

Building Parent-Teacher Alliances

ISNA Education Forum 2007

Track: *Weekend School*

Presenter: *Farheen Khan Farooki,
Principal of Saturday School
Islamic Society of Greater Valley Forge
Philadelphia, PA*

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Power Point Presentation
Distribution of resource packet*

Abstract

Weekend Islamic programs have become a pillar of Muslim American culture, yet are faced with a multitude of restrictions, including a lack of resources (monetary, human, and material) as well as a lack of time. Maximizing the role of parents in the educational process is presented as a solution.

Building a strong alliance between parents and teachers relies on open and frequently utilized communication. Specific methods of such contact are discussed in this paper, including the following: weekly take-home sheets, parent-teacher conferences, Open House events, newsletters, email, student assessment, and easily-accessible teacher contact information. Materials are also included for implementing a weekly take-home sheet, scheduling parent-teacher conferences, advertising an Open House event, and creating a newsletter. (Additional materials are included in a separate resource packet as well.)

Despite the resource limitations weekend Islamic programs face, the discussed examples of parent-teacher communication are still attainable. Additionally, the presented methods are flexible. They can be used for students of all ages, by either teacher or administrator, and applied to a single class or an entire school.

The Importance of Parent-Teacher Relationships in Weekend Islamic Schools

Weekend Islamic schools have become a pillar of Muslim American culture. A large percentage of Muslim families rely on these once-weekly religious programs with the assumption that these classes alone will cultivate and sustain the religious knowledge of young Muslim Americans. With such a heavy responsibility placed on the shoulders of such educational programs, are they really equipped to deliver?

Weekend schools are faced with limitation after limitation. There is a lack of human resources – volunteer teachers are scarce, at best. There is a lack of material resources – teaching supplies, chairs, and the money to purchase such items are all close to nonexistent. And most inhibiting of all, there is a lack of time. An average weekend Islamic school runs between two to three hours per week. Given that one week consists of 168 hours, students spend 1% of that time with their teachers! With all these restrictions, how can teachers fulfill all of the expectations that are placed on them?

Parents are the most influential people in a child's life (Gelfer, 1991), and teachers – no matter what type – can reap great benefit from their involvement. In an article written by Jeffrey I. Gelfer, the roles of parents and teachers are described as “mutually interdependent” (Gelfer, 1991). Parents and teachers must unite to maximize teacher efforts and student potential. The goal of this paper is to aid educators in strengthening this parent-teacher relationship through clear and open communication. Specific methods are discussed that can create avenues of parent-teacher communication, thereby building a strong parent-teacher coalition.

Methods of Parent-Teacher Communication

1. Weekly Take-Home Sheets

Parents should be kept informed on a weekly basis as to what information their child has covered in class. Weekly take-home sheets provide parents something constant to depend on, something to look out for. Given that classes are held on a weekly basis – and only for two to three hours per week – significant progress should theoretically be made at each class meeting. Additionally, in order to retain this knowledge, there is a need for reinforcement throughout the week. Weekly take-home sheets help facilitate constant communication much needed between the school and home.

The following is an example of a weekly homework sheet:



ISGVF Saturday School
Level _____ Classroom



This is what we did in class today:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Homework:

1. Learn/practice surah _____
- 2.

I, the parent of _____, have read this letter and have helped my child with his/her _____ homework to the best of my abilities.

Parent's Signature

2. Parent-Teacher Conferences

Parent-teacher conferences offer the unique opportunity for both parties to sit face-to-face, one-on-one. The length of the meeting is not indicative of its effectiveness. A brief conference, lasting even five minutes, can provide the opportunity parents and teachers need to rectify a concern and allow each to understand the others' expectations.

These conferences can be either mandatory or optional. Below are forms designed to accommodate either style:

ISGVF Saturday School
Parent-Teacher Conferences
Winter Session

Student's Name _____

Please meet with your child's teacher on
December 2nd/9th
at 10:30 am or 1:30 pm.

*Given the number of parents that each teacher needs to meet with, it would be greatly appreciated if the conference time listed above were honored with your prompt arrival.
Thank you!*

ISGVF Saturday School
Parent-Teacher Conferences
Spring Session

InshAllah, the spring session of parent-teacher conferences will be **optional**. If you would like to take advantage of this opportunity, please complete and return this form to your child's teacher by March 10th.

Conferences will be held after school on March 17th, inshAllah.

Student Name _____

Area(s) of concern to be discussed at conference _____

Depending on the number of parents your child's teacher needs to meet with, there may be a wait time – your patience will be appreciated. Thank you!

