



winterberry

charter school

We should notice that we are already supported at every moment. There is the earth below our feet and there is the air, filling our lungs and emptying them. We should begin from this when we need support.

- Natalie Goldberg

A WORD FROM MS. MALL

Dear Winterberry Families,

Below you will find answers to many site-related questions that have come my way over the last few months. Please feel free to contact me via email, phone, or in person if you have further questions. Change is never easy and our hope is that we will be able to move together toward the change. Part of doing this successfully will involve direct and consistent communication. Please join us in striving for this goal in all interactions with each other.

Why Include Grades 7 & 8 at Winterberry?

Walking into school this morning after an early morning appointment I had the pleasure of watching Winterberry's seventh and eighth grade students making their way to Movement class. As a former middle/high schoolteacher I noticed something different about this group; they radiated joy in their running, skipping, and laughing bodies. Another difference is that they are not afraid to be themselves at Winterberry. Many of us are able to reach back far enough into our memory banks to remember our own middle school journey. Regardless of where we found ourselves at that time, we were all experiencing a transformation of our physical, emotional, and social selves. Some of us have really beautiful memories of that time, however many others recall feeling a sense of isolation, disconnection, fear, or other such emotions. Few people talk about this time as one of security and connection. This is one aspect that the teachers, staff, parents, and most importantly the students at Winterberry value.

Students and families who have chosen to stay never regret this decision and have experienced that their children are completely prepared for entering high school. In fact, they tend to have an advantage when connecting with their teachers and peers. They also understand what it means to complete a job well and they generally enjoy the process of learning. They are interested in being involved and participating knowing that their involvement matters, is valued, and is needed.

When our founding families took up the process of applying for our charter the original intent was for the school to encompass grades K-8. During our first and second years we served grades K-6 and have slowly



Tuesdays with Ms. Mall in the
Front Lobby 8:45am - 9:30am &
2:30pm - 3:15pm.
or mall_shanna@asdk12.org

November

- 11.3.11 WPG Meeting, 6pm @ Winterberry
- 11.10 - 12.11 Waldorf Teacher Training
- 11.14.11 NO SCHOOL
- 11.17.11 WCC Meeting, 6pm @ WBerry
- 11.18.11 EARLY RELEASE • 7th Annual Lantern Walk 6pm @ Goose Lake
- 11.24 & 25.11 Thanksgiving Holiday!

December

- 12.1.11 WPG Meeting, 6pm @ Winterberry
- 12.9.11 All School Assembly, 6pm at Bartlett High School!
- 12.15.11 Early Release • NO WCC MEETING
- 12.16.11 - 01.02.11 Winter Break

January

- 1.5.12 WPG Meeting, 6pm @ Winterberry

and steadily built up our middle school classes. Much of this has been dependent on the two factors of space and qualified staff. This continued vision of including grades seven and eight is consistent with Waldorf models both private and public. Additionally, the curriculum itself is one that spirals from grade one through eight and is not fully finished until the close of eighth grade.

Families who have committed to completing this circle know the vast riches it provides. The faculty members at Winterberry have also witnessed the incredible growth and change in our middle school students and teachers. In response to this they support this continued journey as a vision that is right action for our school. Each year we build our middle school program as we did in the early years with our grades program. Every year we have more students remain at Winterberry or join as new students in the middle school.

Why is the school moving out of downtown when the intention of the founding families was an urban/downtown setting?

This is a great question that requires a bit of background beginning in 2004 when the founding families began this journey. Finding physical sites for charter schools was, and continues to be, a national challenge. When the group began the process of considering a charter they had their sites set on an underutilized church on 11th and E Street. Before they had even submitted the charter the church was demolished in favor of condominiums. The group continued their search and were able to make connections with the community of Shiloh Baptist Church located between Fireweed and 15th on Ingra. What the interior of the building lacked in space, it made up for in proximity to wild space in the form of the Chester Creek Greenbelt. Pastor Brown worked with our founding families and made a good faith offering of the use/rental of the building if all obstacles could be removed.

This is the point (April 2005) that I entered the process as the administrator of Winterberry. I began meeting weekly with Pastor Brown and a small team of parent volunteers to resolve occupancy issues. These meetings continued for six weeks without any movement toward the end goal. I began searching for a site again and found our current site toward the middle of May. After initial contact with the owner I asked Sara Wilson Doyle if she thought having a school downtown would be an option. She was skeptical at first, but in true Sara style she took up the task of gaining a conditional use permit with great efficiency, energy, and focus. In fact, Winterberry would not have had a site without her amazing efforts and volunteered time.

