will meet on Wednesday for a concluding discussion before the Board makes final decisions.

One positive development is that we are currently projecting that we may recover most of our lost enrollment for 2016/17.

Thank you for your prompt responses this year during our re-registration process. This has allowed us to form an idea of our enrollment levels for next year far in advance of normal. We've also had many new families register for the 2016/17 school year and are currently projecting between 162 and 168 students for next year. The baseline at this point in our school history for a healthy financial position is 165 students. Enrollment beyond that number, which we expect to be our norm going forward, will allow the school to thrive into the future.

Celebrating Miss Ruth

Please join the school in celebrating Ruth Ker this coming Saturday, June 24, from 3:00 to 6:00 pm. Unfortunately, AWSNA has scheduled their yearly Delegates meeting in Detroit that day, so I will be unable to attend this most important event, but I will be sending my love and admiration for her immense contributions to our school from afar. I will be back in the office on Monday, July 4.

Finally...

I've had the opportunity to visit several Waldorf schools this year and to meet with other school representatives at the Association of Waldorf Schools of North America (AWSNA) conferences. I get so much out of these opportunities as I see that we are all facing similar challenges and I find that there is a common enthusiasm and will to move forward and provide the best education possible.

Even more, I work directly with a group of individuals who astound me with their dedication and talents. Sometimes we face real problems that call on us to grow and improve how we operate our school, but it is my belief that our school is steadily achieving the excellence that is our goal. I hear this from the faculty and Board, who remind me of the major strides we've made in recent years. I hear this from dedicated parents who have been at our school for many years as well as new parents who are just finding us after years in public schools and feel grateful for the individual care that each student receives at SWS. I hear this from Susan Penner, former Inspector of Independent Schools, who told us last year that "working with Sunrise Waldorf School was one of the highlights of my professional career." And I hear this from AWSNA leaders, who have congratulated me on how "Sunrise has become such a bright light in the Waldorf community."

The parent body is a huge part of that community and I thank you for your ongoing involvement in making Sunrise Waldorf School such a wonderful place to be. I sometimes sense that some parents do not want to bother me when they have concerns or just wish to understand the school better. I want to assure you that I truly welcome the opportunity to speak with you at any time about any ideas, questions or concerns that you have. Meeting and talking with parents is one of those aspects of my job that I treasure most as we all work together to make SWS a great school.

Warmly,
Kevin McDuff
Head of School

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