3. *Open House*

Inviting parents and families to visit a school shows them that they are a valued part of the school and school events. This type of inclusion also provides parents with the opportunity to see firsthand how the classroom operates, including activities and student-teacher interaction.

Depending on teachers and administrators, this type of an event can be portrayed either formally or informally. An example of a simple Open House format could be merely informing

parents of a date and time in which they may come and quietly observe the classroom. This would be the preferred arrangement if it were being done at the classroom level. As a schoolwide function, a more elaborate format could include an orientation for parents, followed by light refreshments, and conclude with classroom observations. A flyer “advertising” a larger scale Open House is as follows:

Saturday School Open House
Saturday, November 18th, 2006
11:00 am to 1:00 pm

Meet
other
parents

Come observe
your child's
classroom!!

Speak
with
teachers

Show your child
the importance
of Islamic
school!!!!

Students are to have a normal instructional day.
The schedule for parents will inshAllah be as follows:

| | |
|---------------------|--------------------------|
| 11:00 am - 11:30 am | Orientation |
| 11:30 am - 12 noon | Refreshments |
| 12 noon - 1:00 pm | Classroom Observation |
| 1:15 pm - 1:30 pm | Zuhr Prayers & Dismissal |

Please note that the actual date for Open House is different than what was noted on the Saturday school calendar

4. Newsletters

On the surface, newsletters may seem cumbersome to create and/or distribute, but with the growing number of resources and luxuries that technology can provide, it can be a very uncomplicated method of parent-teacher communication. A quick search online can yield many free templates used to create newsletters. Additionally, many of these templates are designed specifically to be used by schools and/or educational programs. With some basic modifications and text insertions, an impressive weekend Islamic school newsletter can be produced in a matter

of hours. Distribution of these newsletters can take place through email or by being uploaded onto the website of the weekend Islamic school's mosque. This would bypass all the dilemmas a printed newsletter would pose. These next two pages are an example of a newsletter created using a free template from Microsoft.com.



ISGVF Saturday School Newsletter

From the Teacher's Desk

Assalamu alaikom Parents!

We hope that everyone is enjoying this blessed month of Ramadan!

To keep parents informed about Saturday School events, we have designed this newsletter to send to parents via email. With updates every couple of months, parents will inshAllah be able to keep track of upcoming events, topics being covered in class, and any additional announcements/reminders we might need to make.

We teachers would like to wish all the families of Saturday School a heartfelt Eid Mubarak!!!

Respectfully,

Farheen Khan

Nasreen Quraishi

Seema Rayan

Curriculum Highlights

September/October

We have just completed our Ramadan unit. This unit included topics such as Qur'an, Zakat, food etiquette, and Eid.

November

Our next unit is Salat, inshAllah. Subjects we are hoping to cover include manners and the significance of prayer, adhan, and wudu.

December

In December, students will inshAllah be discussing Hajj, Eid, and the stories behind these events.

You are Invited...

Parents are invited to attend our Open House on November 11th! Although this will be a day of regular instruction for the students, parents are invited to sit in during class time. As teachers, we hope that this will provide an understanding of classroom activities, teacher-student interaction, and how our classes are run in general.

Refreshments will also be served, inshAllah. Please be sure to attend!

Parent-Teacher Conferences = Parent-Teacher Cooperation!

Parent-teacher conferences are scheduled to take place December 2nd and December 9th. It is our hope that by keeping the lines of communication open, we can be more effective in making progress with your child(ren). During the month of November, teachers are going to be contacting parents, inshAllah, to schedule a 15-minute block of time on either the 2nd or the 9th of December. Conferences provide the opportunity to share concerns, issues, ideas, etc. By working together inshAllah, we can accomplish so much more!

Teacher Contact Information

In an on-going effort to keep parent-teacher communication flourishing, we ask that parents keep teacher contact information at hand.

Farheen Khan (780) 555-6753
Teacher457@gmail.com

Nasreen Quraishi (897) 555-2546
Teacher375@aol.com

Seema Rayan (570) 555-2378
Teacher839@yahoo.com

Reminders to Students

- Let's remember our "Musjid manners"! That means using our "inside voices" and walking instead of running.
- All students are expected to do their Zuhr prayers in jamaat before dismissal.

Reminders to Parents

- Parents are also welcome and encouraged to join their children in Zuhr prayers before dismissal. The best form of education we can give to our children is through our actions and the examples we set!
- Please be sure to send a backpack and a snack/lunch with your child.



