

PROSPECTUS – WISTERIA CHARTER SCHOOL

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Wisteria Charter School (WCS) of Buffalo, New York, is committed to providing an innovative public educational opportunity to meet the diverse needs of its students. Located in the Nation's third poorest city, the school design reflects adherence to the New York State Common Core Standards, through careful amalgamation of a Waldorf educational approach. This educational framework employs an arts-integrated, developmentally-appropriate curriculum which addresses the full spectrum of a child's academic and social needs in ways that are meaningful, responsive and inclusive.

Mission Statement

Wisteria Charter School cultivates socially conscious, critical thinkers by addressing students' intellectual, emotional and physical needs. Utilizing an arts-integrated Waldorf-Methods approach, students are fully prepared to meet the challenges of a multicultural and ever-changing society.

Meaningful- knowledgeable, sound decision-making

Responsive- timely, mindful, purposeful action

Inclusive- Expansive, in-depth, universal

Key Design Elements:

Wisteria Charter School provides a comprehensive program of activities, aimed at creating a community of compassionate, self-motivated and intellectually engaged students. Wisteria's curriculum places equal emphasis on a strong academic foundation, artistic expression, social development, and attention to the needs of each child. According to William Butler Yeats, "Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire." Waldorf education engages a child's intellect, imagination, will and sense of aesthetics. How a subject is taught is equally important as what is taught, hence the use of movement and arts in the curriculum. The research-based, time-tested pedagogical methods designed by Dr. Rudolf Steiner are at the heart of this mode of education. Waldorf methods inspire student volition, inquisition and creativity because classroom activities involve three key areas—the head (thinking), the heart (feeling) and the hands (willing).

In the context of a nurturing environment, students will benefit from 1) small instructor-student ratios, 2) 3 to 4 week-long instructional content blocks, spanning 2-3 hours in length, 3) a practical and consistent 5-day school week, 4) routinely-scheduled ELA and Mathematics enrichment periods, 5) 180-day school calendar, aligned with the Buffalo City school district for ease in collaboration, 6) Early Foreign Language Instruction, 7) Comprehensive Art Instruction (visual, theater, vocal, instrumental), 8) Committed Parental Involvement, and 8) a developmentally-appropriate curriculum.

Unique Design Characteristics: *Academic Rigor, Artistic Relevance, Affirmed Relationship*

Art-Integrated Interdisciplinary Instruction: Arts integration is a key aspect of Wisteria Charter School's class instruction because it addresses the multimodalities of individual student educational needs, learning styles and interests. Content is presented in conjunction with narration, movement, song and exemplary illustration to address diverse learners. A study conducted by Dr. Carrie Norlund found students who were educated with Waldorf-based arts integration reported numerous benefits, including divergent thinking, internalized knowledge through on-going visual stimuli, emotional intelligence, balance self-perception, creativity and strength of will.¹

¹ Norlund, Carrie, Art experiences in Waldorf education: graduates' meaning making reflections, February 28, 2007 Available-<https://mospace.umsystem.edu/xmlui/handle/10355/4457>

Nature-Based Experiential Learning: According to Piaget, learning is a continual process of interaction between the individual and his/ her environment.² When applied in an educational setting, students are afforded the opportunity to engage in concrete physical experiences and actively hypothesize—making learning both meaningful and memorable constructs. Teachers serve as facilitators of the learning process, guiding students via experiences, rather than didactic lessons. As a result, children are met in ways that inspire them to think critically about the connectedness of content-area subjects.

Differentiation: At Wisteria, throughout instructional time, students are encouraged to develop their understanding of core content through creative and artistic assignments. Subject matter is delivered by the teacher, who initially sets the instructional tone and degree of difficulty, without the typical reliance on textbook material. Core content Main Lesson Blocks serve as a tool through which students become fully engaged in their personal academic process, and work at their own pace. Through mediated scaffolding, teacher observation, student-initiated inquiry, peer-reinforcement and guided practice, students effectively grasp core content at the most appropriate cognitive level, and generate quality academic product throughout classroom instruction.

Looping: In this set up, students and teachers are afforded the opportunity to remain together as a cohesive educational unit for up to three consecutive years. Looping optimizes consistency by increasing annual instructional time. English language learners, students with disabilities and minority groups show improved academic performance, more positive peer relationships, and increased self-efficacy. With looping, parents are afforded more time to acquaint themselves with teachers, which will strengthen the bonds of school community.

The Founding Group of WCS

Wisteria Charter School's founding Board of Directors is a skilled 7-member consortium of civic leaders, committed to overseeing the charter school operation. To uphold this commitment, a grant writer, an attorney, an educator, a member of the philanthropic community, an arts professional, and a financial professional operate under a clear set of guiding principles dictated by the school's Mission Statement. Also, one board seat is reserved for the WCS Parent Circle Chairperson, the school's designated liaison. The Board's ability to effectively launch, oversee and govern the institution is made possible because of the group's unwavering commitment to the children, families and community for whom it is founded. The expectations and responsibilities of Board members is not only outlined in the Official WCS Board of Director's Packet, but it is also enforced as each Board member must sign documentation acknowledging their fiduciary responsibilities and duties of loyalty to the mission of the school. Moreover, members of the Board reflect an elite level of experience and education in their respective fields.

