

Friends of Waldorf Education
(Freunde der Erziehungskunst Rudolf Steiners e.V.)
January 2024

**First steps towards the foundation
of a Waldorf initiative
– Questions and answers –**

Who can found a school?

Waldorf schools are usually founded by parents who are looking for a Waldorf school for their children, and cooperating Waldorf teachers. They need a school sponsor (see below). When parents want to found a school, that does not necessarily mean that can find teachers who are enthusiastic about the intended location, or the Waldorf pedagogy itself. Most initiatives are created by parents who have come together to form first of all an initiative group and to work on the idea and its implementation. This may take several years, sometimes even several founding generations.

What are the first steps towards an initiative?

Working groups are usually formed to look at the essence of Waldorf education, to deal with funding issues, to look for buildings, and to look for teachers. It is also important to study the national education laws and to contact local politicians to find out how they receive the idea of a Waldorf school.

If questions arise, you can contact the national Waldorf Association (if it already exists), the Friends of Waldorf Education, or the International Conference for Waldorf Education-Hague Circle. Above all, however, it is necessary for parents and teachers to familiarize themselves with the basics of Waldorf pedagogy.

What can help as introductory reading for the working groups?

It is a good idea to choose Rudolf Steiner's lectures on education and work through them together. Further literature suggestions can be found, for example, at:
<https://www.waldorfpublishings.org/>

What is the best way to start the initiative?

A Waldorf kindergarten is the bedrock of a Waldorf school. It is highly advisable first of all to set up a Waldorf kindergarten, to familiarize more parents with Waldorf education. Founding a Waldorf school should only take place after 2 or 3 years of fruitful experience with a Waldorf kindergarten.

How many people are needed for a start-up?

If the founding group already has 20 to 30 members, tasks can be distributed sensibly among them and on a voluntary basis (no remunerations). As a rule of thumb, if three kindergarten groups can be filled, then one school first class can later be filled. Another important point of reference is the number of people really interested in public lectures on Waldorf topics. If 60 to 100 people come together for such presentations, there will probably be enough potential parents.

How do you choose a suitable location?

The location should be easily accessible by transportation means. It is helpful for future parents if they find out at an early stage in which district (or in which municipality) the school will be located.

Which working groups are important?

The most important thing is a working group that is as large and comprehensive as possible, dedicated to study the vision for a Waldorf school in a quite specific location, and preparing the appropriate strategies and structures for the project. The "school vision" of the parent-teacher group should be so clear as possible, in order to make the correct decisions. A specific working group must be formed very early to work on the task of finding Waldorf kindergarten educators and Waldorf teachers. Waldorf teachers are generally not easy to find and recruit. The public relations working group must attend meetings of the local city council, approach the political parties and generally promote the idea of a Waldorf school in the desired region. Public relations work also includes dealing with the press, setting up a website with regular information on events and lectures, as well as a calendar of working group meetings. A financial committee should also be formed since the beginning. Its function is to draw up a concept that provides a financial overview of the first few years of the future operation.

What legal steps can be expected?

At a suitable point in time, the initiative should enter into legally binding agreements that can no longer be made by a loose association of individuals (like the previous working groups of pioneer parents and educators). Afterwards the need will arise to constitute a NGO association (or to choose another possible legal form, such as a cooperative). In any case, the legal entity must be non-profit.

What local support is needed?

If possible, an already existing Waldorf school in the region should accompany the founding process as sponsor. This is generally the case when the sponsoring school can hope to be relieved by the new foundation. But if the other school would be deprived of a vital proportion of its pupils by the new school, it is unlikely that it decides to sponsor it. In this case, however, it should be considered whether the initiative itself is justified.

How many classes should be formed to begin?

It's quite appropriate to start with 1 to 3 primary classes and then open a new class every year so that the school grows at a manageable pace.

What requirements should be met before starting the school activities?

- The founding initiative should confirm that enough pupils were enrolled. This means that a sufficiently large group of prepared parents is ready to support the hard work of setting up a new school. When the first class or classes open, there should be at least 20 children per class. In order to achieve this, experience already showed that about twice the number of interested parties should be available in advance.
- Suitable buildings must be found. This applies both to the actual start situation (kindergarten) and to the school construction period, during which the school will grow year after year.
- The initiative must have a solid financial plan for the first 5-10 years. In many cases, it will only be possible to get started when incurring debts. However, the planning must then clearly establish how these debts are to be paid off within a reasonable period of time. This peculiar detail should be examined by an expert finance manager from an experienced school.
- For the start and for the first 2-3 years the initiative must have trained Waldorf teachers for all disciplines. It must also present a plan on how adequate Waldorf teachers will be recruited in the following years. The role of "founding teacher" is particularly difficult to find. Moreover it is advisable to arrange in advance for suitable and interested persons to attend a Waldorf teacher training course.
- The planned school should not meet resistance from the local population or authorities; it should receive the broadest possible political welcome and support.
- If possible, an existing Waldorf school should assume the project-sponsor role for the new school. The sponsorship should take the form of a personal responsibility assumed by some teachers from the sponsoring school – tasks should include participation in joint conferences, stays, etc. In particular, the sponsoring school should undertake the task of providing for teacher absences.

