

Self-Study Visiting Committee Report –

for

Prairie Hill Waldorf School

N14 W29143 Silvernail Road

Pewaukee, WI

March 30 - April 2, 2014

Visiting Committee Members

Meredith Johanson (team leader)

Tracy Edwards

Debra Judge

Deborah Lederman

Katherine Thivierge

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The charge of the AWSNA visiting team was to determine the actual situation as it existed in the school, its program and its procedures, and not to pass judgment on the professional personnel involved. Hence, this report is an objective description of circumstances as they appeared to trained and experienced educators. Any use of this report as an official assessment of a staff person's professional competency would be in violation of the professional ethics under which a school evaluation is conducted.

Any recommendations on safety issues should be addressed as soon as is feasible: While the AWSNA team may comment on conditions related to safety, the report is not to be construed as substituting for periodic inspections of the facilities as required by law and by principles of good practice in risk management gleaned from professional counsel to the school.

The members of the visiting team voluntarily reflected their professional judgment in arriving at the conclusions reported in this document. They are willing to support the thoughtful evaluations that they have made, provided the report is used appropriately. They are not to be held accountable for an injudicious or unauthorized use of this document.

School Profile

SCHOOL DATA:

School Name: **Prairie Hill Waldorf School**

Address: **N14 W29143 Silvernail Road, Pewaukee, Wisconsin, 53072**

Type of community: **Suburban**

Type of School: **Co-ed, Day**

Date School Founded: **1987**

Date School Incorporated not for profit: **1987**

Name of School Contact: **Sandra Martin, Faculty Chair**

Date of Appointment: **Fall 2013**

Date of previous accreditation of the school: **July 2006**

Other agencies by which the school is accredited: **North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement. Member of WECAN.**

Range of Tuition: **\$5800 to \$ 10,145**

Range of Salary Scale: **\$ 26,980 to \$ 48,000**

Date of most recent full opinion financial audit: **September 17, 2013 for fiscal year ending June 30, 2013.**

Date of most recent Long Range Planning Process: **October 2010**

STUDENT BODY

Enrollment includes which grades? Playgroup/Pre-K through Grade 8

Please give the appropriate number for each of the following categories:

Total Enrollment:	<i>Boys:</i>	68	<i>Girls:</i>	66
Pre-School:	<i>Boys:</i>	22	<i>Girls:</i>	23
Elementary:	<i>Boys:</i>	46	<i>Girls:</i>	42
Secondary:	<i>Boys:</i>	0	<i>Girls:</i>	0
Postgraduate:	<i>Boys:</i>	0	<i>Girls:</i>	0
Boarding:	<i>Boys:</i>	0	<i>Girls:</i>	0

Foreign Exchange Students: (Indicate countries and numbers)

None

Describe the cultural/ethnic mixture of the student body.

Limited ethnic diversity with 5% African-American, 2% Asian-American

3. TEACHING FACULTY:

Please give the appropriate number for each of the following categories: *(Exclude those, or the appropriate portion of those, with administrative duties.)*

	<i>Full-time:</i>	<i>Part-time:</i>	<i>Full-time Equivalent</i>
Male:	0	0	
Female:	13	16	

Academic Training of Teaching Faculty

Number who have not earned B.A. or B.S degree:	2 (1-EC lead) (1-Grades Tchr)
Number who have earned bachelor's degree only:	13 (2-EC Lead) (3-Grades) (2-Tchng Asst) (5-Subj Tchrs) (1-Adj Faculty)
Number who have earned master's degree:	9 (1-EC Lead) (3-Grades) (4-Subj. Tchrs) (1- Adj Faculty)
Number who have earned other degrees or equivalents (such as eurhythmy diploma):	7 (3-EC Leads) (1-Grades) (2-Subj Tchrs) (1- Adj Faculty)
(continued next page)	

Number who have Waldorf teacher training certificates:	4 (1-EC Lead) (2-Grades) (1-Tchnng Asst)
Number currently in Waldorf Training Program:	2 (2-Grades)

4. SCHOOL ORGANIZATION - GOVERNANCE & ADMINISTRATION

Board of Trustees

Total no.: 8 Men: 4 Women: 4 Minority: 0

Term of Office: 3 years

How chosen:

Self populated, application and interview

Please list the principal Board Committees.

Executive Committee

Finance Committee

Fund Development Committee

Committee on Trustees (Board Development)

Buildings & Grounds

Human Resources (joint with Circle of Colleagues (CoC))

Operations Group (joint with CoC)

Roots and Wings, a Parent and Family Association (joint with CoC)

Administrative Structure:

Administrator

Business Services Manager

Faculty Chair

Program Services Manager (Reception, health room)

Financial Services Manager

Admissions Coordinator

Marketing/Communications Coordinator

Fund Development Director

GRADUATES

Please give the following information for each of the last three years:

Total number of graduates if highest grade is 8th:

One year ago: 6

Two years ago: 12

Three years ago: 10

AWSNA Visiting Team Roster

Meredith Johanson, Trustee and Administrator Emeritus, Camellia Waldorf School

Tracy Edwards, Administrator, Spring Garden Waldorf School

Debra Judge, Fifth Grade Mathematics Teacher, University School of Milwaukee

Deborah Lederman, Class Teacher, Housatonic Valley Waldorf School

Katherine Thivierge, Executive Assistant, Association of Waldorf Schools of North America

Introduction, Mission and Philosophy

Prairie Hill Waldorf School was founded in 1987, and is located twenty-two miles west of downtown Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The school has an Early Childhood program with playgroups, a preschool class (Wonder Garden) and two kindergartens, and Grades One through Eight. The initiative for founding the school arose from a nearby established biodynamic agricultural community and there are a number of other anthroposophical initiatives in the greater Milwaukee area.

