

Northern Lights School Parent Handbook

Updated September 2020

The Northern Lights School is a not-for-profit independent school offering Waldorf-inspired full and part-time JK/SK kindergarten, Grade One/Two/Three, Friday Adventure Program, Parent and Child Program and an unlicensed After School Care program. Northern Lights School is located at the Tapiola Nature Reserve at 140 Pento Drive, Thunder Bay for the 2020/21 school year.

Our vision is to re-imagine education in Thunder Bay. Our mission sees the unfolding of each unique individual through an education for the head, heart and hands. The school grows each year as the lead class moves up a grade. www.northernlightsschool.ca Waldorf schools are worldwide with 1000 schools in 50 countries. Waldorf education celebrated its 100th anniversary in 2019. The education is developmentally appropriate, rigorous, creative and relevant to its space and time.

Our Programs

At the heart of Waldorf education is the recognition that children pass through distinct stages of development. Each segment of the curriculum corresponds directly in content and presentation to the stages of the growing child. Subjects and skills are introduced at the time when the child is most receptive to learning them.

Subjects are learned holistically, not in isolation. The Waldorf curriculum uses an interdisciplinary approach, and carefully integrates academic, artistic and practical activity. Healthy emotional development is nurtured by conveying knowledge through direct experience. By freely using arts and activities in the service of teaching academics, an internal motivation to learn is developed in the student. To this end, information technology is not utilized in grades kindergarten to seven.

We are blessed this year to move onto the Tapiola Nature Reserve. Access to hiking, skiing and snowshoe trails makes for all season activities. Being located beside the North McIntyre Rec. Centre gives us access to a skating rink during the winter months. Outdoor skating is a great addition to our outdoor active play. A river and creek which runs through the property allows for ample opportunity to explore water life.

“The child who lives in an atmosphere of love and warmth and who has around him really good examples for his imitation is living in his right element.” The Education of the Child, Rudolf Steiner, founder of Waldorf education.

Kindergarten

The kindergarten environment is warm and supportive, providing a place where children can feel secure and loved. The space is simple, beautiful and harmonious to the senses, thus avoiding over-stimulation and encouraging the development of creativity and imagination. It is a “Land” of work and of play.

Imitation is one of the child’s main learning tools at this age. The teachers strive to be worthy of imitation. “Each simple deed, if done with quiet and loving reverence, will be imitated in such a way by the child that the qualities of wonder and reverence will grow in the child, nourishing, and sowing seeds of those soul qualities that are so vital—reverence towards living things, respect, consideration and tolerance towards his fellow human beings.” Rudolf Steiner

Rhythm and routine strengthen the four to six year old and bring a sense of security and trust. The kindergarten daily rhythm breathes, alternating free, unobstructed play time with more structured activity.

Daily outdoor play time allows children to experience the awe and wonder of nature. The expanse of the outdoors provides opportunity to run, climb, roll, dig, splash and so much more, all contributing the child’s

mastery over her physical being. Vigorous outdoor play builds resilience, strengthens growing bodies, and soothes the senses. Good quality outdoor clothing allows for a joyful experience even on cold and rainy days.

Circle time brings the children together into a form that builds cooperation, draws upon a child's innate ability to imitate and reinforces developmental movement patterns. Songs, verses, rhymes, and large and small motor movements are woven together into seasonal themes or stories.

A much loved part of the kindergarten morning is story time. Stories that are rich in imagery are told several days in a row allowing the children time to build the pictures in their minds and live into the stories. Some are tales about everyday things while others depict seasonal nature themes. Age appropriate fairy tales are also told. Some stories are presented as puppet plays. At times a story is acted out by the children giving an opportunity to 'be' the characters in the story. The teacher may create stories that relate to the particular age and disposition of the group.

Coming together for snack is an important part of the kindergarten morning. Children may help with snack preparation, setting the table and washing dishes. The lighting of a candle and singing a song of appreciation for the food brings reverence to the experience.

During indoor free play time children can choose to be involved with a group or play alone. The many natural materials such as wood, wool, stones, silk and simple handmade toys nourish the child's senses. The open ended materials call forth imaginative and creative play. Logs may become a race car one day and house for a baby the next. There is opportunity to participate in various tasks such as cooking, watering plants, dusting, sweeping, finger-knitting, colouring with beeswax crayons, modelling with beeswax, wet felting, wood working and painting.

