

# **Site Review**

## **Renewal – Orchard Valley Waldorf School**

### **Independent School Review Report General Education**

**Site Review Conducted**

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Submitted by Independent School Review Team:

J. Deborah Ormsbee

Pat Pallas-Gray



## Site Review Scope of Work and Purpose

Orchard Valley Waldorf School (OVWS) is a general education school, in East Montpelier Vermont, approved for kindergarten through the eighth grade. OVWS follows a traditional school year calendar. The Independent School team conducted a site review on Thursday, September 22, 2022. OVWS's head of school submitted a timely renewal application and required supporting documentation in compliance with State Board of Education renewal requirements.

## School Philosophy & Educational Objectives

State Board of Education Rule 2225.2, 2225.5

Founded in the early 20th century, Waldorf education is based on the insights, teachings and principles of education outlined by the artist, and scientist, Rudolf Steiner. The focus of Waldorf curriculum is to inspire life-long learning in all students and to enable them to fully develop their unique capacities through involvement in the arts, exploration of the natural environment and to provide creative, student-centered academic enrichment opportunities.

## School Philosophy

OVWS was developed within Stiner's Waldorf framework; however, academic programming is personalized to address the needs all enrolled students. OVWS's renewal application states that:

"Orchard Valley Waldorf School is an educational institution that serves children from early childhood through eighth grade. We deliver proven educational programs, guiding each student along a path that allows the child to grow into young adulthood with inner confidence, a love of learning, and the dynamic thinking required to promote social renewal. We seek to awaken and educate the whole child by equally engaging the mind, enlivening the imagination, and strengthening the will, in harmony with the natural stages of child development. This is accomplished by:

- Integrating the arts into all aspects of the curriculum – foreign language, humanities, math and sciences
- Creating an environment of safety and acceptance that seeks to recognize the special gifts of each child
- Cultivating a living relationship between the land, our children, and the community where the joys and traditions of play, work, festivals, and song unfold."

## Program Objectives

OVWS's stated objectives are a blend of Waldorf educational philosophy and compliance with Vermont statute and State Board of Education Rule requirements for students in grades, K – 8.

"In our early childhood program, our objective is for the children to develop their bodies, minds and social skills through group and individual play, as well as through teacher-directed activities. Through story, movement, and rhythm the teacher helps children with small and gross motor skill development such as speech and language acquisition. Our goal is that when

our children reach the age of 6-going-on-7 and are ready to enter the first grade, they will be ready to embrace the education that meets the needs of the next phase of childhood.” ... and ...

“In our elementary program, our objective is to educate the whole child by allowing each individual’s abilities to unfold naturally and fully. Through the use of story subjects are introduced and developed. Subjects are addressed through reading, writing, singing, painting, allowing children a variety of ways to incorporate the knowledge of the lesson. In addition to the academic goals of each grade, the teacher works to create a positive social environment in which the children can learn. The objective is that each child learns to get along with others and develops the confidence to handle social challenges and conflict.”

## **School Enrollment**

16 V.S.A. §166(b)(4), State Board of Education Rule 2225.3

The Independent School Team confirmed that on the day of the site review visit, there were a total of thirty-five students enrolled at OVWS. Students are enrolled by parents with the specific aim of enrolling their child in a school that follows the Waldorf philosophy, that includes active parental engagement as a facet of their child’s learning experience.

Students are enrolled in OVWS through a rolling admission process and final enrollment decisions are made by an admission committee comprised of class instructors, the head of school and appropriately identified community advisory group members. Under the school’s current enrollment process, a parent/guardian contacts the school, and a plan is made for the student to participate in a three-day “shadow” visit. Parents/guardians and prospective students meet with OVWS staff at the conclusion of the school visit to discuss potential enrollment.

## **Governance**

State Board of Education Rule 2225.4

OVWS’s renewal application describes the governance structure as:

“Waldorf schools are known for having governing structures that include parents, faculty, and community members in a non-hierarchical framework. Teachers and staff meet weekly to conduct school business. Parents are organized in a Parent Council and serve as members of the various school committees. Parents also engage in active support of the school through tasking and volunteerism.

