

## Brooklyn's Arab Academy

That this topic remains open is surprising. Other than objections from a few of us—the New York Sun's editorialists, its columnist Alicia Colon, the investigative team of Beila Rabinowitz and William A. Meyer, plus my own article and blog on this subject—the school enjoys unflagging support. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation helps pay for it. The mayor's office, the Anti-Defamation League, and the United Federation of Teachers endorse it. Newspaper coverage from the NY Times, NY Daily News, Brooklyn Daily Eagle, and International Herald Tribune attempts to discredit opponents, sometimes stooping to distort our arguments.

Even parents who protested Khalil Gibran International Academy (KGIA) being placed in their children's buildings speak only of insufficient space and mixing older students with younger ones. As one put it, "Our issue is not with the substance of the school. It's with the space."

Such parental objections led the Department of Education (DOE) to abandon its push to place KGIA in a Brooklyn primary school. Instead, it found a location for the next two years, and a department spokesman stated with finality: "This is not a tentative decision. The school will open at this site in September."

That said, the school's prospects appear less than certain. Firstly, with the 2006-07 academic year now over, 5th graders generally know which school they will attend next year, and though some families have expressed interest in KGIA, not a single student has yet enrolled there.

Second, that the DOE has apparently instructed school administrators not to talk to the press bespeaks a siege mentality.

Third, that all 12 members of KGIA's advisory board are connected to religious institutions validates concerns about its being a religiously-oriented school.

Fourth, the advisory board's three Muslim members all have Islamist connections unsuited to a taxpayer-funded school. Khalid Latif, the Imam of New York University, threatened NYU that should a student event displaying the Danish cartoons take place, "the potential of what might happen after they are shown" should be "not taken lightly." Al-Hajj Talib "Abdur-Rashid" belongs to the "National Committee to Free Imam Jamil Abdullah Al-Amin" (Al-Amin being a convicted cop-killer). Shamsi (or Syamsi) Ali runs a madrasa in Queens where an almost exclusive focus on Koran memorization might be breaking state educational laws.

Finally, parents will not be assuaged by resolving problems about school crowding and the mixing of different-aged students for, whatever they say publicly, the evidence suggests that their real objection to KGIA involves the school's inculcating pan-Arabism and radical Islam.

• Why did NY parents accept without demurral, schools teaching Chinese, Creole, French, German, Japanese, Russian, and Spanish, while the parents of two schools have rejected the KGIA?

• The too-crowded argument is hollow, since the second school building has an overcapacity of about 680 seats, far more than what the new school expects for the 60 students during its first year and double that many the second

• School administrators promise heightened security for the school building that houses the KGIA, implicitly suggesting this is a parental concern related to Arabic instruction

• Katia Lief, for example, worried about "a cultural-religious school" with "girls in burqas"; (That she wrote a confused apology some days later for the comment only confirms the parents' fear of plain talk.)

• It is common to object to Islamic institutions by raising practical issues such as crowding, traffic and parking. In a co-authored study dating from 1991, I already noted several instances of this pattern in Europe and the US, and it has become even more routine since then.

The fact is, Islamic institutions do have a pattern of extremism and even violence. Concerns are valid and should be aired openly. School Chancellor Joel Klein has promised that "If any school became a religious school," he would shut it down, adding that he will not tolerate "a political school with a political agenda."

Readers can write him at [JKlein@schools.nyc.gov](mailto:JKlein@schools.nyc.gov) to point out their concerns about KGIA's religious and political nature.

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