When we opened in the fall of 2005 with 144 students in grades K – 6, there were concerns with the confined space of the school in general. At the time we averaged 35 sqft of classroom space per student. Since then we have grown to 209 students in grades K – 8 and this average space per student has declined to 24 sqft per student. Even without our current grade seven and eight students we would be looking at a loss of approximately 8 sqft per child.

Why do we need a new site?

The lack of adequate classroom space is the primary reason for our move to a new site. This includes indoor and outdoor space and the decision to move locations is the result of many years of work by parents, staff, and hired professionals. In 2009, the staff at Winterberry submitted the following letter to the community:

From: Members of the Winterberry Staff

Tuesday, September 15, 2009

Re: Open letter to the Winterberry community

Dear Winterberry Community, Charter Council, and Parent Guild;

We are writing to clarify our needs around our school space. It has come to our attention that we have not been clear about these needs to all concerned parties, and we wish to take this opportunity to make some of these needs known. Thank you for listening.

First of all, we are grateful for the space that we have, and we utilize every inch of it. We are, however, feeling close to our maximum in terms of what we can do with the space we have. We have implemented many creative solutions to teaching in small spaces, and while this is working on some level, we believe that we have hit a ceiling in terms of what programs and experiences we can offer the children.

Last spring we surveyed the Winterberry community, and several issues were of unanimous value to all three of our bodies: classroom space, play space, and room for specialty classes were three of the most important across the board. With this letter, we would like to illustrate the importance of these aspects to our school space.

Our current space has the following limitations: classroom size is adequate for desk lessons but far from ideal for any movement or active time; hallways are small and bottlenecks contribute to the noise experienced by our upstairs neighbors; our specialty teachers have no space of their own and must move about, lugging their materials on a cart, or cram themselves into classroom with the desks pushed to one end; our play area, while large enough, has no flat area of any size on which to play games; we have no large indoor space for communal gatherings, eurythmy, indoor movement, and assemblies; and we have no real space to house our enrichment program, the one program which actually generates revenue for us. We are currently finding space for music, languages, handwork, movement, and enrichment by utilizing classrooms when the children who occupy them are gone. This creates obvious human challenges, particularly around transitions and creating a workable schedule.

We have concerns about the future of our space. We are feeling the need to grow, both in terms of numbers of students (we would like to see full classes in every grade very soon, even by next year), and in terms of the "diet" which we offer the children. We are moving towards an interdisciplinary approach to teaching, which requires frequent collaboration, sharing, and a weaving together of the curriculums into a cohesive whole. This will require, we believe, space in which to offer music, languages, handwork, and movement. This space should hold the feeling of the discipline being taught, and despite our intense efforts, does not appear to be possible if the children cannot move from the space in which they spend their main lesson time. We ask that a search for a new school site that will meet the long-term vision of the school be undertaken by our school governing bodies by utilizing information gained from the Administrator's Committee on Growth and Future Development.

The heart of Winterberry, is, of course, the people and the community. We are offering our children a rich and developmentally appropriate educational experience as we are now. But to grow a truly interdisciplinary program, with a healthy student body and a waiting list that will insure future support and funding, we believe very strongly that a new space must be a priority by the time our current lease runs out. We have a need to come together as a community with ease in our own auditorium; to have the possibility of eurythmy on site, to tumble in, to participate in Greek Wrestling, and so on; to offer a room in which the soul of music can be truly felt and experienced; to travel each day to "Russia" or "Japan" when we study languages; to work with our hands in a space filled with the tools, smells, and visual beauty associated with handmade objects; to house our very successful enrichment program; and finally, though possibly most importantly, to have room to breathe and move in our own classrooms. We are asking for much, we know. We humbly request that any of these needs be met, and offer them to you as a picture of what we are working with daily, and what lives within us as a vision for the future.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration. Some staff members did not reply one way or the other to our request for feedback on space, but all of those who replied wished to be signers of this letter.

Very Sincerely,

Members of the Winterberry Staff

Why not stay in our current site and expand to the third floor?

