Growing a Waldorf-Inspired Approach in a Public School District

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Executive Summary

Growing a Waldorf-Inspired Approach in a Public School District documents the practices and outcomes of Alice Birney, a Waldorf-Inspired School in Sacramento City Unified School District (SCUSD). This study highlights how such a school addresses students' academic, social, emotional, physical, and creative development. Birney students outperform similar students in SCUSD on several behavioral and academic measures. The study also examines how a district supports alternative models of education while working to ensure equitable access to a high quality education for all its students. This study provides an opportunity to learn from alternative approaches to schooling to help surface deeply embedded, often unchallenged, assumptions about public education and expand our understanding of the purpose of education and the practices that support the development of the whole child and deep student learning in public schools.

This mixed methods study was conducted over the 2013–14 and 2014–15 school years. We interviewed nearly 40 educators, students, and parents and engaged in almost 40 observations of classrooms, out-of-classroom activities, school events, and teacher trainings. Our quantitative research included an examination of multiple years of student record data from SCUSD including: 1) student demographic data, 2) student standardized test scores, 3) student attendance and behavioral data, and 4) graduation data.

Learning From an Alternative School in the Public Space

As the country moves from the era of NCLB (No Child Left Behind), with high-stakes accountability and narrowing of the curriculum into the potentially more expansive era of Common Core, we can make the most of this critical window of transition to broaden our understanding of the purpose and essential components of a well-rounded education to better prepare students to both survive within and solve the problems of our world. Although this research focuses on a single school, our careful examination of its practices can help inform these goals. Our research also enables us to explore the potential of Waldorf and other alternative approaches in other public school settings, and explore the contextual conditions that support the effective implementation of such alternative traditions.

Grounded in Steiner's theory of child development. At Birney, the Waldorf-inspired approach differs from many other public schools in the extent to which Birney extends its focus beyond providing students with specific knowledge and skills to prepare them for college and career, to also preparing children for meaningful lives in the broadest sense by developing them for physically, socially, artistically, and cognitively meaningful engagement with the world. A second difference is the extent to which Rudolf Steiner's, the founder of Waldorf Schools, theory of child development and goals for nurturing human development inform every aspect of

how children experience school including the curriculum, pedagogy, and structure of school. This research provides an overview of the nature of Waldorf education from kindergarten through eighth grade in the public system.

Teachers engaged in sustained relationships. The execution of Steiner's philosophy through its curriculum, pedagogy, and school structure is strongly supported by the sustained relationships formed between and among teachers, students, and families. Central to this relationship is looping, where teachers ideally commit to staying with their students from first through eighth grade. This sustained relationship fosters deep and lasting ties between teachers and their students as well as teachers and the families of the children in their classes. The curricular freedom that looping affords its teachers directly impacts the pacing of instruction as well. When teachers have the luxury of time, as well as the primary responsibility for their student's education, they are not under pressure to prepare students to a certain level of proficiency at an arbitrary point in time in order to hand off to their next teacher. Teachers can be responsive to the students' needs, readiness for new learning, and skill development in designing their instruction.

Within the context of sustained relationships, instruction in the Waldorf-inspired classroom is built from several key ideas:

1. The teacher teaches the child rather than the subject;
2. Every child develops at his or her own pace;
3. Children move through different developmental stages in which they need different learning environments to thrive;
4. Children will access learning through multiple learning modalities: art, music, handwork, movement, speech, reading, storytelling, hands-on experimentation, practical life skills, and connection to nature. These modalities are taught both discretely and through an interdisciplinary approach;
5. Teachers monitor and respond to children's developmental stages and optimal learning modalities by adjusting their instruction, including the needs of special education students and English Language Learners;
6. Long-term relationships with teachers support students' development.

Well prepared and thoughtful teachers. Steiner's child development theories, while complex and nuanced, provide the teachers with guideposts that give them purpose, intention, and guidance as they develop their curricula and work with students and their families. Although teachers have autonomy and flexibility, they are bound within the frame of Steiner philosophy. Key to this approach is the notion of and support for teachers as lifelong learners who are continually developing their craft.

Teaching in a Waldorf-inspired school requires a significant commitment. It requires teachers to give of themselves completely into the relationships they form with students and families, to cultivate deep knowledge of Steiner philosophy, Waldorf curriculum and pedagogy, to invest in their own continued learning and growth, to engage collaboratively with colleagues, and to play a leadership role in their school.

Powerful parents. Since Birney's inception, parents' demand for and support of a Waldorf-inspired school have been crucial to Birney's sustainability. Twenty years into its history Birney continues to have one of the longest waitlists in the district. Parents' deep commitment to the school, based on a strong understanding of the Waldorf approach, helps them support the school financially, assist in classrooms, lead community-building school functions, and, when necessary, exert political pressure. Collectively these factors have been critical to Birney's staying power and strength.

Producing Strong Results

Quantitative analysis of student record data as well as qualitative analysis of interviews with Birney graduates, reveals that Birney successfully supports students' development. In particular, Birney produces greater gains for its low-income and African American and Latino students than for its school population as a whole. Birney students demonstrate low transiency and suspension rates, positive student-achievement outcomes, and graduate from high school at high rates. The following are some highlights of the positive outcomes of Birney's approach.

- African American and Latino students at Birney have a suspension rate that is ten times lower than similar students in the district.
- Over five years duration for African American, Latino and socio-economically disadvantaged students the effect of attending Birney was correlated with an increase of 8 percentile ranks (i.e. from 50th percentile to 58th percentile) in ELA. Attending Birney had a smaller but positive effect size for these students in math.

Interviews with graduates reveal that their K–8 experiences support their continued growth and learning orientation through high school and college. In particular graduates report they approached their continued education with the assumption that their voices were worth hearing and sharing, be it with peers or their classroom teachers, even if they were taking a minority or unorthodox position. Driven to pursue personally relevant educational interests, for the purpose of self-improvement and curiosity, they did not fear failure but understood it to be a part of the learning process. Profoundly, many students commented on the social responsibility they felt to engage the world in a meaningful way that makes the world a better place.

Space to Flourish

Alice Birney has succeeded and persisted in retaining fidelity to the Waldorf approach and in serving students well because of both school and district level policies and practices particularly in the areas of instructional practice and well-trained teachers.

At the school level. Gradually over time, Birney cultivated increasing levels of district-sanctioned school-based decision-making over curriculum and assessment, which were critical to developing and sustaining key practices. Although the school taught the Waldorf curriculum since its inception, at times struggle and advocacy were necessary to have the approach officially approved by the district. In turn, the district required Birney to justify its practices and demonstrate its alignment to more mainstream instructional approaches and assessments. This helped the Waldorf educators reflect and deepen their practice and ensure that they were meeting the needs of all their students.

Well-trained and thoughtful teachers play a large role in Birney's success. Ensuring highly qualified teachers proved essential to Birney's sustainability. After several years of advocacy Birney earned control over a range of practices to ensure a high level of professional capacity with their staff. These practices include hiring and job security policies that privileges Waldorf training and support for training in Waldorf methods.

At the district level. When alternative schools are given a say over how to support meaningful learning, it enables the schools to come out of the shadows of non-compliance and to create more coherence in their instructional models. Schools can channel their energy from fighting battles around what they are doing to improving their practice. However, the degree of school-based decision-making that is appropriate is highly dependent upon how well developed the instructional approach, the capacity of the staff, and the resources available to support teacher capacity building and planning time. These are crucial areas where the district can provide differentiated support to schools.

When the unique training and expertise of alternative models are honored with supportive HR policies, schools can achieve stability and sustainability and are more likely to produce strong outcomes. Districts need to ensure that the quality of alternative training is adequate to support the alternative model. Furthermore, from an equity perspective, districts need to be mindful of potentially inequitable distributions of highly trained and skilled teachers across their schools and balance the types of resources and training to which all districts have access.

Context Matters. The success of Alice Birney, a school often at direct odds with prevailing notions of curriculum, pedagogy, and pacing of instruction, is striking.

We assert that Birney has succeeded and persisted because of a number of interwoven factors. First, while varied over the years, the district's commitment to fostering innovation and to allowing some school-based decision-making enabled Birney to maintain fidelity to the Waldorf approach. Second, as Birney produced positive student outcomes and sustained a consistent demand for the school, the district provided increased opportunities for school control over its instructional program. Finally, it may be that the consistent demand for the school and the positive student outcomes are due, in part, to the comprehensive nature and coherence of the Waldorf approach to schooling.

Conclusion

The story of Alice Birney, a public district school of choice, provides a powerful example of the types of alternative educational approaches that are possible within the public system. Often at odds with prevailing norms and assumptions about the nature of schooling, Birney provides a counterbalance for what is possible to nurture the growth of the whole child. Particularly powerful are the examples of the ways the school attends to children's social-emotional, physical, and artistic development and how this focus has profoundly shaped its graduates into the young adults they are today.

It is striking to see such an approach supported and promoted within the context of a school district. Birney was able to achieve fidelity to the Waldorf approach because SCUSD granted them decision-making control, although often hard fought for, over curriculum, assessment and staffing decisions. That fidelity to a cohesive and holistic approach in turn led to high levels of student and parent satisfaction, demand for the school, and strong student outcomes.

These areas of decentralized decision-making permit opportunities in the public district space for alternative approaches, without forcing a de-unionized, deregulated, often profit-driven charter route. Ironically, schools like Birney have the potential to achieve some of the original goals for the charter school movement. By serving as sites for innovation, district schools can learn much from their example about broader ways to conceptualize school and student development.

Preface

Research on Waldorf Schools

Although beyond the scope of our research, we offer a brief overview of past research on Waldorf Schools to place our work in context. The holistic approach championed by proponents of Waldorf-inspired education appears to offer a promising alternative to more traditional attempts to meet the needs of children and youth. However, the validity and efficacy of this alternative has been studied largely by those who are directly involved in the work. As Waldorf-inspired schooling continues its expansion into the public sector, the research base must be enlarged to allow for a more independent evaluation of its legitimacy. Additionally, more research is needed to understand whether and how Waldorf-inspired schools, both individually and collectively, meet the specific academic, social, and emotional needs of racially and linguistically diverse urban public school students.

The Research Institute for Waldorf Education and its semi-annual Research Bulletin, along with The Waldorf Early Education Association of North America's Gateways, generate most of the English-language research on Waldorf education in North America. This research is neither fully independent nor peer-reviewed by educational scholars not directly affiliated with the Waldorf mission.[1] Though not primarily motivated by the desire to provide outsiders a clear view on the methodologies used to generate the research, both the *Research Bulletin* and *Gateways* serve as barometers for what the larger English-speaking North American Waldorf community considers important.

Most of the recent work produced by the *Research Bulletin* or *Gateways* between 1996 and 2014 tends to be small scale and qualitative or philosophical. Being largely qualitative in nature, research topics from the *Research Bulletin* and *Gateways* ranged from the particularities of implementing specific aspects of the Waldorf Method (Trostli, 2014), to the importance of improving teacher education (Biesta, 2013). This qualitative focus on patterns and trends provides rich, small-scale snapshots of classroom and school life in a variety of largely private Waldorf school settings. However, the lack of large-scale quantitative analysis prevents both Waldorf advocates and independent researchers from having a comprehensive system-wide understanding of long-term trends in Waldorf education.

There are few large-scale quantitative or qualitative comparative studies of Waldorf schools—either public or private—with one another, and fewer still that compare public Waldorf-inspired schools with their similarly constituted public school counterparts (Woods, Ashley, & Woods, 2005). Even smaller are the number of studies that focus on urban public Waldorf-inspired schools. The Waldorf research community in North America seems to be aware of the existing data and methodological criticisms and is attempting to move parts of its own research agenda towards

addressing them through the generation of larger scale quantitative or mixed-methods studies. *The Survey of Waldorf Graduates* (Gerwin & Mitchell, 2007b) is the most comprehensive response to this issue from the community itself. This was reflected in the stated objectives of its authors:

> By design, this survey of Waldorf school graduates solicited both quantitative and qualitative data in order to form a living yet statistically based portrait. The thrust of this research was not to give sole credit to Waldorf schools for the achievements of their alumni/ae but to paint a picture of these graduates as a way of seeing who they are as they head out into the world (Gerwin & Mitchell, 2007a, p. 15).

The community is also aware of the importance of supporting independent and comparative examinations of both public and private Waldorf and Waldorf-inspired schools (Gerwin & Mitchell, 2007b).

Outside of the existing Waldorf-generated literature, three independent studies are highlighted here that reflect promising methodological approaches to filling gaps in the existing research base around public Waldorf-inspired schools. The first (McDermott et al., 1996) was a qualitative study of the nation's first public Waldorf school: Milwaukee Urban Waldorf School (no longer in operation as a Waldorf school). It provided independent evidence to support many of the qualitative claims of increased student well-being and academic performance made by the Waldorf research community. The second (Oberman, 2007) was a mixed-methods study comparing public California charter schools to one another, melding statistical analysis of student achievement data with qualitative interviews of members of individual public Waldorf school community members. The third, and most comprehensive, entitled *Twenty Years and Counting: A Look at Waldorf in the Public Sector Using Online Sources* (Larrison, Daly, & Van Vooren, 2012), compared public Waldorf-inspired schools in California to one another, as well as their non-Waldorf peers using three sets of STAR test data. Additionally, the researchers gathered and coded online reviews of public Waldorf-inspired schools in the state to provide a sense of how respondents saw these schools. Though each of these three studies (McDermott et al., 1996; Oberman, 2007; Larrison, Daly, & Van Vooren, 2012) focused on a particular area of interest, when placed together they provide a multilevel view of the public Waldorf-inspired system that is largely missing from the existing research base. Collectively, the studies showed that public Waldorf-inspired schools in a variety of settings (urban, suburban, middle-income, or low-income) have better social and academic outcomes than the majority of similarly constituted public schools. Qualitatively, these studies showed that the Waldorf philosophy provided students and teachers with a space to develop meaningful and lasting relationships where students were seen holistically. These schools were seen as happy, caring places that supported student development in a variety of areas, with the goal of developing well-rounded individuals.

As Waldorf-inspired schooling continues its expansion into the public sector, the research base must be enlarged to allow for a more independent evaluation of its legitimacy. Particularly in urban settings, the holistic approach championed by proponents of Waldorf-inspired education offers a promising alternative to meet the needs of diverse students. However, the validity and efficacy of this alternative remains almost entirely unexplored by the traditional research community. Additionally, more independent research is needed to understand how Waldorf-inspired schools, both individually and collectively, do or do not meet the specific academic, social, cultural, and emotional needs of economically, racially, and linguistically diverse urban public school students.

Chapter 1: Introduction and Background of the Study

For the entire first hour of the morning in a seventh-grade classroom at Alice Birney School, there is not a single sound from Mr. Martin.[2] And yet order rather than chaos prevails. What is happening here? The teacher, a long-time veteran, conducts the opening of the school day like a mute maestro, greeting each student at the door with a gentle handshake and friendly nod, leading students through their morning routine of calisthenics, making eye contact in some places, using hand signals in others, as the class enthusiastically stretches, twists, and reaches. The class continues through its routine: into choral song, verse recitation, and homework review. All the while, the teacher silently directs and connects with students, prompting particular individuals to answer the questions of their classmates, or gently touching the shoulders of others who have lost focus in order to redirect them. An air of deep, hard-won trust is palpable. The students trust their teacher, and he them. Having traversed their educational journey together beginning in first grade, what transpires in his classroom did not emerge instantaneously, but through hard work and dedication to a core set of values and practices. This pervasive sense of trust, that is so notably absent in many schools, embodies the essence of public Waldorf-inspired education. It is a trust that fuels nearly everything at Alice Birney.

This report is a study of the practices and outcomes of Alice Birney School—a public Waldorf-inspired school in Sacramento, California, that stands in sharp contrast to the common practices of most American schools and accomplishes extraordinary outcomes. Students stay with the same teacher for the eight initial years of their education and engage in a set of deeply personalized and authentic educational experiences that differ dramatically from what they would encounter in any other type of school. The curriculum and teacher's pedagogy is deeply rooted in a well-developed, complex theory of child development that informs an instructional approach integrating the arts, physical and social-emotional development, and practical skills. At Birney they do not focus primarily on building basic skills in the early grades or implementing a standardized curriculum. And yet the school proves effective at achieving the goals most often advocated for 21st century schools: young people who are highly literate and numerate, deeply knowledgeable about the physical and social world, critical and creative problem solvers, independent thinkers, collaborators, and communicators. In this study, we explain how this occurs.

Why Examine Public Waldorf-Inspired Schools?

> "If we taught babies to talk as most skills are taught in school, they would memorize lists of sounds in a predetermined order and practice them alone in a closet."
>
> —Linda Darling-Hammond

In part because of the narrowing of the curriculum in response to the accountability pressures of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), public education in the United States has often come to mean a set of specific types of experiences based on largely unquestioned assumptions, for example:

- Schools should make students competitive at the local, state, national, and international levels.
- Standardized testing captures student learning better than other measures.
- Educational equity is best achieved through systems of accountability that focus on grade-level standards applied equally to all students in a standardized curriculum.
- Instruction should focus primarily on basic literacy and mathematics skill development.
- Curriculum should prioritize basic skills; there is no time for imagination and creative play
- Explicit reading (decoding) instruction should begin in pre-K.
- The instructional pace should move quickly to keep students engaged.

The Waldorf-inspired approach adopts none of these assumptions or the practices that accompany them. Examining alternative models allows us to surface deeply embedded, unchallenged assumptions about education. Waldorf schooling proves an excellent model for this type of analysis. Although most Waldorf education occurs in private schools, there are several well-implemented and long-standing Waldorf-inspired public schools, including Alice Birney School. This study, of Alice Birney School, founded in 1995, enables us to examine multiple important questions:

1. What are the essential components of a public Waldorf-inspired model that can contribute to positive outcomes for students of any background?

2. What are the academic, social, and personal outcomes for students who attended Alice Birney School overall and from different demographic groups?

3. How was an urban school district able to support alternative models of education, like Waldorf, to flourish in the public system?

Although this research focuses on a single school, we hope that our careful examination of its practices, its district context, and its outcomes will help create a frame from which to examine other schools and to question the very nature of schooling across our public system. This study may enable researchers and practitioners to explore the potential of Waldorf education in other public school settings, suggesting further possibilities for additional research and drawing inferences from the Alice Birney model about the contextual conditions that support the effective implementation of such innovations. This research will help fill a gap in research on the Waldorf model, since it is one of the only studies conducted of a public Waldorf school and one of the few conducted outside the Waldorf establishment.

A Short History of Steiner Philosophy and Waldorf Schooling

An understanding of the history of Rudolf Steiner and the Waldorf Schools provides important context to Waldorf public schools in their current incarnation. Born in 1861 to Austrian parents, Steiner, the creator of Waldorf schools dedicated his life to addressing spiritual questions and cultural challenges by means of philosophical insights and practical solutions. Heavily influenced by the works of Kant, Goethe, and other German idealists, Steiner would call his own philosophy anthroposophy. At the center of anthroposophy is the individual, whose independence and freedom society must encourage. His 1894 book, *The Philosophy of Freedom*, most clearly outlines his view for the bridging of the spiritual, philosophical, scientific, and practical realms. It continues to have significant influence on contemporary adherents of anthroposophy and acts as a philosophical foundation for the curriculum of many

private Waldorf schools. Though the philosophy of anthroposophy is the backbone of much of the Waldorf approach to schooling, it is not directly taught to children (http://www.waldorfanswers.com/Waldorf.htm).

Steiner viewed education as a vehicle for reimagining the development of individuals within society and, therefore, for reimagining society as a whole. He believed that the health of society was at stake. He viewed society as having three independent and interdependent spheres: economic, political, and cultural. Known as social threefolding, Steiner saw these three aspects of society as constantly evolving and growing in greater independence from and interdependence with one another. This belief in the independence of each sphere came out of Germany's experience with World War I where, according to Steiner, the fusion of all three social realms created the conditions that resulted in the war (Staudenmaier, 2009).

Steiner believed no sphere should dominate the development of the others. For instance, the economic realm should not dictate the cultural, or vice versa. Steiner thought cultural institutions like museums and libraries should be open to all free of charge, and all families—not just those who had the money to do so—should have the freedom to select the type of education that best fit their children's needs (Usher, n.d.). Additionally, Steiner advocated for the independence of science and academics from politics, and argued government had no business regulating expression or thought. Steiner's exaltation of the individual and his or her independence did not mean that he abandoned cooperation. He argued, for example, that "economic activity should be organized and carried out in the spirit of brotherhood with the objective of meeting the needs of all human beings on the planet" (Usher, n.d., para. 4). Schools would play a central role in the creation of a world where man's independence, and thus the independence of these larger social spheres, would be fostered.

In 1917, Emil Molt, owner of the Waldorf Astoria Cigarette Factory in Stuttgart, Germany, attended a series of lectures by Steiner (Tautz, 1982, p. 16). Moved by their content, Molt publicly advocated for Steiner's philosophical positions and in 1919 invited Steiner to lead a school for the children of his employees (pp. 26-27). Initially funded by the company, the school gained full independence by 1920. Radically different from traditional German forms of education, which encouraged rigid discipline and conformity, the Waldorf school engaged in several progressive practices: For example, it was co-educational and open to all regardless of ethnicity or religion, with the children of company employees having their tuition fully paid by the company (http://www.rudolfsteinerweb.com/a/emil_molt.php). The school proved to be popular, and within five years its population grew from roughly 300 students to over 1,100.

Introduced to this new approach to education by Steiner and developmental in their methods, the faculty believed their job was to facilitate the individual growth of each child through three distinct seven-year phases. The curriculum integrated arts, music, and practical skills with traditional academic subject matter.

Other anthroposophically influenced courses, such as eurythmy (movement) and form drawing, further differentiated the Waldorf school from its other German counterparts.

Because of their progressive nature, Waldorf schools spread relatively quickly both inside and outside of Germany throughout the 1920s amongst families looking for a different way of educating their children (Werner & Von Plato, n.d.). However, with the rise of the Nazi party, growth of Waldorf schools throughout Europe was slowed or stopped altogether (Werner, 1999).

After World War II, many of the formerly shuttered German Waldorf schools reopened and others were founded. Fueled largely by the Waldorf commitment to cooperation, mutual understanding and the development of the whole person, post-War Germany saw a rapid rise in the number of Waldorf schools. Similar, though slower, growth took place in Western Europe and the U.K. Though present in North America since 1928, much of the growth in Waldorf education began in the 1960s, amongst a climate of anti-authoritarianism and experimentation, and continues today in communities committed to a slower, more holistic approach to the education of their children. Since the 1990s, Waldorf-inspired schools have expanded into the public school sector (largely charter). California leads the nation with approximately 24 public Waldorf or Waldorf-inspired schools (http://www.allianceforpublicwaldorfeducation.org/find-a-school/). In 2013, there were approximately 1,056 Waldorf schools in over 60 countries (Federation of Waldorf Schools in Germany, 2015).[3]

Though Steiner, who died in 1925, did not live to see the global expansion of his ideas, his intellectual and philosophical presence continues to dominate the modern Waldorf movement. Some aspects of his philosophy have proven controversial (Chertoff, 2012; McDermott & Oberman, 1996), but others, like his advocacy for physicality, music, arts, relationships, and a holistic developmental approach to children, attract scores of families and educators who seek an alternative to the NCLB-influenced narrowing of curriculum in many schools. As Waldorf schools have moved into the 21st century, the community negotiates a balance between staying true to the core tenets of Steiner's philosophy while expanding their mission in a world often at odds with those tenets.

Waldorf schools and theory today. Nearly 100 years after the founding of the first Waldorf School, Steiner's theory of child development continues to have salience for many educators. From curriculum to pedagogy, nearly every choice made in a Waldorf school setting is motivated by a belief in Steiner's theory of human development that breaks child development into three 7-year stages. According to *The Alliance for Public Waldorf Education* (2013), teachers in a Waldorf setting *must* [emphasis added] accept a human development view of their students to effectively implement the curriculum (p. 9). The Alliance also argues "Through a shared

understanding of child development, teachers across grades can work in concert and in correspondence with a child's level of maturity and developing capacities" (2013, p. 10). The overarching theory influences nearly every aspect of the school, from personal relationships between teachers and students, to what will be taught and when, to how the classroom is laid out. It provides teachers with a structure and philosophy to follow and within which to have autonomy and creativity. Many public schools lack this well-defined philosophy leaving teachers more adrift in determining their intentions for student learning and shaping their practice.

Academics remain central to the Waldorf approach, however teachers are motivated by the desire to develop the entire child, not just his or her cognitive capacities. Although non-Waldorf educators may agree with holistic approaches to child development, they are limited by the structures of their school environments to fully realize these goals. However, the Waldorf classroom puts this belief in holism into daily practice. In an educational system obsessed with college and career readiness, Waldorf schools are devoted to life readiness. This focus on patience and holism is a radical departure from what larger society currently demands of its teachers and students. In recent years the increased focus on accountability and narrowed curriculum has emphasized speed and content breadth. In a Waldorf school, that focus is deemed developmentally inappropriate and a slower pace and depth of study are privileged.

From a Waldorf perspective, the child, like society, is a dynamic and evolving being, whose independence and freedom should be carefully maximized. *The Alliance for Public Waldorf Education* explains the theory this way:

> The individual child's journey is considered to be a microcosm of the human journey, with emerging capacities and an ever-expanding worldview at each step...The relationship between self and world changes, and the child's consciousness moves from [an] early dreamy state, through concrete engagement with the physical world [stage 1]; to imaginative, picture-filled thinking [stage 2]; to the independent critical thinking and self-direction of the young adult [stage 3]. (2013, p. 9)

Few schools or programs describe who children are supposed to be at different points in their lives like Waldorf schools. Most tend to think of each grade in terms of what students should be able to do in specific content areas. Rarely do schools describe children in terms of a larger vision for who the children should be as people. This is a key distinction, one that has dramatic impacts on the choices made for students in a Waldorf setting. This also partially explains why Waldorf children underperform on standardized measures of reading and mathematics in the first three grades. Steiner's theory of child development finds it inappropriate to force students to learn to do things if they are not ready. This does not mean that Waldorf teachers are not laying

the foundations for future development. However, it does mean that they will not force development onto students, especially if that development comes at the cost of the cultivation of other important skills—skills that most standardized tests do not measure. Indeed, *The Alliance for Public Waldorf Education* encourages Waldorf educators to see curriculum as:

> Not a fixed or rigid document—or a set of student outcomes progressively laid out on a prescribed timeline—but a living instrument of educators, who become engaged in a thoughtful, creative process, fostering the healthy growth of their students. (2013, p. 9)

The healthy growth of students, from a Waldorf perspective, involves significant interaction with natural materials and human life processes: growing and eating organic foods from the school garden; carding and knitting items from real wool; building and investigating with wood, sand, earth, clay, and water; painting, sculpting, moving, and making music. In later sections of this report, we discuss in more detail how Steiner's theories play out in the lived experiences of students, teachers and parents at Alice Birney.

Chapter 2: Study Methods

Our Research Approach

Our study uses a mixed-methods approach to examine school practices and outcomes for students in public urban Waldorf-inspired schools. Few independent studies have generated the amount of qualitative data around this topic as we have, and this study helps to demystify the largely misunderstood world of Waldorf-inspired schools. We believe that the words and stories of the parents, faculty, staff, alumni, and students provide a level of insight into what makes the school function that would otherwise be missed if our methodology were primarily quantitative.

The study was conducted over the 2013–14 and 2014–15 school years with several intensive site visits to Alice Birney Waldorf-Inspired School as well as visits to the other public Waldorf-inspired schools in the Sacramento City School District, A.M. Winn and George Washington Carver School of Arts and Science. For this study we conducted 39 interviews and focus groups with a Steiner College administrator, district administrators, school administrators, teachers, support staff, students, graduates, parents, and community members and conducted 38 observations of classrooms, out-of-classroom activities, school events, and teacher training.

In order to examine the outcomes for students who attended a Waldorf-inspired public school in Sacramento City Unified School District (SCUSD), we examined student-level data. We analyzed multiple years of student record data including the following elements: 1) student demographic data, 2) student achievement data, 3) student attendance and behavioral data, and 4) graduation data.

To analyze student experiences and engagement in school we compared student attendance and suspension rates at Birney with other Sacramento City Unified School District (SCUSD) schools from the 2010–2014 school years. We used value-added methodologies (VAM) to examine the influence of attending Birney on students' achievement gains on the California Star Tests (CST) in ELA and math relative to other similar students in SCUSD. This regression model based on five years of consecutive data (2008–09 through 2012–13) includes student-level demographic variables to control for the influence of student characteristics (gender, free/reduced price lunch status, race/ethnicity, language status, special education status, and prior achievement) on students ELA and math performance. Finally, although the data were limited, we were able to track two eighth-grade cohorts of John Morse (the school site prior to Birney) for their four-year high school enrollment and completion status in SCUSD. (See Appendix A for more details about the study methods.)

Our study is among the first to access detailed public data and provide an up-to-date picture of the academic performance of a public Waldorf-inspired school. Placed together, both methods allow researchers, practitioners, and policymakers, along with other interested parties, to have the most comprehensive view of a public Waldorf-inspired school currently available.

Chapter 3: Waldorf Education Comes to Sacramento City School District

Gradual and Deep Implementation of the Waldorf approach in SCUSD

Key elements in place in Sacramento enabled educators to sow the seeds of public Waldorf-inspired schools. First, in 1959, the Sacramento Waldorf School was founded as a private school. Today the school is "one of the largest private Waldorf schools in North America with over 400 students, it is viewed as a mature and successful Waldorf school" (http://www.sacwaldorf.org/about-sws.html). Second, Rudolf Steiner College, founded in 1976, is the largest and one of the oldest Waldorf teacher training centers on the West Coast. In addition, several other private Waldorf schools have sprung up in the Sacramento area as well in the past 25 years. All of these institutions provided: a dedicated community of activists committed to expanding Waldorf education to as many students as possible; a supply of teachers with an awareness of and interest in Waldorf methods, resources, and knowledge; and a parent community hungry for Waldorf learning environments for their children. These institutions planted the seeds for the birth of three public Waldorf-inspired schools in the Sacramento City Unified School District (SCUSD) over the past 20 years.

The first public school. The move towards public Waldorf-inspired schools began with SCUSD Superintendent Rudy Crew in the early 1990s. Crew was inspired by a visit to Milwaukee to the first public Waldorf-inspired school in the country. He requested that the faculty of Steiner College help him start five public Waldorf-inspired schools. They responded that the first step was to see if there was interest from Waldorf-trained teachers.

