

## Delivering the Dream 2007

Picture a stream of educators five people wide, extending down the hall of Detroit's Cobo Center, continuing beyond the line of sight. Minutes pass as they file into the dining room, smiling, networking, comparing notes. Five minutes pass, and there's no end in sight. Ten minutes go by, and they're still coming, with a steady hum of anticipation. Fifteen minutes later, and the last of 3,000 participants are finally approaching the door. Does anyone still question whether Michigan's charter public schools movement is a powerful force?

Inspired by more than 100 speakers and session leaders, attendees at the 10th annual Michigan Charter Schools Conference are back in their schools today, implementing ideas and strategies with renewed enthusiasm. We at MAPSA extend another warm "thank you" to all who helped make this event a success, including our sponsors.

### Congratulations to the following 2007 award winners:

- **Teacher of the Year:**

- **Amy Straus**

- 5th grade, Central Academy in Ann Arbor



- **Administrator of the Year:**

- **Nawal Hamadeh**

- founder & leader, Star International and Universal Learning academies in Dearborn Heights, and Universal Academy in Detroit



- **School of Excellence: Oakland Academy** in Portage



## Dearborn Heights Educator Wins Administrator of the Year Award

For More Information, Contact  
MAPSA at 517-374-9167

**EMBARGOED until 1:30 p.m. Friday, Nov. 2, 2007**

## Dearborn Heights Educator Wins Administrator of the Year Award

- **Detroit, Taylor, Oak Park leaders are finalists**

DETROIT -- Nawal Hamadeh, an educator leading three Dearborn Heights/Detroit schools that fill a crucial gap for low-income, often Arab American students, will be recognized Nov. 2 as Michigan's Charter School Administrator of the Year.

The schools she founded serve 2,000 K-12 students. A native of Lebanon, Hamadeh serves not only as lead educator, but as a role model to children dealing with economic and cultural challenges.

"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."

Ouza, a University of Michigan alumna, has been a substitute teacher at Star and hopes to return as a social worker after completing her master's degree. Ouza admires Hamadeh for her gentle influence, including through personally funded college scholarships.

Hamadeh will be recognized during Friday's 10th annual Michigan Charter Schools Conference, which will draw 3,000 educators to Detroit's Cobo Center. The award will be presented during lunch, between 1 and 1:30 p.m. **Hamadeh will not know of the award beforehand.**

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. Further, Arabic is taught at beginning, intermediate and advanced levels.
- 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.
- Meet national and international standards including adopting and introducing the International Baccalaureate Standards this 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."

Erik Garr, a Detroit native who's now a partner with Chicago's Diamond Management & Technology Consultants, worked with Hamadeh recently on developing a strategic business plan.

"I was impressed with how well run the schools are, plus they're filling a profound need," Garr said. "When you do business planning, you look at market research, and it's clear -- we need Nawal Hamadeh and her schools. They're meeting a need other schools are just not addressing, and it would take too long to get them to change. ... Imagine trying to learn English in a traditional school. We'd lose a lot of these kids. Nawal's not losing them."

Star and Universal are "beating the odds," with more than half of their students qualifying for subsidized lunch while at least 60% are proficient in both math and English language arts. Further, Universal was recognized in May through the Skillman Foundation's Good Schools program in Detroit.

Leila Hamade, director of compliance for the schools, said Nawal Hamadeh keeps the focus on students and

continuously finds new tools and methods for staff to use in helping students. Students know her, and parents trust her. Importantly, Nawal makes extensive use of data in educational and staffing decisions, a push that permeates each school.

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

"We promote peace, not wars," Hamadeh 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."

The four other 2007 Administrator of the Year finalists are:

**Nan Gill, University Preparatory Academy in Detroit.** UPA founder Doug Ross calls Gill a rare leader with the ability to think big picture, implement plans and relate well with others. She was a primary creator of U-Prep when it opened in 2000 as a middle school. When the elementary was added, she designed the building, curriculum, educational goals and environment, then led the way in making it happen. This summer, she was promoted to chief instructional officer, overseeing five principals and responsible for graduating students who can compete with peers from the state's best schools.

