



September 5, 2008

Via E-Mail Delivery and U.S. Mail

Mr. Asad Zaman
Executive Director
Tarek ibn Ziyad Academy
4100 East 66th Street
Inver Grove Heights, MN 55076

Dear Mr. Zaman:

The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) received your August 25, 2008 letter describing the actions Tarek ibn Ziyad Academy (TiZA) intends to take, beginning with the 2008-09 school year, in response to MDE's letter and report of May 19, 2008.

MDE has reviewed the policy changes proposed by TiZA's Board of Directors regarding Friday prayer and after-school transportation. As an initial matter, the Department found the defensive tone of TiZA's letter surprising given the constructive discussions between TiZA and MDE staff over the last several months. It is inaccurate for TiZA to imply that MDE's legal concerns regarding the school's operations during the 2007-08 school year were unfounded and it is of utmost importance that TiZA take seriously its responsibility to comply with applicable state and federal laws.

In general, MDE finds that TiZA's plans for after-school transportation and Friday prayer may be in compliance with the law, subject to confirmation of the Department's understandings regarding Friday prayer, as set forth below.

After-School Transportation

TiZA's proposed modification to its after-school transportation policy, and TiZA's provision of additional facts regarding its after-school transportation schedule, adequately address MDE's previously stated concerns. Due to the cost savings of accepting an alternative bus time, as well as the results of a parent survey indicating preference for a later bus time due to parent work schedules, TiZA has proposed to retain its later afternoon bus schedule, but will reimburse those parents who wish to arrange transportation for their children immediately after school. MDE encourages TiZA to follow up with parents later this fall to determine whether the proposed changes continue to meet parent and school needs.

Friday Prayer

MDE has reviewed the policy changes proposed by TiZA's Board of Directors with respect to Friday prayer. Based on TiZA's August 25 letter, MDE holds the following understandings regarding the school's revised policies for accommodating Friday prayer.

- TiZA proposes to accommodate Friday prayer that is student-led only, with staff present only for supervision of student safety. Staff wishing to pray on Fridays will use space separate from the students. Parents and/or other adult community members will have no role in leading students during Friday prayer.
- TiZA generally proposes that "the time allocated for Friday prayer accommodations will be reduced." Since the Friday prayer time during the 2007-08 school year was approximately 30 minutes in length, MDE assumes that the time set aside to accommodate Friday prayer going forward will be less than 30 minutes and will not unduly affect non-praying students.
- Subtracting out the non-instructional time during which students may participate in Friday prayer, TiZA has calculated that its students will still receive at least 1,109 hours of instructional time per year, which meets the minimum requirement for public schools. As noted in earlier MDE correspondence, if cumulative non-instructional time puts TiZA below minimum teacher contact requirements, that may impact the school's state aid.

If TiZA believes that any of MDE's understandings are incorrect, we request that the school contact MDE in writing as soon as possible to provide clarification.

After the start of the school year, MDE staff will conduct a site visit to TiZA to determine whether the policy changes specified in your August 25 letter have been successfully implemented. MDE also may request further information throughout the school year, as necessary, documenting that the proposed changes have been completed and maintained.

Please contact Morgan Brown, Assistant Education Commissioner, at 651-582-8627 if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Chas Anderson
Deputy Education Commissioner

c: Wayne Jennings, Sponsor Liaison
Islamic Relief USA