The school was sponsored by Chicago Waldorf School for nine years, and was first accredited by AWSNA in 2005. Since that time enrollment peaked in 2006 at 209 students, and has since steadily declined to 132. This decrease, along with turnover in administration, faculty, and board has created significant challenges for the school in recent years. Despite those challenges, the school has been able to provide a rich Waldorf curriculum to the students it serves and parents are generally satisfied with their children's school experiences. The people we spoke with at the school were very open in sharing their struggles with the visiting team, and it is our hope that our recommendations will support the school in moving forward with strength and courage.

The school's philosophy can be summarized by this quote from Rudolf Steiner and Marie Steiner: "The need for imagination, a sense of truth, and a feeling of responsibility, these are the very nerve of education. Our highest endeavor must be to develop free human beings who are able of themselves to impart purpose and direction to their lives." The school's mission statement is as follows: "Prairie Hill Waldorf School awakens the capacity for dynamic thinking, creativity, and compassion, inspiring children to contribute their unique gifts to the world." The classes and activities observed by the visiting team demonstrate that both the quote and the mission statement are truly living in the school on a daily basis.

The school has also developed the following statements:

- Our vision
- Living community principles
- Objectives

In addition, the Faculty has developed “Essential Qualities of a Waldorf Education” and a “Code of Compassion” is posted in the hall.

Board, faculty, administration, and parents were all involved in the development and review of these statements, most recently in 2013. The mission statement appears on the website, and in various handbooks and publications. An older version of the mission statement is prominently displayed in the entry hall.

Parents can learn more about the philosophy by reading *Renewal* magazine and by attending parent education offerings and class meetings. Teachers deepen their understanding of the philosophy through anthroposophical study.

While the school’s major festivals arise from the Christian calendar, they are making an effort to be more inclusive by, for example, referring to Michaelmas as the Festival of Courage, and choosing a story from a different culture each year to portray the theme of courage (beginning in Fall 2014).

The AWSNA visiting team commends the school for its:

- Commitment to Steiner’s view of the developing human being and to the fundamental principles of Waldorf education.
- Interest in identifying authentic universal themes for the festivals so they will resonate with families from all religions.

The AWSNA visiting team recommends that the school:

- Simplify its statements of mission, vision, objectives, principles, qualities, and the code of compassion to succinctly express its message.

Educational Programs

Waldorf education strives to produce human beings who are capable themselves of imparting purpose and direction to their lives. By seeking to educate the head, heart, and hands of the child, the curriculum covers a broad spectrum of subjects, balancing academics, artistic expression and skill, and practical learning. Waldorf teachers are dedicated to cultivating a natural love of

learning in their students, developing their intrinsic motivation and essentially teaching them how to joyfully teach themselves, a resource they will be able to draw on throughout their lives.

Prairie Hill places emphasis on a developmental curriculum that is taught artistically, using movement, drawing, music, storytelling and rhythm, and with each child's unique gifts honored in a nurturing social environment. Nourishment of the spiritual, physical, and emotional aspects of each child is integrated with the development of intellectual capacities, allowing learning to become a lifelong passion along with developing an ability to work with others to put that learning to service in the world. The educational programs are offered in the two sections of the school: Early Childhood and Grades. The Prairie Hill School is striving toward making available full and complete educational programs and specialty classes to these constituencies.

Early Childhood

The early childhood program at Prairie Hill Waldorf School adheres to a traditional model of Waldorf Early Childhood programs. There are tasks that are appropriate to the young child, such as cooking, baking, gardening, laundry, cleaning, and so on. Purposeful tasks proceed in a logical sequence and involve a wide variety of movements and gestures that become the basis for logical and flexible thinking later on in life, as they are performed in a conscious, deliberate way that allows the child to take in what is happening. The young children are included in these tasks in an age-appropriate way, that also allows for imaginative play and the development of gross and fine motor skills. There are many duties that the children accomplish throughout the day to great joy and success

In 2005, the school was given a donation to be used to build a Kinder House to hold the Early Childhood programs. Due to financial constraints and decreasing enrollment, the project has remained on hold since that time, and part of the donation was used this year (with the donor's permission), in part for the expansion of the Early Childhood programs. The school believes that a way to increase their enrollment over the long term is to grow the Early Childhood classes and eventually move all the EC classes into the Kinder House. To begin this expansion, the school has decided to turn the half-day Wonder Garden program for 3's and 4's into a full day program and to include a hot lunch made on site, along with a full day Kindergarten program. The school has hired additional assistants to work with the Lead Teacher in the Wonder Garden, Kindergarten and Parent Tot programs. The Wonder Garden class has reached capacity and there is the hope that increased enrollment will require a second class. In addition, the Parent /Tot program has grown significantly and there is increased enrollment in the Kindergarten classes. It is obvious that the school sees that the future lies within growing enrollment in Early Childhood and is actively engaged to that goal. There are 44 enrolled children in Early Childhood, excluding the play group program.

The facilities struggle to meet the needs of the Early Childhood. The current Wonder Garden room has no running water, and the teacher must bring water from outside the classroom while

the Parent /Tot classroom has no running hot water. There is a central kitchen area that permits for food preparation in addition to crock pots in the classrooms. There are no bathroom facilities in the classrooms and all the children in Early Childhood share bathroom facilities in a central location. This makes for congestion in this space for the children and staggered times to be in the facilities.

Year-end reports are provided to Early Childhood parents, with the exception of the Kindergarten classes. Lead Teachers prepare one comprehensive report for the child's last year of Kindergarten, highlighting the child's interactions, fine and gross motor skills, and, as appropriate, the child's readiness for First Grade.

The AWSNA visiting team commends the school for its:

- Emphasis on providing a high quality, rich and varied program with limited resources.
- Increased enrollment in Early Childhood classes.
- Utilization of the outside space for play.
- Increased number of Parent/ Tot and Early Childhood classes being offered.
- Planning for future growth of Early Childhood classes as a way to build up the Grades program
- Encouraging Assistants to take up Waldorf Early Childhood Teacher Training.

