



Minnesota Department of Education Response to Concerns Raised about Tarek ibn Ziyad Academy

Charter Schools are an important component of Minnesota's tradition of providing public school choice to Minnesota students.

The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) goes to great lengths to make clear to charter school sponsors and directors that, while schools should accommodate students' religious beliefs, they must be "nonsectarian" under the state's charter school law.

We take seriously the concerns raised regarding Tarek ibn Ziyad Academy and will be conducting an appropriate review.

Oversight of Tarek ibn Ziyad Academy

MDE conducts a thorough review of the school's proposed curriculum, policies and operations when its sponsor applies for approval to open a new charter school. That process took place for Tarek ibn Ziyad Academy ("Tarek") in late 2002. The school was approved on January 7, 2003.

Since then, MDE has corresponded with and conducted site visits at Tarek to ensure that the school is adhering to Minnesota charter school laws, including a requirement that states that a charter school must be "nonsectarian" in nature [Minn. Stat. 124D.10]. Under state law, faith-based entities are not precluded from sponsoring charter schools but they must strictly adhere to the requirement that the school be "nonsectarian."

Correspondence between the Minnesota Department of Education and Tarek MDE regarding "nonsectarian" requirements in charter school law

July 22, 2004: MDE letter from School Choice Division to Tarek regarding observations by staff participating in a May 13 site visit and inquiring about students' religious practices at the school.

- The letter cited Subdivision 8(c) of the charter school law [Minnesota Statute 124D.10]: "A charter school must be nonsectarian in its programs, admission policies, employment practices, and all other operations. A sponsor may not authorize a charter school or program that is affiliated with a nonpublic sectarian school or a religious institution."

- The letter also referred the school to the U.S. Department of Education's "Guidance on Constitutionally Protected Prayer in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools" as required by Section 9524 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

December 1, 2004: MDE letter to Tarek regarding a November 7, 2004 article in the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* and inquiring about three statements in that article, including two that related to students' religious practices.

(Copies of correspondence are available upon request.)

MDE site visits to Tarek

September 2003

MDE staff from Title Programs – English Language Learners conducts a site visit at Tarek.

May 2004

A team of MDE staff from the following offices conduct a site visit investigation at Tarek in response to a May 5 written complaint received by MDE: Special Education Compliance, Program Finance, Federal Programs & Services – Food & Nutrition, Title Programs – English Language Learners, and Charter Schools.

November 2007

Routine site visit.

Reponses to recent concerns

MDE takes seriously the concerns raised regarding Tarek ibn Ziyad Academy and its sponsor Islamic Relief and will be conducting an appropriate review, including:

- Additional site visits
- Correspondence to Tarek regarding the concerns raised
- A letter to the U.S. State Department inquiring about the standing of Islamic Relief-USA