



Principal Robert Aranda

Avenue Scholars seen as ‘kids at promise’

Possibly no school in the Omaha metropolitan area has experienced a greater diversity culture transformation in the past 20 years than Omaha Bryan High School.

According to Principal Robert Aranda, now in his 10th year at the helm, the student population in 2000 was 65% White, 14% Latino, and 11% African American. In 2018, it’s 65% Latino, 15% White, and 15% African American.

Being of Latino ancestry himself, and with his professional experience, Aranda appears to be the right person at the right time for Omaha Bryan. Prior to assuming the principal job at Bryan, Aranda was an assistant principal and principal at Bryan Middle School. He started his Omaha Public Schools career as a math teacher, first at Omaha North, then Omaha South, where he started a dual language program.

Before coming to Omaha, Aranda was a teacher at an Indian Reservation in northern New Mexico.

At Omaha Bryan, administrators and teachers have had to adapt and mold their programs to fit the needs of a diverse student population.

“With the cultural change, it changes how we build relationships, maintain those relationships and build on what we have going,” Aranda said.

Aranda recognizes that his family background has factored into his position at Bryan.

“I was recruited here 19 years ago from New Mexico. I was a lucky one; I had teachers who looked like me. My education path was lucky. My experience growing up, I didn’t understand we were poor,” he said.

“We forget to share these stories with students and with our staff — of how and we are; if



we would, we would find that we we’re all a lot more similar than different,” he said. “As teachers and administrators we have to go back to the core of who we are. We have to remember we are here to serve all.”

Avenue Scholars Foundation has helped Bryan do a better job serving all students’ needs.

“I really like the transitional piece,” he said, noting that in addition to the high school coaches, ASF now provides post-secondary coaches.

Aranda also appreciates that Scholars are not necessarily looked at as “students at-risk.”

“This program looks at kids ‘at promise’ [rather than ‘at-risk’],” he said. “If we can change that mindset to look at them as kids ‘at promise,’ I think it elevates the game.”

Seniors prep for college experience

The Seniors started the semester by enrolling in Human Relations 1010, a dual enrollment course through Metropolitan Community College. In this class students are earning credits in both their home high school and at MCC, which will allow them to gain early credits towards their Associates Degree.

The content of this course allows students opportunities to learn about a variety of human behavior topics related to improving personal, job, and career effectiveness, including but not limited to stress management, goal setting, ethics and diversity in the workplace, and preparing for a professional interview. Through this experience, students are gaining exposure to the demands and expectations of a college class while still in the comfort of their home school with their Career Coach as their instructor.

In addition to their Human Relations course, students have also recently

prepared for and taken the placement exam, the Accuplacer, at MCC. The results of this test determine the level of English, Math, and, if necessary, Reading, students will be placed in when they begin taking classes on MCC's campus, possibly as soon as next semester for some students. In addition, the information helped students to begin plotting out their class progression in college.

Meanwhile, outside of both of these experiences, the Seniors are working diligently on their grades, attendance, work ready skills and behavior to ensure they are eligible to attend Senior Academy and/or participate in another approved Senior Experience next semester. They are also working to remain excellent candidates for the Avenue Horatio Alger Career Scholarship, which will be awarded this spring to active Avenue Scholars who are in good standing with the program.

Juniors plan for college and careers

The juniors are busy exploring their strengths so they can make informed decisions about their career choices. The students are working through career-readiness curriculum to help them learn about how to obtain a job and show up to show up to the job with the skills to be successful. Career coaches are working with students to write a resume and cover letter, and they are practicing interview skills.

During the first semester, students also focus on their transferring skills as students in a work setting as well as the classroom. Career coaches work with students on how to improve their academic skills to ensure they are ready for Metropolitan Community College courses.

Juniors take an in-depth look at the high-demand career areas in Omaha: Medical Sciences, Business, Trades and Manufacturing, Industrial Technology, and Automotive Technology. Students recently attended a Career Exploration Day at Metro's Fort Campus. During this day they were able to explore each

industry area. Businesses graciously took time out of their schedules to teach students about entry-level positions within their industry areas and career advancement opportunities within the industry.

Businesses provided hands-on activities for the students to get the feel of what a career would be like within that industry. Highlights of the day included repairing a car bumper at CARSTAR, driving a truck simulator with Werner Trucking, practicing basic welding techniques with Drake Williams Steel, and experiencing a 3D printed engine replica created by prototype students at MCC. Students left the event with more clarity about what they want to pursue in the future.

Juniors Career Coaches will teach students about the career plan. Both student and coach will create a plan together, including proper steps to achieve their goal. This career planning process will continue beyond the high school program into their education and training at MCC.

UPDATE

Avenue Scholars is well at Bryan High School. With 50 active Juniors and Seniors this year, the Avenue Scholars program is finding its place in Bryan Nation.

This year's students have been an excellent group of hard working and committed students. Many Scholars have part-time job experience or continue to look for this experience, and several others are highly involved in school activities. Our goal is that ALL students have at least 150 hours of work experience by graduation and that their career choice is narrowed down to a high skilled, high demand, high paying career.

In the classroom, the Juniors have learned about their Gallup Strengths, attended the one-day Career Exploration Event, and will soon research their careers of interest. The Seniors have been enrolled in my section of Human Relations 1010 at Bryan. They've transitioned to following a syllabus and rising to the demands a college class, including reading from their textbook on a regular basis, maintaining strong attendance and moving through material at a more intense pace than we did last year. I'm hopeful they'll be ready to take classes on campus from other MCC Instructors this spring.

Being my first year at Bryan, it has been a great transition to be a part of the Bryan Bear family.

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