The AWSNA visiting team recommends that the school:

- Include the needed resources (sinks, bathrooms) in the long range strategic site plan.
- Hire and train new assistants prior to the first week of school.
- Continue to evaluate the most effective roles for assistants in Early Childhood.

Grades

Prairie Hill School has 89 grades students, with 7 grades classes, and a combined 3rd and 4th grade class and a projected combined class for grades 1 and 2 in 2014-2015. Specialty classes include Woodworking, Physical Education, Spanish, Strings, Chorus and Handwork. The school has a faculty chair that is not a teaching member of the school who supports the educators in their administrative work.

The elementary grades of 1-5 share space with grades 6, 7, and 8. There is some physical separation between these two sections so that the younger grades are set apart from the middle schoolers. The school's gymnasium is a multi-use facility with a portable stage and lighting for class plays and music performances.

The grades are led by educators dedicated to the school and to the students. All but one of the subject teachers are hourly employees who do not participate in committee work, Circle of

Colleagues work and faculty administrative tasks. In addition, the school no longer has a full time Learning Support Program and utilizes the local public school for Special Education services, which is becoming a growing area of attention within the Prairie Hill School.

The school works in partnership with the nearby Tamarack Waldorf School and shares activities and events with them such as the Pentathlon, watching each other's school plays and enjoying festivals. This connection helps to build community ties and a sense of fellowship within the school and parent body.

The Middle School is composed of 6th, 7th and 8th grades. These 3 grades share a cooperative approach to curriculum delivery, often with an exchange of block teaching amongst the faculty and in preparation for entrance into local high schools. Currently, 7th and 8th grade students experience both teachers and this approach offers the students a variety of teaching styles and grading expectations. A meeting with the 7th and 8th graders provided a classroom full of happy students who have shared many meaningful experiences that have helped them recognize the unique benefits of their Waldorf Education.

Programming in the school makes good use of the available resources. The school is continuing to bolster the students' mathematics study through the projected addition of a second Math Skills Teacher. 7th and 8th grade will each have their own skills teacher. The school is committed to presenting science in a phenomenological manner and preparing the students to do well when they leave Prairie Hill School. The school has one foreign language (down from two at the prior site visit), a Physical Education teacher, a lively strings program and one full time Specialty Subject teacher that provides both woodworking and handwork. The small school library is nicely managed and benefits from an electronic checkout system that allows for tracking of the literature and magazines. The School Librarian strives to have a collection that is both classical and contemporary while attempting to keep the library stocked with materials that are both age and content appropriate.

In their Self Study, Prairie Hill quotes Rudolf Steiner when he said "Eurythmy is the heart of Waldorf Education", and there have been significant changes to the Eurythmy program at the school since the last site visit. The changes are such that Prairie Hill does not currently offer Eurythmy and has not offered it for over 5 years. Therapeutic Eurythmy is available if parents choose to incur the cost themselves and after a recommendation from the visiting Anthroposophical doctor or class teacher or when a parent requests the therapy. It is difficult to have a program full of life when the "heart of a Waldorf Education" is beating so weakly. For the program to be complete, the school needs to decide if it truly believes that Eurythmy is the heart of Waldorf Education.

Presently, current curriculum standards and benchmarks as well as assessment rubrics do not reflect the present measurables used by the faculty and the guidelines are under review. Each teacher prepares a year end reports that follows a standard format that includes a curriculum

overview, observations about the student, comments from subject teachers and grades for the middle school students. There are no guidelines or articulated requirements to document mid-year Parent Teacher Conferences in a standardized way and the school cannot ensure that what the teacher wants to communicate and what the parent hears are the same thing. Also, Grades teachers do not have an agreed upon requirement or format for student record keeping throughout the year and there are inconsistencies in information that is being gathered. Grade teachers may wish to consider a clearly articulated philosophy of report writing that reflects the scope and sequence of the Grades classes and ensures that parents and teachers are clearly sharing and understanding student information.

The AWSNA visiting team commends the school for its:

- Teachers, who are dedicated and committed to the growth and success of the Grades Program.
- Programs and groups that have aided the teachers to feel connected to the parent body and vice versa.
- Peer -to- Peer Support within faculty that is strong, supportive and productive.
- Increasing the number of Waldorf Certified Teachers.
- Growing collection of policies and procedures that have brought structure to processes and have allowed the teachers to work better and in a more consistent manner.

The AWSNA visiting team recommends that the school:

- Develop and implement Scope and Sequence of grades classes and assessment rubrics for the students as well as a clearly defined and understood philosophy of report writing that includes all regularly scheduled Parent /Teacher Conferences as well as End -of- Year Reports.
- Define what a complete program means for Prairie Hill Waldorf School and then incorporate the implementation of those programs into the Strategic Plan when fiscally prudent.
- Encourage the faculty to find a way to define and express its collective point of view.

Activities and School Sports

There are Extra Curricular activities at the school including competitive sports, clubs, classes and activities. These options are available to the 5th through 8th grade as is appropriate to the complexity of rules and skills. The Physical Education and Games teacher coordinates the programs and parents are volunteer coaches and referees. The Physical Education teacher is a dedicated employee with a strong background as a Physical Education Specialist within the Milwaukee Public Schools, but without Waldorf training or certifications. For Prairie Hill students to have an education that engages the head, heart and hands, it would be highly valuable to have an educator that has a Waldorf trained background.

Presently, Prairie Hill Waldorf School is still looking for a Track and Field Coach, with a number of volunteers to be assistants but no one to lead. Current after school offerings are ski club, handwork lessons, strings and piano lessons.

The School Sports program is small and led by dedicated volunteer coaches. This leads to inconsistent approaches to the teams and to school rules and guidelines. With one mixed grade class in 2013-2014 (3rd and 4th grade) coupled with the addition of another mixed grade (1st and 2nd) in 2014-2015, in the future the school may be hard pressed to maintain activities due to limited number of students that are eligible to participate.

