



River Valley Waldorf School Educational Plan

First Draft

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This document describes what we hold as our educational adaptations, and is a potential picture of River Valley Waldorf School as we head into the academic year 20/21. We assume that, in the following year, we will continue to be influenced by the global pandemic we are currently experiencing. We assume it will be necessary to integrate guidelines outlined in the RVWS Health and Safety Plan. It is our hope that this Educational Plan will serve as a guiding document--for teachers, parents, and all leadership bodies of the school.

In this document, we have outlined four major sections: School-Wide Supports, Early Childhood, In-Person Learning in the Grades, and Remote Learning in the Grades.

The ideas in this Plan reflect our pedagogical identity and commitment to Waldorf education and academic excellence. The Plan has been influenced by our shared experience of remote learning, and lessons learned as we stepped into this new norm, beginning with the sudden arrival of the pandemic in March 2020, through the end of the school year. The Plan reflects feedback received from parents, teachers, and students as we began to use remote learning platforms and also strove to maintain community, while at the same time distancing. The Plan reflects ideas shared from other academic institutions, and Waldorf schools in particular.

It is our hope that this Plan will be helpful as a resource and will be seen as a living document, a mirror of our changing level of understanding and our increasing proficiency with the flexibility of Waldorf education and with remote learning. It is our hope that ideas contained here are seen as dynamic and changing as our needs change and as we observe and learn.

In creating this Educational Plan, we referred to the Association of Waldorf Schools of North America's *Principles for Waldorf Schools*, as well as countless other AWSNA resources. In particular, the following aspects of the AWSNA Principles have guided our thinking:

- 1. Waldorf education enlivens the physical, emotional, intellectual, social, artistic, and spiritual capacities of the human being as the individual moves through the phases of this life.**
- 2. Waldorf schools foster social renewal by cultivating human capacities in service to the individual and society. Waldorf schools foster development so that, throughout life, individuals are motivated to serve humanity with strength of will, depth of feeling, clarity of thought, and the ability to work with others. The educational program is designed to strengthen these fundamental human capacities in our students.**
- 3. The educational program is developed out of an understanding of the physical, emotional, and intellectual development of the child. Core components of the educational program include the student-teacher relationship; the artistic approach; working from experience to concept; working from whole to parts; use of rhythm and repetition; and observation as the foundation for assessment.**

4. **Waldorf schools support freedom in teaching within the context of the school's shared agreements. Individual teachers work creatively with curricular, pedagogical, and assessment components of the program out of freedom and in a way that serves their individual students, the class as a whole, and the school community.**

5. **Enduring human relationships between students and their teachers and among the children themselves are at the heart of Waldorf education. Healthy human relationships with and among parents and colleagues are essential to the well-being of the school.**

1. School-Wide Supports

River Valley Waldorf School, like Waldorf communities across the globe, only function well when all members feel heard, safe, and supported. The following areas point to ways in which the school would like to support the community.

- Rhythm and form are anchors of Waldorf philosophy. Whether we are on the school grounds and in the classrooms, or online for remote learning, this coming school year, children and their families may experience times of adjustment to new expectations and rhythms. In addition to putting the proper physical safeguards into practice, we want to create an environment that, while being physically safe, also feels socially and emotionally safe. **The school is exploring ways to provide social-emotional support for teachers and students, as well as curating resources for families about topics such as how to support children and adjust to new social habits, routines, and environments.** Our community, past and present, *is* our school and we are committed to doing what we can by providing helpful resources and support, in addition to creating a safe environment.
- Waldorf schools have a strong history of hands-on learning in all classrooms, reserving technology until it can be introduced later in the child's development. We also recognize the need to have preparations in place for times when the school is required by law to temporarily stop in-person instruction. Clearly, if the circumstances necessitate, the school will need to continue classes in another mode. In order for teachers to offer rich, hands-on classes in times of remote learning, they will need training for how to best make technology the vehicle, not the driver, of those lessons. To that end, **the school is actively pursuing the best ways to provide teachers with adequate training over the summer on the art**

of teaching online, using the beautiful and balanced approach that students and families love about Waldorf education. In addition, steps will be taken to provide adequate training and support for both students and their families in how to use the technological tools provided.

