

October 2004

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Al-Amal School Newsletter

Al-Amal School – www.al-amal.org – (763) 571-8886

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Al-Amal School is a **full-time Islamic school** in Minnesota with Pre-K through 12th grade. It is accredited and provides an Islamic educational environment for more than 350 students!

For more info see our web site at www.al-amal.org

On the Right Track

Often times, people wonder how Al-Amal School compares with the other area public schools especially with respect to it's Middle and High School performance.

The following information about our school's performance on nationwide tests should convince even the toughest critics:

This year's IOWA Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) results confirm that we are on the right track: by-and-large our results are

above the national average and improving!

When compared to other schools, Al-Amal School students have scored higher than the national average in Reading, Language, and Math.

20% of the M/H students are in the top 1% in the Nation in at least one subject.

22% of the M/H students are in the top 5% in the Nation in Math.

More than half of all students are in the top 10% in the nation in at

least one subject.

Here is a comparison of test results with the Columbia Heights District (the closest district that takes the same nationwide tests as Al-Amal) showing the percentage of 2nd graders scoring above the national average:

	<u>CH</u>	<u>Al-Amal</u>
Reading:	30%	68%
Math:	44%	89%

Also the test numbers show that we have improved in all areas compared to previous years. For more information about ITBS test results please see page 2.

PTSA is Making an Impact by Rafi Sohail, PTSA Communications Director

Al-Amal School's PTSA is a volunteer organization that consists of the Al-Amal School parents, teachers, and students. It is governed by its own by-laws under the Minnesota PTSA and the National PTA charter, and its main purpose is to promote the welfare of the children and of Al-Amal School. The PTSA role is to establish a forum to address emerging school issues and initiatives, communicate and seek assistance/volunteers to address the needs, and

provide collaborative efforts when needed.

Al-Amal School PTSA has made a significant impact since its formation in May 2003. In addition to providing assistance in organizing the fundraising event and various school activities, following are the highlights of PTSA contribution during the last school year:

- Math and English tutoring program
- Destination Imagination for the 1st and 2nd grade kids

- Teacher appreciation week
- Holiday survey
- Annual school picnic and silent auction to raise funds for the playground
- Recommendations to the Board and Administration to streamline various school policies

To learn more about the PTSA and how to get involved, please contact the Al-Amal School Office.

“The longer the students stay with Al-Amal the further they improve!”

Al-Amal in comparison – Test Results

This year’s IOWA Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) results confirm that we are on the right track: by-and-large our results are above the national average and improving!

The ITBS is a nationwide standardized test that measures basic skills and general content knowledge. Al-Amal School students are given the ITBS every year in the Spring for three main reasons: 1. Assess the school’s performance, 2. Provide feedback to teachers, and 3. Monitor student’s yearly progress.

When compared to other schools, Al-Amal School students have scored higher than the national average in Reading, Language, and Math.

The figures on the left show the number of students (in percentages) who scored above the national average. The dotted line at the 50 percent level indicates the national average. The elementary school is shown as the lower

elementary (Grades 1 and 2) and the upper elementary (Grades 3-5). The Reading score measures vocabulary and reading comprehension. The Language score measures spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and usage and expression. The Math score measures math concepts and estimation, problem solving, and computation. As the figures show, with the exception of the lower elementary in Language, all four segments of our school (the lower and upper elementary, middle, and high school) exceed the national average in all three subject areas.