When RIM completed their report (available on our website at www.winterberrycharterschool.com) they suggested following up with our building owner to see if this would be a reasonable option. Our site committee met with our current building owner to discuss such possibilities but the rent for expanding the space soon exceeded our budget. Our landlord also investigated the possibility of creating another building just west of Winterberry on AK Railroad land, however the cost of that lease was estimated at over \$700,000 a year. In addition, community/teacher/student priorities of a large flat play yard, access to natural spaces, and an on-site multi-purpose room would not be supported. The committee was realistic during these conversations and knew that some things may have to be delayed however, the lease price more than doubled our current rental amount and was not possible.

Many factors play into the amount of rent our school can pay each year. We have been committed to achieving full Waldorf certification for all of our teachers and by the end of the 2013 school year 90% of our teaching staff will have achieved this goal. Achieving this goal has taken a lot of dedication by all those involved. First of all by our teachers who have been willing to take this journey involving countless hours of training during the school year and their own personal summers. Secondly, the individual parents who have donated miles, tickets, and personal funds to subsidize the training of their classroom teacher. Lastly, the WCC and WPG who have both determined Waldorf Certification and Training for our teachers to be of the highest priority and have made efforts to allocate and raise funds to make this happen. It is no small effort and has cost our school community approximately \$85,000 a year to fund training. The result has been a group of very committed and knowledgeable teachers who continue each year to grow our program in accordance with our charter and Waldorf methodology.

Why are there 28 students in my child's class?

This question has multiple answers based on pedagogy, practicality, and finances. When researching optimal class size a typical range that is quoted is somewhere within the range of 15 to 25 students. Studies on class size have typically been done within the traditional school setting using classes that have a new teacher each year. Many schools in California that are inspired by Waldorf methods have class sizes that range from 28 to 35. Looking at European Waldorf schools the class sizes usually range from the upper 20s to the low 40s beginning in grade one. Before you panic, I am just expressing what we look at when determining class sizes throughout the grades. I can assure you that Winterberry does not have plans to have 40 children in each class. When we look at class size we want to choose the size that allows the class a rich mix of personalities while also making room for siblings when possible.

When we began a school our goal was to have 20 students in each class. In many cases our classes were even smaller. Once we combined the grades into larger classes (at one point we had more than one of each class) our teachers reported a much happier group of students. With more students the social fabric of the classroom was easier to weave and maintain.

We also have the reality of budget that is related to the ever-rising costs combined with little or no increase in the base student allocation from the State of Alaska. For the past two years the ASD has not received an increase in student funding and all estimates point to no additional funding for the coming two years. Each year our salaries increase by 2 to 4 percent and our other benefits have increased even more dramatically. For example, during our first year as a school the health care (insurance) cost per fulltime employee was \$7,200. This amount will be \$16,600 per fulltime employee in the coming 12/13 school year. Our teachers

have also seen an incredible increase in their monthly out of pocket expense. When I began teaching in 1998 teachers paid \$70/mo out of pocket and now they pay as much as \$400/mo for the same care. I know this is nothing new to most of us, but I hope it will shed some light on the current fiscal demand associated with staffing a school to serve the children.

We do have a committee of parents who are participating with other charter school parents to advocate for additional funding. I know that this committee is always looking for new members and energy. If you are interested, please send an email to a member of the WCC (emails available at the end of the newsletter) and express your interest.

Why are we moving to Muldoon?

As a point of fact, we are not. The proposed location is on Bryn Mawr and Wesleyan Drive. The University Community Council is the district where the school will be located if all property issues are resolved. As a point of reference, in regard to traveling via car, below you will find the comparisons between traveling to our current site and traveling to the site:

Kincaid Area to current site (508 W 2nd Avenue) = 9.5 miles

Kincaid Area to new site (4800 Bryn Mawr) = 12 miles

* additional 2.5 miles of travel distance

Abbott Loop Area to current site (508 W 2nd Avenue) = 7.9 miles

Abbott Loop Area to new site (4800 Bryn Mawr) = 5.4 miles

* +/- 2.5 miles less travel distance

Girdwood Area to current site (508 W 2nd Avenue) = 38.1 miles

Girdwood Area to new site (4800 Bryn Mawr) = 38.6 miles

* additional +/- .4 mile of travel distance

Eagle River Area to current site (508 W 2nd Avenue) = 6.4 miles

Eagle River Area to new site (4800 Bryn Mawr) = 4.1 miles

* +/- 1.8 miles less travel distance

Earthquake Park Area to current site (508 W 2nd Avenue) = 7.9 miles

Earthquake Park Area to new site (4800 Bryn Mawr) = 5.4 miles

* additional +/- 2 miles of travel distance

F Street Area to current site (508 W 2nd Avenue) = .7 miles

F Street Area to new site (4800 Bryn Mawr) = 5.1 miles

* additional +/- 4 miles of travel distance

Fireweed Area to current site (508 W 2nd Avenue) = 2.2 miles

Fireweed Area to new site (4800 Bryn Mawr) = 3.3 miles

* additional +/- 1 mile of travel distance

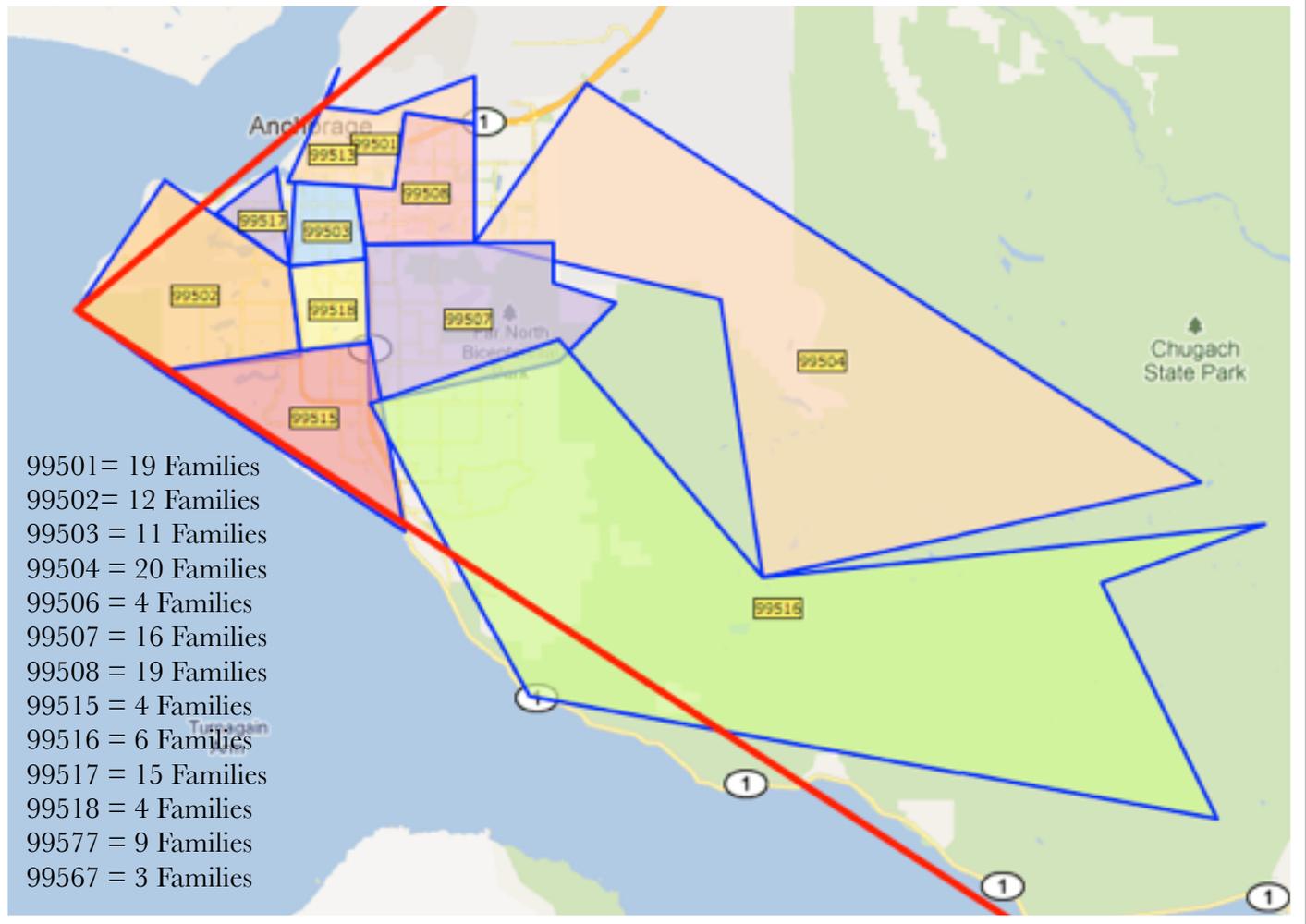
Baxter Area to current site (508 W 2nd Avenue) = 6.4 miles

Baxter Area to new site (4800 Bryn Mawr) = 1.1 miles

* +/- 5.3 miles less travel distance

Why are we moving to a site that is further away from most of our families?

