Diana Cantu is hoping the Doctors Academy Health Fair at Abraham Lincoln Middle School has opened some eyes. The program's goal is to foster an interest in medical professions with the goal of bringing them back to Selma someday.

“We're growing health professionals to come back to the Valley,” said Cantu, the Doctors Academy Program Coordinator for Selma High. “Doctors don't just fall out of the sky. They become that because of their hard work and persevering to reach that milestone.”

Seventh and eighth grade students swirled around her in the school's gym.

Selma High students enrolled in Doctors Academy had set up displays March 19 showing their semester's research on health topics such as lungs and kidney diseases, to skin cancer and eating disorders. They also put on skits to get students thinking about drinking and driving and the reality of language barriers creating a health disparity for some residents.

The fair gave the middle grade students a chance to learn about the program directly from the high school-aged students enrolled in the program themselves. They also heard from college-aged tutors who explained how the academy helps prepare students for college studies.

“You get to job shadow doctors during the summer and find out what it's like to be a pediatrician or a dentist,” Jasmine Pelayo told one group of middle school students.

Tutor Sonia Mendoza said aside from helping the high school students with their regular classes, they offer study and time-management skills.

“Doctors Academy helps you get to where you need to go. We taught about the SATs and a lot of the students said if it weren't for our class, they wouldn't have passed it,” Mendoza said.

Selma High teachers David Norman, Michelle Loucks and Jennifer Manter are the Doctor Academy instructors at Selma High.

Selma High sophomore Tania Acosta said that the program helps with short-term academic help while helping them plan for medical training.

“Whenever I have a doubt, or something I don't understand the tutors are beneficial in getting us
a better understanding of certain subjects like history.”

Rehearsing for one of the skits, sophomore Samantha Ramirez said the younger students need to realize how having a language barrier can create a health disparity for patients and that issue needs to be resolved.

“It could cause deaths because what if they don’t understand how to take their prescriptions?”

Middle school student Bailey Baker said she just learned about how cystic fibrosis can be inherited and felt the fair gave students a useful glimpse at medical professions.

“It’s fun to learn about beneficial things like that. If someone’s in a car wreck, you’re there to help.”

The four-year program overall gives high school students a chance to start training for a medical career through summer school enrichment; rigorous accelerated classes with an emphasis on math, science and writing; parent empowerment workshops; medical profession mentors; and clinical placement in medical, science or health settings.

“We give them tips about getting into medical school and tell them about different career paths in the health professions,” Manter said. “They’ve become experts on a health topic and today they’re presenting everything they’ve learned throughout the school year.”

A major goal of the academy is to have these students return to the Central Valley once they’ve completed their educations.

“The whole premise behind this is for them to see that kids who look like themselves and have their experience can be successful,” Cantu said.

The Academy’s awards night is May 7.

The Doctors Academy is a school-within-a school program at Caruthers, Selma and Sunnyside high schools. It’s offered by the University of California San Francisco’s Fresno Latino Center for Medical Education and Research.

For more information, visit http://bit.ly/1H2hBLH, or contact DA Coordinator Cantu at dcantu@fresno.ucsf.edu, 241-7676.