However, the establishment of WCS comes from the active work of the Application Development Committee. This group consists of a Lead Applicant (who is a tenured NYS Certified Teacher), a grant writer, an urban planner, an attorney and a broad spectrum of professionals and educators who have assisted in the preparation of the school's prospectus and application. Furthermore the success of our program is solidified by our community based relationships with *Journey's End Refugee Resettlement Program*, *Community Action Organization of Erie County/ Head Start* and the *Western New York Book Arts Center*. Executive Director Nathan Hare, Executive Director Molly Short and Print Director Chris Fritton provided WCS with a spectrum of financial, programmatic and child-centered resources.

² Kolb, D.A., "Experiential learning: experience as the source of learning and development," *Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1984.*

II. STUDENT POPULATION

A. Student Enrollment

Grades	Projected Enrollment Table				
	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2017-2018
K	25	25	25	25	25
1st	25	25	25	25	25
2nd	25	25	25	25	25
3rd	25	25	25	25	25
4th	25	25	25	25	25
5th		25	25	25	25
6th			25	25	25
7th				25	25
8th					25
Totals	125	150	175	200	225

B. Target Populations

Demographic Snapshot-- The City of Buffalo

Buffalo Public Schools, situated within an urban and demographically diverse Buffalo City School District, serves a vast majority of the municipality's enrolled youth on nearly 70 campuses.³ Census information continues to indicate that there is a need for new instructional methods that can appropriately serve a changing student population citywide.

The City of Buffalo has a substantial number of households with school-age children. According to 2000 U.S. Census data the City of Buffalo, whose total population was recorded as 292,648 persons, has 39,393 households with children. Of the households with children, 53% (or 20,768) have children between the ages of 0-4, while 58% (or 22,773) have children 5-9 years old and 54% (or 21,466) are 10-14 years of age. Just as significant is the ethnic diversity in Buffalo where 54% of the total population is White, 37.2% is Black and 7.5% classify as Hispanic. Furthermore, 2.5% identify themselves as being a member of 2 or more races while 1.4% are Asian and .8% are American Indian/ Alaska Native.

Wisteria Charter School-- Welcoming Students with Disabilities, English Language Learners (ELL) and the Economically Disadvantaged

While statistics paint a picture of diversity, they also tell a story of a city whose populace struggles financially. In 1999, it was reported that the median household income in Buffalo was \$24,536 and the number of people living below the poverty line was 26.6%.⁴ State data indicates that the total population of students enrolled in K-12 in the District is 32,732 and of

³ Accessed via the web on January 3, 2011 Buffalo Public Schools website-
<http://www.buffaloschools.org/district.cfm?subpage=68>

⁴ Accessed via the web on January 3, 2011 National Relocation Website-
<http://profiles.nationalrelocation.com/New%20York/Buffalo/>(<http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/36/361100.html>)

these students, 8.4% are classified as English Language Learners/ Limited English Proficiency. Posing an even greater challenge to the district are the number of children who are eligible for free and reduced priced lunches and those who received a Special Education classification (81.6% and 17.2% respectively)⁵.

In addition to the hard stats and raw data, the City's neighborhood planning reports provide evidence of the municipality's development priorities. Currently, the City's Office of Strategic Planning has determined that "land banking" is the best method to manage the large tracts of vacant land created by the movement of population from the far Eastside and sections of South Buffalo to the near Eastside, North Buffalo and parts of the Westside. This is significant since decisions made regarding the physical environment, including residential housing and neighborhood development, are directly related to where new immigrants settle in the city. Therefore the development strategies employed by our municipality are an indicator as to where the school will be located and how we will reach a large segment of our target population who continue to settle here from all over of the globe.

In an effort to accommodate the educational needs of our target population, Wisteria Charter School's physical presence as well as its use of Waldorf methods is especially beneficial. For those who lack fluency in English, live in conditions of poverty, and those with special educational needs, quality education is a necessity for prosperity. With the assistance of our network of related agencies and their corresponding programs, WCS is well suited to serve neighborhoods with increasing numbers of newly resettled school-aged children in a nurturing environment with conscious, intentional, and planned diversification. Waldorf methods make progressive education possible for communities that face the challenges of poverty and cultural assimilation.

Plan for Recruitment and Enrollment- Meeting the Needs of the District

Wisteria's founders feel that it is important to serve the entire community and to support the school district by reaching out to populations not traditionally involved in, or knowledgeable about methods used in Waldorf education. Our plan for recruitment and enrollment will result in a balanced lottery and a balanced shift in the demographics that comprise the Buffalo Public Schools.

The network of professionals that WCS has formed a relationship with includes the Community Action Organization of Erie County (CAO). The CAO is a \$31 million dollar social services agency with a Head Start program. Head Start's early childhood education program is available to low income families whose children qualify for free and reduced priced lunches once the child is old enough to enroll in a District school. In addition to this, we have also developed a relationship with Journey's End Refugee Resettlement. Journey's End is the only New York State sponsored immigrant resettlement organization, with an education component, located in the City of Buffalo.

⁵ Accessed via the web on January 3, 2011 New York State Department of Education Website- <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/psc/startcharter.html>

The populations served by CAO and Journey's End mirror the groups of residents needed to have a healthy and balanced student population. We will be using the tight network of contacts and communications to further introduce Waldorf's educational principles to the parents of ELL students and those from low income households. These professional relationships will form the basis of our long-range outreach activities and ensure that we will have strong community linkages solidified by trust.

Educational Choice Options- Keeping Everyone Informed

All of the aforementioned factors make the introduction of WCS, a Waldorf methods charter school, both timely and appropriate. To ensure the success of WCS, the Application Development Committee has recruited an award-winning Community Engagement Specialist to design and facilitate an ongoing process of civic engagement that extends beyond the application review period. The outreach methods employed by Wisteria Charter School Initiative have already begun and will continue in varying intensities and focus for as long as the school is in existence. This approach will ensure that the institution mutually addresses the needs of the communities from which the student body resides.

