

COMMUNITY NEWS

Local educator runs top high school

By Khalil AlHajal

Saturday, 01.19.2008, 04:25am

- **The U.S. News and World Report analyzed more than 18,000 high schools in 40 states, identifying 1,591 of the gold, silver or bronze medal schools.**
- **Six Wayne County high schools were ranked, one silver and five bronze, including Star International Acad founded in 1998 by Arab American Nawal Hamadeh.**

DEARBORN — One of the top high schools in the country, according to the U.S. News and World Report, is a Dear Heights charter academy attended almost entirely by Arab American and other minority students.

The report analyzed more than 18,000 high schools in 40 states, identifying 1,591 of them as gold, silver or bronze n schools.



Six Wayne County high schools were ranked, one silver and bronze, including Star International Academy, founded in 199 Arab American Nawal Hamadeh.

The privately run, publicly funded format of the charter sc allows administrators, Hamadeh said, to cater to students' indiv needs with specialized programs and policies.

"There's more autonomy in the decision making," she said, th the school and its staff must meet the same standards as tradit public schools.

The report's rankings were determined by three main factors t on academic and enrollment data from the 2005-2006 school ye The data analyzed whether each school's students performed b than statistically expected for the average student in their ; whether the schools' least advantaged students—black, Hisp low-income—were performing better than average for si students in the state, and the degree to which schools prep

students for college-level work.

Hamadeh runs the school and two others in the Detroit-area through her management company Hamadeh Educat Services.

In 2007, the schools received a federal grant worth nearly \$1 million over three years to expand their Arabic progr Hamadeh also received Michigan's Charter School Administrator of the Year award at the 2007 Michigan Charter Scl Conference.

The accomplishments have come despite nearly 90 percent of Star International Students being economically disadvant She attributes the success to maintaining a wide variety of programs tailored to accommodate diverse needs of stud offering English as a second language, Arabic as a second language, optional single-gender classes, extra multicul curriculum, free after school tutoring and extra-curriculars, and an 11-sport athletic program.



"We just have to work harder and offer more programs that accommodate different needs," Hamadeh said. "Somet (disadvantaged) students don't have enough support. We ha make up for that."

Students of Star International come from throughout the Detroi Ann Arbor areas, Hamadeh said. Parents learn about the sc through word of mouth.

"Diversity is very important," she said about the 27 diff countries represented in the school between staff and students. Hamadeh said that on several occasions, parents have moved children from Star International to other schools, only to return later, citing its safe environment.

"No school has all angels, that's for sure," she said, describing

International as strict with an emphasis on discipline, but not

way that inhibits creativity.

"They really trust us. They trust that we understand the cultures and understand student needs."

At the upcoming annual Martin Luther King Scholarship Dinner held by the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, Hamadeh is set to receive an Educator of the Year Award.

She insists that she's never had awards and accolades in mind as she's worked over the years, but has just tried to maintain quality programs.

"I'm very excited and very happy," she said about the various recognitions she and her schools have received. "It's rewarding."

"The fact that I'm getting an award just makes me even more responsible to live up to it."