The AWSNA visiting team commends the school for its:

- Physical Education Teacher and Parent Volunteers, who are dedicated and committed to the growth and success of the Extra -Curricular and School Sports Programs.
- Developing in the students the ideals of sportsmanship, teamwork and dedication.

The AWSNA visiting team recommends that the school:

- Develop consistent guidelines and rules for all coaches and activity leaders that reflect the school's guiding principles and philosophy.
- Assist the Physical Education teacher to become certified in Spacial Dynamics or as a Games teacher.
- When fiscally possible and financially feasible, consider implementing after school-tutoring and student support services, and expanding intramural games.

Governance

The governance of the Prairie Hill Waldorf School is carried by the Circle of Colleagues, the Board of Trustees and the Operations Group. The schools strongly carries the indications of Rudolf Steiner that Waldorf schools be led by the teachers who work with the curriculum and the students. The Faculty of the Prairie Hill Waldorf School plays an ongoing and critical role in setting and maintaining the direction of the school.

Circle of Colleagues

Pedagogical and spiritual leadership of the school is presently carried by the Circle of Colleagues. The Prairie Hill Waldorf School has undergone some transition in this area, having established a College of Teachers in 1994, which was dissolved in 2001 when trust in the leadership of the College broke down, related to its decision-making process and communication. A conscious decision was made by the full Faculty for a Circle of Colleagues to responsibly carry the Spirit of the College and the vision of the school. Faculty feels that the level of trust is building.

The Circle of Colleagues consists of all full-time faculty, the Faculty Chair and the School Administrator. Any employee of the Prairie Hill Waldorf School who is committed to the work of the Circle of Colleagues is invited to attend the first part of the weekly Circle of Colleagues meeting. It is responsible for developing and monitoring the programs, pedagogy and personnel. Its work includes the cultivation of a meditative life that supports the spiritual impulses of the school. The weekly meetings include study, child/class studies, coordination between the various sections of the school (early childhood, lower school, middle school subject classes and administrative staff), and a business portion.

Faculty work is facilitated by faculty committees which meet weekly or bi-weekly. Those mandated committees are the Festivals Committee, Human Resources Committee, Parent Liaison Committee, Operation Group, Teacher Professional Development, Tobias Care Group and Roots & Wings (the parent and family association).

The AWSNA visiting team commends the school for:

- Faculty's work together to rebuild faculty trust and collegiality where all can contribute.
- Faculty's work on mandated committees which facilitates the decision making processes of the Circle of Colleagues.
- The establishment of healthy and effective meeting process through the timekeeper and keeper of the heart.

The AWSNA visiting team recommends that the school:

- Empower the mandated committees with authority to make certain decisions which need not be reviewed, discussed and decided by the Circle of Colleagues. This will allow for more time in the Circle of Colleagues for valued child/class study, pedagogical study artistic work and business.
- Agree upon a single mode of reporting and communication that is efficient and effective, and commit to it.

Board of Trustees

The Board, composed of nine members (five of whom are independent) for 2013/2014, meets monthly, with joint Board/ Faculty meetings twice a year. A number of mandated committees serve the Board: Finance, Tuition Adjustment, Development, Marketing, Human Resource, Buildings and Grounds, the Operations Group and the parent and family association. Trustees serve on a number of those committees. Minutes of Board meetings are maintained, but the minute book is not maintained onsite in a form to be available for inspection as required by law. The By-Laws have recently been reviewed and revisions are presently pending Board approval.

The Board is involved in the budget-making process. The Finance Committee and Board of Trustees receive a monthly budget-to-actual income statement. Monthly cash flow statements are provided to and reviewed with the Board each month by the Treasurer. The income statement that is prepared is exported into Excel and reformatted and supplemented for presentation to the Finance Committee.

Regarding personnel matters, the visiting team was informed of instances where members of the Board of Trustees became involved in conversations with individual staff members concerning the work of other staff members without the knowledge of their supervisors.

The AWSNA visiting team commends the school for:

- The dedication and selfless intention to be of service to the school on the part of the Trustees and committee members.
- The active participation of faculty and parents on the Board.
- The active seeking on the part of Trustees of means to assist the school to function more effectively in the area of administration and finance.

The AWSNA visiting team recommends that the school:

- Work on Board building by taking inventory of present Trustee strengths, qualities and skills to develop a profile of potential new Trustees who would bring needed qualities.
- Seek outside community members who possess the identified needed qualities as Board recruits.
- Provide the Board of Trustees with monthly balance sheet and income statement reports.
- Investigate whether the capabilities of the existing accounting software (QuickBooks) to create informative “memorized” financial reports for the Finance Committee and Board would be sufficient so that exporting into Excel for further formatting and the addition of additional information would not be necessary. The presentation of reports printed directly out of QuickBooks is also a healthy check on accurate fiscal reporting.
- Review the Board committee structure with an eye to streamlining function and effort to

reflect the availability of people to serve on the committees.

- Clarify and communicate the appropriate involvement of the Board in personnel matters at the school.
- Maintain the corporate minute book on site so as to be available for inspection by authorized school constituents.

Operations Group

The Operations Group helps the Administrator manage day-to-day operations and serves as a central communication center, helping direct issues and questions to other groups as appropriate and coordinates efforts between the various spheres of school activity. It is sensitive to issues that need attention and upcoming events and responsibilities. This mandated committee meets weekly and consists of the Administrator, Business Services Manager, Faculty Chair, Grades and Early Childhood Department Chairs.

The AWSNA visiting team commends the school for:

- The commitment of the Operations Group members who have leadership responsibilities in the school to the work of this group to facilitate smooth school operations.

The AWSNA visiting team recommends that the school:

- Explore whether bi-weekly or monthly meetings would be more sustainable and still accomplish the needed work. Find a possible meeting time for all mandated members.

