

# How to recruit and retain the best teachers

By Omar Ezzeldine, Ed.D.

*The following is an excerpt from a dissertation filed by the author in complete form at UCLA in June of 2004. The implications are as far reaching today as they were 2 years ago with regard to the impact school culture has on teacher retention. For a complete copy of this dissertation including the data, tools, and references, please conduct a web search for the author's complete name. Following this excerpt is an essay on what Muslim schools can learn from public schools.*

## STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Teacher turnover in private religious schools, which educate 11 percent of all school-aged children in the U.S., is relatively unstudied compared to turnover in public schools. Yet turnover rates in private schools nationally, of which 70 percent are religious, are almost twice as high as public schools (Whitener, 1997), especially in schools with fewer than 300 students (Ingersoll, 1995). Teacher turnover is known to be related to low student achievement. While most private school administrators perceive that high teacher turnover is simply a result of the lower salaries paid in private schools (Khaloui, 2002), some research suggests that, while less pay may be related to *turnover*, it may not be related to *retention* of teachers in private schools. Retention has to do with the attractive factors of a school rather than its deficits. The factors that motivate teachers to *remain* in schools are subsumed within the larger topic of school culture. These factors include positive interpersonal relationships within the school, active administrative support and teacher participation in decision-making (Ingersoll, 1999). Ingersoll's analysis of a national survey of over 62,000 public and private teachers identified several factors that could be classified under school culture. Some regional studies offer similar findings (Hammer, Rohr, and Carol, 1992).

While some general factors are available, less known are the deeper reasons that teachers stay in private schools and religious schools in particular. For religious schools (Catholic and other religions), the teacher turnover rate is twice as high as the turnover rate for public schools (Ingersoll and Rossi, 1995), and nothing is known about the deeper motivations of teachers who choose to *stay*. Retaining good teachers is especially important to religious schools because, unlike many private schools, they are typically financially vulnerable. Unless administrators clearly understand the factors that motivate teachers to *stay* in private religious schools they will be unable to increase retention of teachers in this critical segment of the U.S. educational system.

However, offsetting their financial vulnerability, religious schools – separate from other private schools – have strengths that if better understood may improve teacher retention. Religious schools focus on a mission strongly associated with a particular faith. Teachers who are attracted to religious schools are often motivated by more than a job or position, but rather a spiritual connection that may be referred to as a “calling.” Religious school administrators with whom I am working report that they wish to increase teacher retention and knowing teachers’ true motivations may lead to a better understanding of the problem. However, because there is a scarcity of research on religious schools there is little guidance for religious school administrators; thus, a study on retention issues at private religious schools would certainly shed light on how they may be induced to stay.

While survey data alone does not provide sufficient detail about teacher retention, when combined with qualitative methods a more in-depth understanding about teacher retention emerges. As noted earlier, research on both public and private schools, point to

a number of factors as the primary motivators for teachers to remain. These factors include positive interpersonal relationships within the school, active administrative support and teacher participation in decision-making and are subsumed within the larger umbrella of school culture – the collection of shared values and beliefs that guide individuals' behavior. While research provides some clues to the central importance of school culture, we have very little that directly associates it to retention, particularly in religious schools. The research conducted within a sample of participating religious schools identifies a more detailed and rich description of school culture and how it relates to teacher retention. Because the factors that develop a school's culture exist beneath the surface of day-to-day life, a study that includes both quantitative and qualitative methods is a better instrument for getting at the connection between school culture and retention.

To begin to understand this connection, we must first understand culture, which has been defined as the accumulation of beliefs and values, some of which are held consciously, others are held unconsciously, that guide the behavior of individuals in a group (Schein, 1989). School culture was examined in three main areas: climate, which is further broken into two parts, involvement of teachers in decision-making, and a spiritual connection. Edgar Schein sees climate as “the feeling...that is conveyed in an organization by...the way in which members of the organization interact...” (Schein, pg 5, 1989). The interpersonal interactions of students, teachers, and parents are one part of climate and a careful analysis of teacher' perceptions of these relationships may reveal the deeper reasons behind school climate's influence on teachers that choose to stay.

