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A School For Losers

Every student who attends this NC school wants to lose weight.

Clemson, SC -- The number of things to pack seems to grow as she goes.

"I didn't realize I had all this stuff," says Hillary Keane.

All this stuff has to go.

"I'm getting ready to go to college, University of South Carolina."

It won't be her first time away from home. She spent half of her senior year at a boarding school, an experience that changed her inside and out.



"I was really excited when I got these, because they're like size 10, and you know getting down to that number was significant."

Hillary lost 65 pounds at the Academy of the Sierras in California, a weight loss boarding school.

A daily journal helped her log calories, fat grams and exercise; and just like her friends back in South Carolina, she tackled homework and exams.

"Hillary traveled thousands of miles, but now there's an option for students much closer to home, in the North Carolina Mountains."

The director took us on a tour of the Academy of the Sierras, North Carolina.

It might not look like much now, but this construction site will soon be home to dozens of 6th through 10th graders.

Upstairs are the sleeping quarters, room for the boys and the girls.

And downstairs you'll find two regular classrooms, and one that is starting to take the shape of a kitchen.

The culinary class is part of the AOS philosophy, helping students learn healthy eating and healthy living, encouraging them to try new activities like hiking, tennis, even rock climbing.

"On a daily basis the expectation for any student is that they get about 10,000 steps," says Ryan Mandamba.

Most students lose about four pounds a week.

"We've seen about a 90% success rate for those leaving, continuing to lose or maintaining that weight loss."

Weekly individual and group counseling sessions are also part of the formula to give students the self-confidence many never knew.

At AOS, pounds disappeared, a new talent flourished and a shy teenage girl blossomed into self-assured young woman.

"I walk with confidence, even if I'm not feeling so skinny or pretty one day, I will walk with confidence."

Construction should be finished at the Academy of the Sierras March 1, but the first students are already in class.

Payton Rich is one of them. The Randleman 8th grader met her fellow classmates at the Asheville airport on February 1.

They're taking a mobile classroom to Florida and back, as part of the AOS curriculum.

"I hope to of course lose weight, and boost myself, so that I can be happy about things I do," says Payton.

Payton wants to lose at least 50 pounds, and we'll be following her every step of the way.

Stay tuned for updates.

AOS is expensive. Room, board, tuition, therapy and all activities run about 58-hundred dollars a month.

Insurance will cover up to one third of the cost, and scholarships and financial aid are available.

[To see Hilary perform "I'm a Mess," click here.](#)

Click here to listen to [Fat School](#).