

# **Successful Islamic Schools Leading the Way to Successful Communities**

## *Model of Administrative & Financial Structures*

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# Successful Islamic Schools Leading the Way to Successful Communities

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An Islamic school is more than an educational institution; it is the blue print of the future generation and a future society. Hopefully, Islamic schools, if Allah willing, can help establish Islamic communities “whose manners, ideas and concepts, rules and regulations, values and criteria are all derived from the Islamic source – so that the Muslims’ way of life is an example to all mankind” (Qutb, 1990). Islamic schools should be a driving force in reforming the society, and this very important and difficult task can only be accomplished through the team-effort of all those involved in management; the school board, the principal, staff, parents, students, and the community at large.

It is not sufficient to bring into Islamic schools the latest in technology and science; what is more important is to intertwine this with the moral fabric of the Quran and the Sunnah. As Allah says in the Quran, “You are the best community raised for mankind, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong, and you believe in Allah” (Quran: 3:110). Thus, the turn of this new century has called upon the Muslim ummah to fulfill its divinely appointed task for mankind, that of establishing a well-balanced and just community.

September 11, 2001 was an eye opener for the Muslim Community, as the nation began to hold it accountable for the terrorists attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon. A big question mark was put on the role of Muslims in the United States and their contributions to the community at large. Today, the challenges of leadership are even greater, as the focus transfers from individuals to communities. Islamic schools can

be the change agents in reforming the “jahiliyya” society and promoting the true community based solely on the principles of Islam rather than on cultural or western traditions. The 21<sup>st</sup> century has given a new outlook to Islamic schools, not solely as institutions of reading and writing but as institutions of Dawah.

If schools represent the “model” of a future community then Islamic schools need to make sure that they present a model school that can lead to a future model community. The long-term survival of an Islamic school will depend on having a sustainable model for the educational program. This paper will examine the administrative and financial structure, long-term strategic planning, short-term daily planning, and how all of this would meet the goals, philosophy, and mission of an Islamic School.

There are more than two thousand Islamic organizations and masjids in the United States, ranging from small single room to multipurpose buildings. Yet, the administrative and financial structure of each determines the success of that institution. The challenges are many; from limited resources to cultural diversity to conflict in leadership and management; but with faith in Allah, sincerity, taqwa, and striving towards success everything is possible.

In an article, Managing Islamic Centers in America, Iqbal Unus emphasizes the need for better planning, organizing, coordinating, budgeting, and evaluating in the midst of constrained resources as these are the “spokes that hold the management wheel together. Failing to plan is planning to fail.” Managing and planning depends largely on budgeting, which must be realistic so as to “serve as a guidepost that keeps all of the organization’s elements on track, by enabling the management to project revenues based on estimates of expenditures and avoiding unrealistic expenditures. Thus the two

essential pre-requisites of a successful Islamic School are the administrative and financial structure of the school, as one cannot survive without the other.

Although Islamic Schools have become the common trend in the United States since the 1970's, in no other time in its history have they gained more attention than this day, after the tragic event of September 11, 2001. Religious education is not something new to the schooling in America, it has been there since the first schools began, as the teaching of religion was required by law in early America. The first teachers were pastors and the first schools were in churches. Like the Islamic Schools, there are many Jewish and Christian schools around the United States but there are major differences amongst them mostly due to the incompetent administrative structure and inadequate resources that the former are built on. One other valid reason for not doing so good is the uniqueness of the Islamic schools with reference to its mission and philosophy.

