



SAKINAH CIRCLE ALTERNATIVE PROGRAM

The first 13 years

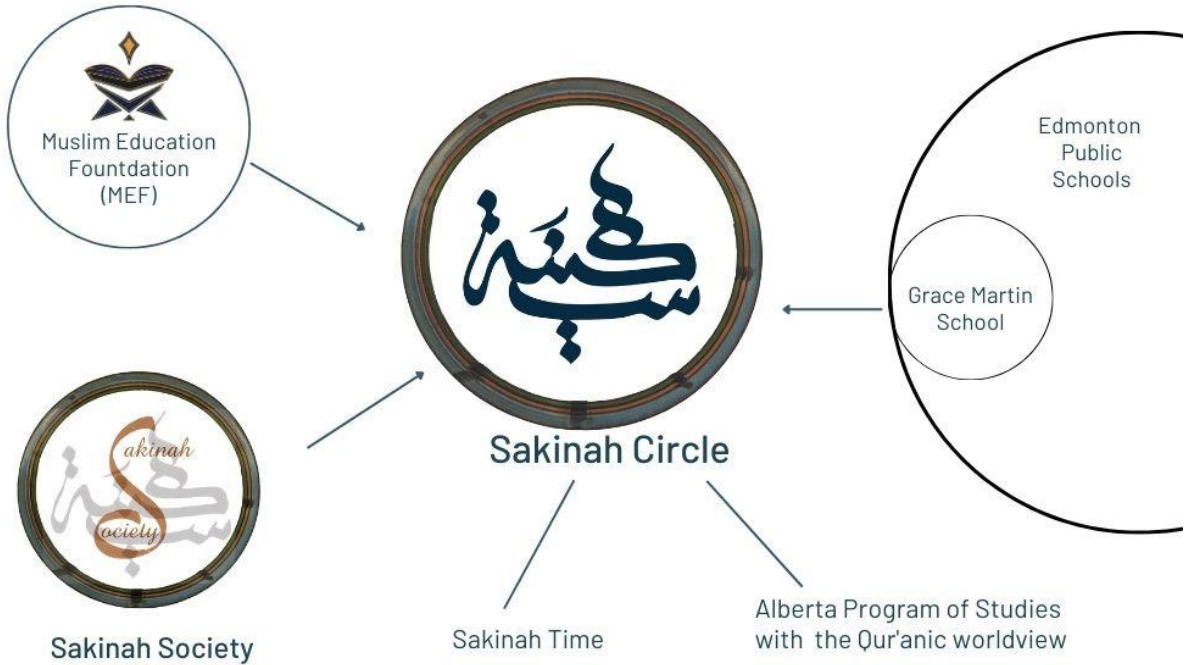
Findings of a Year-Long Review



MUSLIM EDUCATION FOUNDATION

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Sakinah Circle



C O N T E N T S

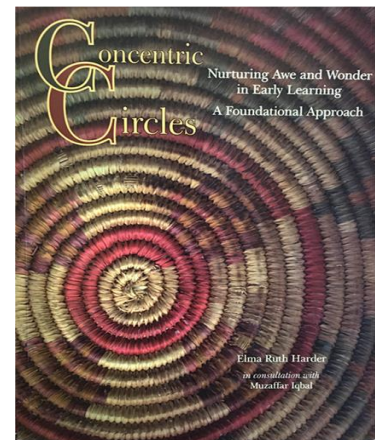
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I. Introduction

The Arabic noun ‘sakinah’ means “tranquility; inner peace; stillness of the heart, intellect (*al-aql*)”. The noun *sakinah* appears six times in the Qur’an.

The educational philosophy of *Sakinah Circle* was first expounded in its foundational text: *Concentric Circles, Nurturing Awe and Wonder in Early Learning, a Foundational Approach*. Written by Elma Harder and published by the Muslim Education Foundation (MEF) in 2006, *Concentric Circles* provides the theoretical framework and pedagogical examples of an approach to learning rooted in the Qur’anic worldview. Briefly stated, the Qur’an teaches that throughout the span of our lives, we remain in a dynamic relationship with the Creator and His creation and that whatever we do in our earthly lives matters both for the duration of life on earth and for the life in the Hereafter. The educational philosophy emerging from this worldview makes us life-long learners, endowed with intentionality and purpose. This educational philosophy places a great deal of emphasis on having a holistic and nurturing learning experience, leading to spiritual and intellectual growth that nourishes *Sakinah* in the heart.

