



Valley of the Sun Waldorf Association
dba Desert Marigold School

6210 S 28th St Phoenix AZ 85042
☎(602) 243-6909 🌐DesertMarigold.org

September 16, 2019

Dear DMS Community,

Thank you for submitting your questions from the Town Hall meetings. We have taken great care to answer your questions as thoughtfully and thoroughly as possible. As we continue working through a time of transition, we may not have definite answers to some of your questions at this time. Those areas that are still a work in progress are noted within the answers below.

As we received questions from eight community members that contained similar inquiries, we grouped questions into several categories: curriculum, garden, high school and administration. The questions are quoted verbatim. Additional commentary was not included as we can only address actual questions arising from the information shared at the community meetings on September 9 and 10, 2019.

CURRICULUM QUESTIONS

Q: Why did the school switch from Spanish to Latin?

A: Rudolf Steiner was supportive of bringing Latin into the curriculum, especially in the later elementary years. The idea of teaching Latin at DMS is not a new idea, but rather has been discussed for many years. Further, Latin was never intended to replace another foreign language. It is our intention in the future to have two language programs (Latin/Greek) and another foreign language such as Spanish, German, Mandarin, French, etc. This year, our job posting for a language teacher brought us a very talented Latin teacher, who is familiar with Waldorf education and is eager to learn more.

One of the unique problems at DMS is a scarcity of highly qualified teachers with some knowledge of, or at least interest in Waldorf pedagogy. There is no established pool of trained, primary school foreign language teachers from which a Waldorf school may draw or a formal training program designed specifically for foreign language teachers. That said, DMS encourages all teachers to obtain the professional development necessary to become a Waldorf

certified teacher. This commitment takes time to complete but it is a long term goal to have all faculty who teach at DMS to be highly qualified under the State as well as be Waldorf certified.

Here is some feedback from some of the grades teachers as to how Latin is being taught and received by students in class.

First Grade - in the younger grades, the Latin teacher is enjoying getting to know our students and presenting rich lessons in his work with the children. In first grade, they are learning songs and listening to nature stories in language class with the Latin teacher. In their language/Latin class the first grade children are learning songs, reciting poems together, playing finger/circle games, and practicing rhythmical counting and other exercises. The Latin teacher presents a dramatized narration of a developmentally appropriate story in his work with the children. Although the children may not understand the precise meaning of many words and phrases, they will absorb the feelings and the different sounds and rhythms of the language. Clearly they are enjoying the drama, suspense, humor of the simple tales, songs, and poems, and capture its essence as it is carefully presented by way of gesture.

Fourth Grade - the children are learning colors, numbers, and simple sentences to speak and write. They are using engaging and predictable stories to help them identify the patterns to follow when constructing Latin sentences. [Class teacher] observe[s] the children making connections to Spanish and other words in the English language. Building the capacity of flexible thinking and also identifying patterns and structure of language is not isolated to any one language. Latin is the root of the romance languages and a strong component of the English language.

Eighth Grade - The Latin teacher has brought a new energy to foreign language. The students are excited to learn a new language and the material is directly applicable to their studies (Anatomy, English, Science, etc.) Though it's thought of as a "dead language," Latin is most definitely being spoken and brought alive in the classroom in meaningful and engaging ways. The study of Latin in schools has been proven to be essential to the retention of phonics for younger students. Latin is the language of law, science, medicine, and philosophy, and greatly enhances students' ability to further their success in these subjects. Like any foreign language study, Latin is transformative to students' thinking and adds a depth of curriculum integration that Waldorf education strives for.

Q: Why is the 6th Grade not looking after the chickens this year?

A: We are evaluating best practices for animal care on the campus.

Q: Is there any effort at all ongoing to find a brass/woodwind teacher?

A: Yes, the winds teacher job posting is ongoing and has been since the summer.

Q: What factors did you use to decide to make the HS curriculum changes?

A: The high school teachers and the former high school administrator believed they need to focus on preparing students for the state assessments, which have recently been mandated to be given in the 10th grade. In light of the state-wide changes to the AZMerit testing dates and the shifts to integrated science standards, the high school is in the process of shifting to a multi-disciplinary course development for grades 9-12, including Chemistry, Biology, Physics, Geology and other sciences as seminars.

