



November 8, 2007

Dear Parents,

Thank you wholeheartedly to all who were able to attend the October 23 All-School Forum. Your presence and your participation – whether through voicing your thoughts, listening, or both – are significant expressions of your continued interest and dedication to our school’s well-being and success. We are delighted to present below our responses to the questions raised on that occasion. Out of concern for coherence, we have grouped the questions into two categories: Those in the first category (A) are followed immediately by a brief and precise response (the designation ED indicates an answer provided by the Executive Director only). The second category (B) recapitulates the questions requiring a more developed response.

The first portion of the Forum evening was dedicated to a presentation of the school’s governance structure. Although too lengthy, this presentation ensured a shared understanding of the coherence within which our school operates. You can view this presentation on our website at www.seattlewaldorf.org, on the Parent Page.

In the course of preparing these responses, we are reminded anew that change is a complex, and at times difficult, process, and that the understanding and perspective of our close and loyal community is essential to a successful outcome. We are strongly committed to both clear communication and the associated supportive listening needed to sustain our community and keep the school strong and growing.

Changes currently underway are based on practical idealism – aligning the practices of the school with our declared intention. These adjustments are informed by the desire to operate the school in effective and clearly defined ways, while cultivating the unique community life of a Waldorf school. These changes, whether radical (as in our fundraising approach), or more subtle (as in our festival and community life), have extraordinary ramifications which will require time to become fully manifest. As an Executive Council, we are in a position to see the large picture, and to see connections which may not be apparent from another vantage point. We recognize however that we are far from being omniscient, and that we must therefore be vigilant and remain committed to seeking input and views from those around us – including from our parent community. We are diligent and candid in responding to the multi-layered concerns we hear, and are adjusting our approach to encompass the concerns and suggestions we hear when appropriate.

We sincerely hope that the following responses will bring you the clarity and confidence you need in this time of significant growth in the life of our school. This document will be posted on the Parent page of our website for future reference. As always, we are available to answer any further questions at your convenience. You may call or email us, make an appointment, or simply engage us at any time. Additionally, it is one of the central goals of our Conscious Conversations meetings in the coming months for us to be able to hear your views, ideas and concerns on these topics and others.

SWS Executive Council

Executive Council Members:

Geraldine Kline, Executive Director
Lisa Ayrault, Dean of Education
Neil Weinberg, Director of Community Development
Nettie Fabrie, Chair of the PCG

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October 23 FORUM – Responses from SWS Executive Council

Board of Trustees

Staff and board members qualifications, board minutes, top 10 priorities, relocation

- Biographies and photos of current SWS Board and staff members will be available on November 17 on our website at <http://www.seattlewaldorf.org/MeetUs/Board.html>
- Minutes of Board meetings are available for viewing in the main office. Ask our receptionist for the Board Minutes binder.
- The Board of Trustees will make a decision on November 15 as to the form in which board policies will be published, as well as to how best communicate the selection process of board members.
- The Board of Trustees is currently engaged in further defining and articulating the priorities for the future through a series of work retreats conducted in addition to regular board meetings. The outcome of these meetings will be communicated to the school community as part of the board strategic plan.
- The relocation of the school is not currently being considered. If and when this option is considered, the planning phase would likely take several years, giving our families ample time to consider such a change.

PCG (Pedagogical Carrying Group)

High school programs, staffing, support- Exchange students - Graduation/Rose Ceremony- Specialty curriculum- Festivals and community life

- **High School** - We are building separate budgets for the pre-K - 8, and the High School, and will continue to do so for the next few years. This ensures that the needs of both are clearly identified and met with integrity. This budget is still in the making, and will be mailed to you prior to the Conscious Conversations series which will begin to take place within a few weeks.
A faculty workgroup composed of high school teachers and grade school teachers with extensive high school experience are finalizing the high school program for the 2008-09 school year and beyond. From this program, we will derive precise staffing needs, enabling us to finalize the high school budget. Our intention is to ensure that the incoming Grade 9 receives a full Waldorf high school curriculum as it progresses through the grades towards graduation. The plan, including a detailed program and financial picture, will be published immediately after Thanksgiving (at the latest).
- **Exchange students**- SWS is in the process of filing a petition to make it possible for us legally to welcome high school international exchange and boarding students. The end result of this process, which takes 6 to 9 months, should allow us to organize an exchange and boarding program for the 2008-09 school year. The structures provided by the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency ensures that schools and students are tracked and monitored for the duration of the exchange.
- **Graduation – Rose Ceremony**- Ceremonies at the Seattle Waldorf School are a significant component of school and community life. We are delighted to announce that a thorough review of our ceremonies, including the grade school Graduation and Rose Ceremony, is bringing clarity without significantly altering either event. A group of faculty members, functioning as a workgroup of the Pedagogical Carrying Group, recently submitted a proposal to the PCG regarding the grade school Graduation and Rose Ceremony. After consulting our current Grade 8 Class Parents on October 5th and 24th to ensure that this proposal was meeting the expectations of students and families, the Executive Director ratified it on November 1, 2007. This document was published via a special email communication to Grades 6, 7, and 8 families on November 5th.

