



READING & LEARNING: (Above) Avenue Scholar Anna Ochoa M reads to Alayna Peacock, a Spring Lake Elementary student

From left, Omaha South juniors Sue Reh and Hka Say, hold the attention of Spring Lake third graders Orlando Esquivel and Miguel Padilla

## LEARNING TOGETHER

### Omaha South students focus on mentoring through reading program

Reading is a key to success at all educational levels — unlocking doors to rewards of lifelong learning and careers.

Avenue Scholars Foundation staff and students are enjoying the rewards of a “Learning Together” partnership — in its third year — between ASF juniors at Omaha South and third grade students at Spring Lake Elementary.

In this reading program Avenue Scholars students, under the direction of Talent Advisor Juan Cangas, meet with about 20 third grade students, representing six classrooms, on Wednesday mornings to read and discuss prescribed passages from a variety of books.

“It’s very structured. We have booklets and curriculum to follow,” Cangas said. “[ASF] students have to read a passage and prepare questions.”

Once they get to Spring Lake, the Avenue Scholars help children read the book, and then they check to make sure the children understand what they read.

“Each student has one or two elementary kids, their mentees; they keep that match for the rest of the year and build on that relationship,” Cangas said.

Cangas got a jump-start on working with the Learning Together company four years ago.

“They [the Learning Together company] support summer school for migrant students at OPS in July,” Cangas says. “Every summer, in July, students commit to three weeks of the program, from 8:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. every day. I wanted to continue that with Avenue Scholars. I started doing it with my junior class [at Omaha South] to give them more opportunity at community service.”

Community service is one of several benefits. Avenue Scholars are also developing skills they can continue to utilize as students and as mentors.

“This is a very good vehicle for students to improve their own reading,” Cangas said. “I love the mentorship

aspect of the program. They learn to become leaders. They step into that teacher role and experience how to deal with behavior and learning issues.”

Sabrina Young, the ESL Resource Teacher at Spring Lake who coordinates the reading program with Cangas, is an emphatic supporter.

“It’s an absolutely incredible program,” Young says. “Our kids love it. They really look forward to it. The mentors are strong role models they don’t always have in other places.”

With few opportunities for “real work,” the Learning Together program provides a real-life, hands-on experience.

“For students who don’t have a job, this is a job-like experience. It is good for their resume,” Cangas said.

And by Reading Together, both the elementary and high school students build reading competence and confidence — thus making the program a partnership beneficial to all.

**HEART-TO-HEART:** Kylie Linderman (right), visits with ASF Counselor Kelly Bernadt. Linderman, an MCC sophomore, has been with ASF for four years and plans to accept an open invitation from ASF to always come back. "I can go to them for anything," she said.



**HIGH FIVE:** Ariana Parker (left), a Millard South junior, and Mahalia Myles, an Omaha North senior, express their agreement on Parker's sentiment of "we're family" [at ASF].

## Fellowship groups focus on social topics

Body image, dating, women's health — heavy issues, serious questions, concerns for the future.

Despite the serious nature of these issues, Avenue Scholars Foundation's female students and staff look forward to the quarterly meetings that provide a positive environment in which to discuss these relevant topics.

This women's group, formally called "Flourish," continues to thrive in its fourth year at ASF.

"It's there to help girls learn more about themselves and to grow [as young women]," says Counselor Kelly Bernadt, who is in her second year of directing the meetings.

Meetings are held Friday or Saturday nights in the ASF Career Center once a quarter. Attendance ranges from 25 to 35 people, according to Bernadt. For each meeting, Bernadt schedules a topic for presentation and discussion. When

possible, she arranges to have a speaker.

For the first meeting this school year the topic was body image. Discussion included education, problem solving and coping with the societal expectations associated with image. At the Dec. 6 meeting, the group focused on healthy relationships — what a "healthy relationship" should look like, how to get out of an unhealthy relationship and dating violence.

"As teenagers, some are just not aware of the red flags," Bernadt said. "We provide a supportive area for the girls to come together. We open it up to all the schools; they have been able to make connections almost immediately. The connecting [between schools] has been cool."

For teenagers Ariana Parker and Mahalia Myles, Flourish meetings have provided a comfortable environment in which to open up about feelings and

experiences they were previously afraid to share. The topic of relationships hit home for them.

Parker, a 16-year-old junior at Millard South, says she had to work through some unhealthy relationship situations. She has learned to cope.

"All of the girls here have different perspectives in the way they view things," Parker said. "When they say things out loud, they get new perspectives on their futures. I want to help others in situations like these. Telling others what I've been through — seeing my strength — can help them."

Myles, a 17-year-old senior at Omaha North, also finds the Flourish meeting a safe place to talk openly about problems she has experienced in relationships.

"[Some situations] really got me

*FLOURISH continued on Page 4*

## Meet Metropolitan Community College/ASF STAFF

**Emily Van Hook**  
Math  
Instructor



**Duties:** Variety of mathematics courses: Developmental Math, Beginning Algebra, Intermediate Algebra, Modular Math  
**Education:** BA in Mathematics at Hamilton College (Clinton, NY), Master of Arts in Teaching at Providence College (Providence, RI)  
**Previous Work Experience:** 1 year each at Fall River, MA; Omaha Burke High School; and MCC  
**On Working at MCC:** I love math, and I truly enjoy teaching it. I feel very privileged to be part of students' learning and growth during this important phase of their lives.

**Steven Reller**  
Math  
Instructor



**Duties:** Variety of mathematics courses: some classes focused on ASF students  
**Education:** Bachelor of Science and Master of Arts in Mathematics, both from Minnesota State University Mankato  
**Previous Work Experience:** Full-time math instructor, Minnesota State, 4 years; MCC, 1 year  
**On Working at MCC:** I enjoy seeing people who tend to have trouble with math topics both (1) finally be able to understand and use those topics, and (2) understand that learning a challenging topic takes time, practice and focus.

**Marni Valerio**  
English  
Instructor



**Duties:** Developmental English, Composition 1, Composition 2, English elective  
**Education:** BA in History at University of Dallas; Secondary Education Certificate at Tarleton State University (Stephenville, TX); Master of Arts in English, UNO  
**Previous Work Experience:** Secondary social studies in Texas, Wisconsin, Omaha Mercy High School; Writing Center Consultant at MCC  
**On Working at MCC:** ASF students challenge me to be creative as I teach. It is rewarding to see them grow as writers and communicators.

**Joyce Van Dusen**  
English  
Instructor



**Duties:** English and Reading classes  
**Education:** Bachelor of Science in English, and Master of Education in English, University of Nebraska-Lincoln  
**Previous Work Experience:** English teacher, Platteview High School (South Sarpy District 46, NE), 11 years; Omaha Westside High School, 10 years  
**On Working at MCC:** I love working with students who are discovering their untapped potential and watching them move toward a future they had not known existed. It's exciting to see students develop self confidence and take on responsibility for their education and their lives.

ON THE JOB: Angelina Scales “pulls meats” and checks with a customer while making sandwiches at an Elkhorn Jimmy John’s in early November.



## ASF job search tips in Scales’ favor

Face wrapped in calm serenity, red pony tail poking out from underneath her black Jimmy John’s hat, Angelina Scales transitions efficiently through a variety of tasks — bread preparation, taking phone orders, and joining the assembly line of sandwich making — during a November noon rush hour.

Scales joined the part-time work force “around” Oct. 22 at the Jimmy John’s Elkhorn location, 801 N. 204<sup>th</sup> Street.

Avenue Scholars Foundation staff, specifically Career Talent Advisor Terry Fischer, were instrumental in Scales’ job search.

“Terry helped me by taking me to apply at Jimmy John’s and a few other places,” Scales said.

Scales says Fischer also helped by preparing her for interviews. ASF requires that all students hold part-time jobs.

“That’s the goal,” Fischer said. “The Career team developed a ‘Part-Time Job Toolkit,’ which helps students help themselves get a job. It navigates students step-by-step through how to successfully look for and obtain employment. In addition, the Career team works one-on-one with students looking for work. We also go to the high schools and hold workshops on ‘part-time employment.’”

Avenue Scholars Foundation believes part-time employment is an essential component of students’ preparation for lifelong careers.

“We believe that a part-time job is a great place for students to network, polish transferable skills and prepare them for the world of careers,” Fischer said.

Justin Dueling, Jimmy John’s general manager, says Scales has been doing a great job learning those transferrable skills.