- The Health and Safety protocols outlined in the recent draft will affect how RVWS will look and feel and may necessitate modifying how main lessons and specialty subjects are offered. We are exploring new methodologies for bringing vibrant and nourishing Waldorf pedagogy. The rich Waldorf curriculum is strong enough to support a multitude of modalities, but in order to make this shift as seamless as possible our teachers will need time and training to imagine and create new ways to bring these lessons to the students. **The school will provide additional educational opportunities for teachers over the summer, as they prepare for different scenarios.**
- Some students may have experienced some level of trauma as a result of the shift in social norms and an increased presence of cultural fear. Additionally they may struggle to complete tasks while working at home. Signs of trauma can be depression, anxiety, or the inability to concentrate. We are exploring therapies to work with teachers, training them in strategies and opportunities for meeting students' mental health needs and perhaps even directly in the middle school classrooms as well. **The school is investigating how best to identify students in the upper grades who are struggling with their work in order to help keep them on track and how best to work with specific needs as they arise.**

2. Early Childhood

The Early Childhood department at River Valley acknowledges that children of different ages have different developmental needs. Our Early Childhood teachers have adapted the CDC guidelines and the RVWS Health and Safety Plan to address the needs of the children in our care, in order to continue to provide a pedagogically sound experience while also ensuring health and safety. The following document outlines our current plan, and is subject to change.

Guiding Principles

- **An environment that protects & nourishes**
- **Love and emotional warmth**
- **Free, imaginative play**
- **Creative, artistic expression**
- **Trust, wonder and joy**

Early Childhood In-Person Learning

- Our days together will primarily be spent outdoors where children will be able to benefit from the healing aspects of nature and the healthy movement of their bodies. We will incorporate staggered times for drop-off and pick-up, and when classes are in the building, teachers will create a predictable daily and weekly rhythm to support the child's sense of security and confidence. With safety protocols in place, we will be able to continue offering a warm meal during the school day.
- Children will remain with their assigned teachers and class throughout the day and create strong bonds within their groups. Children learn through imitation and it is with a mood of patience, love, and warmth that the teachers will implement health and safety guidelines.
- Play is the work of the young child. Ensuring that children have a safe and appropriate environment in which to play will be a priority. Surfaces, toys, and personal items such as nap mats will be cleaned daily. The number of toys will be limited to reduce risk of exposure.
- We will continue offering opportunities for activities that support the foundations for academic learning such as writing through drawing, language arts through verse and story, as well as organizing activities for more free creative expression.
- Young children need to know and experience that the world is good. We will develop our day to day procedures while holding this in particular focus. We will be looking to fully integrate health and safety measures in ways that meld into the rhythm of our days calmly and with levity and joy, while protecting children's innate sense of trust and wonder.

Early Childhood Remote Learning

- Weekly curriculum offerings for parents will include:
 - An aspect of Waldorf early childhood pedagogy and tips for parents & children
 - Songs, verses, & stories with tutorials audio/visual
 - Ideas/activities for indoor & outdoor work and play
- Craft projects will be prepared and sent home, or made available for pick up
- A teacher-hosted Zoom parent meeting will be offered each week focusing on:
 - Emotional support
 - Sense of community
 - Q & A
- Teachers will be available by phone during specified hours and by email

- **Guidelines for Children**

We suggest that children participate in the daily life of the family, supported by the rhythm and activities provided by the EC faculty.
- **Guidelines for Parents**

We want to support each parent's goals for their children within the parameters of their home and family circumstances. Teachers will encourage parents to:

 - Uphold a strong family rhythm and slow down
 - Maintain self-care
 - Focus on *how* to accomplish family goals and less on *what* to accomplish
 - Review the weekly curriculum offerings on their own, ideally without their children

3. In-Person Learning in the Grades

Waldorf education is unique in that the richness of the curriculum supports the multifaceted dimensions of each developmental phase of childhood. It is our intention to offer a true Waldorf curriculum, appropriate for each age group, in a way that can be experienced fully by students, and supported by all teachers.