- Teachers send out weekly homework sheets – please look out for these each Saturday. These are designed *to keep parents informed* as to what was covered in class that day and what homework is expected the following week.
- In the event that your child is absent from class, please contact his/her teacher for missed classwork. This is crucial in keeping your child from falling behind!
- Weekly assignments *must be completed* to ensure your child's progress!

Upcoming Events

Classroom Open House

November 11th

School Closings

| | |
|---------------------------|----------------------|
| October 21 st | Eid break |
| October 28 th | Eid break (con't) |
| November 25 th | Thanksgiving weekend |
| December 23 rd | Winter break |
| December 30 th | Winter break (con't) |

Parent-Teacher Conferences

December 2nd & December 9th

Testing

Trimester 1 ends mid-December and *testing will take place December 16th, inshAllah*. Testing methods may vary according to student levels and/or teacher discretion. Please look out for additional information as it becomes available.



Thank You Parents!

Special thanks are due the following parents:

Saba Salim for providing assistance with the Level Alif class.

Fouzia Haris for volunteering to substitute for the Level Alif class.

JazakAllah khair to all the parents for all the hard work that goes in to bringing their children each Saturday morning and working on their homework assignments throughout the week!

5. Email

Mailing lists can be created to include all enrolled families or be specific to each classroom. Using “BCC” (or “Blind Carbon Copy”) upholds the privacy of recipients and keeps replies confidential. Email can also accommodate various types of information with no restriction on quantity – general reminders, documents, pictures, flyers, website addresses, newsletters, etc. Of all the methods of parent-teacher communication being discussed, email is the least time-consuming and most convenient. It can be done at the discretion of the teacher or administrator, and the parent at the receiving end can read, write, and/or respond to an email at their leisure as well. Having an easily accessible method of contact between weekly class meetings is a powerful way for parents and teachers to stay connected.

6. Assessment

How does an educator gauge his/her own effectiveness in teaching? The answer to this is simple: Assessment. It is a reflection of teacher success. Furthermore, evaluation is the ultimate communication of teacher expectation and student progress. It also brings teaching full-circle: students are given a projected goal to work towards and positive results reinforce their efforts.

Assessment is often overlooked, especially in the weekend Islamic school setting. Although student testing deserves an entire paper devoted solely to this subject, it also finds a place among the topic of parent-teacher communication. A positive outcome from student assessment communicates multi-faceted success for parents, teachers, and students alike.

7. Availability of Teacher Contact Information

Teachers need to show that they are approachable. Contact information should be incorporated into all printed exchanges with parents. The more readily accessible the teacher’s name, phone number, and email address are, the more likely a parent is to make use of them. Contact availability is the single-most important aspect of keeping the lines of communication open and utilized between parents and teachers.

Conclusion

A staggering percentage of Muslim American families depend on weekend Islamic programs to successfully provide their children with religious and moral education. By building parent-teacher alliances, the time and resource restrictions imposed on these once-weekly Islamic

programs can be overcome. Despite these limitations, all of the discussed examples of parent-teacher communication are achievable. This paper includes models as well as materials for establishing parent-teacher communication – weekly take-home sheets, parent-teacher conferences, Open House events, newsletters, email, student assessment, and easily-accessible teacher contact information. Each means of parent-teacher communication discussed above can be used for students of all ages, by either teacher or administrator, and applied to a single class or an entire school. The true establishment of parent-teacher communication leads to understanding and unity, thereby ensuring the success of teacher efforts and promoting on-going student progress.

References

Gelfer, J. I. (1991). Teacher-Parent Partnerships: Enhancing Communications. *Childhood Education*, 67(3), p. 164

Resource Packet

Distribution Style

- ✓ *Hard Copy – provisionally bound copies of reprintable materials to be used in implementing the discussed examples of open parent-teacher communication (for use by teachers and/or administrators)*
- ✓ *Soft Copy – CD of Microsoft Word document templates to be modified and used in implementing the discussed examples of open parent-teacher communication (also for use by teachers and/or administrators)*

Contents

- ✓ *Weekly take-home sheets (one blank form and one completed example)*
- ✓ *Parent-teacher conference forms (2 different styles)*
- ✓ *Open House flyers (one for uploading onto website, plus one print ready)*
- ✓ *Open House introduction letter for parents*
- ✓ *Open House informational handouts for parents (one on “Helping Your Child Get Ahead” and one on “Tips for Quranic Memorization”)*
- ✓ *Open House comment form*
- ✓ *Newsletter (3 different examples/files)*