

Scholarship Service and Step

Written by Maya Beecham
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A total of 34,000 students are educated within the Minneapolis Public School District. Seventy percent are students of color. James C. Burroughs II and staff in the Office of Equity and Diversity within Minneapolis Public Schools, view diversity, equity and respect as key factors in gauging the successful education and guidance of students. From April 13 through April 24, 2010, the Office of Equity and Diversity in partnership with key community stakeholders, has been hosting Scholarship Service and Step Week; a series of events exposing students to the benefits of post secondary education, successful career paths, and service to community. The ultimate goal is to propel the next generation of leaders into positive leadership, and to support 100 Strong Who Care – Building Bridges for the Next Generation, an initiative that matches professionals with students through service-learning events at Minneapolis Public Schools.

Burroughs, a proud Morehouse College Graduate and member of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc, explains, “The purpose of it is to not only to get youth interested in colleges and careers but to also show the other side of fraternities and sororities. A lot of times they are known for movies like School Daze, or Stomp the Yard, where you see stepping but a lot of times it’s more to it than that. There is community service and academic performance. Carter G. Woodson, a member of my great fraternity, Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc., founded Black History month. Other distinguished members include Vernon Jordan, and the 1st Black Governor Douglas Wilder. So those are things we want to help youth understand about the purpose of fraternities and sororities as well.”

Other partners in the initial planning of strategy and events include Delphanie Daniels, FaceTime; Rose McGee, AchieveMpls!; and Christopher Bennet, Morehouse College Alumni Association. Minneapolis Public Schools reached out to these community partners and posed the question, “What can we do to come together and create a scholarship and service step week so it’s not only a step show, but also celebrates the service and scholarship of fraternities and sororities.” The outcome includes the following events.

Dr. Robert M. Franklin, Morehouse College, Speaks at University of Minnesota

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Wednesday, April 21, 2010

100 Strong Who Care at Minneapolis Public Schools
Thursday, April 22, 2010 and Friday, April 23, 2010

Delta Sigma Theta and Fellowship Missionary Baptist Church Blood Drive
Saturday, April 24, 2010

Morehouse College Alumni Association Walk for Prostate Cancer
Saturday, April 24, 2010

AchieveMpls! Parent College Tour
Saturday, April 24, 2010

8th Annual Midwest Greek Step Show (A portion of proceeds to 100 Strong Who Care.)
Saturday, April 24, 2010

"We want to make sure that our young people have exposure to the various aspects of college life. The main goal of Minneapolis Public Schools is to have every child college ready and in order to do that, you have to create a passion in that child around going to college and what college is. So with all of these events, we are doing we want to give youth a slice of college life. And whether you go to the University of Minnesota, Morehouse College, Augsburg College, or Minneapolis Community and Technical College, we want youth to know there is fun in college, service activities, and people who care --first and foremost. We are bringing people in who have gone to colleges and are now in their careers. We are going to have college students talk to youth about engaging in college and moving onto their careers. It is really important for us to bring in that connection from the students to the community," said Burroughs.

The overarching vision for the Office of Equity and Diversity is continually answering the question, "How do we connect the richness of diversity we have in our school system with the community, the business community, the non-profit community, and how do we make sure everybody is excited about helping our youth graduate from high school and move onto their careers?"

"So a lot of the work we do through 100 Strong Who Care, Service Scholarship and Step, and even work through our business partners, partnerships with a diverse supplier base, is geared towards building that community connection with our schools. As we all know children of color are not doing as well on test scores, and aren't doing well in graduation rates. We want to create innovative programs that can help them do better," said Burroughs.

For more information on the Scholarship Service and Step Week, contact Adebisi A. Wilson, Minneapolis Public Schools Office of Diversity and Equal Opportunity, at (612) 668-0018 or adebisi.wilson@mpls.k12.mn.us.