“She overall stays busy, constantly busy doing

whatever tasks we ask her to do,” Dueling said. “She has learned to do a lot of jobs and she does them all well.”

ASF advisors and Dueling have noticed a more confident personality bloom in Scales since she took the Jimmy John’s job.

“I can see she’s definitely motivated,” Dueling said. “She started out kind of quiet, but she has gotten to know people here, and they are all very accepting of her. Angelina is always staying positive; you can see it helping her self esteem.”

Scales’ hours have varied from 19 to 32 hours per week. Her duties are also varied: clean, stock, answer phones, pay car (taking cash from customers in drive-thru), take orders in drive-thru, front cash register, consolidating (wrapping sandwiches) on both line and drive-thru, pulling meats and making sandwiches.

“I do pretty much everything,” Scales said.

According to current part-time job assessment data, 74% of ASF students are employed in part-time jobs.

Cultivating, monitoring and assessing part-time jobs for ASF students is a continuous, revolving process for Career Talent Advisors.

“We are constantly creating opportunities for students to practice their transferrable skills in workshops and in the classroom, which will make them better employees,” Fischer said. “We have open dialogue with students about their strengths and areas of needed improvement.”

Scales, who recently earned her Associate’s Degree from Metropolitan Community College, is enjoying the work experience, but she does aspire to do more, beyond part-time employment.

“I plan on working for a while, save up some money, then eventually go back to get my bachelor’s [degree] in forensic science,” she said.

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*“Our mission is to ensure careers for students of hope and need through education and supportive relationships.”*

## ASF mission: ensure careers for students

*Commentary by Jef Johnston  
Chief Operating Officer*

As a junior, James participated in two Avenue Scholars Explorers activities: urban agriculture and business entrepreneur workshops.

These choices fit in with his career assessment profile and also seemed a natural fit with his Gallup strengths, which told him he liked to take ownership in his projects and that he liked to figure out how to strategically develop a plan to meet his goals.

All the while, he held a part-time job working at a fast-food restaurant. He seemed to have found what he loved to do in the culinary field. He developed a plan for his college study and found the coursework link between school and his future job. He enrolled at The Institute for The Culinary Arts at Metropolitan Community College. Following college, he wants to begin working as a chef, which he found could provide income of \$40,000 a year. He enjoys the responsibility and creativity involved in his work and one day hopes to open his own restaurant.



James is an example of what real world, hands-on experience can do to supplement academics. Employability requires a wide range of skills to be competent, and James learned that together, school and work would be his connection to an adult world and a career where he would make good money and do what he loved to do.

Our ASF mission is to ensure careers for students of hope and need. Our program is planned and purposeful to provide career learning in context.

Talent Advisors are teaching academic skills, but they are also role models who love their own work, who help students develop emotional and behavioral skills to be successful workers, and who guide students in planned work experiences that help students see the connection between their own behavior and career success. They have to 'do' work, not just talk about it in school.

Thus, students have multiple on-site work experiences, part-time jobs, and focused work experiences similar to pre-employment internships. The ultimate goal for Avenue Scholars is a career in a field they love.



**FLOURISH**  
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down," Myles said. "Coming here [to Flourish meetings] lets me relax. I know everything is going to be Ok. I can let my guard down."

At Flourish, Parker and Myles feel part of a large sister-hood.

"We're all family here," Parker said. "The ASF program is an amazing place to be."

### Men's Group

Career Talent Advisor Bradley Ekweremwu is planning to start a men's group, beginning Jan. 9.

"We are looking at the second Thursday of every month," Ekweremwu said. "We want to have educational/fellowship sessions at the Avenue Scholars Career Center, go to movies, go to sporting events, go to dinners, and other events."

"Similar to Flourish, we will talk about major topics relevant to current male students. We want to give them a safe place to give and receive fellowship. A group of male staff have come together to comprise the foundation of the group, and we are going to start marketing the idea to the students early in the new year."



### Scholars earn Associate Degrees

**UPWARD AND ONWARD:** Amber Franklin, Linh Lam, Marisol Novotny, Angelina Scales, Tanner Copenhaver Abraham Mora, proud recipients of Associate Degrees from Metropolitan Community College, were recognized at a dinner reception Nov. 11 at the new Charleston's restaurant, located at 7540 Dodge St.