- **Subject teachers paired with classes** - In order to maintain small group sizes, and minimize exposure and transitions, we are exploring the possibilities of collaboration between main lesson and subject teachers, or other possible pairings that would allow for the development of smaller cohorts.
- **Experiential learning and projects** - We envision many double periods with class teachers that allow for hands-on learning, independent discovery, inquiry, and ongoing individual and group projects. We also envision experiential learning and projects forming a significant component of our curriculum this year across many topics and grades, also offering opportunities for collaboration across subject areas.
- **Learning outdoors** - Each class will have their own designated outdoor “classroom” space which they can utilize at any time, weather permitting, for projects, lessons, and activities. Some subjects which work especially well outdoors are: writing, drawing, drama, discussion, games, and group projects. We envision a movement program outdoors that offers ongoing, structured games and activities that support social distancing in a child-friendly way. In addition, we will continue to have recesses and time in nature for free play. Outdoor time and a strong connection to nature and the seasons is a strong tenet of Waldorf pedagogy, and we see this as a therapeutic and beneficial aspect of our curriculum, now more than ever.
- **Recesses** - Transitions will be staggered, as needed, and held with care to minimize contact as much as possible when moving through the hallways.
- **Class culture** - Desks will be spaced 6 feet apart within classrooms, if possible, and we will actively work to create class cultures that encourage healthy habits and a positive relationship to wearing cloth face covering, when age-appropriate and for safety reasons. We will strive to find a balance between distancing and wearing face coverings so that neither action is unduly uncomfortable.

- **Assemblies, Plays, and Events** - We are committed to continuing to enliven and hold the festival life of our school, and will approach each festival and event creatively, with some events being held outside, some festivals being celebrated individually within each class, or with smaller gatherings, as needed.

4. Remote Learning in the Grades

River Valley Waldorf School is committed to offering pedagogically sound learning all year round, including during times of remote learning. Our teachers are researching different instructional methods so we can provide a nurturing and engaging remote-learning program that continues to develop the academic skills children need and is balanced with arts, projects, and remote hands-on activities.

Our remote learning program will:

- ❖ Begin after a two-day transition period, once the state mandates that schools temporarily close
 - ❖ Be prepared for by teachers prior to the beginning of the school year 20/21
 - ❖ Maintain core main lesson blocks for each grade level
 - ❖ Maintain the story curriculum for each grade level
 - ❖ Aim to maintain regular practice of the core academic subjects, including math and language arts skills
 - ❖ Provide regular lessons and projects in the arts and special subjects
 - ❖ Allow for social interaction between students via Zoom
 - ❖ Continue to provide a consistent, high quality learning support program
- **Transition into remote learning** - If River Valley needs to close the school building for a period of remote learning, in accordance with guidance from the CDC, state and local government, there will be a transition period of two weekdays for families to make the changes they need to make to shift into remote learning. After the two transition days, school will continue with a full remote learning program.
 - **Preparation for Remote Learning** - Over the summer, because of the likelihood of multiple school closures, each teacher will prepare for eight weeks of remote learning curriculum which can be implemented throughout the course of the year as needed. When the school shifts into a period of remote learning, if what is

being done in the classroom is easily transferred without delay to remote learning, the teacher may decide to continue at their discretion. In some cases though, the remote learning curriculum will be a separately prepared block that reflects Waldorf pedagogy, as well as the necessary shift in expectations (in regards to time and intensity) that accompanies remote learning.

- **Schedule** - A school wide weekly schedule will be provided at the transition into remote learning. We will provide a suggested daily rhythm for parents to establish at home, and guidance from teachers about methods for establishing healthy rhythms. We will provide a regular, weekly class schedule that includes lessons for main lesson and subject classes through a remote learning platform and regular weekly Zoom classes. This schedule will reflect the amount of time that is healthy for children to spend engaged in remote learning according to their age.

