



WECAN Zoom Meeting—Reopening – Working with our Ideals and Social Distancing

05/20/2020

Magdalena Toran is facilitating conversation for today. This session is being recorded for posting to the wider community. Questions only are to be posted in the chat box, please. Panel participants will each speak for about 5 minutes. After their presentations, questions posted in the chat box will be responded to.

Susan Howard introduced the panelists:

Katherine Scharff from Saratoga Springs Waldorf School and Sophia's Hearth and Birth-to-3 Advisory group.

Rachel Turner from Hazelwood Waldorf outdoor Kindergarten in Eugene, OR

Vanessa Kohlhaas from Seattle Waldorf School

Keelah Helwig from Waldorf School of Garden School, Long Island

Laurie Clark from Denver Waldorf School

Panelists please state the size of one's school or program with your remarks.

This series of meetings will focus on three different areas. Today will focus upon CDC guidelines—masks, social distancing, toys, sanitizing. Schools are in varying stages of planning to reopen. Today will concentrate upon—for whenever our own program does open—building a picture of what desirable practices may look like.

Katherine Scharff—CDC regulations regarding young children. For Sophia's Hearth will be required to have staggered drop off and pick up; monitor daily temperature checks. SH is looking to have the young children outdoors exclusively for now. In September, cleaning indoors will occur as necessary. There will be outdoor hand washing and sanitizing. Question of face masks recurs again and again. They have just heard from governor that all teachers will have to wear masks. Social distancing for this young age is impossible. So how do we work with smaller groups, "pods" of children, so they can play together? Toys—there are a lot of toys that can be cleaned quickly. But soft toys, capes, cloth materials—can envision the these could be washed daily. Daily cleaning, disinfecting, etc. is being looked at closely, how often that needs to happen, etc.

Need to review and work with parents about not bringing the child to school if he is showing any signs of ill health.

Biggest question is how we can work to build relationship with such young children. One thought is to begin building the relationship in the summer with distancing visits, visits in the park. With mask, voices are affected. They are looking strongly at use of language that builds relationships. Important for teachers to do what is necessary by requirements but not impart to the children any resistance or anxiety. This is essential.

Rachel Turner—appreciation expressed to WECAN leadership who has risen to this impossible task with grace and humor. Hazelwood is standalone program outdoor program for children 18-

months (?) thru 6 years. 16 children with 3 teachers. Teachers are learning art of relaxing into uncertainty. Rachel has more questions than answers, but her questions have been getting better. For her, the most true and beautiful thing in working with young children is to cultivate experience that world is good and safe. This is based on feeling at home in one's body. Commitment is to emphasize cultivating healthy sensory environment for the child. They are out-doors 3 out of 4 hours each day. Goal is to preserve the innocence, dignity, dreaminess of the young child at this time. This program is licensed in OR. Group size will probably be limited to 10 and limited to 1 or 2 teachers. They are looking at spending more time outside—no inside time to eliminate sanitation needs. Another idea is to remove all toys and only use inside space for resting and eating. All of play, circle, crafts will happen outdoors.

Vanessa Kohlhaas—Seattle Waldorf School (pre-kg through grade 12). Total of 7 EC classrooms. School community has many constituencies that are pressing for decisions about what the fall opening will look. The needs for information and the pace of decision-making move at different speeds. So far there are mostly recommendations in WA state rather than requirements. Recommendation now is 10 in a group, but this is not a firm requirement. One decision has already been made. The EC program is licensed and will stay open as a day care even when the whole rest of the school may be closed. Not all teachers are certain that they will feel safe in working in this circumstance. Vanessa is working on a program to create safety for teachers. Remote learning, tuition reductions are on the table.

Questions under discussion: about parents coming into the building, drop off and pick up, teachers' clothing—long-sleeve aprons, each teacher having several. Masks? Differing opinions range from asking for everyone to wear masks to wanting none at all.

Instead of home visits, they propose to have each family come to the school for this get acquainted meeting as a first step toward transition to being dropped at school. At this school visit, the parent is present which will not be possible once school starts. Teachers will be appearing and speak both with mask on and mask off. Snack and lunch—food will come from home to be placed in identical containers at school so that all look alike. This is in an intent to have some uniformity that everything is predictably the same.

Keelah Helwig—Waldorf School of Garden City on Long Island, NY. (Pre-kg-12) 9 Parent-child classes, 4 mixed aged kgs, 1-2? Nurseries. All staff and faculty and children will wear masks, visor-like see-thru so the face can be seen. Classes will be kept small. 75% of the morning will be outside. School is purchasing outdoor toilets, hand-washing facilities, tents, yurts. But all of school want to be outside up through grades and high school, so space (of which there is a lot on their campus) will be allocated. Parents will not be allowed in building. There will be temperature checks daily. Classes will remain in their own classroom for the day. They are also envisioning long-sleeved smocks to be changed once a child has come in contact with the smock. Classrooms are being imagined as a hub. All soft materials will be removed.