Administration

The administrative staff consists of five full-time positions, the Administrator, Faculty Chair, Business Services Manager, Program Services Coordinator and Facilities Manager, and the part-time positions of Admissions Coordinator, Financial Services Manager, Marketing & Communications Coordinator, Fund Development Director, Custodian and School Store Manager (a total of 5.7 FTE, excluding the store manager and facilities personnel). While Waldorf schools vary widely in the amount of administrative staffing, many schools operate with one administrative staff member per 30-40 students. Prairie Hill is consciously investing in its administrative staff to help increase teacher and parent support and retention, build enrollment and increase non-tuition income. Administrative staff have worked to develop an attitude of service to parents.

Though the self study indicates that administrative staff holds bi-weekly meetings to ensure clear communication and coordination of efforts, meetings do not seem to be accomplishing that purpose. There were instances of information and work product not being shared between administrative staff members to inform and direct their mutual work for the benefit of the school. Some staff members expressed lack of clarity regarding reporting relationships and work

responsibilities.

The Administrator is responsible for all administrative activities and the administrative staff except for the Faculty Chair. He is a member of the Circle of Colleagues and is an *ex officio* member of the Board. He chairs the Operations Group, Human Resources Committee and the Tuition Adjustment Committee and also serves on the Finance Committee.

The Faculty Chair is the administrative arm of the faculty and oversees faculty orientation, hiring, mentoring and the evaluation process. She is responsible for review and refinement of programming, schedules, policies, procedures and the faculty handbook. She chairs the Circle of Colleagues meeting, attends administrative staff meetings, and serves on the Operations Group, Human Resources Committee, Teacher Professional Development Committee, Parent Liaison Committee, and is an *ex officio* member of the Board.

The functioning of the administrative staff together has not always been respectful and with cooperative purpose. It has resulted in the dissension and unpleasant working conditions. All have been consciously working on this with some outside mentoring, and it appears to be much better than reported in the recent past, however, residual resentment and distrust was shared with the accreditation visiting team. All administrative staff care deeply about the school and work very hard to serve the needs of the school well.

The AWSNA visiting team commends the school for:

- The dedication, commitment and hard work of administrative staff in service of the school and the school community.
- The cooperative working of administrative staff in cramped quarters.

The AWSNA visiting team recommends that the school:

- Assess present administrative roles and functions and creatively look at how to streamline towards greater effectiveness, clarity, cooperation of efforts and appropriate work loads.
- Clarify the lines of reporting and responsibilities of administrative staff in accurate and current job descriptions.
- Continue to develop and solidify effective functioning of administration that provides an objective, respectful and effective means of working together.
- Establish a culture and procedures for the consistent and organized sharing of information that is needed in other administrative functions. Create forms to facilitate this process.
- Find a means of carrying out administrative staff evaluations at appropriate intervals and in an environment of honor and trust. It may be necessary to find creative ways to accomplish this given the present mood surrounding administrative personal relations.
- Develop objective standards for setting compensation levels and phase in their implementation.
- Develop procedures to determine the professional development for administrative staff that would best serve the school, and implement the plan to carry this out. Continue to

budget for administrative professional development as resources permit.

Policy and Decision Making

The self study reports that recommendations regarding policies and decisions usually come through the committees and are brought before the Circle of Colleagues or Board for discussion and decision unless a committee is specifically delegated to make a decision. Parents are involved in the decision making process through their volunteer participation on Board committees and other activities. Parent input has been solicited and considered on some important changes in the school, such as the restructuring of the Early Childhood program.

It was, however, the observation of the accreditation visiting team that the process by which big decisions for the school were made is not always clear, like the recent expansion of the early childhood program and staffing. Other decisions for spending outside of budget also appear not to have gone through a defined and transparent decision making process. It is clear that the decisions at the school are made with the best of intentions for the good of the school, but process to reach a particular goal, and even that goal itself, is not always properly worked through. There is not a central location where policies and procedures are available for reference when a decision needs to be made, so, though policies and procedures may exist, they are not consistently followed. This also results in a lack of objectivity and transparency in the decision making process.

The AWSNA visiting team commends the school for:

- The commitment of faculty, staff and Board to the good of the school.

The AWSNA visiting team recommends that the school:

- Continue to develop form in policy, shared agreements, mandate work and procedures to support collegiality and objectivity in daily work.
- Develop clear and objective decision making processes and ensure that the appropriate stakeholders are involved at the appropriate point in the process. Keep written records of decisions in a location that is accessible to the appropriate faculty and staff members. Communicate decisions timely to the appropriate parties.
- Use the procedures and policies that it has adopted to reach decisions and formulate new procedures and policies where they would serve to objectify and simplify processes and to ensure that stakeholders are involved appropriately in the process.
- Maintain procedure and policy manuals which are kept current and available for reference by groups involved in the decision making process both centrally and where the groups meet to facilitate easy reference.
- Maintain minute books of all committees and faculty/staff meeting groups in a central location that is accessible to all faculty and staff. Where groups hold confidential proceedings, those minute books should be available to all who should have access to the

content.

Long Range Planning

The school held five long-range planning sessions facilitated by an outside consultant 2002 through 2005. In October of 2010 Faculty, Board, Administration and parents worked together to revise the strategic plan for 2011-2013. Eight core principles were identified with strategies designed to accomplish the goals described in the principles. A review of the most recent strategic plan, however, seems to indicate that the plan was not thoroughly worked through but cursorily reviewed and minimally revised without a real look at the present situation at the school and the identification of present goals and the steps to attain them. The school is planning to develop a new three-year plan in the fall of 2014 following the completion of the AWSNA accreditation process.

The AWSNA visiting team commends the school for:

- The strategic planning work that it has been done in the midst of great challenges.

The AWSNA visiting team recommends that the school:

- Follow through with its intentions to revise the strategic plan, with particular attention paid to including all stakeholders, agreeing on a school-wide shared vision for the future, and including options based on attainable enrollment goals.

