



Principal Jesse Tvrdy

Avenue Scholars brings ‘culture of hope’

Jesse Tvrdy, in her third year as principal at Ralston High School, says her mission is “to prepare students for lifelong learning and careers.”

Throughout Tvrdy’s career, she has worked in schools that have made giving kids access to resources — whether toward college, vocational education, or extra career training — a primary focus. In that framework, Tvrdy is especially fond of the Avenue Scholars Foundation program.

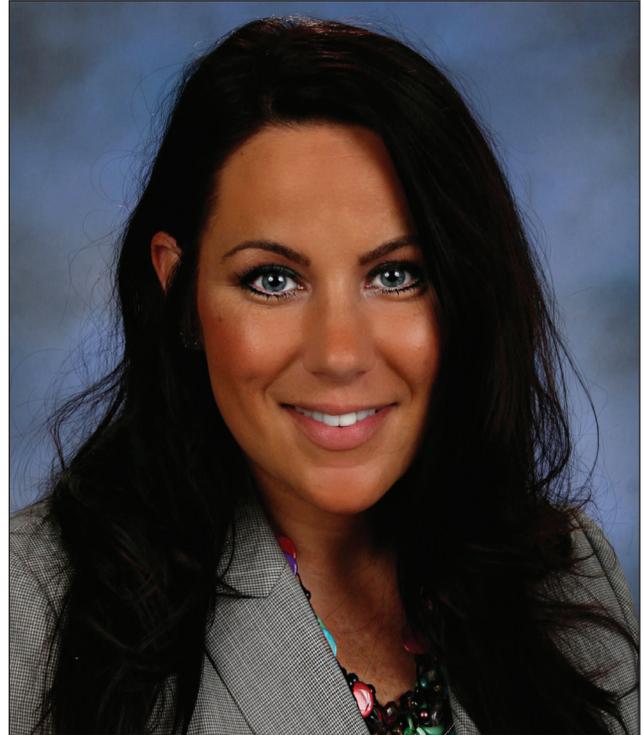
“Hope is a big piece of it at Avenue Scholars, and we talk a lot here at Ralston of how we want to give kids an opportunity, whatever that might be, and we want them to have hope. We want kids to see a future. Avenue Scholars provides a pathway — in the wraparound services they provide with mentoring, the classes, the college visits, the career explorations and the relationship I have here with Mrs. Beth Leach (Ralston’s High School Career Coach), to support them on that journey.”

Previously a principal for three years at an Alternative School and an assistant principal for four years at Thomas Jefferson High School in Council Bluffs, Tvrdy believes she has found the perfect fit at Ralston High School.

Before working in Council Bluffs, Tvrdy lived in California, working in a challenging school environment as part of a “New Principals at New Schools” leadership program. Upon starting a family, she realized she wanted to move back to Nebraska where all of her extended family lives.

The job itself has provided Tvrdy the opportunity to achieve her life’s goal of being a head principal.

“Being an alternative school principal, you



are by yourself, you’re on an island. At Ralston I have a team, people I count on, people I depend on. It’s an embracing culture. It feels like a family,” Tvrdy said. “I feel myself thriving here as a professional leader.”

Tvrdy has embraced the culture of hope Avenue Scholars Foundation has brought to Ralston Scholars. For Tvrdy, the positive impact was immediately visible at the annual Celebration Luncheon held each spring to welcome the new class of Scholars.

“Just seeing those kids the last two years at that kickoff, the photos of them in their polos, feeling they belong to something special, someone is valuing them, on that day, I see the impact on those students — on their self-worth and the hope that there is something better in store for them,” she said.

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

The students at Ralston High School are doing well this year.

They are working all over Omaha in different capacities. Two students, Karen Gonzalez and Cameron Brown, were recently offered first-time jobs at Quick Trip. Other places of employment include Dairy Queen, Runza, Von Maur, Prairie Life Fitness, Spaghetti Works, Pepperjax, and Skatedaze. Also, six of the Ralston Avenue Scholars students are employed at various HyVee stores.

Early work experience in a positive working environment continues to be so important for the students. It has been wonderful to see their confidence grow as they learn new on-the-job skills.

Ralston continues to increase its early access to college courses within the building. Many students are taking advantage of this opportunity along with our early access opportunities. Some students will have four MCC courses completed by the time they graduate high school.

This year, the students will volunteer at The Foodbank for the Heartland over the fall break and we've partnered with Youth Frontiers again to be the leaders for the Ralston Public Schools Fifth Grade Kindness Retreat.

The fall season also means it is recruiting season I am looking for 25-30 10th graders to join my program. This year our focus will be recruiting students interested in the trades, automotive, business, information technology, and medical sciences. I am blessed to be in my third year serving as the Career Coach for Ralston High School and look forward to the remainder of the academic year with my students.

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