

Principal touts charter school benefits

BY SUE BUCK
STAFF WRITER

Having students wear uniforms at Oakland International Academy, a charter school and public school of choice in Farmington Hills, helps eliminate one of the toughest parts of adolescence.

"It removes the peer pressure," said Principal Fatima Jakri. "It gives a more egalitarian atmosphere in the school."

The former Arizona resident fits in well with the school's focus on international studies. Jakri is German and Irish by nationality and Muslim by religion.

The majority of people feel Muslims are of Middle Eastern descent," Jakri said. "In actuality, they are only about one fifth of the Muslim population in the world. The rest are from various countries."

The Westland resident grew up in a Mormon family with a couple Lutherans thrown in. She was educated in a public school system, her mother was a school board member and her

brother is a former school board president. "I knew what that was like, so I wanted to see the flip side," Jakri said.

Being taught to value choices in life prepared her for her varied role at OIA, where parents seek a different way to educate their children.

Students come from home, public and private schools. "I have students in my school who are refugee status and are limited English proficient," she said.

Classes are capped at 24 students. Of the 80-member student body, seven are seniors who are required to meet the same standards as public school graduates.

The school administers the MEAP test and the Iowa Test of Basic Skills twice a year, along with STAR Math and Reading assessments.

"We feel like the state does, that what is on the MEAP is something which should already be on the curriculum," Jakri said.

There's no special MEAP

preparation but, maybe, a little less homework given during that time.

Students are at the state average for writing on the MEAP.

"We struggle in social studies as does every other school," Jakri said. "We have students at both ends of the continuum and students in the middle. If we keep focusing on growth, we are going to improve our test scores. We focus on whenever our children are at, getting them as far as we can."

An avid Academy booster, Jakri doesn't favor capping the number of charter schools so long as there is a need for choice. If parents are unhappy with the school, they'll vote with their feet, finding another educational option for their children.

"That is a parental issue," she said. "The percentage of parents happy with charter schools is very high. We have had numerous students who have been unsuccessful in other environments and have come here and been extremely successful."

Children who felt "swallowed

up" in a big environment have flourished at OIA, she said. "We have a very nurturing environment."

Staff can tell what's going on with their students on any given day. "One of us can say, 'Hey what's wrong? I saw you weren't giving your all in gym. Did you have a long night? What's going on? We're able to network.'"

Jakri doesn't see problem children, but problem issues. "We don't have weaknesses, we have opportunities for improvement," she said.

If a child enters seventh grade with a third grade reading level that's not a roadblock. "My concern is how far can I grow you because I have you. We already have you, and you are our child."

For reasons which also include travel time and logistics, children use their own and parental transportation as well as can pool. School starts at 8 a.m.; with first hour classes at 8:15 a.m.

"I don't want to start at 7:30 a.m.," Jakri said. "Oh my."

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COMPLAINTS

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the city's law works, because if a dog isn't responding to voice command, its owner is breaking the law by not putting it on a leash.

But the ordinance doesn't define what oral control actually is, and there appears to be a fine line in proving what control over the animal means, council members said.

Mayor Nancy Bates asked the city manager to investigate whether oral control can be defined and whether loose dog complaints are an issue in the city.

The penalty for not controlling a dog is a misdemeanor punishable by up to \$500 and/or 90 days in jail.

Resident Mary Romine addressed the council about the issue during Monday's regular meeting. She identified herself as a member of the Country Oaks Homeowners Association.

In the past few months, her neighbors have complained about dogs running loose. Because her subdivision has a wide open commons area, owners tend to let them run loose, she said.

"They're taking themselves out for a walk," she said of some people's attitude with their pets.

Romine said she found the city's leash law to be a little too loose in terms of what it means to control a dog.

"At least change (the ordinance) so it will read to put them on a suitable leash," she said.

Councilman Jon Grant said some dogs are so powerful they cannot be controlled by a leash alone, either. Bates said any dog running loose should be reported to the police.

She said the council will examine the issue again in a study session; no date was set.

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