



YELLOWSTONE SCHOOLS

Newsletter

Fall 2021 Vol. 1 | No. 2

COMMUNITY CIRCLES

PROVIDE
TOUCHSTONE FOR
YELLOWSTONE
STUDENTS

LEARNING BY TEACHING

READING BUDDIES
INITIATIVE HELPS
STUDENTS LEARN
TO READ

THE DEVASTATING
IMPACT OF
COVID-19 ON
EDUCATION





“May you live in interesting times!”
So says an ancient Chinese proverb that yearns for times of peace and tranquility.

The past year and a half of COVID-19 has certainly proven to be interesting times. **At Yellowstone Schools, your gifts last year made it possible for our faculty and staff to accommodate these interesting times.**

Your support enabled us to provide laptops and wifi hotspots (and so much more!) to every family at Yellowstone so that students could remain connected to the life-giving education we provide. In addition,

teachers developed significant rapport with parents to ensure alignment and provide individual consideration to each of their students. Our teachers also engaged our students more deeply through our new community circles initiative (read more on page 2). **Bravo, Teachers!**

During this same time, our advancement staff organized a wonderful fundraising event at Hermann Park’s McGovern Centennial Gardens. **You helped us to make this Party in the Park a massive success!** Meanwhile, other administrators were quick to apply for and receive emergency funding to accommodate our response. **Bravo, Staff!**

Finally, Yellowstone is now fundraising for the largest campaign in its history. This initiative will result in a new addition to our facility, almost doubling our campus footprint. It will also fund a multi-year academic plan to ensure our students are successful. Yellowstone’s board of directors has been developing a new strategic plan for the school that will emphasize a “one school” approach that will offer a contiguous Pre-K through 12th grade education. You can learn more about this plan and our fundraising campaign on pages 5 and 6. **Bravo, Yellowstone Leadership and Supporters!**

So how has Yellowstone responded to these interesting times? Very well, I’d say! And we couldn’t do it without your support—THANK YOU!

With gratitude,

Lionel Jellins
Board Chair, Yellowstone College Prep



**THE YELLOWSTONE NEWSLETTER
FALL 2021 VOL. 1 | NO. 2**

The Yellowstone Schools newsletter is printed twice yearly for donors, volunteers, students, parents, alumni, and friends. Questions or comments? Contact advancement@yellowstoneschools.org. Copyright © 2021

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DESIGN | Creative Element, LLC

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Principal of Yellowstone College Prep

ON THE COVER | Kyree, Pre-K4

Rooted in the Christian faith, Yellowstone Schools serve more than 500 majority Black students and alumni in PK3 through 8th grade and beyond. Located in Houston’s historic Third Ward, Yellowstone is committed to partnering with students and families, regardless of financial means, to provide life-changing experiences that prepare scholars for life beyond high school.

Yellowstone Schools is comprised of Yellowstone Academy—a private, Christian school serving PK3 through 5th grade—and Yellowstone College Prep, a tuition-free charter school growing to serve 6th through 12th grade. As a public entity, College Prep complies with all federal and state laws.

COMMUNITY CIRCLES PROVIDE TOUCHSTONE FOR YELLOWSTONE STUDENTS

BY DENISE BRAY HENSLEY

Yellowstone Schools got a jump on the pandemic with a concept planned even before the world changed. Community Circles is a program started last school year for middle-school students, teachers, and staff to meet every morning and jump start the day with a focus on common goals. It builds on the skills students learn during their Bible classes and in school family time in elementary school.

The result of the first year of Community Circles is a closer group of students during an isolating time and teachers who are more knowledgeable about what’s going on in the lives of their young scholars.

“We are proactively giving our scholars the space to learn from one another and providing tools to deepen their self awareness,” says Mesha White, who just finished her first year as Yellowstone’s middle school principal.

“It’s been a year for adapting, and this program helped all the students—and us—weather what’s been thrown at us,” she adds.

Ivy Dolf, school social worker, said the program was developed last summer with an eye on starting students and teachers off strong every day.

Students and teachers sit in circles when they meet. They check-in with themselves and one another. Then, they discuss lessons around the school’s PRIDE values—positivity, responsibility, integrity, determination, and excellence.

Community Circles is designed to last 30 minutes. Lessons were made digestible for all grade levels so everyone has a united concept for their focus.

“I was so impressed by how the teachers hit the ground running and how the kids got into the nitty gritty with it,” said Ms. Dolf, who started her career at Yellowstone as an intern.