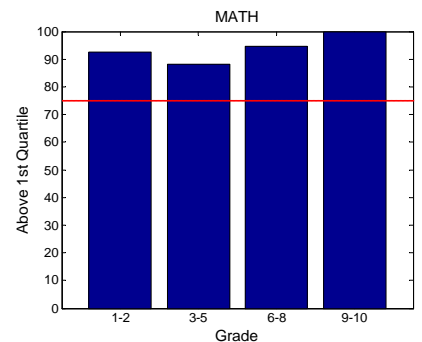
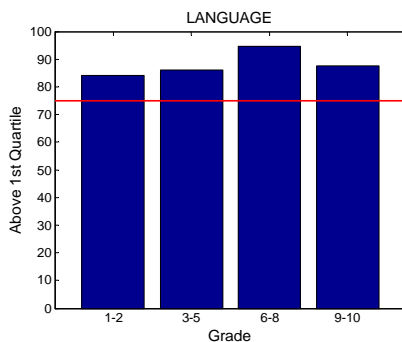
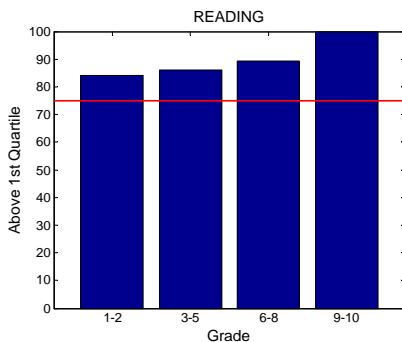
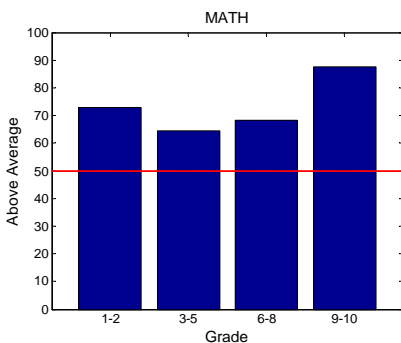
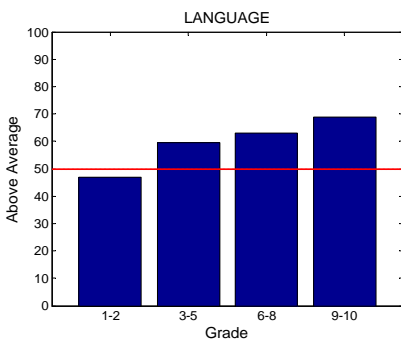
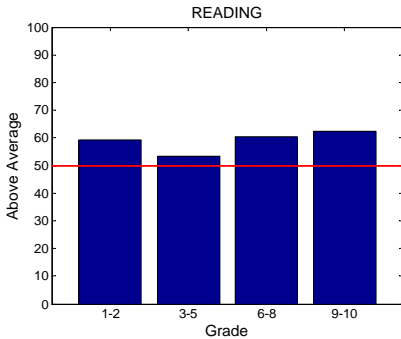
We can look into each subject area in more detail to answer the question: Are the average scores higher because of a few very bright students or is Al-Amal School actually succeeding in setting the bar high for the great majority of its students?

One way to find that out is to look at how many

students are below or above the 1st quartile (25th percentile). The figures below show that Al-Amal School students are well above that level in all three subject areas. The national average (75th percentile) is again shown as the dotted line. While all segments of our school score well above the average which indicates higher standards, our high school achieves 100% in Reading and Math (none left behind!)

While the above average scores are reassuring, the overall trend is very encouraging. We noted that our results in all areas improved compared to the previous years. Moreover, the test results are higher for higher grades. This trend is especially visible in Reading and Language scores. That is, the longer the students stay with Al-Amal, the further they improve!

If you need further explanation or have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the schools office.



Raising Tomorrow's Leaders by Abdisalam Adam, Chairman of the Board

Al-Amal School strives to produce world-class students equipped to compete academically, socially, and spiritually.

The school is going through it's 11th year of its operation. The journey is both an opportunity and a challenge. With the help of Allah (SWT) and the dedication of the school's Administration, Staff, Board and parents, the school has grown to be a formidable alternative for parents wishing to have an Islamic education for their children.

Academically, Al-Amal students show consistently higher scores than the national average on the Iowa Test of Basic Standards (ITBS). Our 11th and 12th graders participate in the Post Secondary Enrollment Options (PSEO) and have sailed through college level classes. All of the Al-Amal graduates so far have gained admission to institutions of higher education in Minnesota. Data on students clearly shows strong correlation between improved student achievement and time spent at Al-Amal. Our math results have remained high through the years on the Iowa test. Also, we have adopted the Direct Instruction (DI) curriculum to boost reading skills in the early grades.

Al-Amal students grow up in an Islamic environment in which their social skills develop. Starting from pre-school, students memorize Qur'an, du'a, acquire Islamic moral character and positive behavior. The same nurturing environment continues in the upper grades, too. Furthermore, Al-Amal students exchange visits with students from other schools to learn about their programs and experiences. They also participate in cleaning a Masjid project as well as food drives to help the needy and homeless.