Phase One of Wisteria's outreach strategy sought citywide input. It involved a full spectrum of communication techniques that has made Wisteria largely popular in neighborhoods throughout the school district. The first phase was divided into steps. Now that the first phase is complete and the Prospectus is submitted the second phase begins. Phase Two will continue to communicate with neighborhoods across the city but will also have a special focus on low income and immigrant populations to inform parents of the benefits of Waldorf methods and Wisteria's lottery and enrollment process.

Phase One

- Step 1-- News Paper Articles

There were two articles printed in the Buffalo News on January 12, 2011 the first was a report in the School Zone Blog section of the online edition and the other was a front page story in the print edition of the *City and Region* section.

Buffalo Rising: News Daily featured a story about Wisteria on the same day (Jan. 12th) as the Buffalo News reports. These articles served to promote WCS and advertise the public meetings on a broad scale.

- Step 2-- Public Meetings

We've held four large public meetings in the areas that the Committee identified as having neighborhoods suitable to locate our proposed school. Dispersed in the east, west, north and central sections of the city, these meetings represented the full diversity of the population of Buffalo's neighborhoods. To ensure ample attendance the following methods of communication was used: The Buffalo News, radio, TV news, posters, handbills and websites.

Dates and locations of the initial public presentations: Niagara Branch Library January 12, 2011,

Merriweather Branch Library January 13, 2011, University at Buffalo's Allen Hall January 14th, 2011 and Crane Branch Library January 15th, 2011.

In addition to the large meetings, several small meetings were held where parents familiar with Waldorf educational methods met and discussed the possibility of a charter school over Waldorf-inspired craft activities. These meetings, known as "Handworks," were by invitation based on contacts formed at Waldorf programs in Buffalo and East Aurora, New York.

- STEP 3-- Hit the Airways

Radio, Internet, Television: These are relatively quick ways to let the community know that surveys are available, meetings are planned and that input is sought. The Founding group conducted radio talk show interviews for "Living Now" on January 17, 2011 and "Kirkland's Korner," on January 25, 2011. We have an Official Wisteria Charter School Website and Blog where we provide information and continuous updates for those interested in following the development of Wisteria Charter School. We were also on Channel 7 WKBW TV's website billboard and on YNN (Your News Network) website billboard on January 15th. An abundance of fast-breaking news stories prevented the stations from giving us the scheduled coverage that was previously scheduled.

- STEP 4-- Conduct A Survey

A brief survey instrument was developed and distributed at each of the large meetings and to those in the smaller gatherings. The survey was also posted on informational blogs, on the Official Wisteria Charter School Initiative blog and website. The Better Schools/ Better Neighborhoods Headquarters on Fillmore Avenue served as the official survey/ comment sheet drop-off point for those who lack Internet access. Group Ministries Human Services Center distributed the surveys to clients enrolled in their programming. In addition to questions directly related to the proposed school, those completing the questionnaire were also asked for their zip code. This information was geo-coded on a map of the city and the responses were reviewed and analyzed based on where the respondents reside. Comments were also received online via our website's Contact Us Page in the Comment section as well as by email.

- STEP 5-- Meet with Civic Leaders and Elected Officials

Our Outreach Specialist also set 1:1 meetings and phone conversations with School Board Members, Elected Officials, not for profit executives and the Superintendent of Schools to get candid information to identify additional resources and to assist with the overall establishment and viability of the proposed school.

The Phase Two and all subsequent phases will incorporate the communications mechanisms used by the non profit social service agencies responsible for assisting populations that we hope to reach in addition to methods we have already employ. In addition to this, we will also be arranging meetings with the local philanthropic and banking community to garner additional financial resources to keep Wisteria strong.

Waldorf methods embrace community and connectedness therefore, we will always employ outreach strategies that are meaningful, responsive and inclusive, to address that which is important to our school community.

SERVING AT-RISK STUDENTS AND STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Meaningful Needs Framework

Wisteria Charter School is designed to include high level instruction, designed to meet the needs of a wide range of learners. Our program will involve screening, progress-monitoring, qualified instructors (receiving on-going, practical professional development), along with timely, appropriate and effective intervention. Embedded in the curriculum are numerous means to address diversity in learning and the challenges associated with that diversity. On all levels, from administration to teachers to students and parents, Wisteria ensures open dialogue pertaining to student performance involving acknowledgement of cultural and linguistic needs, and the guarantee of appropriate instruction.

Responsive Needs Framework

Should a student fall below appropriate grade level benchmarks, a school-wide progress-monitoring system will be enacted for a period of weeks, during which parents or caregivers will be notified. Data collected from a range of formative and interim assessments from teachers will be reviewed.

Differentiated instruction to suit individual challenges will provide immediate feedback, as student progress is monitored. If a deficit is determined, a 3-Tiered Response to Intervention model will be initiated to 1) determine the needs of the student and 2) aid in determining whether additional assistance is required. (Illinois PBIS May 15,2008, Adapted from “What is PBS?”, <http://pbis.org/schoolwide.htm>) Both academic and behavioral interventions will be blended seamlessly within the school’s classroom instructional design.

