

How this learning center nurtures kids

Tiana Junious is a mother with mission to recreate environment

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Rochester Democrat and Chronicle USA TODAY NETWORK

Over the last year, education has drastically changed for children. What hasn't changed is the importance of a nurturing environment to cultivate learning.

Tiana Junious grew up in an environment that continually supported her — even as storms developed outside the classroom.

When Tiana was 15, her older brother Jasper Junious was murdered.

“None of my teachers knew what happened. I don’t know if they cared to know what happened,” Junious said. “I couldn’t relate to any of them anyway. I was taken care of by the neighborhood and my family.”

Today, Junious is a grown woman, a teacher, a tutor, and a mom with a mission to re-create that nurturing for students in Rochester.

The Noetic Learning Center

It's Friday afternoon at the Noetic Learning Center in Rochester's 19th Ward.

Tiana Junious, the owner, is wrapping up her day as a substitute teacher for the Rochester City School District. After virtually wishing her students a good weekend — a man enters inquiring about children’s books with Black characters. Junious asks the man to check back in an hour and bring his kids so they can scan her collection. He exits with a smile.

“He doesn’t want books; he just wanted to stop by and say hey,” Junious said, giggling at the interaction.

“When my students come in, the time they spend with me is the most interaction they have with some-



A child during a tutoring session at the Noetic Learning Center.

PHOTO PROVIDED BY TIANA JUNIOUS



Junious

Interaction is the secret sauce at No etic — kids find it hard to leave once they enter. The synergy helps with the loss of the classroom setting for youngsters who’ve had to adjust to remote learning.

one outside of their family. Most kids don’t want to leave; they stay for hours,” said Junious.

DeAnna Anderson, a resident of the 19th Ward, enlisted Junious to tutor her daughter after a recommendation.

“She works really well with our daughter, Anderson said. “After the first session, she was so excited; she couldn’t wait for the next one.”

The Noetic Learning Center opened in early November after RCSD laid off Junious in August. After teaching in the school district for seven years, most recently at Andrew J. Townson School 39, Junious had no idea what to do next.

Junious reflected. She had dreams of one day starting her own school. The thought process led her to mobile tutoring.

Junious steadily built a client base throughout the community but traveling in and out of parents’ homes during the pandemic was not ideal.

“I knew I had to find a space. I didn’t want to bring the virus back home to my daughter,” Junious said.

With help from her father, Junious found a suitable base for the learning center in the 19th Ward. She quickly went from application to approval, and before she knew it, Junious had a home for her clients and an option for the community. Monday through Saturday, she tutors 10-12 kids from kindergarten to 11th grade in all subjects.

DeAnna Anderson’s daughter struggled with reading and sight words, but after a few sessions with Junious, she began to build confidence.

“Now she’s reading short stories without a problem,” Anderson said. “Her teacher has noticed the progression, and I couldn’t be any happier.”

the back of their mind.”

Junious rides a wave of emotion with her students through unstable living conditions, fires, domestic disputes, and food insecurity. She makes house visits, shuttles food back and forth — all the while hoping her learning center can serve as a refuge.

“My daughter enjoys her loving and caring spirit,” said DeAnna Anderson. “She is very patient and takes her time to meet the needs of every child I have seen her work with—children love to see a teacher or tutor that can relate to them.” Operating Noetic comes with its challenges.

“I’m still trying to build revenue, but while doing that, I don’t want to overcharge the community,” Junious said. “I can’t charge a single mother 50 dollars an hour during a pandemic. I have to take all that into consideration. I still have to keep the lights on.”

To combat the residual impact the current economy has on her venture, Junious hopes to work with nearby businesses to sponsor neighborhood children — creating a scholarship program.

Junious also mentors aspiring teachers at Noetic. Junious guides those in graduate degree programs who come from neighborhoods similar to the one that bred her. She hopes the instruction can generate more black educators from the community who can relate to their students.

“We have to create that path. We have to empower and inspire each other. I want aspiring teachers to come in here and work with the kids, “ Junious said. “That’s the only way you’re going to learn how to teach. You’re not going to learn how to teach through a book.”

Suddenly the door of the learning center opens. The man inquiring about children’s books with black characters has returned. This time, his kids accompany him, eager to check out the books.

On a typical day at Noetic, Junious fills in as a substitute teacher for RCSD during school hours while her niece attends a separate virtual classroom. Around 4 p.m., she disinfects the center; the students enter, decompress, and the tutoring begins.

“We go through each of their lessons; we have fun and play around until their parents come. Sometimes I’m here from nine to nine,” Junious said.

The long hours speak to Tiana’s passion for teaching — a career path that became clear while a student at Monroe Community College. Talented in Math, Junious gravitated toward accounting first, but a school project to instruct a class gave her the teaching bug. She switched her major the following semester.

“I got a placement at School 34 in the city, and I fell in love with teaching,” Junious said. “I said to myself, ‘This is what I should be doing.’ Our students don’t get to see people who look like them, teach them. So I felt like I could help my community more by being a teacher.”