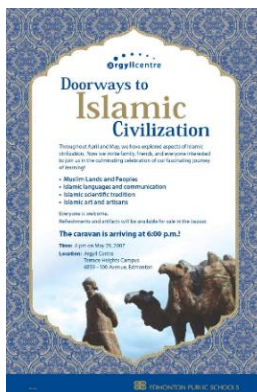
More specifically, as an alternate program in Edmonton Public Schools, *Sakinah Circle* delivers Alberta Program of Studies from the Qur’anic worldview. The program seeks to provide education that leads to development of critical minds and hearts conscious of their relationship with the Creator, fellow human beings, and the natural world that surrounds us. This approach to education recognizes the learner’s innate nature (*fitrah*), seeks to nurture God-Consciousness (*taqwa*) and cultivates compassion so that learners strive to become God’s true vicegerents (*khulafā’*). The learning experience in *Sakinah Circle* is conceived as a process of continuous intellectual and spiritual growth for all three categories of participants: students, teachers, and parents, who together constitute the “*Sakinah Community*”.



II. A Brief History of *Sakinah Circle*

In 2006, two members of the Muslim Education Foundation (MEF), a non-profit educational foundation, approached the principal at the Argyll Centre for Home Education for support in developing and providing resources to Muslim homeschooling families. He showed interest, but first we needed to determine the level of interest within the Edmonton Muslim community. MEF called a community meeting for December 12, 2006 at the Argyll Centre to find out. The turn-out was phenomenal—more than 300 people came on that cold and stormy evening! The interest for a program in the Muslim community was clear: we needed to do something.

Doorways to Islamic Civilization (April and May 2007)



The first step in our journey was an enrichment program, *Doorways to Islamic Civilization*, which was offered to families over eight evenings in the spring of 2007. Muslim Education Foundation partnered with the Argyll Centre to plan, coordinate, and deliver this well-attended *Doorways* project which explored various aspects of Islamic civilization in four specific areas: Muslim lands and peoples, Islamic scientific tradition, Islamic art and artisans, and Islamic languages and communication. The turnout and enthusiasm of the community as well as the rich learning experiences led to the announcement on May 26, 2007 that the District Superintendent has approved *Sakinah Circle* as a new program at Argyll Centre for Home Education.

Part-time enrichment program (2007-2008)

Thus started the first formal phase of Sakinah Circle. During the 2007-2008 school year, Sakinah students were registered with the Argyll Centre for Home Education and attended the onsite enrichment program four mornings a week. Interest kept growing for a full-time onsite program.

Pilot Program (2008-2010)

For the next two school years, Sakinah Circle was a full-fledged pilot program, with plans to prepare a recommendation to the Board of Trustees for an alternative program. Between 2008 and 2010, representatives of MEF and District staff from several departments, including Planning, Alternative Programs, Curriculum, and Human Resources met monthly to work through all aspects of a new program. Detailed curriculum documents for KG to Gr. 6 were developed.

Full-time Alternative Program (approved on March 23, 2010 to begin for the 2010-2011 school year)

On March 23, 2010 the Board of Trustees of Edmonton Public Schools accepted the recommendation that Sakinah Circle be an approved alternative program for Kindergarten to Grade 6 in the school district. The District chose a site in south east Edmonton. The Sakinah Circle Alternative Program was thus established in Grace Martin Elementary School in September 2010 and has remained there since then.

Planting the seeds of Sakinah Circle in Edmonton Public Schools

<p>2007</p>		<p>Doorways to Islamic Civilization Argyll Centre for Home Education</p> <p>Afterschool program throughout April and May Exploring aspects of Islamic civilization</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Muslim lands and peoples • Islamic scientific tradition • Islamic art and artisans • Islamic languages and communication <p>The Superintendent approves Sakinah Circle as a new program at Argyll Centre for Home Education on May 26, 2007.</p>
<p>2007-2008</p>		<p>Enrichment Program Argyll Centre</p> <p>Monday to Thursday mornings 22 Homeschoolers: KG – Gr.3 1 teacher</p>
<p>2008-2009</p> 		<p>Pilot Program (year 1) Argyll Centre</p> <p>Monday to Thursday full day 46 students in 2 classes: KG /Gr.1 and Gr. 2/3 2 teachers, 2 EAs for Arabic, Qur'an instructor</p>
<p>2009-2010</p>		<p>Pilot Program (year 2) Argyll Centre</p> <p>Monday to Thursday full day 59 students in 3 classes: KG, Gr.1, Gr. 2/3 3 teachers, 1 EA for Arabic, Qur'an instructor</p>
<p>March 23, 2010</p>		<p>McCauley Chambers, Centre for Education</p> <p>EPSB approves Sakinah Circle Alternative Program This follows months of focused preparation. Monthly meetings with Central Office staff (Planning/Alternative Programs/Curriculum/HR) Development of KG–Gr.6 curriculum document</p>