The second part of climate is administrative support, which is similar to a positive climate among co-workers. Teachers report more satisfaction in a job where they feel

supported by their administrators (Whitener, 1997). An example of administrative support may include openness to innovative ideas such as school projects that may require administrative approval. Another example may be administrators who support their teachers even-handedly in the event of a parent complaint. Administrators who take the extra effort to respect both the parent and the teacher will most likely create a climate that teachers find attractive.

The second subset of school culture that was examined is teachers' engagement in decision-making in the school. Private schools, especially religious private schools are small and close communities in and of themselves. Schools that encourage their teachers to participate in decision-making are shown to have higher teacher retention (Ballou and Podgursky, 1998), perhaps because including teachers in decision-making develops a tighter bond between them and the school.

The third and much less known subset of school culture that may have a profoundly important effect on teacher retention is a spiritual connection that teachers may feel toward their schools. Schools that are ideologically and spiritually homogeneous may induce a strong spiritual connection with teachers. This connection may contribute to teachers' retention, especially when the connection is strong. One way of studying this connection is through a careful examination of the statements of teachers who chose to work in religious schools. By interviewing teachers, one may discover a perceived spiritual connection between the teachers and their schools.

### **The Questions**

Among the questions this study seeks to answer is why teachers choose to remain in religious schools. Also, what are the elements of a religious school's culture that may

lead to better teacher retention? Is it possible to ascertain whether teachers choose religious schools because of a calling or because of an attitude of “this is just a job?” Will understanding these deeper dimensions of school culture help increase teacher retention?

### **The Study**

I located this study in a sample of private religious schools in Orange County, a developing area where a diverse array of religious schools are plentiful. In total I acquired a sample of ten schools that included five accredited schools – two Episcopalian, one Jewish, one Catholic and one Muslim – and five non-accredited schools, one Episcopalian, one Jewish, two Muslim, and one Catholic. I conducted a survey and then followed up with interviews that supported the survey data in order to determine teachers’ primary motivations for remaining in their respective schools. I developed a list of reasons why teachers stay in religious schools for the purposes of guiding administrators who wish to improve retention. The data may even be extended to offer new insights to the current strategies *public schools* use to increase retention.

This study required a commitment from the participating schools. Participants were expected to share feelings and personal opinions regarding the reasons they chose to work in their particular schools and the reasons they give for choosing to stay. The study did not seek primarily to uncover negative sentiments about the schools or administrators, but rather the positive aspects of school culture that may motivate teachers to return year after year.

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR ACTION

### **Summary of Findings**

#### **Sample Characteristics**

The purpose of this study is to assist religious schools in retaining their best teachers. To gather necessary data I conducted a survey of teachers in a sample of these schools and then interviewed a smaller number to answer some of the questions that emerged from the survey data. I was trying to identify factors that were related to teachers' predisposition to stay at their schools or to leave. After a careful analysis of the findings, the answers to the research questions become more apparent. In this chapter I summarize the findings and discuss their implications for practice. Finally I discuss ways I intend to use the study to affect practice and steps I plan to take to prepare the study's results for a broader public engagement.

The findings are based on data drawn from teachers from a variety of backgrounds and faiths. Schools in the sample were also varied in their ages, sizes, and faiths. Taken together these variations provide important contrasts in the data. For instance the percentage of respondents from different faiths is evenly distributed with a standard deviation of only four percent. The sample of teachers could be described as "mature" in that nearly two-thirds (60 percent) are over the age of 40. Similarly, two-thirds (65 percent) of the teachers have been teaching for more than six years.

## **Characteristics of the Teachers and Schools**

### **Teachers “Love” Teaching**

To understand what is beneath teachers’ commitment to their schools, I analyzed the data about respondents’ attitudes about their profession. The findings are clear that the respondents are much more committed to teaching than one might expect. Ninety-nine (99) percent of the respondents reported that they “love teaching as a profession,” which suggests that even teachers who are planning to leave their schools are doing so despite their love of teaching.

### **Teachers are Committed to Faith-Based Education**

While not as impressive, but still a substantial number, 59 percent of all respondents indicate a commitment to faith-based education. Slightly fewer (56 percent) report being committed to the actual faith of a school. This finding suggests that while a commitment to teaching as a profession is the nearly unanimous sentiment of all respondents, teaching in a faith-based school is important, but secondary. This was best described in the previous chapter by Julie Guzman when she says “...it’s not so much a calling to a [religious] school...It’s more a calling to teach... regardless of the faith.”

