



Principal Ruben Cano

‘Avenue Scholars connects kids to resources’

Having a “common background” as many of his students, Omaha South High School Principal Ruben Cano is committed to giving hope to all graduates, regardless of the color of their skin.

Cano, born and raised in Las Cruces, New Mexico, was accustomed to being in school systems and belonging to a community where the student population, citizens, teachers and community leaders were of Hispanic or Latino background.

“I took it for granted that a majority of the people looked like me, so when I got here to teach at South, I realized that wasn’t as common as I thought it was,” Cano said. “I distinctly remember a student in one of my classes saying he couldn’t go to college because he’s Mexican. I told him, ‘that is offensive to me. The color of your skin does not determine where you end up in life. If you want to go to college, you should go to college.’”

Cano, in his fourth year as principal, started his career at Omaha South as a classroom teacher for three years. He then moved into administration, first serving as Dean of Students at Lewis and Clark Middle School for one year, as assistant principal at Norris Middle School for two years, and as head principal Norris for four years.

“That’s been the greatest change coming back from when I first taught here to when I came back,” Cano said. “Miss Cara Riggs (former principal) did some things to create a culture here where kids want to be, and built a culture of believing college is something they can do. It’s cool now when I sit in the auditorium now and ask kids who knows someone in their family, or a friend, who is going to college and half their hands go up, that’s a big deal.”

Cano notes that graduation rates when he first started teaching at South were around 50%, and



are now up to 77.4%, which is right around the district average.

The Avenue Scholars Foundation program has built on that momentum by providing another way of “connecting students to resources as much as possible to ensure they will be successful” beyond high school, whether that be a four-year college or a community college where they can learn a trade.

“It’s huge; not only do you have that full-ride to Metro, but a lot of those students getting training in high-demand jobs,” Cano said. “I’m being told their best students don’t even graduate; the businesses come and pluck them out because they need them now, before they complete their program. They will put them to work and then pay for them to go back and complete their degrees later. My understanding is they are making really good money at age 19 and 20.”

At Omaha South, the future continues to shine brightly for all students.

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

We are off and running at Omaha South High School. What a privilege to work with young teens and teach life skills. I am excited about this school year with Avenue Scholars.

The Juniors have been busy learning about what Avenue Scholars can do for them and what they need to do to achieve their goals. The Juniors have also been indentifying different strengths they possess. Then, we learned how those strengths can help students choose careers. We are also helping the students with study skills, and preparing them for work in a professional environment. How do we conduct ourselves in a professional manner and what does that look like? We practiced professional manner on a Career Experience Field Trip.

Avenue Scholars Seniors are also working hard. We are taking the Accuplacer and have been learning about Human Relations for a dual credit at South and Metropolitan Community College. The Human Relations class will help us prepare for Senior Academy next semester. Some of our students will earn a total of 16 credits at Metro before they graduate high school.

I have scheduled conferences with many of the Avenue Scholars families. I am planning to conference with half the families this fall and the other half in the spring. As we learn and grow together every day, I am proud of these kids and cannot wait to meet the families and give personal updates.

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