

Yellowstone Academy Integrated Strategic Action Plan

July 17, 2024

YA Overview

Description

Yellowstone Boys and Girls Ranch (Psychiatric Residential Treatment Center) and Yellowstone Academy (School System) partner together to support youth who struggle socially, emotionally, and behaviorally in their home and school settings. Youth are welcomed by professionals who are committed to building relationships and reinforcing the strengths of each young person. Our caring staff includes psychiatrists, nurses, clinical and school psychologists, therapists, chemical dependency counselors, director of spiritual care, recreational therapists, EGALA therapist, school administrators, teachers, and direct care personnel who provide 24-hour supervision to children with serious mental health needs. Because of these extensive resources, struggling youth receive the individual support they need to learn how to overcome daily challenges and find success in life. Focused outcomes of our program include reduction in maladaptive behaviors, improved interpersonal relationships, re-integration to home and community when appropriate, improved school attendance, and credit recovery to support students' progress towards graduation. Yellowstone Academy (YA) is located on the Yellowstone Boys and Girls Ranch (YBGR) campus and provides various educational settings to ensure an atmosphere where success is achievable for each youth ages 6-18 who reside on campus or are bussed here for Day Treatment. Youth who struggle socially, emotionally, and behaviorally are welcomed at YA by a staff committed to building relationships and reinforcing the individual strengths of each student.

YA operates year-round on a trimester academic calendar. The general calendar year consists of 180 student instructional days with 5 ¼ hours of daily academic instruction. Extended School Year services are offered during a 38-day summer session with 4 ¼ hours of daily academic instruction. General education, special education, vocational education, Title One programs, and Section 504 services are available to meet students' educational needs and offer the least restrictive setting possible for academic services. The number of students in the classroom varies with a ratio of at least one staff for every six students.

Unique instructional approaches at Yellowstone Academy include a "Check In/Check Out" process where students are assigned to a case manager that welcomes them at the start of the school day, after lunch, and again at the end of the day. This process provides for a review of goals, daily educational progress, and communication between the school and lodge personnel. All students receive Daily Behavior Ratings (DBRs) from staff for each educational period in the areas of Classroom Expectations, School Rules, Self-Regulation, and Social Interactions along with a personal, short-term goal. These DBRs are reviewed with students during their check-out time and summarized in school reports.

All YA staff are trained in Violence Intervention Prevention (VIP) which focuses on de-escalation techniques for youth when they begin to escalate emotionally or behaviorally.

Yellowstone Academy implements a School-Wide Positive Behavioral Supports system designed to take a proactive approach in prevention of problem behaviors. This proactive approach emphasizes a school climate and culture that supports and promotes positive student behavior. The foundation of our approach begins with the belief that students have more success when they understand the expectations of their environment. Routines are defined for common areas (e.g., classroom, cafeteria, gym, etc.) and students practice procedural expectations with staff guidance.

Yellowstone Academy (YA), which is located on the 480-acre campus of Yellowstone Boys and Girls Ranch, serves approximately 160-180 students with emotional and behavioral needs. These services include educational instruction through their Day Treatment program which consists of a population of up to 85 youth that are transported from the surrounding districts. YA also provides educational services for up to 95 youth from the Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facility (YBGR), and another population of around 20 youth in the Youth Partial Hospitalization Program located at Billings Clinic.

Purpose

“The purpose at YA is to provide excellence in education through trusting, positive and supportive relationships.”

By providing quality instructional programs to students with disabilities. It is our goal for all students to achieve; educationally, socially, emotionally, and vocationally.

Yellowstone Academy (YA) serves as a model for the implementation of integrated Special Education and mental health practices. Working cooperatively with families, students, and other professional agencies, we provide support to local school districts by serving students who are referred from their home district due to a need for therapeutic Special Education support.

Yellowstone Academy

- Provides therapeutic Special Education services to students who are referred by a public school district and accepted into the program.
- Has class sizes of up to 8 students in grades K-6 and up to 12 students in grades 7-12. Class sizes are often kept below these numbers to maximize the benefit of YA’s setting for the youth it serves and to ensure we do not impede meeting our goals, standards, and objectives of quality education.

The local districts we serve:

- Refer students to YA who they believe would benefit from therapeutic Special Education services that are provided at YA.

- Provide transportation for the students who they refer and are placed at YA as the alternative Special Education setting.
- Are close enough to YA for students to be transported in a reasonable time frame.
- Provide a daily tuition rate, as established by the Montana Office of Public Instruction, for students they refer to cover educational costs.
- Agree to the year-round placement model upon acceptance of a youth into the program.
- Work closely with YA to ensure each student is receiving services outlined in their Individualized Education Program or Section 504 plan.

