

Parent Handbook

Explorations at a Glance – 2011-2012

Academic Curriculum: Students at Explorations are enrolled fulltime in an academic curriculum that supports their individual needs. Many Explorations students attend the local public high school and are enrolled only if the student meets the criteria for admission per district policy. Enrollment into the local public high school as a non-resident student is a privilege with which comes responsibility. If a student does not meet the district standards for admission, the school reserves the right to deny admission or enroll the student on a contractual basis agreed upon by the school administrator, student and Explorations Director. Other educational opportunities are present, but only if warranted by the student's individual needs and supported by the student's treatment plan and ability of Explorations staff to provide appropriate staffing. Alternative curriculum options are present in the public high school through the Alternative Learning Center and through independent coursework. These options may be explored to meet the needs of students as noted above and would be agreed upon prior to admission into Explorations.

Students are asked to maintain daily homework assignments in a personal planner. It may be asked of each student to have the teacher initial daily assignments. Bi-weekly grade reports are submitted by the students and are the basis of determining each individual's participation in extra-curricular activities. Grades below a C preclude involvement in outside activities. Each student's academic performance and subsequent grades are reviewed on an individual basis, taking into account varied learning styles and academic aptitude.

A supervised study hall occurs 2 -3 nights per week. A tutor supervises the study time, provides study skill education, tracks student performance and provides individual tutorial as needed.

Any concerns or questions regarding your child's academic progress are best addressed by phoning Explorations. It is confusing for the local school and for us to have calls made by parents directly to the school without first discussing with Explorations staff. We work very hard to maintain a positive, communicative working relationship with the administration and the teachers at the school and strive to communicate your child's progress on a regular basis. School personnel have been very open to meeting the parents of our participants during their visits to Montana. We can help schedule those meetings through our office upon your request.

Addiction Support Groups: Students with addiction issues are encouraged to attend local AA and/or NA meetings on a regular basis. Family members are welcome to attend during their visits to campus. A meeting schedule may be obtained through our office for any interested parties.

Airline Travel: Though we are equidistant from Missoula, MT and Spokane, WA, we recommend that flights be scheduled in and out of Spokane. We have found there to be more options for travel arrangements as well as better connections in and out of Spokane. Because, however, of the 260 mile round-trip journey to drop off or retrieve someone from the airport as well as the likelihood of inclement weather a number of months out of the year, **we strongly request that when making airline travel arrangements, departure and arrival times fall between the hours of 10:00 am and 2:00 pm Pacific Time.** Please understand that travel outside of those times may pose a safety risk for our drivers and/or passengers and may necessitate overnight lodging. The cost for overnight lodging and extra staffing will be billed to parents in addition to the regular cost of airport transportation. Please refer to the Schedule of Fees for further information regarding airline travel transportation costs.

Birth Certificates: Please send an original birth certificate for your child within 30 days of enrollment. It is necessary for school enrollment. Students will be suspended from school after the 30 day waiting period if an original birth certificate is not received as proof of citizenship.

Birthday Celebrations: Our traditions surrounding birthdays are family-oriented. We ask the birthday person to choose the dinner and dessert of his/her choice. Members of the household help prepare the meal, choose a gift,

and participate in the celebration. In choosing gifts to send for the celebration, please be moderate in your spending and in the number of gifts you send. Elaborate, expensive gifts are not needed and we encourage parents to make gifts creative, growth-enhancing and supportive of your child's interests. Please ask extended family members to send only small gifts and no gifts of cash. Family members are welcome to call on birthdays.

Business Hours: Billing and/or administrative needs are best addressed between 9:00 am - 5:00 pm Monday through Friday (mountain time). Email is another method of contacting our office manager at explorations@blackfoot.net. Administrative questions will be answered as promptly as possible.

Care Packages: Care packages can be a welcome gift from home - in moderation! If parents choose to send care packages, we ask that you follow these guidelines so the giving is similar for each student:

- 1) Please refrain from sending excessive material items (name brand clothing, electronic games, 'extras', etc.). "Functional" is the name of the game. Please check with us to determine whether or not your child's request is a need or a want prior to sending something out of the ordinary.
- 2) If having your child ask for a lot of goods in the past is a part of an unhealthy cycle for him/her or for you, please touch base with us before sending anything. Often, many parents feel guilty about their child being away and send gifts as a way to stay connected. We have found this dynamic to often be unproductive and may recommend gifts or care packages not be sent until later in the child's stay.
- 3) If you send food treats, please remember to send enough that it can be shared with the entire household. **We expressly ask that you not send excessive amounts of sugar or junk food items.**
- 4) A package every few months is plenty! Save up some of the bigger items for birthday, Christmas or Hanukkah gifts.
- 5) Always keep in mind that there is limited storage space for student's belongings.

