

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Mission: Cultivating the Whole-Child**

Our school will offer a Waldorf-inspired curriculum that meets New Mexico State Standards and is fully relevant to our community and local environment. With sustainable living practices as our foundation, the students will create meaningful connections between the physical, emotional, intellectual and social aspects of life. Sustainable living practices will be realized in our curriculum through an emphasis on gardening, farming, sustainable building practices and the exploration of our surrounding local environment. Nature and arts will be a focus in our curriculum. Our school will foster a supportive community of peers, parents and teachers which will help each student become confident, self-directed and engaged learners, invested in their own future. Community service will be integrated into the curriculum as part of the whole person development; each student will develop a sense of responsibility to help others, whether in the classroom or the larger community.

### INTRODUCTION

Our school is inspired by and committed to the principles of Waldorf education and sustainable living. The Taos community is strongly embedded in the arts and the environment. The Waldorf-inspired approach to education has proven to be valued by the Taos community because it emphasizes an arts-integrated experience within a nurturing, multi-sensory, multi-cultural, nature-based approach to learning. The arts are integrated into all academic lessons, and cultivation of the child's imagination and creativity is a high priority. Music, theater, string instruments, wind instruments, visual arts, and hand crafts are all incorporated into the weekly curriculum. The full integration of sustainable living practices into daily school life is valued as a commitment to the environment in the present, germinating the seed of eco-responsibility that will bear fruit far into the future. We aim to open our doors as a K-6th grade plus 9th grade school in the fall of 2013. We will have one class per grade and expand to K-12 adding one upper grade and high school grade each year.

### OUR PHILOSOPHY

The philosophy of our school is founded upon the conviction that children are innately curious about themselves and the world; they inherently want to learn, discover, and create. The role of the school is to nourish and guide this natural exuberance, energy and delight in the quest for meaning and knowledge. Creative approaches in which the arts are integrated into academic learning serve to wholly engage the child and provide an experiential, multi-sensory context for understanding intellectual concepts. The experiential study of world cultures enriches the student's expanding world-view, giving

an appreciation for diversity, flexibility of thinking, and an intrinsic empathic understanding of social and cultural issues. The school's overall educational approach is designed to instill in its students not only high standards for academic achievement and civic responsibility, but also a sustaining degree of intellectual curiosity, creative thinking, problem solving and creative self-expression, as well as valuable interpersonal and intrapersonal life skills. Typically, class teachers stay with the same group of students 1st through 8th grade, advancing through the grades for a number of years, allowing for trusting relationships to be established and true mentorship to take place.

In high school there will be three to four main subject teachers. These main subject teachers will specialize in Language Arts, Humanities, Math, and Sciences. The students in 9th through 12th grade will have specialty subject classes with the various subject teachers including music, strings, drama, handwork and eurythmy. Project-based learning will be a core element in the high school curriculum.

The Waldorf-inspired approach to education is developmental; it recognizes that certain capacities emerge in students at fairly predictable stages, while also allowing for individual rates of maturation and uniqueness. This appreciation for the metamorphosis of comprehension underlies both the organization of the curriculum and the changing methods of teaching. Such a developmental approach to learning often means that standards are taught on a slightly different schedule than is typical, but all students receive a full and rich academic experience as they complete the sequence of grades. Classrooms, materials used and curriculum cultivate a sense of beauty, wonder and deep respect for the natural world, affirming that the intelligence and imagination of the young child is best developed without the use of technology; computer technology is used only as a practical necessity for computer based testing, library and research purposes. Learning a second language begins in first grade. The joy of music enhances cognitive development throughout all of the grades. Cooperation and self-advancement is encouraged rather than outwardly directed competition. The goal of this educational experience is to enable students, as fully as possible, to freely choose and realize their individual path through life. The school community and the larger Taos community, is further connected through seasonal programs and festivals.

## EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

The Waldorf-inspired kindergarten cultivates and works in support of the child's deep, inborn natural attitude, belief, trust and basic reverence for the world as an interesting and good place to live in. Therefore, until age six or seven, children learn primarily through physical activity and imitation. A sense of goodness permeates the soothing, home-like environment of the kindergarten where warmth and toys made of natural materials encourage creative imaginative play. Through storytelling, arts and crafts,

daily, weekly and monthly rhythms, and healthy movement, a strong foundation is laid for formal academics beginning in first grade.

The kindergarten classroom is an open and warm space with different areas for play including drawing, make believe, building and a quiet area with books and pillows. The overall feeling in a Waldorf-INSPIRED kindergarten is one of magic and wholesome activity. A kitchen space is essential for the weekly participatory baking of bread and making of soup by the class.

In grades 1-5, children learn best when academics are conveyed through painting, drama, music, storytelling and other direct experiences that stir their emotions. A sense of beauty weaves throughout the day engaging children in their learning. The arts are used primarily as a means to learn to understand and relate to the world, and also as an avenue for personal self-expression. This builds an understanding for different subjects out of what is beautiful in the world in the broadest sense of the word.

In grades 6-8, the pictorial thinking of the earlier grades are now metamorphosing to more abstract thinking. For example during the teaching of Platonic solids, the teacher challenges students to inwardly picture a cube then transform it to other shapes (truncated cube to the octahedron to tetrahedron). This approach leads to an ever more conscious cultivation of observation and reflection, focusing on building an understanding of what is true, based on personal experience, thinking and judgment. The grade classrooms each have a specific color and painting style. They are warm colors and reflect the evolving consciousness of the children as they progress through the various stages of development. In general, there are no posters on the walls; instead, the classrooms are decorated with the students' artwork.

In high school, teenagers are alive with questions about the world and their place in it. The Waldorf-inspired education is experiential. When learning trigonometry the students go into the fields with surveying; carbonation is studied by making root beer; social science classes incorporate debates and role play. The world becomes the classroom. The subjects are integrated with connections between disciplines being made. For example while students read the Odyssey, they are also learning to weave as Penelope wove while awaiting Odysseus' return.

Our high school will emerge from a unique foundation of skills-focused sustainability and artisan entrepreneurship. Choosing from one of a range of sustainability-focused specializations, students will learn traditional academic content such as science and math through applied experience, with forward- focused thinking that addresses the vast environmental, economic, and social challenges faced in the world today.

Animal husbandry and other important elements of local farming will be a key aspect of our curriculum. We are exploring the standards and conditions required to have farm animals as part of the curriculum and are looking forward to further discussion as to how this innovative program can continue forward in a charter school context.

#### ACHIEVEMENT

The Waldorf-inspired method of education offers an academically rigorous curriculum presented in a developmentally appropriate and arts-integrated context. By combining elements of a traditional Waldorf curriculum, sustainable living, and New Mexico State Standards students will excel academically.

Student achievement will be measured and evaluated using the variety of methods indicated by the Waldorf education model such as portfolio reviews, parent teacher conferences, and in-depth written evaluations by the teacher. Students will have the opportunity to design and engage in independent research projects.

#### WALDORF STRATEGIES FOR ASSESSMENT

The Waldorf-inspired strategies for assessments will be an important tool in providing information on many aspects of how our students are learning including the many standards that are difficult to measure. Waldorf-inspired assessment strategies provide a comprehensive picture of what a student understands and their ability to work creatively and effectively. Because the teachers will be continuing with students through the years they will have a clear understanding of how the individual students learn and if they are on track. The portfolio / main lesson book assessments will provide a basis of how fully the students understand and are able to apply information.

A spirit of open and honest communication underlies all aspects of these evaluations. In addition, our school will utilize and benefit from state required standardized assessments. We will implement the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) consistent with the timeline that New Mexico is following. Standards Based Assessments (SBA) will be implemented.

