Yokosuka Middle School students graduate, move on to next educational adventure

Story and photos by Greg Mitchell, CFAY Public Affairs

Family and friends looked on as eighth-grade students reached the pentacle of graduating from Yokosuka Middle School during the 2012 Eighth -Grade Completion Assembly conducted in their honor June 14.

Yokosuka Middle School Principal Geoff Fong opened with remarks directed to the students and families.

"It's with a lot of fondness and emotion that I look across this eighth-grade class and I have seen a lot of them since sixth grade, and I want to say that I am so proud of their achievements," said Fong.

Fong emphasized that the students were high achievers based off of their TerraNova scores, an academic test conducted every year, on which the YMS eighth-graders had an 80 percent average. The United States-based exam is designed to assess kindergarten to 12th grade student achievement in reading, language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, vocabulary, spelling, and other areas.

"It's with sadness for me to see you guys go because you provided that leadership that model behavior that I want all my kids, the sixth and seventh-graders included, to display. I gave you that challenge at the beginning of the year, and you guys came forward. I am really proud to be your principal."

Other guest speakers were YMS Assistant Principal, Heather Rhine and Kinnick High School Assistant Principal Wendy Cooley.

Following a performance by the Eighth-Grade Choir led by Director Annette Voth, Cooley took the stand to welcome the students to high school.

"I am here today to congratulate you all for graduating from middle school and welcome you all to high school," said Cooley. She quoted the late CEO of Apple, Steve Jobs: "Your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life. Don't be trapped by dogma, which is living with the results of other peoples' thinking. Don't let the noise of other's opinions drown out your own inner voice. And most important, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition."

"High school is the time to do this. High school is the time to be yourself and to grow into you and not a replica of what others want you to be. How do you do this? You have to get involved. There is something for everyone in high school. Whether you are staying here at Kinnick, or if you are transferring to another location, try something new. Find out what you love to do, find your passion."

Yokosuka Middle School Principal Geoff Fong congratulates Aya Stewart for successfully completing the eighth-grade during the 2012 Yokosuka Middle School Eighth-Grade Completion Assembly.

Cooley also encouraged students to try elective courses and elaborated on what Kinnick High has to offer; from video game design, robotics, culinary arts, yearbook, journalism, computer and music, and also for them to get involved in extra-curricular activities or clubs such as sports, music, drama, earth club, honor societies, step team and the b-boy dance group.

"I encourage you all to make the right choices and strive to perform at a level that will expand your capacity to grow in the future," said Cooley.

YMS Team-Leading teachers Michael and Caroline Valenzuela then provided the announcement of each student by name to receive their certificates of completion. In all, a total of 187 students moved on to the high school.

After the ceremony, family and friends spent the rest of the time to congratulate and commend the new, up and coming high school freshmen. For most, it meant shedding the label of being a YMS Dragon, to almost becoming a Nile C. Kinnick Red Devil.

"I am really excited to now be able to go to Kinnick High School," said King Lewis. "My goal on the next level is to make As'and Bs and to work on improving my basketball skills to the point that I will be able to get a spot on the junior varsity basketball team."

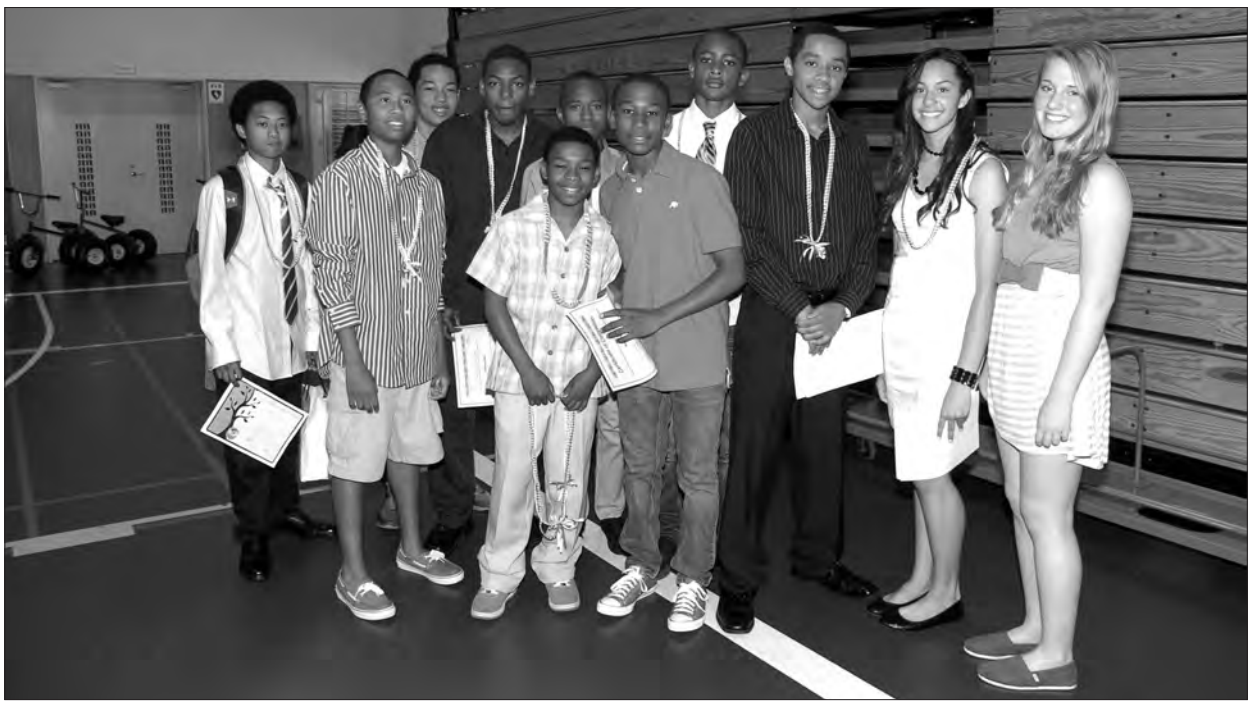
For some, the move from middle school was like a "double-edged sword," because it signaled the beginning of some close relationships being done at world's apart.

It feels good to be graduating from middle school, but it is also sad," said Keisha Hadorn. "Most of the kids here will be going to Kinnick, but there are some who will transfer from here with their parents to another place. It is hard when they are sometimes your friends."

Some students took the time to reflect on things they did in middle school that will help them at the next level.

"I think that the best thing that my parents did to prepare me for high school was make me join the AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) program," said Chris Deibel. "I think some of the skills I learned in there will be important in helping me be able to complete my homework and improve my study skills."

You live for the moment for these young people to grow, said Fong. "To be a part of someone's life, to be directly responsible for someone's development and to see them advance on to the next phase of their lives is really what this job is all about."



Students gather for a group photo upon the completion of the 2012 Yokosuka Middle School Eighth-Grade Completion Assembly held in their honor June 14.