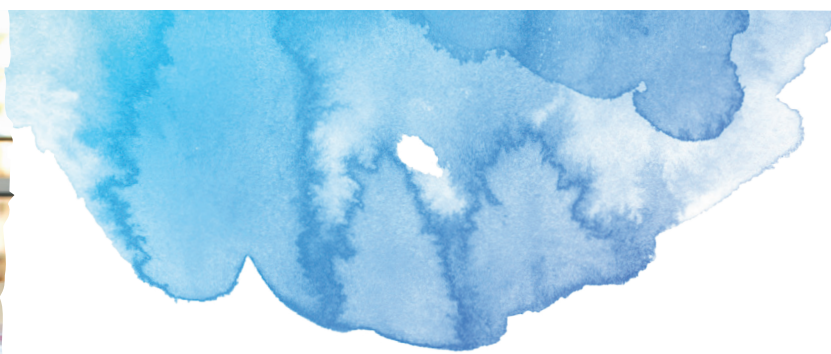




Educating the Whole Child:



Head, Heart & Hands



Blue Oak School
A K-8 Waldorf-methods public charter school



Photo by Mark Thau,
courtesy of Blue Oak

“Sure we’re teaching information, but we’re also creating capacities within human beings.

Shannon O’Laughlin
Education director at Blue Oak

Welcome to Blue Oak

Waldorf education builds lifelong learners

by Brittany Wesely

When you first step foot in Blue Oak School, you immediately feel at home. With walls painted in soothing colors, natural wood furnishings, and cheery students and teachers roaming the halls, Blue Oak is an ideal place for children to learn and grow. But there’s more to the school than beautiful classrooms and happy people.

Founded in 2001 and serving more than 400 students, Blue Oak offers an alternative approach to mainstream education. As a K-8, Waldorf-methods public charter school, Blue Oak provides a rich educational environment that supports the whole child — head, heart and hands.

Waldorf education was founded in 1919 by Rudolf Steiner, who was commissioned by the Waldorf-Astoria Cigarette Company to create a school for its employees. Steiner’s teaching philosophy stressed the importance of different groups of people working together, as the children of both the workers and the managers of the factory should be educated together.

“When Steiner developed Waldorf education, it was not intended to be an elitist system, only for the few who could afford a private Waldorf school,” says Shannon O’Laughlin, education director at Blue Oak. “Our charter school brings it back to how it was intended — for the people, to reach the masses.”

Steiner’s approach to education grew from his view of human development that children learn in three distinct developmental stages. In the first years, children learn through imitation and imaginative free play. Elementary education then focuses on developing creative capacities and showing children

that the world is beautiful. Secondary education later fuels the tendency of young people to think critically and search for their own truth.

O’Laughlin says Blue Oak, as a public charter school, blends the philosophy of a traditional Waldorf school with the rigor of Common Core State Standards.

“Waldorf education meets the needs of students by providing for them academically, physically and emotionally,” says Nathan Rose, superintendent of Blue Oak. “We nurture the students year after year and get them ready for high school and college.”

Integral to Blue Oak’s Waldorf-methods education is a focus on learning through the arts. With an integrated approach to education, Rose says Blue Oak students learn every subject through in-depth lessons, hands-on experiences and artful expressions in textbooks that the students themselves create.

Also unique to Waldorf methods, students stay with the same teacher and same group of classmates through the years. By teaching the same group of students from first through eighth grade, instructors are able to form intimate relationships with the children and adapt lessons to meet their needs and interests.

Rose says a Waldorf approach, with its emphasis on educating the whole child, has proven to positively impact student learning and achievement and the development of academic, creative and social capabilities.

A 2005 review of research on Waldorf methods conducted by the University of West England, Bristol, cited evidence that Waldorf students demonstrate greater creative behavior, superior scientific reasoning and a stronger sense of self than students who attended mainstream schools. Researchers in a 1996 study by Rivers and Scouter also found that Waldorf students tend to learn better due to solid relationships amongst peers and low levels of harassment and bullying.

By nourishing a love for nature, cultivating creativity and artistic expression, and promoting a collaborative spirit, Blue Oak School encourages young people to grow into adults who are capable of thinking for themselves and have a lifelong passion for learning.



Shannon O’Laughlin, education director



Nathan Rose, superintendent



HOME-LIKE ENVIRONMENT

Blue Oak kindergarten classes are furnished to look much like a home. Silk fabrics, colorful walls, soft lighting, rocking chairs, plush rugs and natural wood furnishings create an environment that is warm and calm. Because early learning is profoundly connected to the child’s sensory experiences, everything the child sees, hears and touches has an effect. Providing a setting that is orderly, quiet and beautiful is essential for learning.

