Pasadena Waldorf: Blending Old and New For An Expansive World View

Description

Opening the doors to a global world vision

Diane La Salle, the director of admissions at Pasadena Waldorf, occupies an office in a big, beautiful, rambling home with a bohemian feel that has been turned into administrative offices and the 4th grade classrooms for the school. Located on a quaint residential street, Pasadena Waldorf is a hideaway from the hustle and bustle of city life. On a very hot day recently, Diane welcomed me to her office on the second floor. A fomer Waldorf mom herself, Diane is extremely friendly, genuine and passionate about the school. We talked for 30 minutes about this intriguing school: its mission, the guiding Waldorf philosophy and specifics about the curriculum. Unique and fascinating, the school pays homage to Rudolph Steinerâ€™s 90 year-old ideas, while embracing many current educational practices.

A view of the campus

Waldorf schools take their name from a world-wide educational philosophy centered on the belief that nurturing both the imagination and the intellect are important to create a deep love of learning in children. Pasadena Waldorf is a developmental school, meaning that, â€œchildren learn in distinctly different ways at different stages of their development.â€• *(Source: Waldorf materials*). As Diane explained, the intellectual, physical, emotional and spiritual development of each child are all nurtured. This is essentially what is known as the whole child approach. However, Pasadena Waldorf is not a progressive school, Diane explained, although it shares many elements with progressive schools. For example, students at Pasadena Waldorf donâ€™t call teachers by their first names as they do in progressive schools.

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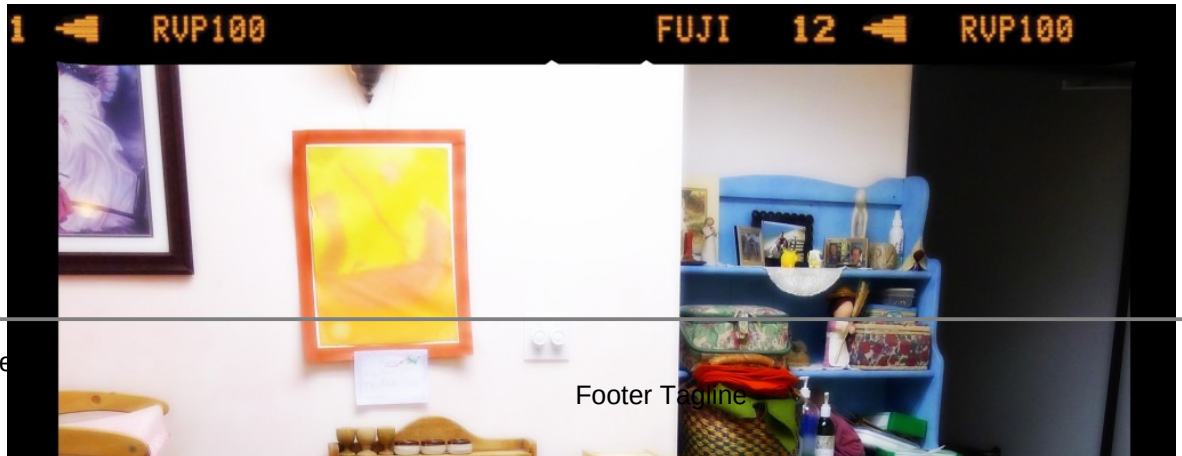
Interestingly, there is no head of school. The school is governed by its faculty and decisions are made by consensus. Weekly faculty meetings help sort out and identify issues involving students and curriculum.

Kindergarten play area

Walking through the gorgeous 3 Â½ acre campus, surrounded by enormous trees on a gently sloping hill, I was taken in by the beauty of the natural surroundings. The school is stunning in its pristine beauty. Classrooms are in located in rustic one-story bungalows. At the top of the campus is the renovated home that serves as the majestic entrance to the school. The middle school is up the hill from there. A newly opened high school resides at separate location.

One of two identical kindergarten classrooms

Pasadena Waldorf has a modern vintage vibe. Walking into the kindergarten classroom felt very nurturing. It is reminicient of a life-sized dollhouse. When we arrived, the teacher was setting up for story time while the kids played in the enclosed outdoor kindergarten play area. The retro feel of the school comes from many of the play and learning tools in the classroom, which are made largely of natural materials such as wood, stones and other found objects.



Close up: One of two Kindergarten classrooms

The main lesson is a two-hour block in the morning over a period of three to four weeks, focusing on one subject. Specialist teachers are responsible for music, languages, P.E., arts and other subjects. Hands on activities are important at Waldorf and the classroom is filled with imaginative activity centers. The power of childrensâ€™ imaginations plays an important role in the classroom. In kindergarten, much of the teaching is done through teacher-led storytelling, without reading from a book. The teachers tell stories based on carefully selected books, while encouraging free play to both teach and inspire. Kids learn through baking, creating books, making snacks, gardening and doing handicrafts. The hands-on quality of the classroom gives one the sense that learning here is both serious and fun, organic and inspiring. Kids reach for the stars while learning the 3 Rs.

