

Heart To Hand School

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AN INTRODUCTION TO HEART TO HAND SCHOOL

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Desert Sage Educational Initiative

In February 1999 a group of parents united to form a nonprofit organization called Desert Sage Educational Initiative (DSEI) for the purpose of bringing independent Waldorf schools to Nevada, beginning in the Reno metropolitan area. From the beginnings of a weekly study group and monthly board of trustees meeting, the efforts have grown from a small in-home preschool to a full kindergarten, accredited teacher education, parent education, and seasonal community festivals and celebrations.

Heart To Hand School

Heart to Hand School is a Waldorf Educational Initiative offering a year-around mixed-age Kindergarten program for children ages 2-6, including an afternoon after care program.

The mission of Heart To Hand School is to create and maintain a simple and loving space where children can play and work and set their imaginations free. To this end, Rudolf Steiner's ideal of ***“Receive the children in reverence, educate them with love, send them forth in freedom”*** is held closely in the hearts of teachers, staff, and parents as our mission.

Heart To Hand School is the first and only Waldorf school in Nevada, but only the first of several schools envisioned by DSEI. Starting out in the home of our first teacher in 2000, Heart To Hand School moved to a small house in 2003, added a kindergarten in 2004, and then moved into its current, larger facility in 2005. Our community of dedicated parents and trustees are working together with the faculty to expand into a Waldorf grade school, as well as to extend Waldorf education into additional locations throughout the region.

Heart To Hand School is a member of the following organizations:

- Association of Waldorf Schools in North America (AWSNA)
- Waldorf Early Childhood Association of North America (WECAN)
- National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)



We offer a home-like environment that is peaceful, colorful, and creative.



Creating beautiful new songs with a pentatonic glockenspiel is a favorite activity of our children.

Waldorf Education

When children relate what they learn to their own experience, they are interested and alive, and what they learn becomes their own. Waldorf schools are designed to foster this kind of learning.

Waldorf Education has its roots in the European educational reform movement and spiritual-scientific research of the Austrian scientist and thinker Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925). According to Steiner's philosophy, each person is a threefold being of spirit, soul, and body whose capacities unfold in three developmental stages on the path to adulthood: early childhood, middle childhood, and adolescence.

The first Waldorf School was established in Stuttgart, Germany, in April of 1919. Today there are more than 1,000 accredited Waldorf Schools in over 40 countries. In North America there are over 150 independent schools affiliated with the Association of Waldorf Schools of North America (AWSNA), and many public and charter schools use Waldorf methods to enrich their teaching. There are also over 50 full-time Waldorf teacher-training institutes around the world; of these, eight are in the United States and one in Canada.

No two Waldorf schools are identical and each is administratively independent. Nevertheless, a visitor would recognize many characteristics common to them all.

Waldorf Mixed-Age Kindergarten

Rather than separating children into younger and older classes, we create a multiage learning environment. This allows children to progress at their own individual rate rather than constantly being compared to (and competing with) others of their own age. Educational research has revealed that in a mixed-age context:

- ◇ Older children demonstrate improved cognitive, emotional, and social development through the opportunities to enhance, reinforce, and consolidate knowledge and skills through sharing with younger children. This also enhances the self-esteem and confidence of the older children.
- ◇ Younger children demonstrate higher levels of security, trust, and independence as a result of the immediate support and assistance of older children. They also benefit cognitively, emotionally, and socially from the stimulation of a wider range of interests, personalities, and abilities than single-age classrooms are able to provide.



Our curriculum fosters imagination, exploration, and the ability to form compassionate relationships.

In addition, research consistently indicates that for both older and younger children there are significant gains in positive self-concept, classroom cooperation, and positive attitudes towards school and learning.

Sweetpeas, Sunflowers, & Wildflowers

Our morning program is divided into two classes: Sweetpeas and Sunflowers. For full-time students, our afternoon program brings children from both morning classes together into one class: Wildflowers. In both our morning and afternoon programs, our teachers offer a nurturing environment that is true to Waldorf Early Childhood principles. Class sizes are limited to 16 students, with 2 teachers.

General Philosophy

In simple summary, Heart To Hand School is a play-based and child-centered mixed-age kindergarten. We believe that the most important thing a young child can do is engage in developmentally-appropriate play.

Through play, children emulate what they observe and experience, experiment with the people and things in their environment, and assimilate the realities of their world. They use body, emotion, will, and mind to explore, learn, and discover their place within – and the ability to influence – their surroundings.

While formal academics are not part of the Waldorf early childhood curriculum, the solid foundations for academic excellence and life-long learning are thoughtfully incorporated into our daily classroom activities. Circle time and story telling immerse the children in the beauty and complexity of our language. Every day they move to poetry and music while finger plays and large motor movements activate and develop coordination, concentration, and memory.

The toys that the children have at their disposal are made of natural materials that stimulate their senses. Most of the toys are nonrepresentational, inspiring children to use and develop their own free imaginations to create the storyline of their own lives. We do not rotate the toys on our shelves because, to the child's creative imagination, they are completely new every day. One day the silks are a cape, the next a crown and belt, the next a dog tail or horse's mane. The only limit is the child's ability to inventively make believe ... and our Waldorf curriculum removes this limitation through the development of ever-increasing imaginative, artistic, and cooperative creativity.



