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Alternative Yampah High graduates 39

First of several area graduations in coming week

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GLENWOOD SPRINGS, Colorado — Traditional high school didn't work for Amber McCoy. But Yampah Mountain High School gave her the alternative she needed to be a success.

“Yampah has given me an opportunity I never thought I'd have,” McCoy said on a sunny Friday morning, as the school graduated its 20th class outside the Glenwood Springs Community Center.

“Most of us up here today didn't think we were going to graduate, but Yampah gave us that opportunity,” she said. “Now it's our turn to give to the world.”

McCoy could have graduated early last year, but decided to stay for her senior year so she could have her college credit courses paid for.

She'll now be the first in her family to go to college and is the recipient of four college scholarships, including the Jim Calaway

Scholarship for first-generation college-bound students.

Yampah Mountain is an alternative high school operated by the Mountain Board of Cooperative Education Services. Based in Glenwood Springs, it serves students from four area school districts, from Parachute to Aspen.

One by one, many of McCoy's 38 classmates stood up, walked to the podium and shared similar stories of how Yampah gave them a chance to complete their high school education when that prospect looked bleak.

This year's class included 12 graduates from Yampah's Teen Parent Program, which allows young parents, usually mothers, to stay in school while having daycare available for their young children on site.

Joining that group this year, though, was teen father Kevin Atchison, who sat in the front row with the other program graduates holding his daughter, 2 1/2-year-old Alice Olivia McDilda-Atchison, on his lap. Alice's mother, Jessica McDilda, graduated from the Teen Parent Program last year.

Giving the keynote address for the Yampah graduates Friday was George Stranahan, a Yampah alumni parent and founder of the former Aspen Educational Research Foundation, now known as Compass, which operates the charter Carbondale and Aspen community schools.

“I'd like to offer you some advice, on the grounds that it's expected but not necessarily useful,” he quipped.

“You enter a world of increasing complexities,” he continued. “There are no easy answers.”

That complexity shows up in the way people interact with each other over long distances through various social media; all part of different communities that are inter-connected, he noted

“Still, we all have an identity and characteristics that define who we are ... you get to identify what it is that you do,” Stranahan said.

“As you move through multiple communities, keep that same identity wherever you are,” he concluded.

Yampah Mountain's graduation ceremony was the first of several area high school graduations that will take place over the next week or so.

In the Garfield Re-2 School District, Coal Ridge and Rifle high schools will have their graduation ceremonies on Sunday.

Roaring Fork School District Re-1 graduations take place next weekend, starting with the alternative Bridges High School May 28 and Glenwood Springs, Roaring Fork and Basalt high schools on May 29.

Also graduating May 29 will be the senior classes of Grand Valley and Aspen high schools.

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