We aspire of our students to be compassionate and caring about their immediate and larger community. Many of the school's extracurricular activities such as Lego League, soccer, Destination Imagination, Science Fair, and Girl Scouts strive to develop inquiry and leadership skills in our students. Finally, many of our teachers use the Responsive Classroom model to guide discipline in a purposeful gradual manner.

One of the goals of Al-Amal School is to prepare students who have a firm grasp of Islamic beliefs and principles. Our Qur'an and Islamic studies curriculum emphasizes a

solid understanding of Tawheed (Oneness of Allah) and taqwa (piety). Students start the day with Qur'an and ahadith before school begins. Also, the weekly Jumu'ah Khutbah and, daily dhuhr prayers reinforce the students' readiness to undertake the teachings of Islam with pride and dedication.

Bearing the importance of the school's mission, the Board has set four goals to promote the school's competitive edge:

- "Live Islam"
- Quality Education,
- Financial Stability, and
- Connecting with all Stakeholders

are the focus of Al-Amal's Annual Operating Plan for the 2004/2005 school year.

For optimal results, the Board, Administration, Staff, and PTSA (see *article on front page*) must all work together hand in hand to educate our children. The expertise, ideas, contribution, and assistance of each and everyone of the community will be highly appreciated.

May Allah (SWT) help us all in undertaking the trust upon our shoulders.

Ramadan Mubarak!

"Al-Amal students grow up in an Islamic environment in which their social skills develop"

"One of the goals of Al-Amal school is to prepare students who have a firm grasp of Islamic beliefs and principles."



"Be very proud of yourself. You changed people for the better and enlightened lives."

Al-Amal Alumni make a difference!

Sumaiya Mamdani, one of our first graduates is a fourth year student at the University of Minnesota. She is pursuing a BS in Child Psychology. She plans to be a pediatrician. She is currently the vice president of Al-Madinah Cultural Center and is involved in various organizations such as MSA, IRG, MYM and Student Experience

Internship Program.

Sumaiya did a presentation titled "Women in Islam" at the Anoka Ramsey Community College in September this year. Following is the feedback she received from the organizing professor:

"My students truly enjoyed your presentation. More importantly they learned. I

have had students stopping in my office to thank me for arranging for your visit. Several have told me they were changed by the experience. Be very proud of yourself. You changed people for the better and enlightened lives. What a wonderful, wonderful thing to do!"

Interview with Parent of the Year (Sr. Sabiha Jamadar)



"The message I have for the parents is please play an active role in your kids' lives by modeling good behavior and getting involved with their school."

Q: Please tell us something about yourself.

A: Before I say anything about myself I would like to thank Allah for having given me my wonderful parents. My husband Mushtaq Syed has also been a driving force in whatever I do. I have been in the US for eight years now and here in Minnesota since July 2003. When I arrived in the US, I worked as an MIS administrator at a company in California until my daughter came. Later, I switched fields and taught at Silicon Valley Academy, an Islamic School at Santa Clara, California. Presently I am a stay home Mom but I help at Al Amal School whenever it is possible for me to do so. I also volunteer in the Saturday school as Islamic studies and Quran teacher.

Q: Why did you decide to send your daughter to Al-Amal School?

A: Sending kids to an Islamic school helps them gain knowledge of Deen as well as Duniya. My daughter has always been in an Islamic school since the time she was 2 years and eight months old. So when we were to move to Minnesota, we had already decided to send her to an Islamic school. Alhamdulillah, we were fortunate enough to have Al Amal School in the same city as my husband's place of work. When I first visited Al Amal school I was very impressed by the administrative staff. They were very professional in their approach and always willing to help. The teachers were also very eager to help and caring. The fact that apart from regular subjects, my

daughter would be learning an Islamic way of life and Quran in a safe atmosphere from caring teachers, was the reason why I send her to Al Amal School.

Q: What message do you have for other parents at Al-Amal?

A: The message I have for the parents is please play an active role in your kids' lives by modeling good behavior and getting involved with their school. The kids' academic progress is your responsibility as much as it is the teachers'. Teachers and parents are partners in the important task of raising confident, positive and responsible Muslims of tomorrow. Research shows that kids, whose parents volunteer in the class, do better academically. So what are you all parents waiting for?

Renewing Our Commitment by Dr. Salah Ayari, **Principal**

It is no coincidence that the theme of this year's fundraising once again puts emphasis on preparing future leaders, a goal that is clearly stated in our mission. Some time ago I was asked the question: What is Al-Amal School doing to instill leadership qualities in its students?

