

Dearborn Heights Educator Wins Administrator of the Year Award



Nawal Hamadeh

ACTFL Member Nawal Hamadeh, an educator leading three Dearborn Heights/Detroit schools that fill a crucial gap for low-income, often Arab-American students, was recently recognized as Michigan's Charter School Administrator of the Year. The schools she founded serve 2,000 K–12 students. Hamadeh was recognized in November during the 10th annual Michigan Charter Schools Conference, which drew

over 3,000 educators to Detroit's Cobo Center.

"Mrs. Hamadeh talks with students about her own story—about starting with nothing," said Angel Ouza, a 2004 graduate of Star International Academy in Dearborn Heights. "She works to inspire students all the time, asking if their education is going well and talking about how important college is."

Besides Star International, Hamadeh leads Universal Academy in Detroit and Universal Learning Academy in Dearborn Heights. The three schools immerse students in Arabic and English languages. They learn reading, writing, comprehension, and grammar in both, and Arabic is taught at beginning, intermediate, and advanced levels. The schools also promote the study of Arabic and American cultures, have diverse staff members who share their cultures and give children a global view, follow

the Michigan Framework with a curriculum fully aligned to state standards, and meet national and international standards including adopting and introducing the International Baccalaureate Standards this past fall at the middle and high school level.

Earlier this year, the schools received a federal grant worth nearly \$1 million over three years to expand their Arabic programs. Only three such grants were given across the country, part of a national push to increase the number of students studying languages deemed critical to America's competitiveness.

"Nawal Hamadeh is a true, 21st century educator, implementing education in ways that position all children for success as adults," said Dan Quisenberry, president of the Michigan Association of Public School Academies (MAPSA). "She builds bridges, connecting students, educators, parents, and communities. She is a role model with remarkable lessons to teach all of us in education, no matter who our students are or where our schools are located."

In describing her reason for starting the schools, Hamadeh expresses a passion for children, families, and communities. She talks of strengthening an often-elusive connection between disparate cultures.

"We promote peace, not wars," she said when the foreign language grant was announced. "The more we understand each other, and our cultures, the less conflict there is. We bring people together, sharing in the process of learning, sharing meals, sharing lives. It's a good model for a global world."