“Start children off on the way
they should go, and even
when they are old they will
not turn from it.”
Proverbs 22:6 (NIV)

“Community Circles work well at Yellowstone in part because they mirror what students experienced as they moved through our lower grades,” said Candice Lapid, who recently finished her first year as the principal of Yellowstone’s elementary school.

“Starting in Pre-K, our students get used to meeting each morning. They begin with a Bible lesson, then talk through a specific character virtue, and end by sharing their feelings and prayer requests with one another,” she adds.

“Every day is a fresh day for every child,” said Mrs. White. “We can’t afford to let that ball drop. Every day is important to our scholars, even under unusual circumstances.”

To read more about the
Community Circles initiative,
including more quotes from our
teachers, visit our blog!

yellowstoneschools.org/blog





LEARNING BY TEACHING

Reading Buddies initiative helps students learn to read by partnering middle-schoolers with younger buddies

BY THOMAS PARKER

This Spring, Yellowstone Schools partnered with Kindred Stories to pilot a “Reading Buddies” program. Locally owned and operated by Terri Hamm, Kindred Stories is a bookstore committed to amplifying Black voices and to bringing diverse stories to our local community.

Yellowstone’s Reading Buddies program partners middle school students with second-grade students who are still learning to read. The students pick out a book together from a selection of developmentally appropriate books curated by Kindred Stories. The older student reads the book to the younger student, and they spend time working through a set of guided questions.

“If a middle-school student isn’t reading on grade level, it sometimes can be hard for them to pick up a book lower than grade level and read around their peers. This program gives them the opportunity to be seen as a leader while reading books that may be appropriate for their reading level,” said Mesha White, middle school principal.

The goal is to inspire greater confidence in students while also helping both of them to practice their reading fluency, comprehension, and writing skills.

Taykoia Jackson is a seventh-grade teacher at Yellowstone who helped to lead the Reading Buddies pilot. “I could see the intense engagement of both the younger and

older students as they read together. My scholars loved participating and kept asking me when they could do it again. I hope to be involved in this program again!”

“My students were so excited to spend time with some of the older students,” said LaVerne Gilliam, second-grade teacher at Yellowstone. “They couldn’t wait to meet their buddies and pick out a book, even the ones who aren’t normally excited about reading. It was awesome to see them so engaged!”

The pilot was an overwhelming success, and Mrs. White plans to make it a recurring program this Fall. “I envision a school campus where we maximize every moment for our students, such that they are learning even when they think they’re just having fun.”

Yellowstone began a strategic planning process in September 2020 to address the impact of the pandemic on our school program and plan for future growth. The Reading Buddies program is just one of several initiatives we are implementing to help our students recover from this national crisis.

Read more about the strategic plan, our new priorities, and our COVID-19 academic response on pages 5 and 6, or visit www.yellowstoneschools.org/forever.



**2021 YELLOWSTONE GOLF CLASSIC
PRESENTED BY RIVERBEND ENERGY GROUP**

MONDAY, OCTOBER 18 | 11:30 AM

REGISTER ONLINE AT YELLOWSTONESCHOOLS.ORG/GOLF

THE DEVASTATING IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON EDUCATION

COVID-19 has created an **unprecedented national education crisis** that will have implications for an entire generation of students.

As many of you have experienced firsthand, the pandemic has significantly hindered student learning and academic achievement over the last two school years. Experts predict it will take several years to fully recover.

In recognition of this crisis, Yellowstone's Board of Directors and school leadership team began planning in September 2020 to address the impact of the pandemic on our school program. This process has culminated in a strategic plan to define Yellowstone's priorities and to recover from COVID-19 over the next several years. To fund this initiative, the board has approved a \$30 million comprehensive campaign.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

FOCUS ON EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE

Rooted in our Christian faith since our founding, Yellowstone is committed to providing an excellent education. We will create an exceptional educational experience for every student in every grade level we serve.

RECOVER FROM COVID-19

We are not holding anything back as we respond to this crisis. Yellowstone students are depending on our support, and we are investing an additional \$6 million towards this academic recovery effort over the next three years.

DEVELOP OUR UNIQUE PREK-12TH GRADE PROGRAM

We believe strongly in the opportunities our public/private model creates for students and families, and we are committed to our long-term goal to offer an exceptional PreK-12th grade program on one campus.

BUILD A COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL CAMPUS

We expect our enrollment to nearly double in the next few years as we grow to serve students through 12th grade. To accommodate Yellowstone's expanding student body, we must extend and improve our facilities.



“See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.”

— Isaiah 43:19 (NIV)

Visit www.yellowstoneschools.org/forever to find more information about each of these priorities and additional architectural renderings of our expanded campus!