The students we serve:

- Are students with educational diagnoses of: Specific Learning Disability, Emotional Disturbance, Other Health Impairment, and Autism who are functioning intellectually in the average range.
- Are students with social/emotional/behavioral struggles who are receiving Special Education or Section 504 services before being referred by their home school district.
- Are struggling in their local school district and are referred by their district's administrative team for review by YA's administrative team for consideration of placement at Yellowstone Academy.
- Are in Kindergarten through Twelfth grade.
- Are students that Yellowstone Academy and the student's district of residence both believe can be better served and have their needs met by Yellowstone Academy.

YA's beliefs and practices are centered around YBGR's mission of **“Caring people preparing youth for life”**. In order to prepare youth for life and to build trusting, positive, and supportive relationships, we believe that we must first understand the population of students we serve. Over the years, the staff at YA have grown in our understanding of our youth through focused professional development. In partnership with YBGR, we have focused on training in trauma-informed care and understanding the impact of mental health issues on our students. Just a few examples of ways we have worked to broaden our understanding include:

- Conducted a book study on Ross Greene's “Lost at School”
- Brought in a nationally recognized professional, Howie Knoff, to do an Organizational and Psychoeducational Needs Assessment of YA
- Contracted with Licensed Clinical Social Worker, Stacy York, and Occupational Therapist, Erica Schuppe, to present to staff on trauma-informed practices.
- Hosted YBGR staff for a presentation on the ARC model (Attachment, Regulation, and Competency)
- Conducted book studies on Ruby Payne's “Emotional Poverty” vol. 1 & 2
- Implemented the “CHAMPS” program created by Randy Sprick, Ph.D.
- Contracted with a nationally renowned speaker, Larry Thompson, for a year-long, staff-centered, professional development on Responsibility Centered Discipline.

Throughout both Residential and Day Treatment services, our students take part in individual, group, and family therapy designed to promote healthier functioning in school and the community. The environment encourages good daily habits and provides structure and support through consistent, predictable scheduling. Youth thrive and grow personally as they learn to manage their time, be accountable and responsible community members and respect those around them. All staff involved with youth, including lodge and school staff, are well-trained in behavior management and intervention techniques. Staff are encouraged to help youth in our care develop positive, meaningful relationships with those around them.

Overall, Yellowstone Academy strives to improve classroom engagement and decrease disruptive behaviors. Unfortunately, we always seem to be “restarting” our classrooms due to youth discharging and returning to their community schools. With an influx of new students into the classrooms, behaviors increase and engagement decreases. We see the management of this constantly changing population as an area that still needs improvement.

Additional Information

- Created a backpack meals program for our most needy families
- Continually work on student attendance through family contacts and incentive programs
- Decreased student/staff ratios
- Improved environmental factors that were creating sensory issues for youth and staff in the Heptner Education Center through new carpet and soundproofing the floor
- Created staff committees for continued small group interaction
 - Professional Development
 - Social
 - Climate/Culture
 - New Hire/Mentor
 - Safety
 - Technology
- Created more stable funding
- Hired 1 Behavioral Specialist and 1 Therapist for each Day School classroom
- Audited Annually
 - California Department of Education
 - Illinois Department of Education
 - Montana Office of Public Education (SPED Department)
 - Montana Department of Health and Human Services
- Participate in the VOC-Rehab grant for high school age youth to get “job” readiness training
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SUMMARY

As stated earlier, our purpose at YA is to “... provide excellence in education through trusting, positive and supportive relationships”. This ongoing process of building relationships with students is crucial for all youth, but especially those that we serve at YA. Establishing trust and a partnership with our student population will always remain at the forefront of what we do regarding professional development and student-centered school improvement. The task of supporting youth in crisis to get them ready to re-enter their homes, communities, and school districts will always present a unique set of challenges to our district. The challenges we face at YA are ones that we will continue to meet head-on through a dedicated and professional staff that meets students where they are and creates a personalized approach to learning.

Improvement Priorities (CNA)

CNA areas of need:

Meaningful annual climate goals are developed, communicated clearly, written into required plans, and revisited at least monthly with staff.

A consistent data protocol is used to place and move students within and between the tiers of instruction.

Parents and families with students receiving Tier 2 and 3 interventions are given meaningful data and information on individual student progress toward goals a minimum of 6 times per year.

The use of a Multi-Tiered System of Supports framework is clear, consistent, and evident within the school.

Student interviews or focus groups provide a voice in decision-making in the school.

Students can earn dual credit through participation in programs.

The district has on-boarding processes to bring new professionals into the system.

YA Staffing input -

Behavior management tools

Schoolwide reward system

More PD (Professional Development) for working with ED (Emotional Disturbed) students

Continue to develop campus security.

Improve staff attendance

Continue to develop a parent/community engagement environment

Student attendance/achievement

Improvement Priorities

Improving student achievement

Creating a culture of collegiality, belonging and meaningful service for staff

Community and family Engagement

Gaps and Root Causes

Student Achievement:

A typical YA youth enters the school at the height of their emotional, social and educational struggles. These struggles transcend every environment: community, home and school. YA strives to prepare the students to reintegrate into their communities, schools and homes with appropriate coping skills to navigate academic and mental health struggles.

- Mental Health struggles
 - Increased physical health issues/illnesses.
- Attendance
- Co-morbid learning disabilities
- Value of school
- Lack of educational options
- Hopelessness
- Lack of basic needs being met outside of school
- Cumulative deficits
 - Educational gaps and holes due to multiple placements, lack of school attendance, lack of consistent scope and sequence of learning
- Trauma and neglect

Recruitment and Retention of High-Quality Staff:

YA has struggled over time to maintain the support staff needed to ensure consistency of care and maintain programming integrity. It has also become more difficult to recruit qualified teaching staff for all of our high need classrooms.

- Pay
- Competing with 2 large school districts and many other employers in our community
- High stress work environment
- Emotionally challenging youth
- Benefits
- Lack of consistent on boarding process
 - Often driven by lack of staff and need to be in classroom too soon
- Lack of available applicants
- Physical location – a little out of the way

Community and Family Engagement

YA struggles creating the experiences and access to campus that other schools rely on. YA is not the community center/activities hub of the youth served.

- Not the local school district of any enrolled youth

- Parents live in distant communities
- School district encompasses just the boundaries of the YBGR campus
- Serves a population of youth with historically low school involvement
- Families are engaged in difficult therapeutic expectations and experiences while youth is enrolled as a YA student

YA Priorities/Goals

Increase Student Achievement

Goal 1 – Increase School Attendance

Over the next semester (Fall of 2024), YA will reduce student absenteeism by 20% by implementing a positive attendance incentive program and communicating regularly with parents to address potential barriers to attendance.

Action Steps

- Develop an incentive plan than accommodates wants/needs of diverse population (August 2024)
- Target intervention for chronic absenteeism (Monthly)
- Provide Individual, Group and Family Therapy (Ongoing)
- Integrate a case manager for all eligible families (Hire by June 1, 2024)
- Monitor and adjust strategies used to engage families and home culture (Ongoing)

Monitor Progress

- YA administration and staff will formalize incentive plans monthly starting September 1, 2024
- Treatment Team/Classroom Team weekly staffing – this will be added to the agenda (Fall 2024)
- Annual IEP Meetings

Goal 2 – Increase engaged time across all curricular areas

Within the 2024-2025 school year, YA will transform our learning environment by introducing innovative technology and resources that foster creativity in the classroom and ensure our students can access the latest skills and knowledge needed for today's job market.

Action Steps

- PD for all teachers on availability and implementation of engaging activities (Fall 2024)
 - Legos for Education
 - Discovery Ed
- Professional Development for all YA staff centered on improving school climate, student and teacher satisfaction (Yearlong training contract starting Fall 2024)

- Create collaborative culture for students and teachers to discuss and plan events and activities happening in the classroom increasing “buy in” and engagement of the learning process (Ongoing)
- Foster a safe climate for SED youth to work on mental health and schooling simultaneously (Ongoing)

Monitor Progress

- YA Administration and Professional Development Committee will create, and make available to staff, an annual training plan for schoolwide professional development
- Monitor the Daily Behavioral Rating (DBR) scores with an emphasis on engagement
- Treatment Team/Classroom Team weekly staffing – this will be added to the agenda (Fall 2024)

Recruiting and Retaining High Quality Staff

Goal 1 – Increase staff efficacy in Behavior Management

Within six months, YA staff will begin an advanced PD training focused on students with social/emotional/behavioral struggles and implement new strategies in their work as measured by staff interviews and observation.

Action Steps

- Create time for staff to complete the online portion of the training
- Ensure weekly meetings amongst staff to talk about new strategies and how they utilized new concepts
- Create posters/intranet entries of best practice and challenges

Monitor Progress

- Monitor online module completion
- Monthly work group check-ins
- Monitor DBR scores
- Treatment team meeting note audits

Goal 2 – YA will create and utilize a job induction program

Within six months, YA staff will create a job induction model that outlines training, mentorship and responsibilities for completion.

Action Steps

- Create time for staff to update current staff handbook, mentor responsibilities, mentee outcomes and administrative check-ins
- Ensure monthly meetings amongst the committee that oversees New Hires/Onboarding with specific goals
- Create documents/training available on the intranet for all job aspects and a list of staff willing to help train the tasks

Monitor Progress

- Have a draft handbook available for review on or before October 1, 2024
- Create a time to meet with new hires/supervisor at a minimum twice per month
- Review monthly progress specifically

Improve Parent/Community Engagement

Goal 1 – Create systems to support parent engagement

Within the next semester, YA will improve parent engagement by developing and regularly updating the school website with relevant information and resources, by creating a content calendar and communicating it with parents.

Action Steps

- Create a mailing to send home at the start of the 2024 school year
- Utilize our SIS to engage parents with emails
- Create a survey for students and parents to ensure participation and improvement to engagement
- Add to the list of topics discussed during Treatment team meetings

Monitor Progress

- Student and parent surveys 2 times yearly
- Parent survey at IEP meetings (Yearly)

Goal 2 – YA will create outreach to involve parent participation and engagement

Over the next semester, YA will improve parent-teacher communication and engagement by implementing regular parent-teacher conferences, sending monthly progress reports home, and ensuring that all communication is timely, clear, and personalized to each student's needs. The success of this goal will be measured through parent feedback and improved student attendance and achievement.

Action Steps

- Create a calendar invite system where a parent can schedule a meeting with the YA administration team via online system
- Schedule a Parent/Guardian Day where students can show off their work and their school/campus
- Use gas cards as an incentive for parents to participate with programming on our campus

Monitor Progress

- Parent survey at IEP meetings (Yearly)
- Monitor increase of parents on campus
- Track the number of TEAMS/ZOOM meetings requested

Yellowstone Academy's Current Family Engagement

Yellowstone Academy's programming is dedicated to the students who reside at the Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facility of the Yellowstone Boys' and Girls' Ranch (YBGR) and the Yellowstone Academy Day School. Parents, Families, and youth served at YBGR and YA are constantly changing throughout the year with enrollments lasting as little as 6 weeks. Parental involvement is encouraged/required at Progress Meetings, IEP Meetings and Master Treatment Plan Reviews. At these meetings, parents receive updated academic reports that include classroom progress, behavioral data, and academic testing data.

Most of the parents and families of our youth live in other Montana cities and this makes activities difficult to plan. However, parents are encouraged to visit the Ranch and spend time participating in the school day, educational activities, and other events. If they cannot visit, Video conferences and phone conferences are offered.

Due to the nature of the school population and the distance parents/families live from our facility, it is rare to have parents visit or attend meetings in person. The majority of families attend meetings via electronic methods.

Indian Education for All

Yellowstone Academy IEFA

Yellowstone Academy partners with the Native American Resource Coordinator employed at Yellowstone Boys and Girls Ranch. Through this partnership, we have been able to offer many new hands-on activities for our kids. Activities already being provided include:

- Smudging 2x a week, Presentation, Les Lefthand from Rocky Mountain Tribal Leaders
- Mustang Nation, 2x a month. (Native American Youth Group)
- Candy tipis.
- Native American Heritage Month, Tipi Raising, Honoring Jim Thorpe & Rock your braids.
- Traditional Games (six weeks).
- Treated Tipi poles (with linseed oil).
- Braiding Sweet Grass for Young Adults book set.
- Attend Western Heritage Exhibit regarding native American boarding school

This is a new program this school year and we are excited to watch it grow with more and more activities offered.

YA is also a part of ACE Alliance for Curriculum Enhancement and we will be attending their training offered on May 1 for IEFA compliance, best practices, and ideas for improving relationships with local or nearby tribes.



Student Performance Standards

Student Learning Outcomes - MATH

Yellowstone Academy is ensuring all K-8 students are learning math using the My Math curriculum and supplemental supports such as IXL Math, Super teacher worksheets, and Teacher pay Teacher sources. Every K-8 student is required to take the NWEA maps test which is offered three times a year. According to the results from the past 3 testing sessions at YA, (see attached data) students have increased their math scores by 18 % overall. Students are instructed in the content area of math every day, including a 40-day summer school session that is offered/required at Yellowstone Academy.

Student Learning Outcomes ELA

Yellowstone Academy is ensuring all K-8 students are learning in English Language Arts through the use of the Reading Mastery curriculum and supplemental supports such as IXL Reading, Read Naturally, Reading A-Z, Super teacher worksheets, and Teacher pay Teacher sources. Every K-8 student is required to take the NWEA maps test which is offered three times a year. According to the results from the past 3 testing sessions at YA, (see attached) students have increased their reading scores by 8% overall. Students are instructed in the content area of ELA every day, including a 40-day summer school session that is offered/required at Yellowstone Academy.

Yellowstone Academy Graduate Profile

Social and Emotional Learning	Communication	Emotional Intelligence	Technology and Tools
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate Social Skills • Dependable and Reliable • Self-Directed • Resilient • Healthy Coping Skills • Accountability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teamwork • Frustration Tolerance • Communicate with a variety of audiences • Situational Perception • Written Communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empathy • Sense of self worth • Open-Mindedness • Critical Thinking Skills • Self-Advocate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial Literacy • Employability • Manage Medical Care • Internet Safety • Job Search Literacy • Written Communication