In 1991–92, Crew formally formed a committee to explore the possibility of a public Waldorf-inspired school in Sacramento that followed the Milwaukee model. Out of this work came more formal district financial support, in the form of Title I funds, for training interested teachers; almost 60 showed up. One current Birney teacher recalled being sent to the training despite a lack of interest and being transformed, thinking "Oh my gosh, this is something!" The training allowed like-minded teachers to network and meet one another. Through this initiative, several teachers, including Birney's founding teachers, Katherine Lehman and Lauren Rice,[4] organized teachers into a group called Waldorf Inspired Educators (WISE). Rice described the group's genesis this way:

> There were various other people, some that knew nothing about Waldorf Education, all different schools all over the district, most of us did not know each other....[T]here was probably a core of about six or eight teachers really that just kept meeting.

However, their momentum would be subdued with departure of Superintendent Crew. Rice describes the difficulties they faced:

> [W]e were in this swamp of no man's land, there was no administrative support, we were all teaching at different schools, there was no core, and so we just kept meeting at different peoples' classrooms... we just decided we were not going to stop meeting. And so we kept meeting and we found a few little inroads, we found some special education money that we did some teacher training through that because, of course, movement and arts education and rhythm activities and all of those things that were good for special needs children...but that was one way we kept sort of dangling bait out in the district.

The group began to explore the possibility of creating their own school. They met with district leadership, only to be told they would have to convince an entire faculty at a school site and they were told:

> Nobody really cared about many things that we thought were important, social-emotional learning? No, that was off the table.... [W]e were moving into standards, and we had to show how Waldorf Education was going to teach these academic standards.

During this time SCUSD underwent a dramatic restructuring to desegregate its schools. Out of this came several magnet programs designed to lure white parents into schools with low white populations. Oakridge Elementary School was one of the schools that explored the possibility of converting into a magnet school. WISE and representatives from Steiner College were asked to make a presentation to Oakridge's school community. To their surprise, the Oakridge teachers voted to adopt the Waldorf model, although as later events indicate, they did not fully understand the implications of their vote.

Several WISE teachers, including Lehman and Rice, were hired to teach at Oakridge as it restructured as a Waldorf-inspired school in the 1995–96 school year. However, the district did not approach the transformation of the school thoughtfully. They did not sufficiently address building teacher and community understanding or buy-in to the model. Rather, it was imposed on the community. Rice discussed some of the early challenges:

> [T]here was a very sort of uncomfortable and ugly transition of the teachers that were there. [They] either had to become Waldorf teachers whether they wanted to or not, or leave the school, and many did leave the school....[The school district] dropped it in without any parent education. They didn't know what we were. There were all kinds of language and cultural issues, including Southeast Asian fathers

> saying, "You want my son to knit, that's women's work." It went from that to the Latino families saying, "I'm sending my kid to school so he doesn't have to dig in the dirt....why is he in the garden? I want him on the computer." There was just no cultural foundation to build a school, so that was a very painful year that involved lawsuits and really bad press and very ugly.

The founding Oakridge teachers questioned the district's commitment to train teachers and fully adopt the Waldorf approach. Many Oakridge teachers were not willing to fully commit to the Waldorf philosophy and approach and resisted efforts at retraining. But a core of highly committed teachers were open to the new ideas and carried them forward in spite of the turmoil and dissent.

By the start of the second year, 1996–1997, a small organized public opposition emerged amid accusations of "witchcraft" (Lindeloff, 2003). The small group responsible for the claims, People for Legal and Non-Sectarian Schools (PLANS), "an unlikely coalition of conservative Christians, agnostics, and atheists," issued legal challenges asserting that the program at Oakridge, and later John Morse, violated the establishment clause of the constitution, asserting that anthroposophy was a religion (Lindeloff, 2003). All of these lawsuits were dismissed (the last in 2012) over issues of standing or the plaintiff's inability to establish that anthroposophy was indeed a religion (PLANS, 2012). The legal action consumed much of the teachers' time and energy and required them to distance themselves from using public district dollars towards Steiner College training, in case anthroposophy was deemed a religion. Teachers, therefore, had to spend their own money to receive training.

A new start for the Waldorf-inspired school. In order to give the school respite from its critics—both internal and external—as well as other issues resulting from its founding, the district relocated the school to the John Morse Elementary campus in 1997, in its third year. All the Waldorf teachers at Oakridge were moved to an unused campus at Morse School. Although a bus was provided to any families that wanted to continue at Morse, very few came. The district placed responsibility on the teachers to recruit students to the school. One teacher recalls that process:

> And we literally went to door-to-door knocking on peoples' doors, like we looked for strollers in the front yard, they've got kids...it wasn't a neighborhood school, it was just an empty building, and so we sort of canvassed the neighborhood and we got some people there.

However on the first day of school, the school started with 10 teachers and 86 students, which was clearly not sustainable. The district gave the staff a year to increase enrollment and provided support through direct mail campaigns. The staff was desperate for students and one of the outcomes of that need was a high percentage of special education students. As a founding teacher recalls:

> So if you were breathing and you wanted to come to this school, we said, yes...[W]hen the dust settles you often find yourselves with a very high number of special ed. kids and kids with lots of various kinds of learning and social problems, and that was the case. But by the end of the year we had doubled in size and...the district allowed us to keep our 10 staff members and continue the program.

This level of faculty engagement and programmatic advocacy would play a central role in the school's development. The teachers at Morse went above and beyond what many would have expected of them because they truly believed in the value of what they were doing and the promise it provided for their students, including testifying at school board meetings and spending their summers surveying neighborhood families. As a founder recalls, "The core group of teachers knew every school board member, and they knew us, and there was a tremendous political advocacy on the staff to protect this program."

Teacher involvement would be the core driver of the school as it matured. As one founding teacher explains, "Waldorf schools are teacher-driven schools, and so in the early years I think we had to be really...really firm about what we would try, what we weren't going to try, and why, and we had to really know the why." The first administrators of the school were not strong advocates for Waldorf methods and struggled with the district perception that they could not control their teachers. However, it was the teachers' clarity of vision that enabled the school to persist.

The school has had four principals since its inception, and only the last two—former principal, Cheryl Eining, and current principal, Mechelle Horning—could be classified as strong advocates for Waldorf methods. A founding teacher described the evolving relationship between teachers and administrators in the following way:

> We had to sort of thread this needle and find people that were willing...there were times when rules could be bent, and there were times that rules could be broken, and there were times that they couldn't.... And I think it took, especially in the beginning, teachers that were just willing to say, no, this is what it should look like, really create a division of what a public school would look like. We knew it wouldn't be like the private schools.

The district-mandated Open Court reading program became a source of tension as it directly contradicted the Waldorf approach to literacy development. At times the school has had to rally parents to engage the district to ensure that the school could sustain its commitment to the Waldorf curriculum, as it did when the kindergarten teachers were supposed to implement Open Court district-wide. As a founding teacher recalls:

> [S]o the parents contacted the school district and the school district realized they had a number of parents...who were really opposed to this adoption, and were clear that they had chosen Waldorf Education, they weren't blind to the differences in pacing between Waldorf Education and the mainstream, and so that was able to stop, but it was another kind of emergency that happened.

The advocacy efforts of parents and teachers prevented the school's teachers from having to teach Open Court. These challenges are discussed further in the last section of the report on policy issues.

Another time, another founding teacher recalls, district reading coaches were being sent into the school to teach the teachers how to use the basal reader.

> We all looked at each other and said, "well, number one, we know how to use a basal reader, and number two, we are not going to." And we didn't pitch a fit, we just said, "you can visit another school because this isn't what we're doing."

After these experiences the teachers realized the importance of developing a strong line of communication with the curriculum department and showing that their curriculum was aligned to district expectations. They were also careful not to react negatively to the district-mandated curriculum.

> It became really pressing that we explain to the curriculum department what were we doing, and when. Thus began years of work about looking at...the district standards, then later it became the district adopted state standards, [and we created] curriculum maps, where we would address every single standard and show when we were teaching it.

This effort took a tremendous time commitment on the part of the teachers, again further deepening their understanding of and commitment to the Waldorf approach. As a founding teacher explains:

> We truly had to make our own scope and sequence for our curriculum....We said...what are we, what are we covering every grade, you can imagine how many hours this took as a whole faculty to...it didn't matter what grade you taught because if you're a class teacher, you're coming around sooner or later, it was a collective effort....But we did the work so that we could stand behind our curriculum and say, absolutely, we're teaching every single one of these skills, but our timeline is completely different, almost completely different in the lower grades. And then we finally got board approval.

This willingness to compromise in order to protect the larger vision of the school played a key role in its growth. A key decision that the faculty of Morse made was to become a school of choice. Though this has had a direct impact on the school's racial, economic, and linguistic diversity, it reflects, further still, the staff's willingness to compromise. They understood that having parents and students who want to be a part of the community is important in any school, but that for something as radically different as Waldorf education, choice mattered even more. Though founding teachers appreciated the upsides of being a school of choice, they also expressed a contradiction:

> [A]s the school was becoming more successful, it was becoming noticed by the white community and then people in higher socioeconomic group within the white community, so now people were signing up ahead of time, and our classes were beginning to fill, and we saw that our diversity was going down, which was very frustrating, especially because of these high hopes in the beginning...I came to at least one conclusion, which is that it has...in the beginning, when it's coming into the public system, it had to be where teachers and parents felt strong enough that they could go down to the school board and say, "What are you doing? We went to this school because it was like this, please don't change it, please support it."

Despite its challenging start, Morse grew rapidly and eventually had a substantial waiting list.

Maturing and spreading Waldorf-inspired schools in the district. The arrival of Jonathan Raymond as district superintendent (2009–2013) profoundly influenced the future growth of public Waldorf-inspired schools in Sacramento, and the community at Morse in particular. In his first 100 days as superintendent, Raymond committed himself to visiting every school in the district, spending about 40 minutes at each site. He had a vague notion of what Waldorf schools were about but had never seen one in action. He described his visit to Morse this way:

> When I got to John Morse, there was such a sweetness—there was a garden, there were mud boots outside of the door, children were singing, and I was taken by that. I visited every classroom and ended up staying for two-and-a-half hours. I was impressed by the physical set up of the classrooms, the calm demeanor of the teachers and the students, the children's respectful attitudes; by eurythmy, music, violin. This was a school where students, staff, and parents were happy. I liked that. (Romer, 2012, p. 3)

Raymond's personal investment in maintaining the programmatic integrity of Morse motivated him to work with the local teachers' union in order to make sure that

all teachers at Morse would have Waldorf training or commit to Waldorf training. Raymond remembers responding to concerns from parents who reported to him that "this great experiment was going down the tubes fast." Superintendent Raymond hired the school's current principal, Mechelle Horning, due to her willingness to work with the teachers and school community in not only protecting the essence of the school but also expanding it. Perhaps the ultimate testament to Raymond's belief in the vision at Morse was the fact that he enrolled his son and two daughters there. Raymond would also oversee the expansion of George Washington Carver School of Arts and Sciences, the first public Waldorf-inspired high school in the country and the creation of a second K–8 Waldorf-inspired school, A.M. Winn, during his tenure. These schools' creation and development are discussed in Appendix D.

Fourteen years after the move to Morse, in 2010–2011, Raymond spearheaded the school's relocation to Alice Birney School, an empty campus a couple of miles away, to allow for its expansion to accommodate its long waiting list. This move also enabled the Morse campus to be used for students with cognitive difficulties who had been previously housed at a remote location. Superintendent Raymond hoped that expanding to the Birney campus would help stem the loss of children from the district and "bring more of our kids from non-public spaces back."

Instead of having only one grade-level class at a time, by 2014 the school had two classes per grade level in Grades 1–8 and expanded into a program for early kindergarten through eighth grade. The school now brims with children and has separate classrooms slightly away from the other classrooms specifically for its seventh- and eighth-grade students. Even with this move, Birney has one of the longest waitlists of any school in the district. Despite its growth the community still uses familial language to describe itself. Be it parents, administrators, students, or teachers, a sense of family and community permeates the experience provided by the school. Table 1 illustrates the population of Birney students.

Yet, the real key to the long-term and sustained success of the Morse/Birney project is the faculty's commitment to a clear vision for what they wanted and continue to want the school to be, as well as the continued availability of teachers both committed to the Waldorf approach as well as trained in it. Teachers tend to stay at Birney for many, many years and make strong connections with parents, who in turn become extremely strong advocates for the school's program. The average tenure of the current staff is 15 years although many have been at the school

Table 1: Alice Birney School Demographics, 2014–15

Student characteristics	
Enrollment	584
Race/ethnicity	
African American	7%
Asian/Pacific Islander	4%
Latino	20%
White	60%
Multiple ethnic groups	8%
English language learners	4%
Socioeconomically disadvantaged	29%

Source: http://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest

for 20 years since its founding. A veteran teacher talked of the importance of having a stable vision to which the community could attach itself:

> I think whenever a group is working towards one goal...when everybody knows what they're doing and they're all on the same page, I think that those schools are going to be successful when everybody kind of has that focus and that guided mission that they're working on.

Indeed, the clarity of teacher and community vision helped empower the school to directly confront, and triumph over many obstacles that would have proven fatal to less committed schools.

Chapter 4:
Alice Birney Waldorf-Inspired School in Action

Inside the Waldorf School

Few studies external to the Waldorf community have documented student, teacher, and parent experiences in a Waldorf-inspired school. We hope this study will help give a more in-depth picture of the nature of Waldorf education from kindergarten through eighth grade in the public system. In particular, we focus on how Steiner's theory of child development informs every aspect of the educational experience, including the goals of school; the nature of relationships within the school; the structure of the school day, curriculum, pedagogy; and how the space is configured. In addition, in this section we discuss the role of parents in supporting public Waldorf-inspired education in Sacramento.

Developmentally Appropriate Instruction for the Whole Child

The Waldorf instructional approach differs substantively from many other approaches to schooling in the United States. One of the key ideas that most differentiates a Waldorf education from other models, is its ultimate goal: whole-life preparation. In addition to providing students with specific knowledge and skills to prepare them for college and career, a Waldorf education seeks to prepare children for meaningful lives in the broadest sense. It seeks to prepare students for physically, socially, artistically, and cognitively meaningful engagement with the world. A second difference is the extent to which Steiner's theory of child development and goals for nurturing human development inform every aspect of how children experience school.

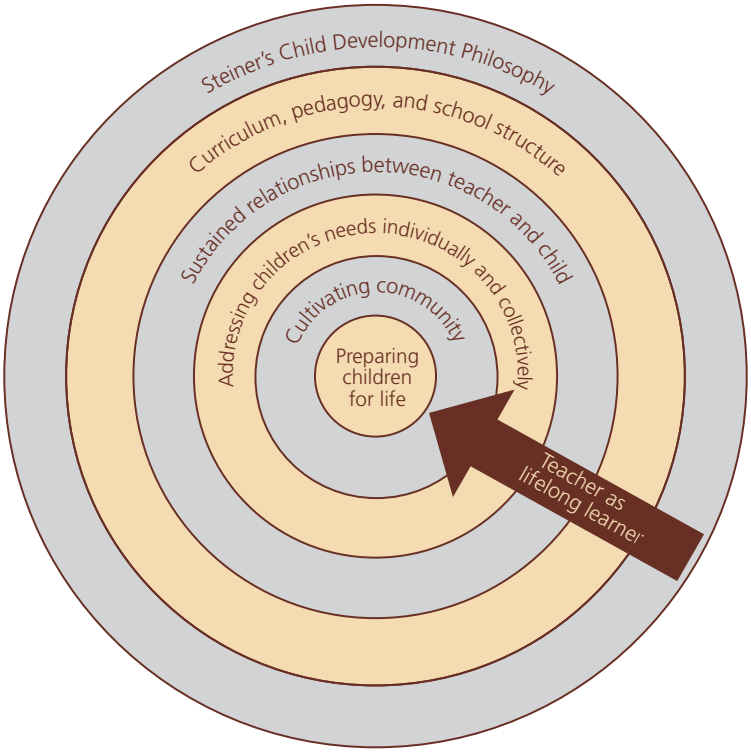
The Waldorf approach to education is inherently non-linear and mutually reinforcing and therefore difficult to describe through the linear form of a written report. Figure 1 (on next page) is an attempt to capture the interactive and complex approach of a Waldorf education.

Steiner's philosophy of child development directly influences the curriculum, pedagogy, and structure of the Waldorf-inspired school. These explicit links, while complex and nuanced, provide teachers' guideposts that give them purpose, intention, and guidance as they develop their curricula. Although there is autonomy and flexibility for teachers, they are bound within the broad frame of the Steiner philosophy. Key to this approach is the notion of and support for teachers as lifelong learners who are continually developing their craft.

The execution of Steiner philosophy through its curriculum, pedagogy, and school structure is strongly supported by the sustained relationships formed between and

among teachers, students, and families. Central to this relationship is the eight-year loop that teachers ideally commit to staying with their students from first through eighth grade. This sustained looping fosters deep and lasting relationships between a teacher and the students as well as the teacher and the families of the children in their class. Furthermore, it fosters deep relationships among the children and families in the class to create a strong sense of caring and community. It is because teachers have both the luxury of time as well as the primary responsibility for their children's education that they are enabled to enact the curriculum through a pedagogy that is responsive to students' individual and collective needs. Ultimately, looping is an important vehicle to enact Waldorf philosophy through its curriculum and pedagogy. The sustained relationships developed through looping, as well as the developmentally grounded curriculum, enable teachers to address the needs of their students holistically.

FIGURE 1. A WALDORF-INSPIRED APPROACH TO SCHOOLING



In the following sections, we parse out and delve into these ideas as if they were discrete for the purpose of illustrating how they are lived in one Waldorf-inspired public school, Alice Birney. We hope that this rich description brings to life the theoretical constructs of Steiner philosophy.

Intentionality of place and pedagogy.

> "Not only is our curriculum different, but the way we feel when we come to school is different."
>
> —Parent

> "[At] our school they say stuff in a different way and sometimes it helps [you] understand what they're trying to teach you better. The teachers explain it in a way that's easier to learn it."
>
> —Sixth grader

At Waldorf-inspired Alice Birney School there is a high level of intentionality in what is taught, how it is taught and when it is taught. In many ways the classrooms at Alice Birney are the antithesis of many American classrooms in their appearance, the materials used, and the pedagogical approaches of the teacher. One way Waldorf-inspired classrooms differ is in teachers' ideas about child development and what is developmentally appropriate. In contrast to ideas about what children need in many public school classrooms, where it is believed that if the walls are not covered with stimulating colors and a text-rich environment, the children will not be engaged, Steiner philosophy suggests that children need a soothing calm environment to learn. A Waldorf classroom is painted in muted non-industrial colors, like light purple, or a soft yellow.

Since there are no computers in the classrooms, the classrooms are outfitted with blackboards, upon which the teachers draw a detailed and colorful chalk drawing related to the current main lesson, the core instructional period of the day discussed later in this report. Homemade curtains cover the windows and all classroom furniture is wood or wicker. There is an absence of synthetic materials or store-bought teacher materials in the classroom. The walls have student work but are not cluttered. In each classroom a nature-based display marks the season. Similarly, the learning materials the students use are different. They have special oversized paper bound books for the main lesson study, high-quality beeswax crayons, and colored pencils. Students keep their art materials in a homemade fabric pouch.

As students progress through the grades, particular features of the classrooms remain the same, like the soft color schemes of the walls, but others fade away or exist with greater sophistication and complexity. An eighth-grade classroom has the same warm and familiar feeling of a first-grade classroom, but the displayed work is more sophisticated and the desks are often arranged to encourage greater student collaboration. The same care and deliberation that goes into curricular choices and decisions are also reflected in the organization of the space to best meet the students' developmental needs.

Teachers interact with their students in ways that also diverge from how many teachers are trained to perceive their role. Alice Birney teachers are uniformly soft

spoken and non-judgmental regarding their students. It is rare to hear a teacher praise a student; he or she is more likely to make a comment that reflects a factual observation and recognizes the student's effort, such as "you took a lot of time with that drawing." This is the kind of comment that is now recognized as supporting a growth mindset and contributing to student success. Even as students are reciting memorized verses, the teacher will not respond differently to the well-prepared student compared to the student struggling to remember the words. This lack of expressed judgment implies a level of faith in the child that they will progress without an evaluative stance, either positive or negative, from the teacher.

The modulated and calm voice extends to the way the teachers manage classroom discipline. In Waldorf-inspired classrooms there are no point or reward systems for compliance. At Birney, the teachers rely on the predictability of routine and rhythm with set practices for transitions, like the use of songs to move children from one activity to the next. They also emphasize classroom unity to support a calm and cohesive learning environment. Children know what is expected of them. When addressing individual children who are not engaged or who are disruptive, teachers take the position that a child's needs are not being met and respond in a soft-spoken way often using touch to connect to their students and understand the nature of the problem. For example, when a second-grade student was not helping his classmates move desks to clear an open floor space as they were singing, the teacher just pulled him close, wrapped her arm around his shoulder and sang with him. Nothing

corrective was said; no harsh looks were directed at him. Just firm but loving support. As a special education teacher explains the Birney approach to discipline:

> It's not so much a punishment system as it's wanting to see progress. It's more positive in that way, and then a big thing is that students don't get yelled at or talked to in a way that sometimes can happen in other schools.

In the Waldorf-inspired classroom, the teacher's role changes over time as the students progress through the curriculum. The early grades are primarily teacher directed, with moments of more child-led activities, such as during practical life studies in third grade where students demonstrate independence in cooking and gardening. In fourth grade, students begin engaging in more group learning. The teacher gradually releases control to the students, but explains to students, "freedom comes with responsibility" and that students need to demonstrate their ability to manage the increased freedom. By sixth grade, according to a teacher:

> The groups are very efficient and they work together and they take care of each other, and I don't have people not doing the work. Everybody knows there's an expectation and there's an end goal and we are trying to get somewhere with this.

A veteran teacher lays out visually how the change in the teacher's role physically situates them differently in the classroom:

> [In the early years] I'm in front of them, I'm directing them, I'm calling the shots. Somewhere around fifth/sixth grade I have to step to the side of the room and guide them, and in seventh and eighth grade [when we are studying] revolutions, let's live in chaos and anarchy, so you have to change your position. I can go from the front of the class, to the side of the class facilitating and guiding, and then at the end of eighth grade it's like, I'm here, like this old tree, deeply rooted here, and come back and visit me. It's beautiful.

Learning revolves around main lesson. From first through eighth grade, morning instruction is dedicated to *main lesson study*. During this approximately two-hour time block students are engaged in interdisciplinary thematic instruction. Main lesson blocks, or themes, last three to five weeks. Students work in oversized paper bound books referred to as their main lesson books in which students record their learning, in verse, creative writing, discursive writing, and drawing. One student describes them in this way, "Instead of getting textbooks we're basically like making textbooks." Most teachers integrate the arts and movement into their main lesson units, to make them more engaging as well as a more well-rounded and experiential exploration of the topic. Drawing is often a central component of the main lesson book.

Main lessons are the primary opportunity for teachers to teach English language arts, math, social studies, and science while integrating the arts. Central to the main lesson is its alignment to children's developmental stage and its integration of multiple areas of growth. Consequently, main lesson looks very different in the younger grades versus the older grades, as older children can sustain a focused study of a topic for longer periods of time. For a detailed account of two main lesson activities in second and sixth grades, see Appendix B.

Because it is a long block of time, teachers often integrate physical activity and music into their main lesson class time to break up the intensity and the type of focus required of students and to integrate learning. In a fifth-grade classroom, we observed the teacher began the day with song, verse, and a short set of stretches. After a bit of sustained silent reading, he took his students to the blacktop, where he incorporated multiplication with movement activities and then did a jogging loop around the black top with them. This was all done between intellectually demanding tasks, in order to help focus the students and lower their anxiety. Similar integration of physical activity took place in every classroom observed. Whenever a teacher felt that a student's energy flagged or the class needed recharging, he or she would spontaneously lead a physical exercise to support student engagement and physical development.

Physical activity is used not only to break up sedentary cognitive focus but also to help deepen cognitive growth. For example, in a third-grade classroom students practice cupping a ball, letting it drop, and catching it with both hands while saying their spelling words. The teacher explains:

> [Students who] are having a really hard time with their bodies are not able to spell at the same time that they're doing the ball. And the goal is that you feel enough in control of your body and your actions that your brain can do something else.

Teachers carefully observe each student's ability to integrate physically and cognitively and continue to give them opportunities to practice as long as they need it.

A slow and multi-faceted approach to reading instruction. Birney, like other Waldorf-inspired schools, takes a slow and deliberate approach to teaching reading. Although reading instruction begins in first grade with the introduction of letters, children are not expected to read fluently until third grade. According to Principal Horning, "We don't get too worried or upset about it until fourth grade; that is the big difference."

Birney teachers are all comfortable with this approach and do not see it harming children, but rather enabling them to be better readers when they do read. As one teacher explains, "The danger of asking a kid to read too early, they decode and they don't have a rich mental capacity, and then they lose interest, no wonder they don't

want to read." Principal Horning further elaborates that the emphasis is placed on the learning rather than students' demonstration of proficiency, which marks a dramatic difference from more assessment-driven approaches to reading instruction. She says, "It's a matter of the pressure and emphasis; they are taught to love language and love words before they are forced to demonstrate their ability of how much and how quickly." In addition, focusing on reading early, before many children are developmentally ready, takes up considerable time in the schedule leaving little time for the rich and wide-ranging instruction that Birney offers.

Children are taught to write before they can read. They are taught to copy and engage with language before they can decode it. A teacher describes the impact of this approach:

> The pressure to read or not read is completely taken out....We learn to write first...they've been writing for years, even when they had no idea what it said. So it was like they were engaged already in a physical will engagement kind of way and then it was look at the words you're writing....now they are starting to realize I am not just writing swirls and swishes.

Each letter as it is introduced is accompanied with a picture and a story, which helps students integrate it into their mental schemas. Because of this developmental approach and deep commitment to serving each child's individual needs, Birney teachers believe that when children are not mastering something, such as reading, it is probably because they are not developmentally ready. However, teachers are continually assessing students' progression and responding with what they believe the students need. Teachers tell countless stories of children who don't read or speak for years, only to fully blossom when they are ready. For example, a teacher remembers a student who did not read until the end of sixth grade. By taking a developmental approach while also continuously assessing for any underlying difficulty with this child they preserved his love of learning:

> There is a lot of good research out there saying that some boys particularly don't have their brain fully developed until they're 11, so we're asking them to do something that they're not ready to do, so giving him that gift of time allowed him to fall in love with reading.

In many public schools driven by pressure to prepare students to perform well at early ages on reading assessments, this child would likely have been labeled as poor at school, given remedial work, and perhaps persuaded that he was unintelligent. A graduate of John Morse (the site of the school prior to moving to Birney), who now attends UC Berkeley, described how even though some children learned to read in second grade, she herself did not master reading until the end of third grade, and then progressed rapidly. She describes her early literacy activities and how she benefited from the gentle approach of Morse:

> First grade was learning all the letters. So we'd take maybe like every week or every couple of days we'd pick a new letter. We'd learn the sounds. We'd draw a picture with the letter and then a picture of something like an animal that started with the letter....And then in second grade we moved on to learning things like all the vowels and beginning to read. We had reading groups so those kids who were more advanced were in one reading group and those kids who needed more help were in another. I learned to read at the end of third grade, where I could actually read really solidly by myself, and then after that I just absolutely loved reading because I was given the time to actually find it for myself. I wasn't forced to sit down and read...I never felt like I was stupid because I couldn't read and all the other kids [could]. It was just I could move at my own pace. After really learning to read I was reading Harry Potter and I was going through lots of books.

A current parent who transferred her stressed-out daughter to Birney shares a similar experience:

> Our daughter was at the traditional school and forced to read, her hair was falling out, she was super stressed out. So we came here and it was exactly what my kids needed, and they have completely blossomed under less stress.

Developing the art of speech. At Birney, speech is valued as an area for competency in itself and as a way to support literacy development. It has many facets, including a connection between spoken and heard language, articulation, and artistic connection, as well as building a sense of community. Celebrating the beauty and power of language, both spoken and written, is highly valued at Birney. It is a side of literacy development often completely neglected in classrooms focused on students' decoding abilities. The increasingly narrow and formulaic way literacy is taught in many public schools to prepare students to perform well on standardized tests has resulted in students losing an understanding of the art of using language. A Birney teacher wonders, "How do you love language if you don't create beautiful language... how do we use our voice as an artistic instrument, as well as a communicative tool?" Hearing and speaking language is an essential part of literacy development in the early years, as a teacher explains, "There's this connection between language coming in and language going out" with the listening to and telling of stories.

One of the prime vehicles for developing speech is the recitation of verses, which begins in kindergarten in choral recitation. There are verses for starting and closing the day, for transitioning from one activity to another, for the themes of the year. The recitation of verses is taken seriously and engaged in physically as students stand up straight behind their desks so they can breathe deeply and fully enunciate

their words. A teacher describes the multiple purposes for which she selects verses for her students:

> But for speech exercises in the morning opening, I usually try to have two types going: one that's more artistic and then there's articulation exercises. They did "splendid is the light, splendor of the fall, splatters of orange", all s-p-l's, and especially in the primary grades when I'm in a language block I'm teaching letters and sounds, there might be "big brown bears biting big black bugs," and then we read that together. So it's this connection between articulation, language, and reading, all of it, all balled up together.

Verses are connected to the main lesson study. For example, as the sixth graders studied Rome they recited with passion and excitement a verse, O Roma Nobilis, in Latin. The teacher describes how the students relate to the verse:

> The kids feel it. They think they're Roman soldiers. So as long as there's passion and they're feeling it we can live with that, and then as soon as I see that it's losing something then we'll bring in something new.

The choral recitation aspect of verses builds class community as a teacher explains, "I think that unison speaking too is huge with building the culture of the class. When you're speaking together, or singing together...there's a group unity."

Starting in the second grade children are given their own short verses that they don't have to recite out loud. By fourth grade students start learning their own verses to recite on the day of the week of their birth, each week. They are called *birth day verses*. One teacher describes how she selects a verse for each child. "We gift them this...I gave them a verse that I felt was something that I see potential or a striving within each of them." The students recite the same verse once a week for the entire year. Over time they perfect the recitation of the verse. By sixth grade, many students can recite their verse with tremendous theatrical ability. The teacher helps direct them in their inflection, their subtle use of gestures and eye contact. Speech is also enacted through class plays that in the early grades are mostly choral speaking but develop over the years to memorization of individual parts.

Learning to get along.