2010—to-date



Sakinah Circle Alternative Program

Grace Martin School K-6

Fulltime program with modified calendar
Began with four classes: KG, Gr.1, Gr.2/3, Gr.4/5
with 4 classroom teachers, plus Arabic teacher, program specialist,
and Qur'an instructor.

Board Document

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

March 23, 2010

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: E. Schmidt, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Sakinah Circle Alternative Program

ORIGINATOR: D. Barrett, Assistant Superintendent

RESOURCE

STAFF: Gloria Chalmers, Leanne Fedor, Sandy Forster, Ann Parker, Elisa Rawe, Jim Ray, Christopher Wright, Bonnie Zack

RECOMMENDATION

1. That, subject to sufficient enrolment, the establishment of the Sakinah Circle alternative program for Kindergarten to Grade 6 be approved for implementation beginning in September 2010.
2. That the Sakinah Circle alternative program begin the school year four days earlier to provide additional time to accommodate significant Islamic festivals.

* * * * *

III. Vision and Mission

Our vision

Education that brings us closer to the Creator; a process of learning based on the Qur’anic worldview, encompassing all disciplines, to develop critical minds, conscious hearts, and compassionate human beings

Our mission

To provide guidance and an environment that recognizes the learner’s *fiṭrah*, nurtures *taqwa*, and cultivates learners who strive to become *khulafā’*

A. Alberta Program of Studies Through the Qur’anic Worldview

“The Sakinah Circle alternative program links the Alberta Program of Studies learning outcomes to the Mission and Vision Statement for the program by appropriately integrating Qur’anic content and Islamic concepts. The units of study integrate learning, faith and life in order to nourish inner peace and harmony, as the name “Sakinah” suggests. The focus in this alternative program is on transformational learning which addresses the spiritual, intellectual, aesthetic and practical needs of the learner. The program proposes to offer learning activities that harmonize self-discipline, courtesy towards all living creatures and stewardship of the environment. Carefully prepared classroom and outdoor learning activities are used to connect students with their natural world and their Creator. This connection is the foundation for encouraging conscientious choices for a wholesome lifestyle.”

Board Report p.2

“Curriculum documents for Sakinah Circle address the outcomes of the K-6 Alberta Programs of Study. Units of study are approached thematically, integrating Qur’anic content, Islamic concepts, and Prophetic Tradition where appropriate, to enrich the worldview central to the Islamic way of life. To do this, thematic statements are identified for each General Outcome in each grade level of the Program of Study. Enduring Understandings provide a unifying concept, these are transferable, and are conceptualized through sustained inquiry during the learning process.

In addition to the stated Enduring Understandings and Alberta Education grade-specific learner outcomes, each curriculum document identifies possible Reflective Questions for teacher and learner consideration. Reflecting on these questions is intended to further integrate aspects of Islam with the Alberta Programs of Study. Reflective questions italicized and in red reflect the Islamic worldview and those in black are more general. Reflective questions serve to orient and direct teacher thinking with two distinct foci: reflective questions encourage both teachers and students to relate and connect aspects of Islam and Islamic civilization with the Program of Studies outcomes; and reflective questions help teachers direct students thinking to the higher levels of Bloom’s taxonomy (analysis, synthesis, evaluation) in the Alberta Programs of Study outcomes.

A sample Transfer/Performance Assessment Task has been identified for each general outcome by way of providing an exemplar of a student activity that directly links the

Qur'anic worldview or Islamic heritage and the provincial Program of Study. Authentic assessment is seen as a tool to analyze student learning, and as its Latin origin *assidere* (to “sit with”) implies, the teacher makes thoughtful observations, balances a variety of assessment techniques, keeps records, offers helpful feedback, and applies the gained knowledge of student learning; formative assessment becomes an integral part of planning the learning process.”