The child's own natural creativity is honoured and respected. At the beginning of water colour painting the teacher tells a short story, perhaps

about a little gnome playing in colourful puddles. She paints with the children, modelling proper grasp and rinsing of the brush. Painting has a therapeutic effect on all children. Insight into the child's mood is sometimes revealed in the painting. The children are free to experiment with the colours with no expectation of form. In the process of painting the child fully experiences and lives into the living qualities of the colours and inwardly experiences how one colour interacts with another.

Bits of beeswax are warmed and softened in children's hands, their "little ovens." Nimble fingers form three dimensional figures such as snails or apples or swords. Fine motor dexterity is developed while the sense of smell is nourished. Finger knitting develops small muscle co-ordination in preparation for holding a pencil to write.

The celebration of the seasons is an integral part in the kindergarten life. A nature garden table changes throughout the year bringing the magic of the seasons indoors. Children may bring small treasures that they discover in the world outside. Poetry, songs, stories and creative activities enable the child to live deeply into the seasons.

Seasonal festivals are celebrated throughout the year. Certain festivals are celebrated within the classroom with just the children and teachers while others are celebrated as a community with families.

Discipline is an important part of the kindergarten environment. The children become aware of the limits that are upheld firmly and lovingly by the teacher. The children are also encouraged by the teacher to begin to develop a sense of responsibility for their own actions and practice skills that are demonstrated by the adults. During the school day it is not uncommon to hear someone tell a friend, "We all play together." The teacher is aware of how the quality of imitation is so active in young children and how important it is for the adults to respond with care, reverence and respect for others and for the child's surroundings. By so doing, the children will imitate a good example.

The kindergarten brings children together into a little community, the “Royal We”, providing opportunity for social development as the parallel play of a younger age shifts to cooperative play. “We learn our kindergarten ways” through interaction with one another. “We” help a friend that is hurt, especially if we did the hurting. “We” take care of our Land and help each other put things in their place. “We” experience disputes that allow opportunity to learn to settle things. “We” learn to take turns and share. A child learns that mistakes can be fixed and that “All is well in our Land.”

After a busy morning the children have lunch and are gently ushered into a well needed rest time. The rest of the day is spent outdoors playing.

Morning Snack is provided by the school and the children bring their own lunch. The morning snack schedule follows the grain of the day: Monday - Rice, Tuesday - Oats, Wednesday - Millet, Thursday - Rye, Friday - Quinoa. Tuesday is soup making day and children are requested to bring a contribution of fresh organic vegetables that we will use in our snack time soup. Please bring your contribution on Monday or Tuesday mornings.

Kindergarten Daily Rhythm - times are approximate

8:30 - 9:00 - Outside arrival and supervision begin

9:15 - Indoor or Outdoor Activities & Preparation of Snack

10:00 - Tidy Up and Circle Time - Verses, Music, Stories, Puppet Play

10:30 - Snack & Dishes

11:00 - Outdoor Adventures & play

12:00 - Lunch preparations & washing hands ed up for lunch

12:15 - Lunch - Children bring their own lunch

1:00 - Dishes & settling in for story and rest

2:00 - Rest clean up & prepare for Outdoor Play

2:30 - Outdoor Play

3:00 – Pickup

Our new property at Tapiola Nature Reserve allows us to spend most of our day outdoors. Utilizing our indoor space minimally during compatible weather will flex our schedule slightly. A rhythm of proper handwashing and washroom breaks is integrated throughout the day.

Kindergarten Rest Time

Following a busy morning the children need time to reflect, to digest and to be still. Even children who are not accustomed to resting in the afternoon eventually learn to enjoy a little nap or relax quietly. Our rest time lasts about 3/4 hour, sometimes longer. Most children arise bright-eyed and pink-cheeked after some downtime, where no talking, negotiating or sharing has occurred. Some will deny that they rest, sleep or come anywhere close to liking quiet time. Your confidence in the importance of this time helps your child to adjust to resting. Including the practice of rest time at home can be very supportive in integrating rest into your child's life and easing the transition into resting at school. It can be a lovely time of the day for both child and adult.

