

For Immediate Release

Flexible seating about more than just comfort for VHS literature class

9/29/17

YUMA, AZ – Hilary Brown’s literature and language classroom at Vista High School is taking the rigidity of seating charts and wooden desks and turning it upside down. In some cases, literally.

The philosophy is known as flexible seating with the idea, according to education author Diana Oblinger, that learning spaces convey an image about teaching and learning. “Space can either enable, or inhibit, learning,” Oblinger wrote.

For Brown, who is in her first year at Vista, it is all about making her students feel at ease, which has led to increased productivity.

“I want students to have a comfortable learning environment,” Brown said. “The best comment I can get from students is that this doesn’t feel like a classroom. That’s what I want.”

The comfort level in Brown’s classroom is obvious as soon as you walk in the door. There are more options for workspaces than there are students.

“I thought it was a little unusual at first. Normally, we have assigned seats and have to be at a desk,” VHS senior Bryan Lange said. “But we have options in this class. If I’m not comfortable where I’m at, it’s going to make things a whole lot harder to learn.”

And that’s the ultimate goal for Brown: helping students remain achievement driven, while maintaining what she referred to as a “student-centered” classroom.

“My students are coming from really unique backgrounds, so I’m creating a space where everyone’s story is equally important and creating that space where there’s a feeling of everyone’s experiences are valid equally to mine,” Brown said. “That has to do with how the room is set up and has to do with instruction.

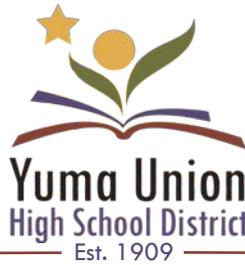
“How can I present this writing or present this literature with my students’ experiences in mind and open up a space where the things they’ve been through and where they are coming from is going to add to our learning and not distract from it and not seem like a burden.”

Still, that doesn’t mean students get to take an easy path. Her literature class studies the same set of texts used throughout Yuma Union High School District and has delved into some college-level reading.



Vista High School

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Laura Campbell
Principal

“It’s not, ‘We’re at Vista, so we have to make this easier,’” she said. “This is what’s going on at the other campuses, but we have to move at a faster pace, so in some ways it’s more challenging.”

VHS has 90-minute classes and a varied schedule that starts and ends slightly later in the day than the other five campuses in the District. School staff has long prided themselves on offering unique ways for students to choose education as a pathway towards a brighter future.

“I’ve been impressed by how mature the students are here because a lot of them are on their own or they’re already taking care of someone else,” Brown said. “They work. They’re responsible for themselves, so a lot of them have really important, pressing, urgent reasons to care about their education. It’s an honor to teach them.”

Knowing that students were, in effect, choosing to remain in school, Brown said it was important to offer something unique. Flexible seating was part of that, and so was building connections with students.

“It was cool because we didn’t have seating charts and we can just sit wherever we want,” VHS junior Adrian Valencia said. “[It was comfortable] because of just how she acted. We always feel welcome.”

Brown added: “If students are choosing alternative education, I want them to be able to walk into my room and see that this is different.

“[Seating is] first-come, first-served. There are some kids that will sit in the same spot every day and there are others, depending on how they feel that day, will move every day. But that’s how it’s supposed to be.”

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For more information about Vista High School, please contact Christopher Franey, VHS Communications Liaison, at cfraney@yumaunion.org.



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9/29/2017

Continuity and chemistry spark Kofa girls volleyball to unprecedented start

YUMA, AZ – Kofa High School volleyball coach Brittany Garcia has witnessed her share of success over her eight years with the program. There have been city championships, state postseason appearances, and several years of accumulating an overall winning record.

Garcia, though, has yet to be a part of any success as far-reaching as their undefeated start to the 2017 season. Through 13 matches, the Kings have yet to lose. They are ranked No. 7 in AIA's 6A Conference, their highest of all-time and as part of their school-record 13-0 start to the season, they have won an unfathomable 39 of their 42 total sets played.

"My expectations were really high entering the season," Garcia said. "This team specifically has been practicing all summer. It's been really helpful in building that chemistry."

The chemistry, which Garcia and several players cited as a key to their success, started building with workouts and camps over the summer. It helped that the group returned seven seniors following a 14-9 record a season ago.

"Last year was a really successful year for the team," Kofa senior captain Laura Sanderson said. "But this year is amazing. Just being able to see all these girls get better as the season persists and just see everyone build as a team. Everyone has each other's back, so it's nice being part of a team that just gets better each year."

The Kings have been good before. In 2013, Kofa went 27-4-1 under Garcia, and they have had more wins than losses every season since 2010. Despite that success, however, they have not won a postseason match in more than a decade. This year, though, it seems things could be different.

"We lost a big hitter last year, Abbey Jensen. She was our main middle," Kofa junior captain Keiley Sharp said. "The talk around town was that we were not going to be much of a team this season. We had everyone doubting us. We just go into [matches] with nothing to lose."

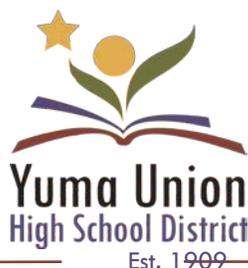
That ability to create a mental edge has been common for the team since last summer, when they would spend hours together on and off the court. More importantly, it has created a group led by seniors like



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Yuma Union High School District
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Governing Board:
Teri Brooks
Bruce Gwynn
David Lara
Shelley Mellon
Phillip Townsend

Mike Sharp
Principal

Sanderson, Ashley Reyes, and Chloe Garcia and underclassmen Sharp and Isabel Ponce that is even better than the sum of their parts.

“Normally, you have that one standout player that makes the huge difference,” Garcia said. “In my opinion, I have a lot of standout players. Everyone is doing their job on the court. They know where they’re supposed to be. They have that chemistry where they know what ball is there’s and what ball isn’t.

“You know how teams always have their cliques. I don’t really see that on this team. Everyone’s talking to each other, everyone’s a part of the conversation.”

Ponce, one of the team’s three captains, added: “We trust each other and you can tell everybody gets along. It’s not divided. We are all one team.”

And that’s led to some momentous victories through the first month and a half of the season. The Kings, who lost to Skyline High School in 2016 in a five-set grudge match, rallied back to beat them this season, 3-1. The next night, the Kings lost one set to Gila Ridge. They haven’t lost one since.

“We are together five days a week and we are working, doing drills,” Sanderson said. “We’re bonding, even after practice. We go and drink smoothies together. We are a big family pretty much.”

They are a big family that come a month from now when the playoffs begin may have a chance to hoist up a banner in Rillos Gym.

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For more information please contact Tim Keller, Kofa High School Athletic Director, at tkeller@yumaunion.org.



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For Immediate Release

November 15, 2017

Yellow Ribbon assemblies deliver important message about suicide prevention

YUMA, AZ – Yellow Ribbon Project founders Dale and Dar Emme stood in front of nearly 2,000 Gila Ridge High School students and faculty at two assemblies on Wednesday, Nov. 15 with an important message:

“We all have a voice.”

The Emme’s are dedicated to preventing youth suicide and attempts by making suicide prevention accessible to everyone. The couple started the Yellow Ribbon project after their son, Mike, committed suicide in 1994. Since, they have been have traveled the country advocating awareness to people of all ages.

“We are here to talk about suicide prevention,” Dale Emme said. “But also to empower the kids, to be able to know how to help and that it’s OK to ask for help and to be able to be a link for their friends if they know of anybody that really does need help.”

Wednesday’s assemblies were preceded by two days of training for approximately 60 middle school and high school students and staff members that included representatives of all school districts in Yuma County as well as others from Antelope, Somerton and Mohawk Valley. Yuma Regional Medical Center has worked closely with project.

“One of our physicians came to us, and he had experienced the loss of their student. He said, ‘You’ve got to do something about this,’” said Wayne Steffey, Executive Director of the Foundation of Yuma Regional Medical Center. “So, the foundation decided to be as active as we can, and this is the result from it.”

According to the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, the rate of suicide in the United States has steadily climbed since 2006. As of 2015, teens and young adults, aged 15 to 24, make up about 12.5 percent of the nearly 45,000 deaths by suicide each year. However, according to the Center for Disease Control, suicide is the second leading cause of death for ages 10-24.

“We want them to be able to become suicide prevention advocates, to have a voice in a movement in the country about raising awareness for this circumstance and condition,” Dar Emme said. “It’s a life skill that’s never talked about. We learn CPR, but we never learn how to help somebody if they were really at that point in their life. So, it’s an educational piece about how they can help, how they can be educated at a very basic level.”

To help take on the challenge in the Yuma area, YRMC founded the Yellow Ribbon Suicide Prevention committee. The committee is chaired by Foundation of YRMC Board Member, and YUHSD Board Member, Shelly Mellon and includes Tom Tyree, Lynda Penny, Gila Ridge High School Guidance Director Ginny Legros, Dr. Rob Takesuye and his wife Ginny Takesuye.

The committee's goal is to bring similar Yellow Ribbon awareness assemblies to all YUHSD campuses.

"[I want students] to know that they have the ability to help," Legros said. "They may not have a clinical background or a counselor's background or anything of that nature, but they are the key to being able to prevent suicide and being able to just speak out the word 'suicide' is very, very important. They are the ones that will be able to teach their parents, their grandparents about how to talk about a topic that is very prevalent in today's society."

The Yellow Ribbon Project is dedicated to preventing youth suicide and attempts by making suicide prevention accessible to everyone and removing barriers to help. The program's two keys are: empowering communities and individuals through leadership, awareness, and education, and by identifying/collaborating with support networks to save lives. For more information, visit yellowribbon.org.

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For further details, please contact Eric Patten, YUHSD Director of Communications, at (928) 502-4676 or epatten@yumaunion.org.