What experience should the "founding teacher" have?

Founding teachers should be experienced Waldorf teachers. The person usually transfers from an existing school to the new school to be founded. The ideal personality is a class teacher who already finished a full teaching cycle from grade 1 to grade 8. Beyond the pedagogical maturity he/she should possess sufficient experience in dealing with the school's self-governing groups and functions.

What is a "founding teacher" responsible for?

Since the founding teacher may be the only person who knows the working habits and tasks for the pedagogical group, during the start period he/she is an essential advisor for the formation and consolidation of the teaching staff, and the development of the school conference work. In

addition, he can initially assume the task of negotiating with authorities, as well as accompany discussions with parents.

What other teachers does the school need?

Ideally, a new school should start with several classes at the same time, and each class needs a class teacher (this is the teacher that will accompany the class from grade 1 to grade 8). Such a teacher should be trained in a Waldorf teacher course, and the more previous teaching experience he/she has, the better. If the founding circle of the initiative dedicated enough time to research where potential Waldorf teachers are, they can then attend a Waldorf teacher training course. It is advised to consider the teacher needs of all the schools in the area, and find new teachers elsewhere, instead of poaching teachers from existing schools.

Each discipline needs a specialized teacher for subject lessons. Class teachers can take over some of the first subject lessons (for example, a foreign language, handicrafts, music or horticulture). Subject teachers may begin with a partial assignment, and later receive a full assignment. The lessons of Eurythmy, as well as the lessons of foreign languages and sport, need trained specialized teachers.

How are schoolchildren admitted?

- The association representing the school initiative appoints, for example, the founding teacher, or other adequate subject teachers to conduct the admission interviews.
- The children must be presented individually and examined pedagogically, in order to evaluate their readiness for school. Only experienced teachers should be involved in this important task.
- Simultaneously, a discussion takes place with the parents. (How do they feel about and align themselves with the Waldorf education principles? Are they ready to stay in a lasting and fruitful cooperation with the school?)
- Any admission must be approved by an interview with the school doctor. A new Waldorf school should be established with an anthroposophical doctor as soon as possible, to provide the children with adequate medical care.
- A financial agreement (with corresponding written declarations) between parents and school association is required. In principle, this should include discussions that examine how much the parents can contribute to the running costs of the non-profit Waldorf school.

How are teachers contracted?

After the initiative group has decided about hiring teachers, employment contracts should be signed with them. In addition to the usual basic employment contract clauses, the teacher contract should contain the obligation to work cooperatively, the acceptance of collegial responsibility and the willingness to follow continuous further pedagogical training.

What happens at the inauguration event of the school?

There will certainly be a large public celebration, including a festive speech by a school representative and statements from invited public partners. Representatives from the sponsor school may add their artistic and cultural presentations, so that all parents, teachers and children feel that they are now embarking on a new voyage together.

How is the teachers' conference formed?

After all needed teachers are contracted, it is advisable (before the school activity begins) for the teachers to meet together to festively celebrate the first "teachers' conference". This is a special occasion that differs from all founding activities, because now the group formed by all teachers becomes a separated entity, with its own authority on pedagogical themes.

How is the school association board formed?

While teachers need their own conference composition, it is less clear who should form the board of the school association. Should the board be formed by parents alone? From the early

days of the initiative, with an intensive involvement of parents, it is probably normal to presume that the the school association, as well as the association board and its board members are recruited exclusively from the parents community. However, a really cooperative working scheme needs that teachers join hands with parents for all tasks of the association. Depending on the local opinion, the association board may be formed in a certain percentage balanced ratio of parents and teachers. This trusting relationship between parents and teachers is recommended in any case.

Does the school need an office manager?

When it comes, for example, to construction planning or a similarly drastic phase of school life, a professional office manager will be needed. But he has no status as "school director".

What to do when uncertainties appear?

Even when minor uncertainties appear, the school can always turn to its friends in the sponsoring school. If such a sponsoring school does not exist, then (a) the national association, (b) the Friends of Waldorf Education, or (c) the International Conference for Waldorf Education – Hague Circle.

Are there alternatives to founding a Waldorf school?

Yes, when the foundation could not be realized as quickly as expected, one can for example organize a recreational school. Children who attend a regular primary school can visit – during one or two afternoons per week, or on Saturday morning when they have no school – such a recreational school to enjoy the elements of Waldorf education that they don't have at their regular schools. They are offered artistic, cultural and occupational activities with watercolours, eurythmy, and they can possibly get involved in the sounds of a foreign language or the imagery of fairy tales. If some people of the intended school initiative (for example, future teachers who already live in the area) can take these tasks, such a provisional offer can alleviate many of the difficulties that have arisen because the school foundation could not evolve as wished.

What is the recommended literature?

Please look at titles in <https://www.waldorfpublishations.org/search?x=o&y=o&q=parents>