

The Yew School

Information for Families 2022-2023

Thank you for your interest in The Yew School! This packet of information is a “living document” as we work to plan our first year of operation. The details and policies are not set in stone as we hope to refine them with input from the families we will serve. However, they will give you a good idea what to expect from an education at The Yew School. Please feel free to reach out to members of The Yew School team with questions, concerns, or to schedule a tour of the Yew Mountain Center property. This information was last revised 4.15.2022.

Is the Yew for You?

Located a 500-acre nature preserve with forest, fields, ponds, creeks, and waterfalls, The Yew School a big change from a typical school setting. The Yew School is designed for students who will thrive in an experiential, project-based, inquiry-led educational setting. With less time seated at desks and in front of screens, they will discover strengths that may not be apparent in a typical classroom.

The Yew Difference

The Yew School will prioritize values of “inside-out” leadership that start with understanding of the self and increasingly extends to larger communities. Students will work towards individual and community goals they set with the help of school mentors and their families. They will learn to be stewards--of their physical, social, and emotional health, of their path as learners, and of the land that supports them. The natural environment will be a rich source of academic content, a setting for physical exertion and challenge, an inspiration for reflection and artistic expression, and a laboratory for hands-on projects that have relevance to their studies and lives.

Key Features

The Yew School will operate as a program of the Yew Mountain Center, a nonprofit educational center located on 500 acres of a nature preserve, a lodge

with large common areas, and a certified restaurant kitchen. Established in 2016, Yew Mountain Center's mission is to provide programs that explore Appalachian ecology, culture, and arts while promoting personal and community wellness.

With an active forest farming project, it is a destination for people to learn about cultivating medicinal plants native to the Appalachian Mountains. The botanical sanctuary adds rich opportunities for study. The Center offers weekend workshops and seminars that are tied to its place in these mountains. These programs bring in experts to teach hands-on sessions about nature, art, and culture. Yew School students will have opportunities to learn from these masters, deepening understanding of and pride in their Appalachian Mountain homes.

Foundational Values of the Yew School

- We honor youth's intellectual, emotional, physical, and spiritual development, respecting their agency as learners.
- We value the role of parents, grandparents and community elders in the education of youth.
- We believe that every individual has an important and unique role in the peaceful and prosperous functioning of a community.
- We look to nature for authentic examples of resilience, interdependence, variation, diversity, and resourcefulness.
- We believe that students will be thoughtful caretakers of an educational culture they help to create.
- We believe a curriculum that prioritizes collaboration and personal growth over competition creates the best environment for learning.

Founding Questions:

- How can we make experiential education inclusive and accessible for local families?

- How can the program we develop and offer at The Yew School work in cooperation with public schools and enhance outcomes for students in the PCS and GCS districts?
- How can we collaborate with area families to create an educational middle years program that meets their needs?
- What skills, attitudes, and knowledge do middle years youth need to be well and prosperous now and in future stages of life?
- What unique challenges and opportunities does growing up in this specific place offer students?

Teaching and Learning at The Yew School

A Day at the Yew School

Students arrive at The Yew School between 8-8:30 am and are dismissed at 3:30-4 pm. A typical school day will primarily consist of two sections, each led by a different teacher:

- 1) science, technology, engineering, math or STEM, and
- 2) humanities (language arts, social studies)

There will be atypical days at The Yew School as well. Excursions to local points of interest and overnight experiences will deepen students' learning and understanding of our place in the world

The Yew School Year

The academic year will roughly follow the local public school calendars but will feature overnight experiences and other special projects that may lie outside the traditional calendar. As of this writing (4.14.2022,) our calendar is not finalized, but we anticipate a start date on or near August 18, 2022 and a finish date on or near June 9, 2023.

We are working with families who show early interest in the school to come up with a calendar that best accommodates local need. We hope to build in several

four-day weeks to allow for a healthy school-home balance with optional Friday activities offered. These shorter weeks will be offset by some Saturday instructional times when the Yew Mountain Center has educational programs with visiting experts.

Though our approach differs from what is available in most WV public schools, the content standards are comparable to WV state and national standards. One of our goals is to provide an education that will allow students to transition (back) into a public school environment with ample tools and knowledge needed to advance their path as learners with their peers.

Students will work in small groups on collaborative hands-on projects on a campus with forests, fields, ponds, creeks, and waterfalls for classrooms. Writing and arts projects integrated throughout will encourage research, reflection, and creative expression. Thematic units will integrate learning between the STEM and humanities portions of the day.

Students will be involved in growing and preparing their food and cleaning up daily—assuming responsibilities that will give them ownership of their learning and the choices they will make throughout life.

In addition to the outdoor experiences, indoor learning labs with computer access will give students an opportunity for independent or guided study to advance in math, foreign language, and/or writing skills as needed. Contract teachers and volunteers will be brought in for special units such as arts (dance, theater) and foreign language units.

Peaceful and Prosperous

One of the inspirations for founding The Yew School is the recognition that our society needs individuals who can work together in a diverse community. We need youth (and grown-ups) to understand how their actions can work to enhance or detract from shared experiences. To this end, The Yew School will employ restorative practices to help maintain the peaceful and prosperous functioning of our learning community.