Parent work—currently offering Simplicity Parenting for whole school. Going to continue this support for the entire school with parents being able to speak with parenting coaches. School has to be very clear that when we launch into “parent-directed home learning,” teachers need to let parents know what they can expect from the teachers and school. School will begin

parent communications very early in the fall so that they have established a common language with parents that they have been building from the beginning.

Laurie Clark—Denver Waldorf School (pre-kg through grade 12). At the school, Laurie represents EC on a planning “Dream Team” to envision scenarios for the fall. Three scenarios—first would be “go as normal.” Second is that of having 10 children in a class. Classes are usually 16-18 and would be separated into two groups, lead teacher taking 10 and the assisting teacher the rest of the class. They would be in separate rooms and switch playground time, spending most of the time outside. Right now, Colorado says that children over 3 should wear masks. Laurie cannot see how to support this. The school has made the decision that the younger children and grades should have the most actual in-person time in school. This would be for EC and up to grade 5. If we have closures again, we would go back to a weekly activity bag, once a week movement live by zoom. The third scenario will be not being in school at all, going back to remote instruction with students.

There will be two more meetings in this series. Next week will discuss what do we do if we cannot come back to our campus? Third meeting will discuss what options there are if we have to go completely back to remote learning.

Susan describes conversation from last Saturday of international of Waldorf EC representatives sponsored by IASWECE. There is no Waldorf kindergarten in the world that she is aware of where teachers and children are wearing masks, except for Waldorf kindergartens in state-run schools in Russia, and the US. There have been protests in Europe that requiring masks is tantamount to child abuse. The officials have backed off to say that schools may do what they want but, if choosing to not wear masks, will be accepting responsibility for what may happen.

Magdalena Toran speaking—there are many questions about understanding what are guidelines and what are regulations. We must get clarity as to which is which. As early childhood educators, we will want to stand for what we think is in the best interests of the child. Every program needs to check with state and local authorities to be clear about what regulations are; these vary from state to state or province.

Questions posted in the chat:

Outdoor programs—questions around bathroom needs, outdoor toilets, outdoor heaters, tent and yurt sources?

Rachel—focus is on warm dress for the children. If this is done, the issue of shelter is not so pressing. Their school has no physical structures as shelters that would need sanitizing. Children do use indoor toilet before going out on their walk and when returning back. Children can pee in the grass as needed. Hand sanitizers are carried.

Western MA—temperature guidelines are declared by the state (when it is too cold to be outside). It is essential to know what your state guidelines are.

Katherine—does diapering outside already. She carries supplies in her backpack. Sophia's Hearth supports toilet training with the children when they are outside as well.

Taking temperatures—WSGC are exploring thermal thermometers and thermometers that do not touch the skin. Vanessa—Seattle will use a questionnaire that parents have to respond to—any signs of illness, etc. If teacher determines that the child does not seem well, then they would take the temperature.

Food—Be sure to check with local regulators. Restrictions about how food can be prepared and how served. Teachers will have so much to keep track of that preparing food may be too much to take on with everything else.

Contracts—flexibility in contracts? If we go to remote learning, for EC, then those families will get a “tiered” tuition.

Contact for getting into the WECAN io groups. Individuals who have not yet joined this resource, please do so.

Working with limited outdoor space? Denver is working with limited outdoor space. It may be that the playground equipment cannot be touched, so that will make it even more limited. There is a park nearby that will be utilized a lot.

Extended care, shortened day? This is certainly a question. WSGC has extended care to 6 pm. But are considering to have school day end for everyone at 3:30. Seattle—plan is to have 3 teachers caring for a group in teams. But this does extend the contact hours for each teacher and makes for a longer day.

Childcare centers can remain open in WA state, so there is question about what would happen if the rest of the school closed and the EC will stay open.

Is ratio of 10 children a recommendation or a requirement? In MA of 10 includes the teachers, not only the children.

For unaddressed questions, please go to WECANCommunity@wecan.groups.io to check in with colleagues and schools who are dealing with the same questions.

Warmest thanks are expressed to each of the panelists for sharing their multiple pictures. Further ideas or “tidbits” can be shared on the WECAN Community io group. We can share resources and links in that way.

To subscribe, contact WECANCommunity+subscribe@wecan.groups.io

Notes by Nancy Blanning