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Youth fire program promotes early education in public service

OMAHA, Neb. — The Junior Firefighter Cadet Program will reach its first milestone on Thursday, May 14, when it hosts its first induction ceremony at the Howard Kennedy Elementary School at 5 p.m. The new program is a collaboration between the D.R.E.A.M. after-school program at Howard Kennedy Elementary School, the Omaha Fire Department, and the EMS and fire science programs at MCC.

The Junior Firefighter Cadet Program is designed to allow students to think about careers outside the box. It gives young students the opportunity to learn about fire science and EMS fields and be part of a group, all while having fun. The program is an academic year-round program that targets students in the 4th, 5th and 6th grades at Howard Kennedy Elementary School. The students engage in fire department operations, fire safety, discipline, physical fitness, citizenship, volunteerism and career planning. Along the way, students can achieve rank advancement and partake in a graduation ceremony that is held at the end of each phase, where they receive their rank badge, certificate and recognition for their hard work.

One of the goals is to introduce young students to careers in public service with a clear pathway from 4th grade through college.

“Some young students in our community do not know that minorities or women can be firefighters. We knew we had to change their experiences and provide them with the opportunity to explore these professions. We firmly believe in the philosophy of ‘to see one is to be one’. Our goal is to provide opportunities for students to see career fields that they may one day want to work in,” said Stacey Ocander, dean of health and public services at MCC.

“A program like this allows students to know that whatever their dreams are, they’re attainable and that there are people in the community who care about their success. Every day is a new learning platform for these students, and now they can focus on the long-term capabilities of their lives and their community. This program will be the difference in students’ lives,” said Raymone Sazone, site director for the D.R.E.A.M. after-school mentoring program at Howard Kennedy Elementary School.

“The Omaha Fire Department is proud of our partnership in the Junior Fire Cadet Program. This program will pay dividends for years to come, as students will obtain skills and knowledge that not only will prepare them for careers in public safety but for success in life. The community will benefit as these students become positive role models for others to emulate. The Omaha Fire Department benefits because with the development of the necessary skills and attitudes at an early age, it will give them a head start in pursuing a career in the fire service,” said Tim McCaw, battalion chief at the Omaha Fire Department.

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Metropolitan Community College, accredited by the Higher Learning Commission, is a comprehensive, public community college that offers affordable, quality education to all residents of Dodge, Douglas, Sarpy and Washington counties. Founded in 1974, MCC has the largest enrollment out of six community colleges in Nebraska and is the second largest postsecondary institution in the state. MCC serves more than 40,000 unique credit and noncredit students.