- **Specialty Curriculum** – The purpose of specialty classes is to engage our students in the discovery and practice of subjects other than those presented by the Class Teacher – such as handwork, world languages, movement, and art. These lessons are an integral part of the Waldorf Curriculum. A workgroup of the PCG is currently engaged in formulating a proposal for supporting Parent education in the context of each class. This proposal for a systematic approach to presenting the curriculum is scheduled to be finalized on November 15, after which it will be reviewed and ratified by the Executive Director, then communicated to the parent body via email. In the meantime, we have requested that special subject teachers join parent evenings on a regular basis for this current year.

Development

Fundraising – Parent Participation & Consultation – Festivals

- **Fundraising** – Fundraising at the Seattle Waldorf School is definitely undergoing a major shift. Informed collectively by SWS historical fundraising records, statistical fundraising analyses of comparable institutions, as well as the most current fundraising practices, the school is shifting to a mission-based approach. It is apparent that although our supporters are strongly connected to the school on an emotional and experiential level, the school's mission needs to become explicit if we are to expand our strong base of supporters (currently limited essentially to tuition-paying parents) so as to include the community at large. This effort calls for a clear articulation of our mission, plans, financial picture, and needs for increased fundraising. Articulating the school's mission is the task of the Board of Trustees, as is the development of a strategic plan. Both are then carried out by the Executive Director, who communicates to the parents as various elements of this plan are implemented, via our regular communication routes (emails, meetings, Update).

Conscious Conversations

We consider it essential that our closest supporters be well versed in our mission and our financial needs, as a precondition of an expanded fundraising effort. The 2007-08 Conscious Conversation initiative is designed so that each family can:

- Share concerns, questions, and suggestions with the teams who will conduct these conversations. These will be shared anonymously with the administration. (Notes from this conversation will not include your name.)
- Understand our current and future plans, and financial picture

In essence, Conscious Conversations give each family the same attention typically given to major donors: a conversation, a mutual listening, and an opportunity to base one's financial contribution on current, accurate, and understood facts and figures.

We will send you our financial statements prior to the start of the Conscious Conversation series, so that you may familiarize yourself with them. During the conversation, we will ask you to consider making a contribution toward our annual fundraising goal. Of course we will not expect anyone to make a contribution on the spot, nor will we ask to know the amount of your contribution. Our only wishes will be to ensure that you understand the school's needs in the context of our long-term plan, and also that you have an opportunity to have your perspective heard with the attention and the focus it deserves. . The central point of the Conscious Conversations is to build a community of shared vision and create an interpersonal space where gifts are made out of a conscious commitment to the mission of the school.

One of the concerns expressed in the forum discussion was about a potential unintended message arising from the Conscious Conversations approach: that we are most open to hearing your input when we are asking for your financial support. This is emphatically not the case and we wish to reinforce that the opportunity to engage in dialogue and feedback is in no way limited to these particular conversations. The board, the executive council, the faculty and other staff are always open to hearing feedback, ideas and concerns from the school community. Because of the time and logistical investment needed to implement the Conscious Conversations, it is an ideal additional opportunity for feedback and dialogue

Raising More Money

Last year, we spoke of moving toward an event-based, mission-based method of fundraising. We are still working with this plan, and the Conscious Conversations are the prerequisite for this successful expanded fundraising effort. We will be using the Benevon fundraising model, which you can learn more about at www.benevon.com. The foundation of this model lies in the fact that in order to be successful in funding its mission, an institution needs to have a strong base of involved and informed participants. The Conscious Conversations are the step we have chosen to ensure that you are both involved and informed. We are currently considering whether a Spring Luncheon is feasible, or whether it is more realistic for us all to prepare for a fall of 2008 fundraising event.