If a student is deemed “at risk,” WCS teacher will discuss options with the Instructional Coordinator and plan for increased academic intervention. At or prior to that time, parents or caregivers will be notified to develop and implement smaller-group instruction and increased individualized classroom activity monitoring, which may be provided by additional classroom co-teachers or paraprofessionals. In keeping with the responsive needs framework, all students at Wisteria Charter School will have individualized folders. Here, work may be added, or assignments may be differentiated in a discrete manner. Folders will be marked accordingly for any students identified as “at-risk.” If more assistance is required in order for students to meet or exceed academic proficiency, high-impact intervention strategies will be employed. Coupled with frequent assessment of progress, data collected during the 3-Tiered RTI method will assist parents and caregivers, as well as the school in making recommendations to the District’s Committee for Special Education. In conjunction with Wisteria Charter School’s Special Ed. Coordinator, CSE will conduct a comprehensive multidisciplinary evaluation and prepare a written report of student performance levels. If deemed necessary, an Individualized Education Program (IEP) will be developed in keeping with the determined disability.

Inclusive Needs Framework

Services will be rendered with the needs of each particular student in mind. The IEP will guide instruction for that student, indicating any classroom, instructional or assignment-related modifications. To ensure academic and social success for all students, WCS is committed to education if students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment. Accommodations will be offered discreetly and consistently to complement the normal classroom rhythms. Should a student enroll at Wisteria and has previously been identified as needing an IEP, WCS will conduct IEP reviews, to assure that the student is benefitting from a free and appropriate public education. Depending on the student and required level of service, some of the various educational arrangements we have budgeted for are:

Organizational Level	Resources or Tools	Function
Administrative	Special Education Coordinator	Appointed to teach students directly, arrange and conduct annual IEP reviews, hold meetings, and confer with parents
Faculty (teacher)	Integrated Co-Teaching Model at the classroom level	Designed to unobtrusively serve a variety of students
Faculty (All Levels)	Meaningful and Practical Professional Development	Geared toward maintaining an exceptional Special Education setting
Student(s)	“Lattice” Support and Enrichment Room	To provide individual or small-group enrichment of daily lessons
Parents, Faculty, School Community	Active collection of reading material and instructional resources	Parents, teachers and administrators have useful information at their disposal

SERVING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS/ STUDENTS WITH LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY

Meaningful Service Framework

Wisteria Charter School is set to welcome all students and families, regardless of need. The educational framework is poised to address a wide range of socioeconomic, cultural, and intellectual criteria. In recent years, Buffalo has experienced an influx of Students with Interrupted Formal Education (SIFE). Because of the Spanish-speaking population and many new SIFE children, Wisteria is poised to form a long-standing relationship with the English Language Learner population.

In compliance with New York State and Federal laws, all potential students at Wisteria Charter School will begin the English Language Learner screening process with the Home Language Questionnaire. If the student’s home language is a language other than English, Wisteria will utilize its ongoing collaborative effort with Journey’s End Refugee Resettlement (a member of our agency network) to conduct interviews in the student’s native language as well as English. Journey’s End will supply translation in school or at the home of the student. Academic coaches, fluent in 12 languages are available to “push in” to classrooms and assist hands-on.

These coaches provide teaching tools to support the educational growth process. Students who are English Language Learners or students with Limited English Proficiency, once determined, must take the Language Assessment Battery- Revised (LAB-R), determining their need for ESL services.

Responsive Service Framework

Wisteria Charter School will take full advantage of longer routine scheduling blocks to meet the needs of English Language Learners. ESL lessons will be administered by a New York State certified ESL teacher who is acclimated to Waldorf teaching methods. In a two-year research study conducted at the University of New Hampshire, struggling English Language learners were more prolific when provided with simple art supplies to supplement standard “pen and paper” writing exercises. Assessment of student work illustrated more organized, imaginative narratives, rich in content, even from emerging young writers.⁶

Because of the teacher’s knowledge of interdisciplinary instruction, students are encouraged engage in course curricula with zest, joy and love of learning. When teachers utilize movement, students retain vocabulary, acquire more content knowledge, and demonstrate increased comprehension skills. In addition, cultural connectedness through artistic expression maximizes student self-efficacy⁷

Students feel encouraged and affirmed at school, rather than being viewed as outsiders. Wisteria Charter School’s afternoon skills blocks will serve as ESL instructional time. Students eligible for bilingual services will take the New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test (NYSESLAT) annually, to determine future ESL course content needs. Translators from Journey’s End will be utilized on an “as-needed” basis, to meet the Native Language Arts (NLA) requirements. In addition to the NYSESLAT, student receiving ESL services will be subject to quarterly language skills portfolio assessments, using appropriate ELL language acquisition, including criterion-referenced evaluation.

Professional development opportunities may be provided “in-house” by staff members, or facilitated by Journey’s End Refugee Resettlement. On-going faculty learning opportunities will be instituted to address Wisteria’s faculty and staff members, and familiarize them with the necessary policies, procedures and challenges associated with attracting, retaining, and meeting the academic and social needs of LEP students.

“Parent Circle”

We believe that parental involvement is crucial to the successful implementation of school-wide accountability. Parents are a vital part of the school community, and are valued for their support of student achievement within the classroom as well as at home. Wisteria Charter

⁶ Olshansky, Beth. “Picture This: An Arts-Based Literacy Program,” *Educational Leadership*, September 1995, Vol. 53, No. 1.

⁷ Gourgey, Bousseau, & Delgada, *Children’s Theater Review*, 1985.

School is committed to actively supporting parents through Parent Circle Chairperson and the various levels of parental involvement.