> A Waldorf school has more than just learning. It has more adapting to your environment, learning about different things you never would learn if you were in different schools, and mostly a way to actually attract a friend instead of like just rejecting people.
>
> —Sixth grader

Supporting the whole child at Alice Birney also includes nurturing each child's social-emotional development. Children are taught, encouraged, and expected to get along with each other. Staying with the same children and teacher for eight years supports this value as well. The nature of learning how to care for each other evolves as children develop. For example, at the kindergarten level there are three rules: "Be kind, be safe, be a good worker," according to a teacher. Children are encouraged to take care of each other. The teacher explains, if a child gets hurt, another child will run into the room to get an "ice crystal for someone who has fallen down; taking care of each other, and taking care of themselves" is an important skill that children learn. The kindergarten teacher talks about "golden deeds" meaning taking care of each other. The expectation of what caring for each other means grows as the children mature. In the early elementary grades the teacher uses stories to teach about being kind and caring for others. A teacher explains:

> You are always tracking the social progress. If there's a child that I see left behind, or alone a lot, you'll tell a healing story that kind of speaks to the duckling who's left when everybody else has traveled across the lake and the kids know and they respond to it. It's amazing how wise they are socially at this age.

An upper elementary teacher focuses on building her students' awareness of opportunities to care for others. "I am always trying to work on helping [my students] not just think about themselves but to look around and make sure everybody's o.k. right now, and if they're not, what can you do to make it o.k.?" Middle school teachers tend to use class meetings to address social issues within their classes. According to a teacher the school focuses on "cooperative play and having fun and celebrating everyone's ability level rather than just favoring the kids who are good at the thing." Parents are most appreciative of this aspect of their children's experience at Birney. One parent explains:

> It is a whole lot less *Lord of the Flies* here....That there is, from day one, an alternative presented to the children, that first we figure it out yourself by using words, and that we do not resort to physical pushing or bullying, and honestly, I haven't seen any of that, or really heard about it at this school.

Another parent adds, "I think that socially the expectation is higher here, that you are a citizen of your classroom, and of the school, so you behave like that. I think that's kind of a big deal."

Supporting students' needs. Looping facilitates Birney teachers meeting their individual students' needs in ways that teachers who spend just one year with students cannot. Part of knowing students well through many years together is that the teacher understands what each child needs to thrive and can identify different areas of growth for each child holistically.

Lunchtime at Alice Birney embodies the "getting along" ethos that motivates the entire school. Adults do not control the large play space and tend to fade to the periphery, present but not central to the goings on of the blacktop, play structures, or grass. Mixed-gender groups abound, there is some cross-age play, and almost all play seems more cooperative than competitive. Students enter and exit games at will. Few students play a single game for the entire length of lunch. Balls are tossed or friends chased with no apparent end purpose. Some children dance, others sit under the large trees. Laughter and smiles abound and almost no children sit alone. Students in the middle school grades (seventh and eighth in particular) tended to sit and play away from the younger kids. However, there were notable exceptions on the basketball court where the older children played with their younger schoolmates in an inclusive and cooperative manner, rather than against them. In general, there existed a sense of belonging, inclusion, and safety. One mixed-gender and mixed-age group played a game of keep-away with a soccer ball. One boy fell while chasing another who possessed the ball. Rather than laugh or humiliate the other student, the boy with the ball passed it to another schoolmate, stopped and checked on his fallen comrade. Moments like this show how different the communal space at Birney is and how the fruits of the community's efforts are reflected in the actions of its students.

The students also recognize that they are well known by their teachers and that they can count on their teachers for support. When discussing what enables them to do well in school, a sixth grader explains, "Like if [you] don't know what's going on they'll actually take the time to explain it to us or they'll pull us out during recess." Parents express gratitude for the individualized support from teachers: "I like how [a Waldorf education] approaches the whole child, nothing is really forced, they find the ebb and flow of the child and figure out what works for them." Another parent says what they love about the school is that their child "was allowed to be an individual and not be an outcast, so he was himself, and he's been learning at his own pace."

Despite the holistic and individualized approach for all children, some children enter Alice Birney with specific special education needs that extend beyond the classroom teacher's capacity. In truth, because of its holistic approach, parents of special needs children are particularly attracted to Birney. Some hope that Birney will "save" or "fix" their children while others hope it will be a more humane place for their child. Some of the children who attend Birney fall into traditional definitions of special education and others do not. Some parents bring their children to Birney to avoid labeling them as special education students. However, there does not appear to be a stigma, at Birney, for receiving special education services. According to one teacher, regular education students are sometimes jealous of the fun that students have with their special education teachers. In addition, according to a teacher because of the multiple ways that students experience school, every child has "many chances to shine."

Birney provides a range of support for children with diagnosed needs, including speech, language, occupational therapy, reading, writing, and math support. There are five educators who provide special education support (two resource specialists, a speech and language therapist, an intervention specialist, and an instructional aide). Teachers provide push-in and pull-out supports and hold small groups for RSP reading, writing, and math support. Some children with academic or emotional needs or motivational issues are referred to the intervention teacher as well as the other special education teachers, by the principal or a teacher. He works with students one-on-one, in small groups and pushes into the classroom. One of the particular ways he offers support to third and fourth graders is on numeracy issues. Some students need support with their math skills but others just need to build their self-confidence.

The special education teachers are challenged to build schedules that do not interfere with the children accessing all the aspects of the holistic instruction. They try never to pull out a student during main lesson, looking for time most often during specialty classes, and trying to vary their pullout schedule so students do not miss the same specialty class repeatedly. The special education teacher joins the main lesson and joins sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade math groups to provide support to the students who need it. The principal gives the teachers a high level of autonomy to build the support program themselves.

Although the RSP and special education teachers have certain skills and procedures they have to follow and have not yet received full Waldorf training, they try to

incorporate Waldorf-style instruction in their work with students, including hands-on learning approaches, movement, and singing. "It's traditional science-based methods for reading....I tell everybody it isn't Waldorf but I can try to make it look as much like Waldorf as possible," describes one of the teachers.

The special education teachers feel that Birney's holistic approach to education serves special needs students better than in many other public schools. Many of the children who are fully included in the classroom at Birney would likely be separated in a communicative handicapped class in a different school. In one class a Down Syndrome child is fully integrated into the class where he receives a considerable amount of assistance from a full inclusion aide, the teacher, and even the other children in the classroom.

The special education teachers also collaborate with the classroom teachers to identify ways to best support each of the students, providing guidance to teachers on how to scaffold the learning for individual students. The teachers love working with the special education teachers and aides because they see how "present they are with the kids. They love the kids."

In general, teachers feel that the Waldorf approach provides students greater access to the curriculum because they can learn through multiple modalities. This is true regardless of a child's learning needs. Most commonly instruction is delivered primarily through auditory and visual modalities, however, in a Waldorf-inspired school, like Birney, instruction can be accessed through movement, music, art, handwork, and speech. As one teacher says:

> You are going to jump your math and then you are going to sing about it and then you're going to work it out with some art work and your teacher is going to put some drawing up on the board to remind you all of it. All the learning styles are being addressed.

In this way the students have so many more access points to learning than in many other educational settings.

Although Birney serves very few English language learners (about 30 students during 2014–15), the school does provide those students who are fourth grade and older with additional supports through an afterschool tutoring program. One of the reasons the school has so few designated English language learners above fourth grade is because of its high redesignation rate. Children who indicate on the state-required home language survey that they are an English language learner are invited to attend an afterschool tutoring program three days a week. Even after a child graduates from the program they can still attend for an additional two years. The program is co-run by the English language coordinator/Spanish teacher and an intervention teacher.

Child Development Theories as the Basis for Teaching

At the heart of the Waldorf instructional approach, built on a well-defined theory of child development, is respect for children, not as partially formed adults but as their own beings. A teacher explains, "We talk about receiving children with reverence, that there is something special about every child that enters here."

Reverence extends to every stage of child development. Steiner identified distinct stages of development that span seven years each. Even though Steiner's developmental philosophy follows a person into adulthood, given that this research focuses primarily on children from kindergarten to eighth grade, we elaborate most fully on the first two 7-year stages. Within each stage, the child's developmental needs shape the curricular focus and the pedagogical approach of the teacher.[5] Under the guidance of a number of founding teachers and supported by a well-trained staff, Birney teachers have been able to maintain strong fidelity to Steiner philosophy and Waldorf curriculum. Teacher training is elaborated upon more fully in a later section.

In this section we lay out the Steiner developmental philosophy and corresponding curriculum in a grade-by-grade chronology. The description of the Steiner philosophy is derived from a document produced by the Alliance for Public Waldorf Education (2013), led by a former lead in assessment from the California State Department of Education, and contributed to by members of Steiner College in Sacramento and educators from Alice Birney School as well as other Waldorf-inspired public schools.[6]

Play is their work: Birth through kindergarten.

> "Play is their work really, and it is a place where they can also learn how to deal with each other in a social context, not where I'm going to go in and necessarily solve right away."
>
> —Birney kindergarten teacher

At Birney, children may attend two years of an early kindergarten program from ages 5–6 in a mixed-age classroom, which is towards the end of the first stage of Steiner's first 7-year stage of development. The number of years they spend in the program depends upon their birthdate and developmental readiness as determined by teacher assessment and observation. The classroom space is designed to gently ease children into school life. Children can bring slippers to wear in the classroom at school and boots for outside play. The classroom is home-like with a kitchen, imaginative play spaces, and vast outside spaces. In contrast to widely held notions of children's developmental needs in preschool and kindergarten, a Waldorf-inspired kindergarten is decorated in muted colors, it is not a text-rich environment but a subdued environment. There are many spaces for children to physically engage with open-ended play objects in their environment.

Children's developmental needs include physical exploration, sensory-motor function, the engagement of the will, rhythm, language development, connection to the natural world, and imitation. All these developmental needs are met as the teacher establishes the structure, rhythm, routines, and environment for the children. Repetition and routine carry the children—guided by the adults. The children engage in activities that address their developmental needs in multiple ways.

At Birney, the day begins outside where children play. Although there are a few play structures, children gravitate to the natural spaces. They play in the playhouse, the sandpit, among the trees and plants, and dig in the dirt. Stumps and large rocks of various sizes permeate the landscape for children to navigate across and through. The outside space is intentionally set up with physical obstacles for children to navigate. For example, children have large wagons outfitted with sturdy off-road tires that they can pull each other in. Although there are small sections of the yard that are paved, much of it is bumpy dirt and even a section with large river rocks. Children have to work together to pull the wagon over these physical challenges; it takes persistence, cooperation and is an authentic task. The outside play is almost all child-directed. Outside time also includes cooking projects in small groups with the teacher, washing towels, and other craft activities, like sanding wood swords.

Building off the importance of outdoor child-directed play, one day a week, children spend the day at a nearby park where, rain or shine, they play in the woods. They take a 30-minute walk, then play outside, and have snack outside. The teacher made backpacks for every child and they carry their own bowl, spoon, and napkin for

snack. The children have little hand drills that they use to drill into acorns or wood. After they play, they go to "rolling hill" and roll down it. Through these activities children develop sensory-motor integration, physical and imitation abilities, social skills, and they connect to the natural world.

Four days a week, part of the day is spent inside the classroom and includes a circle time in which children are immersed in a language-rich environment of storytelling, singing, and movement. Stories and songs are chosen to reflect the seasons and cultural traditions. A kindergarten teacher describes:

> It's a foundation of literacy and moving, singing rhymes. Some of it is loud, some of it is soft, some of it is big body movement, some of it is little body movement, and then we just let it rest for a moment.

Then children have snack and play inside. Materials in the classroom are all natural wood, wicker, or fabric. Children can play in a pretend kitchen area or baby area, or with blocks to make forts. Drawing and sewing supplies are always available. There is a sensory washtub where children can wash rocks in water and always some kind of seasonal display. Children's play also mimics home life, with work activities like cooking, sweeping, gardening, and building.

The school day is organized into "a schedule that is strongly rhythmical...they occur in a predictable schedule, allowing the child to relax into the rhythm of the day, week, season, or year" (Alliance, 2013, p. 11). Even the snack is rhythmical, according to their teacher. "We don't say Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday; it's rice day, oatmeal day, bread day, quinoa day, soup day." On soup day children bring something for the soup from home and it is cut up during outside playtime and added to the soup, to make a kind of stone soup. After the children eat, a crew of children will wash, rinse, dry, and put away the cups and put leftover food into a compost bucket. Other routines are rhythmical as well, for example, Tuesdays they hear a story, Wednesdays they paint with watercolors, and Thursdays model with beeswax. "All this rhythm and organization just helps a young child feel so secure because it's always expected, always the same," explains their teacher.

A time of imagination: first and second grade. Stage two of Steiner's child development theory begins at age 7 and lasts through age 14. Within each stage are distinct phases. The first phase includes first and second grades. In contrast to many schools preparing students to excel on standardized literacy assessments in which this period marks a laser-like focus on literacy through decoding, according to Steiner philosophy, children develop literacy skills best by first developing the ability to tell stories and imitate writing, before they learn to read and write.

According to Steiner's child development theory while children still need to develop themselves physically and rhythmically as they did in the first stage, in the second stage children develop their capacity for imagination as well. Children also learn through connecting to emotions and feeling. For this reason, much of the instruction focuses on sparking the child's imagination through storytelling, drawing, and singing. The curriculum responds to this focus on learning through imagination, which one teacher calls "oral literacy." "The rich story curriculum of the lower grades invites the child to be inwardly active, creating her own images for each scene of every story." The intent behind this process is to "take the child from story image, to picture, to letter, to word, and onwards to reading and arithmetic" (Alliance, 2013, pp. 12–13).

The idea of supporting children creating their own imagery is a central tenet of Waldorf developmental theory. Younger, pre-literate students are theorized to see their mental world in pictures rather than words. Developing a student's ability to mentally visualize a story plays an

essential role in the student's later ability to move towards the concrete world of words. Telling vivid, descriptive tales fosters this inner world. Teachers select texts and plan curricula with this developmental goal in mind. Stories are also intended to connect to children's feelings, because it is believed that what resonates with children's feelings will be remembered and integrated rather than just presented as disconnected facts that may be "received, briefly retained, tested, and often quickly forgotten" as is more common in educational approaches (Alliance, 2013, p. 12).

The curriculum in first grade is connected to fairy tales from many cultures and nature stories. These stories often contain "archetypes of human existence and have been used throughout history to explain the world around us" (Alliance, 2013, p. 12). According to Steiner, at this age, children are still in a "somewhat dreamy consciousness and feeling of connection to the world" (Alliance, 2013, p. 13). As a teacher explains:

> It's very experiential, and incredibly developmentally appropriate. Children in second grade particularly are still very much in that dreamy place, they haven't completely landed on the earth, and so as many images and pictures you can give them, it just feeds their soul, it seeps deeply into their being and it kind of ferments for a couple of years and this it springs forth in something quite beautiful in reading, in writing, in beautiful recitations.

First graders also go on nature walks. When the school was at John Morse, they could go on nature walks adjacent to the school. There was a little stream and tree area. Some middle schoolers reminisce about nature walks and how magical that time was for them:

> Student 1: We used to go on nature walks almost every morning...and it was all about...building fairy houses and building things and finding sticks and twigs and building things and making little stick figures and playing with them.
>
> Student 2: I loved doing that.
>
> Student 3: We also had this little nature table where we'd put this little silk cloth over it and all the things that we found nature wise would go on it. If we found like this cool stone we'd stick it on there or like an acorn with the cap still on it or just like a little feather. We'd just put it on there or even a wasp nest, like just a little one, we'd just stick on there and it was like really nice and decorative. It was pretty cool to find stuff and just put it on there.

Throughout the years, the teachers strive to help children connect to nature in developmentally appropriate ways. Just as the younger students looked back fondly on these nature walks, so too did older former students. Almost all of the graduates interviewed for this study mentioned how important having the freedom to explore, observe, and interact with nature was in shaping how they see the world.

In second grade, the curriculum shifts to respond to children's increasing self-awareness, where fairy tales are replaced by fables and legends, which focus elements of human nature and "examples of extraordinary humans who worked in harmony with nature to bring goodness to the world" (Alliance, 2013, p. 13). A veteran Birney teacher describes the developmental stage of the second grader:

> I see this budding mischievous[ness], just these kids kind of playing with words or playing with what I am saying or bringing their joke that's horrendous but thinking it's hysterically funny, and they're ready for that world of fables and riddles.

In this early phase of schooling, art plays a central role in facilitating the child's ever increasing exploration of large parts of the world. Teachers use stories rich in imagery and pictures that convey facts and processes (Alliance, 2013, p. 12). Music is also central, as students sing throughout the day and as they transition from one activity to another. The place of song in the day also reinforces the rhythm of the day, in these early years as well as throughout a Waldorf education.

With active imagination and oral abilities developed, as well as imitation skills nurtured since early stages, this phase is also viewed as a time when children are receptive to memorization of verse and mathematical facts. The memorization and recitation of verse, as described earlier, is a central component of a Waldorf education. The verses often relate to the seasons and are full of imagery. A Birney teacher explains:

> You are asking a lot of a child when you are asking them to speak, you're asking them to claim a place on the earth, and proclaim their light-filled presence, so that's pretty powerful for a child, for [people] to stop and listen. You're asking them to articulate their speaking clearly as a gift from the speaker to the receiver, and that's a wonderful gift... there is a lot of brain development that's going on when you're asking a child to speak clearly, crisply, and with a place of mental images... building mental memory.

Memorization of verse is also viewed as an essential pre-reading activity. Steiner philosophy suggests that before reading, when nurtured, children have a huge capacity to take in oral sounds since that is how small children learn from their parents. One graduate describes how this emphasis on developing memory continues to impact her:

> My memory is really good. I have a lot of visual memory but I also have oral memory too. I have a lot of different ways of remembering things, a lot of different ways of working with things. There's a lot of flexibility when you learn with Waldorf. You know you're not just learning in one way, but you're learning in so many different ways, and that really helps as you get older because sometimes you can't just read something and remember it.

Awakening to the world: third grade. Third grade is a pivotal year in a Waldorf-inspired education. According to Steiner's theory of child development it is at this age when children increasingly see themselves as separate from the world around them. Steiner literature describes this phase as a time when children's increased self-awareness makes them more "awake." A temporary loss of confidence and insecurity often accompanies this growing self-awareness. One teacher describes his experiences with his students, "after the summer they come in with a different awareness."

The curriculum is selected to mirror this phase, as the children study the story of the ancient Jewish people. This study of the Jews is studied not as religious education, but as mythology that includes "ordering of a world out of nothing, the departure from paradise (mirroring the child's departure from early childhood), and the need to learn a range of practical skills that will be required to successfully live on earth" (Alliance, 2013, p. 13). As one teacher explains, "By studying how the Hebrew people deal with the amazing difficulties in their lives we're giving them insight on how they deal with tragedy and difficulty in their own lives." Another teacher describes it as:

> It's just kind of what they're experiencing. It's not always fairy tales.... We're asking the third grader to write long pieces and do cursive and to really start thinking of math in a different way. It's not a story anymore. There's a sort of sadness that comes with 9. There's a sort of sadness in the story of the Hebrew people from the very, very beginning.

In correspondence with the focus on the Hebrew people the children at Birney build a Sukkah outside as a celebration of a Jewish festival and have many of their lessons inside it. In addition, students study measurement, time, and money in connection with the ancient times. For example, students measure their desk width, height, and depth, using a range of ancient measurement techniques, such as their palm, hand span, and cubit (from fingertip to elbow). They compare their measurements, double-check them, and discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the units of measurement.

The development of practical skills is an also an essential component of children's learning in third grade, although it happens across all grades. At Alice Birney third-grade students spend a considerable portion of time learning to cook, sew, garden, farm, and build. In three-week rotations, 10 children cook, 10 children set up a garden and care for chickens, and 10 children build, including a wooden calendar. Children also crochet their own hats. They go on field trips to farms and help care for farm animals. A middle school student recalls how practical life study is integrated naturally into core academic content areas. "Cooking is kind of the Waldorf way of learning fractions."

Although third grade marks a new level of awareness, the integration of music, the arts, and movement is still seen as vitally important to developing the whole child. Each day starts with the recitation of a morning verse, followed by a movement exercise in which students have to remember a sequence of movements, like twiddle your thumbs, clap your hands, then stamp your feet.

Finding balance and integrating into the world: fourth and fifth grade. Fourth and fifth grade is a time of increasing stability, according to Steiner philosophy. Children feel more comfortable with themselves and their increasing independence. Their body proportions have evened out and they are more coordinated. Children demonstrate an eagerness to learn and a deep interest in the world around them. They are ready for understanding the complexity of life. As a veteran Birney teacher explains:

> In fourth grade when they're starting to pull away from their parents and their teacher and they're starting to see...the foibles of their friends and they start to piece apart the world, we bring them fractions, and we bring them precision and beauty of the animal world, so it just feeds their souls in ways that I just can't express.

The curriculum corresponds to these changes. The children study Norse legends in fourth grade and the mythologies of Ancient India, Persia, Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Greece in fifth grade as well as a variety of religions that arose from these civilizations including Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, and Buddhism. This variety of mythology illustrates to the children that there are many, and often competing, ways of explaining life and that those perspectives are often linked to geography, culture, and historical circumstances. At the end of fifth grade the study of mythology transitions to the study of ancient history.

According to the Steiner philosophy:

> This transition marks a point in human history at which the Greeks moved from an earlier worldview that was holistic and external to a more philosophical, individual, and questioning approach. It mirrors a change in the child's thinking from picture-based thought to the dawning of formal thought. (Alliance, 2013, p. 14)

In connection with the study of ancient civilizations in fifth grade the students visit an Egyptian museum and participate in a pentathlon at another Waldorf school in the area. The pentathlon includes classic sports such as javelin, races, and jumping contests. A teacher explains:

> They tied it back in to the grace and beauty of the Greek times. So it wasn't so much about being first and being the fastest; it's more about just enjoying the movements and the grace and beauty of it rather than just the competitive nature.

The child's growing awareness of the complexity in the world leads to the study of fractions, decimals, verb tenses, and parts of speech. Children are also increasingly feeling connected to their communities, which leads to a study of local and state geography in fourth grade and of North American geography in fifth grade. Field

trips align to the curriculum including an overnight at Fort Ross, an old Russian Fort on the coast of California. On this trip each child takes on a historical role. A teacher explains, "They became a militia or a gardener or a hunter and they had to do it the whole two days. It wasn't superficial." Middle school students remember the experience fondly and with detail.

> Student: You had to write a letter and militias were...the guarders of the Fort Ross. This Fort Ross has been there since the early 1800s so it was really cool to see that, and they let you sleep in like some of the old places that they used to sleep in. I slept in the church because we were gardeners.
>
> Student: You had to dress up and...
>
> Student: I still remember my name...It was Igor Leontivitch Chernik, because we were all Russian.
>
> Student: There was Russians and natives....there would be two militia from our class, guarding the doors of the whole fort, and there was this big wall around it. There would be militias and you'd have to sign in with them, and I remember the militias they slept in the guard area. They had cannons, like old cannons that were out of the windows.
>
> Student: I remember at night we'd have a night shift...ours was at like 2:00 in the morning.
>
> Student:...We'd have to keep the fire. We just relived what they used to do back then.

Continuing the connection to nature developed in the early years, students study animals and zoology in fourth grade and botany in fifth grade. Arts are integral to the student's study of geography and life science, by supporting a more in-depth and experiential connection to the material through the drawing of representational maps and engaging in close observational drawings of animals and plants. This study also further cements children's connection to nature and sense that they are part of the natural world. However, it also preserves a connection to story, imagination, and wonder. A teacher describes how all the pieces fit together:

> If we're going to study...the deer, I'm giving a little story about it. "Hiding among the tall dry grasses near an oak grove the fawn awaits his mother. They spent most of the day away. The sun is setting slowly playing with red and orange hues in the blue sky canvas." So after talking about this we may talk about the characteristics of the animals. And for some parents, they want us to go further into more of the dissecting. And it's hard for anybody to

> understand that, why we don't too early. There is the sense that if you do, you kind of lose the sense of wonder that is connected to the beauty of something. Yes it's important that you get there, but we need to do that gradually rather than just knowing facts. There was a great quote about that, "What signifies knowing the names if you know not the nature of things?"

In this way learning goes beyond the literal understanding of facts and is about the connection to and passion for the world. In connection with their study of animals and botany, the students go to observe the elephant seals on the coast and camp among giant sequoias and learn about the trees.

A time to connect with concrete reality: sixth grade. On the verge of adolescence, according to Steiner philosophy, the sixth grader both can begin to engage in causal thinking and needs to engage in a matter-of-fact engagement with the material rather than the fanciful or emotional aspects that characterized earlier stages of development. The history curriculum mirrors this developmental stage:

> The turning inward, the foreshadowing of adolescence, is mirrored historically by the European Dark Ages, when knowledge and civilization seemed to disappear. It is reassuring for teacher and parent alike to recall that knowledge and culture had not vanished but were hidden for protection and deepening, waiting to reappear in a flurry of learning and progress in the High Middle Ages. By the end of sixth grade, we see greater mastery of critical thinking or formal operations; the child's world is expanding again. (Alliance, 2013, p. 15)

Sixth grade curriculum includes the rise and fall of the Roman Empire, the birth of Christianity and Islam before turning to the Dark and Middle Ages. The sixth-grade teachers at Birney require a considerable amount of in-class writing. In correspondence with the study of medieval times, the students participate in medieval games with other Waldorf schools on a big farm where the students get to do archery, sword fighting, ropes challenges, and other games. In their handcraft class the sixth graders explain that they "make this tunic and then we put a design on it and that's for the medieval games." A teacher describes it as "Robin Hood out in the forest." In this way the students' study of these historical times is experiential, and connected to writing, handcrafts, and the arts. Math is also connected to their historical study as they learn business math, including transactions, profit and loss, and interest as it connects to the rise of towns' trade and guilds in the Middle Ages.

According to Steiner philosophy, the sixth grader's grounding in a rational and concrete notion of reality supports the study of physics, including optics, acoustics,

magnetism, static electricity, heat, and cold. Children are introduced to these topics through experiential activities, rather than definition of the concepts. Children then can deduce meaning from their experiences. The children also study geology as well as the study of naked eye astronomy (the astronomy of the Middle Ages), corresponding to their historical studies. Students experience the geology they study as they camp and climb around the base of Mount Lassen, a nearby volcano.

The final phase, intense exploration and restlessness: seventh and eighth grade. In response to the end of the second stage of child development, children are ready to launch into a period of intense exploration and discovery. This focus extends to growth in terms of thinking, beliefs, and relationships. "Traditional beliefs will be challenged and tested and the young person must learn to stand firmly in her own thoughts. Perspectives will change dramatically, just as they did for the artists of the Renaissance" (Alliance, 2013, p. 15). Correspondingly, in seventh grade the students study the ideas of the Age of Discovery, the Reformation, and the Renaissance, which mirror their own growth cognitively and artistically. At this age, students are able to turn away from stories and mythologies to biographies of leading historical figures. Geography includes the study of Europe and Africa mirroring much of the Age of Discovery. In accordance with the Age of Discovery, the students spend a night on the Balclutha, an old sailing ship docked in the San Francisco Bay, and pretend to be shipmates for the night.

As students' bodies change they study human physiology, health, and nutrition. Science also includes the study of inorganic chemistry. "Scientific study continues to emphasize the careful objective observation of phenomena before concepts are formed." The study of naked eye astronomy covered in sixth grade expands to encompass a heliocentric view, "with an examination of the conviction and courage of the pioneering Renaissance astronomers" (Alliance, 2013, p. 16). Students also begin their two-year study of algebra. At Birney all upper grade students take math at the same time to provide flexibility in math groupings as well. In sixth, seventh, and eighth grade there are two math groups; both cover the same material but one works at a faster pace than the other. Student empathy and the generally non-competitive environment fostered throughout the years at Birney make this differentiated instruction possible in a way in which students do not feel labeled or judged.

Eighth grade marks the end of the looping cycle with the classroom teacher and the beginning of a new stage of development focused on critical thinking and specialized instruction. In seventh and eighth grade to accommodate scheduling challenges and give teachers planning time during the specialties, Birney has chosen to shorten the main lesson block from 2 hours to 90 minutes. In eighth grade the two teachers decided to each specialize in a main lesson block and to teach it to both their own students as well as their partner's students to provide the students with experience with more than one main teacher in preparation for high school.

The eighth-grade main lesson curriculum corresponds to the students' developmental orientation. As a veteran teacher explains, "In eighth grade, when they have had it with authority, we give them revolution." The study of revolutions leads into

a study of the founding of the United Sates. Students compare the American and French revolutions and study the worldwide impact of the Industrial Revolution. Biographies continue to serve as a key source of understanding for students, providing them access to connect with historical events as lived experiences. Students also study American literature and the short story and develop their ability to understand and write with perspective, voice, point of view, and style.

For science, students study hydraulics, aerodynamics, and motors in connection with the developments of the industrial age. Organic chemistry is introduced with a focus on the chemistry of food. Students' science lab reports are as much written documents of the scientific process as carefully executed visual representations.

Eighth grade culminates with a series of events that include a major play, a week-long class trip, and a major project presentation of individual student projects. The exhibition of student projects exemplifies the school's commitment to nurturing the development of the whole child and their individual passions as well as the cumulative effect of the school's emphasis on art and language development.

The eighth-grade exhibition is a forum where students present culminating multiweek research rooted in a particular interest. The classroom in which the exhibition took place was packed with family, staff, and non-presenting students offering their classmates support. During the exhibition itself, individual students orally presented their findings to the audience and each incorporated an artistic component. The art was placed prominently behind or near them while they orally presented their findings. The eighth-grade teacher for this group facilitated the program, introducing students and their topics. The exhibition covered a range of student-selected topics, from the effects of oceanic pollution, to the history of cycling, to discrimination against transgendered students, as well as a demonstration of method acting. Each presentation also included an artistic component: One student showed a series of impressionistic watercolor paintings, another a tile mosaic of the word "equality," another a vivid collage of cycling images. All of the artwork was of exceptionally high quality and indicative of long-term artistic training. The verbal presentations themselves showed the students' familiarity and comfort with public speaking. After presenting their research and art, they fielded audience questions skillfully while generally lacking the awkwardness found in most eighth graders placed in similar situations. Graduates of Alice Birney reinforce this observation by crediting their ability to speak publicly and organize their ideas in high school and college directly to experiences like these exhibitions.

Indeed, the exhibitions showed that Birney actively prepares its students for college, career, and life beyond even if that language is not actively used by the adults in the school. The school's commitment to elevating the arts, music, and creative expression helps produce students capable of thinking outside of the box, confident in who they are and will be, with a willingness to share with others.

Educating the whole child through the fine and practical arts.

> "I think every school should be like this. We should all learn how to sew and knit. We should all learn how to carve. We should all learn how to cook."
>
> —Seventh-grade student

> "It brings the arts in various ways to develop the whole student, and along with that music and language. And in building this base you build a whole learner and you build someone who loves learning and someone who is going to pursue knowledge rather than having it poured down their throats."
>
> —Birney teacher

In addition to the interdisciplinary and thematic nature of core classroom learning, learning in the fine and practical arts also differentiates a Waldorf-inspired education from many other public schools.