Parent Participation

Parents participate in numerous ways which can be broadly grouped into two categories: participation in the life of the *class*, and participation in the life of the *school*. We have spent considerable time and attention defining the role of parents at the Seattle Waldorf School, and have done so with the following considerations in mind: First, clarity has been a recurring request from parents, encompassing, for example, levels of time commitment and decision processes. Second, we acknowledge that although the school community was historically accustomed to a certain way of participating in school life, this approach was not necessarily consultative, nor respectful of parents' availability, skills, and values. We have established clear distinctions regarding the areas of school life where the participation of parents is essential, and areas where the faculty and/or administration retain autonomy, such as for example pedagogical programming or legal issues.

- **Participation in the life of the class** – Your Class Parent or Class Teacher regularly solicits your participation in class activities such as plays or field trips. You are very familiar with these wonderful ways to support our school and your children. Class Parents operate within the guidelines outlined in the Class Parent Guide, available on our website at www.seattlewaldorf.org, in the parent page.
- **Participation in the life of the school** - In essence, the community and social life of the school lies entirely with our parent body, and is held within the Parent Council. You can view its constitution on our website at www.seattlewaldorf.org, in the parent page. Geraldine crafted this constitution out of her long experience working with parents in Waldorf Schools. Now the challenge is for parents at SWS to take this up and bring it to life. *We will dedicate our next two Parent Council Sessions (Tuesday, November 13 and Tuesday, December 11, both at 7:00 pm) to taking a closer look at the constitution and how parents wish to be involved. We invite all parents who are interested to join Geraldine, Neil and Lisa for an open discussion about this vision of the Parent Council. We are interested in understanding how to engage our parents in carrying this important work.*

Festivals

A focused effort to clarify our school festivals is underway, both through a faculty workgroup of the PCG, as well as in the festival committee (which is comprised of parents). Festivals are primarily of a pedagogical nature. The majority of festivals take place within the classes and are centered around students, their development, and the curriculum (for

example, the festival of Santa Lucia in Grade 2). Although festivals often proceed within a ceremonial atmosphere, they are distinct from school ceremonies such as the grade school Graduation or the Rose Ceremony. Certain festivals are also community events, such as Michaelmas for example. In these school-wide festivals, the community comes together to create and celebrate the festival and the community.

This year's Michaelmas festival will provide a useful example: On the one hand, the faculty focused its efforts to design a festival for the students, which is what the faculty knows best. However, Michaelmas is also a community event, and although in the past the festival truly expressed this fact, in the most recent years the faculty, rather than the parents, created the community event component of the festival. Teachers are certainly the ones best suited to creating events with and for our students. For festivals to have meaning however, they must be a collective creation; having a festival *designed by faculty for parents transforms the festival into a performance* by the students for a parent audience.

This year we chose to ask the faculty to design the festival for the students only, and to acknowledge the fact that the community's participation in the creation and hosting of the Michaelmas festival has not been a reality in recent years. From this experience of a simple get-together, the festival committee has been re-created, and is on its way to considering how to renew the authentic participation of the community in the festival life of the school.

October 23 Forum – Questions, Category A – responses provided immediately below each entry

These questions and comments were recapitulated from flip chart notes taken during the meeting. The notes were an attempt to capture the gist of what was spoken. As the speakers have not had a chance to review them nor correct any mistakes, they should not be seen as quotations attributable to the speakers named.

Woody P. (daughter, 11) Copies of the Update to the High school

Kimberley Hiner, our receptionist, has prepared "Parent Communication" binders for both Kinderhaus and the High School (in addition to the one already located at the main school office). These binders contain printed copies of all email communications to SWS parents.

Ingrid O. (daughter 3, son DP and MP)

I just want to say I really miss the auction. It was a great social event where we got to know ourselves – where else can I find out about who knits in the community, or who paints houses and also gives massages at the same time? Can't we add this in addition to what's planned or continue it?

Two questions are raised here. The question of fundraising is answered above. The question of community connection lies in the realm of the Parent Council. Perhaps a professional directory can be established by the Parent Council?

Alicia S. (sons, 4 and 6)

I have a question about specialty teachers and the possibility of teaching other languages. What if parents are interested in supporting with donations adding other languages? Can we target specific areas with our donations?

Donations can be earmarked. However, the creation of new programs is the sole responsibility of the Pedagogical Carrying Group, and therefore we cannot honor a request to supplement programs we do not currently offer or plan to offer in the near future.

Peggy K. (sons, 3 and 7)

Asking for sensitivity to the workday – realizing that parents can't come to events scheduled during the day.

We are very cognizant of the schedules of working parents, and try to schedule events at times that are most convenient to most people. Whenever possible we hold several sessions of the same event, in the evenings as well as during the day time.