“Restorative Discipline is a whole-school, relational approach to building school climate and addressing student behavior that fosters belonging over exclusion, social engagement over control,

and meaningful accountability over punishment. Its practices replace fear, uncertainty, and punishment as motivators with belonging, connectedness and the willingness to change because people matter to each other.” ~Dr. Marilyn Armour, Founder, Institute for Restorative Justice and Restorative Dialogue

Rather than rely exclusively on punishments and rewards, students will learn from staff, family, and peers as appropriate how their actions help or hinder progress towards shared goals. We expect humans to make mistakes. We will help young people learn how to learn from them, work to repair the damage they may have caused, and to move forward with more tools to create solutions that grow possibilities for themselves and others.

Roots and Branches

The great white oak near the lodge is an awe inspiring resident of the Yew Mountain Center. It is a reminder to dig in deeply to draw nourishment and wisdom from our home while stretching outwards towards a more distant light that allows us to explore more territory, and provide nourishment, shelter, and inspiration for ourselves and others. We use this metaphor of our oak to look beyond our immediate environment to learn about the wider world of human experience.

Like the oak, we adapt to conditions, change with the seasons, and rely on the members of our interconnected community. The Yew School will function as a connected organism, welcoming input from our students and families, and growing in response to changing needs. We invite you to participate in these sapling days of The Yew School to co-create a vibrant educational ecosystem.

Assessing Needs and Growth

How’s it going? We want to know and assume that you do too! The Yew School believes that assessment and evaluation is a two-way street and that education works best when it is a collaborative effort between home and school. Authentic assessment, evaluation, and good communication are key to running an educational program that meets the needs of our young people and their families.

Students will be assessed on personal and curricular goals using portfolios that they work with their teachers to compile each semester. Formative assessments

will be used to guide teaching throughout the school year. Students and parents will be asked to evaluate the instruction and program each semester.

There may be instances when we use a traditional grading scale, but we believe that it is what is behind that letter grade that is most important. Teachers will write narrative reports about each student throughout the year that capture that moment in their development and indicate directions for potential growth. Our staff will be accessible for conversations about students' experience at school and will welcome information from home that helps them understand factors that may be affecting them while at school.

How's it going? The state wants to know too! West Virginia requires standardized testing in private schools. The state provides an approved list of tests from which to choose. The leadership team will determine which of those tests most closely matches the goals of the school and standards for West Virginia.

Who is Creating The Yew School?

The idea of a "one-room schoolhouse" experiential outdoors-focused middle school in Pocahontas County goes back at least a decade, but the concerted, collaborative effort to make it a reality on the Yew Mountain Center property began in early January 2020.

Erica Marks is a career educator with experience in a diversity of school settings and the current director of the Yew Mountain Center. She assembled a team that includes graduates of Pocahontas County School, former and current teachers, former school board member, a retired WV principal, and local parents to collaborate on a proposal to the Walton Family Foundation's Innovative Schools Project. Their proposal was awarded funding in June 2020, but due to the challenges of the pandemic, the school opening was deferred until August 2022.

The steering committee for The Yew School includes Margaret Worth, Eleanor Bell, Adrienne Cedarleaf, Michelle Jeffers, Zachary Drennan, and Erica Marks. We are in the process of recruiting teachers for the upcoming school year.

Can We Afford The Yew School?

If The Yew School is right for you, we will work with your family to make it work for you. One year of The Yew School costs approximately \$4500 (this number may change as fundraising and recruitment efforts continue.) The Hope Scholarship may be available to you to cover most of this cost. The Yew School will work to

raise funds for need-based scholarships so that financial hardship is not a barrier to a student's access to quality experiential education. Tuition payments are due at the beginning of each semester in monthly installments.

We expect all families of Yew School students to contribute to the community experience in some way as we believe that each individual has something valuable to share and learn from. Whether it's helping with gardens, preserving food, chaperoning/participating in a school event, or making a financial contribution, we will work with your family to find comfortable ways you can help The Yew School community thrive.

How Do Students Apply to The Yew School?

The application process involves a written application and an interview with the student and parent or guardians. Please answer the questions as thoughtfully and honestly as possible. There are no right or wrong answers! We are not looking for a particular kind of student, but will recruit a student body that reflects a diversity of strengths and backgrounds. After we receive your responses to the application prompts, a representative of The Yew School will contact you regarding scheduling an interview. Please be sure to provide contact information.

1. **Student Section** *Please choose at least 4 of the following prompts to respond to.*
 - Write briefly about a goal you have for yourself. Tell why it is important to you.
 - How do you respond to challenges?
 - Describe a time that you enjoyed learning something.
 - Describe one of your best qualities.
 - What worries you about attending a school that spends a lot of time outdoors? (or about attending the Yew School in general?)
 - What excites you about attending a school that spends a lot of time outdoors? (or about attending the Yew School in general?)
 - Is there anything else you would like us to know about you?

2. **Parent / Guardian Section** *Please respond to at least the first four prompts.*

- Write briefly about a goal you have for the student.
- Describe a time your child made you proud.
- What is one thing you've learned about how to best support him/her through a challenging time or situation?
- How could you be involved in The Yew School community? What skills, talents, materials, or time do you have available to enrich our learning environment?
- Is there anything else you would like us to know about your child or family? (optional)

Responses can be mailed or emailed to:

Admissions at The Yew School
9494 Lobelia Road
Hillsboro, WV 24946

theyewschool@gmail.com