CREATIVE, ARTISTIC EXPRESSION

Kindergarten students regularly practice watercolor painting, drawing, beeswax molding and seasonal crafts. Even in the early years, children are given high-quality art materials, such as natural beeswax crayons, to provide the satisfaction of creating something beautiful. Teachers also offer music, oral storytelling and puppet shows that form the basic foundations for learning language arts and math skills.



Waldorf Kindergarten Offers Comforts of Home

by Brittany Wesely

A nurturing environment of love, warmth and harmony is essential to Rudolf Steiner's Waldorf teaching methods. Here are some of the unique features of a Waldorf-methods kindergarten classroom at Blue Oak and how they encourage the healthy development of the young child.



FREE, OPEN-ENDED PLAY

Simple toys with minimal features allow children to develop their creative capacities and make their own toys — a colorful piece of silk becomes a river or a grassy meadow, wood blocks become houses or castles. With ample time for unstructured play and limited adult interference, Blue Oak kindergarten classes encourage imaginative play, which supports creative and critical thinking later in life.



MEANINGFUL WORK

Children gain satisfaction and a sense of purpose when they are able to participate in real and practical work. Blue Oak kindergarten teachers model activities — such as sweeping, dusting, gardening and baking — that the young students enjoy imitating. By inviting children to participate in both play and work, teachers provide them with many more opportunities to learn and grow, and students develop self-sufficiency.



The Waldorf Classroom at Blue Oak

by Brittany Wesely



Waldorf is a unique approach to education, offering art, music and engaging academic experiences — all within in the regular school day. Here are a few key features of the Waldorf-methods education in a Blue Oak classroom:



Photo by Melanie MacTavish

MAIN LESSON

Blue Oak teachers focus on integrating English, math, science and social studies around a thematic unit before rotating on to the next subject. During the main lesson, teachers go in depth and approach each subject in a variety of ways, allowing students time for the information to be digested.



Photo by Melanie MacTavish

ART AS A TEACHING TOOL

Art is incorporated in every subject at Blue Oak in order to engage children actively in learning and to allow them to develop their own conclusions. Students create their own textbooks, in which they practice handwriting, grammar and composition. By drawing and painting their own images of the concepts they learn, students are able to better engage in their main lessons. Students also learn technical art skills, such as form drawing, mirroring and symmetry.



Photo by Melanie MacTavish

LOOPING

Blue Oak creates a strong community through “looping” the grade levels — teachers stay with the same group of students from first through eighth grade. Having the same students through the years, teachers are able to adapt lessons to the needs and interests of their students. Looping helps students, teachers and parents form fruitful relationships and target long-term goals, and creates students who have strong interpersonal skills.

FIELD TRIPS

Students are able to deepen their understanding of curriculum by applying lessons to life outside the classroom. Starting in the third grade, students go on overnight field trips that strengthen relationships with peers, encourage connections to the outdoor environment, and provide real-world context for learning the curriculum.

SPANISH

Recognizing that foreign language is easier to learn when children are young, Spanish language lessons are provided frequently for students in all grades. By the time students have completed eighth grade, they will have had better exposure to the language than many of their high school peers.





Photo by Melanie MacTavish

CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

The classrooms at Blue Oak are carefully curated to create a calm yet inspiring atmosphere. Furniture made from natural materials, walls painted in soothing colors and plush rugs on the floors make for an ideal place for children to spend their days learning.



Photo by Mark Thau, courtesy of Blue Oak

PRACTICAL SKILLS

Handwork projects help children develop healthy imaginations and provide beneficial, therapeutic activity. In the early grades, students begin handwork, learning to knit, crochet and hand sew. As the years progress, students are introduced to machine sewing and woodworking.



Photo by Mark Thau, courtesy of Blue Oak

RESPECT FOR NATURE

Rich, direct experiences in nature are encouraged for all students at Blue Oak. In the younger years, students create scenes with wood, stones and nuts collected on class nature walks. Older pupils take an experimental approach to studying nature. Students also participate in seasonal festivals throughout the year.

NUTRITION PROGRAM

Blue Oak partners with the award-winning fresh foods company, Revolution Foods, to provide meals that have all-natural ingredients with no artificial colors, flavors or preservatives. Meals offered include a second-chance breakfast, snacks and lunch. After school, supper is available for free for anyone in the community under age 18.



Photo by Mark Thau, courtesy of Blue Oak

MUSICAL ARTS

Music plays an important role in the Waldorf curriculum. All students begin learning the recorder and practicing choral singing in the first grade. Third-grade students begin to learn violin, and in the sixth grade, students are given the opportunity to continue with advanced violin or another string instrument, such as cello or viola.

MOVEMENT

Recognizing that the link between mind and body is a powerful teaching tool, Blue Oak teachers utilize movement as an essential element of the curriculum. Students express the concepts they learn through physical motion and rhythm, in age-appropriate ways. This allows children to fully engage in learning by involving multiple areas of the brain, as well as develop physical awareness and comfort in their bodies.