Maria G. (son 2)

You know that for the students' fundraising, bake sales and such, now we are not supposed to raise money for ourselves. Well I think that money that we raise should go for the children. We all here in Seattle set aside money for outside causes. Now they say it's all to be for outside the school. The children should raise money for themselves. It should be for us.

Our intention is to provide our students with an expanded context regarding fundraising. We wish for the students' efforts in fundraising to culminate in a direct experience of the impact their efforts can have on others who are less fortunate than they are, as demonstrated in the recent Grade 8 garage sale for the benefit of 100 Friends.

Cindy F. (daughters, 3 and 8)

I love when I have a meeting with Mr. G. I learn so much. I also wish Nettie would always come; I am always so amazed at the knowledge. But I am concerned about the high school. I would love to hear why to continue. We can come together to hear this as a group in the eighth grade. Also – I am concerned that the sibling discount go all the way through high school.

We will be hosting a High School Curriculum presentation on Tuesday November 27 at the main campus, where Nettie Fabrie, Ingrid Orlow (high school English), and Holly Brewster (high school math and science) will present both the 2008-09 high school curriculum, and the context of child development informing it.

Our current discount policy applies to grades 1-12. An extensive consultative process will take place when we reconsider our discount policy.

Joel D. (son 7, daughter KB)

What's the relationship between PCG Chair and the Dean of Education? How do these two positions fit into the ideal/context of Three-fold?

ED: The position of Dean of Education was created prior to the implementation of the current governance structure. In the ideal three-fold structure, the Dean of Education position encompasses the role of the PCG Chair, and is a position reviewed every three years. While we are keenly moving towards a full implementation of the ideal, it is essential that we make staffing decisions based on peoples' capacities and individual strengths. At the moment, the capacities of the PCG Chair (this role is in addition to a full-time teaching load), combined with those of the Dean of Education, ensures a full and balanced representation of the pedagogical life of the school on the Executive Council, and therefore meets our goal.

Category B – Questions requiring more developed responses. Discussion and answers are in the text above.

Katrina W. (daughter, 3)

I don't understand as a new parent who is choosing the Board and what are their qualifications. What's Neil's job and qualifications? Tuition discounts seem high and we are asking for money, do things need to change? Is there an Annual Financial Report?

Peggy K. (sons 3 and 7)

Because of the fiasco of the Rose Ceremony I am asking this—how will Middle School Parents be communicated with about the graduation? For the seventh graders, everything that they look forward to has been taken away from them – graduation, the Middle School Musical – although I realize this was not connected, that is the children's perception.

Asking for sensitivity to the workday – realizing that parents can't come to events scheduled during the day.

Leslie M. (daughter 2, sons 5 and 7)

I myself am not against change, but for the seventh graders, they see the high school as "the worst thing they ever did;" that the rug was pulled out from under them. The rhythm holds us and now the rhythm is gone.

Susan H. (daughter, 8)

In what way is the school carrying the high school and what are the plans for the future? What is sustaining that school?

Barbara H. (son 4, daughter KB)

How is the specialty curriculum tied into the main lesson curriculum. In an ideal world, what would be available for sports and art in the school? (Later addition after meeting: what about the possibility of exchange students to/from Switzerland?) *GK working on it, steep federal regulations – ready May 2008*



Jeannie W. (son 3, daughter 1)

Questions about fundraising – last year we had an Annual Fund and Auction. Will we have an annual fund? The auction was a fun event, a participatory event that brings in people from outside.

I have heard rumors about looking for another place for the school and I just moved here to be closer to the school!

David O. (daughter 3, son DP and MP)

This is an incredible effort with clearly everyone's heart in the right place. I have been reading an inspiring book by Charles Rissotti (njw note: *Many Unhappy Returns: One Man's Quest To Turn Around The Most Unpopular Organization In America (Leadership for the Common Good)*) the former IRS Commissioner who took on the task of turning around the IRS. When he came taxpayer satisfaction was at 3-4%, when basically 80-90% of the American taxpayers were really just trying to do the right thing. In 4-5 years he had changed things so that there was 70-% customer satisfaction.

I think tonight there has been a mixed message:

You say you want to listen and yet I hear and see Sales – there's a table in the back filled with things....you want money from us. What's the relationship between when you are looking for input and when you are asking for money?

RACI -- responsibility, accountability, consulted and informed: I have heard the first two tonight, but what about consulted and informed? You need to look systematically at opportunities for consulted and informed.

