

**Featured:** CONTINUING ON: Clarke Central High School Assistant Principal Tamika Henson poses for a photo outside of the CCHS cafeteria on April 26. Despite growing up under difficult circumstances, such as her teen pregnancy, Henson never let it prevent her from pushing forward. "My pregnancy never was an obstacle to my growth. It was (like) fire," Henson said. "It was what ignited me, pushing me to excel, to be all that I could because I was no longer just thinking about Tamika. I was thinking about (my daughter), Jasmine (Payne). I knew that I couldn't take no for an answer. I knew that I couldn't make excuses. I had to make it happen. I knew that the lifestyle in which I grew up, that's not what I wanted for my daughter." Photo by Lucas Donnelly



# HENSON'S HELPING HAND

*CCHS Assistant Principal Tamika Henson's childhood challenges have impacted her mindset when it comes to helping the CCHS community.*

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and asks them what's wrong, seeking to help them out. The student reacts with skepticism: why would the administrators care?

Little do they know, CCHS Assistant Principal Tamika Henson has had her fair share of experiences with life's challenges. Growing up in Nellie B. Homes, a low-income Athens neighborhood, Henson dealt with widespread challenges, including poverty, family struggles and her teen pregnancy.

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It is May 15. A student walks out into the Clarke Central High School bus loop after failing another test. They're struggling, and their options are dwindling fast. As they trudge to the buses, an administrator notices their troubled expression

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CCHS Assistant Principal

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Despite struggles she faced as a 16-year-old mother in 1997, Henson doesn't view her past with regret and believes it made her the person she is today.

"I actually was an adult before I was an adult. I became an adult student who had a mature mind and who thought outside of high school (because), at that point, I could no longer think as a teenage girl. I had to think as a responsible parent. So I had to grow up very quickly," Henson said.

CCHS Principal Dr. Swade Huff has known Henson since she first started

working for the district as a bus driver.

"Being a parent at a young age, she did not use (her problems) as a barrier (to her) success. She transitioned as a bus driver for the district for a period of time, continued to work hard on a degree in college (and) became a math teacher," Huff said. "Excuses are a pathway to nowhere. She has 101 excuses that she could have used in her lifetime. But she chose not to, and I applaud her for her perseverance."

Despite Payne growing up with a single teen mother, Henson worked to make sure her daughter lived the best life possible.

"I always tell people I can't give up. Look who my mom is. Giving up isn't an option. I have to do this. I must do this. I have to succeed," Payne said. "She's an inspiration to many, and oftentimes when I tell people our story, they're really shocked that that's where we come from. She's an inspiration, especially (to) me. I know because of her (that) I can't give up on anything. And I know that I can do it. I mean, she did it."

Henson's perspective on sympathy and pity shows how her experiences have impacted her ability to understand the people around her.

"A lot of times, when people feel sorry for you, they tend to support you in ways that may enable you to keep going down a negative path. They will not push you to your full potential because they feel sorry for you," Henson said.

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**-- JASMINE PAYNE,**  
Henson's oldest daughter

"That's why I don't want to ever have sympathy for someone because I don't want to put them in a boat where I feel like they can't. (However), I want to empathize with them and support them to do all that they can do."

CCHS junior Jaedah Faust was in Henson's 2021-2022 Honors Geometry class when Henson was a math department teacher, and has experienced her tough love and mindset firsthand.

"Recently, I got into a big conflict. She was there to help me and talk to me about what I could do to avoid a situation in the future," Faust said. "She (told) me how I'm a great student, (that) I have a lot to look forward to in life and that I shouldn't (involve) myself in things that could harm my career."

Math and Career, Technical and Agricultural Education (CTAE) department Instructional Coach Alexis Scott worked as Henson's instructional coach when Henson was working in the math department, and has noticed her influence on the people around her.

"I have seen her care. I have seen students who are having a very difficult time come to her and she helps them through that difficult time," Scott said. "Whether that be with an issue at school or an issue that they're having outside of school, they feel safe talking to Ms. Henson about that concern and they view her as a safe adult in the building."

Henson plans on using her story, mindset and advice to great effect as one of CCHS' assistant principals.

"Anybody can sit down and say 'No, I can't.' What is that? What is 'I can't'? That doesn't make sense to me. I encourage everyone, regardless of any situation (they) are in, that does not have to determine who you are (or) who you develop to be," Henson said. "We all have room to grow at all times, and you can wither up and die, (but) what good is that? You (have) to fight really hard to keep going, to grow, to push, to flourish, to soar."



**Above:** A NEW BEGINNING: Clarke Central High School Assistant Principal Tamika Henson poses with her first daughter in 1995. Being a teen parent, Henson became a mature adult faster than most. "I no longer thought as a teenage little girl," Henson said. "I began to think as an adult because I was in a situation where I had made adult choices. So I had to then think about the future. Not just my future, but the future for me and my daughter." Photo courtesy of Tamika Henson



**Above:** GRADUATION: Clarke Central High School Assistant Principal Tamika Henson poses during the Cedar Shoals High School Class of 1996 Graduation. Henson had to skip out on valuable parts of her high school career to raise her daughter. "High school is like the pathway to the rest of your life. Have fun, but be serious when necessary. Oftentimes, it's necessary to engage in the full high school experience," Henson said. "Because I didn't, I wasn't a part of any clubs, or nothing like that. I didn't go to games, I didn't do any of the high school stuff." Photo courtesy of Tamika Henson