Inclusive Service Framework

In the way of retention, the Parent Circle will collaborate with Journey's End to serve as a strong support network, promoting the Wisteria Clothes Swap, car-pool system and utilization of the community room. Teacher-directed plays and assemblies, seasonal festivals and fundraisers serve to unify the community-at-large in support of these students. The school's Faculty Chairperson will serve as liaison between parents, teachers and the administrative body, communicating needs that may extend beyond the classroom, but still impact the school wide community. Members of the Administrative Committee will assure that school communicative materials are translated into various languages. Languages for the communities we will serve may include, but are not limited to: Arabic, Burmese, Vietnamese, Turkish, Spanish, French, Swahili, Kinyarwanda, Nepali, Serbian, and Karenni.

Students will benefit from continued differentiated instruction through ESL teachers. Instruction steeped in real sensory experiences, oral tradition, and repetition to mastery, combined with world literary approach addresses the needs of LEP students. Looping, which promotes healthy teacher-student relationships, has also proven to be beneficial to the English Language Learner. Because of the nurturing environment offered by Wisteria Charter School, both teachers, ESL students and their classmates feel more comfortable. Through routine visual, auditory and kinesthetic stimulation, students are less likely to demonstrate fear and apprehension in the classroom, which are typical dilemmas for this population. Waldorf principles encourage active and intentional engagement with the community whereby the school seamlessly integrates with the neighborhood around it. Therefore, meaningful, responsive and inclusive public input is of the utmost importance to the founding members of the Wisteria Charter School and it is our intent and mission to incorporate the needs of our community into the development of WCS.

III. SCHOOL DESIGN

a. Increase student achievement and decrease student achievement gaps in reading/language arts and mathematics

There is clearly a need to achieve higher standards, and close many of the achievement gaps that exist in education today. Wisteria Charter School's Waldorf-methods design will provide an interdisciplinary, art-integrated approach to learning. Research of these time-tested features has illustrated significant gains in elementary school reading fluency and comprehension, ELA and Mathematics standardized test scores, student achievement and intrinsic motivation. At the same time, these schools seamlessly support literacy across the curriculum. Students educated via Waldorf methods in arts-based Waldorf Schools scored higher than their peers on the National SAT.⁸ Rather than an accessory at Wisteria, the arts serve as the framework for achievement in English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science and Social Studies.

⁸ Oppenheimer, "Schooling the Imagination," 1999.

In *The Challenge: Building a Successful 21st Century School District*, Deputy Superintendent of Buffalo Public Schools, Dr. Folasade Oladele notes that literacy across the curriculum must be firmly established in pre-kindergarten through accurate, routine phonemic awareness and the alphabetic principle. Furthermore, the City of Buffalo plans to address the stages in early literacy from a developmental perspective, while addressing each individual core content area. Emphasis is being placed on reading, writing, critical thinking, meta-cognition and culturally and linguistically responsive teaching⁹.

Meaningful Achievement Framework

In a Waldorf –Methods approach, educators seek to build “capacities” for learning. Instructors apply developmentally-appropriate educational practices which lay the foundation for profound and long-term academic achievement. Research conducted by Dr. Ida Oberman found that students educated in urban public Waldorf-methods schools showed significant gains in English Language Arts and Mathematics. In two of the three cases studied, public Waldorf-methods students met or exceeded their comparable counterparts in performance on eight-grade state assessments. The third school (a large, urban school with a high percentage of Free and Reduced Lunch and English Language Learners) showed remarkable gains. Student scores went from 67% “Below Basic” in ELA to 61% “Proficient or Above” by their eight-grade year. Thirty-four percent of the students were “Below Basic” in math. However, by grade eight, 66% scored “Proficient or Above” on state math assessments.¹⁰

Responsive Achievement Framework

Student will engage in music, visual art, movement and drama throughout the day in integration. Arts integrated schools in Minneapolis reported substantial effects for all students. The greatest impact was for disadvantaged students. “Students become better thinkers, develop higher order skills, and deepen their inclination to learn.”¹¹ In addition, students will receive enrichment through hands-on instruction in practical handwork, movement and physical education, which support intellectual growth. For example, foundational drawing in response to literature in the early grades gives way to concrete understanding, enhanced critical thinking and increased variety and complexity of student written and verbal responses in all subject areas.

While meeting the needs of diverse learners, an arts-integrated curriculum speaks to the necessary student behavioral qualities that enrich school classrooms and enhance school communities. School Climate has a direct impact on addressing student achievement gaps. When students are genuinely engaged in course content, instructional time is maximized, as students are less likely to engage in disruptive behaviors. The report on “A+ Schools” cited a 94% drop in school situations requiring school disciplinary action. (A+ Schools, U of NC-

⁹ Oladele, Dr. Folasade, *“The Challenge: Building a Successful 21st Century School District,”* Buffalo Public Schools, 2009.

¹⁰ Oberman, Dr. Ida, *“Learning From Rudolph Steiner: The Relevance of Waldorf Education for Urban Public School Reform,”* September 2007.

¹¹ Rabkin & Redmond, *“The Art of Education,”* 2005.

Greensboro) Increased interest in taking risks, cooperating, solving problems independently and within groups, preparedness and taking initiative for learning are benefits of such a program.