First, desirable leadership, in the context of our mission, requires that our students are first and foremost equipped with a strong understanding of the Islamic faith and values so that they are able to interact with community and global issues with an Islamic frame of mind.

Second, to succeed in a pluralistic society, we strive to expose our students to different perspectives. To that end, Al-Amal continues to open up to the outside world, constantly welcoming visitors of other faiths and educational institutions. Over the past years, hundreds of students, from kindergarten to high school and college students, to college professors from the state of Minnesota, and neighboring states and

even from overseas came to visit Al-Amal School and spend time with the students. Educators and students from as far as Thailand, India and Uzbekistan visited Al-Amal School recently and got a chance to interact with our students. These visits are enhancing the educational experience of both Al-Amal students and those who come to visit us.

Preparing future leaders goes beyond the walls of the classrooms and takes place in a variety of settings. Our middle and high school students are scheduled to visit the Minnesota Supreme Court in October to meet with Justice Paul Anderson for a tour of the court building and to learn about the judicial system. For the second year in a row, our students will be attending the Day on the Hill event organized by the Joint Religious Legislative Coalition to meet with Minnesota lawmakers in March. They are also scheduled to visit the headquarters of the American Red Cross in Minneapolis to learn more about serving others. They will also be visiting

other public schools during the course of this school year.

Al-Amal students are learning the meaning of and practicing public service by visiting other Islamic centers to help with clean up. Our students will volunteer with the Feed my Children Program to package thousands of meals to be served to the needy and poor throughout the world. More than 50 students from middle and high school have already volunteered to help perform different functions and duties during the 11th fundraising event of Al-Amal School.

Despite our limited resources, it is our hope that Al-Amal School will make a lasting contribution to the preparation of future leaders that will make a positive difference. This is a daunting task that requires the joint effort of the school, the parents and the community. This fundraising event offers an opportunity for our parents and the Muslim community to renew their commitment to raising tomorrow's leaders.

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"It is our hope that Al-Amal School will make a lasting contribution to the preparation of future leaders."

TEACHERS WANTED: Do you want to be part of this exciting environment?

Al-Amal School is looking for teachers. Qualified applicants are invited to apply for the positions of elementary homeroom, middle and high school teachers, as well as Islamic studies. Please send your letters to "Hiring Committee, Al-Amal School, 1401 Gardena Ave NE, Fridley MN 55432



Robotics Club – Sharing the Knowledge

Al-Amal students have been participating for the past two years in a robotics competition called FIRST Lego League. The experience has been a thrill to say the least. Our teams represented our school very well and brought home 5 trophies and 5 plaques in two years.

In order to benefit more students from this highly creative activity, the program is being organized as a student club this year. The Robotics Club will be run by students and will function throughout the year. The club will also allow our students to learn organizational skills and develop leadership traits. The club has its own bylaws and elected student officers.

The club had organized a

summer robotics camp last August. All Al-Amal students who are in 3rd grade and up and those who have not participated in Lego League before were invited to join. Fifteen campers of various ages signed up. The campers were divided into small groups and assigned a mentor. The older, experienced students were the mentors.

After a 4-week long training in building robots and programming, the campers formed 3 teams and competed against each other. The competition included robot performance rounds as well as technical and teamwork questioning by two judges. At the end of a very exciting and tight competition, all students were awarded medals.

The benefits of these kinds of activities are numerous. Students learn problem solving skills, creative thinking, teamwork, and sportsmanship all this while working with - state-of-the-art technology. Facing a very challenging task and seeing it through to completion help students build self esteem.

Currently, the students in the robotics club are busy working on this year's FIRST Lego League challenge. Al-Amal is participating with 3 teams again. Eight of the 15 students who participated in the summer camp are part of the teams. The regional competitions will be in December 2004. We expect them to continue in the tradition of successes this year as well, insha Allah.

“Students learn problem solving skills, creative thinking, teamwork, and sportsmanship all this while working with a state-of-the-art technology.”



Top: Technical and Teamwork Judging at Robotics Club Summer Camp finals
 Right: Mentoring of younger students by an older student



Letters

In September 2004 approx. 90 students from Patrick Henry High School in Minneapolis visited Al-Amal School to learn about Islam and Muslims. Following are two Thank You letters sent by Patrick Henry High School students:

Have you ever thought about how other people think of you? Have you ever thought about how your religion can change the image given to you by society? For me personally, my image has changed about the religion of Islam in a very positive way. I have never thought that my perspective on religion would change within hours of exchanging words with fellow Muslim friends.

