

## **How Green Are Waldorf Schools?**

A fundamental aspect of Waldorf Education is a commitment to nurture and sustain the natural world. Through curriculum and activities such as gardening, composting, and student-managed recycling programs, students learn to become stewards of the environment in which they live.

This is implicit in every Waldorf school.

But what about the explicit commitment to being eco-friendly in Waldorf schools and communities? Curious about this, and wondering if AWSNA could perhaps be of service in helping schools become more ecological, we sent a Green Survey to Waldorf schools and associated programs around the country in order to get a picture of their levels of commitment.

Questions centered around schools' purchasing of paper and cleaning products, energy consumption, communications costs, landscaping practices, vehicle use, recycling, hot lunches, building, and green policy.

The results of the AWSNA Green Survey clearly indicate a desire within Waldorf communities to support and encourage environmental sustainability and stewardship. However, the results also demonstrate a substantial lag between desire and practice.

Why is this? And can the information garnered from the survey help in shrinking this gap?

### **Paper and Cleaning Products**

Here's an example: The first group of questions on the survey addressed the use of paper products, including paper towels, toilet tissue, copy paper, letterhead, lined pads, paper used for promotional printing, main lesson books, drawing paper, practice paper, and painting paper. For the schools that provided information about their use of copy paper, only 63% use recycled content paper, while 96% of those schools would like to purchase recycled content paper.

The main reason given for this disparity was simply the cost. The same was true of paper towel use. Only 64% of the responses to this question reported use of recycled content paper towels, while 98% reported the desire to use paper towels containing recycled content. Similar numbers were seen for all of the products in this section.

The next category of questions addressed the use of environmentally friendly cleaning supplies: floor cleaner, window cleaner, general cleaner, hand soap, sponges and mops. Once again, the desire to use environmentally friendly products was indicated. 79% of schools that responded to the questions covering floor cleaner use an environmentally friendly alternative. 91% of the schools that responded would prefer to use an

environmentally friendly floor cleaner. Another example is the use of environmentally friendly hand soap. Only 65% of the schools that replied to this question currently use environmentally friendly hand soap, while 91% of those schools would like to. The difference between desire and current use can again be attributed to cost, as well as, to a lesser extent, reliance on janitorial services that do not provide an environmentally friendly alternative.

### **General Landscaping and Recycling**

Under the category of landscaping, schools were asked about their interests in regionally appropriate xeriscaping, biodynamic lawn and garden preparations, and garden and lawn equipment. The responses for each question were mixed. Several schools responded that because they rent land and are not responsible for lawn care, these questions do not apply to them. 57% of schools who replied to this section were interested in biodynamic preparations.

In all of the schools that responded, recycling is a common practice. Most schools have student-managed recycling programs in which one grade is responsible for collecting recyclables. Also of importance is the common practice of composting. 75% of the schools that responded to this section compost their food waste. As with the student-managed recycling programs, most of these schools have student-managed composting programs.

### **Building and Landscaping**

The building portion of the survey contained questions about the use of environmentally friendly materials in new buildings and/or major renovations. Although the majority of the schools that responded have not undertaken any major building projects, 29% of the schools did some form of construction in the past five years. Of those, 46% used some type of environmentally friendly building materials. Examples given ranged from including a few green materials into a design to entire LEED certified buildings. Of the 67% of schools that are planning future building or renovations projects, 53% are hoping to use environmentally friendly materials.

Many schools are trying: we learned about sustainably harvested Virginia hardwood flooring, hard plank siding at the Charlottesville Waldorf School to straw bales used at the Nelson Waldorf School and Tara Performing Arts High School, and LEED certified materials at the Chicago Waldorf School. As many of you know, Denver Waldorf School, San Francisco Waldorf School, and the Charlottesville Waldorf School are all working towards LEED certification.

The Pasadena Waldorf School wrote this: “We just opened our preschool in a former kindergarten room in our 1907-era house, and installed a new building to house our parent/toddler and kindergarten classes. All the construction, installation, and finishing

were achieved in the most environmentally-friendly, non-toxic ways possible. While we can't say the projects are totally green (readily renewable as well as environmentally safe), they are a huge step forward. Several parents were vital contributors to this process as we worked to address their concerns about such issues as off-gassing.”

A noteworthy addition to the energy purchases section was a question detailing the use of alternative energy. Several schools have integrated photovoltaic panels, geothermal heating and cooling, and passive solar design into their energy use practices.

### **Green Practices and Policies**

The final section of the survey covered schools' policies on green practices and education. The responses received revealed that the majority of schools do not have an established green plan or policy. Despite their lack of a written policy, most schools integrated recycling and composting into their curriculum. A few schools have developed curriculum highlighting the use of renewable energy.

Many schools explained that an eco-friendly culture is standard in their communities, and therefore, explicit education policies have never been developed. Some schools stated that informal green practices are initiated by students, others by parents, for example.

Some schools are creating compacts such as the Pasadena Waldorf School's "Sunflower Compact," which confirms the "mission to be responsible stewards for our earth, and to conserve her resources."

Other explicit movements include an Ecoteam being developed by the Shepherd Valley Waldorf School and an elective class on sustainability. Academe of the Oaks also offers a green club as part of an after school program. In their efforts to develop policy and practice some schools have been asking for materials and ideas.

The survey results were collected from 67 schools and programs across Canada and the U.S. over a six month period in 2007. 67 schools completed and returned survey forms; of these 86% were from the United States. The remaining 14% were completed by Canadian schools. The survey focused on the purchase of "green" alternatives to conventional products. For this survey, a green alternative was considered to be any product, service or practice that has a smaller impact on the environment.

The vast majority of the Waldorf Schools in North America that were surveyed have expressed to AWSNA a desire for assistance in achieving these goals.

*Written by Winslow Eliot*

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