At Wisteria artistic endeavors are neither fragmented nor isolated. They are incorporated into each of the academic subjects studied. Students draw, play instruments, paint, sing, use practical objects and outdoor exploration, act and recite poetry as part of their main lesson and special subjects. Writing across the disciplines allows for guided and independent practice, while instilling an ongoing and progressive love of learning. In the arts integrated *A+ School Program*, fourth grade state writing test scores improved 30 percentile points.¹²

Inclusive Achievement Framework

The use of the arts integration in an educational setting has been well-documented as being beneficial to a wide range of learners with differing learning styles. According to Ingram and Riedel,¹³ significant gains in reading scores of third through fifth graders were noted. In the study, English Language Learners and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds illustrated more pronounced benefits. Because the class teacher recites the lessons directly with less reliance on textbooks, course material is received firsthand, without the excessive use of handouts, worksheets and workbooks. When overused, these additional “teaching aids” may hinder a struggling student’s comprehension. Furthermore, Wisteria’s use of the arts to teach English Language learners and multilingual students allows for increased opportunities for teachers and students to explore issues of diversity through visual art, song and poetic verse.

The Founding group’s ability to assist in closing the achievement gaps is evident through the careful selection of highly-qualified teachers, as outlined in NCLB. Teachers utilize curriculum guides to identify key academic skills, thus maximizing “teacher-student” direct contact.

b. Increase high school graduation rates and focus on serving at-risk high school student populations (including re-enrolled drop-outs and those below grade level);

A solid foundation in the elementary grades will lead to academic success in later years. In a research study, Waldorf graduates considered their Waldorf education to be “very influential” in their ability to think critically, challenge assumptions, verbalize, form judgments, and view things in wider concept. They also reported increased interest in positive social interaction and increased interest in crafts and practical handwork. There was a decreased interest in passive forms of education and recreation, like “watching television”¹⁴ There was a direct relationship observed between the number of years spent in a Waldorf-methods educational program and genuine interest in diversity and other cultures. The Waldorf program provides students with

¹² “A+ Schools,” University of North Carolina at Greensboro

¹³ Ingram & Riedel, “*Arts for Academic Achievement*,” 2003.

¹⁴ Oberman, Dr. Ida, “*Learning From Rudolph Steiner: The Relevance of Waldorf Education for Urban Public School Reform*,” September 2007.

developmentally appropriate, multidisciplinary approaches to learning, resulting in increased achievement and school success.¹⁵

c. Focus on academic achievement of middle school student populations and preparation for transition to high school

WCS recognizes the importance of addressing the academic and social challenges that often face this unique population. The inclusion of practical handwork in Kindergarten and the early grades (activities like knitting, painting, woodwork, and Suzuki strings) build confidence, volition, manual dexterity and develop fine and gross motor skills. These tasks are linked to linguistic ability, grammatical acumen, mathematics and sequencing, and timing ability. In *Educational Leadership*, Norman Weinberger, a professor at the University of California at Irvine, wrote, "Music has the ability to facilitate language acquisition, reading readiness, and general intellectual development, to foster positive attitudes and to lower truancy in middle and high school, to enhance creativity, and to promote social development, personality adjustment, and self worth." Waldorf methods not only develop certain specific skills; they actually strengthen synapses in the brain, creating a sense of wholeness in young children. These students emerge with talents and skills that engage both the creative portion of the brain and the logical portion.¹⁶

d. Utilize a variety of high-quality assessments to measure understanding and critical application of concepts

Meaningful Assessment Framework

Wisteria Charter School will employ a variety of effective assessment measures to ensure high student performance, achievement, while continuing to build character and self-motivation. Student performance will be evaluated primarily through student portfolio assessment. Teacher observations, weekly progress notation and evaluation of student skills in all content areas via student in-class inquiry will continue to drive instruction. School faculty planning sessions and grade level team meetings will be utilized for curriculum mapping. Group professional development opportunities will be used by all teachers to develop detailed evaluation rubrics clearly illustrating individual student progression to task mastery. Students with disabilities will be afforded all necessary accommodations and will be evaluated in accordance with IEPs¹⁷.

Responsive Assessment Framework

Initial literacy screenings like San Diego Quick (SDQ) will be administered to gauge student performance levels. Formative assessments will be developed by teachers, under the guidance and direction of the Curriculum Lead Teacher. Also, adaptations of city and state-adopted textbook material will be incorporated. Interim grade-level benchmark assessments will be implemented and utilized as an ongoing measure of success within a quarterly academic time frame. Progress reports will be distributed quarterly, in line with the city school district.

¹⁵ Almon, Joan, "Educating for Creative Thinking: The Waldorf Approach," ReVision, Fall 2003.

¹⁶ Petrash, Jack, *Understanding Waldorf Education: Teaching from the Inside Out*, Gryphon House Books, 2002.

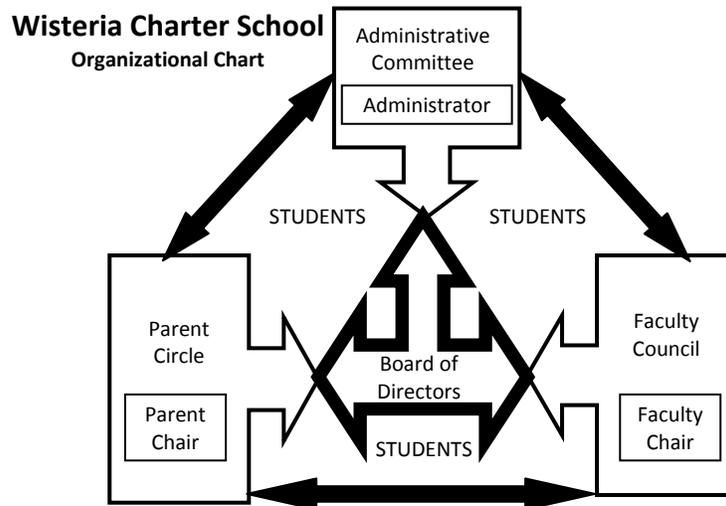
¹⁷ Jenkins & Johnson, "Formative and Summative Assessment," The Gale Group, Accessed January 5, 2011-
<http://www.education.com/reference/article/formative-and-summative-assessment/>