My history teacher announced that we would be visiting an Islamic school. My reaction was whatever! Not even knowing this would turn

out to be a turning point in my life. When we got to the school and was welcomed by their principal, it felt very warming. Walking in, I was totally impressed at how they use their school not only as a learning area, but as a place where you would feel at home. The school had an area just for praying. Then when some of the students walked in and we got a chance to ask each other questions, I was blown away at how well we connected! The students there were no more any different than the students I see everyday at my school. With these students we found out a lot about the religion of Islam and about each other. Some

of the more unfamiliar subjects to me, which were discussed, were the Islam's way of getting married, the five pillars of Islam and the different times of day that the Muslims pray at. I did not know that the Muslims had to pray five times a day. But we weren't the only ones who got the chance to ask questions. The Muslim students asked questions too. Some that even stumped us!

The time spent to acknowledge how similar I am to everyone around me despite color, gender or religion has not been wasted at all. Today I am a totally new individual.

Mao Lee, 10th grade

In a society full of misconceptions of Muslims, I was not sure how to feel about the field trip to Al-Amal School and the Minnesota Islamic Center. My mother was a little hesitant to sign the permission slip, which made me want to go more. I knew my mother was one who believed the misconceptions. I wanted to prove to her that they were not true. The only for that was to get answers from actual Muslims and that is what I planned to do. I was a bit nervous. I was afraid of somehow disrespecting the Islamic religion. My fears were relieved when I saw the

smiling faces of the kindergarteners at Al-Amal. We listened to Salah Ayari, the headmaster of the Al-Amal School, tell us about the school and it's amazing achievements. As we listened, my excitement grew and then finally, the Al-Amal students came into the prayer room. We broke into "small" groups, and then I realized how small the school actually was. Our school brought approx. 90 students, so the groups were not small at all. There were about 15-20 girls from Patrick Henry to 8 Al-Amal girls. At that time, we received about 30 minutes to ask questions.

In that time, I fully realized how much we are alike. Sometimes we would ask questions and they would laugh just because they are just like us. For example, we asked if they shaved their legs, they laughed and said it would not matter if they did because their legs are covered up all the time. My questions were answered and I made new friends. It surprised me how the 8th grade girls were so mature and handled our curiosity. In the end, we were sad to leave, but we exchanged e-mail addresses to stay in contact.

Stephanie Zappa, 10th grade

"For me personally, my image has changed about the religion of Islam in a very positive way."

"In that time, I fully realized how much we are alike."

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We're on the Web!

See us at:

www.al-amal.org

Al-Amal Students of the Year and Graduate in 2004

Elementary: Mahmoud Mire

Mahmoud Mire was chosen as the Student of the Year from the Elementary Level for the year 2003-2004. Mahmoud has been an exemplary student, who consistently showed good Islamic behavior and his grades have been consistently high throughout the school year.

Middle-High: Rawan Hamade

Since Rawan joined Al-Amal School six years ago, she has consistently been an outstanding student, with a great attitude, Islamic behavior and an improved academic performance. She has been on the Principal's List each quarter in the past year.

Graduate: Layla Salim

Layla Salim belongs to the second batch to graduate from Al-Amal. She has been with Al-Amal School since its inception in 1994. For the last two years, Layla has been taking college courses through the Post Secondary Enrollment

Brief News

Delegation from India

A delegation from India visited Al-Amal School on September 20. 12 visitors came for a U.S tour through the State Department and consisted of professors and educational leaders from renowned Islamic institutions in India. The visitors spent three hours at the school during which they learned about the history of the school, curriculum and challenges. They visited classes and then had lunch catered for by Holy Land.

Al-Amal Student Leads the Taraweeh Prayers

Mohammad Baga (9th grader of Al-Amal School) is again leading the Taraweeh prayers at a masjid in Bloomington. Mohammad is a hafiz (one who has memorized the entire Qur'an).

Students prepare Art items for Fundraiser

The 5th-9th grade girls painted 20 pieces of artwork for the fundraising dinner. They are 8 by 10 inch wall plaque's in a marble finish with a gold and silver Quran verse engraved on.

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TO:

