

School Boards Leading to Successful Accreditation

**Paper Presented at the
Islamic Society of North America's
7th Annual Education Forum
April 14 – 16, 2006
Chicago, IL**

Yasmeen Qadri, Ed.D.
**Coordinator, Professor in Education
Valencia Community College, Orlando, FL
Director, Edconsultations, Orlando, FL**

Kamran Qadri, M.Ed.
**Teacher, Odyssey Middle School, Orlando, FL
Adjunct Professor, Valencia Community College**

About Your Presenters

Dr. Yasmeen Qadri is currently the Education Coordinator at Valencia Community College and has been an adjunct instructor at the University of Central Florida in Orlando, Florida. She is one of the founding members and the past principal of Muslim Academy of Central Florida, the first Islamic School in Orlando, Florida. Dr. Qadri is originally from Hyderabad, India and has taken the United States as her homeland since 1979. Dr. Qadri has a Masters in Psychology from Osmania University in Hyderabad, India and a Masters in Social Sciences and a Doctorate in Curriculum and Instruction from the University of Central Florida.

Dr. Qadri has presented several workshops and professional papers at the local, national, and international levels. She has worked extensively on building bridges between the Muslim community and the larger community by presenting at churches, synagogues, temples, and schools. She has been actively involved in the Women's Interfaith Council and the National Conference for Community and Justice. She is an educational consultant for accreditation of schools, opening of full-time schools, teachers training, curriculum development, training for boards and principals, conflict resolution, and parents' seminars. She is an active member of educational organizations like the Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development, American Association of Educational Research, and the Florida Law Related Education Association. Some of her recent papers that have gained much popularity are Islam and Democracy, Conflict Resolution in Islamic Schools, and Establishing Effective Schools. Dr. Qadri is also the director of EdConsultations, an organization that assists in opening new schools, strengthening functioning schools, and providing excellence in education at all levels.

Dr. Yasmeen Qadri was nominated to be on the Mayor's Education Task Force to help improve the Orange County Public Schools in Orlando and is the Director of Educational Affairs for the Council on American-Islamic Relations in Florida. Dr. Qadri has been featured in the local newspaper and television, radio, and at the Orlando Historical Museum. She was recognized 'as a woman leader making a difference' by the International Sisters Network during March 2004 Women's month. She was the first Muslim woman delegate from the United States chosen to represent at the World Congress in Civic Education and Democracy hosted at Budapest, Hungary in 2004.

Mr. Syed Kamran Qadri earned his Masters in Educational Leadership and his Bachelors in Science Education from the University of Central Florida. He is currently teaching science to middle school students and is certified in both middle grades science and mathematics in the States of Florida and Virginia. He is also certified in K-12 Educational Leadership in the State of Florida. In addition to teaching full-time for Orange County Public Schools, Mr. Qadri also teaches as an Adjunct Professor at the Winter Park and the East Campus of Valencia Community College, teaching core introductory courses to aspiring future teachers and to those teachers who are enrolled for recertification purposes. Mr. Qadri will be starting his doctorate in Educational Leadership at the University of Central Florida in the fall of 2006.

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Proposal Presented at the 7th Annual Education Forum (April 14-16, 2006, Chicago, IL)

Abstract

Accreditation has become the buzz word to gain recognition and growth in Islamic schools. This workshop will talk about the accreditation process from A to Z highlighting the various people involved in this strenuous process and the challenges and solutions for a successful accreditation. Presenters will also share their own experiences as school leaders and two successful models will be presented. This session will highlight how accreditation can be used not only to build the high standards of excellence in the Islamic school, but more importantly how it can be used as a tool to measure continuous success. Panelists consist of a successful team of school board member, principal, and teacher, each of them stressing on their role in the accreditation process.

Yasmeen Qadri, Ed.D.

Coordinator, Professor in Education

Valencia Community College, Orlando, FL

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Few factors have a greater impact on student achievement than the quality of the school. Given the vital importance of the overall quality of teaching to student success, school accreditation is an important tool for schools to acquire. The process of accreditation is a tedious process, but when it is completed, it allows for accountability and sets parameters with which the school should operate with.

Accreditation is an important component of a school as it signifies that the school has met the set standards at an acceptable level and is willing to not only maintain those set of standards but has committed to continue to improve on them. These standards can include seriousness of their course of studies, parental and community involvement, safety, handling of academic records, and accounting and business practices. Additionally, membership in an accreditation body demonstrates that the educational institution has made a “commitment toward excellence through continual self-evaluation of the staff and programs”.

The accreditation process can seem to be a monumental task, but with proper planning and support, it can be a very rewarding experience for all involved. There are seven steps to consider when a school is planning to apply for accreditation:

1. The school selects an accrediting organization and completes the initial paperwork required to start the accreditation process. The paperwork is then reviewed by the organization and if the school meets the application requirements, it is notified and is sent an accreditation handbook to start its self evaluation process.

2. Using the accreditation handbook the school evaluates its level of operation relative to the standards for accreditation. This includes the evaluation of the school, its faculty and staff, the curriculum and instruction, financial records, facility, etc. This process of the complete evaluation of the total school program is called the self-study.
3. Once the school has completed its self-study, it notifies the accreditation committee of its completion. The self-study is then reviewed for its compliance with the requirements set by the accreditation agency and is reviewed by the committee chair. The school is then notified of any changes that might need to be made before the final copy is submitted to the agency and the evaluation committee members.
4. An onsite team that will evaluate the school is set and the school submits copies of the self-study to each member of the team for them to review.
5. The onsite team visits the school and discusses matters with students, teachers, the Parent Teachers Association, the school board, the finance department, etc.
6. If the visit is not what was expected, then the school has the opportunity to make changes from the reports and recommendations where compliance needs to be strengthened.
7. The school can be put on a provisional status while it makes changes. Once the changes are made then the committee can go forward with its accreditation of the school. The accreditation usually is for 5 years before the school has to be re-evaluated.

In addition to providing detailed information on the functionality of the school, accreditation also provides accountability for the stakeholders of the school. This inquiry based process allows the stakeholders to take ownership in the school as they are held accountable for the success of the school. So what does this all mean to the stakeholders of school; the school board members, parents, teachers, students, and community?

School board members are ultimately responsible for the quality of education at their school as they take an active role in the policies, fiscal responsibility, and community relations. Accreditation assures to the other stakeholders that the school board is moving in the right direction with the interest of the school as its priority. The accreditation also gives the school board members an “opportunity to gain a better understanding” of the day to day activities at the school and also assures that the board in itself is involved in professional development.

For the school's administration and teachers there is the “joy of being associated with an institution that has gone through the rigors of the accreditation process including the detailed self-evaluation of the total school program” through the self-study. The accreditation process also provides for a foundation for the learning experience to take place for both the administration and the teachers and an opportunity for them to work and grow through professional development.

Since they are the main stakeholders in the school, students also benefit from an accredited school. To the students, an “accredited school validates the fact that the institution with which they are entrusting their futures will provide them with sound

educational foundation”, but also prepares them for the future. This is evident and is validated through the self-study that the educational institution would continue with its own professional development to stay abreast with the latest trends in education.

Once the school has been awarded its accreditation, it is imperative that the stakeholders continue to maintain the standards on which the accreditation was awarded. It takes a lot of time and dedication to achieve the standards set forth during the accreditation process, but it only takes a short while for these standards to decline. It is the responsibility of all the stake holders to continue to maintain the standards by reviewing, updating, and amending the standards and seeking professional developmental services for all stakeholders. It is also essential to stay current with the latest in education as a commitment was made during the accreditation process that the school will provide its students with a “sound educational foundation”

To conclude, the process of accreditation ensures that the school has met the stringent requirements set forth by an independent third party, the accreditation committee. It is extremely important that the same amount of dedication and effort that went into the initial process of accreditation be maintained and that continued professional development becomes a habit. It can be very easy to forget about the sole purpose of accreditation, which was to see if there is maintenance of high standards for the educational institution, once the accreditation is awarded. It is just as important to continue to maintain the goal of accreditation and that is “to maintain a quality education for the entire student population. “

Resources:

1. Montessori School Accreditation Commission (MSAC)

<http://www.montessori-msac.org/accreditationprocess.html>

2. New England Association of School and College (NEASC)

<http://www.neasc.org/cps/cps.htm>