

OMAHA IN BLACK AND WHITE AN OCCASIONAL SERIES**OMAHA IN BLACK AND WHITE** AN OCCASIONAL SERIES**Helping teens succeed despite their mistakes**

BY PAUL GOODSSELL / WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

It wasn't a very good idea for **Cierra Moten** to get into a shouting match with her chemistry teacher.

Already expelled once and suspended repeatedly over the years, the 16-year-old junior even tried to take a swing at the teacher. It was so intense that a security guard had to drag her from the classroom. Once she cooled down, **Cierra** feared the worst.

Kicked out, she assumed, for the second time. No high school diploma. No college. No career.

Cierra needed another chance.

Hundreds of other Omaha high school students make mistakes every year.

They fail a test or blow off an important assignment.

They misbehave and earn suspensions. Some get pregnant or arrested. Some fall behind after they skip school or fail courses.

Helping students bounce back from those mistakes is a key to reducing the Omaha community's dropout problem.

That means better guidance counseling, more kids in after-school programs and summer school, and new approaches to help students make up missing work. It means keeping kids in classrooms instead of suspending them.

And it means providing youths with adult mentors who can guide children to make wise choices.

It also requires helping students move beyond the goal of merely finishing 12th grade. Money isn't the only barrier that keeps some students out of college. Often, what they

See [Page 6](#)



REBECCA S. GRATZ/THE WORLD-HERALD

Cierra Moten 's graduation from Bryan High last year followed a school career that included poor grades in middle school, suspensions and an expulsion — and opportunities to bounce back from her mistakes.

Powered by TECNAVIA

Copyright (c) 2009 Omaha World-Herald 05/17/2009