Please do not bring special dolls or stuffed toys into the classroom. It is often a source of upset when a favourite toy is lost, forgotten, or dirtied. We provide relaxation mats with sheets. Please bring a small blanket and a small pillow with a plain pillowcase for each child. We ask that you provide slippers with leather or sturdy soles.

Grade One Readiness

The transition from kindergarten into school is a big step in the lives of children. Their striving and their way of learning have changed. They are no longer pure 'imitators' but become 'followers' with the ability to follow instructions more and carry them out. This inner shift and development also shows physically. The children's limbs stretch; the change of teeth has started, new molars can be seen in the gums, and the first baby teeth fall out.

Whereas the young child happily plays with everything, the Grade 1 ready kindergarten child can be bored and might need some encouragement to actively engage in play. On the other hand, they start remembering play from the day before and want to continue where they have left off. All of the above, amongst others, are signs of healthy cognitive development.

Another aspect is the social emotional development, as demonstrated by the readiness to leave the parents and strive to go to the teacher and the class. Day to day kindergarten life shows where the children are at developmentally.

Teachers use a Grade One Assessment that further helps to further inform teachers and parents of developmental readiness. At the Northern Lights School a child whose birthday is before June 30th will be assessed if they are ready to move on to Grade One. Children born between June 30th and September 30th will be assessed more carefully to determine if they have the developmental capacities they need for a successful start in Grade One. Parents of Kindergarten children will be given an indication at the April Parent/Teacher interview as to their child's Grade One Readiness. Students entering the school at other times will be assessed on a case by case basis.

Grade One/Two/Three

Waldorf education sees human development in seven year cycles. After the age of seven, the child moves to a new stage and the education turns towards the development of the heart and soul of the child. A Waldorf class teacher is an artist and brings the education 'on the wings of imagination'. Learning through the arts activates the child inwardly and develops their relationship to the subject and to oneself. The close community relationship established between a class and the teacher as Waldorf teachers move with the class through the years.

Each day begins with a morning weekly rhythm of 2 days of handwork, 1 day painting and one day baking/woodworking/seasonal activity.

Main Lesson in the afternoons is a three dimensional approach. The children begin with speech & movement, followed by stories and oral lessons by the teacher and then the children are creative in creating the lesson in their books.

Lessons in the early grades are infused with outside time, a time of movement filled with games, songs, rhymes, recitation, mental math and other exercises to prepare the child for lesson work. The children come to their seats, ready for the learning in the classroom.

During Main Lesson, the children enter into one subject intensively. The main subjects, such as language arts, science and mathematics are taught by the teacher through storytelling. This imaginative approach engages the whole child while they learn.

Following the oral presentation by the teacher the children work with the lesson in their books with coloured wax crayons in Grades One and Two and later with coloured pencils. The books include compositions and illustrations that the student creates from the lesson as a means for feeling into the lesson and deepening their learning.

Main lessons are one and a half hours per day, with each main lesson subject area lasting from three to four weeks. After one month when one subject has been fully explored, a new Main Lesson is introduced.

The children take up handwork such as knitting and crocheting and artwork such as painting and modelling. Music and French are taught through verse, stories and games.

Two great rhythms work concurrently in the Waldorf grade school: the daily rhythm of lessons and the rhythm of the seasonal activities and festivals throughout the year.

Grade One/Two/Three Daily Rhythm - times are approximate

8:30 - Outside arrival and supervision begins

9:15 - Indoor or outdoor play & preparation of snack provided by the school

10:00 - Tidy Up and Circle Time – Flute, Verses, Music, Stories, Drama

10:30 - Snack & Dishes

11:00 - Prepare for Outdoor adventures & play

12:00 - Getting washed up for lunch

12:15 - Lunch - Children bring their own lunch

1:00 - Main Lesson – language arts, mathematics, science blocks & daily handwork

2:30 - Outdoor Play

3:00 - Pickup

After School Care Program

The school offers a nature-based After School Care program. The program is for children from kindergarten to 13 years of age. We are blessed this year to move onto the Tapiola Nature Reserve. Access to hiking, skiing and snowshoe trails makes for all season activities. Located right beside the North McIntyre Rec. Centre gives us access to a skating rink during the winter months. Outdoor skating is a great addition to our outdoor active play. A river and creek which runs through the property allows for ample opportunity to explore local water life. The property is well suited for after school outdoor activities. The program will be offered on site and not include off campus trips.