Across the grade levels, students take specialty classes, which enable students to have access to learning through the arts, movement, foreign language, handwork, and gardening. Some of the classes are taught by professional teachers and some are run by parent volunteers. Table 2 provides an overview of the specialty classes offered.

Table 2: Specialty Classes

Class	Grade	Teacher
Eurythmy (movement)[7]	All grades	Professional teacher
Gardening	All grades	Parent volunteer
Handwork	Kindergarten—finger knitting 1st–2nd grade—2-needle knitting 3rd grade—crocheting 4th—needlepoint 5th— knitting with 4 needles 6th—embroidery 7th—needle felting 8th—sewing machines, book making	Professional teacher
Multicultural folk dance	3rd–8th grade	Professional teacher
Spanish	1st–8th	Professional teacher
String instruments	4th–8th grade	Professional teacher
Woodworking	4th–8th grade	Parent volunteer

Students attend most of the specialty classes one to two times a week. Some last all year; others are for shorter spans of time. In addition to the specialty classes taught by other teachers, the classroom teacher teaches cooking, singing, flute playing, drama, and art, including drawing, painting, and sculpture.

Students relish their time in specialty classes. For example, in the early elementary grades in handwork class, students work with laser-like focus on completing their knitting tasks. Some sing quietly to themselves, while others chat about events in their lives, but most are silently engaged in the act of working with their hands towards the completion of a pattern. The space exudes a soothing calmness. The handwork instructor gently guides the students to improve their work, to consider different techniques or to even go back because they can "do better." The work students engage in is not superfluous or frivolous, it feels purposeful and intentional.

The teachers are also intentional in how they engage students in the arts in terms of the timing. As one teacher explains:

> Clay work is bringing them into their bodies so you've got to do it early in the week, to bring them out of their weekend. Then watercolor painting is more for their thoughts so I do it midweek, and then we end the week on form drawings so that we're ending by collecting all of our intellectual thoughts.

The emphasis on the beauty of carefully executed drawing is internalized by the students, who remember how excited they were when they were first given a compass to draw circles (in sixth grade):

> Student 1: When you get the compass...you will be so happy when you get a compass because you draw perfect circles. It's so beautiful.
>
> Student 2: All those times you've made a circle that just looks terrible, gone. The compass makes it perfect.

Drawing has multiple purposes in the Waldorf-inspired classroom from a way to communicate understanding to a way to stimulate brain functioning through clearly articulated form drawing activities aligned to the children's developmental stage.

The specialty and in-class art, music, and cooking instruction benefit children in innumerable ways but include a deep appreciation and understanding of beauty, the development of fine and gross motor skills, a connection to nature, cognitive development as it relates to making music, art, and learning a language. In addition, specialty classes provide students with experiences learning from other teachers besides their classroom teacher. A seventh grader identifies developing creativity

as an important and valued component of an education at Birney. "I think it has helped my creative mind to progress more with the art and the little creative things they had us do."

Students' proficiency and mastery of the arts is not a criterion for their exploration in them. All children are viewed as needing the learning that comes from engaging with the arts. A veteran teacher explains, "[If a student doesn't feel] very artistic, but you still have to get your hands in the clay. You still have to play your flute." Teachers also speak to the healing nature of the arts and handwork. "They get to work with their hands, their hearts; it just nurtures them and heals them." The arts are also seen by teachers as a way to help students find their path in life. As one teacher explains:

> It's an education where the teacher strives to find out what is the potential of each child? What did they come here for onto the earth... and how do we help them to reach their highest potential? And not knowing what it is, we need to introduce them to everything that's out there, and we do that through images and through music and through art, visual and performing. We want to find out what it is that each child can be passionate about and then how they can contribute that hopefully later on in life. We want to guide them into being good people who want to do that.

Teaching Waldorf in a Public School: The Journey of a School as Family

> "It's not a job, it's a life."
>
> —Birney teacher

Teaching in a Waldorf-inspired school takes tremendous commitment. It requires teachers to give of themselves completely into the relationships they form with students and families, to cultivate deep knowledge of Steiner philosophy, Waldorf curriculum and pedagogy, to invest in their own continued learning and growth, to engage collaboratively with colleagues, and to play a leadership role in their school.

Looping redefines teaching. Looping enables Waldorf-inspired teachers to approach setting learning goals for students differently than in many other approaches to schooling. In a Waldorf-inspired education, teachers do not speak about students being "at grade level." Students are measured against themselves rather than standardized measures. This is possible because of the commitment that teachers make to stay with their students from first grade through eighth grade. This radical form of looping dramatically changes the role of the teacher. Not only

does the teacher remain with their class, ideally, for eight years, but the class stays together as a cohort. An individual teacher holds vastly more responsibility for a child's growth than any individual teacher who does not loop with their students as is more common in public schools; a Waldorf-inspired teacher cannot either blame a previous teacher for not covering certain material or ensuring that a child had learned it, nor can they write a child off, knowing that they just have to endure one difficult year. They have to find ways to engage, support, and challenge their students for up to eight years. One teacher explains:

> There's nothing you can sweep under a rug. You look at the people in front of you, you really see them for their strengths, weaknesses, the family that they have been dealt, and you look at all of that as just a big large picture and nothing can just get waited out.... Everything has to be in a process of being worked on....You don't have that attitude of how you're going to tolerate; you're [thinking] how am I going to help him to become the best person that he can be, but also the person that we can all live with for eight years (laughing)? It was great to not have that sort of "ugh I can't wait to pass this person away from me," because I think it changes the whole way that you teach, the way you make decisions. It's not about rewards and punishments; it's about creating relationships that are going to last forever potentially.

Looping embodies the essence of what it means to be a Waldorf teacher in a public school better than almost anything else. It takes a special teacher to be willing to embark on the eight-year journey that looping requires. It demands that a teacher see himself or herself as more than a grade-level teacher. Indeed, the teacher must see himself or herself as a student as well, one developing as a human being by helping in the development of others. More importantly, it requires the teacher to see himself or herself as a member of a family. Waldorf teachers understand that they are committed to the children under their care not merely for the course of the school day, or school year, but for life. This relationship will change and evolve over time, but the relationship between student and teacher is what makes the entire school go.

The prospect of being with the same group of students may seem daunting; however, because of the vision provided by Steiner's developmental theory, Waldorf teachers meet it with joy and enthusiasm. Each grade has associated characteristics, all tied to the larger theory. This understanding that each level is distinct, with familiar themes emerging regardless of the group, gives teachers who have yet to teach students at a given grade level a way to think about their children. It does not mean that individual differences within a classroom will be ignored or erased, but rather the collectively shared vision of what third graders will face

versus what fifth graders face helps provide a sense of security for a teacher. At the same time, the developmental model helps teachers plan activities that the community feels are appropriate for each grade's developmental level. Teachers also have to develop new curriculum each year, as one explains, "We are basically reinventing the wheel almost all the time because we bring a twist to it that seems to be very useful. It makes us very present as teachers." Even if a teacher has completed a full loop in prior years, they revise their instruction to meet the needs of each cohort of students with whom they work. The Birney teachers, however, relish this challenge. One explained:

> I love to learn and keep up; I like the challenge of putting together different lessons and I like the subject matter as you move your way through the grades. You see that the curriculum really does offer opportunities for engagement in the learning.

The curricular freedom that looping affords its teachers directly impacts the pacing of instruction as well. Since the teachers are not under pressure to prepare students to a certain level of proficiency to hand off to their next teacher they can be responsive to the students' needs, readiness for new learning, and skill development in designing their instruction. One parent describes it as "a very forgiving, child-paced method of teaching." Central to the Waldorf philosophy is taking time for quiet, to let the new learning sink in, to pause, to absorb, to come at the learning from various angles. A teacher explains the approach "learning through wonder, imposing questions and then letting it rest and coming back and thinking about it versus just putting in and demanding facts." Although, to an outsider the slower pace of instruction can appear to be less rigorous, it can open the door for deeper understanding and integration. A parent explains, "Sometimes the slower pace is mistaken for less information and less learning...it's definitely not, it's just not vomited at you, it's just not skin deep, it goes in, it's absorbed and lived." As a result, teachers can be much more responsive to the needs of both their individual students and their class as a whole. There is also less need to have absolute standards for each grade level. A veteran teacher shares that she measures the growth and progress of each of her 31 children, with explicit tracking three times a year in math and language. "I don't care [about] their second grade reading level, they're moving forward. The child that is stagnating, that's the child that I lose sleep over." However, the teacher's role is to create the type of environment that supports each child's development. One teacher wrote in a reflection about being a Waldorf teacher:

> [Child] development is at times like a river which has gone underground temporarily, just to emerge fuller and robust a few miles downstream and teachers don't just wait for this development to take place, but nurture the healthy environment that warrants this becoming.

Another challenge of looping is developing and sustaining a teacher's comfort zone with a range of age groups. For the most part teachers have to work through their discomfort with certain ages, showing students that adults struggle and are not experts at everything. One teacher reflected on the challenges she faced as she progressed through the grades with her students:

> I went through a huge transition last year where I didn't think I would move on. I thought...I might not be the right teacher to keep going...I told everyone in fifth grade, it's the golden year. You know it's the age of Greek beauty and balance. It's going to be amazing. And then I felt like we just slid downhill all year long, but this year we just climbed right back up again...I had to get through a lot of hesitation on my own part and learn about the kids and be open to the experiences that they and their parents bring me. So last year was just full of experiences. This year has been so nice so I'm feeling like it's going to be ok, but my goal is to make sure that I can be happy and successful day by day and just work on that. But I feel like I'm in it for the long haul. I had to get through that big transition last year, and I know I'm not the only one who has to go through that.

As students get older, the teacher has a wealth of personal experience with the students to draw from, to refer back to, and to share with the students. Without teachers willing to loop, this unbroken line of shared experience would not be possible. Looping also forces teachers to confront their own discomfort and insecurities in ways that other schooling models do not. One teacher described how looping required her to evolve and undergo a pedagogical paradigm shift she would have otherwise been able to avoid:

> [W]hen I became a teacher I was like, "I'm not going to be a middle school teacher." I hated middle school, didn't want to be in middle school, nothing. High school I'd like, college I would like, the little ones were fine, and it turned out with my last group sixth, seventh and eighth were the best years because you see their personalities coming out and you get to know them and you get to see what they were becoming and be a guide and navigator on that journey.

But perhaps the most striking testament of the familial bonds fostered between teachers and their students is the willingness of teachers at Alice Birney to feel vulnerable with their students and to know that their students will support them. One teacher spoke of her personal insecurities and how the connections she has with her students allowed her to confront those insecurities:

> [O]ne of the deepest darkest secrets I hold as a Waldorf teacher is that I am not an artist and I'm not a singer. So every day I have to

> push myself to come in here and put my chalkboard drawing up on that board and let the whole world see it and I have to sing songs... [I]nitially when they were second grade, third grade, even fourth grade, they just thought I was wonderful and I could do everything so beautifully. And then when we hit fifth grade it was like "whoa!" I was suddenly way out of tune. They could hear it. I always was but they could hear it now and they could draw better than I could, a lot of them....because there are still a lot of kids who struggle just as much as I do or more, so I just remind them, "I get your struggle. I understand."

A veteran seventh-grade teacher corroborated the necessity of struggle and the learning brought about through the teacher's own challenges:

> You don't have to be an expert, the students will see that you're striving to learn the material and that's ok. If you make mistakes, that's ok, it's your effort, you're striving, through which they learn almost as much as [if you were an expert]...I know that's a Steiner tenet for teachers. It's ok, you're going to be struggling and the students will see that and that's good.

In addition to being able to be responsive to individual students' needs, classes develop a group identity with explicit needs. A support teacher observed that: "[E]ach class here has a personality. It's a big part of the looping of staying together first through eighth. It ends up each class has its own identity." Parents, students, and teachers all credit the sustained relationships between teacher and student as instrumental in the positive experiences students have at Alice Birney in terms of having both their individual needs and collective needs addressed. For example, one parent notes:

> I feel that the teachers here are more vested in what they're teaching the children because they helped develop what they're teaching the children, and they can tailor it to the classroom, so that way nobody has that left behind feeling. The group is moving forward.

Where at many schools, teachers may one year teach first grade and the next fourth, the stability of looping, organized around a clear philosophy, allows teachers to more confidently meet the unexpected. It also allows for deep bonds between students and teachers. The sustained relationship creates a more efficient learning environment. Teachers and students do not need to take time at the beginning of the year to get to know each other and the expectations that the teacher has of the students. As one parent explains:

> The whole anxiety of who's my teacher, who is going to be in my class...all of that is gone and the teacher gets to build every year, build and build and build. The first day of school it's like they never left, we're just moving on.

Although teachers look at the relationships over the long haul they also take seriously the responsibility of teaching as well. If they do not teach their students, no one else will. As one middle school teacher reflects, "I feel a huge responsibility to the kids for their learning...and I want to help them as much as possible." Another teacher adds, "The Waldorf teacher is almost like a co-parent. We spend a disproportionate amount of quality time with each child not only during the six hours of the school day but on and on." A sixth-grade teacher described the importance of these relationships in her own identity: "It's about connections. You can either connect with the children, you can connect with the curriculum, they can connect with each other...I mean it just fits my DNA and most of these kids' here, too."

Additionally, teachers must be willing and able to facilitate a sense of community between students and all of their families. This means understanding that looping with students requires getting to know who they are outside of the school and the out-of-school forces that shape them. It means bringing together families who would otherwise likely never meet, and helping maintain their long-term commitment to what looping entails. Again, it takes a special teacher who is not only willing to take this extra task on, but to take it on year after year. A district administrator shared

the way Birney teachers modeled, not only for students, but parents as well, what a healthy and supportive environment looks like:

> [T]he teachers at Birney are incredible, just incredible, and parents sense that. [The teachers] model all of the things that we teach children about working out and working through our differences...[They] don't move a child from a classroom because a parent has a squabble with another parent. [They] say, "Ok we're going to model this for our children, and that's a very different approach than traditional schools."

For parents to be willing to commit to such a fundamental and important process, and to work towards supporting the teacher and his or her students, they too must see the classroom as an extension of the family. As students exit Birney, the experience of looping forges a sense of lasting community that transcends the walls of the classroom and the fences of the campus. None of this would be possible without teachers willing to take risks, move outside of their comfort zones, and do challenging extra work necessary for the success of the entire endeavor.

The added demands (and rewards) of learning to master Waldorf methods. As discussed in previous sections, teaching at a Waldorf-inspired school requires teachers to have a deep understanding of the Steiner philosophy of child development as well as the Waldorf approach to schooling because it operates in such sharp contrast to commonly held ideas of public schooling. Teachers need intensive training on Steiner philosophy and the Waldorf instructional approach to be able to develop a sense of mastery once they are teaching within a Waldorf-inspired school. After many years of the school, district, and teachers' union working together, Principal Horning was able to restrict her hiring to teachers who have at least one year of Waldorf experience—working as a teacher or teaching assistant in a Waldorf school or some training through any Waldorf training program and express commitment to complete their training. Once hired, all Birney teachers are expected to complete their Waldorf teaching training in a reasonable amount of time. However, since teachers have to pay for their education themselves, Birney is not in a position to enforce this expectation. In addition, Principal Horning states, "We always believe that we are life-long learners and that we are never truly done with learning."

Because Alice Birney is located in Sacramento, in close proximity to the Rudolf Steiner College, teachers do have access to high-quality training. All Birney teachers have been exposed in some way to Steiner College, either from having taken a few summer classes or having completed a Waldorf teaching diploma from two full years of study.

For teachers interested in the Waldorf approach, however, Steiner College can be prohibitively expensive. In response to this challenge, in 2012 the Birney and Carver principals responded to a request from then-Superintendent Raymond for a proposal

for a district-funded Waldorf education program called Waldorf Education Seminar for Teachers (WEST). The district agreed to sponsor this introductory seminar for all teachers in the SCUSD district to ensure that Birney, Carver, and more recently A.M. Winn had a pipeline of teachers with some Waldorf training. The Birney and Carver principals design and administrate WEST. The funding covers materials, supplies, and instructors from Steiner College faculty and Birney and Carver to teach specific topics of Waldorf education.

In 2012, teachers signed up for the two-year WEST program that includes two weeks of seminar classes in the summer and 4-hour monthly meetings throughout the school year. In 2014, 34 teachers graduated from the first cohort. In 2014 a second cohort began with 25 teachers. All three Waldorf-inspired public schools in Sacramento hire some of their teachers out of this cohort.

The content of the WEST program is vastly different from typical public education professional development. It involves as much personal reflection as discussion of the role of the Waldorf teacher. For example, one instructor, widely respected as an important teacher of Steiner philosophy, stated, "We need to care for ourselves so we can stand before the children as models worth imitating and we can stand before teenagers with an uncynical look at ideals and ideas." He went on to encourage the participants as they were reading about Steiner philosophy to identify their "edge experience and questions, what puts them at the edge of discomfort, because that is where the growth is." Learning topics included Steiner philosophy, main lesson, movement, and form drawing among other topics. Furthermore, a sense of community is fostered as the participants all contribute to communal lunches that they enjoy together each day.

Participants shared some of their takeaways from their learning. "I like the concept that learning is a process of gaining and losing abilities; it cultivates reverence for what the young child brings to us." Another person stated:

> The more I learn about Waldorf, the more I feel I need to unlearn about myself. There is a slowing down. I wanted to protect my own children from the world. I want to bring what I had in my childhood to my life today. Joy, living fully in my body.

An afterschool teacher said, "[This method] forces me to slow down. Kids need the attention so much." When she greets students at the door, they just stop and breathe and tell her all about their day and say "I can use some knitting today." Liz Beaven, president of Steiner College, expressed confidence that the WEST program provides high-quality foundational learning, professional development, and instruction in methodology and has fidelity to the Steiner model. Although it is not nearly as comprehensive as Waldorf teaching certification through Steiner College, it does make the Waldorf approach accessible to more teachers.

In the 2014–15 school year almost all teachers had completed the majority of their Waldorf education. Table 3 details Birney teachers' level of training.

Table 3: Birney Teacher Training

Training Completed	Percent of Teachers
Completed training through Steiner College	10 teachers (50%)
Will complete Steiner College training summer of 2015	5 teachers (25%)
Completed 1 year of training from Steiner College and 2 years of WEST	4 teachers (20%)
Completed grade level trainings only in Waldorf curriculum	1 teacher[8] (5%)

The Waldorf model requires a level of commitment to outside study and training that many other school models do not. The fact that there is a regular and consistent cohort willing to commit to doing them for multiple years shows both their level of belief in the method and their understanding in the necessity of the extra work required to master it. Not only do teachers have to master the state-mandated grade-level standards for the grade they are teaching in any given year, they must also master the Waldorf equivalent for that grade. As one teacher explained:

> Many people refer to our spouses as Waldorf widows or widowers because...it takes so much time. And in our training in the summer at Steiner College one of the teachers there...said we need to make it beautiful but we also need to work on [developing] a certain speed because we have lives and we need to get on to other things we're doing. So that's part of what we work on.

As difficult and demanding as the path through the grades is, teacher willingness to grow and learn ultimately helps make the classroom a safer and more understanding space. For teachers new to the method, this often proves to be a daunting task; however, the broader community accepts that the teacher is growing and learning as well as his or her students, providing a space for flexibility and growth that a school more organized around hard data such as test scores would not be able to provide. However, Waldorf teachers feel that their commitment to continual learning and growth not only helps them be better teachers but also helps them grow personally. A veteran teacher who came to Birney after years of teaching in public schools explained why he was willing to sacrifice in order to master Waldorf methods:

> Waldorf to me is very inspiring...That was why I came here. I knew that I was going to work on myself to improve, to be able to read more about everything...[I]t's child development for the children but

> it's also human development for us in huge ways. Talking about health for me, the amount of work is unbelievable. So people ask me..."Is this easier? " and I say "It is easier in the way that it's meaningful, but it's extremely demanding."

Another teacher with public school experience added:

> I love the intellectual study of Waldorf education. I love going to Steiner College, so that has been incredibly freeing for me, and I see it working. I see things that in the very beginning I was thinking...is this going to work? I'm seeing it play out so beautifully in the children I'm working with.

Teachers in public Waldorf-inspired schools understand that they are on a journey, and that motivates their willingness to do so much extra work. They understand that the journey will be rewarding and that even though the school may consume much of their life, the impact they make on the larger world makes their sacrifices worth it.

Collaboration and curriculum development for independence. Looping presents unique challenges to fostering a sense of community, as teachers, with the exception of specialty teachers, do not share students. Each teacher, in a sense, operates in an isolated sphere of influence over their classroom community. Given this context, it is particularly important the staff has a sense of community with one another and knowledge about each other's students. The supportive, collaborative environment at Birney makes the extra work required of teachers at Birney much more manageable. No teacher feels like he or she is alone, even though all are expected to be independent shepherds of their classes. A central tenet of Steiner philosophy is collective effort aimed at providing maximum independence for the individual. At Alice Birney, the teachers deeply internalize this axiom.

The nature of looping with students in an eight-year cycle means that teachers teaching new material each year are in a constant state of curriculum design. For guidance, teachers rely on (a) the grade-level main lesson topics, (b) teachers who have taught those grades already, and (c) their partner teacher who is teaching the same grade as they. In many public schools, early career teachers are often overwhelmed by having to design a portion of their curriculum, and much of it is designed for them in off-the-shelf curriculum guides. But Waldorf teachers design their curriculum every year. They often take time during the summer to plan together. The teachers use that time to figure out their main lesson blocks and their learning goals for each main lesson block and for the year as a whole in grade-level teams. A sample lesson planning template can be found in Appendix C.

Even when teachers have access to curriculum from other teachers, they often choose to redesign it to meet the needs of their students and their teaching style. One veteran teacher explains:

> People hand down binders of references...I like looking at them but I usually do my own thing. I went to a Waldorf school and just the creative process of putting it together, I need that. I need to almost take it apart in order to build it myself. I love looking at people's stuff, but then I end up usually doing my own thing.

Another teacher adds that although there are Waldorf topics and approaches, he adds his own flavor as well. He feels that a good teacher has to constantly question whether his approach is working with his students.

At Alice Birney the school strikes a careful balance between respect for the Waldorf curriculum and for a teacher's autonomy and professionalism. Principal Horning explains:

> Because of my teachers' vast knowledge, personal study, and experience, I trust them to make decisions that are best for the children that sit in front of them each day. They are the experts and deserve to be honored and treated as such. They know they can use me as a resource as needed and I check in with them regularly.

A teacher, new to Birney but experienced in other public settings, reflects:

> The biggest thing is teacher autonomy and creativity. That feels so good. It feels so good to be treated like an intelligent person who's been to 9 years of college and who can make decisions based on information.

Before its expansion to having two teachers working at each grade level, the faculty at Birney had a different form of collaboration. Since each teacher was at a different point in the looping process, daily collaboration proved more difficult. However, teachers made time to check in with one another and for the more experienced to support the less experienced by looking at lessons and giving feedback.

As Birney has expanded to having two teachers for each grade, collaboration at the school has increased in a more direct way. Many of the grade-level teachers frequently check in with one another, compare progress and make suggestions on how to approach challenges. Although Birney teachers meet weekly, compared to other district teachers who only have opportunities for monthly collaboration, teachers could benefit from even more collaboration. Some teachers plan in lockstep with each other while others use the time to share ideas. A middle school teacher explained how this process worked for her:

> [W]e just share. We're totally teaching different things. Yesterday I explained to her what I was doing and she was doing more of a math-based economics block. She was telling me "I'm doing...decimals, percentages right now" and then I told her what I was doing and she said "Oh, I didn't even think of doing the social studies kind of aspect to it." And so those are the kinds of things we're able to share with one another and then we decide, you know, is that what my class needs? Is that where I want to go?

Because of looping, many teachers realize that what they need to teach their students varies, based upon what they have already taught or not taught their students as well as the speed at which they move through the curriculum. For example, one teacher taught more fractions in fourth grade than the other fourth-grade teacher so by the time the students got to sixth grade the teacher who had taught less in fourth grade completed her coverage of fractions with her students. This approach informs assessment as well. As a veteran teacher explains, "What's the point of having a hard line (assessing certain skills and knowledge) if you haven't learned steps 1–5 pretty well." Although how teachers assess student learning daily or weekly is differentiated by teacher and student, every grade level has common assessments that they use every trimester, in which grade-level teachers use the same assessment. Birney was able to negotiate with the district for the creation of its own benchmark assessments but it does have to use the district timeline in its administration.

All teachers understand that each class is, in many ways, a world unto itself, and they deeply value the autonomy and independence that this understanding fosters. An eighth-grade teacher described her view of collaboration saying:

> We [the eighth-grade teachers] actually have been pretty independent. Not all teachers...some teachers plan more together, but we've kind of done our thing. We have very different classes, too, so it kind of makes sense that we would choose to plan differently to accommodate our classes and how they are. Also our own interests and how we develop...The joy of teaching too comes from bringing your own authorship, if you will, to it.

The community creates an environment where everyone is collaborating towards maximizing the independence of its members. Teachers want to take and mold curriculum that fits their needs and the needs of their students, but that is best done with as much information as possible so teachers do share all of their curriculum with each other.

Weekly, dedicated time is set aside for specialty teachers to meet with special education, speech therapist, and intervention teachers as well as with the principal to discuss student progress and determine what more can be done to make students successful. Using the class roster they discuss each student, starting with students who have IEPs

and 504 plans. Over the course of the year they discuss each student several times. According to the principal they each share what they know about the student, and teachers often come to the team to ask for suggestions for a specific student.

Collaborative leadership: the evolution of an idea. The spirit of deep collaboration that exists between the teachers and staff has only recently extended to the administration. In its early years, the school's administration did not work well with the teachers. The teachers often felt that they were being put in near impossible situations, where they wanted to preserve the essence of what it meant to have fidelity to the Waldorf approach, and what they were asked to do by the state and district and the school's administrators did not always buffer those pressures for them.

A veteran teacher described what this was like:

> Waldorf schools are teacher-driven schools, and so in the early years I think we had to be really...firm about what we would try, what we weren't going to try, and why, and we had to really know the why... [T]hat was very painful for some administrators. There were things like, "Why can't you control your teachers, and why are the teachers deciding what you're doing?" and...well, we wouldn't have a school without them. [W]e had to sort of thread this needle...there were times when rules could be bent, and there were times that rules could be broken, and there were times that they couldn't, and so we had to sort of learn...there are others that we just go, "OK, that's one we just lose on." [I] think it took, especially in the beginning, teachers that were just willing to say "No, this is what it should look like" [to] really create a vision of what a public [Waldorf] school would look like.

It is hard to say which factors have most enabled the sustainability of the school and its fidelity to the Waldorf approach, however, the extent to which its success depends upon intense teacher training and teacher implementation of that approach is certainly a key factor.

With the hiring of Mechelle Horning as principal in 2009 and the support from former Superintendent Jonathan Raymond, the contested relationship that existed between administrators and faculty almost completely disappeared. Although Horning had taught many years in the district in other schools, she received a master's degree in curriculum and instruction with an emphasis in the arts in a program that was a collaboration between Rudolf Steiner College and Cal State Sacramento. She believes in, and understands, what the teachers are doing in ways that previous administrators did not. Under her stewardship, the school has grown tremendously and several teachers spoke about how, for the first time, they felt totally supported in what they were doing. As one newer teacher stated, "She was wonderful from the very beginning; what do you need, how can I help you? This is how your parents can help you."

Birney now supports teacher learning, leadership, and a strong sense of community by providing teachers with time to learn together. Three Mondays a month teachers meet for 90 minutes for a common planning time. Each staff meeting begins with saying a verse together, followed by a personal check-in, the principal gives important announcements, they sing together, do an artistic activity led by a teacher and engage in a child study, and conclude by reciting a verse and holding hands. Principal Horning recognizes the importance of nurturing all the members of her school community, including the teachers. As one teacher explains:

> When we meet we always take time, and sometimes it takes 45 minutes to go around and check-in, "How is everything with you?" Many times, "What are you doing for yourself to keep yourself together?" because like I said it's very demanding. It's a work of love.

Child study is a significant part of each meeting. The child study requires each teacher, over a three-week period, to quietly observe a particular child that a teacher has "brought forward out of some type of concern," according to Principal Horning. Parents give permission for this activity prior to it occurring. Observations are shared over a three-week period of time in a very structured way. The activity concludes with the teachers offering suggestions for next steps to support that student. This activity differs dramatically from approaches taken in public schools in terms of the depth and duration of the study and the extent to which the whole school is invested in supporting the child.

One Monday a month, the teachers meet with their mentor—new teachers are assigned a veteran teacher from the staff as a mentor. They meet weekly or biweekly and observe each other teaching. Occasionally, when they have the funds, the school hires a master mentor teacher to support Birney staff as well. Furthermore, once a year the staff takes two days to have an exchange day where teachers from grades above and below share their curricula and pedagogy with each other. Occasionally, teachers are given an extra day or two for planning by the district to align their instruction to the Common Core.

Journeys begin, journeys end. At Birney, the commitment to the creation of a meaningful journey for all its members continues to drive the work that goes on there. The students are in the care of people who see their own personal journeys reflected in the lives of those students. The sense of everyone moving towards becoming better people who are trying to make the world a better place is palpable. It is what sustains the difficult and demanding work.

Birney is a harmonious environment. From the orderly entrances of students into their classrooms at the start of the school day, to the cooperative, largely non-competitive play that they engage in at lunch, Birney feels safe and supportive. The harmony that exists throughout the school comes from years of hard work by the teachers and staff, which the school's students further strengthen.

Parents as the Glue of Alice Birney

Since its inception, parents have been crucial to Alice Birney's survival and the quality of its programs. Parents' deep commitment to the school, based on a strong understanding of the Waldorf approach, helps them support the school financially and with political pressure when needed and contributes to decision-making in key ways. In this section, we discuss all of these aspects of the parents' role.

Since Alice Birney has one of the longest waiting lists of any district school, the school has not had to pay as much attention to recruitment for many years. However, they do want to ensure that they are attracting a diverse population of families and so have invested some effort to ensure some level of diversity. For example, around 2012, some of the kindergarten teachers went to preschools in the area that served the Latino community and spoke to families about their program at parent nights. A few families came to Birney and then word spread in the community and more enrolled over the next few years. As a Spanish-speaking teacher explained, parents learned about the program and thought, "Oh, this is like what we do in Mexico, because we do the woodwork and we do the knitting and crocheting," and they thought, "This is a fantastic place." Because of its approach to literacy, its alternative approach in general, and its location in a more middle-class part of town than when it was at Morse, the school attracts more educated families and has less ethnic diversity than many schools in the district. Birney continues to promote itself to a

diverse population through information sessions in the neighborhood, open houses, and pancake breakfasts for prospective families. Increasing diversity is a part of the school's most recent vision planning.