Business Management and Financial Affairs

The Prairie Hill Waldorf School a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. The Board of Trustees carries the financial authority for the school. The Finance Committee oversees the fiscal management of the school. It is comprised of the Administrator, Board Treasurer and other qualified Board, Faculty, parent and community members, and meets monthly with additional meetings as needed. It is the Finance Committee that prepares the operating budget with recommended tuition rates for approval by the Board.

The school owns its building and thirteen acres of land, subject to a mortgage of \$765,000 which was refinanced in 2012 to lower the payments and provide the school with \$48,000 which was used for expenses.

It is reported in the self study that tuition comprises 59% of the school's income, however, that creates an inaccurate picture in that the total revenue considered includes gross fundraising figures with high costs, at least in the case of scrip. The balance of revenue is provided through fundraising activities—the annual appeal, Yuletide event, Spring auction, the school store, sale of scrip and miscellaneous others. The school is committed to socio-economic diversity and through its Tuition Adjustment Program seeks to make Waldorf education accessible to those

families who want it for their children, while maintaining the school's financial responsibility. That program was expanded in the 2013/2014 year to include the early childhood families. With an enrollment that is essentially the same as in 2012/2013, the school projects an increase in net tuition income of \$23,798 for 2013/2014.

The Administrator, Business Services Manager and the Financial Services Manager carry responsibility for the day-to-day fiscal operations and monitoring the budget. Standard financial reports along with a budget-to-actual report are reviewed monthly by the Finance Committee. The work of the Finance Committee is reported at its regular meetings. The financial records are audited annually by an independent CPA firm.

The school has undertaken some extraordinary expenses for the 2013/2014 school year which include a roof repair, outside administrative mentoring and restructuring of the early childhood program to create a full-day Kindergarten, and increasing the Playgroup/Summer Program Coordinator to full-time. These additional expenses (excepting the administrative mentoring which was outside of budget) result in a budgeted deficit of \$180,750 for 2013/2014 which is being funded predominantly out of cash reserves. Additionally, \$60,000 of a donation dedicated to a future Kinderhaus was converted for use in the early childhood program expansion with the permission of the donor. It is of concern that all cash reserves and part of a capital donation have been dedicated in this fiscal year to the expansion of early childhood program operations with no financial means or plan for carrying the expanded program into the next and future years. The reserves built over a number of years will be exhausted by the end of the current fiscal year. The 2012-2013 school year also had an operating deficit of \$33,308. The Board is committed to a balanced budget for 2014/2015.

The school carries adequate and appropriate insurance coverage.

The AWSNA visiting team commends the school for:

- Providing an excellent program with limited resources.
- Its clearly defined financial policies and procedures.
- Its commitment to making Waldorf education available to a diverse student body through the tuition adjustment program
- The expansion of the tuition adjustment program availability to early childhood families.

The AWSNA visiting team recommends that the school:

- Establish a commitment towards fiscal responsibility and financial sustainability through a balanced budget, increased enrollment and other sources of revenue, control of expenses, and increased transparency about finances among constituents.
- Carry out its commitment to a balanced budget for 2014/2015 and into the future.
- More fully utilize the reporting and budget-monitoring capabilities of QuickBooks to analyze budget vs. actual and year-over-year comparisons and gain a clearer and more consistent view of the financial picture.

- Ensure that the implementation of any program expansion or capital improvement include plans to carry it forward into the future, including financial and other resource needs.
- Work to rebuild financial reserves.

School Plant and Facilities

The Prairie Hill Waldorf School is housed in an historic 1950's style school building on 13 acres of land. The school has grown to its full capacity in the building, with very limited space for administrative offices. This lack of space for a full program is a major concern. There are long-range plans for the building of an early childhood Kinder House. The grounds provides plenty of room for outside activities, including open play on grass, a grades garden, ball games and a separate kindergarten play area. There is a small wooded area, wetlands and a large open area. The third graders raise chickens, and space is available for gardening activities.

The property is presently zoned agricultural, which means that it operates under an approved Conditional Use Permit. This requires individual municipal approval of some events.

The facilities are well maintained and serviced by a full-time Facilities Manager. The age of the building and its components require constant upkeep. One boiler was recently replaced and the other 60 year-old boiler is working well with the attention of the Facilities Manager. Capital improvements are done as needed due to budget constraints. Building problems and repair requests are submitted in writing to the Buildings and Grounds Committee and needs that require financial resources are brought to the Board of Trustees for funding approval.

The Facilities Manager is responsible for building and grounds maintenance and repairs. Inspections are required and current on the boilers, fire safety and elevator. The school's water supply is from an on-site well and quarterly inspections of water safety are required and performed at the initiative of the county agency. The school has recently formed a Safety Committee which is working in cooperation with the sheriff's office. Daily cleaning is done by a part-time employee with learning disabilities. Parent volunteers clean rooms and common areas thoroughly at least twice a year.

Fire drills are required to be conducted monthly with the required reports filed in compliance with local and state laws. Due to the harsh winter this year the school missed a couple of winter fire drills which will be made up in the spring. One storm/tornado drill may take the place of one fire drill, and the school has had an annual tornado drill. The school is working collaboratively with the local sheriff to establish safety procedures and has newly formed a Safety Committee, comprised of the Facilities Manager, members of the Building and Grounds committee, administrative staff and parents.

The AWSNA visiting team commends the school for:

- The creation of a beautiful space for its learning environment.
- The expanse of natural surroundings owned by the school.
- Its skillful maintenance of the school building and grounds with the resources available.
- The active Building and Grounds Committee and the creation of a Safety Committee.

The AWSNA visiting team recommends that the school:

- Enter into a school community-wide study of how to utilize the space of the the present building to adequately serve the school or whether a different space is needed as a part of its long-range and strategic planning.