TEACHING READING

Waldorf education methods encourage students to first develop strong oral communication skills before introducing written language. Blue Oak kindergarten teachers familiarize students with language through the repetition of stories, songs and rhymes. Students are later introduced to letters and words over time. This gradual transition to understanding the written word produces children who have a greater understanding of language, an enthusiasm for reading and advanced vocabularies.



Heidi Billsborough, left, and her daughter, Piper Mitchell, agree that Piper's education at Blue Oak from kindergarten to eighth grade prepared her for success in high school. Photo by Melanie MacTavish

Prepared to Succeed

Blue Oak alumna thrives after graduation

by Evan Tuchinsky

When Piper Mitchell graduated from eighth grade at Blue Oak, she left a school community that had been a major part of her life since kindergarten. Most of her classmates decided to continue attending a charter school by enrolling at Inspire School of Arts & Sciences. Four went to Chico High. Piper and another student chose Pleasant Valley.

Attending a mainstream high school presented Piper with a major transition. After all, her freshman class was practically the same size as the entire student body at Blue Oak. Plus, she'd studied in classrooms governed by the Waldorf method for education, a further difference from her new peers.

At first, Piper felt nervous. Soon, though, she came to realize that Blue Oak gave her skills for success that she didn't even realize she'd acquired.

"Altogether, Blue Oak was such a great experience," she says. "There were times when I wondered, 'How will I be prepared for high school?' But I feel like I have a lot more maturity about the world than a lot of kids I go to school with now, and I'll be

a little more creative than most in my classes. I feel like I got really comfortable really quickly and fit in pretty easily."

Piper's mother, Heidi Billsborough, points to specific qualities her daughter developed.

"She's a deeper thinker than I would've been able to teach her, probably," Heidi says. "She has more emotional depth, definitely more appreciation for beauty. Her education was very well-rounded."

"I'll have to admit, I was kind of nervous about her going into freshman year, because I knew it was going to be a lot different, and I was a little bit worried about where she would stand academically. But I think she had all the tools she needed."

Piper is earning As and Bs while balancing schoolwork, friends and extracurricular activities. In her freshman year,

she became a cheerleader — something new for her — and continued on the team this fall as a sophomore. She's auditioned for the spring musical; if she lands a leading role, she'll skip cheerleading for basketball season.

Heidi, a registered nurse, chose Blue Oak for her only child because of the school's distinct approach and sense of community.

"In the time that we were there," she says, "Blue Oak really grew a lot and changed a lot, but it always really held true to the core values and the reasons we chose it in the first place."

At times, Piper says, she wanted to follow friends to other schools, but she's glad she continued her education at Blue Oak through eighth grade.

"There's such a good connection between you, your fellow classmates and your teachers. You really bond," she says. "It's just a great place to grow up, a great community — really positive."

Blue Oak was such a great experience.
Piper Mitchell
Blue Oak alumna

BUILDING A STRONGER STUDENT

The Waldorf-methods education offered at Blue Oak nurtures students into exceptional individuals and successful, engaged learners. As a result, when they graduate from Blue Oak and enter high school, students find themselves well prepared for the new challenges they face.

Dan La Bar has witnessed this firsthand. Formerly an administrator at Blue Oak, he's vice principal at Inspire School of Arts and Sciences, the high school of choice for many Blue Oak alumni.

"We see the traits of deeper thinking and artistic expression," La Bar says. "They serve the students well in our program."

Blue Oak students learn to approach schoolwork with a clear intention, applying

focus and forethought. They also receive instruction in multiweek content blocks, not just broad overviews.

As a result, La Bar says, "[Blue Oak students] come to high school ready to go deeper into subjects. They take time to gather their thoughts and do a good job the first time."

Blue Oak alumni also gravitate toward student government and other leadership roles in high school, where they can apply their problem-solving skills.

"There's an openness to the students to think outside the box," La Bar says, "because they've been exposed to an arts-infused education."

AT THE ROOT OF WALDORF

Everything you need to know about education at Blue Oak

WHAT IS BLUE OAK SCHOOL?

Blue Oak School is a Waldorf-methods public charter school in Chico. It is tuition-free and open to any kindergarten through eighth-grade student in California.

WHAT DEFINES WALDORF EDUCATION?

Waldorf is an educational philosophy that focuses on fostering responsibility, independence and a love of learning by educating the whole child — the head, the heart and the hands. Featuring full integration of the arts in all subjects, Waldorf education provides a strong, balanced foundation that children can build on as they grow.

DOES AN EMPHASIS ON ARTS LEAVE ROOM FOR ACADEMICS?

