

# TheTimes

## Teacher to Muslim students: 'We did not do this'

*First-year teacher tried to help his students at Islamic School understand tragedy after 9/11*

BY GEOFF PURSINGER

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**Like many people, Jawad Khan remembers exactly where he was when he first learned about the Sept. 11 attacks.**

Back then, Khan was a first-year teacher with the Islamic School of MET, a grade school run by the Islamic-nonprofit Muslim Educational Trust since 1993.

The small private school on Scholls Ferry Road has about 150 students who take general education classes while also learning about Islam. When the planes crashed, Khan and the rest of the students gathered together to watch the coverage on television.

"I remember it was remarkably calm," Khan remembers. "We gathered everybody together and told the kids that something had happened. A really bad thing had happened."

The school year had begun only a week earlier, and Khan said the staff made sure to talk to the young students about what had happened, and who was really responsible for the attacks.

Khan said it was important for the kids to realize that despite any discrimination they might face because of the attacks, they should know that they were not responsible.

"We told the kids, 'we know who we are and we did not do this,'" Khan said. "No matter what people say, go talk to your parents and reassure yourself that this is not something that you did."

The school's first priority after learning about the attacks was the safety of the students, Khan said.

Some at the school feared reciprocity, Khan said, but as time went by and nothing happened people began to realize that the community supported the school.

"One blessing we at the school felt was that we live in this community," said Khan who was born and raised in the Portland area. "Portland is a very accepting community and very diverse. People said, 'this group is not responsible for this and they aren't the avenue to take our frustrations out on.'"

### 'Be able to move on'

Many were shaken by the attacks, including many in the Muslim community, Khan said.

"For a lot of people, I think it strengthened their faith," he said. "Wherever they were faith-wise, I think people felt that their Muslim identity was being attacked. Maybe they were a bit lax in their faith before and it brought them back.



JAIME VALDEZ / THE TIMES

Jawad Khan was in his first year of teaching at the Muslim Educational Trust during the Sept. 11 attacks. Khan said he tried to prepare students for any discrimination they might face.

“People said, ‘Hey, I need to portray what it is we are really about. What our beliefs, our ethics, morals and our values are.’ I think it brought some people back and made them remember who they were and what their faith was about.”

And knowledge of Islam and Muslim culture has spread since the attacks, Khan said, making it easier for Muslim children to fit in with their non-Muslim peers.

“The kids (today) have much better interaction and understanding with their classmates than when I went to school,” Khan said. “There was a lot less understanding about who I was, back then. I was much more exotic and different and strange than they are now with all the information that has come out about Islam. In Portland, there’s a place for everybody.”

Teachers at MET say they plan to talk to this years’ students about the attacks, and what they mean, Khan said.

“The little kids, they don’t know any differently, they were too young. But we’ll talk a bit about it and be able to move on from there. I hope everyone will move on in a way that they can commemorate it and know how tragic it was, and know they can move forward, just like they are in New York,” Khan said. “They are about 40 percent done with the new building (on the World Trade Center site) and it looks great.”

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