Board Document, p.4

Sakinah Circle alternative program for Kindergarten to Grade 6 was born with an initial curriculum document which added enduring understandings to all subject areas, posed reflective questions for teachers and students for the specific outcomes, and provided sample transfer tasks and performance assessment to the four core subject areas in the Alberta Program of Studies.

Over time, with Sakinah-specific resources started to develop through specific endeavors to produce content, professional learning and collaborative efforts by teachers along with the Program Specialist who accessed the resources and experts from the Muslim Education Foundation. The corpus of these teaching and learning resources includes lessons and units specifically designed with the Qur'anic worldview, thematic resources that integrate subject areas for multi-grade levels, and resources to focus on character development.

The main language of instruction in Sakinah Circle is English.

Arabic is taught as a K-6 Language and Culture course “where the language is studied to develop communication and intercultural and strategic skills, and to build an appreciation for the culture” (Alberta Education, Programs of Study) and, specifically in this alternative program, “to support and extend knowledge of the teaching of the Qur'an” (Board Document, p.2).

Music curriculum is adapted for the Sakinah Circle program.

Sakinah Library Resources

The Sakinah library collection has been purchased with dedicated funding, almost entirely from parent fees and it belongs to the Sakinah program. The Sakinah section of the Grace Martin library has an area dedicated to the carefully selected Sakinah Circle resources. Books are divided into two sections: one section is for Sakinah student circulation and another for Sakinah teacher use.

Two Times in Sakinah Circle

Sakinah Circle has two distinct “times” in a school day:

- i. 72-minutes of instructional time outside the provincially mandated time. This time was built into this alternative program at its inception; this is henceforth called Sakinah Time.

Sakinah Time is subdivided into two distinct units:

- a. Morning assembly (12 minutes), during which all Sakinah Students are present
- b. Two 30-minute slots per school day; each slot is for a specific grade level. Thus, every class meets the instructor twice a week for 30-minutes.

This means that each student has a specific amount of time devoted to learning various aspects of Islam and Islamic civilization in the Foundations of Islam Curriculum presented in this document.

This curriculum is to be delivered during 12 mins per day of the morning assembly and two 30 minutes sessions per week per grade level.

- ii. Students continue to learn about Islam and its tradition during the provincially mandated time in which Alberta Program of Studies (APS) is delivered from the Qur’ānic perspective. This happens through infusion of Islam in APS; details for this are in a separate document.

B. Sakinah Time

What is taught during Sakinah Time enriches and deepens the Qur’ānic worldview. The content is drawn from the Qur’an and Sunnah—two primary sources of Islam. It includes aspects of practice of Islam. Islamic praxis is a lived experience and it helps to refine character. The original vision of the Sakinah alternative program, as approved by the Board of Trustees of the Edmonton Public Schools in their meeting of March 23, 2010 (See [Sakinah Circle Handbook](#)) includes Sakinah Time as an essential part of this program. Practical aspects of this time (schedule, location, classroom, etc.) are worked out in consultation with the school principal, whereas its content and its delivery are managed by the MEF.

Curriculum for Sakinah Time

Sakinah Time content has organically evolved over the years. It has gone through distinct phases of development. Starting in 2019, MEF started to review content and its delivery. The review process involved extensive consultations with the International Advisory Board of MEF and local scholars. The result is a document (“Sakinah Time Learning Outcomes”) that divides this content into five specific areas: Qur’ān, Sunnah, *Fiqh*, *Aqīda*, and Architects of Islamic Civilization.

The desired outcomes mentioned in the document are the minimum required level of learning in the Sakinah Program for a graduating student who has spent seven years in the Sakinah Program. It is expected that parents will supplement this learning at home so that a Sakinah Graduate surpasses these minimum levels of learning in each area. For details, see [Sakinah Time Learning Outcomes](#).

C. Three Pedagogical Pillars of Sakinah Circle

i. Nature-focused

We bring nature focus to our learning wherever possible, to increase each child’s connection to the cosmos and to nurture awe and wonder in creation. The Qur’ān continually reminds us to reflect on the “signs” of the natural world. Not only do outdoor experiences in natural places help children really learn about nature *in nature*, the benefits of having deep connections to nature improves our lives in many other aspects.