**Rashid Fai'Sal, Academy of Oak Park Marlow.** Fai'Sal knows students personally, taking time to challenge each to greater achievement. He monitors classes, talks with parents, and encourages students. Sometimes it's by talking about great colleges, and sometimes it's by giving a youngster a book about Jackie Robinson. He's developed teams among staff and meets with them regularly to plan improvements to the school's programs. He seeks opportunities to showcase excellence, such as the NAACP writing contest, which last year brought a first and third-place award to academy students.

**Frank Nardelli, Dove Academy in Detroit.** Nardelli is a loving leader who expects and receives the utmost from staff, students and parents. That's essential in a school located in a high-crime area, serving an at-risk population often struggling with family issues. Under his leadership, the school secured accreditation through the North Central Association, beat the local district on the MEAP, and this spring was named one of six high-performing Detroit elementaries by the Skillman Foundation. Nardelli started as a first-year teacher at Dove when it opened 10 years ago, was promoted to assistant principal, and took the helm in 2004.

**Angela Romanowski, Trillium Academy in Taylor.** Romanowski is a finalist for the second year in a row, leading a school that continues to make gains in MEAP scores while combining a focus on Montessori methods and the arts. Romanowski has nurtured a strongly cohesive team of teachers who are expert in individualized learning. Under her leadership, the school has expanded to include high school and is adding a wing with more classrooms, a second gym, another specials room for art, music, drama and Spanish, and a tech lab. This fall, Trillium's enrollment grew 25%, to 612 students.

## Oakland Academy Wins Statewide School of Excellence Award

For More Information, Contact  
MAPSA at 517-374-9167

**EMBARGOED until 1:30 p.m. Friday, Nov. 2, 2007**

## Oakland Academy Wins Statewide School of Excellence Award

- **Detroit, Dearborn Heights, Big Rapids and Taylor schools are finalists**

DETROIT/PORTAGE -- A charter public school where children are assessed weekly, with parents receiving notes each Monday about the week's learning objectives and progress reports each Friday, will receive the 2007 Michigan School of Excellence Award on Friday, Nov. 2 at Cobo Center.

Oakland Academy was started 10 years ago by the Foundation for Behavioral Resources. It serves grades K-6 with an emphasis on the basics and a 10/1 student-teacher ratio. Students exceeded the state average on 10 of 13 MEAP tests last year. On the national Northwest Evaluation Association Measures of Academic Progress, Oakland students in every grade showed greater growth than their peers across the country, including by 30+ percentage points in grades 1 and 5 and by 25+ points in grades 2 and 6.

Oakland staff will be recognized during the 10th annual Michigan Charter Schools Conference, which will draw 3,000 educators from across the state. **Oakland staff will not know of the award before receiving it** during lunch on Friday, between 1 and 1:30 p.m. Oakland is one of 230 charter public schools in the state.

"Oakland Academy teachers, administrators, parents, students and board members are true leaders," said Dan Quisenberry, president of the Michigan Association of Public School Academies (MAPSA). "They provide a small, family-oriented environment that offers ultimate accountability. This is a model school that deserves replication nationwide for the benefit of children and communities alike."

Principal Melissa Dahlinger said in addition to weekly report cards, a focus on the basics and low student-to-teacher ratio, children excel because of a tutorial assistance program that helps both those who have special needs and those who are above grade level. Math groups let students advance at their own pace, and a Character Counts program and community service projects help children develop exemplary behavior.

"We offer a choice many families look for ... Parents feel like they're part of a learning community. They know what's going on with their child, not just academically, but emotionally and socially, too."

Dr. Grace Emily, school co-founder and president of the Augusta-based Behavioral Research Foundation, said the organization plays a key role in the school. Its board members come from across the country, from entities such as Johns Hopkins University. Most directors are psychologists dedicated to operating education like a business, with strong accountability and extensive teacher training.

The foundation helps teachers become experts in matters such as classroom management, behavior management and the psychology of learning. Oakland teachers have a performance pay system, earning up to an additional 20 percent of their salary based on academic performance.