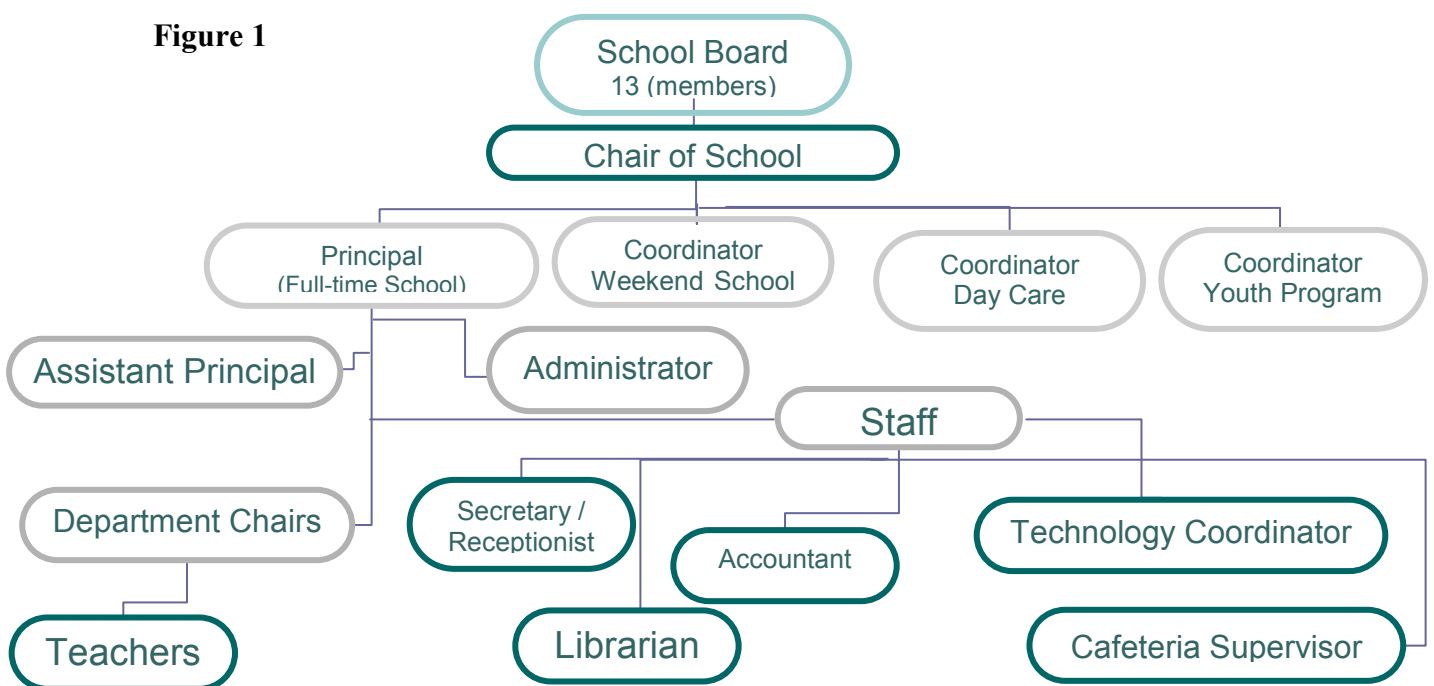
The ultimate goal of Islamic schools should be to produce graduates who are not only rich in knowledge but who are noble in character and who can promote righteousness in the society. In the words of Saliba and Tomah, the general characteristics of Islamic education, however, is that it is neither purely religious, as was the case with the Israelites, nor purely secular, as was the case with the Roman, but both at the same time. Many verses are to be found in the Quran and in the Sunnah (example of the Prophet) which indicates that education aims at the realization of happiness in this and the next world and according to a tradition of the Prophet, the best among you are not those who neglect this world for the other, or the other world for this. He is the one who works for both together (Kysilka & Qadri, 1997). Thus the most challenging task of

establishing an Islamic school is to form it on the true principles of Islam in order to raise a new generation of American-Muslims.

How can we then define a successful model Islamic school? And if there has been none so far, can one aim to establish it? The successful model of an Islamic school is based on its administrative and financial structure, its parents, teachers, and students. In *Managing Islamic Centers*, Iqbal Unus describes six ways to establish a successful model and advises to: Set Standards of Service; Streamline Communication; Monitor Costs & Benefits; Look out for Growth; Judiciously Executing Trust and Board Evaluations.

Having observed Islamic Schools in Washington, Chicago, New York, Houston, Detroit, and Florida and working closely with other Jewish and Christian schools has enabled me to develop a Model Administrative and Financial structure. The following model was designed for the Muslim Academy of Central Florida in Orlando but has not yet been put into action in its totality due to a shortage of financial resources and miscalculated budget.