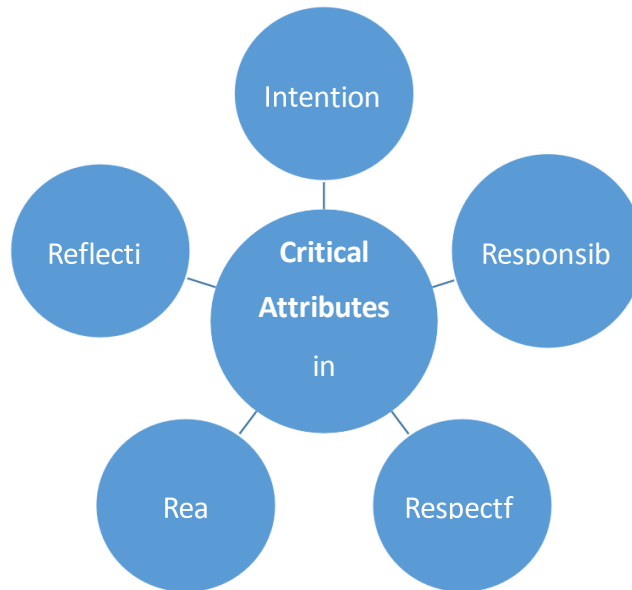
ii. Historically-rooted

Finding our meaningful place on the timeline of history provides each of us connection to the past, our present, and looking to the future—of our life on this planet and in the hereafter. Historical rooting has two aspects: personal history and collective history. We want each student in Sakinah Circle to identify with their own historical roots as well as receive a rich understanding of Islamic civilization as manifested through transmitted sciences (which deal with the Qur’ān and the Prophetic Sunnah) as well as those branches of knowledge which are classified as acquired knowledge (languages, arts, natural and social sciences, etc.).

iii. Service-oriented

Service to others and experiences in stewardship are fundamental to becoming a compassionate human being with a conscious heart. We encourage good deeds and intentionally seek service opportunities.

D. Critical Attributes



E. Enduring Understandings in Sakinah Circle

Enduring understandings are ongoing threads that connect our learning across disciplines and over time, provide unifying concepts, are transferable, and are conceptualized through sustained inquiry in the learning process. Reflection and contemplation are implicit in the Sakinah Circle philosophy and are a means to fathom and comprehend enduring understandings which support the Vision and Mission of Sakinah Circle.

i. Signs and symbols point us to our Creator and Sustainer

The Qur’ānic term *ayāt* is translated as “signs”, and refers to the verses of the Qur’ān as well as the signs in creation. The *ayāt* are signs of revelation, which can be seen in the three realms of creation (the cosmos, human history, and our own selves) and they are signs that point to and remind us of the Creator Who has given us life and sustains us. The signs and symbols which children encounter at every turn indicate or signify the presence of something beyond – the perception of that sense of “other” is a fundamental part of their learning as they move from concrete to more abstract ways of thinking. Signs and symbols appear in all subject areas.

ii. There is harmony in the cosmos.

The balance, the symmetry, and the design of the cosmos provide a natural starting point to cultivate a sense of order, justice, peace, and aesthetics. In the process of discovering what we see, what we hear, and how things move, cosmic patterns and wondrous beauty emerge. The Qur’ān draws our attention to this apparent harmony in the universe and within ourselves as a proof for *tawhid*, the Oneness of God and unicity of all things. We make conscious intention to recognize the harmonies of the cosmos and seek to develop an approach of inquiry and inquisitiveness that is always alert for patterns and cycles. In all subjects, and especially in language and fine arts, we participate in the exploration and expression of beauty and harmony.

iii. We have a place in space and time.

As individuals and as communities we have a particular place on the continuum of time and we live in relationship with one another. Human beings have been given the role of *khalifah* on earth – a role of stewardship for the world in which we live and have our being; this demands conscious hearts, critical minds, and compassionate responsibility. Our place in the story of life, rooted in the past, growing in the present and looking to the future, provides curricular content for science,

social studies, and all subject areas of the humanities.

iv. Language is a divine gift to be appreciated and treated as an amānah.

Language is a divine gift which serves as a tool of expression in our ongoing story. This gift of language is an *amānah*, a sacred trust, which grants us the opportunity and capability to communicate with each other. The ways in which we communicate and the languages we use reflect who we are and play a significant part in how we relate to each other. Meaningful, beautiful, and honest use of words is the art of language. This is the realm of Language Arts.

v. All Prophets brought the same essential message: to remember God.