While Birney does not have the ethnic diversity of some Sacramento schools, it does have a high percentage of students with diagnosed and undiagnosed special needs. As a public school, Birney takes all children. This proves a special challenge for parents and teachers working together to ensure that these parents and children are fully included in the school and parents feel that their children's needs are being met.

Understanding Waldorf. Because of the strong family engagement and buy-in necessary to make a public Waldorf-inspired school work, the staff wants to make sure that families understand the Waldorf approach fully before they commit to enrolling. The school continues to provide parents with education on parenting and Waldorf philosophy throughout their years at Birney.

Prior to enrolling at Birney, families are required to take a tour of the school and attend an information session. Principal Horning explains:

> We tell parents when you choose this school you are making a family lifestyle decision. We are on campus several nights a month and some weekends. We are asking you to be engaged with your children and to reduce screen time.

These tours and informational sessions have been widely attended with 75 people attending each session. At these informational sessions Principal Horning describes the Waldorf approach including that it is not an early literacy program but rather that they provide oral language and imaginative play.

In recent years, the school has given all parents who register for kindergarten a book, called *Simplicity Parenting* (Payne, 2010). For families entering at kindergarten, the kindergarten teachers invite them to a welcome tea before school starts, so the children can look at the yard and find their cubby and get to know the school to ease the transition.

One veteran teacher credits Principal Horning with doing an excellent job educating parents through the school visitation and mandatory meeting prior to their enrollment, so less burden for parent education falls upon the teachers. She remarks that this represents a change from the past when parents would enroll in the school without fully understanding the approach, in particular the later introduction of the alphabet and numbers.

Once families enroll, the school continues the parent education component and building relationships with families. First-grade teachers often conduct home visits

to learn about their students. One teacher explains, "I visited every family at home and learned a lot from them just listening to what they loved about [their child]. I asked questions, like what did you love about kindergarten? What are you looking forward to in first grade?" Another teacher took his guitar on home visits and played music and sang with the children.

The school hosts parent education nights where they address different components of the instructional program like eurythmy and painting. The goal is to make the experience hands-on for parents, coupled with a theoretical component so it is accessible but grounded in Steiner philosophy. The school will often send an article home with families as well that discusses the topic. One teacher describes the articles as "pretty intimidating [even for] native English speakers," so she makes an effort to personally invite parents to attend the parenting night events.

While it can't be enforced, enrolling at Alice Birney represents a commitment not only to support the schooling approach, but also to commit to Steiner philosophy on parenting at home. This philosophy includes limiting children's screen time via cell phones, video games, TV, and movies. It also includes not wearing clothes with commercial characters. These recommendations are all grounded in research and professional recommendations such as the American Pediatric Society to limit screen time to protect children's brain development and facilitate physical activity and social and developmental needs. The recommendation against commercial clothing is intended to protect childhood and not use children as vehicles for commercial marketing. Although the school cannot regulate parenting at home, they do work with parents to help them see the causes of their children's challenges concentrating at school if they feel that they spent all their time playing video games. As one veteran teacher explains:

> We have a school rule that we don't discuss movies and television at school and video games...I know on Monday morning when they come in bleary-eyed exactly what they've done, [kid's name] has spent every waking minute playing Minecraft....My approach is [to say to the parent] he seems to have trouble concentrating, how could he better spend and fill his weekend hours.

Despite the Waldorf approach suggesting an ideal home environment, teachers try to approach their interactions with parents from a position of compassion and understanding. As one teacher explains, "I can only encourage and support, give articles. That's all I can do, and not judge...but understand our job is hard all the way around. Being parents is [hard]." The commitment to looping not only impacts the ongoing relationship between teachers and students but with families over many years and enables the teacher to support children and their parents more deeply than in many other schools. A parent explains the value of the deeper relationships with the looping teacher and other families in the class:

> You have this person who becomes another parent, another part of your family. There's consistency in the class, and they really grow up with these other students...and it's amazing and we go camping every summer with the other families....it does become an extended family.

One elementary teacher talks about how her work with parents around a child's behavioral issues at home has transformed the family:

> I've given them *Simplicity Parenting* to read and they're kind of having a Waldorf revolution. There's been a lot of tears and a lot of adjustment but it isn't just a child thing. It's a whole family thing.

Parents also value the deeper relationships with teachers and sense of connection to the school. One parent commented that he particularly appreciated the play-based curriculum, stating "It gave me confidence at home when they're just playing, doing block stuff and I know what is happening and say 'Oh, that's why this is helpful.'"

Teachers developing relationships with parents. Teachers hold two to three meetings with all their parents in their classroom each year. For example, one teacher holds an initial meeting with parents to give an overview of the year's curriculum, gather feedback from parents, and request volunteering time as well as discussing the children's developmental stage. In October the teacher meets with families again to check in and learn about how things are working at home. In November, teachers have individual conferences with parents in which they review how each child is growing. Some teachers write narrative reports on student progress three times a year. One parent appreciates the in-depth nature of these conversations and the written reports about their children that the teachers produce:

> They really take the time to say what their strengths and weaknesses are...I think we get the added bonus of the teacher really sitting down and thinking about the child and writing something. And sometimes it can be three pages, I mean incredible undertaking for the teacher to do that three times a year, so I really honor their time and commitment.

Beyond the formal structures in place to facilitate communication with parents, teachers make themselves available before and after school, by phone and e-mail.

Parent support crucial to Birney's success. In large part, parent support of Alice Birney/Morse/Oakridge has been crucial to its success. Now that the school is established and successful, parent support is more traditional in its nature including assistance in the classroom, fundraising, and special events. However, in the first decade of the school's formation, parent support was vital to its existence as parents exerted political pressure on district officials and physically helped transform the school sites.

In the early years, it was parents' advocacy that ensured that the school remained viable. Parents advocated that the school only hire Waldorf-trained teachers, that the teachers have curricular autonomy to teach the Waldorf methods, that the school have a supportive principal, and that the school expand to two classes per grade level. They have also been responsible for creating the physical space in transforming the kindergarten yard and big playground, funding and promoting monthly field trips in every grade, creating an environmental waste plan, and planting 28 trees. According to one teacher who began as a parent at the school:

> I was asked to fight a lot of battles for the teachers with the district, and had a lot of meetings with the superintendent that he did not want to have...parents are the strongest, most articulate organizers and backers of the curriculum....We've had principals that I pretty much think were brought here to bring us in line, like toe the line, did not always last long because parents are great organizers.

The act of advocating for their students and their school further connects parents to the school and builds a sense of commitment and community.

When the school moved from John Morse to the Alice Birney site, the parents spent countless hours and donated materials and equipment to tear up the cement and part of the parking lot on the school grounds to make an entirely natural play space for the kindergarten classes. This space, formerly mostly paved, is entirely natural with trees, dirt, a hill, rocky area, sandbox, playhouse, and gardens. This effort was entirely parent-led and executed.

Beyond the crucial advocacy and school transformation role, parents continue to sustain the school through their assistance in the classroom and with school activities. Parents are critical to the success of community events like the Harvest Festival, Knit-a-thon, Pancake Breakfast/Earth Day, and Whole World Festival. In the kindergarten years, there is at least one parent helping in each classroom every day. In third grade when students study practical life, parents are very involved supporting gardening, cooking, and woodworking and expected to help out several times a week. In addition, across all grades parents are responsible to bring in snacks for their class for one week a few times a year and to donate additional supplies to the school. A district official describes the expectation for parent involvement in the school as a "way of life."

Parent engagement is crucial for Birney to fully implement the Waldorf approach to instruction. As classes go on a variety of field trips over the years, from climbing Mount Lassen to doing an overnight historical simulation at Fort Ross, teachers must facilitate trust between all of the families in the classroom. Some families are willing to financially support these activities in order to make sure that all children can participate. The trust generated by the teacher and the relationships between

families that he or she facilitates makes all of this possible. Similar things happen in other school environments, but the depth of connection between families in an eighth-grade classroom at Alice Birney is almost unique in a public setting. The families, which have been through so much together, know one another with a refreshing familiarity. During an eighth-grade exhibition of work, more than fifty parents, students, family, and community members showed up in the evening to support students in their presentations. Families genuinely interacted with each other in a deeply familiar way. Parents had obviously seen not only their own students grow through looping, but also had played roles in the growth of other children in the space. As the presentations commenced and ended, the audience was genuinely engaged. This engagement came from the familiarity it had with each student, his or her development, and evolving interests.

Fully realizing all the components of a Waldorf education requires considerable fundraising as the district does not pay for specialty teachers and programs or Waldorf materials, such as beeswax crayons, main lesson books, and watercolor paper. The Parent Guild was formed originally to provide subsidies to teachers' summer Waldorf workshops for professional development in the "Art of Teaching" from Steiner College. Since the district has financed the WEST program for teachers, the

Parent Guild supports most of the specialty teachers. Unlike most schools' fundraising organizations, the Parent Guild employs the specialty teachers directly, including the eurythmy, handwork, and folk dance teachers. The Guild also purchases all Waldorf materials directly and then distributes them to the teachers. The programs depend upon the fundraising activities of the Guild. In past years, when funding fell short the handwork classes had to be shortened by a few weeks and at times they run out of Waldorf materials such as watercolor paper.

One of the prime ways the Guild raises money is through several large fundraising events, including Earth and Vine, which is an annual dinner and auction, and the Winter Faire. Events like these become strong traditions and serve a dual purpose of raising funds and building community. Annual pledges and materials donations are the big emphases for raising funds. The Guild also runs a little store that sells Waldorf supplies and handcrafts.

Like a PTA, every parent is automatically a member of the Parent Guild. Within the guild there is an elective executive committee that includes co-chairs, secretary, treasurer, volunteer coordinator, social activities coordinator, and publications coordinator. This executive committee functions as the voting body of the guild.

However, in contrast to many public schools where a small group of parents do the majority of the work, at Birney parent involvement is shared by many parents. Furthermore, in many schools often the white and most affluent parents are disproportionately involved in the school, however at Birney involved parents include low-income parents, working parents, Latino parents, and limited English speaking parents. The two parents who lead the Parent Guild expressed concern and awareness that parent activities are structured in ways to feel inclusive to all parents. Beyond the fundraisers, the school is conscious of creating opportunities for parents to be engaged that do not require financial donations. One of the parent leaders describes the most involved parents as cutting across cultural and socioeconomic differences and being those parents where the "underlying factor is the emphasis placed on wanting to get what they came for, to make sure that they are helping with that."

When parents choose Birney, they recognize that much of what makes Birney unique is not funded by the district and requires a high level of involvement in work hours and dollars to sustain. However, parents appreciate being able to send their children to a school with other "like-minded parents" that meets the needs of their children.

Chapter 5: Student Outcomes

Life Readiness: Evidence of Success

For public Waldorf-inspired schools like Alice Birney, a commitment to preparing students for the adult world extends beyond preparation for college and career readiness to include life readiness. They do this by attending to students' social, emotional, physical, artistic, and creative development. Analysis of student outcomes both through quantitative measures of student academic success as well as qualitative measures from Morse/Birney graduates illustrates that Morse/Birney is successfully supporting students to achieve these broad goals.[9] In particular, Morse/Birney has a stable student population, positive discipline and student achievement outcomes as well as positive graduation rates. Morse/Birney outperformed many other district schools in reducing ethnic and socioeconomic inequities. More details about our methodological approach can be found in Appendix A.

Stability and connection to school. Students are more able to benefit from the goals of a school when their enrollment is steady. Measuring school stability rates provides one indicator of its ability to meet the needs of its students and families. High school stability rates help students develop a connection to school and benefit from the goals of the school. The high stability of Birney students both within each school year and across years in school supports students benefiting from the nuanced multiyear approach to instruction characterized by the Waldorf approach.

To better understand student stability we used district data to measure the extent to which students stay in the district or school for the entire year. Table 4 (next page) illustrates the comparative stability rates of Alice Birney to other SCUSD public schools for three consecutive years, and shows consistently high stability rates.

In addition, we examined the rates at which students intended to return to Birney from one year to the next in K–7 compared to students in other SCUSD schools in the same grade levels. For Alice Birney, over 90% of the students for all grade levels (K–7) reported to the district that they expected to return, with a range of 90%–97% within each grade level. In contrast, for other schools at SCUSD, the percentages of students who reported expecting to return to the same school were from 76%–86% for grades K–7. These results indicated a stable learning environment of Alice Birney Waldorf School where a majority of students can develop strong relationships with their classmates and teachers and have a consistent instructional environment. It is unclear the extent that income differences may play into the differences in stability rates and transiency from one year to the next in these district comparisons. SCUSD in 2014–15 served about 68% low-income students compared to Birney's 41%.

Table 4: Stability Rates of Alice Birney Waldorf-Inspired K-8 School Compared to Other SCUSD Schools (2011-12 through 2013-14)

	Alice Birney Waldorf			Other SCUSD Schools		
Grade	2011–12	2012–13	2013–14	2011–12	2012–13	2013–14
K	97%	95%	97%	83%	86%	87%
1st	94%	97%	98%	86%	87%	89%
2nd	98%	97%	97%	87%	88%	89%
3rd	97%	97%	100%	88%	89%	90%
4th	97%	97%	100%	89%	88%	92%
5th	97%	97%	92%	89%	88%	90%
6th	91%	97%	98%	90%	90%	91%
7th	97%	94%	95%	89%	90%	91%
8th	100%	100%	100%	89%	90%	90%

Supportive discipline practices. Since the early 1990s, "zero tolerance" policies (American Psychological Association, 2008) implemented in districts and schools have resulted in increased disciplinary actions including suspension. For instance, during the school year of 2009–10, among the U.S. schools, 2.4% of elementary school students and 11.3% of secondary school students were suspended (Losen & Martinez, 2013). The suspension rates in SCUSD were more than double these national averages, with 5.4 to 6.6% of elementary students suspended in the years between 2011 and 2013. Rates for African American and Latino students were at least one third higher in each of these years.

Research shows that higher percentages of student suspension are associated with lower levels of academic achievement (Eitle & Eitle, 2004; Raffaele-Mendez, Knoff, & Ferron, 2002), as well as environments less conducive to learning (Steinber, Allensworth, & Johnson, 2011). Furthermore, considerable research documents the disproportionate suspension rates for African American and Latino students, further limiting access to educational opportunity (Gonzalez & Szecsy, 2004; Losen, Hodson, Keith, Morrison, and Belway, 2015; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2000; Skiba & Peterson, 1999; Skiba & Rausch, 2006). Students who are suspended are more likely to repeat a grade, drop out, and become involved in the juvenile justice system (Fabelo et al., 2011; Lee et al., 2011).

The suspension rates of Alice Birney Waldorf School have been at least two thirds lower than those in the city as a whole in each of the years between 2011 and 2013 (see Table 5, next page). In 2013, suspension rates for the school as a whole and for African American and Latino students were only 0.7%. In SCUSD, the rates were 8

times higher overall, and 10 times higher for African American and Latino students. Our qualitative data illustrating Birney's positive approach to student discipline explains these findings.

Table 5: Student Suspension Rate Comparison for K–8th Grade

Year	Alice Birney Waldorf				Other SCUSD Schools			
	Total Students	Suspension Rate	Latino/ African American	Suspension Rate	Total Students	Suspension Rate	Latino/ African American	Suspension Rate
2010-11	416	1.7%	121	2.4%	30,028	6.6%	15,042	8.5%
2011–12	472	2.0%	136	2.2%	31,178	6.3%	15,625	8.3%
2012–13	488	0.7%	136	0.7%	30,446	5.4%	15,558	7.2%

Birney supports strong student performance on state assessments. We examined how the Waldorf-inspired approach of Morse/Birney supported the academic success of all its students generally, and African American and Latino students, and socioeconomically disadvantaged students specifically. Although teachers at Morse/Birney do not spend instructional time engaging in test preparation and their curriculum does not align closely to the tests, standardized tests are the most widely used measure of student achievement that can be used to compare across schools in the district and state.

To estimate the effects of Morse/Birney on student achievement, we used data from the California Star Tests (CST) in English Language Arts (ELA) and math from 2008–09 through 2012–13.[10] Our models controlled for the influences of prior year achievement in the same subject and student demographic characteristics (gender, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, English Language Learner (ELL) status, and special education status).

Based on multiple years of student outcome data for all students in SCUSD, we developed longitudinal data sets with students matched to schools by year. We used value-added methodology (VAM) to examine whether attending Morse/Birney was a significant predictor of student achievement gains on CST English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics (Math) exams relative to those achieved by similar students in other district schools. CST tests were taken annually in each grade and all students in a given grade level took the same test. As the tests do not use a comparable scale across grades, we converted CST scale scores to standardized units (known as z-scores) to enable comparability.[11]

We ran three separate regression models on students of Grades 3–8 in ELA and mathematics, respectively. Model 1 includes Grades 3–8; Model 2 includes Grades 3–4; Model 3 includes Grades 5–8. We chose this approach because past research on

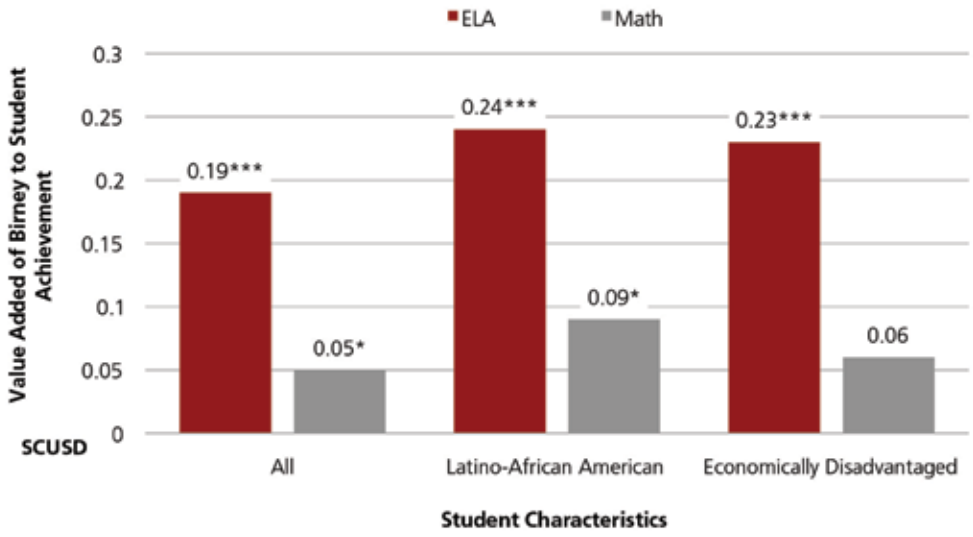
public Waldorf-inspired schools indicated below average academic performance in early grades with above average performance in later grades.

We also ran regression models on the CST test scores of Latino and African American students of Morse/Birney in comparison with the same ethnic group students in SCUSD (with controls for other demographic characteristics) as well as the comparison of Morse/Birney's socioeconomically disadvantaged students (including other demographic controls) with their counterparts in SCUSD.

The models showed that around 60%–66% of the student achievement on CST ELA and around 52%–60% on CST mathematics were explained by the statistical models in this study. The detailed description of the statistical models and results are available in Appendix A.

At all grade levels, students at Morse/Birney outperformed other district students in ELA in our examination of all students, the Latino–African American subgroup, and the socioeconomically disadvantaged subgroup, respectively. More specifically, the results of the regression models indicated Morse/Birney had a positive value-added effect on students' ELA achievement of all grade levels (Grades 3–8). For math, Morse/Birney had a positive value-added effect on students' mathematics achievement in Grades 5–8, which was also found for African American and Latino students relatively to similar students in other schools. The key results from the regression models are displayed in Figure 2. The achievement data were adjusted using z-scores and the mean achievement of the SCUSD school district is set at zero.

FIGURE 2: VALUE ADDED TO STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT: ALICE BIRNEY WALDORF IN COMPARISON TO SACRAMENTO CITY UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT (GRADES 5–8)



*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001.

The positive number in Figure 2 represents the estimated value added to student achievement associated with attending Morse/Birney relative to that of similar students attending other district schools, after accounting for students' prior test scores in the same subject and student demographic characteristics.

The positive findings shown in Figure 2 indicate that a greater value added to student achievement both in English language arts and in mathematics was associated with Alice Birney Waldorf relative to other district schools. The average added value associated with Alice Birney Waldorf ranged from 0.19 to 0.24 standard units in English language arts and from 0.05 to 0.09 standard units in mathematics. These effects were greater for traditionally underserved students: Latino and African American students, and socioeconomically disadvantaged students. For instance, for the Latino and African American students and those enrolled in free or reduced lunch programs, the added value associated with the school ranged from 0.23 to 0.24 standard units in ELA relative to that of other similar students in their district.

How large are these positive school effects? While there is no simple conversion of standard deviation to more familiar assessment scores, we made rough approximations. For example, for students in the middle of the range, a difference of 0.2 standard deviations translates into about 8 percentile ranks (i.e., from 50th percentile to 58th percentile). Note that the difference is slightly less for students further away from the middle of the distribution. When we converted the effect sizes using standard units to percentile points, Morse/Birney students, in comparison with students at other SCUSD schools, made relatively positive CST ELA test score gains for about 8 percentile points increase in mean student achievement.

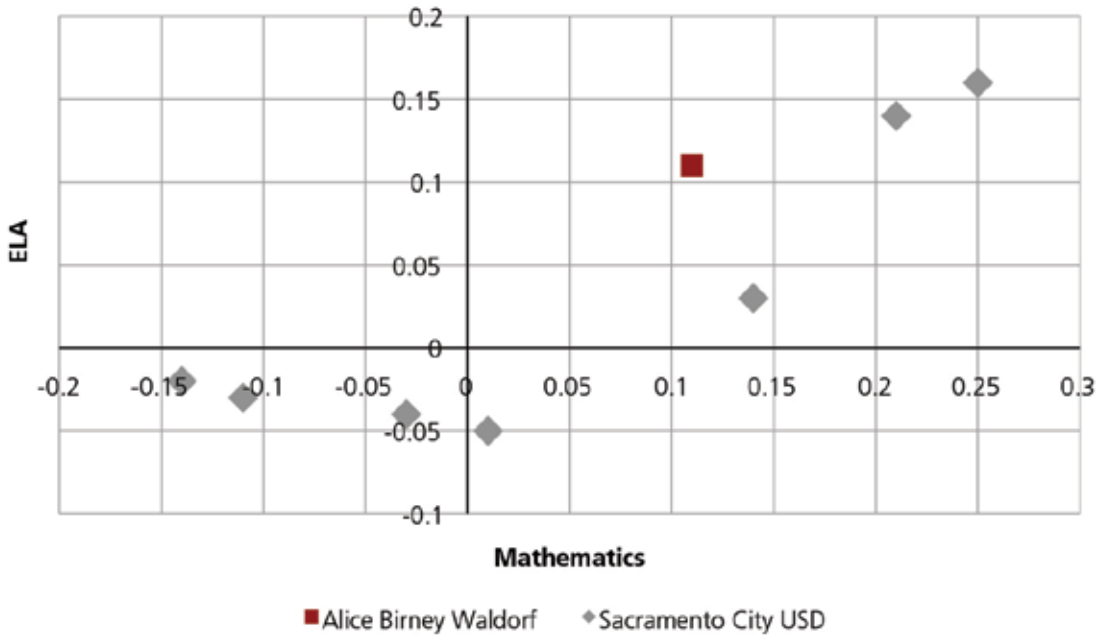
Outperforming other schools and narrowing the achievement gap. Another way to examine relative learning gains across schools is to compare the productivity statistics for all district schools. How does Morse/Birney compare with other K–8 schools in the district, when we control for student characteristics and students' prior achievement? We opted to compare Morse/Birney to other K–8 schools rather than middle schools for two reasons. First, it is a more comparable group of schools (typically K–8 schools have higher achievement by the middle grades than middle schools), and second, there are more K–8 schools than middle schools in the district. We examined the relative learning gains of students in Grades 5–8 at the school level to compare the relative gains for Alice Birney students to those of same grade-level students at all SCUSD K–8 schools (see Figures 3–5).

The regression models provided the basis for students' projected test scores. School productivity was assessed by comparing the mean difference between actual and projected scores for students in the SCUSD K–8 schools. The school productivity outcomes for each K–8 school are also standardized units (z-scores). A positive value indicates the estimated value added by the school to student achievement for similar students at other K–8 schools in Sacramento City Unified School District.

These figures show the relative learning gains in English language art and mathematics for each SCUSD school for Grades 5–8, while controlling for student background characteristics and prior learning.[12]

Figure 3 reflects the school productivity scores with inclusion of all students in Grades 5–8. The red square in Figure 4 indicates that Alice Birney students are outperforming other similar students in Grade 5–8 in five of SCUSD's seven K–8 schools (grey diamond) in ELA, and they are outperforming similar students in four of SCUSD's seven K–8 schools in mathematics.

FIGURE 3: VALUE ADDED TO STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT: ALICE BIRNEY WALDORF IN COMPARISON TO OTHER SCUSD K–8 SCHOOLS (5TH–8TH GRADE) (CST)



Figures 4 and 5 (next page) show the mean productivity levels subgroups of each school (Grades 5–8): Latino–African American students and socioeconomically disadvantaged students of individual schools, respectively.

Figure 4 indicates that compared with seven other K–8 schools, after accounting for other demographic characteristics and prior achievement, the Latino and African American students at Birney (red square) are outperforming African American and Latino students in six other SCUSD K–8 schools in ELA and outperforming Latino and African American students in four SCUSD K–8 schools in mathematics (grey diamonds).

FIGURE 4: VALUE ADDED TO LATINO/AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT: ALICE BIRNEY WALDORF IN COMPARISON TO OTHER SCUSD K-8 SCHOOLS (5TH–8TH GRADE) (CST)

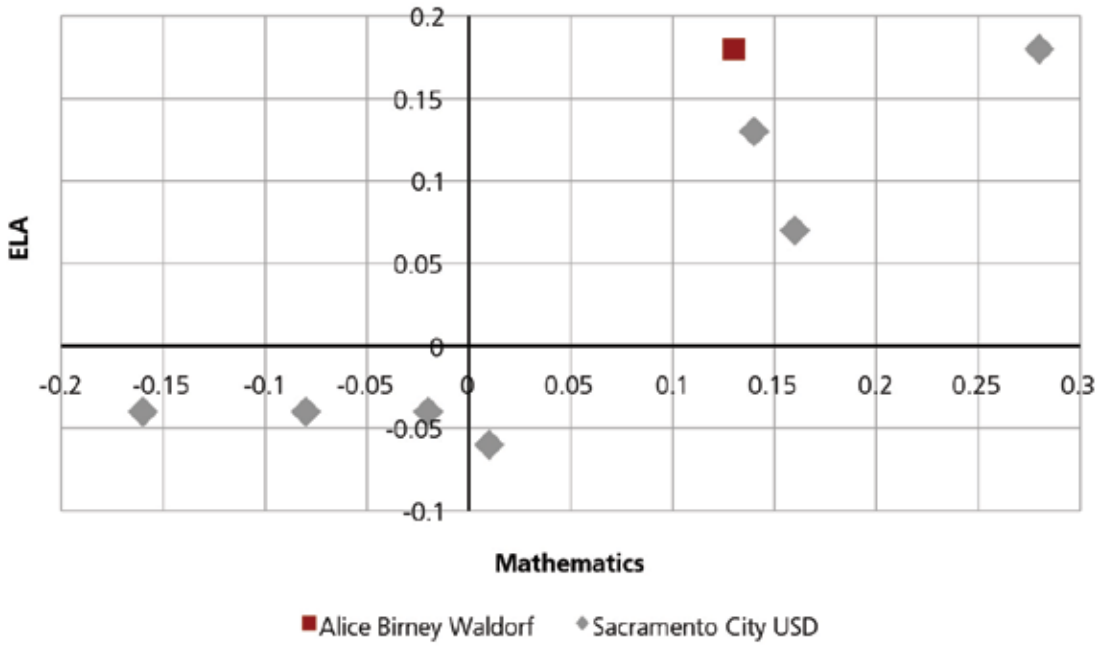


FIGURE 5: VALUE ADDED TO SOCIOECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT: ALICE BIRNEY WALDORF IN COMPARISON TO OTHER SCUSD K–8 SCHOOLS (5TH–8TH GRADE) (CST)

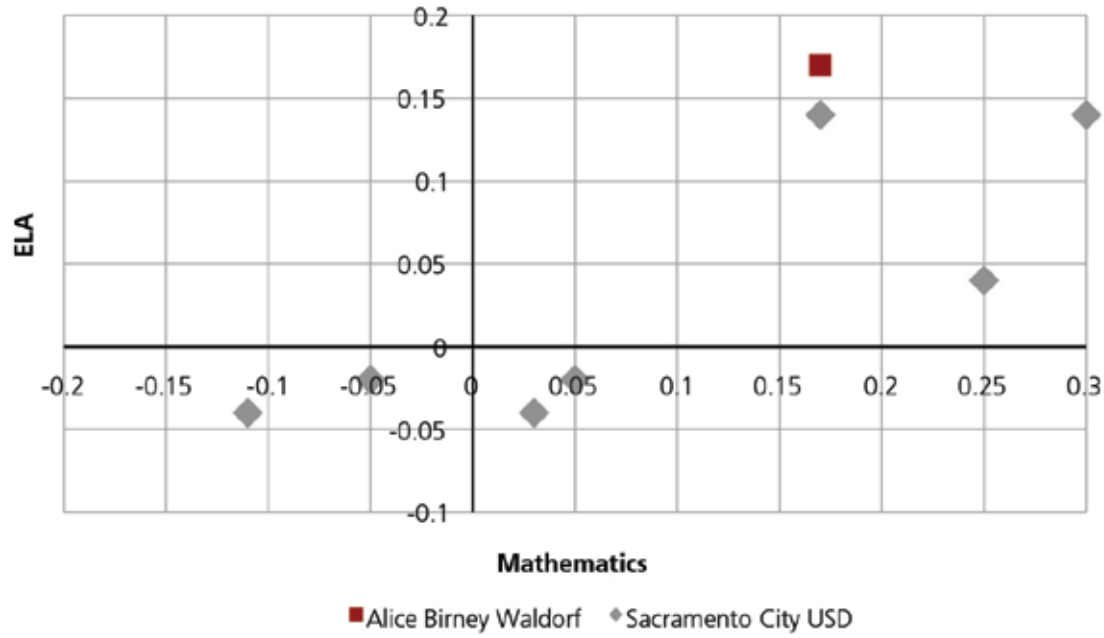


Figure 5 indicates that the socioeconomically disadvantaged students at Birney (red square) are outperforming the socioeconomically disadvantaged students in all other SCUSD K–8 schools in ELA and outperforming the socioeconomically disadvantaged students in four SCUSD K–8 schools in mathematics after accounting for other student characteristics and prior achievement (grey diamond).

