

(All)Star Academy changing lives

By RAAD I. ALAWAN

Your Community Voice

Waeda Faour didn't speak English when she moved to this country two years ago. Either did Hassan Aoun.

But a local charter school group helped make their international transition a little easier.

"I didn't even know how to say 'hi,'" said Star International Academy sophomore Faour.

Star Academy has helped Faour, Aoun, and many other immigrant students understand and speak English. The English as a second language classes are part of a multicultural curriculum at Star that have parents and students excited.

"The help is good," said Star Academy junior Aoun. "The teacher translates everything."

Star Academy is run by Hamadeh Educational Services (HES), which operates three Metro Detroit charter schools. Universal Learning Academy (K-2), Universal Academy (K-11), and Star International Academy (K-12).

Both Faour and Aoun say they feel comfortable attending Star.

All three academies are stunningly diverse: Arab American, Hispanic, Asian and African American.

And they're all well behaved. Attendance is high and the dropout rate is low. Graduation rate is better than any large public school in Dearborn. Going to college isn't a dream here. It's expected.

"Everything is organized and they really take care of us," said Faour. "The teachers are detailed, and you can ask them any questions."

The secret behind Star's success is Superintendent Nawal Hamadeh, who's involved in every detail of her charter school group, which began in 1998. Since then, the number of students enrolled at the three charter schools has almost quadrupled to 1,700.

Families, staff, and community leaders recently celebrated the growing success of the schools with a community breakfast. Students



The Lebanese consul general, Dr. Ali Ajami, visited Star International Academy during a special ceremony celebrating the charter school's eighth anniversary. Above, Dr. Ajami gets a school tour by Superintendent Nawal Hamadeh (left).

from kindergarten to 12th grade honored their educators through a zajal performance, a form of music and song common in Lebanon. The students thanked and even poked fun at their teachers using a tambourine and rhyme schemes.

"Every time I see her (Principal Anita Hassan) in the hall, she's talking on her cell phone," Faour sang.

Aoun literally sang his teachers praises during his zajal performance.

"I've learned English here fast," said Aoun. "Plus we have fun here. We go on field trips and I play soccer."

Mrs. Hamadeh is visibly pleased with his answers and with the school's mission: A quality education and a qualified staff.

"I do give the credit to the staff," said Hamadeh. "We have a very dynamic, outstanding, qualified staff. Without them, we could not do this. Also, the families, our board members, and our community are really very supportive. They work together with us to help make sure their kids receive an excellent education."

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