Allah has sent Messengers to guide humanity. The revelation given to the prophets weaves a continuous thread up to the final message that was sent to Prophet Muhammad in the form of the Qur'ān, the last of the revealed Books. The Prophetic Tradition is seen as a universal history and prophets form the pivotal points in our history. Learning about the Prophetic Tradition provides a young learner with role models, a framework to understand time through the ages, and inspiration to live life with faith, belief, and trust in the One Who guides, sustains and protects.

vi. Sakinah is the fruit of inner harmony and external balance.

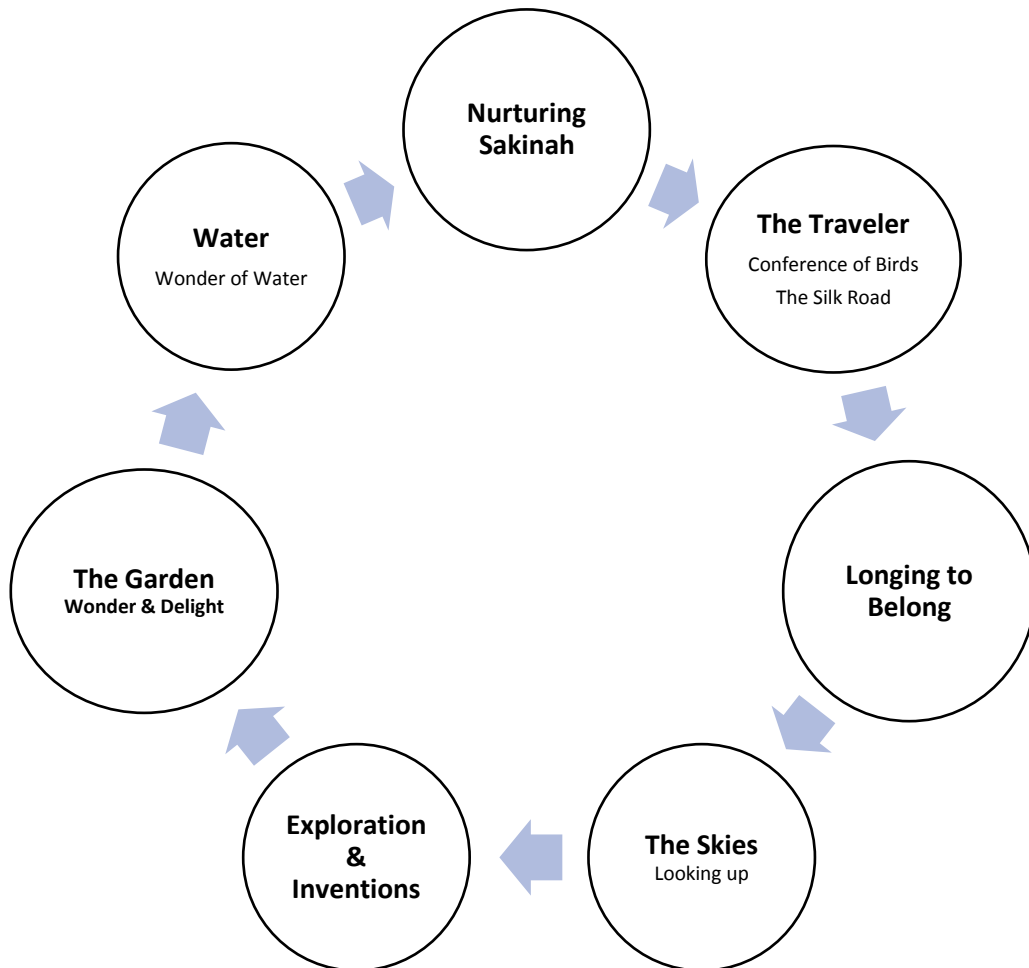
Strategies to nurture inner harmony include developing taqwa, observing the signs around us, and reflecting on how things are sustained in balance with each other. We learn to see things as they really are, distinguish between the true and the false, and focus on sincerity of heart and mind and the intentions of our deeds. And because inner harmony is also affected by externals, we strive to bring balance to our physical body with good nutrition, regular physical exercise, habits of hygiene, and a positive healthy lifestyle. Sakinah will, insha'Allah, be internalized and become evident externally. Everything in the cosmos glorifies God and resonates in praise, and we can also join in this harmony.

F. Thematic Learning

Thematic focus is a brilliant way, an illuminating way, to integrate learning. It is a powerful tool to organize the learning experience, program-wide and cross-curricular. It can lift us up to realms of discovery and delight.

