

The Friends of Waldorf Education
January 2015

Towards Founding a Waldorf Initiative - Questions & Answers

Who can start a school?

Waldorf schools are usually founded by Waldorf teachers as well as parents who are seeking Waldorf education for their children. To take this step, one needs to set up a school foundation (see question below). If parents want to start a school, it does not necessarily mean that there are also teachers who are excited about the location or about Waldorf education in general. Most of the initiatives are developed by parents who meet as a study group and work on their idea and its implementation for several years, sometimes even for several generations.

What are the first steps towards an initiative?

Generally, the process begins with the creation of committees who deal with financial issues, look for available buildings and search for teachers. It is also important to study the national educational laws and to get in touch with local politicians to find out how receptive they are to the idea of a Waldorf school. Should there be other questions, you can always get in touch with your national Waldorf Association, with the Friends of Waldorf Education or the International Council of Waldorf and Rudolf Steiner Schools. Most importantly, all parents (and teachers) should become familiar with the principles of Waldorf education.

What are appropriate introduction readings?

For a study group an obvious choice are the lectures of Rudolf Steiner on education. Further reading suggestions can be found on our webpage: (<https://www.freunde-waldorf.de/en/waldorf-worldwide/waldorf-education/literature.html>)

What is the best way to start an initiative?

A Waldorf kindergarten belongs to a Waldorf school. It is highly advisable to first establish a Waldorf kindergarten, in order to familiarise parents with Waldorf education and start with a school only 2-3 years later.

How many people should be involved in the founding process?

If the founding group has 20-30 members, tasks can be delegated in a meaningful way and on a voluntary basis. As a rule of thumb: when there are enough children to fill three kindergarten groups, there will be enough children to fill a school class. Another indication is the number of people interested in public lectures on Waldorf topics. If 60-100 people show up, there are probably enough potential parents among them.

How to choose a suitable location?

The location should be easily accessible. It is helpful for prospective parents to find out early on, in which district (or municipality) the school will be located.

Which committees are important?

It is very important to have a general committee that develops the vision for a Waldorf school with the people involved and prepares the appropriate strategies and structures. The clearer the vision of the parent-teacher group is, the easier it will be to make decisions. From a very early stage, it is also important to have a Committee in charge of the search for teachers. Qualified Waldorf teachers are generally not easy to find. The Public Relations Committee has to attend meetings of the city council, talk to political parties and advocate the cause of the Waldorf initiative in general. Public relations also include dealing with the press and setting up a webpage with regular information on events and lectures, as well as a calendar for the committee meetings.

From the outset, there should also be a Finance Committee. Its task should be to develop an appropriate concept with regards to funding the first years of running the school.

Which legal steps are required?

At an appropriate time, the initiative should make a legally binding agreement that is no longer one of a loose network of individuals. At this point, it becomes necessary to create an association (or choose another possible legal form as that of a cooperative). In any case, the legal entity must be non-profit.

What kind of local support is necessary?

If possible, a partner school should accompany the founding process. Generally, other Waldorf schools are willing to help, especially if they can hope to be relieved by the new school. On the other hand, if the incumbent school is threatened by a loss of a vital number of students, the willingness to partner the new school should be limited. In this particular case, one should consider whether it is justifiable to start a new initiative or not.

How many classes should the school have in the beginning?

It makes sense to found a school with 1-3 classes and then create a new class every year, so the school is growing at a reasonable pace.

Which conditions should be met before the start of school?

- The founding initiative should verify that there are enough students to take this step. This also means that there are enough parents ready to support the build up phase of a new school. When the first classes open, there should be at least 20 children per class. In our experience, one should have about twice as many interested people to achieve this number.
- Appropriate classrooms must be found. This applies both for the actual beginning, as well as for the build up period in which the school grows larger on an annual basis.
- Financial planning for the first 5-10 years of the initiative must be solid. In many cases, the beginning will only be possible if the school takes up a loan. In this case, however, the plan must indicate specifically how the school intends to reduce debt within a reasonable time period. An expert school manager from an experienced school should conduct a thorough analysis of this specific point.
- The initiative must have suitable Waldorf teachers for the beginning and the first 2-3 years for all subjects and provide a prospect on how to recruit Waldorf teachers in the following years. It is particularly difficult to find founding teachers. It is therefore recommended to find and support people that are interested to attend a Waldorf teacher seminar in advance.
- It should be clear that the plans of establishing a school should not encounter local resistance, but should receive the broadest political support possible.
- If possible, an existing Waldorf school should partner up with the new school. Some colleagues of this school should consider the partnership a personal responsibility, which includes the participation in joint conferences, sitting in on classes, etc. In particular, the partner school assumes an obligation to provide substitute teachers if necessary.