Q: What pushed you to focus on testing, particularly for the 10th grade? What changed for *this* academic year? Q: Why is the school focused on standardized tests? Q: Describe how standardized tests are aligned to the Waldorf pedagogy.

A: Our contract with the charter board requires us to meet the state standards as they relate to public education, which includes measuring student progress through assessments, including AzMerit testing. The Arizona Department of Education has changed the testing date so that all high school students are tested in science through AzMerit only at the end of the 10th grade as well as being tested for Math, English and Language Arts in the 11th grade. Please see <https://cms.azed.gov/home/GetDocumentFile?id=580e209baadebe0d3c1905fb>), page 3 for more information.

As a public charter school, we are required to participate in state standardized testing and teach the Arizona state standards. As a Waldorf public charter school, we realize that standardized testing is only one way to measure a child's progress. We strive to educate the whole child - head, heart and hands. To continue educating the children in this way through a Waldorf curriculum without intervention from the state, we must also demonstrate that we are making sufficient academic progress through standardized tests.

Q: What role did parent or student feedback play in the decisions made in questions [about High School curriculum and testing asked above]?

A: We value parent and student feedback and that feedback helps guide some course offerings, specifically with electives. In August, the high school students chose from a list of seven (7) electives, of which the most popular courses are being taught this semester. Larger curriculum decisions are based on the academic requirements set by the state and informed by Waldorf pedagogy. Every decision is made in the best interest of the students.

Questions regarding the garden

Q: What's the plan to get it integrated into the curriculum? What's the plan to get kids and teens to the garden to connect with nature and work the soil? What's the plan to give teachers ongoing education so they can use the garden as part of their class curriculum?

Q: What is happening with the garden program?

Q: Why do the classes no longer have regular scheduled garden time with Ms. Bobbi?

Q: I was wondering if someone could clarify Farmer Bobbi's involvement with the classes. Our teacher told us farmer Bobbi was no longer teaching a gardening class and that she would now be assisting. Is this true?

A: Waldorf education is a mindful practice of identifying the needs of the children that are before us based on the indications of Rudolf Steiner.

SEPTEMBER 18, 1923:

Question: Should there be a garden for each grade?

Dr. Steiner: I do not object to it. So far, we have been extemporizing the garden work. Develop a paper about this. It can be added to our curriculum.

The Science teacher: Based on my experiences from my botany lessons, I would like to plant plants in the garden that are a part of our studies in botany classes.

Dr. Steiner: This can be done, and will lead to a more structured plan in gardening.

Our contract with the charter board requires us to meet the state standards as they relate to public education, which includes providing students with a certain amount of academic minutes required by the State of Arizona. The older students become the more daily minutes of each subject is required. In the early and middle grades, a science class has taken the place of gardening to meet daily academic minutes for science to effectively meet these requirements. The science classes ensure that students are getting the time needed to learn the state standards and Waldorf curriculum in tandem. This allows for the science curriculum to open up more possibilities and a larger scope of learning. The ultimate goal is to align science classes with the Waldorf curriculum and state standards.

This, however, does not mean that gardening, which is an important component to Waldorf education, is written out of the curriculum. It simply means that the class teacher will include gardening time and lessons in other scheduled areas, which could encompass a broad scope of activities under the direction of a highly-qualified teacher. For example, in the study of ecosystems, a class may use the pond as a focus of study instead of the garden. Yet, the 1st grade class is using the garden to learn about the life cycle of plants and butterflies; the 3rd grade class is using the garden to learn about farming and grains, 4th grade will be in the garden planting the "three sisters" as was done in early Arizona history, 5th grade will be using the garden through botany, 8th grade will learn about crops of the Americas' cotton tobacco.

This is not a year long curriculum but rather being taught in blocks. The academic minutes currently are not being met but we have moved closer than previous years with the current academic schedule.

In sum, working in the garden can be a productive and meaningful component of science and social studies. There are many different components of the science curriculum that cannot be addressed solely in the garden, and yet these topics need to be taught as well. Stewardship of the earth has been valued in the Waldorf tradition. The garden can, but does not have to be, the only avenue of stewardship of the earth. Each teacher with their specific knowledge of both the developmental stage of their grade and the specific needs of the class must decide how best to meet those needs.