The program will begin with an outside activity time from arrival until 3:30. The children will then enjoy snack inside and then activities such as forest play, games, stories, art and relaxation time.

Friday Parent and Child Program

This program for parents/caregivers and young children provides a warm and nurturing environment for learning and socializing. The program is

offered on Fridays in terms over 7 week terms and is incorporated into the kindergarten program.

The morning will be a time for the children to play and participate in a circle with rhymes and songs. It is also a time for parents to learn more about their child and themselves and to share each parenting journeys. While many parenting programs focus on outer skills, this program builds inner practices and capacities.

Parents will receive a lesson each week by email which will give a basis for a conversation circle and then a process for coming to one's own individualized knowledge unique to their parenting. The morning will also include a snack time and an outdoor activity.

Ways Parents Can Support Your Child's Learning Experience

- Regular bedtime - In bed by 7:30 allows a child to be well rested.
- Allow enough time in the morning for an unhurried nourishing breakfast at the table.
- Be on time dropping off and picking up.
- Communicate your observations, questions and concerns to the teacher.
- Dress your child warmly and appropriately for the weather. Refill the extra clothing bag when necessary.
- Come to parent and community events.
- Familiarize yourself with Waldorf education.
- Your patience and Support - It takes 40 days for a child to settle into a new program and routine.

A Media Policy that Grows with your Child

Parents are encouraged to give the gift of a media-free childhood. Teachers are available and willing to assist with transitions to a media-free environment. Students learn best to use electronic media as a resource and tool when these media are introduced after children have developed a rich experiential foundation. Media thus become a supplement to, and not a substitute for, the richness of direct experience.

Consistent with Waldorf education's emphasis on learning through direct experience, parents of children in the lower grades (1-4) are encouraged to foster and support the development of new ideas and attitudes based on real personal interactions, by eliminating media use during the school week and minimizing it on weekends.

As the child grows into Grades 5, 6, and 7, it is appropriate for students to have a gradual and guided introduction to the applications and use of electronic media. During these transition years, use and exposure to media should be very moderate, under clear parental guidance and participation, and work towards the social and educational climate of the class. Media exposure can be a socially divisive influence in these years so care and attention must be brought in guiding the use of media during these years.

What to Bring and What not to Bring to School

Bring: Extra clothes to leave at school.

- 1 pair of underwear - 1 undershirt - 1 pair of long johns
- 3 pairs of socks - 1 t-shirt - 1 long sleeved shirt
- 1 sweater - 1 pair of pants

When your child brings home wet or soiled clothes, be sure to send in clothes the next day to replace the ones taken from their extra clothes bag. Check your child's bag from time to time to make sure it is stocked and that everything still fits.

Clothing Essentials:

Dress your child in layers. The rule of thumb in the winter is 3 layers on top and 2 on the bottom.

-Indoor shoes with ties. We ask that the shoes be plain without lights.

These are to be left at school.

-Rubber rain boots. Wool liners cut to fit the soles of rubber boots make them warmer and more comfortable.

-Hats for all the seasons are to be worn during outdoor time. Please no baseball style caps. The children need a sunhat that will protect the backs of their necks. A wool/silk balaclava is great in cool weather and as a first layer under another hat/hood in cold weather. A wool balaclava is cosy for the weather.

-Fair weather splash pants.

-Sturdy rain coat and rain pants. They must be rainproof (not just water resistant) and breathable is best. It is best if the rain gear is large enough to fit over the snowsuit. Some days are cold and wet.

-Winter boots. Boots with removable liners are best. Check at the end of the day to make sure the lining in your child's boots are dry.

-Snowsuit. Snow suits need to be large enough to allow unrestricted movement and that your child can get it on and off.

-Long underwear. Wool is best.

- Children will need an extra set of snow pants, splash pants, mittens and even an extra coat as they will be playing outdoors more than once during the day and will need dry things to wear. Also they will need a pair of plain soft slippers with leather bottoms to wear while resting and a small plain pillow.