In 2013 the NM SBA will include current standards and there will be a grade 3 Bridge Assessment that aligns with the CCSS. In 2014 there will be a Bridge Assessment for all tested grades that looks and feels more like the PARCC assessment. In 2015 New Mexico will deliver the PARCC assessment. Taos Mountain Charter School will align with the Common Core Standards.

Performance results provide information for various stakeholders. This information will be used to:

- Determine whether students are on track toward being college- and career-ready
- Assess the full range of the Common Core Standards, including standards that are difficult to measure
- Measure student proficiency, including for high and low performing students
- Provide data during the academic year to inform instruction, interventions and professional development
- Provide data for accountability, including measures of growth or improvement in student proficiency

## SCHOOL CULTURE

Our school will be a nurturing, intimate school community that fosters strong positive relationships between students, faculty and parents. People who come together to tend the school garden will illustrate community-in-action, sowing and reaping rewards that reach far beyond the edible result of this work. Children will eat natural, minimally processed, whole foods for lunches and snacks. They will also be given ample time for outdoor learning and play. Our school will be a school that gives young people a sense of belonging to a community that is grounded in respect for self, others and the natural world.

## WHY OUR SCHOOL?

Typically, Waldorf education is only available in private school settings, accessible only to those in the upper economic echelon of our society. We strongly believe that education inspired by Waldorf methods and curriculum should be made public and tuition-free so that all who wish to attend have the option to do so, regardless of their socioeconomic status. In this way, we can ensure social justice in school choice. In addition, Taos, New Mexico is the ideal home for a public school where Waldorf and sustainable living methods are practiced; our school reflects and represents the values of a growing population in our community.

The Waldorf-inspired curriculum is ideal in its ability to meet students at multiple levels and with different learning styles. The integrated, multi-sensory instruction will engage the students mentally and physically in learning all subject matter. The outdoor campus with its extensive garden and play space will be the setting for hands on experiential learning opportunities.

## THE NAME: TAOS MOUNTAIN CHARTER SCHOOL

The name, Taos Mountain Charter School was chosen in recognition of the surrounding land where we are hoping to be located. The school embodies the strength and

perseverance that we are working to instill in the students as well as the inspiration to strive higher. Taos Mountain reflects our intention that children who attend the school will reach great heights in their education, which they will emerge as wise human beings, possessing intellectual strength, and emotional, physical and ecological awareness.

## WALDORF EDUCATION, PAST AND PRESENT

Waldorf education was developed by educator and scientist, Rudolf Steiner (b.1861-1925). It was based on the recognition that the human being is composed of body, mind and spirit. While Steiner believed that education should recognize the spiritual nature of the human being, he never intended this to be taught in the classroom, nor does our school. It is the intention of our school, as a public school, to ensure that no particular belief system will be subscribed to or taught to students within the school. It was with great insight, care and concern that Steiner developed Waldorf education. The Latin *educare* (the root of our word for education) means to "bring forth." Steiner said, "Education is an art—it must speak to the child's experience. To educate the whole child, the heart and the will must be reached as well as the mind."

Today, approximately 1000 Waldorf schools and 1,600 Waldorf early childhood programs span 83 countries and five continents, with 44 Waldorf-inspired public charter schools (and growing) in the United States, as well as an increasing number of European public schools integrating Waldorf methods. Waldorf education is truly global, not only in its scope, but also in its approach. Wherever it is found, the Waldorf curriculum cultivates within its students a deep appreciation for cultural traditions from around the world all the while being deeply rooted in its local culture and context.

## WALDORF OR WALDORF-INSPIRED?

The term "Waldorf" is trademarked, protected and available for use only by private education institutions, with guardianship held by the Association of Waldorf Schools of North America (AWSNA). The use of standardized and required testing, as well as the removal of certain aspects of traditional Waldorf curriculum and practices, means that our school is not a true Waldorf school, and thus, cannot claim to be one in title. The rise of public, charter schools inspired by Waldorf methods and curriculum is leading to the possible development of criteria through which public, Waldorf-inspired charter schools could become accredited. The Alliance for Public Waldorf Education, of which our school is a member, is the primary support network and advocacy group for Waldorf-inspired charter schools in the United States. Our school intends to continue its membership with the Alliance for Public Waldorf Education, remaining informed about future developments in this regard.