### **Religious Schools have Positive Climates**

Eighty percent of all respondents reported feeling positive about almost every aspect of their school community and more than 80 percent reported positive feelings about their schools’ climate. However, somewhat fewer (68 percent) report being satisfied with the level of teamwork between teachers and administrators. Still, more than two-thirds feel positively about their relationship with the administration.

## **Pay Versus Job Satisfaction and Sense of Value**

While a popular view holds that low pay is a cause of turnover, results from my study show that pay alone appears to be unrelated to respondents' level of satisfaction. While perceptions about fair pay are nearly evenly divided, the majority of the respondents (84 percent) report feeling satisfied and nearly three-quarters (74 percent) report feeling valued at their schools. This finding indicates that while respondents are split with regard to whether or not their pay is fair, a significant number report being satisfied suggesting that retaining good teachers may not be such a challenge for most of these schools. However understanding the motivations of teachers that are satisfied and planning to stay may help administrators prevent their best teachers from becoming those who decide to leave.

## **Stayers and Leavers**

According to the data collected from respondents, only 15 percent indicate a lack of commitment to their school with only 3.5 percent of the respondents indicating that they "definitely plan to leave as soon as possible." Overall, this suggests that despite only half the teachers feel they are paid fairly; many more are satisfied and feel valued and only 3.5 percent of the respondents indicate a strong desire to leave. While we can be certain that the turnover rate overall at these schools may be more than 3.5 percent<sup>1</sup>, understanding the motivations of teachers that choose to stay and comparing them to those that plan to leave may help administrators prevent their best teachers from becoming those in the small percentage that leave.

---

<sup>1</sup> According to this sample, it can be assumed that turnover in these schools is, at most, 15%, which is well within the range of percent turnover in public schools as well as industry standards



## **Callings and Spirituality**

One of the questions this study seeks to determine is the possibility of a deeper spiritual calling to teaching in a religious school and how that relates to teachers' plans to stay or leave. As indicated prior, nearly every respondent (99 percent) indicated a commitment to teaching as a profession and teaching as a life-long choice. However far fewer were committed to teaching in a religious school. Even when the results are broken down by those who plan to stay and those who plan to leave ("stayers" and "leavers"), only two-thirds (66 percent) are committed to the school because of its faith. However, one cannot ignore that two-thirds (66 percent) of the stayers is a significant proportion of respondents who indicate a commitment to the faith of the school. Even more (69 percent) of the stayers indicate that they are teaching at their school because of their commitment to faith-based education. This is best described by Francine Averros when she says:

What originally brought me to teach there is I attended the church there, and they were going through a rough time. And at the time, I thought, what can I do for my church? So that's kind of how I ended up starting to teach there.

This statement indicates that respondents hold some value for the fact that the school has some religious affiliation. In fact Anton Gerry who did not share the same faith as that of his school stated:

And one of the things that we've been looking at is having a unique value proposition. Every school has to have that to go forward... The good things I find is that when you have a strong central religious component, that can be sort of used as a unifying technique for the school.

When he was asked to elaborate on the effect this may have on teachers, he said:

...You can retain teachers...if you've got a faculty member that is incredibly driven by the faith of the institution where he or she is working for...then maybe they are

going to be willing to work at that school despite short-fallings and shortcomings they see, because they feel like they're working for their faith.

Anton Gerry's theory is best supported by the following comments made by Bob District:

The schools are no longer rich in faith, but are pretending to be so... I am starting to think that it would be better now to be at a school that is openly secular.... But in prayer and journaling, I have understood that the Lord wants me to be here next year. Every year I start over and ask these questions again.

The commitment to the faith may be able to retain teachers better however this comment shows it can often be a source of great frustration as well.

### **School Climate**

Both stayers and leavers need to find a connection to the school mission and respondents expect their administration to effectively represent the mission of the school.

John Perry explains the value this holds when he says the following:

Well, our head of school...is a great leader, embodies the school's philosophy and mission, and is always a constant reminder to the students, to the faculty, to the staff of what the school's goal is...I think that's one of the great things, having a living example on campus for us.