The positive school productivity scores of Morse/Birney were even more profound in the traditionally underserved groups, Latino and African American students and socioeconomically disadvantaged students. It is important to note that for Latino and African American students and socioeconomically disadvantaged students Morse/Birney is associated with the highest value added of any K–8 school in the district for ELA.

Our multiple regression analyses on multiyear student-level standardized test scores offer one way to examine the effectiveness of Morse/Birney. The results of our statistical models suggest that Birney makes a significant contribution to enhance students' academic achievement and growth, even though its curriculum is not focused on preparing students for CST tests but on broader goals aimed at higher order thinking skills.

Tracking Alice Birney Graduates to High School and Graduation

We also sought to understand how well Morse/Birney prepares students for high school. Therefore, we tracked Birney graduates through high school to graduation. Unfortunately, our ability to offer a comprehensive picture of high school attendance and graduation was limited because there are many neighboring districts and private schools that draw Morse/Birney graduates, therefore with SCUSD data we could only track those students who remained within the district, which represents about half the graduates.

We tracked two eighth-grade cohorts of John Morse for their four-year high school enrollment and completion status with the available SCUSD data. The two cohorts are students who finished eighth grade at John Morse in 2008–09 and 2009–10, respectively. Since the small sample size prevented us from conducting a statistical analysis of the students, we can only show descriptive statistics of their enrollment pattern, see Table 6 (next page). Among these cohorts, a few students attended Waldorf-inspired George Washington Carver School of Arts and Science each year.

For the 2008–09 cohort, 24 students enrolled in public high schools in SCUSD. Across the four-year period, six students transferred to other districts within California and no drop-out was found with their record data at SCUSD. Among the 18 students who stayed and completed the four-year high school education, 17 students graduated from SCUSD high schools successfully in 2013, and the

high school graduation rate is 94% for the non-transferred students. In comparison, the high school graduation rate of SCUSD in 2013 is 85%. For the 2009–10 cohort, 22 students enrolled in the ninth grade in SCUSD and then 2 students transferred to non-SCUSD schools in California without indication of dropping out according to the SCUSD data. All 20 students who stayed successfully completed their high school education with high school diploma in 2014 with a graduation rate of 100%, which is much higher than the graduation rate of 85% of the SCUSD.

Table 6: High School Attendance and Graduation in SCUSD

Year of Cohort	8th-Grade Cohort at Alice Birney Waldorf	The Cohort Tracked in SCUSD				High School Graduation	
	N of 8th Graders	*N* of 9th Grade	*N* of 10th Grade	*N* of 11th Grade	*N* of 12th Grade	Year of Graduation	Graduation Rate
2008–09	31	24	23	20	18	2012–13	16/17 (94%)
2009–10	32	22	21	20	20	2013–14	20/20 (100%)

Note: The high school cohort graduation rates for the SCUSD were obtained from California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System (CALPADS), http://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest

Prepared for a Full and Engaged Life as Change Makers

Beyond student achievement data and graduation data, it is helpful to understand qualitatively how attendance at Morse/Birney prepared students for high school, college, and life. To address this question we interviewed nine graduates of Morse/Birney who were either students at George Washington Carver or who were enrolled in a four-year or community college after having attended Carver or other high schools.

Universally the graduates believed that their experience at Morse/Birney played an instrumental role in them feeling "life ready." Indeed, all spoke of the school's paramount role in shaping them into the young adults they had become. All said they would want a similar experience for their own children (when they have them) or the children of friends and family. They spoke of being deeply engaged in the world, in both thought and action, in ways that transcended mere college and career readiness.

Some of the ways students felt "life ready" was through Morse/Birney's focus on emotional development, the deep connections they formed with their peers and teachers as well as the frequent opportunities they had to engage through oral language (public speaking, plays, recitation of verse). These experiences empowered

students to feel that their voices were worth hearing and sharing, be it with peers or their classroom teachers. Entering classroom discussions did not seem like a barrier to any of them, nor did taking a minority or unorthodox position on papers or in debates. Nearly all of them spoke of the confidence they had in and out of the classroom space, a confidence carefully nurtured by their elementary and middle school experiences. Public speaking was something they all felt they excelled at, and all of them attributed that confidence directly to the pedagogical and curricular choices of their teachers at Morse/Birney. A student explained:

> Waldorf made me a strong person who could speak up for myself...I could argue points and be rational. I really feel that—how much Waldorf made you...be the mover and the shaker. That's what Waldorf creates.

Another student spoke of the social assets and confidence he acquired and how they helped him transition to life in a public school in a much more conservative town:

> I definitely felt socially [adept] to any scenario and I still do. I know in Waldorf every year we had to do plays in the same class and orchestra performances and a lot of public speaking and I was never afraid of that. I was never afraid to be an individual I think because of my Waldorf education. So socially I definitely took hold in high school. You know not knowing anybody was kind of rough in the beginning but I definitely made my presence known in my new community.

Asking for assistance or letting a teacher know that one was struggling did not seem to be a major issue either. Being taught by their teachers that failure and struggle was regular and important to the process of growing also allowed graduates to pursue personally relevant educational interests, not because high grades or accolades would come through that pursuit, but that following one's interest was paramount to being a well-rounded human being. One student recalled conducting an independent research project on Constitutional Law as an eighth grader, for which she shadowed and interviewed lawyers. She remembers:

> It was all about the individual, like what were you ready for, what can we challenge you with?...I wrote a report about it and then created an art project and an oral presentation. It really encouraged me to be independent and that really helped me.

Although the students valued the ways that they have been prepared for life, the transition to high school varied in smoothness depending on where graduates went for high school. Those who moved into comprehensive public high schools spoke of the difficulty of transitioning from a small, close-knit, family-like environment into the larger, more impersonal setting of their new schools. All spoke of the difficulty of getting used to larger classes organized around subject-specific content.

For graduates the transition from a primary and deep relationship with one teacher to connecting with and understanding the expectations of six teachers who did not have the time or space to know them well proved difficult emotionally, and sometimes academically. For some, adjusting to these new relationships and structures took multiple years, while others were able to leverage the social skills they acquired at Morse/Birney to build strong relationships with their high school teachers fairly quickly. For instance, one, a current university student who attended a large public high school, described the difficulty he had adjusting:

> My [new] peers were just better educated in the stupid things like test taking. My friends who went to traditional middle schools knew the system, knew how to navigate the bureaucracy of high school. They knew how to meet the standards. They knew what they needed to do to get an A. They had the experience of letter grades...and it was all so new to me and folks had two years of advantage...John Morse had pieces of that, but not wholly. That's not a bad thing because that would not be a Waldorf education...but it took me a year and a half to fully transition into a high school mindset in a traditional high school environment and mindset. Once I got the hang of it, I was fine and I excelled academically, but it was a rough transition.

Another student, who now attends UC Berkeley, described the stark differences she encountered at an all-girls private catholic high school and how her time at Morse/Birney prepared her for new academic challenges:

> Well, I would say [it] is probably the complete opposite of Waldorf. It's very, very traditional, very structured...it's very rigorous. It's known in the area as being one of the very difficult schools, and I was ready for that challenge; I felt very prepared. I felt ready for college. I felt through Waldorf, even though it was a lot different than what I was going into I had the skills to do it.

Some said that they had few adults whom they had any connection with in high school, while conversely almost all spoke of their ongoing personal relationships with their former Morse/Birney teachers. These continued relationships often played an important role in serving as a source of stability and comfort. No matter how difficult things were in their new environments, graduates knew that they could return to Morse/Birney to find an adult who knew them deeply, and who could give them clear and specific guidance based on that knowledge. The struggles Morse/Birney graduates articulated are not uncommon for many students transitioning to high school, but the bonds forged between Morse/Birney students and with their teachers seem exceptional. A former student, who now attends a California State University, described his public high school experience this way:

> I actually remember entering my class the first day and standing behind my desk ready to say verse. [W]e had textbooks. Just the atmosphere was different. The kids were rude to their teachers and...I wasn't used to it. In Waldorf, your teacher is another parent to you. There's this respect that you have for your teacher that wasn't there in the public school setting. That really disappointed me.

Graduates who attend or attended Carver seemed to feel this transition was less jarring, but still spoke of the difficulty of getting used to having multiple teachers in multiple subject areas. However, Carver students and alumni hailed the school's familial feel and spoke of how having a group of well-known classmates who were also going through a similar transition helped make the move to high school much easier. One student described the environment at Carver this way:

> I had a cool social life, but I mean there weren't large instances of bullying. There weren't like super cliques. There wasn't any bullying of the queer kids, and we all just got [along]...all the queer kids sat at a table outside during lunch...Actually it was really great. It was pretty nonjudgmental because we were the queer nerds and we would dress up in costumes just because we felt like it and no one cared, so it was fantastic.

Another common thread that ran across all of the interviews was the "outside-of-the-box thinking" they acquired in elementary and middle school. The student who attended the all-girls Catholic high school talked about how hard it was for her to not think outside of the box, of having to adjust to a more rigid way of teaching and learning rooted primarily in factual recall:

> The only thing was that I wasn't used to not thinking outside of the box, but I don't think that's something that I would have wanted to be prepared for. [T]hinking outside of the box helped me in my AP classes in high school, and coming to college now at Berkeley it's bringing me back to that because it's about writing essays, about thinking, about talking and seeing outside of the box.

Others who attended public comprehensive high schools told of learning how to navigate the less flexible demands of their new environments. As one student stated, "I was disappointed by the lack of creativity. It was all about filling in the boxes while I was taught to think outside [the box]." Even within a more rigid and competitive setting, most talked about how their preparations in art and music, helped them excel. If high school itself did not directly and explicitly reward the creative and innovative thinking that they developed in elementary and middle school, almost all of the graduates now attending college spoke about how college-level work did. Even students who did not personally feel as optimally academically well-prepared

for academics beyond high school spoke glowingly about their earlier experiences and how those early experiences helped make them well-rounded people:

> Our slogan was head, heart, and hands, which really just embraces the aspect of a style of learning that has to engage all of you. It has to engage the whole person, the mind, the empathy, and the actual physical doing of things. It's really a very all-around approach from many different angles.

Specifically, students also spoke of how a Waldorf-inspired education taught them more ways to learn deeply and retain what they had learned. For example one student explained:

> My memory is really good. I have a lot of visual memory but I have oral memory too. I have a lot of different ways of remembering things and a lot of different ways of working with things....There's a lot of flexibility when you learn with Waldorf. You're not just learning in one way... and that really helps as you get older because sometimes you can't just read something and remember it. Maybe you have to say it out loud or walk around with it or write it down, and that's what I learned through Waldorf was all these different tools to help me with learning.

Although students spoke vividly and passionately about their love for nature, most tended to focus their interests and feel most prepared in the arts, humanities, and social sciences. This is not to say that Morse/Birney graduates were poorly prepared in math and science; indeed many go on to take Advanced Placement STEM coursework in high school. Most had a deep appreciation for science and the natural world, but did not feel drawn to careers that would formalize that love.

For most, academic accolades came as a result of their love of learning, questioning, and thinking about the world. Nearly all said that they thought of learning as largely a competition within one's self rather than between an individual and his or her classmates. The goal was almost always self-improvement and the satisfying of curiosity. They approached school with a sense that they would be fine in the end, and prepared to enter the wider world in curious, engaged, and deep-thinking ways. Profoundly, many students commented on the social responsibility they felt to engage the world in a meaningful way that makes the world a better place. As one student articulated, "Whatever I do has to not only be important to me but it has to help those around me." The student went on to say, "I think if I were to send my kids to a Waldorf School...I feel like they would become people that change the world instead of just someone who learned how to read."

Every graduate interviewed asserted that the core parts of who they are today was shaped by their elementary and middle school experiences at Morse/Birney. In their

own words, they said things like, "My creative expression, my quirkiness, are lasting legacies of my Waldorf education, things that I really value, things that are part of my identity." A senior at Carver stated:

> I remember how excited I was every single day. I was so excited to go to school. That was a feeling that was shared throughout the class. "What are we going to do today, where are we going, what are we going to learn?" and that's the biggest thing about Waldorf. It infuses that excitement, that love for learning.

For them, their loves of nature, reading, art, music, exploration, history, or people come from their time at Morse/Birney. Though some felt less prepared for the rigors and impersonality of higher education, all felt prepared for life, and felt that they had the skills to be successful in nearly any situation. The Waldorf commitment to developing the "head, hands, and heart" invariably prepared these students for college, career, and life. In a time where education is framed in increasingly transactional and competitive ways, as a source for personal advantage and individual success, the Morse/Birney students were refreshing in their views of education. For them, education aligned with the visions of elite institutions like Harvard or Yale: Humanity is best served by those who have a broad, classically liberal education, who think critically, and engage in the world not merely for their own gain, but for the gain of all.

Chapter 6: Implications for Policy and Practice

District Support and School Advocacy Lead to Sustainability

What is so striking about the story of John Morse/Alice Birney[13] is that it was able to achieve strong student outcomes and maintain a high level of parent demand for the school by implementing practices often at direct odds with the prevailing notions of public education in this country. When considering the nature of the pedagogy, curriculum, and pacing of instruction detailed in this report, this fact in itself is remarkable. How could a school sustain itself for 20 years through multiple superintendents and principals, some more supportive than others, and a changing education policy context?

The lessons learned and policy implications from this study can be examined at two levels. At one level, the study is about a public Waldorf-inspired school in a large urban district, shedding light on what is possible within the public Waldorf context, including positive student outcomes and continuing demand from parents to enroll their children in the school. It is also a story about the district context that both enabled and sometimes challenged the school's sustainability. At a more macro level, this study can provide insight into how to create space in the sphere of public district schools for a broader definition of what counts as education, what we value as education. It can shed light on the policy conditions necessary to achieve this broader goal. This section will address the lessons learned and policy implications at both of these levels.

We assert that Birney has succeeded and persisted because of a number of interwoven factors. First, SCUSD's commitment, particularly under Superintendent Jonathan Raymond, to foster innovation and to allow some level of school-based decision-making enabled Birney to maintain fidelity to the Waldorf approach. Second, as Birney produced positive student outcomes and sustained a consistent demand for the school, the district provided increasing opportunities for school control over its instructional program. Finally, it may be that the consistent demand for the school and the positive student outcomes are due, in part, to the comprehensive nature and coherence of the Waldorf approach to schooling. In reality these factors are much more overlapping, messy, and interactive with each other. However, for the sake of understanding their components we dissect them here as if they were somewhat distinct.

Centralized versus school-based decision-making. Districts have to strike a balance between centralized and school-based decision-making. In the case of SCUSD this balance has tilted towards increased school-based decision-making, more at some times than others, depending upon district leadership. The tilt towards school-based decision-making has sometimes been led or supported by district leadership

and at other times pushed by the school community, including principals, teachers, and parents. However, the tension is crucial. Some degree of centralized decision-making ensures equity both for the students within Morse/Birney as well as for all students district-wide. Without the district assessing and ensuring that all students have equitable access to meaningful learning experiences, resources, and high-capacity teachers, inequities will become institutionalized.

Related but slightly different is a tension between a district-wide standardized approach to running the schools versus a differentiated and diversified approach that supports varied educational approaches. SCUSD both developed a range of instructional models while ensuring that they met common standards. The process of requiring alternative model schools to engage in an examination and defense of their practices stimulates a more vibrant, critical engagement of the school staff to ensure that they are meeting the needs of their students. For example, the George Washington Carver Waldorf High School principal discusses the positive outcomes of the tension that exists between fidelity to a long established model and responding to district initiatives and mandates.

> I think the truth of the matter is if the district wasn't providing us funds and kind of requiring it, we probably wouldn't do it. I actually think that's what you see in the private schools. [They think] We are the experts...You see a lot of education frozen in tradition and imitation from whenever it started. You see a lot of that, very little innovation, so I think that is true and yet every advance or innovation that we're using here at Carver I would say is from this exact kind of tension.

External practices and policies have also forced schools such as Birney to continue to examine how their approach is addressing systemic inequities. As a district official reflects, even though educators in Waldorf schools do not teach to standardized tests and often do not value the data that comes from those tests, current Principal Horning has used the tests as way to engage with her staff about questions of equity.

> [The principal] talks with staff about how do we know if we're really meeting the needs of our English learners? How do we know if we're really meeting the needs of our African American students if we don't look somehow at test scores? There are some things that we can't just know from our gut and our heart, and they have because of that been much more open to that.

On the other side, without school-based decision-making about meaningful learning, resources, and professional capacity, Morse/Birney would not have been able to achieve fidelity to the Waldorf approach and likely the demand for the school and its strong student outcomes. In the rest of this section, we address each of these

components and then investigate in more depth the nature of the tightrope balance between autonomy and accountability in terms of the history of the district's interaction with Morse/Birney and the district's allocation of resources and support of the school's instructional approach and commitment to developing the capacity of its educators.

A district school of choice. The founding of the first Waldorf-inspired public school in SCUSD coincided with a time in the U.S. educational system marked by a move towards high stakes accountability testing and resulting narrowing of curriculum and use of scripted curriculum such as Open Court. In those early days, the Waldorf model offered an alternative from that movement. As a founding teacher recalls:

> I think just about every class was full because we had what we called the Open Court refugees...then suddenly there's like a rainbow over us...it's this alternative that everybody who doesn't want to be in that cookie cutter wants in.

Although the nation, state, and SCUSD have moved slowly away from the most narrowly defined notions of education, the Waldorf approach still defines education in a radically broader way than most public schools and thus still attracts families looking for an alternative.

Currently, Birney remains a highly desired school in SCUSD with one of the longest waitlists in the district. For a district that has lost about 8,000 students since 2000, this is a huge factor in ongoing district support. Superintendent Raymond recognized this, "Parents and kids will vote with their feet. I think the greatest indicator of success is when you have waiting lists, when you have families wanting to come, and staying and advocating."

Furthermore, because the Waldorf approach is an explicit choice made by parents and because the school makes considerable effort to engage all the parents and educate them about the approach, parents have been powerful allies, supporters, and advocates for a Waldorf approach. As has been discussed in an earlier section, parents have raised a ruckus when necessary to maintain the integrity of the Waldorf program at Morse/Birney. The district recognizes the parents' power and does what it can to help meet the requests of the parents in their community.

The most significant district response to the demand for Morse/Birney has been their support of two additional Waldorf-inspired schools in the district. A detailed discussion of how these two schools came about can be found in Appendix D.

Producing positive achievement results. Second to its high-demand status, Morse/Birney's ability to produce positive student outcomes on standardized

measures has secured district support. As described in the previous section, Morse/Birney demonstrates strong student outcomes for students across multiple measures, including attendance, discipline, and performance on standardized tests. Furthermore, as demonstrated in the previous section, Birney has demonstrated some evidence of an ability to meet the academic needs of African American and Latino students as well as low-income students. Over time the district has begun to recognize some of the less tangible measures as well. Area Superintendent Mary Hardin Young describes their achievement and its impact:

> What I've found since I've been working with Birney is that they have some of our highest achievers by the time students are in fourth, sixth, seventh, and eighth. They held the highest math achievement in algebra classes for two or three years running. People start to sit up and take notice when things like that happen. They produce incredible writers and incredible thinkers.

That strong achievement, particularly in middle school, had enabled her to advocate for more school-based decision-making for the school with other district staff as proof that their instructional approach is working.

Teachers well trained in a highly defined model. The third factor contributing to Birney's sustainability is the very nature of the Waldorf approach that differentiates it from other alternative models. It differs in the extent to which the instructional approach is so explicitly tied to a theory of child development and educator self-reflection. Every action is intentional in a Waldorf school.

To be a successful Waldorf teacher requires both an intense and comprehensive level of training, but also a level of personal commitment that varies dramatically from other alternative models. In addition to believing in, understanding, and implementing the Steiner philosophy of child development and the Waldorf curriculum, pedagogy, and culture, it requires teachers to work on themselves personally. There are explicit expectations of the kind of personal exploration, investigation, and transformation that teachers engage in to be a Waldorf teacher. Steiner trainers often credit him as saying that teachers have to do the work to be worthy of imitation. Birney's Principal Horning describes that teachers who were not willing to engage in personal examination struggled to feel a sense of belonging at the school. She explained, "We love you as a person, but if you are not willing to rise and do the work to transform yourself as a teacher, you will be very uncomfortable here. Living it is different from looking at it from the outside." To be a Waldorf teacher is a philosophical choice; it is a life choice.

After years of working with the district and teachers' union, Birney was able to ensure that its teachers needed a significant level of training and job security for the school to implement the Waldorf approach with fidelity. This level of training, and

teacher access to it, is discussed later in this section. However, the extent of training, the comprehensive nature of the Waldorf philosophy, curriculum, and pedagogy as well as the degree of teachers' self-reflection may play a determining role in its positive student outcomes and high level of demand. It is worthy of future investigation to determine how replicable the student outcomes and demand would be with other alternative educational approaches.

The district role balancing between centralized and school-based decision-making. We begin to understand the tension between centralized and school-based decision-making by examining Sacramento City Unified School District's (SCUSD) role in this regard. As discussed early in this report, the school was born from the idea and support of Superintendent Rudy Crew. Early district support and understanding of the crucial role of training teachers adequately in the model provided an important grounding for the school's strong foundation. From those early days, to varying degrees, through ten subsequent superintendents, the district has supported innovation and multiple instructional models. Several strong superintendents deeply understood the need to strike a balance between centralized and school-based decision-making in supporting the diverse schools that were created during this era. Birney's strongest support came from Superintendent Jonathan Raymond, who explained the balance:

> I'm in charge but I'm really not in control; the one thing we are really in charge of is the communication, and we're in charge of the message and we're in charge of creating the vision and then we're in charge of creating the structure...it's important that we give people the opportunity to create something that was going to meet the needs of their community, figure out how to support them...it's about what do you hold tight and what do you let loose.

This tension between what you hold tight and what you let loose summarizes the nature of interactions between Birney and the district over time. For example, there were times when principals were placed at Morse/Birney by the district who, according to a veteran teacher, were "brought here to bring us in line, like toe the line." She goes on to say that parental pressure meant that principals that did not support the Waldorf approach fully "did not always last long because parents are great organizers, and when you educate them, and their children are involved," they demand change.

At other times, including during Raymond's tenure (2009–2013) in particular, the district saw its role as moving away from a one-size-fits-all approach towards providing multiple approaches to serving students including Waldorf, language immersion programs, International Baccalaureate programs, and others. As Morse/Birney's students consistently performed well over time and the demand for the school continued, the district saw that the local control they provided the school was

paying off. As Superintendent Raymond explained, "I told my [alternative program] principals, I said, look, we're going to give you freedom and flexibility in return for results, and we'll help establish with you what we think are some fair targets."

Over time, district staff beyond the superintendent began feeling increasingly comfortable providing the school with more decision-making power, particularly over instructional issues. However, those autonomies were often hard fought for by the school principals, parents, and at times the superintendent himself. As the school has become more and more accepted at the district level, particularly because of the support of Superintendent Raymond, it has felt increasingly comfortable sharing its approaches publicly rather than trying to fly under the radar. The current principal, Mechelle Horning, has played a courageous and leading role in this opening up of the school program. She says:

> We've gone from being that crazy hippie program to maybe there is some validation to what we are doing. Even if people don't agree, there is a different level of respect. It has come from not trying to hide what we are doing. Opening ourselves up a bit more and say come and take a look.

Under Raymond's direction the district created Area Superintendents and this too made a huge difference in Birney's sustainability, as they benefited from the tremendous leadership and support of Area Superintendent Mary Hardin Young. She helped the school not only navigate through district protocols, requirements, and policies but also served as their advocate. Principal Horning explains that their Area Superintendent will tell them when they can forgo certain district recommendations around curriculum or other topics.

The tension of centralized and school-based decision-making plays out in a number of sectors, from resource allocation to instructional autonomy to support for professional competence and capacity, which we will explore next (Darling-Hammond & Plank, 2015).

Adequate and Intelligent Resource Allocation. In this domain, while Birney benefits from a few areas of site-based control regarding resources, inadequate resources and a lack of decision-making power over their allocation limit the quality of education the school can provide for its students. The Waldorf model is expensive; in its fully implemented form it includes small class sizes, well-trained teachers, specialty teachers, high quality materials, and a non-institutional facility with natural grounds.

Morse/Birney has not been able to achieve any of these components with public dollars, with the exception of paying for Spanish and orchestra specialty teachers. Beyond district funding allocation, Birney, like many schools, faced a reduction in funds when the threshold for percentage of children in poverty to qualify for Title I

funding increased. At that point, Birney had to let go of several support staff because they no longer qualified for Title I funding. Fortunately, through parents' fundraising, they have been able to pay for most of their specialty teachers, field trips, and high quality materials.

Unfortunately, other components of a Waldorf education have not been met. For example, because of a lack of budget autonomy, Birney is required to operate under the district formula for a class size of 31 to 33 per teacher. In contrast, although class sizes vary in independent Waldorf classrooms, some being not much smaller than at Birney, those schools have a say over how to structure their staffing and often opt to add an aide in classrooms, particularly kindergarten. Secondly, there are requirements of all district teachers to attend professional development that is not applicable to the Waldorf approach. With greater flexibility over professional development dollars, the school could remove some of the financial burden their teachers face funding their own training in Waldorf methods by using district professional development dollars.

Also through continual negotiation and tremendous commitment of parent volunteer hours and community resources, Birney has achieved a substantial modification of the school grounds to create a more natural setting. Despite it often taking two months to gain approval of the planting of a tree, Birney has planted many trees on their campus, created gardens, and even houses chickens. Although they have not been permitted to modify the exterior of buildings, they have been allowed to modify the interiors of classrooms.

While a lack of sufficient resources has more to do with Federal and state funding levels for schools, the autonomies over budget lie within the district purview and limit the full implementation of the Waldorf approach.

Some site-based control over allocation of resources permits schools to address their unique needs in terms of staffing, budgeting of resources, and in Birney's case modification of their physical resources to meet their instructional needs. However, districts need to think from an equity perspective to ensure that students across the district have access to equivalent resources and distribution of resources. It is inevitable when schools are permitted to do their own fundraising that differences in demographics between schools result in inequitable distribution of resources between schools.

Developing and Sustaining Innovative Practice

Gradually over time, Morse/Birney was able to cultivate increasing levels of district-sanctioned school-based decision-making over curriculum and assessment, which was critical to developing and sustaining key practices. Although the school taught the Waldorf curriculum since its inception, it took considerable effort to have its approach officially approved by the district.

Before it was officially sanctioned, teachers had to fight little battles around district assumptions of how they were teaching. For example, in the school's second year at Morse, district reading coaches were sent to teach the teachers how to use the basal reader. The teachers gently told the coaches that not only did they already know how to use a basal reader but that it was not part of their curriculum. In those early days, there was district prescribed curriculum (Open Court) that the school just quietly did not use. These were the "fly under the radar" days.

Articulating curriculum. The 2004 settlement of the *Williams* case, requiring that every classroom have a set of district-adopted textbooks, provided an opportunity for the school to advocate for their own district-approved curriculum. The school worked with the district to create a district-adopted Waldorf curriculum that made the school's choice to develop curriculum outside of the textbooks come into compliance with the demands of the settlement. This process involved the teachers developing their own scope and sequence for their curriculum and aligning it to the state standards and district curriculum. This effort involved the entire staff: Because they loop with all students, they all know what is taught each year. Although the Waldorf mapping did not always align to the district's, they made every effort to show how it fit. As a veteran teacher recalls:

> Then we had to take the traditional curriculum...and we synced the two, it didn't fit but we tried to show how they mapped...We did that work so we could stand behind our curriculum, and say, absolutely, we're teaching every single one of these skills, but our timeline is completely different.

After much hard work, the Morse principal was able to secure board approval for the Waldorf curriculum, which enabled it to withstand changes in superintendents and new textbook adoptions.

Birney has recently repeated this process with the introduction of the Common Core. The alignment of their curriculum to the Common Core can be found online in a document produced through the Alliance for Public Waldorf Education with contributions from Principal Horning and others at Birney (Alliance, 2013). Again, this laborious process has earned the school the district's respect and sanctioning of their curricular approach. Birney's strong student outcomes and the quality of the teachers' work in developing alternative curriculum and assessments aligned to district, state, and national standards earned them considerable respect. As Area Superintendent Mary Hardin Young reflected, Birney teachers were viewed as having greater capacity to adapt to a changing policy environment.

> I think the schools where teachers were already in the practice of writing their own units whether it was that they were integrating Waldorf standards and California standards or Integrated Thematic

> Instruction, it was easier, for many of them, to make the change to Common Core. That is what is necessary in Common Core is thinking about what that standard really is that you're teaching and being able to teach it at a very deep level and support it with all the other things that you're doing instead of just picking up the textbook and doing this page. So I think the change in planning and practice was maybe less dramatic than it was for our traditionally trained teachers.

Developing assessments. Similarly, the district has sanctioned Birney's own approach to assessment at multiple levels from how they complete district report cards, to benchmark assessments to the Smarter Balanced Assessment (SBAC). However, none of these district approvals came without strong advocacy on the part of the school principal, teachers, and even parents at times. For example, the district requires that all schools use the same report card, however many of the items on the report card do not apply to a Waldorf approach to instruction, so Principal Horning spent time discussing with the district which categories Birney teachers would report on in the district report card until she received district approval.

The district also required all schools to administer their standardized benchmark assessments. The district has new benchmark assessments aligned to Common Core; again, this provided the school with an opportunity to advocate for their own approach to assessing student learning rather than administering the district's benchmark assessment. However, according to Principal Horning, "We worked with the district to say why it wasn't appropriate, so we created our own benchmarks." Finally, as the Waldorf-inspired schools have a strong stance against technology in the younger grades, the most recent battle they have faced is ensuring that their younger students—third through fifth grades—could take the SBAC as a paper and pencil test. According to Principal Horning, "The district supported us in doing that. We had to fight for that. We got it. We were the only school in the district that did that."

So time and time again, the district showed itself eventually open to allowing for school-based curricular and assessment control for its public Waldorf-inspired schools. At times, the district realized on its own: Superintendent Raymond recalls telling his instructional coaching team, "Alice Birney isn't coming to the training, they're doing good things, they're a little bit different, let's just sort of let them be, let them go, they are doing good things for kids." And more frequently those autonomies were earned through struggle and advocacy from the school community.

When alternative schools are given a say over how to support meaningful learning, it enables the schools to come out of the shadows of non-compliance and to create more coherence in their instructional models. Schools can divert their energy from fighting battles around what they are doing to improving their practice. However, the degree of school-based decision-making that is appropriate is highly dependent upon how well developed the instructional approach, the capacity of the staff, and

the resources available to support teacher capacity building and planning time. This is a crucial area where the district can provide differentiated support to schools depending upon these factors.

Honoring the Value of Trained Teachers

Similar to issues of decentralized instructional decision-making, over time and with considerable advocacy Morse/Birney earned control over a range of practices to ensure a high level of professional capacity with its staff. These practices include hiring and job security policies that privileges Waldorf training and support for training in Waldorf methods.