Good quality clothing is well worth the investment as we will spend a great deal of time outdoors. A local Thunder Bay company Warmth and Weather supplies wool and wool/silk clothing for children as well as mitts and rainwear. www.warmthandweather.ca They offer the school a percentage of the sale as a support to the school. Check out our homepage for a link that connects your sale to the school.

Or check out: Mountain Equipment Co-Op store: <http://www.mec.ca>

LOST AND FOUND

Please label your child's coat, sweaters, hats and boots. A Lost and Found basket is located in the cloakroom. All contents will be given to charity at various times in the school year, so please check it regularly for your belongings.

Lunches

We ask that parents pack a wholesome, nutritious lunch for their child with minimum packaging and that is free of corporate logos, cartoon characters, etc. The children require nutritious food for a successful day of learning. No candy or pop are allowed at school. Please provide each child with a water bottle.

What Not To Bring

- Toys and personal items from home should not be brought to school, as they can be distracting.
- Children are not to wear nail polish, hair dyes, tattoos, jewelry or watches. These are better suited to an older stage of life.
- We kindly request that you do not use cell phones in the school or in the school yard.

Birthday Celebrations at School

Birthday celebrations are a special event in the life of a child. Parents are invited to join in celebrating your child's birthday. We ask that you not bring younger siblings to the celebration as they often take attention away from the birthday child. Parents are invited to join for part of the morning. We will celebrate summer birthdays at the end of the school year. You will receive details about your child's celebration closer to the date.

If your child is having a birthday party at home and wishes to invite all of the children in his or her class, you are welcome to distribute the invitations at school. However, if invitations are selective, we ask that you extend them away from school.

Often when a family is hosting a party right after school, they collect some of the children from school and carpool them to the party. Please be sensitive to the fact that this can create a feeling of being left out for the other children who are awaiting pick-up. If you are hosting a party that is right after school please collect gifts from other parents at drop off in the parking area.

Pickup

When picking up your child, the parent(s)/ guardian(s) should inform the teacher that the child is leaving. This is essential for the safety of all children. Unless otherwise arranged, children will not be released to any person other than those specified on the registration form. A person delegated by the parent(s)/ guardian(s) will be required to show identification when picking up the child to indicate such a person is indeed the delegate.

Health and Illness

Colds, coughs and fevers are part of every childhood. A child who is not well enough to play outdoors is not well enough to participate fully in the program. We ask, out of consideration to other families at our school, that you keep your child at home if she/he is ill.

When a child is unwell s/he needs quiet and rest. Use of television, DVD, tablet or computer while sick lengthens recovery time. A child should not return to school until he has been free of fever, vomiting and diarrhea for 24 hours. Please call the teacher by 8:00 to let her know if your child will not attend for any reason.

Parents should inform the class teacher if there are any changes in home life that may affect a child's behaviour: parent's absences, serious illness in the family, the death of a family member, the need for medication, or other such information.

Communications

School newsletters will be emailed once a month.

One-on-one parent/ teacher interviews are scheduled in November and April of each school year. Further meetings with teachers can be scheduled at any time during the school year to discuss student learning.

Parents/guardians are encouraged to take an active role in our school and community. We support positive and responsive interactions among the children, parents/guardians and staff, and foster the engagement of and ongoing communication with parents/guardians about the program and their children. Our teachers are available to engage parents/guardians in conversations and support a positive experience during every interaction.

If a parent has a concern regarding their child or an incident in the classroom, they are encouraged to speak first with the class teacher or subject teacher and ask for clarification on the perception the child brings home. If, out of this conversation, an issue or question arises it is important to clearly communicate and work towards a resolution. Email and telephone calls are best used to arrange meetings towards resolution. All issues and concerns raised by parents/guardians are taken seriously by the teachers and will be addressed. Every effort will be made to address and resolve issues and concerns to the satisfaction of all parties and as quickly as possible.

If a conversation with the class teacher or subject teacher does not resolve the issue to the satisfaction of either party involved, they should contact the the Northern Lights Board. Responses and outcomes will be provided verbally or in writing upon request. The level of detail provided to the parent/guardian will respect and maintain the confidentiality of all parties involved.

