

Resources for pregnant and parenting teens

Written by Abeni Hill, Insight News Intern
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Broadway High School, 3017 E. 31st Street, Minneapolis, has been providing resources for pregnant and parenting teens in the Minneapolis school district since 2000, through a personalized learning model and childcare facilities.

The school's mission is to ensure that "every one of these young mothers becomes college and career ready," said family and community liaison Lutunji Abram.

The curriculum at Broadway is "project-based," said Abram. The students find something that interests them and they expand on it.

Devanna Baxter, a student, describes the curriculum at Broadway as a "different way of learning because we don't do as much classroom work."

Biology and Chemistry Teacher Paul Peña recently received a grant to clear out an old playground area and build an outdoor lab and classroom. The new science lab will provide space for activities such as environmental studies, raising a few chickens, and gardening.

Broadway also provides classes for students who are learning English as a second language.

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“Thirty percent of the student body needs support with their English,” said English as a second language teacher Sarah Sehnert.

Broadway School used to be located on West Broadway Avenue in North Minneapolis, but transferred to South Minneapolis and is now housed in Longfellow elementary school. “Broadway High School moved to the Longfellow building because this building accommodates the students’ educational pursuits and social service needs,” said Abram. “While the mother is in class learning and developing leadership skills, her child is just on the other side of the building being taught in a loving and nurturing environment equipped with well-educated and experienced day care specialists.

“Minneapolis Public Schools has supported teen parents by providing day care on school campuses for over 20 years. In particular, North Community High school provided programming under MICE which is now known as TAPPP,” said Abram.

Teen Adolescent Pregnancy and Parenting Program (TAPPP) provides “a wraparound support service,” said TAPPP Coordinator Laura Knutson. The program offers students “parent-child interaction time once a week” as well as daycare services, parenting classes, and a prenatal education. TAPPP also works with North High, South, and Roosevelt High School.

“While you are learning they are taking care of your baby,” said student Jenny Machuza when referring to Broadway. “And you know they are taking care of your baby.”

Machuza turned 13 when she came to Broadway High School and this marks her second year at the school. When she graduates, Machuza plans to attend cosmetology school.

“You have teachers who understand what you are going through as well,” said Baxter.

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Resource teacher Dr. Darlene Gibson describes herself as an advocate and mentor to her students.

“I love giving my services to the students who need it the most,” said Gibson. “Being a single mom seems to be a challenge.”

Broadway High School also holds community town halls every Thursday. In the town halls, organizations from the community offer their services to the students.

“Town halls are extremely important for the population we serve,” said Abram. Some of the discussion topics are employment and housing. Abram said they hold the meetings “to avoid making premature decisions due to lack of knowledge. We want our students to be educated, encouraged, and empowered.”

Last year, Minneapolis Public Schools superintendent Dr. Bernadeia Johnson asked Abram to start a mentoring program at Broadway. Abram said it was a success.

“The program allows career-oriented women from the community to mentor the students at Broadway,” said Abram. “The mentor program is still in existence and mentors are currently matched and being matched with students.”

Abram chooses the mentors herself. One of the current mentors, Natalie Johnson Lee, former 5th Ward City Councilperson, was her mentor when she was a teen mom. “She taught me the importance of a resume,” said Abram.

There are more than 20 mentors in the program. “We have been so blessed,” said Abram. There are very “active” mentors in the program who significantly engage with their mentees.”

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Mentors are expected to connect with their mentees for one hour every two weeks. Connecting can be as “simple as a text or telephone call,” said Abram. “Most are connecting over lunch.” Sharon Sayles-Belton visited the school to “speak words of encouragement” to the students. 5th Congressional District Deputy Director Darlene Benjamin attended job fairs with her mentee.

“Erika Binger connected with the program last year as well and is still in contact with her mentee who just successfully finished her first year of college at MCTC,” said Abram. She emphasized the importance of mentoring, stating that “mentoring is a powerful force that produces positive results.”

If you are interested in becoming a mentor, please contact Lutunji Abram at (612) 668-4714 or lutunji.abram@mpls.k12.mn.us.