The four other 2007 School of Excellence finalists are:

**Crossroads Charter Academy in Big Rapids.** With nearly 700 K-12 students this year, Crossroads is an academic powerhouse, exceeding the state average on 22 of 27 MEAP tests. Founded by a group of homeschooling parents, the school provides foundational math and a phonics-based curriculum. The school's fifth graduating class this past spring included 36 students -- 27 are going on to college and secured more than \$700,000 in scholarships; nine have nearly full rides. One hallmark of the school is its on-site professional learning center for teachers. Other districts, including Reed City, Rockford and Grand Rapids, have all come to the school and its center for training. There, they learn to teach to a variety of learning styles, delve into benchmarking and testing, and research the latest teaching methods.

**Detroit Merit Academy in Detroit.** Merit "beats the odds" as defined by the state Department of Education. More than half of its students qualify for subsidized lunch, and at least 60% are proficient in math and English language arts. Merit exceeded the state average on 15 of 27 MEAP tests last year. On the national Northwest Evaluation Association Measures of Academic Progress, its reading growth was in the top 5% of schools nationwide; its math growth was in the top 15%. Students are grouped by skill level, and individualized instruction is key. If middle schoolers are ready for algebra, that's what they take -- from a textbook found in West Bloomfield's 10th-grade classrooms. Students at the novice level have their own teachers. Principal Heidi Benser brings an unusual background to the job, having worked previously with mentally ill teens and juvenile delinquents.

**Trillium Academy in Taylor.** Trillium is a strong school that continues to make MEAP gains while combining a focus

on Montessori methods and arts education. Its teachers are cohesive and dedicated to the use of individualized learning. Trillium has expanded to include high school and is adding a wing with more classrooms, a gym, a specials room for art, music, drama and Spanish, and a tech lab. Even students in grades 3-6 choose an elective, and the school is home to the area's community theater company. Trillium teachers are earning state and national recognition, including one who was a regional finalist for 2005-06 and 2006-07 Michigan Teacher of the Year. This fall, Trillium's enrollment grew 25%, to 612 students.

**Star International Academy in Dearborn Heights.** Star is "beating the odds" as defined by the Michigan Department of Education. More than half of its students qualify for subsidized lunch, and at least 60% are proficient in math and English language arts. Its MEAP scores exceeded the state average on two tests and tied on a third. More than 1/3 of its students have limited English skills, and nearly all share an Arabic heritage. Star was one of three U.S. schools this spring to be awarded a federal Foreign Language Assistance Program grant to teach Arabic languages. Star will receive nearly \$1 million over three years as part of a national push to increase the number of students studying foreign languages deemed critical to America's competitiveness. Significantly, the K-12 school is adopting the academically rigorous International Baccalaureate Program in middle and high school -- one of just a dozen Michigan schools to do so.

## Ann Arbor Educator Wins Teacher of the Year Award

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## Ann Arbor Educator Wins Teacher of the Year Award

- Detroit, Dearborn Heights, Taylor teachers are finalists

DETROIT/ANN ARBOR -- Amy Straus, a 5th-grade teacher whose lessons become hands-on projects teaching multiple subjects, will be recognized Nov. 2 as Michigan's Charter School Teacher of the Year. Straus, who teaches at Central Academy in Ann Arbor, orchestrates learning through projects such as:

- A Shakespeare study that has students reading original text, adapting it as a screenplay, developing actor biographies, creating puppets, and recording their own version of the Bard's stories as a movie.
- Christopher Columbus journals, comic books that explore scientific concepts such as gravity and other Super Hero forces, and creation of mountains that are dissected as topographical maps.
- An end-of-year detective study with students writing mysteries and learning from a real police officer.

Straus will be recognized during the 10th annual Michigan Charter Schools Conference, which will draw 3,000 educators to Detroit's Cobo Center over two days. The award will be presented during Friday's lunch, between 1 and 1:30 p.m.

**Straus will not know of the award beforehand.** Michigan's 230 charter public schools employ about 5,000 educators.

Parent Lena Alkhatib said Straus' students are respectful and well-behaved -- standing at the water fountain without talking, for example. Yet, they have fun, are engaged in learning, and love their teacher.