### **Administrative Leadership**

Positive relations with the administration may be critical to a teacher's desire to stay. When comparing stayers and leavers in every aspect of school community, both stayers and leavers have positive sentiments. However, the exception and in fact the largest difference between perceptions of stayers and leavers, is with regard to issues that relate to administrative leadership.

Stayers and definite leavers show large differences in their perceptions about administrative leadership. The teachers who say they are going to leave are far less likely to agree with the statement "Teachers feel supported by their administration" than those who are likely to stay. This pattern can also be seen when comparing responses to

the statements, “The administration at this school is supportive of its teachers” and “At this school, teachers feel respected by their principal/school head.” Those teachers who plan to leave were far less likely to agree with these statements than were the other teachers, especially those who planned to stay. Other areas of difference were with regard to staff development suggesting that respondents felt the need for better staff development and clear procedures for evaluations.

### **Collegial Relations**

The next area of significant difference between stayers and leavers is with regard to collegial relations. Both stayers and leavers report having positive relations with other teachers. However when compared more closely, the leavers report having positive collegial relations less strongly. This difference is one of the largest, second only to reports about teachers’ relations with administrative leadership. One example of how much teachers value positive collegiality is described by Francine Averros:

Last year we’d always had a time where a bunch of us, about six of us, could time our lunches, and we’d go have lunch together. One would have the table ready, one would come late, and they’d pick up the tab. We haven’t had that opportunity. But I think that’s important for teachers to get to know each other on a personal level. I think you have more commitment to the school.

Francine then went on to explain how she felt teachers had become less enthusiastic about the school because opportunities to go out to lunch as described above, which built collegiality, were no longer possible because everyone had become too busy. Max Frank points out how he was disappointed in losing this connection when he said:

The one thing that I would have to say is...the negative area here is the collegiality between faculty. No one seems to get together. When I was at Orange, everybody ate in the faculty lunchroom. Faculty all sat down together at lunch and talked. Not about teaching. Just talking...my wishes are...we need to do stuff more together, so we kind of bond...I think it’s important to [help] make

faculty feel that...make sure that you take care of the people that make your institution go, which is normally your faculty, your teachers.

Additionally, John Perry describes the importance of friendly relations with his colleagues as follows:

... the faculty came together to support the accreditation process and make it a positive thing instead of just another reason we have to stay after school for an hour. Also there's different types of celebrations, whether marriages, or baby showers. There always seems to be something that there's reason to celebrate in each other's lives.

Julie Guzman also noted that the feeling at her school is like a family and when one teacher was not asked to return it was like they "got rid of one of [her] sisters. So it's, you know. It's hard."

This need for strong collegial relations may be related to teachers' desires to work with a staff of expert teachers. Among the lowest agreement scores among those who were definitely going to leave their schools was in response to the statement that "This school is able to maintain a very strong teaching staff." These teachers were equally critical of the lack of available mentors to help teachers. In fact, even stayers were critical about this element of their schools. Teacher Julie Guzman offered one explanation when she says: "I think that [my administrator] isn't necessarily great at choosing teachers. And I think that that's a really hard skill to learn." Morale, even for stayers is strongly founded in relations with other teachers. While some data suggest the connection may be partly religious, none of the interviewees indicated that their interactions were manifestations of their spirituality. Max Frank made the point when he described a small group of teachers that "...have what they call table talk where they sit down and talk Scriptures," he immediately followed by saying "That's not me."

## **Conclusions**

Based on these findings it is clear that teachers are not leaving their schools because of a lack of a commitment to teaching or because of low pay. Those who are leaving also love teaching. Teachers who plan to leave their schools are also highly committed to teaching and most are committed to faith-based education. What appears to be most valued by these teachers is a school with a clear vision, an effective administrative leadership and good camaraderie with their colleagues.

