

LETTERS TO *The Language Educator*

In the April 2007 issue of *The Language Educator*, you wrote a very nice overview of existing Arabic programs titled "Riding the Wave." It is an excellent resource article. In the article, many Arabic programs in different schools across the United States were mentioned. We are pleased to also share information about our Arabic program to hopefully benefit others.

Hamadeh Educational Services is an organization overseeing three charter schools in Detroit and Dearborn Heights, Michigan areas. Star International Academy and Universal Academy are both authorized by Oakland University and have been in existence since 1998. They both serve students in grades K-12 who are for the most part from Middle Eastern and/or Arabic background. Universal Learning Academy has been authorized by Bay Mills Community College since 2004 and currently operates grades K-3 (eventually K-12), and over 90% of its students come from Middle Eastern and/or Arabic background. The three schools are public school academies that serve over 1,800 students. All students in grades K-8 are required to take on average one hour of Arabic in their daily schedule. At the high school level, students choose either Arabic or another European language such as French or Spanish

to fulfill their two-year requirement for foreign languages. The teaching of Arabic in each grade level (K-12) is divided into the following four language levels: beginner, intermediate, upper intermediate, and advanced. For each level, there are goals to be achieved with regard to each language skill: listening, reading, writing and speaking. The learning of the Arabic language includes a variety of teaching strategies such as grammar, poems, numbers, and basic mathematics, as well as cultural issues and essay writing. The students can also enroll in an Arabic cultural club.

We recognize the importance of the professional qualification of Arabic language teachers as well as the importance of cultivating them at the school. We aim to work collaboratively with other professionals on instructional policy, curriculum development research, and teacher development as this will contribute to the effectiveness of our academies. We believe that involving the teachers in collaborative multi-site research conducted by more specialized researchers enhances their professional abilities. The results of such research may stand to benefit the teaching of Arabic in general. We are constantly exploring funding resources as this will assist in furnishing our program with the most

current instructional materials and teacher training programs.

Our academies have around 13 Arabic language teachers and two Arabic coordinators. All teachers are native speakers of Arabic, fluent in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and have diverse dialects. Our teachers have both cultural and professional preparation in addition to a strong command of the Arabic language. In addition, they are fluent in English and hold teaching certifications from American institutions. They work collaboratively on the school improvement team and actively participate in planning, implementing, developing, and evaluating the Arabic program. The Arabic teachers are capable of linking the language skills with the concepts of the Arabic culture. They are acquainted with the Standards for Learning, Arabic K-16 in the United States.

We believe that it would be helpful and beneficial for our students and other newly established Arabic programs to know about one another and exchange information.

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