- **Guidelines for Time** - The remote learning curriculum will provide guidance to parents around how much total time is healthy for their children to spend daily in remote learning. There are many well-researched time guidelines available. The guidelines are to include time for main lesson work, subject lessons, and skills practice in their entirety. The following is an example:

1-2 hours in grades 1-3

1 ½ - 2 ½ hours in grades 4-5

2-3 hours in grades 6-8

- **Expectations** - It is expected that students and parents in grades 1-8 will engage with the materials provided in the remote learning program, completing projects and assignments, and submit work to their teachers, where applicable.
- **Accountability** - The school will provide support to families in working directly with students to hold them accountable for doing the work so the burden does not fall on parents, many of whom are working full time. Methods of evaluation during remote learning include:
 - Grades 1-4 - photos of work, submitted by parents
 - Grades 5-8 - photos and scanned files upload, word documents

Teachers will provide a clear explanation of how students' work will be assessed and graded during periods of remote learning. The school is also considering ways to respond in cases of prolonged student absence during remote learning.

- **Parent Communication**

- Parent Zoom meetings at least once a month during periods of remote learning
- Class teachers will offer daily office hours M-F. Subject teachers will offer office hours less frequently but still on a weekly basis.
- Weekly email communications

- **Remote Curriculum**

Grades 1-4

So far we have found stories, drawings, projects, and short videos to be the most effective methods for learning and student engagement in the lower grades and will continue to use these as the foundation for our lessons. The priority during periods of remote learning in the lower grades is to continue the story curriculum, maintain regular practice of math and language arts skills, drawing, and main lesson content. Remote programming in the lower grades will include:

- Daily curriculum-based story or lecture
- Daily “will” work - writing, drawing, modeling, outdoor project, etc
- Daily skills practice - math and/or language arts, including reading
- New main lesson content
- Regular weekly zoom calls (1-2 times per week, as developmentally appropriate)
- Occasional video lessons
- Poems and Songs
- Movement suggestions (juggling, jump roping, skipping, beanbags, bal-a-vis-x, take time, etc.)
- Painting, drawing, form drawing
- Projects and activities

Grades 5-8

The priority during periods of remote learning in the upper grades is to continue learning the new content of the main lesson curriculum, maintain regular practice of math and language arts skills, but not to the exclusion of subject lessons, and provide opportunities for discussion, group work, and social interaction. Remote programming in the upper grades will include:

- Daily curriculum-based story or lecture
 - Daily will work - writing, drawing, modeling, outdoor project, etc
 - Daily skills practice - math and/or language arts
 - New main lesson content
 - Regular weekly zoom calls (4-8 times per week, as developmentally appropriate)
 - Occasional video lessons
 - Poems and Songs
 - Projects and activities
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- **Subject Classes:** During periods of remote learning, children will continue to engage with subject classes throughout the course of each week but not as frequently or intensively as in school, given the reduced number of contact hours students will be expected to engage in school work at home. Because of the diverse nature of the specialty subjects, each subject teacher will offer rich and varied opportunities, appropriate to online learning. Topics may be separate from what was being worked on while on site. Materials will be sent home and clear expectations will be set at the beginning of the remote learning period.

 - **Educational support:** The educational support program offered by RVWS will continue to function fully, to support the needs of individual students during periods of remote learning. Educational support has been found to be very compatible with remote learning. The educational support program is structured around working one-on-one with students to solidify specific academic skills and concepts, and to support sensory integration. These individual live lessons will be offered to students via phone calls and/or video conference calls. Students will have their own materials at home (balls, hoops, etc) to allow them to participate in all movement exercises.

 - **Hybrid learning:** The school is still in the process of exploring hybrid learning models. Hybrid learning could address the following situations: if a student needs to be at home while the rest of the class is in school; or if it is deemed necessary for classes to be held

in-person for partial days and at-home for partial days, to allow for shorter periods of exposure. As we discover more about these models, this document will be updated.