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Hawaii News

Academy boosts students' math, reading and confidence

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The Power Scholars Academy held a graduation ceremony for 81 Central Middle School students at Harris United Methodist Church on Friday. The six week summer program focuses on developing math and reading skills for at risk youth as well as fostering social bonds and leadership abilities.

A summer academic and enrichment program offered through the YMCA of Honolulu is helping students improve reading and math skills.

Eighty-one Central Middle School students graduated from the Power Scholars Academy on Friday.

The program, in which participants are called scholars, is a collaborative effort among the school, community sponsors and Building Educated Leaders for Life (BELL), a national nonprofit that works to improve the lives of children in under-resourced communities.

Research shows that during the summer, low-income students lose more math and reading skills than their higher-income peers.

Assessments are given to participants before and after the session, and results from last summer showed that the 50 Central Middle School scholars gained an average of three months in both math and literacy skills.

Parents surveyed about the program's impact reported that their children improved in other areas as well. Eighty-seven percent of parents reported that they became more involved in their child's education, and 90 percent reported that their child had a more positive attitude about school.

Stephanie Mateo said she has seen an increase in her son's social behavior and enthusiasm about school. "He blossomed into this nice little beautiful butterfly kind of kid now," Mateo said. "He's conversing more, engaging with social activities, which is so wonderful. I'm so grateful."

Eighth-grade scholar Melissa Cabico said she enjoyed learning new things and meeting new people.

"I got more confident in myself," Cabico said. "I can love myself more and meet new people. It changed me a lot."

Nationally, the program was launched in 2013 by YMCA of the USA and BELL in a joint effort with local YMCA associations and schools. The partnership has developed significantly since its origin, and in 2016, 48 local YMCAs offered either a Power Scholars Academy or a PSA Camp, which adds academic instruction into existing summer-long camp programs.

In its second year at Central Middle School, the six-week program ran Monday through Friday for 6-1/2 hours per day. Scholars attended academic sessions with certified teachers in the morning, then took part in health, fitness and enrichment sessions in the afternoon. Volunteers with community service organization The Links Inc. helped by providing science, technology, engineering, art and math activities from its Full STEAM Ahead program.

Power Scholars Academy targets students who are struggling academically and who lack access to summer learning opportunities in their community.

Now that this year's session is complete, Vice Principal Katchia Gethers said she wants the academy's graduates to continue shining.

"I want them to be the voice," Gethers said. "I want them to speak up when there is social injustice. I want them to understand their worth, and I want them to demonstrate excellence at all times."

Students attend the Power Scholars Academy for free.

Harris United Methodist Church and St. Peter's Episcopal Church provided free breakfasts, and hot lunches were provided through the Walmart-YMCA Food Program.

A grant from YMCA of the USA, a donation by the Honolulu Star-Advertiser's Subscriber's Charity of Choice program, and several individual donors provided funding.

Graduation came a day after National Summer Learning Day, which is aimed at bringing awareness to the importance of keeping kids safe, healthy and in learning environments every summer.

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