In every theme we look for

- Qur'anic worldview
- curriculum connections
- nature-focus
- historic roots
- service opportunities





AND HIS THRONE WAS OVER

water

A SIGN OF DIVINE MERCY

A SIGN OF DIVINE POWER

PURIFIES

BRINGS BLESSINGS

A SIGN OF DIVINE WISDOM

ESSENTIAL TO LIFE

A SIGN OF DIVINE PUNISHMENT

REVIVES

Language Arts (English & Arabic)

Water Words

Water Metaphors

Water Stories

Prophet Musa ﷺ
Basket on the River
Parting of the Sea

Prophet Yusuf ﷺ
7 Years Drought
7 Years of Rain

Prophet Nuh ﷺ
The Flood

Prophet Yunus ﷺ
The Big Fish

Math & Science

Fresh & Salt Water

Chemistry of H₂O

Boiling Point

Surface Tension

Wetlands

Buoyancy

Water Cycle

Marine Life

Weather

Water Environments

Symmetry & Proportion

Ibn Sina & al-Biruni Correspondence:
Why Does Ice Float on Water?

Physical States of Water:
Liquid, Gas, Solid

Social Studies, Geography, History

Fishing

Farming

Ship Building

Water Exploration

Transportation on Water

Ocean Travels for Hajj

Caravan Routes Along Watering Places

Well of ZamZam

Ingenuous Water Devices

Banu Musa

al-Jazari

Ibn Jubayr

Ibn Batuta

Zheng He

Fine Arts

Harmony & Balance
Elegance & Beauty
Sounds of Water
Islamic Architecture
& Gardens

Health & Wellness

Water Activities
Swimming, Floating, Fishing
Boating, Canoeing
Water in Our Body
Cleanliness

Water Etiquettes

Charity
Good Deeds Using Water
Respect
Amanah
Ritual Purity
Reflection

Water Science ● Water Protection ● Water Attitudes

Water Technology ● Water Conservation



G. Routines, Procedures, and Guidelines

a. Modified Calendar for Sakinah Circle

When Sakinah Circle was established in 2010, the EPS Board of Trustees approved two recommendations. The second recommendation addresses the modified calendar:

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS	
March 23, 2010	
TO:	Board of Trustees
FROM:	E. Schmidt, Superintendent of Schools
SUBJECT:	<u>Sakinah Circle Alternative Program</u>
ORIGINATOR:	D. Barrett, Assistant Superintendent
RESOURCE STAFF:	Gloria Chalmers, Leanne Fedor, Sandy Forster, Ann Parker, Elisa Rawe, Jim Ray, Christopher Wright, Bonnie Zack
RECOMMENDATION	
1. That, subject to sufficient enrolment, the establishment of the Sakinah Circle alternative program for Kindergarten to Grade 6 be approved for implementation beginning in September 2010.	
2. That the Sakinah Circle alternative program begin the school year four days earlier to provide additional time to accommodate significant Islamic festivals.	
* * * * *	

Significant Islamic festivals are understood to be the two Eids, one following Ramadan (called Eid ul-Fitr) and the other following Hajj (Eid ul-Adha). These are based on the lunar calendar, which moves back approximately 10 days every Georgian calendar year. The length of a lunar month is 29 or 30 days, and so the exact corresponding date in the Gregorian calendar can only be determined with the visibility of the moon, thus the need to remember that the date of Eid may vary by one day, i.e. Eid ul-Fitr would follow the month of Ramadan after 29 days or 30 days, depending on sighting of the moon.

For more information on the Islamic calendar, please see this article:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_calendar

Significance of the modified calendar in Sakinah Circle:

- Modified calendar with early start is an integral part of the foundational document approved by the Board of Trustees.

- It officially recognizes two significant Islamic celebrations: the two Eids.
- It allows Sakinah children to fully realize the importance of their faith tradition as it is being lived in Canada; it is an integral part of personal and collective identity.
- Thus, it has two-fold significance – preservation of the alternative nature of the Sakinah Program and official recognition of the two Eids.

