

Presentation for the Weekend Schools

Propagating Progress While Fostering Excellence in Administration

Thousands of children have an opportunity to get religious education and learn the language of the Quran only through the Weekend Schools. Due to financial constraints and geographical boundaries most Muslim children cannot attend full time Islamic schools. Hence it is very important to make the weekend schools attractive, interesting and organized. Children tend to compare the weekend schools with their full time schools and if they are not run professionally with good leadership and a qualified staff, it will be very difficult to attract the parents to bring their children to attend the weekend schools. Having students attend school a sixth day of the week and keep them involved and motivated is a huge task and needs a lot of planning, techniques, and organization.

In order to increase the motivation and involvement of the students in the Weekend school, we need to make it attractive and fun by including activities which the students enjoy and want to participate. What we have done at our school is that we have increased the recess time to 40 minutes and take the children to the playground for supervised playtime. The teachers organize sports and games and interact with the students. We have also started offering creative art classes at recess time where children have a choice to do an art project using a medium of their choice. We have also established mini mobile class libraries where children listen to stories read by the teachers and parents pertaining to the topics learned in the class. They can also borrow books from these mini libraries to read at home. The other thing we have done is that we have improved the standard of snacks and juices and provide different types of goodies every week. By making the above changes we have increased the motivation and involvement of the children in the school. The attendance has increased and the students seem happier.

In order to propagate progress, to foster excellence, we need to find qualified, creative, and dedicated teachers. This is a huge task as such teachers are rare and we have to take who ever is available. So, we need to provide staff development and train the teachers in pedagogy and classroom management skills. This will improve the quality of their teaching and managing time efficiently so that students learn as well as enjoy the class. This year we have changed the system, taking into consideration the experience and capability of the teachers, we have one teacher teach all the three subjects in a grade level. This has helped in better communication and builds good rapport between the teacher, the parents, and the students. We have also introduced homework sheets which have the homework assignments for the whole month. This is copied and given to the students, a hard copy is put on the bulletin board and it a soft copy is also put on the website so that the absentee students can continue to learn and be up-to-date with the homework.

The teachers need to be evaluated on a regular basis to make sure they are using the proper methodology and the creative ideas in teaching. At our school teachers are given a written curriculum and guided to prepare a year long plan keeping in mind the school

events and holidays. We have a semester system and at the end of each semester, the department head sits with each teacher and goes over the year long plan to see if the teachers are on schedule with their year long plan. They discuss if the teacher has any behavior concerns and general concerns. They also look at the monthly lesson plans and give guidance and suggestions for improvement. A formal observation is done where the teacher prepares a four-step lesson plan and presents a lesson to the students. The department heads keep the principal informed about the evaluation of the teachers. It is then given to the teachers with suggestions for improvement. This procedure is done twice a year. The teachers are also given self evaluation forms to evaluate themselves and highlight the areas they need to focus for improvement.

It is very important to involve the parents in the children's religious education. In order to do so we established a parent/teacher organization. It is a membership service organization created to be a helping hand to the school. Parents sign a contract to volunteer 10 hours in a school year and are given an opportunity to work as a classroom aid, serve snack, supervise and join students at playtime and coordinate the art program at the recess time. The parents are also kept involved with parent meetings which provide parent education sessions. A group of parents take turns in managing the snack store to raise fund for the different events. We also offer a free Quran tarteel classes for moms which motivates them to come every week. They learn to read the Quran with correct pronunciation and also to understand the meanings. In return they can help their children in doing the weekend school homework and memorize the Quran.

When parents feel needed and are kept busy, they are motivated to come to the Islamic Center and this helps to motivate the students and makes going to the school together a family event.

With all this in place and constant monitoring we can assure parents that we can not only sustain the progress of the weekend schools, but make improvements as we go along.