In reference to my good friend Neil here -- I felt like I was being sold to and I found it hard to swallow. You said the Parent Council was where the parents can be really involved and then you sped through the slides of the Parent Council.

Andy S. (daughters 2 and 4)

I know Waldorf is not in favor of competitive sports, but how do they support athletic activity? Really, I don't care what happens to Waldorf School – I care what happens to my child. Do we know how Waldorf grads – particularly the grads from our school—do after graduation? Where are those grads now? I know it's my responsibility to learn more about Waldorf education.

Chaya K. (son 3, daughter 1)

I would like more specific communication about the specialists – more specific-grade specific about what they are doing outside of main lesson.

Candace P. (daughter 11)

There have been many questions about the future of the high school, I just want to say as a parent of a high school student that the high school has a great future. It is even better this year. How many high school parents are here tonight? I mean beside you Jerry who have to be here as a board member. The lack of high school parents is symbolic of the separation between us. There is the question of communication. I receive the Update and have to wade through articles about what is happening here -- which only makes me jealous that Martha didn't have all this in public school – to get to high school events.

I am concerned that the high school faculty isn't being supported.

Lynda M. (daughter 7)

The idea of all the many changes happening now (Lisa clarifies – you mean the last seven weeks, from the start of this school year?) I mean it was all running smoothly last year; the fundraising was great. I want to know what is being changed. What were the deficiencies that are being addressed in these changes?

Sharon M. (daughters 5 and 7)

The qualifications of the board, its policies, the minutes of its meetings need to be public. Where is the role for parents to be consulted? I feel like more of a consumer than a participant.

Keith P. (son 4, daughter KB)

I think you are listening to everybody too much. When I go to a doctor I want that expert to direct the treatment, the same for an architect, or other professionals. I want you to listen, but then do what you are expert at.

Also the meals are working out great!

Teresa P. (son 6, daughter 3)

I am professionally involved in organizational change and there are ways to handle the feedback process on the part of the board and the executive team that more effectively provides a demonstration of listening. Feedback in this way will help with resistance. (offers to help)

Eric R. (sons 8 and 4, daughter 3)

I know from years of my work with HP that customer satisfaction is key. When something is going wrong this is a huge opportunity for developing loyal customers. Well from my Norwegian background – I am good at the passive aggressive thing, well I have shed the passive part: But communication goes both ways. WE all need to be more aggressive in saying what we want. The fact that people are here is a real movement that way.

Financial transparency is a big issue. It can't be we'll give you the financials when you come for conversation; there are pages, figures to be analyzed. Give it to us beforehand, so it's a meeting of minds

Lawrence H. (daughters 7, 4, 4, and son 6)

This is in reference to those festivals, ceremonies that mark the transitions – graduation and such – when will we in the Middle School hear about what's planned. What we are asking for is NOT a diminished experience for our children; the design should be an equivalent experience.

Barbara H. (son 4, daughter KB)

I really like the physical changes around, how things are spiffed up. Like the cedar chips; I couldn't have imagined it would work without the cars, but it does. Thank you for the beautification, the professionalism of everything, the new sign.

I wish for our school to have as professional an image as Bush and Lakeside, in order to attract students from various neighborhoods, and in order to attract similar financial contributions.

Drummond R. (son 6)

We have a student at Bush and that's a whole other different school. But the festivals, we have been talking about this evening. This crystallizes my feelings about the school. The festivals are one of the reasons we are here. I remember after five minutes at the May Faire I wanted to be here. The change in the Rose Ceremony, it was like moving Christmas. The festival life is the spiritual half of what goes on here and has a deep effect on parents and children. For the festivals, here's where the consultative part is most helpful.

Cindy S. (daughter 3)

I want to encourage parents to attend the Parent Education. Take advantage of all the opportunities. Come to the Parent Council. I am in third grade and I have come from the very beginning. If I want to know what's happening, I come to the Parent Council.

Leslie M. (daughter 2 and sons, 5 and 7)

In terms of the festivals, and I work with the festivals in other settings, we realize we never change more than 70% ever year. (Clarified by audience reaction) I mean 30%. Continuity is important; we can depend on the festivals to be the same.

Keith P. (son 4, daughter KB)

This is for the Board. We need your top ten list; the top ten things you feel needs to be changed and why, what was wrong, needed to be improved.

Cindy S. (daughter 3)

How did we get from the approach (Geraldine) talked about last year (RMM) to Conscious Conversations? The approach last year was reaching out to the greater community, this year it seems focused on parents only. Make plans for RMM event in fall 2008-09