

JIHAD WATCH

Does Islam get special treatment in Eastern Iowa schools?

FEB 22, 2018 8:23 PM BY STEPHEN M. KIRBY

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These are interesting times in the Heartland. On February 13, 2018, a meeting of the Board of the Iowa City Community School District (ICCSA) took place. As was later reported in the *Iowa City Press Citizen*: [\[1\]](#)

Activism by some particularly young activists might shake up ICCSD's school calendar to accommodate for more religious holidays.

With the the [sic] microphone adjusted for their height halfway through their public comments, a group of elementary students from various schools asked the board Tuesday to recognize the Muslim holidays of Eid Al-Fitr and Eid Al-Adha.

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These young activists were Muslim students, and one of them explained a significant reason for their request:

The Muslim community is getting bigger here in Iowa City, so (getting the holiday off) will benefit many people.

These young, elementary school-aged activists were asking the school board to not just recognize the two Eid's, but to also make each Eid an official school holiday for which schools will be closed. The board agreed to take the matter under consideration. The Board will have plenty of time to consider this because neither of the Eid's will occur during a school year until May 2021.

But this article also noted that these "activists" had actually started their efforts earlier in October 2017, when some of them had presented their idea to Yaa Appiah-McNulty, the principal of Weber Elementary School in Iowa City. As this newspaper article pointed out:

"I told her I don't really think it's fair people get to celebrate Halloween and stuff, and we don't get to celebrate our holiday," recounts one of the fifth-graders, 10-year-old Reem Kirja.

Appiah-McNulty said it was a huge moment for her. She was proud of the kids for speaking up for themselves and that they felt comfortable doing so on her campus. In response, she said she had the students come up with a plan for how to celebrate the holiday, and that the campus will hold a party in recognition of Eid Al-Fitr in May.^[iii]

So Appiah-McNulty is planning on holding a party in May 2018 at Weber Elementary School in recognition of Eid Al-Fitr, even though Eid Al-Fitr doesn't actually begin until the evening of June 14, 2018. What will this party taking place on public school grounds actually recognize?

Eid Al-Fitr is one of the two holiest days in Islam (Eid Al-Adha is the other), and it marks the end of Ramadan; it is an official holiday in all Muslim-majority countries:^[iii]

Eid -ul -Fitr is a unique festival. It has no connection with any historical event nor is it related to the changes of seasons or cycles of agriculture. It is not a festival related in any way to worldly affairs. Its significance is purely spiritual. It is the day when the Muslims thank Allah for having given them the will, the strength and the endurance to observe fast and obey His commandment during the holy month of Ramadhan.^[iv]

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So Appiah-McNulty is planning on using public school resources to have a party on public school grounds to recognize one of the holiest days in Islam, even though that holy day doesn't actually occur until the following month!

But wait, doesn't the ICCSD give students the day off for Christmas? If they do so for that religious holiday, why not at least recognize Eid Al-Fitr, even if that recognition is done a month early?

In reality, Christmas is not specifically recognized by the ICCSD in terms of being a special holiday. On the 2017-2018 district calendar Christmas is listed as a "Holiday," along with Thanksgiving, New Year's Day, Labor Day and some others. But the date of December 25th simply falls within the two week period that is labeled "Winter Break."^[v] Christmas just happens to be one of the ten week-days during that Winter Break in which the ICCSD schools are closed. In fact, during the 2016-2017 school year Christmas occurred on a Sunday, so the date of December 25th was not even shown on the ICCSD school calendar for that year.^[vi]

And Eid Al-Fitr and Eid Al-Adha are already recognized on the ICCSD calendar, along with 27 other "Religious Holidays" from Christianity, Judaism, and other religions.

Our young Muslim activists are calling for the two holiest days of Islam to be given special treatment by having each of them declared a specific school holiday for which schools will be closed; an idea to which the ICCSD Board seems receptive. In addition, we have an elementary school principal who is planning on using public school resources and grounds to recognize one of those two religious days a month before it even occurs!

It's time for the "separation of church and state" folks to visit Eastern Iowa.

Dr. Stephen M. Kirby is the author of five books about Islam. His latest book is *The Lure of Fantasy Islam: Exposing the Myths and Myth Makers*.

^[i] Aimee Breaux, "Elementary students to board: Make major Muslim holidays school holidays," *Iowa City Press Citizen*, February 15, 2018; accessed at <http://www.press-citizen.com/story/news/education/2018/02/15/elementary-students-board-make-major-muslim-holidays-school-holidays/338821002/>.

^[ii] Ibid.

[iii] “Eid al-Fitr holiday: How many days is it by country?” *Al Jazeera*, June 26, 2017; accessed at <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/eid-alfitr-holidays-170622044026470.html>.

[iv] *Eid-UI-Fitr; a Unique Festival Time of Joy for Muslims*, accessed at <https://www.al-islam.org/fast-sayyid-saeed-akhtar-rizvi/eid-ul-fitr-unique-festival-time-joy-muslims>.

[v] See, for example, the 2017-2018 School Calendar at <https://www.iowacityschools.org/Page/12856>.

[vi] https://www.iowacityschools.org/cms/lib/IA01903939/Centricity/Domain/2856/2016-17_District_Calendar.pdf

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