## PROVEN DEMAND

Years of proven demand illustrate that Taos needs this type of education to take the form of a public school. The Waldorf community in Taos began as a home school group more than 20 years ago and developed into Taos Country Day School and then Taos Waldorf School (TWS), a private Pre-k through 8th grade school. Enrollment peaked in 2008 with 132 students, pre-school through grade eight. Due to the economic downturn at both the local and national levels enrollment numbers have fluxuated but never gone below 80 students (2011-12 school year).

We will be providing an important and needed educational opportunity to many students who are not currently being met. Taos Mountain Charter School will be offering a unique curriculum in the Taos area, there are no other schools offering a Waldorf-inspired curriculum with a focus on sustainability. In addition, we will be offering classes through high school which is an age group currently not being served with this kind of curriculum.

Not only will those who are currently attending Taos Waldorf School (TWS Board of Trustees has endorsed this application for a charter school endeavor) wish to attend our school, but the many homeschoolers in our community who are not able to afford this program currently will also be a target audience. Further, the waiting list at the only arts integrated charter school in Taos indicates that many others in our community wish to experience a curriculum rich in creativity. Taos Mountain Charter School will be incorporating our surrounding environment into everyday learning. Our curriculum will focus on integrating local traditions. We are located in a rural community and wish to bring elements of animal husbandry, farming, oral traditions, and multi-generational interactions into our classrooms. We will actively reach out and recruit enrollment from under-served populations for we are seeking a diverse community.

This educational niche in our community will be highly sought after. The incorporation of sustainable life practices, with an active farm experience for the children is reflective of the strong tie to the land that permeates life in Taos. The children will be working in the garden, harvesting the produce and enjoying all that they work so hard to cultivate. They will build with adobe and recycled materials (earth ships) and learn life skills. We will partner with members of the community for the high school students to have active internships and learn hands on practical skills.

## WHO THE SCHOOL WILL EDUCATE

Our school proposes to begin operating in fall 2013. We aim to open our doors as a K-6th grade plus 9th grade school in the fall of 2013. We will start with one class per grade and expand to K-12 adding one upper grade and high school grade each year.

The school will educate students from kindergarten through 12th grade, ages 5 to 18 years old, from throughout the Taos community. The maximum enrollment is approximately 300 students. Meeting our classroom space requirements will dictate whether a class is 16 students up to 24 students. Our future classrooms will allow for larger class sizes. Recognizing our small class size goals we will be continually investigating additional funding sources to ensure a balanced budget and long term sustainability. We believe that partnerships involving our proposed gardening program will offer many opportunities for funding.

Our school will provide an exceptional, time-tested and research based educational experience for students. By supporting the local need for Waldorf-inspired methods and sustainability in a public school setting the school will inspire and educate families in our area.

#### OUR ENLIVENED COMMUNITY

Our school is a grassroots endeavor created and primarily supported by a dedicated group of local parents and educators. Since February 2012 many have volunteered their time and energy, working to bring our vision to fruition. While some of these board members will go on to the school Governing Council after the school opens, the current founders will identify and recruit additional Governing Council members within our community who are knowledgeable about the Waldorf educational philosophy and who, together, will comprise the well rounded skill set crucial for a functional Governing Council. Governance by this group, combined with the highly skilled faculty and Director will result in a high performing, high growth school that is guided by its Mission, the New Mexico State Standards and best practices for charter school governance.

There has been a significant growth in the number of Waldorf-inspired charter schools in the United States. Arizona and Colorado has seen several new Waldorf-inspired charter schools in the past few years. There is important research now available (presented in this application) illustrating the effectiveness of the Waldorf methods and how well students in Waldorf-inspired charter schools are testing.