

Scholars Preparing to Join Workforce

Avenue Scholars (AS) has a clear mission. That mission is to ensure careers for committed students of hope and need through education/training and supportive relationships. Furthermore, AS aspires for each student it serves to complete our program having satisfied the following guarantees: education/training, work experience, work-ready skills, attendance, and financial and personal wellbeing.

We define work ready habits and skills in a committed Avenue Scholar as an ability to demonstrate responsibility, work ethic, communication, positive attitude, professionalism, teamwork and problem solving. Sometimes, these skills are called 'soft' skills in the workplace, in contrast to the 'hard' skills of experience, education, and training.

Why is it important to be able to demonstrate this readiness for work? Employers have long touted the importance of soft skill development in hiring. According to P. Loretto (2019) at balancecareers.com, "Employers value these types of skills because they demonstrate the internal thought processes of a person and how effective they will be in the organization." In fact, according to J. Bauer-Wolf (2019), writing for inside-highered.com, "...employers emphasized leadership and ability to work in a team as the most desirable attributes when recruiting ... ahead of analytical and quantitative skills."

High school is a perfect place to develop and hone these work ready skills. The Nebraska Department of Education created the Nebraska's Standards of Career Readiness (adopted in 2011), available online at this site, which guide our work with students. <https://www.education.ne.gov/nce/careerreadinessstandards/>.

The Avenue Scholars program builds work-ready skill development into its curriculum and activities from day one. One example is the use of a text, called *Bring Your A Game to Work*, by E. Chester (2012). It involves activities and discussions around developing a work ethic that focus on attitude, attendance, appearance, ambition, accountability, acceptance, and appreciation. Our curriculum engages students in problem solving and critical thinking about appropriate work behaviors, coaches students on employability, and monitors and supports growth in transferable job skills. The first measure of demonstration of developing work ready skills is completion of the Avenue Scholars' career ready curriculum.

The second measure used to monitor and support growth in students' work ready skill development is through the experience of part-time work and employer feedback. All Avenue Scholars complete part-time work during their junior and senior years, a perfect training ground for practicing those work ready skills. To build a successful work history, Avenue Scholars' coaches assist students in finding those part-time jobs, monitor work hours, complete employee feedback forms, and facilitate student self-evaluation and progress evaluations. Students are expected to meet or exceed standards on the employer feedback form.

The Employee Feedback Form that we use in the program represents what employers value in work ready skills. Employers rate students in a variety of categories as proficient, progressing or not progressing. In the area of responsibility and work ethic, we look at reliability and dependability. Communication includes both oral and written communication and timeliness. Positive attitude is reflected as respect for others, confidence, and environmental awareness. Professionalism is measured as carrying oneself with confidence in one's behaviors and attitudes. Teamwork looks at working collaboratively with others. Problem solving includes decision-making, adaptability, initiative, and conflict resolution. Coaches then support

the student in the application of strengths and development of weaknesses in these areas.

We know that employers strive to find workers with valuable work readiness skills. They believe those skills are likely to influence retention and satisfaction on the job. According to B. Bean-Mellinger (2019) at smallbusiness-chron.com, "Candidates with workplace skills are employable because they make sound decisions, have the capacity to acquire new knowledge and easily adapt to various work situations."

What can parents do to help their students? The development of work-ready skills are mirrored in the behaviors and attitudes you expect of your teens at home. Help your student with etiquette and manners. Practice listening and having conversations face to face. Review their digital footprint and social media accounts. Practice time management and goal setting. Expect responsibility and dependability of your teen in everyday life. Any practice at home will help to hone the skills that will benefit a teen for a lifetime.



<http://dm.greenville.edu/2019/05/soft-skills-9/>

*Outstanding Senior Scholar***Cleveland has focus on future**

Senior Kodey Cleveland has been a model of persistence as he works diligently to overcome any obstacles he faces en route to a career in the automotive industry.

“Kodey doesn’t let anything stand in his way,” Knott said. “He has been employed at Walgreens and has been throughout the pandemic. Despite his unease with being in this role at this time,



he’s continued and even went on to earn an Employee of the Month award over the summer.”

Cleveland has a great jump-start on his post-secondary career plan.

“Kodey is in his second year of the Auto Collision program

at MCC,” Knott said. “He’s maintained strong grades in that program and has persisted despite having to be creative with transportation and transitioning to remote learning.”

*Outstanding Junior Scholar***Prentis shows majority on job**

For Papillion-La Vista High School Career Coach Ashley Knott, junior David Prentis has demonstrated to his peers what it means to make the most of his opportunities as an Avenue Scholars student.

“He’s working at Walmart 25 hours per week and has already gotten glowing feedback from his supervisor who said his maturity is far above the majority of his peers,” Knott said. “He’s consistently on time and prepared for class and is an active participant.”

Knott is especially impressed with Prentis’s focus on his future.

“We’re only one quarter into Avenue Scholars, and he’s already talked with me on occasion about his possible long term plans, part-time jobs he can transition to once he turns 18, routes he could take to get to the future he wants, and the income he plans to make,” Knott said. “All while asking for feedback and remaining coachable through these thought processes.”

UPDATE

Avenue Scholars is well into its fifth year with the Papillion-La Vista Community Schools this year. With 45 active juniors and seniors this year, the Avenue Scholars program is growing and thriving.



This year’s group of students has already proven themselves to be an excellent group of hard working, committed and resilient students, especially given the circumstances this year with Covid-19. Many of them brought with them a wealth of part-time job experience, and several others have worked to secure employment this fall. Our goal is that ALL students have valuable work experience by graduation, related to their career of interest if possible, as we know this is the best way for students to gain work-ready skills.

In the classroom, the juniors have learned about Avenue Scholars and the benefits come from the program in addition to the commitment required of them. They’ve also learned about their individual Gallup Strengths, prepared for and attended virtual Career Awareness Events in their industries of interest, and have researched the careers they are considering pursuing. We’ll round out the semester by discussing the best ways to prepare for a professional interview.

The seniors started the semester by spending time reviewing the commitment required to earn the privilege of being able to activate their full scholarship following graduation — including having strong attendance, passing all their classes, participating in a part-time work experience, and demonstrating strong soft skills both while at school and in the workplace. They also have updated and refined their resumes, many have applied for and/or are working in their industry of interest, and nearly all have met the work experience requirement of the program at this point. Additionally, they’ve spent time revisiting the various career pathways available to students in our program and then plotted out their intended pathway forward.

While this will be a year of transition and skill-building for the future, most all students are moving in the right direction, and I’m hopeful they’ll be especially informed and confident in their career pathway moving forward.

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