### **Teachers are Committed to Teaching**

One of the principal findings of this study reveals that teachers in these religious schools are far less likely to leave these schools than the literature and anecdotal evidence suggested. In fact, the turnover rate (estimated from respondents' self-reported plans to stay or leave) indicates that retention is likely to be well below what the research has suggested.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, some may believe that teachers who elect to teach in private religious schools lack the commitment to teaching found among public school teachers. However, as this study shows, teachers in these religious schools are highly committed to teaching. Additionally, most teachers reported that they had a "spiritual calling" to teach, another important factor that leads to commitment. Finally, the vast majority of these teachers report being satisfied with their jobs. What is clear from this study is that teachers' commitment to teaching is primary and commitment to faith is secondary. Religious school teachers seem mired in the image that they have chosen to work in religious schools because of their faith and much less a commitment to teaching as a

---

<sup>2</sup> Nationwide, teacher turnover is between 10-15 percent. As indicated in chapter 1 and 2, teacher turnover in private schools (70 percent of which are religious) has been found to be 20 – 30 percent.

profession. On the contrary, this study demonstrates that while the commitment to faith is high, it is not as high as the commitment to teaching

### **Teachers Value a Positive School Climate**

This study shows the central role of a positive school climate. Teachers' need to feel that they fit within their schools' climate is shown to be of significant importance in these religious schools. Interestingly, it is not necessary that a school have a faith-based mission that corresponds to a teacher's own faith. Whatever faith the mission reflects, teachers must feel comfortable within it, and that the mission remain clear and consistent. The expectation is that schools must protect the integrity of the mission. Teachers need to feel that it is alive and resolute, impervious to the pressures of increasing enrollment or pleasing everyone. Even those teachers who continue to stay, despite challenges and difficulties, seem to be clinging to this one source of meaning – the mission of the school, which at times, if lost becomes yearned for until finally abandoned along with their commitment to the school.

### **Teachers Value Being Appreciated and Respected by Administrators**

The results of this study support what research has suggested as the second most significant predictor to turnover – perceptions about administrative leadership. While one can infer from this study that most teachers in religious schools are satisfied with their school climate, there is a sharp drop when it comes to feeling connected with the school leadership. Part of this is in part due to the perception that the leadership does not facilitate clear communication, in particular procedures for performance evaluations. However at the core of this is a disconnection between teachers and administrators, which

suggests that administrators have not done enough to foster a positive relationship with their teachers. Teachers place a tremendous amount of burden on the administrative leadership to manage the climate at their school and then to clearly identify their role in that climate. This entails making sure that the administrative leadership accurately represents the school's mission and vision.

### **Teachers Value Collegial Relationships**

The last and perhaps most significant factor for retaining teachers is the presence of positive collegial relationships. This aspect of the climate is one of the most significant in differentiating teachers' commitments to their school. Teachers want to be connected to their colleagues, at the very least, on a professional level. Unlike what may have been suspected, teachers do not have high expectations of bonding with one another on a purely religious level. Spirituality may exist among teachers, but more so as it relates to teaching as a profession and working together in a job that holds significant meaning for them. Teachers want to be able to rely on a colleague to talk to and connect with, not necessarily about teaching alone, but about their own personal lives and challenges.

### **Implications for Action**

When I set out to begin this project, it was in large part because of the need indicated by religious schools to develop a support system that would meet the needs particular to private religious schools. To this end, I formed the Interfaith Council of Religious Schools and encouraged the schools represented by the council to participate in this study. The results of this study have direct implications for the participating schools. However this study also provides valuable data for other religious schools beyond those

included in this study. The ICRS and others interested in this study may now take the implications from this study and begin to apply them in their schools, but more importantly to learn from each others' experiences the steps and methods necessary for nurturing positive changes in their schools. Overall these implications suggest that administrators must determine what their teachers value and then "feed" those teachers.

### **Protect and Preserve the Teachers who "Love" Teaching**

The first implication for action is based on the finding that religious schools largely staffed by committed teachers, which are an asset to be protected. This may include teachers that are committed to faith-based education even though they may personally follow a faith different from that of the school. Many schools are plagued with an attitude that their teachers are not committed and at times this attitude may in fact be the cause of low morale. When teachers are publicly recognized as professionals who are committed to teaching, they will feel more appreciated and thus more committed to their schools. Teachers must be considered professionals and thus given support that can come through professional development and through mentors that can guide both new and veteran teachers through their own professional goals.