HIGH SCHOOL QUESTIONS

Q: Please provide a concise list of the changes that will, may or could come to pass in the near future, compliments of this restructuring.

A: We will make a formal announcement within two weeks about the restructure in the High School and who to contact for which situation.

Q: I previously called Mr. Martin when I had a question regarding my son's classes or basic concerns regarding his overall educational experience. Who do I call now - please provide a name, phone number and email address for efficiency.

A: We will be able to share additional information with the community in a few weeks about the restructure. We are currently working on finalizing details of who will handle certain tasks and matters internally and external hiring needs at this time.

The emails of the class teachers are on the following link. <https://desertmarigold.org/who-we-are/facultyandstaff/high-school-staff/>. Please contact the High School by phone, or email the Faculty Realm Chairs (Christie Martin and Millie Harkins) with any questions in the interim.

Q: Please provide the names, phone numbers and email addresses of the new high school teachers, along with their subjects taught.

A: The emails of the class teachers are on the following link <https://desertmarigold.org/who-we-are/facultyandstaff/high-school-staff/>. Please also feel free to contact Faculty Realm Chairs (Christie Martin and Millie Harkins) with any questions. The new teachers' contact information is as follows:

Joelle Reiling jreiling@desertmarigold.org. She teaches English to grades, 9, 11, and 12 and World History to grade 10.

Leslie Miller lemiller@desertmarigold.org. She teaches US/AZ History, Government/Economics, Sophomore English, Senior Play and Freshman Literary Studies.

Q: What teacher is responsible for overseeing the high school student council? Please provide name, phone number and email.

A: Leslie Miller is in charge of the student council. Please contact her at lemiller@desertmarigold.org.

Q: Who is responsible for the Senior Class, including the Senior Trip? What criteria was used to determine this person was, indeed, the best fit for this class? Who will be notifying the parents of class updates and Senior Trip plans?

A: Sarah Baize was chosen by the students and staff to be the class sponsor out of the three teachers available. She can be reached at sbaize@desertmarigold.org. Sarah will be contacting the parents very soon to announce her role and start communication with the 12th-grade parents.

Q: Where is the language program for the high school? This is mandatory to meet state standards.

A: Although a language program is not mandatory to meet state standards, we do intend to provide Spanish as a language in the High School to prepare students who want to pursue a college education.

High School Graduation Requirements

The State Board is responsible for setting statewide minimum requirements for graduation from high school, which can be found in Arizona Administrative Code R7-2-302. Districts and charter schools may, at their discretion, establish graduation credit requirements for their students in addition to the statewide requirements. The statewide minimum course of study requires students to take a minimum of 22 credits:

- Four credits of English or English as a Second Language;
- Three credits in social studies to include one credit of American history, including: Arizona history; one credit of world history/geography; one-half credit of American government, including Arizona government; and one-half credit of economics.
- Four credits of mathematics to minimally include Algebra 1, Geometry, Algebra 2 (or a personal curriculum), and a fourth course that contains high school content.
- Three credits of science in preparation for proficiency at the high school level on the statewide science assessment.
- One credit of fine arts or career and technical education and vocational education.
- Seven credits of additional courses prescribed by the local school district governing board or charter school.

Q: The parents understand that some changes have to be made to bring the school up to state standards. With that understanding and having no objection to

that, what are the other changes that are being made? Why are these changes happening? How will they benefit the school?

A: As part of the charter renewal, DMS was required to submit a Demonstration of Sufficient Progress (DSP) report. The report is evaluated, and each section of the report is rated using 3 grades, meets standards, does not meet standards, falls far below standards. The DSP for DMS was rated as follows:

- Data Overall Rating – Falls Far Below Standard
- Curriculum – Does Not Meet Standard
- Assessment Overall Rating – Falls Far Below Standard
- Monitoring Instruction – Does Not Meet Standard
- Professional Development – Does Not Meet Standard
- Graduation Rate – Falls Far Below Standard

Although we are a Waldorf public charter school, we are also 100% funded by the State of Arizona. Our contract requires us to meet their standards as they relate to public education. We believe it is possible to maintain the Waldorf Pedagogy and meet the state standards. Our focus is on complying with what we are expected to do to meet the educational needs of the students.

Q: If you believe that these changes are going to provide the best outcome for the school then why are you not standing up for them proudly and trying to get the support of the parents?

A: The current administration, faculty and staff are unified and aligned with the goal of providing our students with a Waldorf public charter education. We stand behind our decisions as we move through this transition period and strive to comply with the obligations to the charter board and the State. We appreciate the support of families and the community in our efforts.

Q: How are these changes being made within the guidelines of a Waldorf education?

A: In serving the best interest of our students and meeting their educational needs by marrying a Waldorf curriculum with state standards, we are committed to the core principles of Public Waldorf Education, including, providing a coherent image of the developing human being; an understanding of child development that guides all aspects of the educational program to the greatest extent possible within established legal mandates; serving both the individual and society; fostering a culture of healthy relationships; increasing diversity and access to all sectors of society; engaging in collaborative leadership within established legal structures; and cultivating a love of lifelong learning and self-knowledge.

Q: Who acts as your internal Chief Financial Officer?

A: That role has never existed in DMS. Currently day-to-day accounting is done in house by administrative staff. We retain an outside accounting firm to conduct reconciliations and run financial reports. The Board Treasurer reviews data and reporting monthly and reports out to the full board. The school is subject to an annual audit conducted by an independent accounting firm.

Q: Who has primary responsibility for managing the school's finances, including financial planning, management of financial risks, record-keeping, and financial reporting?

A: As a non-profit organization, the board is ultimately responsible for the school's finances. However, the day-to-day operations are done in house by administrative staff. We retain an outside accounting firm to conduct reconciliations and run financial reports. The Board Treasurer reviews data and reporting monthly and reports out to the full board.

Q: Who is the external auditing firm of DMS?

A: Brett V. Backlund CAP, PC

Q: Why do you lose so many students between 8th and 9th grade? Do you expect/compel grades and middle school teachers to be fully supportive of the high school experience?

A: As a faculty we are supportive of the continuation of students from 8th grade into our High School and we welcome them. We provide them with opportunities to shadow or visit the high school classes during their 8th grade year. This being said, there are many reasons that families and their children decide to attend other schools for high school. Our High School is a small and intimate setting and although this is a draw for some families it does not suit all. Some families and students are interested in larger scale sporting opportunities, specialized art schools, specific clubs and/or an overall larger school population or experience. We support the right for each family to choose what they feel is the best choice for their children's high school experience.

ADMINISTRATION/LEADERSHIP QUESTIONS

Q: Visitor badge for safety? How about hiring someone to be at the gate to be checking people in and out of the property when kids are in school?

A: Keeping our children safe is of the utmost importance to us. It is common practice at schools for visitors to sign in at the office and receive a visitor's badge. Stopping into the office

to sign in and receive a badge allows DMS staff members the ability to recognize a welcomed guest on campus. It is crucial to the safety of our students and teachers that we know who is checking in and out of campus each day. It not only matters for logistical, legal reasons (fire/safety drills) but also to ensure that each classroom experiences minimal disruption.

As with many schools, DMS does not have the financial ability to hire someone to monitor visitors who enter/exit the parking lot. We rely on our visitors to follow the established process for checking in with the front office before entering campus and we agree that a sign instructing visitors to check into the front office would be helpful.

Q: Parents can't talk in the parking lot? Is that for real? Do I also have to send an email if I have to say something to a fellow parent?

A: No, this is not accurate. The relationship between child, parent and teacher is an important one, dependent on mutual respect and openness. Parents are invited to share their questions and concerns at parent evenings, in scheduled conferences and in conversations with their teachers. It is our hope that we can all grow and learn together in the spirit of community.

Parents are free to talk in the parking lot or in the general area in front of the administration office. We encourage parents to directly communicate with each other and ask that all community members practice respectful communication. Specifically, we support direct and respectful speech, including speaking directly to the teacher, parent, employee, or colleague with whom you have an issue, concern, question, or pressing matter. Please avoid engaging in gossip and rumor (referred to as "parking lot conversations") that may be hurtful.

Please refrain from using social media to discuss matters that can be addressed directly with faculty, staff or administration. To respect our teachers' time and not distract from focusing on the students, we ask that parents/guardians email teachers or administration with questions or request an in-person or phone meeting. We encourage you to address issues in a timely manner and be proactive. We strive to answer your questions or concerns but cannot do so in a timely and informative manner to the point of resolution if we are not informed of those concerns or questions.