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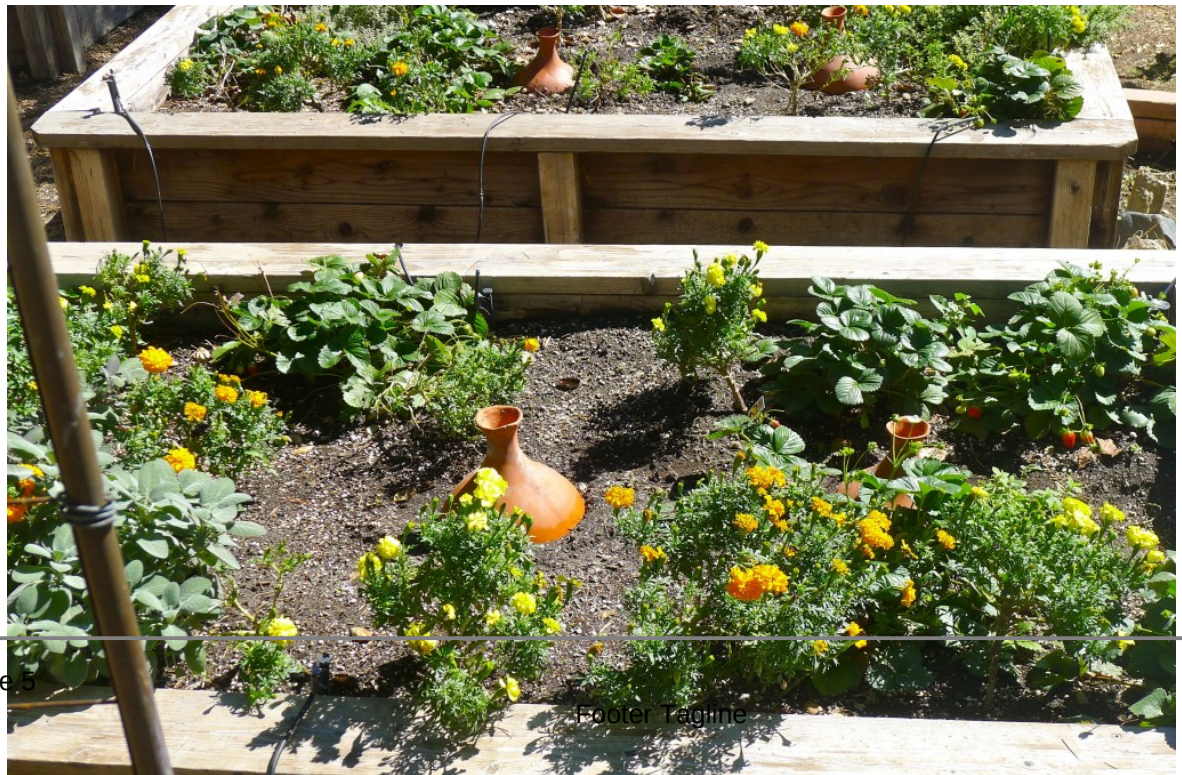
Basketball court

What you wonâ€™t see in the classrooms are computers or technology of any kind. Pasadena Waldorf is a tech-free zone until 9th grade. This is unusual in the world of private schools. But, it fits perfectly with the Waldorf method, which focuses on learning through play, imagination and hands-on experiences with natural materials.

First, Second and Third grade classrooms

Pasadena Waldorf is a structured school, but it is one without the intense academic pressure found in so many private elementary schools. One of my favorite aspects of the program is called â€œlooping.â€• Teachers remain with their students from 1st to 8th grade, forging a deep bond and mutual understanding. There are two kindergarten classes, each with a teacher and an assistant for 20 kids per class.



A place in the sun: the gorgeous garden

Until this year, when the school added its high school, Pasadena Waldorf students went on to 9th grade at The Waverly School, Flintridge Prep., Mayfield, St. Francis, and public schools. Families who attend Pasadena Waldorf live in Pasadena, Altadena, Los Feliz, La Canada and other locations.

My observations of Pasadena Waldorf are that it is a school filled with a love for teaching children to reach their fullest potential. A tried and true philosophy that instills the spirit of adventure radiates from every corner of the school. The educators here have seamlessly blended the past, present and future, creating a warm, nurturing school filled with imaginative elements created byâ€“ and forâ€“ kids. Attention to tiny details combined with a big picture focus on the world in which we live has created a school that is authentic and uncontrived. Encouraging students to dare to dream big is what makes this school so remarkable. Retaining the best elements of eras gone by while remaining just ahead of the educational curve is what Pasadena Waldorf is all about.

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If youâ€™re looking for a school with a distinctive vision, a stunning campus and a style of teaching that has the just the right mix of structure and freedom with a magical, homespun quality, this school might just fit your familyâ€™s wish-list.

The coolest store ever: A carefully curated selection of all things Waldorf-inspired

The schoolâ€™s super-popular Elves Fair is coming up on Sat. Nov. 17th. Admission is free and it the fair is open to the community. It includes music, crafts, games, food, a tea garden, a silent auction and puppet show. Best of all, youâ€™ll get to visit the charming campus store that is stuffed full of amazing Waldorf educational objects and toys. www.elves-fair.com

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For more information, visit, www.pasadenawaldorf.org

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