

Development of a Muslim School In a Christian-Judaic Society

Historically in the United States, there has been a unique relationship between public education and religion. The relationship is frequently tested and recently, many religious groups have raised issue about the lack of moral and ethical behavior of children enrolled in public schools. The criticisms as an integral part of the curriculum, therefore children are learning proper behavior and this lack of attention to values and morals has led to the increases in violence and drug abuse on our school campuses. Parents are concerned for the safety and wellbeing of their children; thus we have seen a tremendous growth in the home schooling movement and in the establishment of private religious-based schools. One such school is the Muslim Academy of Central Florida which serves the growing population of Muslims in the Central Florida area.

This presentation will focus on the chronological development of the Muslim Academy of Central Florida in a community which boasts a strong Christian-Judaic tradition. The chronology will focus on the initial conception of the school, the need to bridge a positive relationship with the broader Christian-Judaic community, the support of the school from the Muslim community, problems of the development of the curriculum to incorporate state curricular guidelines, religious studies and Arabic language. In addition, the presenters will attempt to shed light on issues raised within the school culture which are reflective of cultural differences and philosophical ideas rather than religious issues.

The Muslim Academy of Central Florida is a microcosm of the Middle East set in a dynamic, rapidly changing, cosmopolitan community. The influence of the broader community in which the children who attend the school live, the desires of the culturally

diverse parents, and the concepts of good educational practice frequently come into conflict as the school struggles to provide an appropriate religious-based education to its students. This presentation reflects on these dynamic hopes of providing a forum which focuses on the complexities of developing a school which draws attention to the cultural and religious differences of a particular group of people.