The Board of Trustees is a representative body composed of parents, faculty/staff, and at-large community members. The Administrative Director and Pedagogical Director are direct hires of the Board of Trustees who, in collaboration with the Faculty, Collegial Circle and Board of Trustees, make decisions and oversee pedagogy, HR, and the daily operations of the school. The governing structure of the school is horizontal rather than vertical.

The Board is responsible for the financial and legal well-being of the school and is the legal embodiment of the not-for-profit corporation that is the Orchard Valley Waldorf School. This includes approving the annual and capital budgets of the school, financial

oversight, approval of policies, vision and long-range planning, faculty hiring, and program and facility expansion. The Board is also the representative body that includes parents and faculty/staff in decisions that affect the school and may include members who are neither parents nor teachers. All activities are managed directly or delegated under the direction of the Board of Trustees. School by-laws and state and federal laws, that cover non-profit organizations and private schools, govern the Board of Trustees.”

The Board currently has nine members serving three-year terms. There are at least two and no more than three members of the faculty/staff on the Board. All meetings are open to interested guests. Minutes are available upon request. The annual meeting is held in the fall for the purpose of reviewing the budget, introducing significant plans and review of academic highlights, and electing new Board members.

### **Minimum Course of Study & Required Assessments**

#### 16 V.S.A. §166(b), State Board of Education Rule 2225.5

OVWS’s renewal application included information that addressed benchmarks for each grade, Kindergarten through grade eight. Academic programming meets State Board of Education Minimum Course of Study requirements for delivery of curriculum by student age and ability level.

Additionally, all students participate in Waldorf-centered academic opportunities that include music, fine arts, languages, outdoor education and “hand work” or craft skill development to foster each child’s unique interests and creativity. A woodworking curriculum is a central part of the school’s academic program and students attend workshop to learn about proper uses of woodworking tools, as well as techniques and practical application for creating utilitarian products used in everyday activities. OVWS’s renewal application states that:

“Waldorf educational methodology draws upon a specific curriculum for early education through grade 12 that was inspired by the work of Rudolf Steiner. Elements of this education and methods instruction include but are not limited to the following:

Integration of studies across disciplines of art, music, humanities, languages, movement, history and science that match the developmental stages of the child. Providing attention to all these elements – social, artistic, intellectual, physical, and spiritual development helps children to develop in a balanced way.”

Use of multisensory teaching to engage students learning through kinesthetic, auditory, visual modalities. Use of Main Lesson format that provides a large block of time each morning for the in-depth study in 3 – 4-week blocks. Students begin each day from 8:30 – 10:15 in Main Lesson Monday – Friday.

Students create their own books that capture the essence of the curriculum; recording in verse, composition, illustration, maps and diagrams the work they are learning in all subject areas. These books become a beautiful portfolio of their learning each year.

Teach from the whole to the part with an emphasis on teaching in context and fostering meaningful connections to concepts alive in the world.

Using the oral traditions of storytelling, verse, poetry recitation, drama children learn to paint mental pictures and cultivate a rich imagination that will support the development of strong reading and listening comprehension skills and creative independent thinking.

Student progress reports integrate Waldorf educational philosophy narratives with more traditional student grade-level achievement and families receive formal progress reports in both the first and second semester. OVWS schedules parent-teacher nights to review each child's progress with family/guardians.

## **Professional Staff**

### State Board of Education Rule 2225.8

The Independent School Team have reviewed staff credentials and can confirm that OVWS staff are qualified in their areas of responsibility.

### *Administrative Team*

“OVWS has a full-time Administrative Director, part time Pedagogical Director, Buildings and Grounds Manager, and Office Manager. These four administrative personnel assist the school through the provision of essential support in all areas of school and facility management. The Administrative Director attends weekly Faculty meetings, participates in Finance & Development Committees, Facility Management and Long-Range Planning as part of the Board of Directors. The part time Pedagogical Director chairs faculty meetings, participates in Branch meetings and supports Faculty and Student needs. The Office Manager tends to the immediate student and faculty needs, maintains student and employee files, maintains the school's database, and supports the Administrative Director in meeting compliance with regulatory bodies such as the Agency of Education, Child Development Division, Department of Health. Additionally, OVWS employs a half-time Admissions Director, half-time Registrar and three part time auxiliary support staff.”