College Enrollment: Many Explorations students choose to attend college after participation in our program. We recommend that juniors and seniors take the SAT and/or ACT college entrance exam in preparation for post-secondary studies. Whether or not any immediate plans are being made for college or even if prospective junior colleges do not require the SAT or ACT for entrance, it is best to take the test in case a student's situation changes later in the year. Juniors benefit from having the practice of taking the test. We request the student work with the guidance office at the school to obtain test registration materials and register in a timely fashion. Whether you would like your child's scores sent to a particular institution or if you would prefer to see the test results before the score is sent to any institution, please notify the Director. If you prefer scores be sent to institutions when you sign up for the test, there is no extra charge. If you wait to see them, and then send at a later date, the testing services charge extra.

College visits may be necessary for students who are making their college decision. We support the process of choosing a college and recommend that students are fully engaged in the process. Visiting colleges best occurs at times when students have extra days off from school, thus minimizing their time away from instruction. As with all visits, students need be recommended for visits off campus, based upon their behavior and attitude.

It is imperative that communication between parent(s) and Explorations staff be strong in regard to this important transition. If you would like your educational consultant or other working professional a part of this process, please let us know.

Consultant Updates: If your family has retained the services of an educational consultant or other referring professional, we provide ongoing communication throughout the school year.

Community Service: Every student is asked to participate in a minimum of 40 hours of community service volunteer work or projects during their stay at Explorations. These may be individual or group projects.

Email: Students are encouraged to begin correspondence with family and appropriate others via mail initially. Students are not permitted to maintain a personal email account during the initial stages of their stay. Instead, students may receive email from family members at the explorations@blackfoot.net address. **If you receive email from your child from any other email address, please notify us immediately.** Secretive communication is nearly

always a sign of important therapeutic concerns and may indicate a potentially unsafe situation for a student. As students progress through the program, she/he may earn the opportunity to establish their own personal account.

Extra-Curricular Activities: Each Explorations participant is asked to commit to at least one activity outside of their academics and program activities. This could include an after school sport, a club, musical involvement, drama, coaching or other options. Because of weather and road conditions in the winter months, we strongly encourage participation in events in the fall or spring.

Facility: All program offerings operate out of our HomeBase facility which is also home for our central office and residential program. The facility consists of 80 acres, half forested and half meadow. There is a large log home where the students share many meals and is also living quarters for our residential students and the site for the business office. On the property, there is a staff office, logistical food center and outdoor gear center from which we outfit all trips and expeditions. There is an outdoor kitchen pavilion, a basketball court, a shower house, a large garden and a climbing wall.

Fitness & Nutrition: The Explorations' curriculum provides adequate opportunities for students to remain physically fit such as skiing, bicycling, hiking, and weight lifting. We take pride in the food served at Explorations! The food is not only nutritious, but mealtime is also strong family time and cooking is a skill every student practices while here. (Imagine cooking dinner for 15 people every day!) Meals are eaten as a family nearly every night, with vegetarian entrees available. Occasionally, students are allowed a "Make Your Own" dinner night as an opportunity to be creative and collaborative in the kitchen.

Home Visits: The visit calendar for Explorations students is devised to support the attendance policy of the local public high school and therefore, follows the school calendar very closely. The local school district generally provides its students with two longer breaks during each school year: a Christmas holiday break and a spring break that usually coincides with the Easter holiday. These breaks are often shorter than the breaks at many urban schools. Visits home are a time for students to practice and integrate the things he/she is learning at Explorations into his/her home environment. These visits are therapeutic in nature, are of considerable value for the students and the family. We strongly support home visits for students when the family and the student are both prepared.

The spring visit period is often very short and generally only recommended for students if there is a need for a visit home. We strive to have each student home for Christmas/Hanukkah season if they are emotionally and behaviorally ready to visit home without losing ground or disrupting the family. However, if it is not in the student's or family's best interest for the student to travel home during the holidays, we recommend that he/she remain here and join in our holiday celebrations. To accommodate the needs of many first-year students, we try to schedule both a full length and shortened visit schedule. The students are well aware that visits home are not a 'given'. It is communicated to them that they must be pursuing emotional, family and academic goals to ensure the best chance of a productive home visit. The length of a Christmas visit is recommended no later than the conclusion of Thanksgiving weekend. Spring visits are recommended one month in advance.