"Where do I start? Miss Straus controls the class perfectly. She had 25 students last year, and she was able to contain each of them, each with his or her own attitudes and opinions," Alkhatib said.

"She helped my daughter be organized. My daughter was always doing more. I'd tell her something looked good, and she'd say, 'No, if I can do more, I should write it down,'" Alkhatib said. "At the beginning of the year, my daughter admired Miss Straus. By the middle of the year, she loved her. The kids would say, 'Wow! She knows so much!' I was amazed, wondering how she did it all."

Straus has her own Web site, posting additional learning activities. Alkhatib said students finish their regular homework at night, then rush to their computers to tackle the extra challenges -- driven to earn a star on a special bulletin board in class.

"Amy Straus goes above and beyond to reach every child in her class," said Dan Quisenberry, president of the Michigan Association of Public School Academies (MAPSA). "She's the teacher we all want for our own children -- a teacher who changes lives because she believes in the potential of every child."

Fellow teacher Katherine Blackburn said other staff members often ask if they can drop by Straus' classroom to watch her work. She brings out the best in students -- managing to make a personal connection even with students who've been difficult in previous years.

Another teacher, Reanna Trotter, said Straus goes out of her way to spend extra time with each student individually. She works diligently to involve parents through projects such as a science fair and ends up with the highest parental involvement in the school.

Other teachers, including Trotter, look to Straus as a mentor.

"Amy just has an air about her," Trotter said. "She's extremely knowledgeable and willing to help."

"Amy Straus has a dynamic teaching style," Principal Luay Shalabi said. "She cultivates a respectful, community classroom focused on creative, hands-on learning. She has a classroom management strategy that gives students ownership over procedures. Students have access to, and responsibility for the majority of classroom resources. Everything in the room reflects back on Ms. Straus' energy and passion, and on the student-centered nature of her style."

The four other 2007 Teacher of the Year finalists are:

**Tim Constant, high school social studies, Casa Richard Academy in Detroit.** Constant is known for relating well to his inner-city students, many of whom have struggled in other schools. Teaching in the shadows of the Ambassador Bridge, he leads some of the students' favorite classes: in addition to social studies, he's created a dance class, two law classes, and team-teaches a forensics class he and a co-worker created in response to student interest. Last year, his students took first place in the American Bar Association's national Law Day Review contest with a new constitution they'd written. He's also the senior advisor and introduced the school's first online class last year.

**Qazime Muftari, 2nd grade, Star International Academy in Dearborn Heights.** In Muftari's class, students feel free to try, to make mistakes and to ask questions. She established a writers' workshop for her students, then presented the concept to her peers so they could adopt it in their own classrooms. She uses data to guide lessons and next steps, analyzing each student's strengths and weaknesses and pulling supplemental, tailored materials as necessary. When students struggle, she works to bring all resources together to help them. She works with students outside of class, links them with other key staff, and helps parents see the crucial role they can play.

**Brianne Pedini, 6th grade, Trillium Academy in Taylor.** Pedini's students make solid academic progress, including six who last year gained more than two grade levels. Pedini last year even worked with a new student from another class who was withdrawn and struggling. By adding him to her class for science, Pedini gained his trust, and soon he relaxed and grew excited about learning. Pedini started and leads the sixth grade camp, served on a state committee analyzing the MEAP social studies test, and was Trillium's master teacher mentor last year. She's finishing a master's degree in special education, a focus she chose figuring it would help all of her students who need extra assistance.

**Deepak Shivraman, high school social studies, Academy for Business and Technology in Dearborn Heights.** Shivraman captures student attention through a focus on what's happening around the world. Last year, he and his students collected money to build a well in Dafur. They've helped tsunami victims and argued against the cost of gasoline. He lets students run with projects they identify, nurturing their sense of humanity and compassion for others. He often serves as a father figure to his urban students and is regarded as a leader among peers, who go to him for insight when they have issues in their classrooms. Shivraman also is the head coach of the women's soccer team at Schoolcraft College.