How much experience should a founding teacher have?

Founding teachers should be committed to the initiative and experienced in Waldorf education. He/she usually joins the new school coming from an existing Waldorf school. In the best case, this

person is a class teacher who has gone through at least one cycle from grade 1 up to grade 8 and has enough experience with the self-governing bodies of a Waldorf school.

What are the responsibilities of a founding teacher?

Since the founding teacher may be the only one who is familiar with the conduct of a Waldorf teachers' conference, he/she is a key consultant for building up a teachers' conference and the faculty meeting at the new school. Additionally, this person can initially take over the negotiations with government authorities and engage in a healthy dialogue with parents.

How many other teachers does a new school need?

A new school works best if it begins with multiple classes simultaneously. Each class needs a class teacher. It is highly desirable that he/she has attended a Waldorf educational seminar and the more experienced the person is, the better. If one spends enough time planning ahead and finds potential Waldorf teachers within the initiative group, these individuals can plan to attend a Waldorf teacher training. It is very helpful to take into account the needs of other schools in the area and rather find new teachers than recruit teachers from existing schools.

Specialty teaching will be necessary as well. The classroom teacher can take over parts of specialised teaching (for example music, handicraft or gardening), but one also needs specialist teachers. They may work on a part time basis in the beginning and join as full time teachers later on. Eurythmy lessons cannot be given without specialised training, nor can foreign language lessons or sports.

What admissions protocol will you adopt?

- The founding group of the school assigns the founding teacher or other appropriately qualified teachers to facilitate the admission interview.
- Children must be met individually and examined for their maturity to go to school. Experienced teachers should be involved in this vital task.
- Simultaneously, one must talk to the parents. How do they relate to Waldorf education? Is it possible to imagine a lasting, fruitful cooperation?
- The admission process is not complete before the child has seen the school doctor for a medical examination. Therefore, a Waldorf school should find and contact an Anthroposophical doctor as soon as possible to ensure medical care for the children.
- Finally, a financial agreement has to be concluded between the parents and the school body. This should be determined in writing, specifying the amount that the parents will contribute to the school.

How should the school retain teachers?

Once the initiative has decided on a certain teacher, an employment contract should be signed, including a written commitment to take over responsibility within the teachers college and certify the openness to participate in continuous training.

What happens at the inauguration of the school?

There will certainly be a large public ceremony during with a virtuous speech and during which official representatives of the public sphere speak as well. Furthermore, there will be artistic performances, maybe by the partner school. In any case, teachers, parents and children should experience a feeling of starting together on a new path.

How can one establish a regular teachers' conference?

As soon as there are teachers who are willing to teach at the new school, these teachers should meet for a regular weekly meeting (even before the beginning of the school year). This step implies a turning point in the founding process, as now the body of teachers separates itself from the general founding circle.

How does the school board emerge?

While it might not be difficult to see that teachers need their own body, it is less clear who should be a member of the school board. Should the parents stay among themselves? In the early stage of the developmental process, it is often obvious that the school foundation, the board of directors and the board members are parents. However, now the teachers become members of the association as well. Depending on the vision of the initiative, the board is made up of either a majority of parents, a majority of teachers, or both in a balanced ratio.

Is there a need for a school administrator?

When the school reaches a phase of construction planning or another important moment in school life, it will probably not be possible to continue much longer without a school administrator.

What if uncertainties occur?

Even if small uncertainties occur, the school can always contact their partner school and if it has no such relation, then it can turn to the National or Regional Waldorf Association, the Friends of Waldorf Education or the International Council.

Are there alternatives to founding a Waldorf school?

Yes, e.g. a recreational school. On one or two afternoons or on Saturdays, when there is no school children who attend a regular primary school, could meet to experience the elements of Waldorf education, which are not integrated in their elementary school curriculum: painting with water colours, eurythmy, possibly the sounds of a foreign language and the imagery of fairy tales. If there are people within the initiative group who are able to provide this opportunity (such as future teachers who are already present), such an offer may alleviate much of what has become difficult to realize because the process of founding a school is not quick enough as one would have wished for ones own children.

Where can I find literature on this subject?

- The Education of the Child, by Rudolf Steiner
- A Handbook for Waldorf Class Teachers, Edited by Kevin Avison
- <http://www.florisbooks.co.uk/subjects/education>
- <http://www.waldorfpublishings.org/store/>
- <http://www.waldorfresearchinstitute.org/>
- <http://www.paedagogik-goetheanum.ch/Literature.983.0.html?&L=1>