Q: What is the historical teacher attrition rate for this school? Q: What are you doing to address the recent increase in attrition? Q: What is the administration doing to retain teachers and stop the turnover that's been ramping at the school for the past year?

A: Teacher attrition is common in both Waldorf and public schools today. There are various reasons for teachers leaving their posts. The list includes family transitions and life events, such as moving out of state, compensation and benefits, carrying a class from 1-8, feeling a lack of support and respect from parents, lack of harmony with administration, poor performance, violation of contracts and expectations, harming students, the transient nature of Phoenix.

Some teachers are offered opportunities that they simply cannot pass by and we applaud them and celebrate their successes. There are years when we have a greater number of teachers depart than others; however, we also have a great number of teachers who have remained for many years. There are also many teachers who leave and return to Desert Marigold School, some multiple times. It is a coming together and a parting. The work of a Waldorf public charter teacher is profound and very demanding and sometimes a break in service is necessary and healthy. The decision to leave a place of employment is personal to that individual. It is not legally permissible for us to share why any particular employee left his or her position.

Q: My second question is to whether or not leggings fall into the "too tight" category of clothing. One slide said leggings were acceptable clothing, the next slide said tight clothing was unacceptable. I would just like clarification.

A: We apologize if it was confusing. Leggings are appropriate for school when worn with shorts, skirts or with a shirt as defined by the dress code. "Too tight" refers to clothing that is not typically covered by other garments.

Q: Who in your administration is responsible for the marketing and in/out of DMS community outreach? Does said person above ensure our schools reviews are read and/or replied to in the event those searching for a PK-12 Public Waldorf Charter School is available and reputable?

A: This is a work in progress. The faculty, administration and the LDC are collaborating with each other and the board to improve outreach and increase enrollment.

Q: Is our schools private preschool, kindergarten and aftercare programs DES certified to obtain consistent enrollment while providing quality early childhood education to all in our South Mountain community?

A: Yes, our private programs are DES certified.

Q: While informational and patronizing at the same time, why was the parent code of conduct read in detail at the beginning of the meeting?

A: Healthy working relationships with parents, colleagues, and all stakeholders are essential to the well being of the student, class and school community. Everyone benefits from a community life. To that end, it is important to share all expectations and guidelines to ensure a successful start to the new school year and provide our students and teachers with a healthful and productive environment in which they can learn and grow. In order to bring consciousness of behavior to effectuate appropriate and healthy interactions we have to reflect on the codes of conduct of all members of the community from time to time. Similar information in terms of expectations, appropriate communications and interactions was shared during some of the parent meetings at the beginning of the school year.

Q: Why are the changes to the organization of the school being made?

A: To ensure we are upholding our mission and complying with the responsibilities we have to the State of Arizona. The mission of Desert Marigold School is to provide an educational context that emphasizes intellectual achievement and the imaginative, artistic, and moral growth of its students. By addressing their heads, hands and hearts, the school will encourage students to be lifelong learners and independent thinkers as well as self motivated, self-disciplined, creative, adaptable and responsible individuals.

Q: What was the organization prior to the changes and how will these changes benefit the school?

A: The prior organizational structure no longer fit the needs of the faculty and students. DMS is committed to studying and deepening our understanding of best practices related to the school's current and future state of organizational development. Under the collaborative leadership model illustrated by the Public Waldorf Education Core Principles, we as faculty, staff, and administration collaborate to guide and lead the school with input from stakeholder groups. To the greatest extent possible, decisions related to the educational programs are the responsibility of those faculty with knowledge and experience of Rudolf Steiner's educational insights. Governance and internal administration are implemented in a manner that cultivates active collaboration, supportive relationships, effective leadership, consequential action, and accountability. This governance model is what the administration and the LDC strive to accomplish with the support and direction of the Acting Executive Director to uphold the mission of the school and meet the requirements under the charter agreement and the State of Arizona.

Q: As a nonprofit organization financial information needs to be shared. Where is this information and why are we not receiving it openly?

A: Financial information is shared at regularly every board meeting and board meetings are open to the public. The annual audit is available for review at the administrative office. The annual budget is posted for review on the school website.