Inclusive Assessment Framework

Information is shared through parent-teacher conferences, and allows for an open exchange of goals, objectives and outcomes. In the way of summative assessment, State-mandated standardized tests, portfolios, and teacher-created narrative progress summaries will illustrate student achievement. Final student portfolios must demonstrate proficiency, through achievement benchmarks. Again, carefully crafted rubrics will be utilized. Routine data collection and analysis using a range of assessments such as Individual Reading Inventory Assessments, DRA-2 and CLOZE will provide a well-rounded pupil evaluation. For students with Limited English Proficiency, Wisteria’s ESL coordinator will cross-reference language acquisition with student performance data on the NYSESLAT Test. Faculty planning sessions will be used to sort and analyze assessment data, allowing for fluid discussion to influence forthcoming instruction.¹⁸

e. Increase implementation of local instructional improvement systems to assess and inform instructional practice, decision-making, and effectiveness

Wisteria Charter School acknowledges that effective schools are those that implement instructional improvement systems to provide valuable information on student performance, teacher preparedness, administrative soundness and school policy. Overall success lies in the even application of these educational criteria. The organizational structure of WCS relies on the seamless flow of information, interactions between Administration, the Board of Directors, school faculty, parents and students.



¹⁸ Ehrlinghaus, Michael & Garrison, Catherine, “Formative and Summative Assessments in the Classroom” National Middle School Association, Accessed January 5, 2011 via the web-
<http://www.nmsa.org/publications/webexclusive/assessment/tabid/1120/default.aspx>

On the district level, Wisteria will communicate with Western New York BOCES, to allow for school-to-school transparency, and District collaboration. Both teachers and administration will benefit from centralized data and mutual accountability systems.

Meaningful Administrative Committee

School-wide accountability is upheld by firm, effective and open administration. The selected school leader is in charge in this endeavor. Contacts with students, teachers and parents are administer-initiated, and take day-to-day life into consideration. Information-sharing reflects a breadth of knowledge and a variety of constructs.

Our Administrative Committee will forge meaningful partnerships by providing the school community with the security that school-wide decision-making is appropriate, fiscally sound and feasible. A school principal should truly believe in the ability of each faculty member. In doing so, a community of trust and shared-responsibility prevails. Many times, at the heart of school evaluation is value judgment. At Wisteria, the notion of evaluation is accompanied by supportive network of skilled educators, resources, and a framework involving open dialogue, absent of negative judgment.

In forthcoming administrative recruitment initiatives, we will secure a leader who demonstrates a comprehensive understanding of the student population of Wisteria. Particularly, issues of diversity will be carefully considered.¹⁹

Responsive Faculty Council

The faculty Council will truly serve a support network for novice as well as veteran teachers. Rather than numerous invaluable “drive-by” feedback evaluations, teachers discuss classroom successes and failures within the context of a team. Teachers certified for certain grade levels with gather in “loops” to share best practices, suggest practical instructional strategies, and pool resources. Through centralized district approach, information is both immediate and easily shared. According to Brenda Smith, president of Douglas County Foundation and AFT Colorado, “Support and evaluation have to come together in a fluid process that builds trust and encourages people to talk about where they believe they need to improve.”²⁰

Assessment data will be gathered and used to guide instruction. In the grades, student main lesson books become valuable tools illustrating weekly, monthly, and yearly progress. These content-rich student-created portfolios may be shared for teacher-designed analysis. Such information sharing in a non-threatening environment will outline program strengths and highlight areas for critical evaluation. Student portfolios remain with the teacher from year to year, and at the end of each looping cycle, portfolios may be presented to new teachers in advance of the school year for in-depth academic prior knowledge. Comfort levels increase for

¹⁹ Davis, Darling, Laporte, Meyerson, “Leadership Study: Developing Successful Principals” Stanford University

²⁰ “Continuous Improvement: Making Evaluation a Toll for Increasing Teacher—and Student—Learning”, American Educator, Summer 2010.

diverse populations, thus encouraging students to be more outspoken—taking more risks, as they trust their peers and gain increased confidence in the teacher and the school community.²¹

The Wisteria Administrative Committee will meet monthly with the Faculty Chairperson to develop teacher performance assessment rubrics, which will be completed bi-annually along with a formal review process with administration. In-house professional development sessions will be utilized to compile and analyze data, and inform decisions.

Inclusive “Parent Circle”

We believe that parental involvement is crucial to the successful implementation of school-wide accountability. Parents are a vital part of the school community, and are valued for their support of student achievement within the classroom as well as at home. Wisteria Charter School is committed to actively supporting parents through Parent Circle Chairperson and the various levels of parental involvement.

Basic parental involvement level averages eight (8) hours annual of participation.