Personnel

Prairie Hill Waldorf School has well established processes for managing human resources at the school. Two main groups are mandated to handle faculty personnel issues. The Human Resources Committee is responsible for hiring, orientation, Employee Handbook, and general human resource issues. The Teacher Professional Development Committee is responsible for mentoring, evaluation, professional development, and the mentoring/evaluation handbook.

There is a comprehensive process in place to handle recruitment and hiring that is led by the HR Committee and supported by a relationship with the Great Lakes Waldorf Institute. Lead candidates are asked to teach a main lesson and two other artistic or skills classes at various grade levels. The school has recently hired enthusiastic and highly qualified teachers that are a great complement to the stable and dedicated group of existing teachers. The visiting team observed that PHWS does not have an updated wage schedule that is relevant to all employees. In addition, there have been some recent decisions to add staffing. Some employees expressed concern that the new positions were not adequately vetted in Finance Committee or Circle of Colleagues. There are also concerns about equity workload for these new positions.

Prairie Hill faculty have a great deal of academic training. Thirteen teachers have earned a bachelor's degree, nine teachers have earned a master's degree, four teachers have obtained Waldorf teacher training certificated and two are currently in Waldorf teacher training programs.

Once a new employee is hired, they are provided with a letter that details basic job requirements, hours, salary and benefits. An orientation is conducted by the Business Services Manager that covers all necessary employment paperwork as well as a review of the Employee Handbook. New teaching staff members also receive a faculty handbook that details aspects of teaching, discipline, mentoring, professional development and evaluations.

Prairie Hill places a high priority on supporting its teachers. The professional development process includes self-reflection, goal setting, mentoring, in-services, studies, conferences, and trainings. Full time employees are provided a peer support colleague or mentor, and at least once a semester each peer support colleague observes the other during morning lesson. Subject teachers, most of which are part-time employees, meet biweekly but do not participate in the peer support mentoring process. The Circle of Colleagues includes study and discussion about child development as well as renewal through social and artistic activities. The faculty, board,

and administration have been actively engaged in regular anthroposophical study and have made changes to the weekly Circle of Colleagues meeting as a result of this work. Further, the TPD committee is instrumental in organizing in-services, retreats and workshop opportunities for the faculty. The TPD works with faculty at their various levels of certification and experience to support individual professional development needs, with some funding coming from the school when it is available. For the 2013-2014 school year, PHWS budgeted \$14,241 for professional development.

PHWS has established an evaluation process that promotes growth and gratitude, while cultivating an environment for self-reflection and accountability. Evaluations are conducted for full time teachers on a three year cycle and the process includes a self-evaluation as well as internal and external evaluations. Part-time subject teachers do not participate in the evaluation process.

During the site visit, the visiting team observed that the Employee Handbook and the Mentoring and Evaluation Handbook were updated in the last two years. A draft of the bylaws is pending approval of the Board of Trustees. However, the Faculty Manual has not been updated in some time and does not reflect current practice in many areas.

As parent conflicts or concerns about teacher performance are noted, the first step is to resolve the concern directly with the teacher involved. If the issue is not resolved, the concern is taken to the Parent Liaison Committee. This committee uses the Living Community Principles Support process to facilitate resolution. If concerns from parents, peers or evaluation are significant, the teacher is asked to create a Personal Development Plan, or if it's more serious, a Professional Improvement Plan. During the site visit, the team members observed that there is a lack of clarity regarding the appropriate process for mediating concerns, whether they originate from parents or peers. Further, the Faculty Manual and the Mentoring and Evaluation Guide have differing accounts for resolving concerns. While there is consensus that the first step in resolving any concern is direct conversation with the individuals involved, there is confusion regarding the appropriate next step if direct conversation doesn't result in resolution.

PHWS has worked to clarify and organize the administrative staff. Despite these efforts, the school has struggled with consistency in the lead administrator role; the school has had six administrators in the last 11 years. Evaluations for the administrative staff have been not been conducted consistently. The visiting team observed some overlap in some responsibilities, particularly in the area of finance. In addition, current practices in job responsibilities are not reflected in the administrative staff job descriptions. Finally, in recent years several positions have been added in administration. The school recognizes that there are inequalities in the hourly wages of the administrative staff.

The AWSNA visiting team commends the school for its:

- Efforts of the faculty, board and admin to initiate a habit life that supports objective collegial interactions and productive practical work as seen in the updating of the Employee Handbook and the Mentoring and Evaluation Handbook, communication of decisions, application of policy

- Decision to hire a Faculty Chair to support the work of the Faculty
- Demonstrated commitment to hiring highly qualified teachers that have the capacity to deliver curriculum according to the indications of Rudolf Steiner.
- Development of well established processes for recruitment, screening, interviewing and hiring of new employees
- Demonstrated commitment to mentoring and evaluation for full time teachers
- Development of in-services, anthroposophical studies and other in house opportunities for professional development
- Decision to complete an independent Human Resources audit in 2009 to support improvement in HR process and compliance
- Employment of consistent and uniform record-keeping of employee files

The AWSNA visiting team recommends that the school:

- Establish a mentoring process and an evaluation process for subject teachers
- Develop a consistent schedule for evaluation of administrative staff
- Perform a study of salaries and wages, workload, job responsibilities, student contact (for teachers), and reporting relationships (for administrative staff) to ensure equitability between and within departments (Early Childhood, Grades, and Administration).
- Revise all relevant documentation to reflect current job descriptions and responsibilities, ensuring that the faculty manual, employee manual, and employment letters uniformly reflect current practices
- Consider opportunities to increase the number of Waldorf trained teachers by supporting training for current faculty and seeking to hire trained faculty

Community

Prairie Hill Waldorf School is a true community school where the older students have a real interest in the younger students fostered through many cross grade level activities. Academics, arts and practical experiences nurture potential in all students.

PHWS has students from a large geographical area and strives to have a diverse population in social, economic, racial, and cultural backgrounds, but is somewhat limited due to the demographics in the surrounding cities.