Our toys are mostly nonrepresentational and made of natural materials that stimulate the senses, within an environment that envelopes the child in warmth and color.

Our intention in creating the physical environment of the school is to envelope the child in warmth. The colors on the walls are muted and the corners of the room have been softened. We provide the children with a safe and supportive space, a step away from the busy, demanding world outside ... a place where children can dream, explore, and set their imaginations free.

Rhythm (not schedules)

At Heart To Hand School our days follow a rhythm rather than a schedule. Rhythm involves movement while schedule implies rigidity. Our daily and weekly rhythms provide the essential structure for each child's hours at Heart To Hand, yet allow plenty of time for spontaneous social engagement and inventive activity. Rhythm provides for the children the surety and safety of knowing what comes next. After just a few weeks, students know which day of the week it is by the type of snack that is offered or by the special artistic activity that they participate in.

Our typical daily rhythm follows this general pattern:

- 7:30 Drop-off and outdoor play in the Play Garden
- 9:15 Changing into indoor clothes, going to the bathroom, washing hands
- Indoor circle time
- Snack time
- Special daily artistic activity
- Imaginative play
- Clean-up and story time
- 11:30 Wash hands and lunch
- 12:15 Changing into outdoor clothes, outdoor play in the Play Garden
- 12:55 Closing good-bye song circle with students, parents, and teachers

The curricular day ends here. Those who participate in our extended after care program may expect the afternoon rhythm to follow this pattern:

- 1:00 Changing into indoor clothes, going to the bathroom, washing hands
- Settling down with live (not recorded) music and story
- 1:30 Napping and quiet time
- 3:00 Waking up, putting away nap things, going to the bathroom, washing hands
- 3:30 Snack time
- Imaginative arts, crafts, and play
- Going home

Our daily artistic activities follow a weekly rhythm, generally changing seasonally. Here is a sample rhythm:

Monday	Bake biscuits & make soup
Tuesday	Sewing, woodworking, and other handcrafts
Wednesday	Beeswax modeling, baking muffins, making butter
Thursday	Wet-on-wet watercolor painting
Friday	Nature walk to Manzanita Park

Our curriculum reflects our philosophy that children are sensory and imaginative learners. Through rhythm we meet their developmental needs for security and offer the children ample opportunities to interact with and learn from their environment as well as enrich their language experience through our circle and story times. When there is need for a quiet contraction, children are redirected toward activities such as grinding wheat, carding wool, or joining a teacher in watering plants, dusting, or sweeping the school steps. Supplies for simple sewing and finger knitting projects are always available.



Washing play silks, carding wool and making yarn, knitting, sewing, woodworking, beeswax modeling – our days are filled with a myriad of creative and practical crafts.

Lunch and Snacks

We provide morning and afternoon snacks each day at Heart To Hand School, using organic, whole ingredients whenever possible. We strive to accommodate any food sensitivities and allergies experienced by the students and any preferences in diet expressed by the parents. Examples of typical snacks include:

- “Grain of the Day”: brown rice, oats, millet, quinoa, barley, corn/polenta
- Carrots and cucumbers with ranch dressing
- Apples with almond butter
- Grapes with jack cheese
- Yogurt with almond meal
- Trail mix with apple rings

Organic mint tea is served with the morning snack and water is served with lunch and afternoon snack.

Children who attend on Mondays during the school year (September through May) do not need to bring a lunch on those days because the children will help us make our own soup and biscuits for lunch on these days. However, all children are requested to bring a single organic vegetable to add to our soup on Mondays. We have found children much more willing to eat the soup if they have contributed to its ingredients! Parents pack a lunch for their children on all other school days.

Annual Festivals, Special Events, Continuing Education, and Waldorf Teacher Training (in Reno!)

Annual festivals and celebrations of many kinds are significant elements in the rhythm of life at Heart To Hand School. These include: Michaelmas, Martinmas/Lantern Festival, Thanksgiving Feast, Advent Spiral, Spring Festival, May Faire, and our Fare Thee Well ceremony.

Educational events, community outreaches, and fundraisers are other important aspects of our community life together. Different events are hosted by our faculty, Parent Association, and local Anthroposophy Study Group.

In September 2010, Rudolf Steiner College will be bringing accredited, college-level Foundation Studies training to Reno through Heart To Hand School. These courses fulfill prerequisites for Waldorf Teacher Education Certification (early childhood, grades, and high school) and other undergraduate and Masters degree programs. The courses may also be taken for parent education and/or continuing education for personal development.

Current Faculty & Staff

Clare Brock, mother of grown children and grandmother of three, has supported and volunteered at Heart To Hand School since 2001. She joined the faculty in 2003 as an after care teacher.

Samantha (Sam) Shaw joined us in 2004 as an assistant teacher to our school's founder (Martie Fine), became a lead teacher in 2007, and completed her Waldorf Early Childhood Certification in 2009.