As described earlier, successful implementation of a Waldorf-inspired public school requires, first and foremost, teachers well trained in Steiner developmental philosophy, and Waldorf curriculum and pedagogy. The schools need a level of control over hiring and training of their staff to ensure a quality instructional program. In the founding of the school, the district supported some teacher training. However, there were initially no requirements for hiring trained teachers. Up until 2010, Birney faced the challenges of having to hire surplused teachers, that is, teachers who were not needed at their current sites and who could be placed at another district school like Birney. Furthermore, Birney was also in danger of losing trained teachers during layoffs.

Although the untrained teachers that Birney had to hire could not be fired for not becoming fully trained or implementing the Waldorf approach, they often did not last at the school and also resulted in the loss of families who were faced with 8 years of looping with that particular teacher. A district official describes a particular scenario when there were openings at Birney:

> Some traditional teachers came through and wanted to choose Alice Birney. And we said, "Can we have a little meeting with the top 20 teachers?...If they choose it, we want them to choose it, but we want them to choose it with eyes wide open . . ." We had two [Birney] teachers and [the principal] and I sat in a room with these 20 teachers and shared here's what Waldorf-inspired education is about and... you're not going to teach Open Court. We tried to be as honest as possible and we answered a lot of questions. The school had three openings that year and three teachers chose them. One is still with the program. One left maybe three months in, and one left at the end of the first year.

The teachers left because of the depth of the personal commitment that was expected of the teachers to the students and their families. After the two teachers left, and a Birney parent who was a lawyer made a strong case to the union about the specialized training necessary for Waldorf-inspired teachers, the union left Birney

alone, understanding that it was too big a burden on untrained teachers to teach at a Waldorf-inspired school. At the same time the district was diversifying the educational program offered to its students through a number of strategies; one was establishing specialty schools that required additional training for teachers and another strategy was to provide extra resources and support to the seven lowest performing schools in the district, called Superintendent Priority Schools. Simultaneous to these district initiatives there were budget cuts and teacher layoffs. Superintendent Raymond described the types of investments he was trying to make in his schools:

> We went back to Alice Birney, the language immersion schools, and wherever we had provided those extra resources or training, whether it was an IB or Waldorf credentialing, we said, we're going to treat them as a course of study because we've created this unique investment in them.

At this time, the district, led by Raymond, asserted that Superintendent Priority Schools should be skipped in the laying off of teachers to protect the new teachers and the integrity of the program. This assertion was greatly contested by the teachers' union. However, the district's skipping policy was upheld for two years by an administrative law judge and in the third year, the teachers' union sued the district, but the district's position was upheld by the superior court who ruled the district's Superintendent Priority Schools had a course of study. Although the union fought the district on the surplus and skipping policies for Priority Schools, they never contested the policies at Waldorf-inspired schools because they recognized the level of training required. According to the Carver principal, they recognized that "Waldorf teachers are really happy, so they have to make it a neutral issue." Superintendent Raymond recalls:

> So we worked with the union and we said, look we're not putting teachers there that don't have Waldorf training, they have to have started the training or they're going through the training, we're not going to let you place teachers in there, we're not going to open it up for surplusing, and we've got to find out a way to sort of solve that one. So there was some working with them around that one. Now once we got that solved in that first year, it never became an issue again; they were always cool with the skipping of the Waldorf.

Ensuring the protections for their teachers were a crucial step in the sustainability of the Waldorf-inspired schools. Principal Alessandri from Carver recalls how she and Mechelle Horning devoted time and energy, prepared to present their case to hold onto their teachers, and protect the hiring of new teachers. Fortunately, they were never called to testify.

> Mechelle [Birney principal] and I spent three years during the pink-slipping season, at the district office in front of the administrative law

> judge to show that actually this is by ed. code a specialized program. It really fits the definition of specialized training, specialized program. Our teachers really need 200 hours per summer for three or four summers of training. You've got to know how to greet your class and have them stand up and recite a poem and then do a drawing for whatever lesson you're teaching. I think that was partly Superintendent Jonathan Raymond at the time, who supported not only Waldorf but other specialized programs.

With recent increased control over staffing, Birney is able to post positions for district and external teachers, but is empowered to require that teachers have at least one year of experience as a teacher or teaching assistant in a Waldorf setting or some training through any Waldorf training program and a commitment to complete their training. This has been a powerful change for Birney and the other Waldorf-inspired schools to ensure that they can offer a consistent program across the grade levels. Because students stay with the same teacher from first grade through eighth grade, this consistency is particularly important.

Another staffing challenge facing Waldorf-inspired public schools is the cost of Waldorf training. Training is extensive and expensive. For example, completion of the Waldorf Teacher Education Certificate through Steiner College costs between $22,000 and $28,000 for tuition and fees and takes two to three years of study, depending if students attend full-time or in the summer. The cost and time commitment represents a significant barrier to the school's sustainability. Therefore, since 2012 the district has provided financial backing for Birney and Carver principals to run an introductory district-sponsored Waldorf training program for all district teachers, called Waldorf Education Seminar for Teachers (WEST). WEST is a two-year commitment that includes a two-week summer program, and four-hour monthly meetings during the school year. It is free to all interested district teachers. To date 59 teachers have participated in this program, which has served as a source of teachers for all three Waldorf-inspired district schools. While not as comprehensive as training through Steiner College, it provides teachers with a strong foundation in Steiner philosophy and Waldorf methods. Even though all teachers participating in WEST training do not end up working in a Waldorf-inspired school, according to a district official, the district views the WEST training as a worthwhile investment because "incorporating any Waldorf-inspired methodology is going to make your teaching better."

Giving Waldorf-inspired schools control over hiring and providing some funding for Waldorf training has greatly benefited the district's Waldorf-inspired schools. In addition, Birney benefits from the control over how they structure their school day so they have collaboration time every week where as a staff they can engage in shared decision-making, curriculum development, and reflection on their practice.

When the unique training and expertise of alternative models is honored with supportive HR policies, schools can achieve stability and sustainability and are more likely to produce strong outcomes. Districts need to ensure that the quality of alternative training is adequate to support the alternative model. Furthermore, from an equity perspective, districts need to be mindful of potentially inequitable distributions of highly trained and skilled teachers across their schools and balance the types of resources and training that all districts have access to.

Concluding Thoughts

The story of Alice Birney, a public district school of choice, provides a powerful example of the types of alternative educational approaches that are possible within the public system. Often at odds with prevailing norms and assumptions about the nature of schooling, Birney provides a counterbalance for what is possible to nurture the growth of the whole child. Particularly powerful are the examples of the ways the school attends to children's social-emotional, physical, artistic, and spiritual development and the integration of developmental domains.

It is striking to see such an approach supported and promoted within the context of a school district. The types of school-based decision-making SCUSD provided for Birney, even those that were hard fought for, permitted Birney to have a far greater fidelity to the Waldorf approach than they would have been able to have without some control over curriculum, assessment, and staffing, in particular. That fidelity to Waldorf in turn led to high levels of student and parent satisfaction, demand for the school, and strong student outcomes.

These areas of decentralized decision-making permit opportunities in the public district space for alternative approaches, without having to go into the de-unionized, de-regulated, often profit-driven charter route. Ironically, schools like Birney have the potential to achieve some of the original goals for the charter school movement. By serving as sites for innovation, district schools can learn much from their example about broader ways to conceptualize school and student development.

The challenge for SCUSD and other districts implementing schools of choice and providing them with higher levels of autonomy is how to ensure equitable access to these schools for all students. Birney, like many alternative models, tends to attract more educated, economically stable, and white families. Intentional efforts need to be made to ensure that such schools are truly accessible to low-income families and families of color and are places where all families can feel a sense of belonging and value. However, districts have more control over those equity goals with schools of choice than when they have both district and charter schools within their purview. This is a topic that invites further research.

It remains an open question the extent to which the Birney story can be used to extrapolate to other alternative approaches. The Waldorf model is unique in its comprehensive nature, with its explicit theory of child development, curriculum, pedagogical approach, and philosophy about the role of the teacher. We do know that Birney students graduate with many skills often not addressed fully in other schools, such as creativity, love of learning, inquisitiveness, connection to nature, emotional intelligence, and many physical, artistic, and practical life skills.

Appendix A:
Data Sources and Methodology

The research employs mixed methods, with data drawn from multiple sources, detailed below.

Qualitative Data

Qualitative data, including interviews and observations, were collected from spring 2014 through winter 2015 during multiple site visits to Alice Birney Waldorf-Inspired School, A.M. Winn, and George Washington Carver School of Arts and Science. We developed interview and observation protocols and collected relevant documents. Interviews were conducted with school staff, parents, current students, graduates, and district officials. Observations were conducted of classrooms, specialty classrooms, afterschool activities, recess and lunch time, WEST training, and student presentations. In selecting teachers to interview and classrooms to observe we took care to document the practices of a diverse group of educators in terms of grade level and content taught and years of experience. In total we conducted 39 interviews and focus groups and 38 observations. Table A-1 below details these data sources.

Table A-1: Qualitative Data Sources

Type of Data Source	Who	Number
Interviews	District Administrators	2
	Steiner College Director	1
	School Administrators (2 Birney, 2 Carver, A.M. Winn)	5
	Birney Teachers (classroom, specialty, and special education)	12
	Birney Graduates in high school or college	8
	Birney Parent	1
	Retired Founding Teachers of Birney	2
	A.M. Winn Parents	2
Focus Groups	Birney Parents	1
	Birney Student Focus Groups (5th & 6th graders, 7th & 8th graders)	2
	Carver Teachers	2
	Carver Student Focus Group	1
Observations	Birney Classrooms	14
	Birney Specialty Classes	4
	Birney School (lunchtime, recess, afterschool)	3
	Student Presentations	1
	A.M. Winn Classrooms	5
	Carver Classrooms	8
	Carver lunch and passing period	2
	WEST Program	1

Protocols for interviews were tailored to the role of the interviewee and covered core school features and practices in the areas of curriculum, instruction, assessment, school philosophy, relationships with students, teacher collaboration and professional learning, and school governance. Students and parents were asked about their experiences as members of the school community. Following our site visits we organized and coded our data by central themes. We conducted follow-up interviews with key staff to fill in gaps in our data. The Area Superintendent, Mary Hardin Young; Steiner College President, Liz Beaven; and principals of Birney, Carver, and Winn all reviewed the final drafts of the report for factual accuracy.

Quantitative Data

Quantitative data were secured from district administrative databases provided by the Sacramento City Unified School District (SCUSD). We collected student-level data set from the SCUSD. Multiple years of data were provided including the following elements: 1) student demographic data, 2) student achievement data, and 3) student attendance and behavioral data. We obtained the high school cohort graduation rates for the SCUSD from California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System (CALPADS) by accessing the website of California Department of Education.

Student Suspension Data. We calculated student suspension rates both for Alice Birney and for other SCUSD schools (K–8 grades) using the student level data that the SCUSD provided us. Student suspension rates were calculated using the following formula: the number of students suspended divided by the total number of students then multiplied by 100. We made an unduplicated count of students involved in one or more incidents during the academic year. That is, students who were suspended multiple times were only counted once.

Value-Added Modeling of School-Student Linked Data. This section focuses on assessing if practices of an innovative, developmentally appropriate, Waldorf-inspired approach at Alice Birney Waldorf enhanced solid academic success of its students in general and students of subgroups, respectively.

Student Academic Outcome Measures and Predictor Variables. The student academic achievement measures used in this study are student-level state standardized test scores of California Standards Tests (CST) in ELA and Math. CST are criterion-referenced tests taken yearly by all students in Grades 2 through 11. In this study, we were interested in and analyzed elementary and middle school students (Grades 3 through 8). Because CST are not vertically equated, and thus no scaled scores are available that have consistent meaning across tests, we standardized raw scores by test, subject, and grade level. The standardized scores, called z-scores, have a mean zf 0 and a standard deviation of 1.

Although the California State tests do not allow the calculation of gain scores,[14] prior years' scores in the same subject (ELA or mathematics) on the tests can be used as controls when modeling influences on achievement. Based on multiple years of data

provided by SCUSD, we developed longitudinal data sets with students matched to schools by year. The data set allows us to model school influences on student achievement while controlling for student background characteristics and prior achievement scores. The student background characteristics we controlled for in our models include gender, ethnicity, free/reduced lunch status, English Language Learner (ELL) status, and special education status. All student demographic variables are categorical variables. Our key predictor variable of interest was Alice Birney Waldorf, which has two categories: a) students attending Alice Birney Waldorf School, and b) students attending other SCUSD public schools.

The student demographic characteristics are different between Alice Birney Waldorf and other SCUSD schools in proportion of ELL students, ethnicity composition, and student socioeconomic status. Therefore, it is necessary and appropriate to take these demographic variables into consideration in modeling student achievement outcomes.

Before conducting the VAM analyses with our longitudinal master dataset, we ran multiple regression models on data from individual school years to ensure that there was not drastic variation between years. Table A-2 demonstrates the sample sizes by school year.

Table A-2: Numbers of Students by Year for Alice Birney Waldorf and Other SCUSD Schools (3rd–8th)

Year	ELA		Mathematics	
	N of Alice Birney Students	*N* of SCUSD Students	*N* of Alice Birney Students	*N* of SCUSD Students
2008–09	225	23,875	222	23,992
2009–10	267	24,291	265	24,206
2010–11	290	23,631	289	23,585
2011–12	339	23,615	337	23,580
2012–13	369	23,320	368	23,293
5-Year Total	**1,490**	**118,732**	**1,481**	**118,656**

We also ran regression models on the CST test scores of Latino and African American students of Alice Birney in comparison with the same ethnic group students in SCUSD as well as the comparison between the socioeconomically disadvantaged students and their counterparts in SCUSD. Table A-3 shows the sample sizes of subgroup students of Alice Birney Waldorf by year.

Table A-3: Subgroups at Alice Birney Waldorf of 3rd–8th Grade (2008–09 through 2012–13)

Year	Number of Students (3rd–8th)	Number of Latino/African American Students (3rd–8th)	Number of Socioeconomically Disadvantaged Students (3rd–8th)
2008–09	225	74 (33%)	87 (39%)
2009–10	267	78 (29%)	90 (34%)
2010–11	290	89 (31%)	94 (32%)
2011-12	339	105 (31%)	100 (30%)
2012–13	369	107 (29%)	127 (34%)

School Effectiveness for Grades 3–8. The regression models were run on five-year combined data (2008–09 to 2012–13) on ELA and Math separately. We ran three separate regression models on students of third–eighth grades: 1) including third–eighth grade, 2) including third–fourth grade, and 3) including fifth–eighth grade, respectively (Table A-4 and Table A-5). Each model controlled for student demographic variables. The regression models used an auto-regression, a time series approach in which the projected CST ELA or mathematics score is estimated using the previous year's score as the measure of prior learning. The regression coefficient for prior learning represents the average difference in student achievement in z-scores associated with a one-unit difference in prior learning when holding all other variables constant. The coefficient for the other categorical predicting variables represent the difference in student test scores associated with that group as measured relative to a defined reference group. A dummy-coded school predictor variable was generated to examine the Alice Birney school effect on students' academic achievement, with other SCUSD schools having third–eighth grades being defined as the reference or comparison group. The reference groups for student characteristics variables were: male students for gender, non-English language learners for English language learner status, non-special Ed students for participation in special education programs, Latino for ethnicity, students not eligible for free or reduced lunch programs. In addition, the adjusted-R2, the 'goodness-of-fit' of the statistical model, indicates the amount of variance in student test scores that can be accounted for the regression model.

We ran three separate regression models on students of third–eighth grade in ELA and mathematics, respectively. Model 1 includes third–eighth grade students; Model 2 includes third–fourth grade; Model 3 includes fifth–eighth grade. Table A-4 (next page) demonstrates the results of the ELA models, which predict students' performance on ELA exams. The results are consistent in ELA across three regression models: students of Alice Birney Waldorf School made significantly greater gains in ELA than students of other SCUSD schools both in lower elementary grades (third–fourth) and middle school grades (fifth–eighth), with student characteristic variables and prior year test score controlled. The results indicated that these regression models, including student demographic variables, prior achievement, and school attending, accounted for about 64%–66% of the variation in student ELA scores.

How large are these positive school effects? While there is no simple conversion of standard deviation to more familiar assessment scores, we made rough approximations. For example, for students in the middle of the range, a difference of 0.2 standard deviations translates into about 8 percentile ranks (i.e., from 50th percentile to 58th percentile). Note that the difference is slightly less for students further away from the middle of the distribution. When converted the effect sizes using standard units to percentile points, Alice Birney Waldorf students, in comparison with students at other SCUSD schools, made relatively

positive CST ELA test score gains for about 5 percentile points more increases in mean student achievement based in the third–eighth grade model and the third–fourth grade model. Comparatively, students of high elementary and middle school grade levels (fifth–eighth) made greater achievement gains with 8 percentile points increase in ELA performance.

Table A-4: Regression Models for Student CST ELA 5-Year Combined (2008–09 through 2012–13)

Parameter	ELA		
	3rd–8th Grade	3rd–4th Grade	5th–8th Grade
z-score ELA Prior	0.74*** (SE=0.003)	0.73*** (SE=0.005)	0.74*** (SE=0.004)
Alice Birney Waldorf	0.15*** (SE=0.02)	0.13*** (SE=0.03)	0.19*** (SE=0.02)
Female	0.06*** (SE=0.004)	0.06*** (SE=0.01)	0.06*** (SE=0.01)
English Learner	-0.15 *** (SE=0.01)	-0.14 *** (SE=0.01)	-0.14 *** (SE=0.01)
Special Ed	-0.02* (SE=0.01)	0.03* (SE=0.01)	-0.05 *** (SE=0.01)
Black	-0.07 *** (SE=0.01)	-0.08*** (SE=0.01)	-0.07 *** (SE=0.01)
White	0.08 *** (SE=0.01)	0.10 *** (SE=0.01)	0.07 *** (SE=0.01)
Asian	0.09 *** (SE=0.01)	0.07*** (SE=0.01)	0.10 *** (SE=0.01)
Other	0.02 * (SE=0.01)	0.05** (SE=0.01)	0.02* (SE=0.01)
Free/Reduced Lunch	-0.13*** (SE=0.01)	-0.18*** (SE=0.01)	-0.12*** (SE=0.01)
Constant	0.09*** (SE=0.01)	0.11*** (SE=0.01)	0.08*** (SE=0.07)
R-Squared (Adjusted)	0.66	0.64	0.66
Students (*N*)	71,157	24,473	58,825

*Notes: *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001. Standard errors are in the parentheses. Student ELA scores in the regression models are z scores, the normalized scores within each grade in a specific school year.*

Table A-5 (next page) demonstrates the results of three mathematics regression models, which predict students' performance on CST mathematics exams. These regression models accounted for 57% to 59% of the variation in student Mathematics performance. The results showed a different pattern in predicting student mathematics test scores. When the models were run by including students

of third–eighth or lower elementary students of third–fourth, the negative regression coefficients indicated students of Alice Birney Waldorf made significantly less gains in CST math test scores than their peers in other SCUSD schools on average, with students' prior math achievement and demographic characteristics being controlled. However, when comparing the students in fifth–eighth grade, students at Alice Birney Waldorf School significantly outperformed their counterparts of other SCUSD schools on average, with a significantly positive regression coefficient of 0.05. This indicates that Alice Birney students made relatively greater gains in mathematics achievement in the middle school grade levels.

Table A-5: Regression Models for Student CST ELA 5-Year Combined (2008–09 through 2012–13)

	Math		
Parameter	**3rd–8th Grade**	**3rd–4th Grade**	**5th–8th Grade**
z-score Math Prior	0.71*** (SE=0.003)	0.70*** (SE=0.004)	0.71*** (SE=0.004)
Alice Birney Waldorf	-0.07** (SE=0.02)	-0.24*** (SE=0.03)	0.05* (SE=0.02)
Female	0.02** (SE=0.005)	0.01 (SE=0.01)	0.02* (SE=0.01)
English Learner	-0.10 *** (SE=0.01)	-0.08 *** (SE=0.01)	-0.10 *** (SE=0.01)
Special Ed	-0.05*** (SE=0.01)	0.02 (SE=0.01)	-0.09 *** (SE=0.01)
Black	-0.08 *** (SE=0.01)	-0.09*** (SE=0.01)	-0.07 *** (SE=0.01)
White	0.06 *** (SE=0.01)	0.06 *** (SE=0.01)	0.06 *** (SE=0.01)
Asian	0.20 *** (SE=0.01)	0.19*** (SE=0.01)	0.20 *** (SE=0.01)
Other	0.03 ** (SE=0.01	0.03* (SE=0.01)	0.02 (SE=0.01)
Free/Reduced Lunch	-0.12*** (SE=0.01)	-0.15*** (SE=0.01)	-0.10*** (SE=0.01)
Constant	0.09*** (SE=0.01)	0.10*** (SE=0.01)	0.08*** (SE=0.07)
R-Squared (Adjusted)	0.59	0.57	0.59
Students (*N*)	70,989	24,413	58,691

*Notes: *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001. Standard errors are in the parentheses. Student Math scores in the regression models are z scores, the normalized scores within each grade in a specific school year.*

The effect sizes varied among the three regression models on CST math test scores. When examining student achievement in mathematics by including students of third–eighth graders, the effect size was very small between the two groups, Alice Birney Waldorf students and students at other SCUSD school, with other SCUSD students on average making about 3 more percentile points increase than Alice Birney third–eighth graders. For the lower elementary grade levels of Grades 3 and 4, students at other SCUSD schools made about 9 percentile points more increase in math than Alice Birney third and fourth graders. However, when comparing students of high elementary and middle school grade levels (fifth–eighth), Alice Birney students made about 2 more percentile points increase in math performance, which indicated a small positive effect size.

Changes in Test Scores for Latino/African American Students of Third–Eighth Grade. We also ran regression models on the CST test scores of Latino and African American students of Alice Birney in comparison with the same ethnic group students in SCUSD. Three regression models (Table A-6) were run on ELA performance by including students of different grades: Grades 3–8, Grades 3–4, and Grades 5–8. Three similarly defined regression models were run on CST mathematics performance (Table A-7).

Table A-6: Regression Models for Latino/African American Student CST ELA 5-Year Combined (2008–09 through 2012–13)

	ELA		
Parameter	**3rd–8th Grade**	**3rd–4th Grade**	**5th–8th Grade**
Test Score Lag	0.74*** (SE=0.004)	0.73*** (SE=0.005)	0.74*** (SE=0.004)
Alice Birney Waldorf	0.16*** (SE=0.04)	0.13* (SE=0.06)	0.24*** (SE=0.05)
Female	0.06*** (SE=0.01)	0.06*** (SE=0.01)	0.06*** (SE=0.01)
English Learner	-0.10 *** (SE=0.01)	-0.08 *** (SE=0.01)	-0.09 *** (SE=0.01)
Special Ed	-0.01 (SE=0.01)	0.07*** (SE=0.01)	-0.05 *** (SE=0.01)
Free/Reduced Lunch	-0.11*** (SE=0.01)	-0.15*** (SE=0.01)	-0.10*** (SE=0.01)
Constant	0.04*** (SE=0.01)	0.04** (SE=0.01)	0.03** (SE=0.01)
R-Squared (Adjusted)	0.60	0.59	0.60
Students (*N*)	37,974	13,257	31,296

*Notes: *p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001. Standard errors are in the parentheses. Student ELA scores in the regression models are z scores, the normalized scores within each grade in a specific school year.*

Table A-6 demonstrates the results of three ELA models on Latino and African American students. The results indicated that about 60% of the variation in Latino and African American student achievement on ELA was accounted by these regression models. After controlling students' prior ELA achievement and demographic characteristics including gender, English language status, special education status and free or reduced lunch status, we found that Latino and African American students of Alice Birney Waldorf School made greater gains in ELA scores compared to similar students of other SCUSD schools of third–eighth grade. When running models on lower elementary grades (third–fourth) and higher elementary and middle school grades (fifth–eighth), significantly positive regression coefficients for school comparison were yielded (0.13 for the third–fourth grade model and 0.24 for the fifth–eighth grade model), which indicated a significantly greater school effect related to ELA was associated with attending Alice Birney Waldorf School in comparison with attending other SCUSD schools.

We made approximations of effect sizes by translating standard units into percentile ranks. Alice Birney Waldorf students, in comparison with students at other SCUSD schools, made relatively positive CST ELA test score gains in all three value-added models on Latino and African American students' ELA achievement. For the third–eighth graders, Alice Birney Latino and African American students made increases of about 6 more percentile points in mean student achievement than their counterparts in SCUSD. Similarly, Alice Birney Latino and African American students in third and fourth grades made about 6 more percentile points increases. Comparatively, Latino and African American students of high elementary and middle school grade levels (fifth–eighth) at Alice Birney gained 9 more percentile points in ELA performance than their similar counterparts in SCUSD.

Table A-7 (next page) demonstrates the results of three value-added regression models on mathematics achievement of Latino/African American students. These regression models accounted for about 52% of variance in Latino/African American student mathematics achievement. Table A-7 predicts students' performance on CST mathematics exams. The results showed a different pattern in predicting Latino/African American student mathematics test scores. When the model was run by including students of third–eighth, after controlling students' prior math achievement and demographic characteristics, no school level value added was found. For the model on lower elementary Latino/African American students of third–fourth, the negative regression coefficient (-0.16) associated with the school level effect variable indicated Latino/African American students of Alice Birney Waldorf made significantly smaller gains in CST math test scores than their peers in other SCUSD schools on average, with students' prior math achievement and demographic characteristics being controlled. However, when comparing Latino/African American students for higher elementary and middle school grade levels (fifth–eighth), with a significantly positive regression coefficient of 0.09, Latino/African American students at Alice Birney Waldorf School significantly outperformed their counterparts

of other SCUSD schools on average, which indicated Alice Birney Latino/African American students relatively made greater gains in the mathematics achievements at the stage of higher elementary and middle school grade levels.

The effect sizes varied in two value-added regression models indicating statistical significance of school effect on mathematics achievement of Latino and African American students. The value added modeling on lower elementary grade levels of Grades 3 and 4 indicated that Latino and African American students at other SCUSD schools made about 6 percentile points more increase in math than Alice Birney third and fourth graders. However, Alice Birney Waldorf made a positive school effect on students of high elementary and middle school grade levels (fifth–eighth) and Alice Birney students made about 4 more percentile points increase in math performance than students attending other SCUSD schools.

Table A-7: Regression Models for Latino/African American Student CST Math 5-Year Combined (2008–09 through 2012–13)

	Math		
Parameter	**3rd–8th Grade**	**3rd–4th Grade**	**5th–8th Grade**
Test Score Lag	0.70*** (SE=0.004)	0.71*** (SE=0.005)	0.70*** (SE=0.005)
Alice Birney Waldorf	-0.03 (SE=0.04)	-0.16** (SE=0.06)	0.09* (SE=0.04)
Female	0.01 (SE=0.01)	0.01 (SE=0.01)	0.03** (SE=0.01)
English Learner	-0.05 *** (SE=0.01)	-0.01 (SE=0.01)	-0.06 *** (SE=0.01)
Special Ed	-0.04*** (SE=0.01)	0.07*** (SE=0.02)	-0.09 *** (SE=0.01)
Free/Reduced Lunch	-0.09*** (SE=0.01)	-0.11*** (SE=0.02)	-0.08*** (SE=0.01)
Constant	0.03** (SE=0.01)	0.02 (SE=0.02)	0.01 (SE=0.01)
R-Squared (Adjusted)	0.53	0.52	0.52
Students (*N*)	37,869	13,215	31,214

*Notes: *p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001. Standard errors are in the parentheses. Student Math scores in the regression models are z scores, the normalized scores within each grade in a specific school year.*

Changes in Test Scores for Socioeconomically Disadvantaged Students of Third–Eighth Grade. We also ran regression models on the CST test scores of socioeconomically disadvantaged students of Alice Birney in comparison with students of the same socioeconomic status (eligible for free/reduced lunch) in SCUSD.

Table A-8 demonstrates the results of three ELA models on socioeconomically disadvantaged students. The results indicated that about 60% of the variation in socioeconomically disadvantaged student achievement on ELA was accounted by these regression models. After controlling students' prior ELA achievement and demographic characteristics including gender, English language status, special education status, and ethnicity status, we found that socioeconomically disadvantaged students of Alice Birney Waldorf School made greater gains in ELA scores compared to similar students of other SCUSD schools of third–eighth grade. When running models on lower elementary grades (third–fourth) and higher elementary and middle school grades (fifth–eighth), significantly positive regression coefficients for school comparison were yielded (0.19 for the third–fourth grade model and 0.23 for the fifth–eighth grade model), which indicated a significantly greater school effect related to ELA was associated with attending Alice Birney Waldorf School in comparison with attending other SCUSD schools.

Table A-8: Regression Models for Socioeconomically Disadvantaged Student CST ELA 5-Year Combined (2008–09 through 2012–13)

	ELA		
Parameter	**3rd–8th Grade**	**3rd–4th Grade**	**5th–8th Grade**
z-score ELA Prior	0.73*** (SE=0.003)	0.71*** (SE=0.005)	0.73*** (SE=0.004)
Alice Birney Waldorf	0.20*** (SE=0.03)	0.19*** (SE=0.05)	0.23*** (SE=0.02)
Female	0.06*** (SE=0.005)	0.06*** (SE=0.01)	0.06*** (SE=0.01)
English Learner	-0.16 *** (SE=0.01)	-0.14 *** (SE=0.01)	-0.14 *** (SE=0.01)
Special Ed	-0.01 (SE=0.01)	0.05* (SE=0.01)	-0.04 *** (SE=0.01)
Black	-0.09 *** (SE=0.01)	-0.10*** (SE=0.01)	-0.08 *** (SE=0.01)
White	0.06 *** (SE=0.01)	0.07 *** (SE=0.01)	0.05 *** (SE=0.01)
Asian	0.08 *** (SE=0.01)	0.06*** (SE=0.01)	0.10 *** (SE=0.01)
Other	0.01 (SE=0.01)	0.03 (SE=0.01)	-0.01 (SE=0.01)
Constant	-0.04*** (SE=0.01)	-0.06*** (SE=0.01)	-0.04*** (SE=0.07)
R-Squared (Adjusted)	0.6	0.58	0.6
Students (*N*)	50,771	17,657	41,894

*Notes: *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001. Standard errors are in the parentheses. Student ELA scores in the regression models are z scores, the normalized scores within each grade in a specific school year.*

We made approximations of effect sizes by translating standard units into percentile ranks. Alice Birney Waldorf students, in comparison with students at other SCUSD schools, made relatively positive CST ELA test score gains in all three value-added models on socioeconomically disadvantaged students' ELA achievement. For the third–eighth graders, Alice Birney socioeconomically disadvantaged students made increases of about 6 more percentile points in mean student achievement than their counterparts in SCUSD. Similarly, Alice Birney socioeconomically disadvantaged students in third and fourth grades made about 5 more percentile points increases. Comparatively, socioeconomically disadvantaged students of high elementary and middle school grade levels (fifth–eighth) at Alice Birney gained 9 more percentile points in ELA performance than their similar counterparts in SCUSD.