For questions concerning financial and legal policies as well as fundraising, tuition, etc., please speak with the Arlene Thorn, Board Chair and Administrator. She will assist you or direct you to the person or group that can best assist you.

Community Events

For the child, parent participation in school events is a sign of his or her involvement and support. The Gnome Fair and the Spring Yard Sale are our annual community events and we strive to host these according to the volunteer support available. It is a chance to invite the community to see the school as well as enjoy making seasonal crafts with their children.

We also hold (almost) monthly festival events which include dinners provided through a pot-luck approach. The seasonal festivals are heart warming opportunities for the community to gather. Throughout history, in all civilizations, there have been rituals and celebrations reflecting nature's rhythms. These celebrations or festivals reflect our relationship to nature and spirit and to our life on earth. Festivals bring shared consciousness and they help to unite the community.

While no formal religious instruction takes place in the Waldorf school curriculum, parents should be aware that reverence and an appreciation and respect for the natural environment are present in the day-to-day activities of the school. We live in a Christian-Judeo influenced society and some of the celebrations and festivals of the year reflect this culture. Families who celebrate other festivities are encouraged to speak to their teacher about ways that they can share these celebrations with the class.

The elements of festivals such as light, food, song and story capture children's imaginations. In a Waldorf school, weekly school rhythm and the annual seasonal festivals of nature and humanity are celebrated in ways that help foster wonder, reverence and gratitude. These qualities nourish the child's capacity to be responsible to the human community. Teachers, parents, and children work together in anticipation of a variety of festivals that are celebrated and appropriate to the child's age and curriculum. There are many books available about festivals around the world.

Funding the School

Choosing independent education for your child and family is a decision that requires much contemplation both on a philosophical and a financial level. In an ideal world we would be able to choose the educational system we want for our children on its relative merit and not based on financial means. However, since our current reality is such that alternative choices are not funded by the government, we must raise the needed funds to pay our teachers, provide a roof over our student's heads and supply equipment for our classrooms.

While we endeavour to keep fees as low as possible, it is impossible to not have these fees. While most teachers in a Waldorf school would admit that they choose this career more because it is a calling than for strong financial benefit, the school community, must take responsibility for providing a livable salary so that the teacher may be free to provide the best education for our children.

Gift Campaign

Northern Lights School is entirely self-funded through tuition fees and fundraising activities in order to operate and offer the best possible school experience for our families. Each year we run a Gift Campaign. The Campaign is an opportunity to seek gifts from friends and family for the school. We ask all families to support the Annual Campaign, to whatever extent possible. Every gift is significant and helps strengthen the school and the community.

Accessible Tuition Program

We are committed to ensuring that no student for whom the school is a good fit will be turned away due to financial hard-ship. An Accessible Tuition Program is available by applying for a reduced tuition fee. Please ask at the school office for an application.

Prior to applying for tuition adjustment we ask applicants to consider the following questions:

1. What can our family provide to ensure that the school is financially healthy and viable, ensuring that this education is available to my family in the future?
2. Are there any other sources of income that may be pursued? Is there a parent, grandparent, aunt or uncle who would be inspired to help with tuition or make a donation to the school?
3. What choices have we made to free up our finances to allow us to contribute to the school?
4. Is our family's need for tuition adjustment temporary? When our financial income changes positively, can we provide more? Tuition adjustment awards are granted confidentially and without judgment. We trust that every family will evaluate their financial situation honestly and provide what they can to ensure all students get the best education possible.

Faculty and Parent Development

The faculty meets once a week with the Board Chair to study, share child observations, do art exercises and discuss the life of the school. Teachers attend yearly Waldorf teachers' conferences and are Waldorf trained or are working on their Waldorf teacher education.

During the year parents and teachers are invited to take part in lectures, artistic events and the many activities offered. The class community and the school will only be as healthy as the parent community. This health is fostered through committing to your child's education and being part of it. There is a wealth of material available which describes Rudolf Steiner's views on childhood development and education. There are also a number of books, which do not deal specifically with Rudolf Steiner or Steiner schools but are valuable and recommended. Please ask your teacher for resources or check out whywaldorfworks.org.

We look forward to re-imagining education with you and your family.

