



Metropolitan Community College Avenue Scholar Amber Franklin (center) with Interim President Randy Schmailzl and Bright Futures Board Chairman Walter Scott Jr.

**Bright Futures Foundation Honors
Its First 'Avenue Scholar' Class**

By Lorraine Boyd
The Daily Record

The current state of education has been under a microscope in recent years. Educators debate the best ways to improve student performance.

Less than a year after its founding in June 2008, the Bright Futures Foundation has introduced a groundbreaking way to ensure success of youngsters in the Omaha metro area.

At a celebration luncheon last week, the foundation honored their first Avenue Scholars class and program partners, Benson, Northwest and Ralston High Schools and Metropolitan Community College. The first Avenue Scholars class members, 175 strong, attended the event.

One student from each program partner served as a spokesperson and each spoke in turn to the audience of students, teachers and well-wishers. Those speaking were: Brandon Wainwright of Benson High School; Victoria Vong of Ralston High School; Abraham Mora-Becerra of Northwest High School; and Amber Franklin of Metropolitan Community College.

Franklin was featured in a World-Herald story two years ago as a young student who was determined to improve her lot of poverty and hardship. The article said, "Amber sees how tired and stressed out her mother is. She dreams of another path: high school and college diplomas, then a career on stage and money for nice things."

She was quoted as saying, "I just want to do it. ... I can't be like my mom, my brothers and my dad, all of them. I want to be more of a model for the younger kids."

With this latest opportunity, she seems to be well on her way to reaching her goals.

Nebraska State Senator Tanya Cook gave a speech that spoke of the hope and promise that these students represented. There were some light-hearted moments, including a demonstration of the Benson Bunny sign (bunny ears flapping). Then there was Emcee Michael Kelly of the Omaha World-Herald introducing Dr. Ken Bird with, "The Bird, the Bird, the Bird is the Word...."

Dr. Bird, former superintendent of WestsideCommunitySchools and president and CEO of the Bright Futures Foundation said, "The Avenue Scholars program is one of a kind in the United States and the students being recognized are the trailblazers for this unique program."

"The announcement of this first class of Avenue Scholars is the culmination of many months of hard work by the staff of the Bright Futures Foundation and our many partners. I want to sincerely thank our board of directors, our community advisory board, MetroCommunity College, the University of Nebraska at Omaha, the University of Nebraska system, the Gallup Organization, Omaha area school districts, the Urban League, Boys and Girls Clubs, TEAMMATES, and All Our Kids, Inc.

"Most importantly, I want to recognize the students in this first class of the Avenue Scholars program. Their dedication and desire will drive their success and blaze a path towards a brighter future for themselves and the next generations of Avenue Scholars."

Avenue Scholars, a program of the Bright Futures Foundation, is chaired by Walter Scott Jr. Its mission is to provide an avenue of success for Omaha area students of talent and need by offering comprehensive support from high school through post-secondary education and training, leading to enhanced lives and careers. With the help of the Gallup Organization, Bright Futures Foundation selected students who have a resiliency to overcome difficulties, are generally first-generation college-bound students who have demonstrated financial need, and share a desire to succeed.

Starting this fall, the scholars will be served in their respective high schools as juniors and seniors by a fulltime Talent Advisor who will meet with students during a regularly scheduled class dedicated to college access and success preparation.

Students attending MetroCommunity College will also receive the support of a Talent Advisor. Outside of the classroom, Avenue students and their families will receive a wide range of academic, social and financial planning services. Many of these are delivered at the new AvenueScholarsCenter where students will have additional contact time with their Talent Advisors, as well as regular access to tutors and mentors and a variety of personal support programs. Avenue students continue to receive highly individualized and comprehensive support throughout their post-secondary education.

For those attending a community college or vocational school, Avenue provides unique transitional support into the workforce or into a four-year public or private college program.

For more information visit www.bffoundation.com.

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