**Figure 1**



In addition to the structure defined above, at least two conditions are essential for its total success. First, the vision, mission, and goals of the institution should be solely to please Allah (swt). Second, the professionalism in administration should not be affected by using religious examples from the Quran or the Sunnah to manipulate to one's personal needs. In most Islamic Schools or Mosques, people tend to abuse the policies of the institutions by creating a slack in discipline policies and accountability of administrative and financial matters.

The administrative structure should work hand in hand with the school board, as any differences based on ethnicity can shake the very foundation of the institution. Islamic Schools can help promote unity among the diverse cultures can bring everyone together under the banner of Islam. Instead of pockets of ethnic groups from the subcontinent of Asia, Middle East, and the reverted western Muslims, Islamic Schools can create a single Ummah based on the Unique Quranic model.

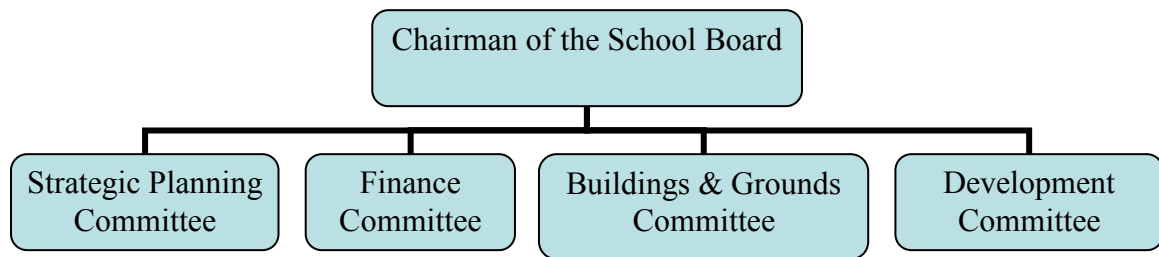
The School Board is the heart of the institution, as it pumps blood in the arteries to keep the body alive. The board is held accountable for the institution, hence the board should consist of “thoughtful, dedicated trustees who fit the board’s and the school needs, are prepared to volunteer sufficient time to learn about the school, and come prepared to board and committee meetings.” (Stanton, 1989)

Although our sample board consists of 13 members, most non-Islamic Schools have between fifteen and twenty five members. Diversity of people and talents is recommended. In short a religious scholar, an educator, an architect, a lawyer, an accountant, and a business man are highly needed. Of work, wealth, and wisdom, a trustee should contribute at least two. Those who are willing to contribute only wealth

might be asked to become members of a donors council, that may be called upon occasionally for contacts or fundraising.

The common trend in most Islamic Schools of having wealthy trustees, who do no work or attend any meetings, should be discouraged. Therefore, in order to prevent this trend from becoming a habit, members of the School Board will be divided into the following sub-committees shown in Figure 2.

**Figure 2**



The term of each board member varies from three to five years. But is it not a bad idea to have trustees take a year off at the end of their fifth year. The Chair leads the board and acts as a liason between the heads and the board to fulfill the board's responsibilities. The Chair upholds the vision of the school, conducts the board meetings, and works closely with the School Board sub-committees. It is advisable to have the chair with an educational degree rather than appointing an Imam or religious scholar as the chair unless in rare exceptions a religious scholar also holds an educational and administration degree and successful school experience in teaching and leadership.

It is very detrimental for the well being of the school, for the Chair or any other board member to interfere in the operation of the school unless requested by the Head.

The Chair and the head work closely and act as partners. This partnership is a vital factor in the school's well-being. Ideally and very often, in fact, it is a frank and warm friendship based on the mutual exchange of counsel, criticism, and challenge.”

(Stanton, 1989)

Last, but not the least, is the financial structure. A sound financial structure is the most important aspect of running a school. In order to attract qualified and dedicated teachers, staff, and administration a comprehensive financial package is a necessity. Furthermore, in order attract parents and students, facilities, innovative programs, and the likes are a must and none can be obtained without adequate finances.