- One (1) class meeting (approximately 2 hours)
- Two (2) student portfolio reviews (approximately 30 minutes each)
- One (1) “Year-Opening Parent Orientation Workshop” (approximately 2 hours)
- One (1) seasonal festival (approximately 2-3 hours)

These mandatory hours do not include any additional parental visits that may be requested or required to address student academics, behavior and/or class conduct issues. Those hours are also required, but not involved with the terms above. WCS reserves the right to enforce these parent involvement hours in connection with student enrollment at the school.

f. Partner with low-performing, local public schools to share best practices

The communication and enthusiasm that we have received from local school administrators has reaffirmed WCS's commitment to partnering with and assisting low-performing local schools. Our outreach conversations with administrators consisted of a preliminary exchange of instructional ideas and pedagogical methods. These discussions were important since they serve as the basis for a more developed, thorough and ongoing model for collaborative written and enacted curricular enhancements. In a mutual exchange, each of our schools will highlight best practices that go beyond mere evaluation to encompass more effective educational strategies. We will work with the School District to identify the best partnership and develop a model for ongoing mutual support.

g. Demonstrate the ability to overcome start-up challenges to open a successful school through management and leadership techniques

We have assembled a sophisticated Board of Directors and are fortunate to have received the support and assistance from a vast number of individuals, community groups and business owners eager to see the long term success of WCS. Even more encouraging is the outpouring of

²¹ Accessed on January 5, 2011. Schoolnet.com-<http://www.schoolnet.com/corporate/ResourceFiles/Whitepaper-draft-Local-Systems-1.4.09.pdf>

technical assistance and advice given by other established local charter schools to aid us in the selection of professional services. Moreover, our first phase of outreach produced an army of eager and skilled volunteers who we arranged into a capacity enhancement network for the purpose of supporting the programmatic and fundraising ability of WCS.

The professional talent tapped for the completion of the NYSED application spans the requisite career fields for establishing an exceptional NYS Charter including: educators (trained in Waldorf curriculum, Special Education, and ESL), College and University professionals, the local charter school community, directors of not-for-profit social service agencies, school administrators, Buffalo School Board members, the legal community, elected officials, public relations/ media experts, real estate development personnel, financial advisors and the business community.

While utilizing a strong teacher recruitment process, professional development opportunities, communication with the Waldorf school network and the assistance of our real estate professional David Resetarits of *Resetarits Construction*, Wisteria Charter School is situated to meet the demands of start-up.

	Writer	Educational experience	Financial ability	Media Contacts	Curriculum Advisement	Business Experience
Career Educator	X	X		X	X	X
Grant Writer	X	X	X	X	X	X
Lawyer	X	X	X		X	X
Arts Professional	X	X		X	X	X
Civic Leader	X	X		X	X	X
Financial Advisor	X	X	X			X
Philanthropic Community		X	X	X	X	X

h. Demonstrate the support of the school district of location and the intent to establish an ongoing relationship with such district

On January 26, 2011 Wisteria Charter School spoke before the Buffalo Board of Education and Superintendent Dr. James Williams providing them an introduction of our school and of our intent to submit a prospectus. We have already spoken to and received the support of several School Board members regarding our proposal and our intent to become an educational ally of the district and the students. The Superintendent is eager to continue discussing the how Wisteria will assist the district and work in partnership with low-performing local schools.

i. Provide access to viable education alternatives to students in regions where there are a lack of alternatives.

Wisteria Charter School will bring quality public education back to the City of Buffalo. In the United States, traditional Waldorf education has been reserved for middle to upper class people, willing and able to pay large sums of money for top-notch curriculum, facilities, and instruction. Even with concerted efforts toward meeting the needs of diverse student populations, actual enrollment percentages of academically “at-risk” students continues to be significantly lower than that of urban centers. Waldorf methods schools are closing achievement gaps, enjoying successes in the way of school climate, and have reported significantly fewer incidents requiring disciplinary action. Wisteria Charter School, through collaboration with Journey’s End Refugee Resettlement, plans to reach out to our growing immigrant population, meeting them with a collection of tools for academic success. Working with local “Head Start” programs will increase our ability to attract and maintain enrollment.

School Highlights

Academic Rigor, Artistic Relevance and Affirmed Relationship

A Standards-Based, Developmentally-Appropriate Curriculum

- Curriculum fully aligned with NYS Common Core Standards
- Multi-leveled class continuum that challenges each child uniquely
- Engaging, Multimodal Academic Framework
- Literacy-Based, Content-Rich Instruction in ELA, Math, Science and Social Studies

An Arts-Integrated, Waldorf-Methods Educational Program

- Experiential, Interdisciplinary Education
- Classical Curriculum, well-rounded and Liberal Arts in Nature
- Learning-Intensive Morning Main Lesson Blocks
- Intelligences enhanced through Handwork, Visual Arts, Movement and Music

A Strong Sense of Culture and Community

- Nature-Based, Environmentally-Sensitive Activities
- Child-Centered Seasonal Festivals and Fund-Raisers
- Free and Public Educational and Cultural Events
- Volunteerism and Civic Engagement Opportunities

“Partnership Circle”- Students, Parents, Teachers and Community Work Toward Common Goal

- Parental Involvement and Education
- Active Student Participation
- Faculty Collaboration and Teaming
- Shared Accountability

Wisteria takes cues from Buffalo’s historical treasures. Through local field trips and studies, students will have the opportunity to experience our world-class theater community, world-

famous park system and top-notch architecture. City attractions will enrich the academic program and assure a well-rounded, holistic education. Currently, there are more than fifty public and charter schools across the Nation utilizing Waldorf methods. Wisteria is poised to introduce public Waldorf methods as a high-quality choice in the City of Buffalo. Unique and challenging curriculum, the formation of self-motivated students, coupled with a caring teaching staff will engage children of all academic levels.