Since 2006, PHWS has experienced peak enrollment followed by a seven-year decrease in student population. Reasons cited by parents who leave the school include the staff and administration turnover, lack of or late information when classes were combined, limited resources in Learning Support, and family's changing financial situation. Efforts are being made to give the grades 6-8 more of a 'middle school' feel to help retain students in grades. The school is beginning to be more proactive in letting parents know when classes may need to be combined and setting up meetings to get questions answered. The Early Childhood program has expanded and has many bridge activities to transition students to first grade. The Admission Coordinator

facilitates programs to generate interest in PHWS and help with the transition of new families, although parents note that there isn't consistency among these opportunities. Programs such as mentor families, orientation evenings, and electronic media are all ways PHWS communicate information.

Alumni relations are strong and connected to the school. High schools that PHWS graduates attend often comment positively that they recognize them as "Waldorf Kids". Exit interviews from 8th graders show students feel ready for high school. It can be challenging for the school when prospective parents ask for test data for students now in area high schools and still maintain the focus on continuing development as human beings.

In 2013-2014 school year the addition of a part time Development Director was added to create a more cohesive, consistent approach to fund development. PHWS has three major fundraisers each year, which are well attended by the school community as well as the greater community. Even in uncertain economic times, last year these activities generated a 26.6% increase over the previous year. A Fund Development Committee meets monthly. Challenges include developing a succession for volunteer leadership among the parents and having a coherent fund development plan.

PHWS has an active calendar for parent involvement. They have regularly scheduled workshops, socials, and Tuesdays Together among other opportunities for parents to feel connected. Parents are a strong part of the community and bring ideas, energy and resources to the school. Teachers have class parent evenings as well as conferences and written end of the year reports on each child. Engaging parents can be overwhelming and it's difficult not to over schedule. Some parents complain about a lack of communication, but do not utilize the resources available to them.

PHWS has experienced periods of low morale in recent years due to teachers and administration feeling overworked and over scheduled. The faculty and administration has seen a lot of turnover in the last few years. Programs such as peer support have helped develop trust among teachers and efforts are being made to make decisions more transparent among faculty and administration. Faculty feels positive about the current teachers on staff and they feel optimistic moving forward as a cohesive group.

PHWS makes use of resources and connection in the local community and invites the public to many of its events. They are a member and contributor to the larger anthroposophical community and have relationships with other Waldorf schools.

The AWSNA visiting team commends the school for its:

- Development of three main fundraisers each year: the Yuletide Faire, the Spring Auction,

and the Annual Appeal.

- Emphasis on parent involvement by offering opportunities for parents to gather including festivals, Tuesdays Together, Roots and Wings and parents are encouraged to volunteer in the classrooms.
- Employment of Fund Development Director to create stability and plan strategies towards the strategic goals.
- Demonstrated commitment to being a presence in the greater community by participating in events such as the Lake County Exposition Fair, Pre-school fairs and the Fall Harvest Fair.

The AWSNA visiting team recommends that the school:

- Develop school-wide strategies to increase enrollment. Examine and implement the appropriate roles of Board, Faculty, Administration and Parents in attracting and retaining students.
- Consider a more formal monitoring and supervision of the existing parent programs to ensure parents are aware of opportunities and to avoid overlap of programs.
- Develop a consistent procedure for combining classrooms, training teachers and preparing parents to aid in the retention of current students.
- Establish a forum for parents to share their ideas.
- Revision of festivals with stories being chosen from different cultures each year.

List of Major Commendations and Major Recommendations

The AWSNA visiting team commends the school for its

1. Commitment to Steiner's view of the developing human being and to the fundamental principles of Waldorf education.
2. Decision to hire a faculty chair as part of the school leadership team and to support the work of the teachers.
3. Emphasis on providing a high quality, rich and varied program with limited resources.
4. Love for and commitment to the future of Waldorf education at the Prairie Hill Waldorf School on the part of faculty, administration, Board and parents.
5. Efforts of the faculty, board and admin to initiate a habit life that supports objective collegial interactions and productive practical work as seen in the updating of the Employee Handbook and the Mentoring and Evaluation Handbook, communication of decisions, application of policy

6. Growing collegiality in early childhood, grades, and subject teacher departments
7. Openness to self-examination and reflection, acknowledgment of struggles, and seeking opportunities for improvement school-wide.

The AWSNA visiting team recommends that the Prairie Hill Waldorf School:

1. Establish a commitment towards fiscal responsibility and financial sustainability through a balanced budget, increased enrollment and other sources of revenue, control of expenses, and increased transparency about finances among constituents.
2. Develop school-wide strategies to increase enrollment. Examine and implement the appropriate roles of Board, Faculty, Administration and Parents in attracting and retaining students.
3. Continue to develop form in policy, shared agreements, mandate work and procedures to support collegiality and objectivity in daily work.
4. Follow through with its intentions to revise the strategic plan, with particular attention paid to including all stakeholders, agreeing on a school-wide shared vision for the future, and including options based on attainable enrollment goals.
5. Develop clear and objective decision making processes and ensure that the appropriate stakeholders are involved at the appropriate point in the process. Keep written records of decisions in a location that is accessible to the appropriate faculty and staff members. Communicate decisions timely to the appropriate parties.

Conclusion

The board, faculty, and parents of Prairie Hill Waldorf School community have high ideals for Waldorf education that are clearly in evidence in every classroom. At the same time, they are facing some real challenges stemming largely from declining enrollment. The recent decision to expand the Early Childhood programs to better “grow” the Grades classes of the future is a solid approach, the results of which may not be known for several years. There is much good will at the school, and the Visiting Team experienced an openness to reflect and work on the internal challenges in the areas of governance and personnel practices. We suggest that the school take a good look at its biography, to avoid repeating the errors of the past. We are hopeful that they will meet their challenges, and, with increased enrollment, more fully realize the mission to which they are all dedicated.