

Weekend Islamic Schools: Are They Preparing Children For Life Ahead?

Recommendations for Weekend Islamic School Teachers and Administrators

In July 2017, the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding (ISPU) hosted a convening with the John Templeton Foundation (JTF) to identify the needs, opportunities, and challenges for weekend Islamic schools as they relate to character development in students. Participants included major designers and publishers of Islamic curricula, leaders and teachers of weekend Islamic schools, and researchers and scholar-practitioners with experience working with Islamic schools. These leaders developed the following recommendations for weekend school teachers and administrators.

Expand the Curriculum Focus

- Don't just memorize the Quran — include topics like behavioral Islamic character development, identity, and belonging in curricula.



Enhance the Classroom Experience

- Shift to a student-centered pedagogy where religion is taught with student context and experience in mind.
- Use online video modules to train teachers and have them earn an Islamic education certification.
- Adopt community service projects as a teaching tool.



Strengthen Administrative Practices

- Use established metrics to assess student character development.
- Train teachers on consistent practices to impart religious knowledge to students.
- Since most schools are part of mosques, encourage teachers to join mosque boards in order to play a role in the decision-making process.
- Set aside a budget for teacher professional development.



Help Other Schools Succeed

- Identify success stories and develop best practices for weekend schools.
- Promote and disseminate existing resources to other weekend schools.



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The Institute for Social Policy and Understanding's (ISPU) mission is to provide objective research and education about American Muslims to support well-informed dialogue and decision-making. Since 2002, ISPU has been at the forefront of exploring the trends, challenges, and opportunities that impact the American Muslim community and offering evidence-based solutions to community leaders, practitioners, educators, religious leaders, and other change makers.

On July 25, 2017, ISPU hosted a one-day convening to identify the needs, opportunities, and challenges for weekend Islamic schools as they relate to student character development. The convening was funded by the John Templeton Foundation (JTF), an organization that seeks to engage faith communities with the science of character development. The event aimed to learn from voices working in the weekend Islamic school sector and to understand how initiatives involving the science of character development could address their needs and opportunities. A total of 14 participants presented their research and findings, and engaged in a rich exchange of ideas. The participants included major designers and publishers of Islamic curricula, leaders and teachers of weekend Islamic schools, and researchers and scholar-practitioners with significant experience working with Islamic schools and Muslim communities. A full list of the participants and their bios are included in the report at ispu.org. Participants attended three one-hour sessions, with each session followed by 30 minutes of participant discussions. The topics of the three sessions were "Education," "Publishing," and "Community Engagement." Each participant was asked to address a series of questions. This infographic presents a sub-section of the participants' combined responses to those questions, as well as the insights that emerged from the discussion sessions.

The primary goal of the convening was to identify the needs, opportunities, and challenges within the weekend Islamic school context, especially as they relate to character virtue development, and to brainstorm how initiatives involving the science of character development can address these needs and opportunities.