For Immediate Release

January 4, 2018

YUHSD launches newly designed websites

YUMA, AZ – Yuma Union High School District’s website, www.yumaunion.org, has a new look.

The district launched its newly redesigned district and campus websites on Dec. 12, 2017. The new sites have been designed in partnership with Blackboard’s Web Community Manager to provide a more user-friendly experience with improved navigation, responsiveness and functionality throughout, allowing visitors to access information and news with ease.

“The new sites will better serve our community in so many ways,” YUHSD Communications Director Eric Patten said. “Information, such as school phone numbers or access to the parent portal, will be readily available and easy to find, and there will be a greater emphasis on content, which should give more reason than ever to continually visit the sites.”

Some of the key features of the websites include: global icons that travel with the user to allow ease of access for some of the more popular links and pages; school calendars that showcase upcoming events on each campus homepage; a social media connections page within each “media” section that will allow visitors to click directly to each campus’ official social media channels; links to easily access YUHSD education platforms Canvas and Illuminate; simplified menu options; an important contacts tab on each homepage; and a renewed emphasis on informative news content showcasing student achievement.

Student photography, in partnership with the Career & Technical Education Digital Photography and Yearbook classes, are featured throughout all seven websites, including as part of a newly designed “media” section which shows photography, videos, and news headlines from around the district. Additionally, the sites are fully compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act and offer Google Translation services as part of a dropdown menu at the top of each homepage.

The process of migrating content and implementing design template changes has been completed by Patten and campus communication liaisons Carlos Ambriz, Ian Coltman, Christopher Franey, James Kuzniak, Emily Rutherford, and Kevin Swearingin.

To access individual school websites, visit the district homepage and select a campus from the “choose your school” dropdown menu in the upper right corner or visit one of the following links:

Cibola High School: www.yumaunion.org/cibola
Gila Ridge High School: www.yumaunion.org/gilaridge
Kofa High School: www.yumaunion.org/kofa
San Luis High School: www.yumaunion.org/sanluis
Vista High School: www.yumaunion.org/vista
Yuma High School: www.yumaunion.org/yumahs

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For more information, please contact Eric Patten, YUHSD Communications Director, at (928) 502-4676 or epatten@yumaunion.org.

(PICTURE BELOW)



Caption: A screenshot of the new yumaunion.org homepage, which went live on Dec. 12, 2017.

For Immediate Release

10/20/2017

Yuma Youth Town Hall brings more than 150 students together to talk education funding

YUMA, AZ – In its sixth iteration, the annual Yuma Youth Town Hall event at Arizona Western College brought more than 150 students together from around Yuma Union High School District to network, meet business owners and community organizers, and discuss preK-12 education funding in the state.

“It was a huge success. You could just feel the energy in the room,” said Shelley Mellon, who owns R.L. Jones Insurance, is a member of the YUHSD Governing Board, and helped organize Friday’s town hall. “[The students] came up with some really creative ideas of how to fund education. They are sold on it. They are in the classrooms and know how much we need that.”

The event, which was hosted by the Yuma Youth Leadership program, consisted of 10 groups of students mixed with varying numbers between YUHSD’s six campuses. After a morning of networking with local businesses, hearing from Representative Charlene Fernandez, and learning about career opportunities in fields ranging from public defense to education to fire services, the groups were challenged with discussing potential solutions to the funding model of public education in Arizona.

That started with brain storming through a series of prompts, including what should be the goals for Arizona’s preK-12 Education system and how does public funding impact the ability to achieve those goals. Each group was required to come up with some significant talking points and present their ideas, creatively, through a skit.

Students were required to research state education funding prior to the event, but they also learned a great deal about the process through their discussions.

“I think the majority of students aren’t getting treated equally as compared to other schools in other states, and at some point we are going to have to compete with them in the career field or even getting into college itself,” Yuma High School senior Miguel Alcala said. “It starts with talking to our parents to let them know because within our community there is a lack of parent participation. They might not have knowledge about [education funding] or experience with it themselves, so it definitely starts there. And for those of who are involved within our school, we need to get the word out there as well.”

For Mellon, who has seen the event grow since its inception in 2014, the beauty of the event is seeing so many students come together to take part in a valuable, meaningful discussion.

“To get them involved in civil discourse at this age, to have a topic and then allow creative ideas to be vetted and come up with a consensus is really important,” she said. “If they can learn this

at ages 14-18, they will carry these skills for the rest of their lives. I'm encouraged to see how brilliant they are and the ideas they come up with. I always walk out of here more energized and encouraged for our future."

The Town Hall is a collaborative event between AWC, YUHSD, and Southwest Arizona Town Hall. According to AWC's website, the purpose of the forum is to create a culture of unity in diversity and moderating skills, which are essential in learning how to work with varying ideas. Yuma Youth Town Hall provides an opportunity for the up-and-coming generations to practice this skill during discussion about relevant topics occurring in society.

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