Hundreds of guests gathered at the beautiful McGovern Centennial Gardens to celebrate Yellowstone Schools on Thursday, April 8, 2021. The event was a huge success, raising \$840,413 to support the students at Yellowstone!



THANK YOU TO EVERYONE WHO MADE A RECURRING GIFT TO YELLOWSTONE IN 2020-21!

Monthly gifts are a vital source of revenue for Yellowstone Schools. By committing to give regularly, you make it easier for our staff to project revenue and serve more students!

Regan and Chris Bailey
Martha Baum
Jan and Robert Benjamin
Katy and Logan Boatman
Treva and Gary Bonner
Kathryn and Cedric Burgher
Barbara Carter
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Monthly donors as of June 30, 2021. If you feel your name should be on this list, please contact us.

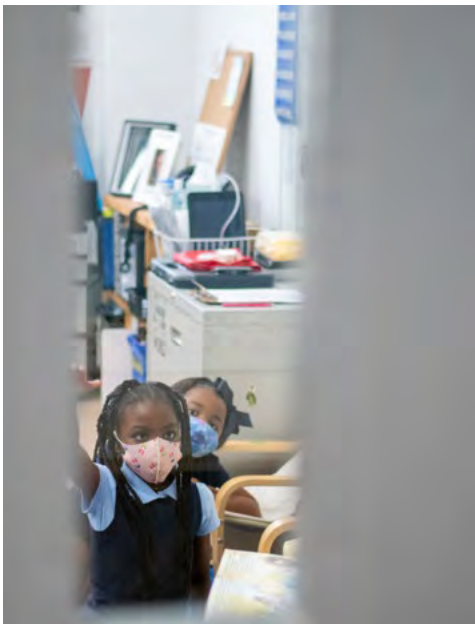
Add your name to this list by making a monthly contribution online at yellowstoneschools.org/give-now, or call our advancement team to set up your gift at **713.741.8000**.

IN HONOR

The following persons were honored by a gift to Yellowstone Schools between July 1, 2020 and June 30, 2021.

- Rebecca Brandt
- Carolyn and Henry Broesche
- Nona and David Carmichael
- Autumn and Michael Davidson
- Paige Dobbins
- Kimberly and David Dominy
- Lesha and Thomas Elsenbrook
- Lori and Bryan Fisher
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- Virginia and Clayton Trier
- Valerie and T.R. Williams
- Darren Wolfman

Making a gift in honor or memory of someone is a thoughtful way to celebrate a special person or occasion while contributing to our mission to inspire, empower, and invest in students. If you would like to make an honorarium or memorial gift to someone special in your life, please contact our advancement office at advancement@yellowstoneschools.org, call us at 713.741.8000, or visit www.yellostoneschools.org/give.



IN MEMORY

Your gift enables Yellowstone to inspire, empower, and invest in students. Please take comfort in knowing that your loved one's memory will be celebrated by bringing children the joy of learning so that they may be empowered to have a better tomorrow.

We remember the following persons who were memorialized by a gift to Yellowstone between July 1, 2020 and June 30, 2021. May their legacy take root in the lives and futures of our students.

- Carol Ansel
- Charles Austin
- Janie Evans
- Beverly Leggett
- Linda Ligon
- Jeff Linville
- Frank Panebianco
- Barbara and Thomas Parker, Sr.
- Sarah and Elmo Patrick
- Austen Reade
- William Winters

Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.

I will say of the Lord, "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust."

— Psalm 91:1-2 (NIV)



YELLOWSTONE
INSPIRE. EMPOWER. INVEST.

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ALUM CHASITY JACKSON TAKES ON PANDEMIC & DUAL DEGREE

When Chasity Jackson rolls over at dawn, her laptop is propped by her bedside with her day's schedule. She creates her "to do" list, usually in 15-minute increments, the night before. Such discipline kept her on task to finish high school with honors while completing her associate's degree from Houston Community College.

She graduated from Jones Futures Academy in nursing and already is certified in Basic Life Support and CPR. Chasity will attend Prairie View A&M University this fall.

"Surely we won't see anything like this year again," she says. Chasity fulfilled all her achievements during a worldwide pandemic and with a full-time job at Fiesta, where she has worked since she was 16. "I had friends and family telling me every day that they believed in me and that I could do it. It was like I had cheerleaders everywhere."

Read more about Chasity's journey at yellowstoneschools.org/blog.

**She adds with emphasis that
"if it weren't for Yellowstone,
I wouldn't be here."**