The rigorous education program at Blue Oak covers the full spectrum of traditional scholarly subjects. With its hands-on, academically rigorous approach, Blue Oak nurtures children's love for learning and prepares them for the future.

DOES BLUE OAK USE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS?

Yes. Blue Oak has incorporated the Common Core standards into math and English/language arts instruction for second through eighth grades, to ensure students remain in line with grade-level peers at other public schools.

DOES BLUE OAK OFFER STRONG MATH AND SCIENCE?

Yes. Blue Oak educators teach math and science through rich experiences that students witness firsthand. Students use investigation and observation to

discover how the world works, then further enhance their understandings of the concepts through local fieldwork and educational trips.

HOW DO STUDENTS LEARN READING?

In early childhood education, language skills are built through the repetition of stories, songs, rhymes and movement. Teachers focus on the spoken word and engage children's imaginations to help children have a solid understanding of language before trying to learn the written word. Once decoding skills are learned, students develop a lively enthusiasm for reading, making them avid readers throughout their lives.

WHY IS STORYTELLING EMPHASIZED OVER ELECTRONIC MEDIA?

Blue Oak educators believe learning should be a tactile and engaging experience. Technology can be distracting in the classroom and it inhibits human interactions and attention spans. When students are learning by listening to a story or engaging in a creative task, their communication skills and creative capacities improve drastically.

ARE STUDENTS PREPARED FOR STANDARDIZED TESTS?

Yes. "The way we prepare them may not be the traditional way of practice, practice, practice the test, but by the way we teach them, they're prepared academically and intellectually," says Stephanie Nichols, Blue Oak's student services director. The rigorous Waldorf-methods education prepares students with the necessary knowledge to perform.

ARE STUDENTS PROFICIENT IN USING TECHNOLOGY?

Yes. To help students excel in electronic forms of testing, technology is first introduced in third grade for testing and assessment purposes. Technology classes are later incorporated for sixth- through eighth-grade students.

IS THERE AN AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM?

Blue Oak students have two options. The Chico Area Recreation District (CARD) operates an after-school program on campus, including Kindercare and activities for first- through sixth-graders. Blue Oak also offers its own after-school program with clubs for a variety of interests, from academics to the arts, music and hobbies.

WHAT IS THE APPROACH TO DISCIPLINE?

Blue Oak employs the Nurtured Heart Approach, in which teachers devote energy to rewarding positive attributes instead of responding to the negative. "We have a very clear discipline approach: When you break the rules, you have a consequence," Nichols says. "Nurtured Heart is just focusing on what's great inside of [students], building on that 'inner wealth,' which helps them behave in an appropriate manner."



Stephanie Nichols
Student services director
Photo by
Melanie McTavish

HOW CAN I SIGN UP?

Visit Blue Oak's website, www.blueoakcharterschool.com, to contact the school registrar and request an application. Nichols recommends that prospective parents take a school tour — Blue Oak offers them every few weeks.

"Our school is an alternative approach to education," she says, "so it's something we want to have people experience."



WHAT DO YOU LOVE ABOUT BLUE OAK?

Take the Next Step

Discover for yourself
all that Blue Oak
School has to offer

"The need for imagination, a sense of truth and a feeling of responsibility — there are the three forces which are the very nerve of education."

- Rudolf Steiner

Blue Oak School is committed to nurturing the whole developing child — head, hands and heart. As a public charter school, Blue Oak provides this alternative, Waldorf-methods education for free to everyone who applies, subject only to the capacity at each grade level.

To find out more about Blue Oak, please contact the school to schedule a guided tour. Then complete your interest form and standard public school enrollment forms. Space is limited, and enrollment is determined by public, random lottery.

Visit the school, attend a seasonal celebration and learn more about what Blue Oak School has to offer your children and the Chico community.

Blue Oak School

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"We really appreciate the emphasis on art and music and how it is brought into so many areas of the school day. Our experiences have been magical, and I am inspired daily by the teachers, administration and staff that pour such love into our children."

Autumn Field, parent and teacher's aide



"It's fun and the teachers are really nice. I get to spend time with my friends. I like doing a play every year."

Eli O'Neil, second grade



"Our students move a lot, and not just in my games and movement classes. Our students learn how to work and play cooperatively, while developing kinesthetic skills necessary to live an active life. Exercise is the 'primer for learning,' so we are fortunate to have this common understanding at our school."

Daebin Gilmore, Games teacher



"I like that you get to stay with your class every year. It builds bonds between people — you feel like you belong."

Ella Kaplan, fifth grade



"I like that I can learn good problem-solving skills. I feel like I am in a comfortable and fun environment to learn."

Miles Keesey, eighth grade



"We chose Blue Oak because we hoped the Waldorf approach could energize our son's love of learning. Blue Oak has accomplished this and more. I truly could not hope for a more nurturing environment for my children."

Laurie Brown, parent