Therefore, the school staff can do very little in the absence of adequate financial resources. The financial resources and management of an Islamic School should be such as to sustain the educational program consistent with the school's philosophy and mission. To ensure financial stability, a certified public accountant should prepare the annual financial report for the school. Finances covers the daily expenses of running the school plus the resources needed for long-term planning: personnel liability insurance, staff payroll, building expenses, etc. The Florida Council of Independent Schools recommends that schools must demonstrate its financial health by maintaining an asset to debt ration of 1.5:1 or better. Repeated operations at a deficit and a substantial portion of debt add excessive burdens to the schools success.

The following data provided in Figure 3 roughly estimates the finances that are required in order for a school to run debt free. The tuition was set at \$4500 per student for 10 months. The model is based on a school that has been in operation after its initial expenses of the building, furniture, and supplies.

### Figure 3

- Revenues =  $\$450 \times 200 \times 10 = \$900,000$
- Expenses
  - Principal Salary =  $\$60,000$
  - Assistant Principal =  $\$40,000$
  - Administrator =  $\$35,000$
  - Teacher Salary =  $\$30,000 \times 15 \text{ teachers} = \$450,000$
  - Office Assistant =  $\$20,000$
  - Librarian =  $\$25,000$
  - Accountant / Book Keeper =  $\$35,000$
  - Technology Coordinator/Web Development =  $\$35,000$
  - Marketing / Fund-raising Coordinator =  $\$35,000$
  - Marketing Budget (brochures, videos, mail outs, etc.) =  $\$10,000$
  - Professional Development =  $\$5,000$
  - Rent =  $\$10,000 \times 12 = \$120,000$
  - Utilities =  $\$2,500 \times 12 = \$30,000$

$$\text{Revenues} - \text{Expenses} = \$900,000 - \$900,000 = \$0$$

The schools should not rely solely on tuition payments to meet its expenses as a majority of Islamic Schools keep their tuitions low to cater to its student body. In addition to tuition, other resources should be tapped to increase the revenue and prevent an annual deficit. The following ideas are suggestions to increase revenue:

- Community Dinners (two; guest speakers)
- Interschool events (four)
- Bake Sales on Fridays
- Eid Gift Shops (two)
- Scholastic / Astrolabe Book Fairs
- Consistent Donors / Partnerships with businesses and other wealthy members of the community.
- Grants and gifts
- Annual parent donations
- Zakat money
- Facility rental to weekend school, adult education, and social events.

The challenges of Islamic schools can never be less, as establishing an Islamic community on the basis of the Quran and Sunnah, can never be easy. Yet, with the consultation of the Shura, with strategic and long range planning, and with unity in diversity, this myth can become a reality. Physicians, computer scientists, engineers, and lawyers, each profession has its own education and expertise; yet when it comes to schools the expertise of education takes a back seat, it is not uncommon to think that everyone can teach and everyone can run schools.

Schools are opening in great numbers, but most are struggling to survive. September 11 has become an awakening call for Muslims to unite under the banner of Islam to promote successful Islamic communities as a community is usually identified by its schools. Only those schools will lead to successful communities which are strong in administrative and financial structure and are based on the true model of Islam free from racial prejudice.

Having passed two decades in establishing Islamic schools, it is now time to take another gigantic step in refining and strengthening them and to use them as instruments of change to reform the society. Islamic schools need to lead the nation in promoting the Islamic educational model of education, as no time in the history of American education has there been such controversy about the low morals and academic success of the school system. Islamic schools not only have an obligation to present their educational model to the west, but also to combat the racism and negativism that the current political situation in the world has given birth to prejudice and hatred towards Muslims and Islam.

Schools should be able to provide training and educational seminars towards establishing a learning community where learning takes place at all levels of the

community, from adults to children and from board members and school leaders to teachers and other school personnel. There has to be ongoing educational services for all stake holders as education is a continuous learning process from the cradle to the grave and better schools will certainly lead to better communities.

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