### *Educational Support and Title I*

OVWS employs a full time Student Services Coordinator/Educator to oversee, and case manage the Title I students' services, collaborate with local districts, arrange for comprehensive evaluations where warranted, provide tutoring and support services to individual students and to serve as a conduit between school and families. The Student Services Coordinator is also responsible for administering Title IA student assessments.

Title II services are made available through Washington Central Unified Union School District currently “allowing OVWS to receive training in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion as well as literacy and mathematics as needed. Title IV funding is made available through the Washington Central Unified Union School District ...we are utilizing this year to improve global citizenship student learning outcomes by engaging with Abenaki Helping Abenaki to provide artist-in-residencies focused on history, culture, economics, art, and music.”

### *Care Group*

“The Care Committee's mission is twofold; to support the school community in its striving to interact with one another using non-violent communication and to support students' individual social/emotional and academic needs. As such, the Care Committee plans and oversees the support of individual students, provides classroom management support as well as conflict-

resolution education for all OVWS students and adults. In an effort to support our students effectively, the Care Committee works closely with teachers and families to develop and sustain a supportive and warm-hearted environment for students which address conflict in a way that teaches, heals, and uplifts all parties. Students can be referred to the Care Committee by a teacher or by their parent/guardian.” (Source: Orchard Valley Waldorf School Renewal Application)

### **Staffing Safeguards:**

Background checks are conducted prior to start date for all newly hired employees. Fingerprint criminal records check, and Vermont adult/child registries are checked annually, and documentation is on file in the school’s main office.

### **Hazing, Harassment & Bullying Policies**

OVWS has adopted the required policy, as posted on AOE website for hazing, harassment, and bullying (HHB). Parent/family and staff handbooks include requirements of HHB in addition to the school’s expectations.

### **Mandatory Reporting Procedures:**

OVWS staff review mandatory reporting policies and procedures during in-service, prior to the start of school each August. Mandatory reporting information is also included in the school’s handbooks and reviewed with parents/family member as part of the admissions process.

### **Facilities**

State Board of Education Rule 2225.6

OVWS campus includes several buildings and are the main elementary building, a renovated farmhouse that serves as the kindergarten, and several buildings that serve as the school’s orchestral/music school facility and outdoor education spaces. An additional building on the grounds is utilized for storage and may be renovated to serve as an additional building at some time in the future.

Each building is clean, well-organized and in good repair. Additionally, each of OVWS’s buildings have hard-wired fire detection system. All fire and safety equipment and heating systems are inspected annually. The Certificates of Occupancy were submitted to the Agency of Education. The school has installed a new air exchange system funded by an Efficiency Vermont grant. The installation of OVWS’s new air exchange system was completed in December, 2021 and has been inspected prior to the start of this school year.

### **Emergency Services:**

In an emergency, OVWS utilize 911 Emergency Services. All staff members complete first aid and CPR training or refreshers, as needed, annually. OVWS staff work with local police and local first responders to conduct and practice monthly fire drills, active shooter and remain in place protocols. A log listing the date, and purpose for each drill is kept on file in the main office.

### **Nursing Services, Medications, and Immunization Records:**

OVWS does not have a school nurse on staff. Medications are not administered by the school's staff and are the responsibility of family members.

The Independent School Team confirms that OVWS student immunization records are up to date and included in secured student files located in administrative offices.

### **Financial Capacity**

Orchard Valley Waldorf School submitted a profit/loss statement, a balance sheet, and a copy of its 990, indicating the school has met SBE rule 2226.11 requirements and has the financial capacity to conduct its educational purposes for the period of approval.

### **Independent School Team Recommendation**

OVWS offers an academic program based on Waldorf school philosophy. The school is supported by proactively engaged parent/family and community members. The Agency of Education's Independent School team confirms that OVWS meets all statutory requirements and State Board of Education Rules and recommends to the Secretary of Education a five-year renewal of the program.