When purchasing student airline tickets, **we recommend parents purchase the type of airline ticket that may be changed for a nominal fee (\$100) if, for any reason, the ticket needs to be reissued with a different date.** We know from experience that the 'best laid plans' can be disrupted by last minute unhealthy and/or sabotaging choices on the part of the child, in which case he/she may not be recommended to travel home for a visit – even when those things occur at the 'last minute'.

Contracts and home plans are written by both parents and student before the visit home, reviewed by Explorations staff and agreed upon in advance. Tuition is billed during the time students are visiting home, as is customary in boarding environments.

Immunizations: Proof of current immunizations is required for participation in the program and enrollment in the public school. Immunization requirements in Montana may be different than the requirements in the student's state of origin. If a student requires further immunizations to enroll into public school, parents will be notified and immunizations will be given by an appropriate health care provider. The State of Montana does not accept a

'conscientious objector' as cause to not immunize. The State only recognizes religious or health reasons as valid if immunizations do not meet the state statutes.

Intervention: At any point in your child's stay with us, his/her choices may warrant an intervention specially designed to impact his/her behavior. There are many situations that could warrant the child's need for an intervention, but generally speaking, a student may be making choices that are negatively impacting him/her or others. Another reason may be a student making choices outside the boundaries and rules of the program. An intervention can vary in length, environment, and selected activities. Parents will be notified of the intervention and your support will be an integral part of the potential success of the intervention. Depending upon the particular intervention, additional fees may be incurred. Please refer to your Schedule of Fees.

Mail: We believe written dialogue between your child and each parent is very important. Between phone calls, we suggest that you write to each other. We ask that, during the first few months of a student's stay with us, correspondence be limited to immediate family members. After that, we will ask each parent for a list of persons outside the immediate family who would be appropriate and supportive, in terms of your child's stay with us. We request that you send the letters through the mail rather than over the fax line unless requested.

Your child's mail to home will initially be monitored. We ask the students to leave their mail unsealed and reserve the option of reviewing it with them before it is mailed out. Often, a student's behaviors and/or emotional stance may spur us to check on correspondence more closely. **If you receive mail from your child that appears to have been mailed from somewhere other than our office, please notify us immediately.**

Misc. Expenses: At times your child will need various items that are easily purchased on our end. These misc. expenses will be added to your monthly billing. i.e.: haircuts, film developing, prom expenses, etc.

Medical Costs: All medical, dental, and optometry bills will be sent directly to the parents. We will relay your insurance information to the specific care provider.

Music: Students at Explorations are able to enjoy listening to a variety of music while living at Explorations. Personal music for each student is allowed, with restrictions. Please do not allow students to bring or purchase any music with a parental advisory or music that is offensive. Inappropriate music will be confiscated and sent to parents at your expense.

Parent Communication: Explorations Directors or staff members will communicate with parents on a regular basis. Written monthly updates will be sent to parents either electronically or via mail. Phone calls will also occur as a means of update and continued dialogue between adults. We view our role in your life at this time as a partner in parenting. Our students watch adults at Explorations collaboratively parent and make decisions regarding all students. Our role with each parent is to build and create a strong parenting unit – even across the miles. Students may attempt to engage parents or staff at Explorations into secretive or exclusive conversations. It is important for all involved that communications between all adults involved with a student be honest and forthright.

Parent Visits: We prioritize a close, communicative relationship with parents. It is a vital part of your child's emotional growth while here. Visits to Explorations by parents are very important - both for you and for your child. We strongly encourage your visits and like to **schedule them in accordance with the steps your child takes in his/her emotional growth.** Family participation is a key!

Parent visits are as individualized as your child's needs, but generally, it is best to **schedule** part of your visit here on site with your child and his/her house mates. We recommend that first year parents spend one full weekend on campus with the entire Explorations family, integrating into the events on our calendar. We recognize that time spent away from Explorations with one's family can also be very fulfilling and is generally recommended as part of a parent visit at later stages in the program. We encourage at least one visit to Explorations during the course of the school year.

Parent Weekends: Parent weekends may be scheduled as a part of the curriculum. These offerings are not mandatory, but strongly recommended.

Passports: Students may travel outside the country. If your student does not have a current passport we suggest you obtain one as soon as possible. Visits home are a good time for students to procure passports.

Phone Calls: During the initial part of a child's stay with us, we encourage phone calls to family every two weeks. We ask students to make these calls either collect or with a **call-home type calling card** only. These phone calls are not necessarily limited in duration, but we ask that the emphasis be a balance between home news, school news, emotional growth and plain old chit-chat. Often, these calls will be monitored with an adult present in the room while the student is on the telephone. We recommend parents check-in with an Explorations staff member to answer any questions or verify any information at the end of the phone call with their child.

There are short windows of opportunity for phone calls during the weekday evenings because of the busy daily schedule. Saturdays in the late afternoon and evening and Sundays after noon generally work well. **We ask that students receive no incoming calls past 9:00 pm mountain time.** If you receive a phone call from your child that is placed from somewhere other than Explorations, please notify us immediately.

Pocket Money: Please do **NOT** send money or checks through the mail to your child. All petty cash funds must be sent to the office personnel. Your student will be allowed \$5 a week from their petty cash for misc. pocket money.

Program Duration: As discussed with you upon your child's enrollment at Explorations, this program is an open-ended experience in terms of time line. It can not be stated strongly enough how important it is for your child to receive this message from all adults in unison. We do not provide students with an end-date and request parents make a one year minimum commitment for their child's stay with us. A student can become very focused on an end-date to the point that emotional progress stops and eventually begins to regress. Though there are many natural "endings" or breaks in a child's experience here (end of summer program, end of the school year, high school graduations, etc.), it is imperative that we work together to establish a return-home date for students. Prior to such natural transition times, we will be in contact, recommending a child's transition home and the steps involved prior to the end of the experience here.

Prescriptions: Parents provide our local pharmacy, Doug's Drug in Thompson Falls, MT, with insurance information and a credit card to be used for billing. We request that all prescriptions for students be bubble-packed.

Senior Graduation: If your child is graduating from high school during his/her stay at Explorations, we will send out a calendar of graduation events after the first of the year. We celebrate graduation in rather traditional ways: a celebration dinner out, a farewell group with house mates and parents, and an after-graduation celebration. We encourage any family members who wish to be a part of the graduation festivities to travel here. Parents of underclassmen may want to attend this weekend for end-of-year activities.

Spirituality: We do not ask participants to adhere and/or practice any aspect of any specific organized religion. While we teach many of the ethics found in many world religions, we respect each person's right to believe and practice spirituality in their own personal way. For students who are accustomed to regular church attendance and desire to continue while here, we will strive to make arrangements for your child to attend church services as much as possible. There are no synagogues in our immediate area. During mealtime, we pause for a moment of silence to be utilized for reflection, prayer, or quiet time.

Summer Curriculum: A summer curriculum of events will be provided to parents after the first of the year. Travel abroad is usually a part of each summer's events.

Summer Visits: Explorations residents are recommended to participate in a specially-designed group of activities over the summer months. Parents and Explorations staff work together to determine when and/or if a visit home

during the summer would be beneficial for the student's growth. These visits coincide with the student's emotional needs. It is rarely recommended that students – even those who are graduating from high school – return to home for the entirety of a summer.

Transportation Fee Incentive: We offer a transportation fee incentive for Christmas and Spring Break trips to the airport. **If your child's travel home is scheduled on the specified date, between the hours of 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. Pacific time, the cost will be as low as \$125.00.** Trips scheduled outside the recommended time frame or scheduled on a different day will be billed at full fees. Please refer to your Schedule of Fees for specific dates and fees.

Thanksgiving: It is an Explorations' tradition to invite family members of students and any former students to Explorations for Thanksgiving. Yes, it can be a houseful, but also a wonderful experience! Our Thanksgiving 'break' is really just a long weekend so we have found it can be a perfect opportunity for some family group work prior to the extended Christmas holiday visit. It is not obligatory for parents to visit at Thanksgiving. For our feast, each member of the house prepares a favorite family recipe from their home so there is something familiar to be shared with others. If you would like to join us for Thanksgiving, please call and make arrangements. We recommend travel on the Wednesday before Thanksgiving and departure the Sunday following the holiday.

Weekly Schedule: During the weekdays, your child is awake and out the door by 7:35 am, having cleaned up, made his/her bed, prepared breakfast, packed a lunch and checked his/her household chore. Students arrive home at 3:50 pm. Between 4:30 – 8:30 pm, students eat dinner, clean up, are involved in supervised tutorial, and perform daily household chores. There is time between 8:30 - 9:30 for personal time, extra study time, showers, packing lunch, etc. 9:30 - 10:00 pm is quiet time with lights out at 10:00. We reserve at least one night per week for group.

Friday nights, Saturdays and Sundays comprise our weekend. Wake-up on Saturday is 9:00 am and on Sunday is 10:30 am. Saturdays are generally a work day and/or activity day and Sundays are generally reserved as a personal day.