Q: Each grade needs to know how much money is in the class fund. Our tenth grade class does not have this information. Who will be providing this and when?

A: We are aware of the need to get this information to the grades. We are working to ensure these records are accurate and properly reconciled. Someone will reach out soon to provide this information as well as the ongoing processes for reporting balance information.

Q: Why is a town hall meeting not being used to answer real questions that parents have? Why do we need to send them in an email?

A: As we are still in a transition period and there were many changes to share with the community, leadership did not believe that there would be sufficient time to provide comprehensive responses to those community members' questions who were able to attend either town hall meeting. As mentioned during those meetings, it is our goal to provide you with thorough and complete answers. The questions we received by email enabled us to thoughtfully and thoroughly respond to questions that benefited the entire school, not just those who were able to attend the informational sessions.

Q: What are the settings where parents can engage with you directly in a Q&A format rather than in writing?

A: See prior response. Additionally, the Parent Expectations document that has lived within DMS for quite some time provides that the forum in which information is disseminated is left to the administrative group holding the meeting. The leadership anticipated many questions from the community due to the changes in policies and the transition that is still in progress. We wanted the ability to provide you with thorough and complete answers without the time limitations presented during a live meeting with the community. Additionally, answering written questions enables the entire community to benefit from the information instead of limiting to only those who could attend the meeting. We are committed to collaboration and transparency, especially during this time of transition. As matters progress, different meeting formats will be considered based on the information to be shared. If you have questions in the meantime, please reach out to the Acting Executive Director.

Q: Please identify prior jobs or roles you've held at other schools. What are your other qualifications for running this school?

A: Christie Kriegsfeld is a labor and employment attorney who specializes in leadership and change management, implementing best practices and re-structuring of various types of organizations and legal compliance. She has worked with numerous clients throughout her 16 years of practice, including assisting and advising many schools throughout Arizona. Her expertise has reduced the need for outside legal and compliance support.

Q: Are you employed at DMS pursuant to an employment contract or at-will?

A: Christie Kriegsfeld is an independent contractor for DMS.

Q: Are you committed to Desert Marigold School remaining a Waldorf school?

A: The faculty, staff, administration and the LDC are committed to providing students with a Waldorf public charter school education.

Q: We would like to see more appropriate oversight and accountability of the LDC. Since you do not have a teaching or Waldorf background, how can you judge their decisions about pedagogy?

A: The LDC is comprised of Faculty Realm Chairs who were elected by members of their realms based on objective qualifications required by the Faculty Realm Chair job description, which was a collaborative effort of faculty, administration and the board. DMS was tasked with creating a new organizational structure that was collaborative and aligned with the need to marry the Waldorf pedagogy with state standards. The LDC members possess the requisite (and extensive) experience to competently serve the faculty and staff to ensure that the Waldorf public charter education at DMS is ever-evolving and continuously renewed through practice, research, observation and active reflection. These members were elected to serve on the LDC to represent the school because of their education and experience with Waldorf's core principles and state standards. The Acting Executive Director is proud to support them in advancing their goals to align the pedagogy with the requirements of being a public charter.

Q: Would you put your photo on the website, so we all know who you are?

A: Employees can opt-out of having their photos posted on the website. That said, the Acting Executive Director will post a picture on the website along with any contact information that is not already provided.

Q: It seems like DMS used to have several additional paid roles – Development, Marketing, Curriculum, High School Principal – as well as several other High School level teachers. Where is all that salary money going? Who is doing all those jobs?

A: We are still in transition in terms of re-organizing the school's full operational structure to meet the needs of the students. In collaboration with the Board, the school is evaluating what roles are necessary as the new structure is being finalized. We will continue to update the community as matters progress.

Thank you to those who submitted questions and for the opportunity to answer those questions to which all community members may refer going forward. This document will be posted on our website for future reference. DMS looks forward to a wonderful school year and we thank you for your trust and support as we strive to provide the best Waldorf public charter (K-12) education for your children.

A vision of the whole child, whose development – physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual – unfolds in stages, A curriculum carefully designed to nurture and support the growth of the child through each developmental stage, With the goal of producing free human beings, capable, in themselves, of imparting purpose and direction to their lives. --Rudolf Steiner

Best regards,

Acting Executive Director and the Leadership and Development Council