Table A-9 (next page) demonstrates the results of three value-added regression models on mathematics achievement of socioeconomically disadvantaged students. These regression models accounted for about 54% of variance in socioeconomically disadvantaged student mathematics achievement. Table A-9 predicts students' performance on CST mathematics exams. The results showed a different pattern in predicting socioeconomically disadvantaged student mathematics test scores. When the model was run by including students of third–eighth, after controlling students' prior math achievement and demographic characteristics, no school level value added was found. For the model on lower elementary socioeconomically disadvantaged students of third–fourth, the negative regression coefficient (-0.17) associated with the school level effect variable indicated socioeconomically disadvantaged students of Alice Birney Waldorf made significantly smaller gains in CST math test scores than their peers in other SCUSD schools on average, with students' prior math achievement and demographic characteristics being controlled. However, when comparing socioeconomically disadvantaged students for higher elementary and middle school grade levels (fifth–eighth), no significant difference between socioeconomically disadvantaged students at Alice Birney Waldorf School and their counterparts of other SCUSD schools on average. However, the positive regression coefficient (0.06) suggested comparatively positive test score gains of Alice Birney socioeconomically disadvantaged students though the difference was not statistically significant.

The effect sizes varied in two value-added regression models indicating statistical significance of school effect on mathematics achievement of socioeconomically disadvantaged students. The value-added modeling on lower elementary grade levels of Grades 3 and 4 indicated that socioeconomically disadvantaged students at other SCUSD schools made about 5 more percentile points in math than Alice Birney third and fourth graders.

These statistical analyses have limitations. The statistical approach we used examines relative student achievement gains within a school district, and does not support inferences between school districts. Our analyses were also restricted to assessing the

school effects on student learning through standardized test scores, which cannot capture the full range of higher order competencies that may be generated through the Waldorf approach.

Table A-9: Regression Models for Socioeconomically Disadvantaged Student CST Math 5-Year Combined (2008–09 through 2012–13)

Parameter	Math		
	3rd–8th Grade	3rd–4th Grade	5th–8th Grade
z-score Math Prior	0.69*** (SE=0.003)	0.70*** (SE=0.004)	0.69*** (SE=0.004)
Alice Birney Waldorf	-0.03 (SE=0.04)	-0.17** (SE=0.06)	0.06 (SE=0.04)
Female	0.01 (SE=0.01)	0.01 (SE=0.01)	0.02* (SE=0.01)
English Learner	-0.11 *** (SE=0.01)	-0.07 *** (SE=0.01)	-0.11 *** (SE=0.01)
Special Ed	-0.05*** (SE=0.01)	0.03* (SE=0.01)	-0.08 *** (SE=0.01)
Black	-0.10 *** (SE=0.01)	-0.10*** (SE=0.01)	-0.09 *** (SE=0.01)
White	0.04 *** (SE=0.01)	0.03 (SE=0.01)	0.05 *** (SE=0.01)
Asian	0.19 *** (SE=0.01)	0.17*** (SE=0.01)	0.19 *** (SE=0.01)
Other	0.01 (SE=0.01)	0.01 (SE=0.01)	0.01 (SE=0.01)
Constant	-0.03*** (SE=0.01)	-0.04*** (SE=0.01)	-0.03*** (SE=0.07)
R-Squared (Adjusted)	0.54	0.53	0.54
Students (*N*)	50,638	17,607	41,707

*Notes: *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001. Standard errors are in the parentheses. Student Math scores in the regression models are z scores, the normalized scores within each grade in a specific school year.*

Appendix B:
Main Lesson Examples from Second and Sixth Grade

Second Grade

In second grade, main lesson time is constituted of a series of short activities, many focused on physical integration with speech or math. For example, students have movements they do to chants about being a valiant knight. Similarly physical and cognitive integration is stimulated as students walk backwards in a circle as they count backwards by 2s and engage in a clapping game while responding to questions regarding multiplication by 2s. Their teacher says, "I am going to really stump you, get ready...16," students clap the hands of the kid in front of them and the kid whose back they are facing as they say "8 times 2 is 16." They are laughing and joyous as they eagerly participate.

Throughout the morning, movement is interspersed with sitting activities. Students are rarely asked to sit for more than 15–20 minutes before they stand or move again. All subject matter is connected. As students are studying the magical world of fables and legends in second grade, the math lesson, literacy work, and speech work are all about knights and legends. Students' spelling words are taken from a passage about knights. The teacher shares a verse with the students, noting that some words are italicized or "tilted" and asking students to read those words. The words are knight, right, bright, fight, and light. The teacher asks the students to identify what is the same about the words, they say they all end in "ight." The teacher asks the students for ideas of other "ight" words. A student says "Kite" the teacher responds, "You would think it would, but grown-ups have decided to spell it differently." The students cut and paste the verse into their main lesson book and then write the spelling words in the book. When it is time to transition to the next activity the teacher sings quietly "quiet, quiet, listen, listen to a peaceful voice." She keeps singing quietly until all students are singing quietly with her, never stopping to ask for students attention. Next, the teacher has students stand and move to a specific space around the desks to sing the alphabet. They make a circle around the desks take a step for each letter. They walk around in a circle singing the alphabet. Then they walk backwards and sing the alphabet backwards. This seems challenging and fun for the students. Students review a portion of a legend that they heard the day before, remembering the main parts of the story.

Students are asked to take out their Main lesson book, which is extra-large. Students are instructed exactly how to fold their book, with 3 pages folded over and the spirals of the book facing their belly. Teacher says "check your desk partner to make sure they have it right." The teacher moves the curtain away from the chalkboard to reveal a beautiful detailed chalk drawing she made of a dragon. The kids "ooo and ahh." The teacher asks all the students to pick up their brown rectangular crayon

and mark a horizon line where the earth is. Then she instructs them to take out green and begin about the center of page to create the dragon belly. She tells them the "dragon's rage and ferocity of the dragon comes from his belly. He has a ferocious, fierce tail."

The students work seriously and attentively. She asks them to draw his "thick neck, there is nothing flimsy about this dragon," she says. At this point the drawing stops. The teacher tells them, "This is a strong beginning. We have to stop. I want you to be able to get to recess. We have worked hard." The students all sing White Choral Bells while they clean up.

Sixth Grade

A sixth grade main lesson begins with the recitation of verse with corresponding movements, similar to second grade.

> O Roma Nobilis, (O noble Rome)
> Orbis et domina, (The circle and mistress)
> Omnium urbium, (Of all cities most excellent)
> Excelentissima.
> Salutem dicimus (We give greetings)
> Tibi per Omnia; (To you among all)
> Te benedicimus, (To you we give blessings)
> Salve per saecula. (Salute through the year)

They chant with unbridled enthusiasm. Then four girls as song leaders for the class, sing a song in Latin as the class echoes in response. The songs and verses correspond to the students' study of Egypt, Mesopotamia, Ancient Greece, and Rome in fifth and sixth grades.

The day of this observation the students are studying economics as it relates to ancient civilizations. They begin with a spelling review, their words correspond to their study. They are asked to exchange their spelling words with their partner and put the words in alphabetical order. As a class they review the spelling and definition of each word. The words are: austere, barter, commerce, commodities, economics, encounter, geography, imperishable, malleable, religious, self-sufficiency, symbol, trade, and value.

The class is asked to work in small groups to write and prepare a presentation on the history of money using most of the spelling words. Before the students break into their groups, the teacher reviews the topic with students, asking them to draw

from their learning from their study of the Old Testament in third grade and their study of Native Americans and California history in fourth grade. She says:

> California was like an island with mountains and deserts. Native Americans had a lot of encounters, some were to barter, also they were enslaved, but we are going to focus on the bartering part of their experience today.

As the students break into small groups the teacher encourages the groups to manage themselves so that all voices are engaged. She says, "When you present, everyone needs to contribute. No one should be left out. If you are a quiet person, make sure you own a piece of the work that is your own knowledge." The students eagerly start sharing their knowledge. They talk about grain banks, the development of banking systems, notions of currency as abstract symbols of wealth, they draw on examples from ancient China, Romans, and Native Americans. Students are given about 15 minutes to discuss what they know and plan their presentation. As they are working, an African American student asks a question of his teacher then runs back to his group excitedly proclaiming, "Oh my gosh, we can talk about how they used shells." As students worked in groups they demonstrated a high level of competence with collaboration, asking each other questions to draw each other out and negotiating differing opinions with respect and courtesy. No group needs to be asked to stay on task. The teacher circulates listening quietly and asking probing questions of each group.

After checking in with each group, the teacher plays a finger harp very softly to bring the students back together. Before the students start presenting, the teacher says to them.

> I heard a lot of confidence. When I first gave this assignment, I saw a lot of worried faces. But then you got into groups and you seemed more confident. Did you surprise yourselves?

Students respond affirmatively and enthusiastically.

The groups of 4–5 students take turns presenting and demonstrate a deep understanding of the words (concepts) they are asked to use in their presentations and the relationships between the concepts. Special needs, academically strong, and struggling students all present, each presenting at their own level of competence. Each group is excited when it is their turn to present. The teachers respond to each group's presentations with positive feedback and suggestions for deeper coverage of the concepts. When one student in a group stumbles with presenting, others jump in to assist. At the end of the presentations, the teacher asked the students how they felt. They responded, "great," "super."

After a quick break for several students to do their weekly recitation of individual verses, the students are asked to write a paragraph using the spelling words, based on their presentations. The teacher challenges the students to come up with an interesting title but reminds them, "The paragraph is your priority. Use the writing skills you know to use. This is your best example of writing." The students are given 40 minutes for the writing task. She writes on the board that, when they are done writing, they need to edit for grammar, paragraph and sentence structure, spelling, and clarity.

Appendix C:
Sample Lesson Planning Template

Grade 4					
Line Song	♫				
8:15 Opening	Opening verse/song:				
8:15-8:45 Pedagogical Activities	Singing & Games	Flute	Circle	Flute	Circle
8:45-9:10 Daily practice	Mental Math & Spelling				
9:10-10:00 Nugget/Story	Beeswax Dramatize Clay Summarize Draw/Illustrate Create Mime/picture frame Musical Review				
Story Recall/ Rendering					
Physical practice			Chalkboard		
New Instruction					
New Story			Bookwork		
Closing					
10:20-10:35					
10:35-10:50	RECESS				
10:55-11:40			Strings		Strings
11:30-12:15	Eurythmy	Handwork		Handwork	
12:15-12:50					
12:50-1:30	Form Drawing	Spanish	Painting	Spanish	Games/Whittling
1:30-2:15	Practice Period	Library	Read Aloud	Ceramics	Folk Dance (January)

Appendix D:
The Expansion of Waldorf-Inspired Schools in SCUSD

George Washington Carver: The Realization of K–12 Public Waldorf

In 2008, George Washington Carver School of Arts and Sciences was the final "small innovative school" to open in the wake of SCUSD's high school reform efforts funded largely by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The school is a dependent district charter school, which means that the administration is given greater flexibility in issues of hiring and some scheduling issues, but it is still governed by the union contract that sets work hours, salaries, and due process procedures among other things. Initially co-located with an earlier "small innovative high school" (America's Choice), the two schools merged under the leadership of Principal Allegra Alessandri.

Alessandri, the daughter of a Waldorf educator and a graduate of the Sacramento Waldorf School as well as a fully trained Waldorf teacher, successfully helped open the San Francisco Waldorf High School and served there in various capacities from 1997–2004. Here she describes how she worked with the existing Waldorf community to open the school:

> We had a district behind us. We had this huge parent-led community that was working with the board of education to make this happen. I felt uniquely qualified because I'd been to a Waldorf School and there aren't a lot of us that have been through Waldorf education that are teaching; I am a product of the education. There aren't a lot of us around, and even fewer people who've gone through high schools. I realized that was sort of my niche and so my family and I moved back here to Sacramento from San Francisco, and spent a year planning and working very closely with the John Morse...families, learning a lot about public education...I think I really came to appreciate how democracy is in action in public schools.

Alessandri shepherded what would be a difficult transition from the struggling environment of America's Choice, a school that served many low achieving students, towards the creation of a school built around Waldorf methods. America's Choice was, in many ways, a dying school. Its population was small and dwindling; it lacked clear leadership and a coherent vision to which the community could rally. After the district officially committed the school to becoming a full Waldorf methods school, many of the existing student body

Table D-1: George Washington Carver Demographics, 2014–15

Student characteristics	
Enrollment	306
Race/ethnicity	
African American	10%
Latino	20%
White	61%
English language learners	3%
Socioeconomically disadvantaged	48%

Source: http://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest

transferred out of the school. With that went much of the school's diversity.

The existing faculty was largely resistant to the changes afoot as well. As part of the conversion to Waldorf methods, the staff needed to agree to additional training if they were not already qualified in Waldorf instruction. All but one of the America's Choice teachers were either terminated or eventually transferred. However, the strong local Waldorf community allowed Alessandri to recruit teachers who were either products of Waldorf education themselves, directly trained in Waldorf methods, or explicitly interested in Waldorf education. These teachers, some who taught in private Waldorf schools locally or even internationally, helped facilitate the transition into full Waldorf. Here Alessandri describes the transition and the forces that made it work, as well as the modifications required for success at the high school level:

> [I]nitially...the ninth–grade team was...the first couple of years, was really the strong Waldorf trained team. And then, as we brought on new hires, we were able to grow and develop the program through the regular daily curriculum. Then as the team got stronger we were able to start bringing in alternative kinds of ideas like the main lesson. Unlike the grade school we don't offer it all year long every day. The structure is just so different in high school with specialty teachers and you have to have a credential in your subject matter, so structurally and in terms of the staffing it just hasn't been possible.

Alessandri and founding teachers feel that Carver's adaptation of the Waldorf approach to meet the requirements of public high school are actually more true to the Waldorf approach than private Waldorf schools that get stultified in their traditions. According to one teacher:

> We are more Waldorf than anywhere because we are not bound by the traditions of how these institutions in the private world got founded. Our challenges have made us be creative thinkers on how do we get around the state rules.

Alessandri has managed to work cooperatively with the SCUSD teachers' union to secure the integrity of her school's program, while ensuring that teachers are afforded the protections that the union offers. One teacher described the pluses and minuses of navigating the frameworks and requirements provided by the union as well as the spirit of cooperation that guides the school:

> I think some of what we've hit up against and try to finesse up against is union issues as well. We have restrictions...or we have limitations on what we can teach and when we can teach it and how much we can teach, and I think those are there in some ways to protect us for good reason, which when I hear stories of private Waldorf school teachers

> there's a lot of overwork and not clear hours, and expectations of extremely long periods and days that then are counterbalanced by some that are very short. So the union element is sort of there in some ways I think is a good protection, but in other ways it limits us as well that we had to hit up against...like details of minutes and amounts of [work]...all this is dictated by the state.

A key to their success has been teacher collaboration as shared decision-making as the faculty has worked together to come up with solutions. As a teacher reflects, "I've never worked in a place like this before, that we make these decisions as a faculty. It's not the big boss making this decision." For example, in order to include the main lesson into their instruction, teachers have designed two to three main lessons per grade level that they teach during a one-month intersession, since it is hard to incorporate the main lesson into the district schedule. Fundraising pays for teachers to teach intersession classes as they are not covered by district funds. Furthermore, rather than rigidly adhering to private Waldorf school structures, teachers focus on a Waldorf instructional approach in their teaching. They talk about the focus on head, heart and hands of the Waldorf approach. One teacher explains:

> It's not just heavy stuff where you are doing this lecture, but you try to get them to be empathetic and feel about it. So you might read some poems, maybe some primary sources or get something deep in there so that they can actually feel it, but then you also do something with the hands where you actually create stuff with your hands. It's an approach where you are integrating all of your senses in everything.

Students experience the instruction in a similar way. One student whose previous experience had been in strictly academic environments, shares her challenges with the integration of doing (art) and feeling (opinion):

> It was a big struggle trying to go from academics to art. I think the biggest problem I had was that I was so used to taking notes and just copying information and just trying to memorize the material to understand it, and at this school most of the teachers would ask "how do you feel about it, what's your opinion on it?" I wasn't used to being asked about my opinion. Like in history class all we would do [was] take notes and answer the questions on the test in class and then we'd leave. But now in history class it's like they ask you questions based on your morality and they ask you whether you think that this point in history was good or bad and it's a lot more personal. So at first I was really confused because I didn't know what to say or what to do, but now that I'm actually here and I've been here for a while it's a lot easier and I feel like I understand school more and I don't think I'd be able to go back to an academic environment so easily.

It is this cooperative environment, built around shared leadership, which resulted in a dramatic turnaround of the school. According to the school's 2012 application for charter renewal (pp. 1–2):

- In three years [2008–2011] the school has grown from 100 to 290 students in Grades 9–12 [it is now at just over 300 students].
- The school's API jumped from 598 to 750 in two years.
- Attendance rates leapt from 85% to 96%.
- Suspensions dropped as graduation rates soared to 90%.
- Carver earned a full six-year Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) accreditation from June 2009 to June 2016.
- Recognizing the importance of personal and professional development, Carver supports the staff by providing a number of opportunities for Waldorf Teacher training including:
    - High School Teacher Training Certification coursework for all faculty every summer at Rudolf Steiner College;
    - Attendance for all faculty and staff at the annual Alliance for Public Waldorf Education Conference in January;
    - Ongoing weekly Waldorf study with mentor teacher and Birney Founding teacher, Betty Staley.

Today, the school continues to see robust growth as word spreads about its program. Increasing numbers of Birney students are choosing Carver for high school. Unfortunately the school struggles to attract and retain students of color, particularly African American students. According to one staff member, the school's alternative structure, and the fact that it does not have many of the social activities found at most high schools, makes it less appealing to students of color, "I can tell you that, and many [African American students] that I've encouraged to come here have...they usually don't stay. It's different for them. It's too different."

Yet, in spite of these difficulties, this staff member still believes deeply in what the school offers, particularly for students of color and working class students:

> [I tell interested African American students]...you'll have a private school atmosphere in a public school setting. I tell them that they're going to get an education, a private school education for free, and you can't beat that. They look at the number of kids in the school, they look at the diversity in the school and that kind of scares them...I try to encourage them and tell them that they'll get

> a great education and it's not the same here. I won't say that race is not an issue because I think it's an issue everywhere but here it's less prevalent.

However, for those that stay the lure of close personal relationships with teachers, along with an open and caring environment where everyone is committed to providing a safe space for student growth, has proven strong indeed. Students speak about how they can be themselves, how they are not judged based on being quirky or idiosyncratic. Carver is truly a school where students can safely express who they are. One student shares:

> The first thing I see was somebody on the piano just like playing Mozart just like in the middle of every...everyone one just surrounded him and he's like just doing it. This place is amazing. It's like this artistic school. It promotes everybody to be themselves and I don't see that anywhere. You have kids on unicycles at lunch, literally on unicycles, and not one kid, there's a ton of kids. There are people that dye their hair, they wear what they want and they're not afraid to be who they are, and they enjoy it. They enjoy high school. You go to other schools and they're like "ah we hate high school." I love this high school. I've always hated high schools until this one.

The teachers comment how helpful it is to have students from Birney and other Waldorf schools at Carver to ground the culture of the school into a climate of acceptance and inclusion. One teacher talks about how she'll purposefully seat Waldorf kids next to non-Waldorf kids. "I am wanting some of that Waldorf culture to rub off on those kids and soften or open."

As high schoolers, Carver students are ready to extend their education out into the world and see themselves as change agents. This gets framed as a social justice and environmental focus at Carver, "tied to real world issues, real world doing, real world feeling, real world thinking," as a teacher describes. For example in an environmental science class, students discuss the impact of perceptions of women's role in society, cultural taboos, contraception availability, education for girls, and infant mortality across various countries around the world.

Carver like Birney and A.M. Winn seek to support the whole child. The teachers talk about supporting students in not only developing their strengths but engaging their challenges as well. As one teacher describes:

> We are here as a school to help grow kids into who they want to be, their highest version of themselves....We want them to unfold who they are and we want to help them unfold even the areas that they don't want to unfold.

A.M. Winn: The Heart of a School Turnaround

The third and newest Waldorf-inspired school came about under much different circumstances than Morse/Birney and Carver. A.M. Winn Elementary was a struggling neighborhood school that suffered from persistent administrative and faculty turnover, declining enrollment, and stagnating or declining student achievement. The district considered shuttering it, as its problems seemed more and more intractable.

However, during the 2010–11 school year, Superintendent Jonathan Raymond assigned Assistant Superintendent of Schools Mary Hardin Young to convene a design team to explore all available options for avoiding closure after a transportation analysis revealed that it would be unsafe for students to walk to neighboring schools. Hardin Young describes the configuration of the design teams:

> We made the team up of parents who had students active at the school, parents who had chosen to move their children to another school—because we wanted to have both parent voices—active staff members, active people in the community who had been in the community for a while, so either through organizations or churches or mom's clubs or whatever, and we then met on a regular basis to research what other programs could we offer at A.M. Winn that would be attractive, that could build enrollment, and then how could the district help support that?

The design team also included the school principal and classified staff. Hardin Young made sure to maximize the choice and voice of all the stakeholders, and co-created evaluation tools with the team that would help finalize a decision:

> At the very beginning of the process we built out characteristics of A.M. Winn and the neighborhood and what we valued in students, what we valued in teachers. We had our rubric to review all programs to reflect that. Then each program that we studied we gave out printed material and websites that people could go to. People were very active in researching things beyond what we gave, which is what we encouraged them to do, so that we uncovered every positive but every critical look at each program.

Table D-2: Winn Demographics Demographics, 2014–15

Student characteristics	
Enrollment	387
Race/ethnicity	
African American	10%
Latino	33%
White	42%
English language learners	19%
Socioeconomically disadvantaged	80%

Source: http://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest

These types of processes are often pseudo-democratic as the district office pushes for specific models from behind the scenes. However,

that was not the case here and the superintendent was clear that he would support whatever decision the design team made regarding the school model. In the end, the design team narrowed their choices to either a STEM focus or a Waldorf focus. The successful examples of Birney and Carver, plus the presence of pricey local private Waldorf schools, convinced the committee that there was a high level of demand for more Waldorf-inspired schools and they selected to transition to a Waldorf-inspired approach, although the vote was not unanimous.

Similar to the history of Carver and Morse/Birney, Hardin Young understood that staff buy-in was paramount to the potential success of the future program:

> So like the other schools where we did design teams we said to the staff once the vote had been taken and we made a presentation to the board and the board adopted the recommendation, we value teachers who have been trained as traditional teachers and want to remain at a more traditional site. Waldorf-inspired education is not for everybody. We want to give you a year as the program moves up the capability of moving to a different school if you do not want to go through training and become a Waldorf-inspired teacher. We've had a lot of takers at that, which has been one of the things that has helped that site grow.

Most of the teachers opted to leave with the exception of two kindergarten and two second-grade teachers who stayed and were paid to receive Waldorf training through Steiner College. Like the teachers, the principal, Michael Kast, who was a new principal and relatively new to the school, was given an option to leave. Although he did not have a Waldorf background, he opted to stay. He sees his role not as an expert in Waldorf instruction but as helping transform the school. He describes his role.

> My questions are not so much about the Waldorf education in the classroom, I have to lean on my teachers to take and absorb that part, I can't be a mentor for the curriculum, I don't have the skills, and that's hard for me to say but that's the reality of it....I am relying on them to get those skills...I have to recruit, we have to change the school, and as we are growing it's becoming easier and easier because there's more bodies to lean on, better parent support.

The board approved the decision to transition to a Waldorf-inspired approach the week after school got out and the school opened that fall 2011 with two Waldorf kindergarten classrooms. Because of the last minute nature of the decision the teachers in those kindergarten classrooms missed the registration for summer courses at Steiner College so Principal Kast brought in two tutors for them who have a vast amount of experience in Waldorf instruction, Peggy Alessandri and Lauren Hickman, to work directly with the teachers.

A.M. Winn added a grade level each year. In 2014–15 they had kindergarten, first, second, seventh, and eighth with Waldorf curriculum and rest of the school remained using their original curriculum. The middle school represents an expansion for the school that had previously been K–6. As a result, the middle school has struggled a bit more than the early elementary grades. According to the principal, many of the middle school students stayed at the school not because they were choosing Waldorf but because they thought they would not be successful in other public middle schools. Furthermore, since these students have not been through a Waldorf curriculum since early elementary, it is harder for the teachers to have full fidelity to the Waldorf approach while simultaneously preparing them for high school.

The teachers at Winn who have embraced Waldorf spoke of how it dramatically impacted their classroom practice. Anecdotally, they spoke of higher levels of student engagement, fewer instances of disruption, and improved academic outcomes. They also spoke of the necessity to mold Waldorf to fit the purposes of the school as much as Waldorf should mold the school itself. Although none of the Winn teachers are fully credentialed Waldorf teachers, all of them have and will continue to attend trainings at Rudolph Steiner College. All of them have taken the Waldorf approach for public schools institute (http://www.rudolfsteinercollege.edu/public-school-institute) and also take the Art of Teaching for their specific grade level every summer. Also, all of them have either completed or are currently enrolled in the districts training program, WEST.

Being a neighborhood school that is open to all comers means that the teachers face challenges that do not exist at the Waldorf schools of choice like Birney and Carver. As a neighborhood school that has been in existence for 50 years, many children are third and fourth generation attendees at the school, which can result in some lack of awareness and resistance to its transformation from their parents. Some families still attend the school for its convenience. The school's transformation is both helped and hindered by the tight-knit community, some who support and others who do not support the change. Many children entering in kindergarten have no preschool experience and a high level of exposure to electronics, which can also make the transition to school challenging. The school has invested time working to educate their families about the Waldorf approach and also expand parts of their Waldorf program to reach all students. For example, as they begin to introduce specialty classes such as handcrafts the principal opted to make it available to all students. "It was very important for parents, and very important for me, we are trying to get this message across that it's one school. There's two different curriculums being taught, but we are still one school, one community."

Hardin Young and the principal believe that fairly soon the school will have to become a school of choice to ensure that families support the Waldorf approach. However, the principal hopes that preference can be given to neighborhood families to preserve the school's diversity.

As the third Waldorf-inspired school in the district, Winn also struggles to find qualified teachers as the pools of Waldorf trained teachers have been diminished by the other schools. However, WEST continues to provide an opportunity for new teachers to receive introductory training, as several Winn teachers and their after-school coordinators have taken advantage of. Furthermore, Winn teachers benefit from collaboration opportunities with Birney teachers who share lesson plans and instructional strategies. Principal Kast also benefits from collaboration with Birney's Principal Horning and Carver's Principal Alessandri. He explains, "They are my big sisters holding my hand sometimes...Mechelle and Allegra are good to lean on...we bounce ideas off each other." The three principals take advantage of every opportunity they have, attending WEST together every year, sitting together at district principals' meetings, and attending Waldorf Association meetings together. The principal also feels tremendous support from Mary Hardin Young at the district office and appreciates the curricular autonomy he receives from the district.

Just four years into the slow transition to becoming a Waldorf-inspired school, it is too early to tell if A.M. Winn will be able to replicate the success of Alice Birney. With their gradual grade-by-grade roll out it will be many years until the school is wall-to-wall Waldorf-inspired and a few more for each teacher to develop the capacity to teach with fidelity to the Waldorf approach. Future research will be helpful to understand the impact of the district's approach to school transformation at A.M. Winn.

Conclusion

A confluence of factors all played a role in creating the environment where Waldorf became a viable choice for the SCUSD community. The existence of one of the oldest and largest Waldorf centers in North America provided a base for the training and development of teachers interested in pursuing Waldorf methods. An established, and large, private Waldorf community also provided a base from which parents and potential teachers could be drawn. A core of teachers and community members made the brave decision to pursue the conversion of a single school to Waldorf methods while remaining committed to that school by fostering its long-term development and growth. Legal challenges predicated on a misreading of the nature of a public Waldorf education were repeatedly turned back. A superintendent made the effort to see, in person, every single school in his district while being open to learning more about the operation of a Waldorf-inspired school. A community that was willing to take the risks in opening the first public Waldorf-methods high school in the country. A district-level assistant superintendent who made community voice central to the redesign of a new school. Yet time and time again, public Waldorf in Sacramento has proven itself successful through the students it helps create and the lasting relationships between stakeholders it facilitates.

Endnotes

1. *Research Bulletin* articles are available at http://www.waldorfresearchinstitute.org/bulletinarticles.html

2. Teacher's name is a pseudonym.

3. This number is closer to 2000 when Waldorf kindergartens and special education centers are factored in.

4. Katherine Lehman taught at the sites prior to the school being located at Birney for 12 years. Lauren Rice has taught at all the sites and still teaches at Birney.

5. A detailed description of the stages and curriculum in public Waldorf schools can be found at http://www.allianceforpublicwaldorfeducation.org/wpcontent/uploads/2013/11/PublicWaldorf_CommonCore_Part1.pdf

6. This document also aligns the Waldorf curriculum to the Common Core and can be found at http://www.allianceforpublicwaldorfeducation.org/wpcontent/uploads/2013/11/PublicWaldorf_CommonCore_Part1.pdf

7. Eurythmy is a dance and movement art form that emerged out of Rudolf Steiner's theories on the human body. Steiner believed eurythmy to be "visible speech." A eurythmy classroom focuses on having students understand rhythm, speech, and tone, and how their bodies move and how those movements can be used to communicate with others and develop their spatial awareness.

8. Teacher was placed at Birney by the district prior to an agreement with the district and teachers' union about minimal training needed for Birney teachers. This teacher will see their class through graduation and then will leave the school.

9. We refer to the school as John Morse/Alice Birney in this chapter as the data spans times in which the school was housed at both the John Morse and Alice Birney school sites.

10. The test was not used after 2013.

11. Z-scores are standardized units where a distribution is normalized to give a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1. The z-score thus represents the number of standard deviation units from a population mean.

12. Individual schools' productivity scores were plotted on axes of ELA versus mathematics, with each dot representing one school. Each axis represents the value added in standard units. A positive score in the horizontal or vertical directions indicates that, on average, students in a school are achieving in mathematics or ELA respectively at a level greater than that projected by the regression model.

13. We refer to the school as Morse/Birney in this chapter as the data spans times in which the school was housed at both the John Morse and Alice Birney school sites.

14. Gain scores cannot be calculated because we have students' scores on annual state tests rather than pre- and post-test scores. The state tests are grade specific and measure student competency on different content from one year to the next.

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