The Rochester community runs through her blood. She’s been in the area most of her life — graduating from RCSD before attending MCC and Buffalo State College. Her parents, who have been together 43 years, ensured her surroundings were stable enough to excel in the classroom through every step.

“The house I grew up in, I stayed there until I went to college. I came back from college to that house. I went to the elementary school across the street. I went to middle school down the street. I went to high school around the corner. My mom dropped me off at school most days,” Junious said.

With a protective bubble that always emphasized education, Junious eventually obtained her graduate degree from Nazareth College. Her experience growing up would come in handy during an early teaching experience at Dr. Charles T. Lunsford School 19.

“I knew the kids in the neighborhood. I knew their parents. I could easily tell a kid that I knew their dad — I grew up with him, and you’re

“I guess I was wrong. Maybe he really did want books,” Junious said.

As Junious helps the children sift through her collection, it’s apparent that you come to Noetic Learning Center for education, but you stay for the environment fostered by Ms. Junious.

Contact Robert Bell at: rbell@gannett.com. Follow him on Twitter: @byrobbell & Instagram: @byrobbell This coverage is only possible with support from our readers.



The Noetic Learning Center in the 19th Ward ROBERT BELL/ROCHESTER DEMOCRAT AND CHRONICLE

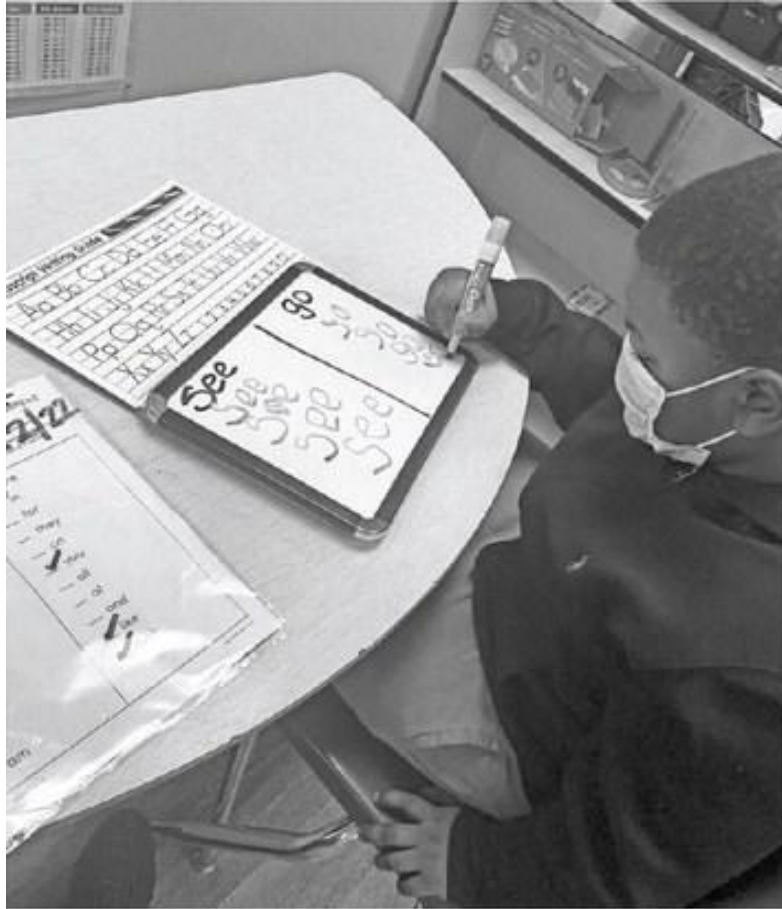
not going to act out in my class,” Junious said. “The kids respected that I grew up two streets over.”

Junious connection to her students is vital, especially during trauma — pain that she soothes through her adolescent wounds.

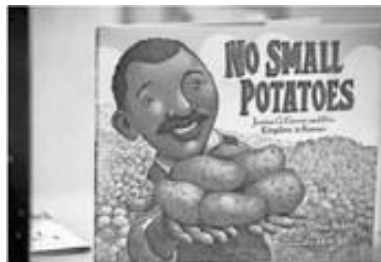
“I could relate when my student came in and said his uncle was killed last night. I know that feeling. Let me comfort you. When it comes to my students, I have a better understanding of what they’re going through,” said Junious.

Junious believes it is essential to know a bit about her students’ life outside of their studies. Some parents are reluctant to have intrusive conversations. The stigma of “staying out of folks business” can hinder her knowledge of the kids; nevertheless, she takes the time to get to know each family’s story.

“If I’m hard on a student when they’re here, and they’re going through so much at home, I’m being inconsiderate,” Junious said. “They’re not going to learn from me because they’re worried about whatever is going on in



Tutoring time at Noetic Learning Center PHOTO PROVIDED BY
TIANA JUNIOUS



“No Small Potatoes” is a book by Tonya Bolden at the Noetic Learning Center. ROBERT BELL/ROCHESTER DEMOCRAT AND CHRONICLE