Actually we are not. Please see the below map to understand our overall community representation from Chugiak to Girdwood.

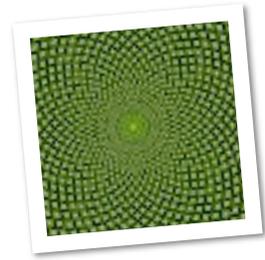
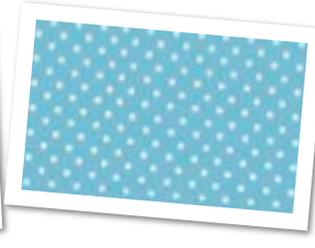


Why are we moving to a site that is so close to Anchorage Waldorf School?

Again, taking the time to read over the RIM report on our website as well as a brief search of the Anchorage Municipal Listing System will illustrate how difficult (and prohibitively expensive) it is to purchase land in Anchorage. Our search has led to a piece of land that is within a three-mile radius of the private school. The Waldron site we initially looked at was within a four-mile radius of the private school.

As many of you know, I meet regularly with the administrator from Anchorage Waldorf School. During these meetings we collaborate and work together to address the needs of our communities. In response to our move both school staffs have had internal meetings about regarding changes to be coming in the future. Additionally, we have asked George Hoffecker (who serves as a mentor at both schools) to meet with the members of both faculty groups on the first Thursday of December.

In addition to this work, our school communities continue to collaborate as part of a study group exploring the feasibility of beginning a public high school inspired by Waldorf education. While the timeframe of something like this would be many years out the process provides an opportunity to connect and talk about issues that are important to all of us.



Winterberry Dress Request

In order to reduce classroom distractions, continue our commitment to upholding Steiner's views on materialism, and respect the needs of all students, families, and staff, we respectfully ask that student attire be comprised of:

- * solid colors,
- * stripes,
- * polka dots,
- * or patterns.

We also ask that all outerwear and accessories (including indoor shoes and lunch boxes) also follow these guidelines. Please choose plain shoes that do not include electronic lights, sounds, wheels, or commercially produced pictures.

When students come to school with items that do not meet these guidelines, school staff may ask them to alter the clothing so it is not distracting (turn a shirt inside-out, for example), give the student an alternative item to wear instead and/or work together with families to find an alternative within a reasonable period.

Our goal is that we can come together on this issue out of respect for all community members knowing that while such items may not distract one, they do distract another. Thank you for your commitment to creating and maintaining the highest quality environment for our children.

As always, thank you for your willingness to grow and work together to create a culture of caring and respect at Winterberry!

Winterberry Charter Council (WCC)

Melissa Janigo, Chair
Tara Smith, Vice Chair
Erin Fleischer, Secretary
Della Swartz, Treasurer
Arthur Harmon, Staff
VACANT, Community Member
Todd Robicheaux, Parent
Bob Steinmann, Parent
Lynne Jablonski, WPG Rep
Meg Eggleston, Faculty Chair
Faculty/Staff Seat, VACANT
Shanna Mall, Principal

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Monthly Meetings: 3rd Thursday of each month, 6pm, second floor of
Winterberry Charter School unless otherwise stated & advertised.

Winterberry Parent Guild (WPG)

Craig Lyon, President
Eric Judge, Vice President
Christina Eubanks, Secretary
Sarah Rygh, Treasurer
Lynne Jablonski, Fundraising Chair & WCC Rep
Mike Rehberg, Volunteer Coordinator
Jeremy Crawford, Faculty Rep
Bob Steiner, Grade Eight Rep
Karie VanDusen, Grade Seven Rep
Emma Allen, Grade Six Rep
Dave Swartz, Grade Five Rep
Brian Sarka, Grade Four Rep
VACANT, Grade Three Rep
Haras Cullers, Grade Two Rep
Tara Petter, Grade One Rep
Leif Lidin-Lamon, Grade Kindergarten Rep
Shanna Mall, Principal

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