Marybeth Legler began in 2002 as an assistant teacher and then after care director in two other Waldorf schools before joining us in 2009 as a lead teacher. She completed her Waldorf Early Childhood Education certification in 2009.

Lelan Harris, after many years as an educator, administrator, and consultant, became the first administrator of our school and the first executive director of DSEI in 2007.

Paula Leeder, mother of two teenagers and with three years of prior teaching experience, joined us in 2007 as an assistant teacher.

Halla DeSart joined us in 2007 as an after care teacher and substitute assistant teacher. She is completing a university degree in education and plans on begin her Waldorf teacher training in 2011.

Jennifer Bowen joined us in 2008 as an after care teacher and substitute assistant teacher. She is completing a university degree in education.

Catie Gegen joined us in 2009 as an after care teacher and substitute assistant teacher.

Former Faculty & Staff

Heart To Hand School has been an important place of personal and professional development for faculty who have since moved on to other roles. Where are they today?

- ◇ Five are early childhood or grades teachers in other Waldorf Schools
- ◇ Three are mothers who continued to work for several years as substitute teachers for us
- ◇ Three are currently pursuing graduate education
- ◇ Two are Waldorf Homeschooling their children
- ◇ One works in a Camphill Community for children, youth, and adults with disabilities
- ◇ One is an administrator at another Waldorf School
- ◇ One is the administrator of the teacher education program at a private college
- ◇ One operates her own Waldorf-inspired home day care
- ◇ One works for Washoe County doing in-home intervention and parent training visits to at-risk families of preschoolers.

Facilities

In December 2005 we moved into our current leased site, which consists of two large classrooms and office space on the property of a Lutheran church. The grounds are expansive, including an enclosed play garden with handmade outdoor play equipment, a playhouse, sand pit, straw bales, logs and stumps to build with, and trees to climb. We also have a large grassy field to run on and a small hillside that we are transforming into a garden. The classrooms are big and have been transformed by parents and teachers to take on the soft, nurturing qualities ideally present in a Waldorf Early Childhood classroom. There is a play loft and a kitchen area in each room.



Our Play Garden is a beautiful year-around place of discovery filled with trees and flowers, vegetables and herbs, hay bales and rocks, stumps and planks, swings and ramps, shovels, wheelbarrows, and more.

Future Expansion & Growth

As the school continues to grow, we intend to acquire our own facility that can accommodate Kindergarten through 8th grade classrooms with all attendant programs. DSEI is working to establish a second mixed-age kindergarten in 2011 and hopes to launch an independent Waldorf grade school in 2012. It is worth noting that Reno already has a local Waldorf homeschooling movement that sustains those of our graduates whose families have been able to make this kind of commitment on behalf of their children.

School Organization

Like all Waldorf schools, the day-to-day running of Heart To Hand School remains in the capable hands of the faculty. Aided by the administrator, they are responsible for all pedagogical issues, curriculum, student or faculty discipline, program development, rhythm, enrollment, and the hiring and mentoring of new teachers. As in all such independent schools, the Parent Association and active involvement of supportive community members is vitally important. Our Board of Trustees, consisting of parents, teachers, and community members, serves to fiscally support the running of the school, as well as working to develop a grade school.



Exploring and “living into” the depths and hues of color is a unique element of the Waldorf curriculum.

Governance and Decision Making

Every realm within Heart to Hand School is fully engaged in the art and practice of consensus decision making. This model requires each participant to practice and develop skills and character qualities of proactivity, careful listening, thoughtful reflection, and patience. The results are, we feel, a healthier school where power is shared equally and appreciative relational bonds are deepened. The consensus process is utilized by both the faculty, board of trustees, parent association, and administration.

What People Are Saying About Us

Christmas Card: Thank you all for being so loving toward [our daughter]. It means so much to us that her gentle soul is met with such tenderness and love.

Internet Review: My child attends Heart to Hand Preschool. The Waldorf curriculum is a play-based program which encourages creative development and helps children understand their relationship to the world. The school has nutritious snacks, toys made of natural materials, and a warm, nurturing environment. The teachers and parents are both active and involved in the classroom and after school activities. My child is a happy preschooler and I highly recommend this school.

Farewell Card: We just want to express our gratitude for giving [our daughter] such a wonderful place to grow. We truly appreciate how you honored her as a child, respected her as an individual, and made her feel safe and loved. We are sure that she will, as we do, cherish the time she spent digging in the mud, climbing trees, and making beautiful watercolor masterpieces.

Internet Review: My child attends the Heart to Hand School in Reno. Heart to Hand is a Waldorf Initiative in Northern Nevada. The Waldorf based curriculum teaches kids how to be conscious of the world around them and encourages their creativity. If you are looking for an alternative to schools filled with TV, junk food, and overwhelming structure, this is it!

Farewell Card: You all have such warm hearts and it clearly reflects upon the children. You always made [our son and daughter] feel so special and welcome. It's rare to find teachers who operate on such a genuine and truly sincere level – you all have such a gift! The work you do is amazing – [our children] are prime examples. From the bottom of our hearts, thank you for being part of [our children's] lives and give them such a truly amazing experience.