

Academic Excellence in Focus

The Waldorf School of Baltimore takes a unique approach to education.

by John Crooks
Contributor

Within minutes of Sinai Hospital and the Cylburn Arboretum is the Waldorf School of Baltimore, an independent school for children from nursery school-age to the eighth grade and home to more than 125 students of diverse racial, ethnic and geographical backgrounds.

I took a tour of the Waldorf School of Baltimore late last fall. Interestingly, despite having been raised in Baltimore and being just a little older than the school itself, my knowledge of it was limited to the bumper stickers I was used to seeing.

Since 1971, the Waldorf School of Baltimore, 4801 Tamarind Road, has engaged in a distinctive model of educa-

tion focused on academic excellence and creative, intellectual and spiritual growth. Based on concepts developed by German philosopher and educator Rudolf Steiner, the mission of the Waldorf School is to inspire children to think, feel and act with depth, imagination and purpose.

Upon entering the school for the first time, I was impressed with the happy and eager faces of the students I saw walking through the doors. The parents with whom I spoke could not say enough good things—everyone believes that both the learning environment and education is worth the investment.

My curiosity was further piqued when Tom Goss, the school's executive director, addressed our group.

"Here at Waldorf our goal is to meet the children at their developmental level," he said. "We want to make the children available to what we're teaching."

Our tour guide explained that there is careful thought behind everything done in the learning environment. Laptop computers are conspicuously absent from the surroundings—students at Waldorf are taught, in their natural surroundings, to develop a keen sensory awareness.

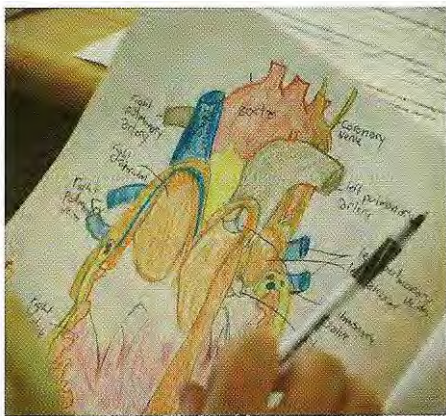
In the lower school, stories, drama, painting and drawing bring subjects to life in a way that goes beyond memorization of facts. Exercises and projects are done which demonstrate the necessity of teamwork and collaboration, such as building a shelter on campus using natural resources found in the environment. I learned that the Waldorf School of Baltimore highly regarded different subjects, such as astronomy, that are not found at other schools in the area.

As students advance to the middle school, lessons concerning issues of law, societal conflicts and evolution of civilization are taught along with math, geography, physics, chemistry and anatomy. I don't happen to be a knitter, so it never occurred to me that math equations and subversive geometry can be learned in cross-stitching and embroidery—but the knitting instructor in the Handwork Room explained how such things work. The objective of the instruction is to reinforce the work done in the main lesson. The students are able to see how mathematics can be a tool for discovery and problem-solving. At the school, the curriculum, pace of the day and extracurricular activities are age-specific and customized to the various developmental stages of the students. Field trips, activities, and community events are incorporated as well to help the students practice what they learn.

A Waldorf education prepares students for high school and beyond. A sign in the library indicates that of all Waldorf graduates, 94 percent attend college and 51 percent attend graduate school.

As a school administrator said during my tour, Waldorf works to create an environment where children and what they have to offer is valued.

For more information, visit waldorfschoolofbaltimore.org.



At top, an example of a student-created textbook. At bottom left, middle school students concentrate while doing an experiment. At bottom right, students pose on the first day of school. Photos courtesy of the Waldorf School of Baltimore