### **Identify and Manage the School Climate**

Teachers value feeling connected to their school's mission and vision. As is evident from this study, teachers will feel more committed when they feel their school's mission and vision are clear and firm. Administrators must strive to ensure that their school's mission is clearly identified; teachers are well matched with it, and make sure teachers see the integrity of that mission maintained through all decision-making.



Involving teachers in some level of school leadership, decision making or at least informing them of the motivations behind decisions will reinforce their sense of connection to the school as an extended family and more than “just a job.” Teachers also need to feel that their administrative leaders are living embodiments of their schools’ mission and vision. To this end, leaders must be aware of their actions and the depth to which their actions leave perceptions in the minds and hearts of their teachers. Administrators must continuously, but subtly, demonstrate the way in which they embody the school’s mission.

### **Appreciate and Respect Teachers**

The way teachers are treated by their administrators has shown to have a significant impact on a teacher’s commitment to the school. Support and respect from administrators must go beyond providing token support like classroom supplies and provide tangible support like useful professional development and providing leadership opportunities. My findings also show that administrators can provide emotional support to help teachers get through difficulties and not confine their roles to just to evaluating them. Even when evaluating them, administrators must clearly explain the procedures for evaluations.

### **Develop and Nurture Teachers’ Collegial Relationships**

Teachers need to feel satisfied with their collegial relations. Much of the burden for creating a collegial climate is on the administration. This can include relieving teachers of break duty, giving them additional opportunities to connect with colleagues or spend time with mentors. Since most administrators are not available to serve as

mentors, they must put special care and consideration into matching new hires to the existing teachers and in selecting teachers to guide their colleagues through their challenges. Such mentoring can be formalized, but there must also be a concerted effort made by administrators to make sure every teacher feels a connection to the school family via colleagues who can serve as informal mentors. It may be as simple as building in opportunities for teachers to come together in a staff lounge and arranging schedules to make sure teachers can meet together.

# **What can Islamic Schools Learn from Public Schools?**

By Dr. Omar Ezzeldine

Public Schools may be seen as the antithesis to Islamic Schools. In fact, most parents who choose to put their children in Islamic Schools or any other private or religious school do so with a desire to escape the secular, spiritually demoralizing and at times dangerous environments of public schools. However from an organizational standpoint, Islamic schools have much that they can learn from the way public schools operate. While the attitude has often been to steer absolutely clear of public schools, there may be lessons learned and even services gained from the public educational system. Public schools have three distinct advantages that Islamic schools should consider. The first has to do with management-staff relations, the second can be described as “bigger is better” and finally the way student needs are serviced.

## **Management-Staff Relations**

Private schools, in particular Islamic schools, are based in tight-knit communities. This is generally because Islamic Schools are established by a small number of families who are usually well-acquainted with one another. Since Muslim populations are still sparse in parts of the United States, most of the teachers and managers in an Islamic school are acquaintances, friends or even family outside of the professional setting. As a result management –staff relations tend to be more casual. While this engenders a great sense of family and community in an Islamic school, at times these relationships begin to compromise the professionalism and the ability for managers to enforce disciplinary processes.

For example, if a teacher is chronically late to work, a School Head that is a family member is placed in the awkward position of firing or reprimanding that teacher. The situation becomes even more precarious if the offending teacher is related to a board member or a big donor to the school.

In public schools, relationships are more professional. This is mainly because of the wide range of individuals that make up the heterogeneous environment in a public school. While some people may be related or even friends, there is a clear distinction between personal matters and business. This may primarily be because of the fact that so many of the people in a public school are not related or friends so the overall atmosphere lends itself to professionalism over casualness. One must be cautious about interpreting this to mean that public schools do not have friendly interactions and even social gatherings outside of school. In fact, there are many opportunities for social interaction between management and staff; however managers are always careful to deal with their employees in a manner that does not compromise their authority.

Another strategy that works to maintain appropriate and effective management-staff relations is focusing discussions on the profession and the organization. This focus on the job creates an image in the mind of the employee that the manager is the individual that represents the organizational goals more so than a friend or family member.

Ultimately the key to effective management-staff relations is to maintain a balance between brief casual conversations and a predominant focus on the school and its effective management.

## **Bigger is better**

One of the most noticeable differences between private schools and public schools is the size. The largest K-12 Islamic schools have about 1500 students. Most Islamic Elementary schools have less than 300 students. Public elementary schools average around 800. High Schools are usually between 2000-3500 students. This large number of students provides the ability to maintain a large number of human resources for administrative and academic collaboration.

While most Islamic Schools have 2-3 office personnel in addition to the principal or school head, most public schools have a minimum of 8-10, as well as district personnel that support the schools in the district. Having this many people administer a school provides a wider delegation of the every day tasks that every school must deal with regardless of whether the school has 100 or 1000 students. These include counseling, attendance, school nurse, bookkeeping, office management, special events, supervision, enrollment, etc. Additionally, Islamic schools have added administrative needs such as fundraising, marketing and community outreach. Even management is spread out over a principal and as many as 5 assistant principals. While most of these tasks in Islamic schools are spread out over volunteers and sometimes even teachers, the reality is that when there are personnel who focus on these administrative needs, job descriptions are clear and productivity is increased.

Teachers in large schools also have access to colleagues with whom they can collaborate and share ideas. While Islamic schools probably have one or two 1<sup>st</sup> grades or two math teachers, public schools have four to six 1<sup>st</sup> grades and 8-10 math teachers. The formation of departments creates more opportunities for support and curriculum

development. The effect of this is even greater when teachers throughout the district get together for collaborative curriculum projects.

One of the advantages of Islamic schools is the small, community feeling it engenders by having such a small number of students. Without compromising this feature, small Islamic schools can form small associations wherein teachers and administrators can collaborate in person through workshops or via newsgroups. Administrative services can also be outsourced to an entity that is shared by more than one school so that costs are evenly distributed. These services can increase to the point at which many schools utilize one central administrative office for specific services in a design similar to that of a public school district. These are just a few examples of alternatives to relying so heavily on volunteers that at times burn out, or turnover too often becoming undependable.

### **Servicing Needs**

Public schools are able to serve a broader spectrum of students based on their needs. This includes students with learning disabilities. As mentioned in the previous section, the large number of students in public schools allows for the hiring of more human resources to serve a wide range of student needs. Public schools also receive funding through grants and other government programs that support their obligation to provide services for special education.

Private schools, in particular Islamic schools, just simply cannot serve all students. They will always have to turn away certain students or at times kick them out because they just cannot handle their emotional or behavioral needs. Ironically, even in public schools, kids are expelled for adverse behaviors that the public school is unable to

handle or remediate. Islamic schools have often been the target of criticisms because of their attempts to serve the needs of students who have needs beyond the skills and training of their teachers. In addition to special education for the mentally handicapped, public schools have trained personnel who help students with all types of learning disabilities, emotional disabilities, and behavioral problems. Special courses are offered where these types of students receive one-on-one instruction, resource specialists, and even personal trainers in some cases. Islamic schools, like most private schools will never be able to serve these various and highly complicated needs, yet they enroll many of these students ever year, hoping that the Islamic environment will help.

Islamic schools will better serve these students as well as the rest of their students by encouraging and supporting the formal evaluations done by their local public school. Every child has a right to public school service, including special education services, even if they attend a private school. Parents must be encouraged to contact the school in their attendance area and request a formal evaluation. The results of these evaluations will include various recommendations for services done by the district. These can include keeping a student in the Islamic school, but pulling the student out for an hour to receive services at the local public school. Government programs such as free/reduced lunch are also available to Islamic schools if they have students who qualify. Services can include free tutoring and even meals. Behavior problems like chronic tardies or absences can be addressed through the local school district. Attending school is compulsory upon every parent and parents as well as young adults can be prosecuted by the local district attorney for failing to attend school regularly. While proceedings vary in every district, there exist formal procedures for filing against families through the local

school district and police department. Although this may seem harsh, it is beneficial for Islamic Schools to be aware that services do exist for a wide range of needs and problems.

Islamic Schools are still developing in the United States and as new ones open, lessons are passed on from older Islamic Schools as well as neighboring private schools. There is also a great deal of things that can be learned and gained from public schools. This not only includes services available to Islamic schools, but also management strategies that may engender a more successful organization.