Annual early start information

1. When Sakinah Circle started at Grace Martin in 2010-11 (Islamic Calendar year 1431), both Eids fell during school year and had four days to have Eid holidays. Eid ul-Fitr was September 10, Hajj and Eid ul-Adha were November 15 and 16.
2. The following year (2011-12), Eid ul-Fitr was during summer break; early start needed to accommodate only the 2 days for the Eid ul-Adha celebration after Hajj.
3. Eid ul-Fitr during summer break continued until 2016; in 2017-18 school year Eid ul-Fitr was on Sunday June 25th and Hajj and Eid ul-Adha were during the summer break.
4. For 2018-19 school year, Eid ul-Fitr was in June, but an early start was not scheduled into a modified calendar.
5. For 2019-20, Eid ul-Fitr is on the weekend May 23 or 24. Eid ul-Adha will be during the summer holidays, thus no need for an early start.
6. For 2020-21, Eid ul-Fitr will most likely be Thursday, May 13, 2021. (According to most calendars, the month of Ramadan this year will be 30 days; if the month of Ramadan is 29 days it will be on Wednesday, May 12, 2021.) This would require an early start to accommodate Eid ul-Fitr. Eid ul-Adha will be during the summer holidays.
7. For 2020-21 and 2021-22 school years, Eid ul-Adha will be during the summer break, so the program will need an early start to accommodate Eid ul-Fitr.
8. Beginning with 2022-23 school year, both Eid ul-Fitr and Eid ul-Adha will be within the school year, necessitating early start to accommodate both Eids. This will remain so for the next thirty-three years.

Islamic Holidays and Celebrations

Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, a month of obligatory fasting for all able adult Muslims. This special month is a time to focus on spiritual growth, increasing acts of worship and doing good deeds. Fasting begins at dawn and ends at sunset. Fasting is only obligatory for the adults, but many young children love to fast with their families. Breaking the fast at the end of the day is a time when families and friends often gather to share food and the blessings of fasting.

Eid-ul-Fitr commemorates the completion of Ramadan and begins with a congregational Eid prayer in the morning followed by festivities which involve special foods, gifts for children, and gatherings of family and friends.

Eid-ul-Adha (Festival of the Sacrifice) is on the 10th day of Dhul Hijja, the twelfth month of the Islamic calendar which has the annual Hajj pilgrimage. Eid-ul-Adha is celebrated much like Eid ul-Fitr, with the

addition that Muslims who meet a certain economic threshold sacrifice a lamb, goat or cow and share the meat with friends, relatives, and the needy.

Ramadan in Sakinah Circle

- Students and teachers have a revised lifestyle and schedule during Ramadan. Family meals after sunset, late hours at the mosque where the Qur^ʿan is being recited every night, and the start of the fast before daybreak impact the amount of sleep everyone has.
- During the school lunch hour, students who are fasting need a place where they are not in the midst of everyone else eating lunch.
- Despite the physical hardships, Muslims experience spiritual growth during this month and community is always looking forward to this blessed month.
- For Sakinah children, this special time of the year comes with opportunities and challenges. It provides opportunities for self-discipline and character development. At the same time, it is physically demanding.
- These considerations are important to keep in view when scheduling events that require more physical exertion or add extra burden during Ramadan.



Non-Islamic Celebrations and other Special Days

Given the high impact which special days have in the wider school culture and the intentional nature of the Sakinah Program, in which “the intent is to enable the students to develop an authentically Islamic personality and become a contributing member of the Canadian and world community” (Board Report, p. 2), awareness and sensitivity on the part of administration are important in the design of the whole school culture. This includes the treatment and public presentation of holidays with strong religious roots and associated beliefs such as Christmas and Easter, and highly commercialized days like Halloween and Valentine’s Day.

Sakinah students do not participate in these celebrations. Nor do they attend band, theatre and other performances where the content of the presentation is not known.

An authentic alternative approach to days when events such as the Remembrance Day ceremony are being observed, helps to inclusively nurture harmony and diversity in school culture. Earth Day is a prime opportunity for everyone to actively collaborate.



OVERVIEW OF REVIEWS/HISTORY

June 2006	Muslim Education Foundation (MEF) publishes <i>Concentric Circles: Nurturing Awe and Wonder in Early Learning: A Foundational</i> (CC) by Elma Harder
Sept – Dec 2006	MEF initiates “Exploratory Meetings” with Maureen Crawford and Ron Bradley (principal, Argyll Centre for Home Learning)
Dec 2006	Meeting at Argyll to gauge community response – 300 people attended
April-May 2007	MEF organizes an 8-week Doorways to Islamic Civilization Project at Argyll
2007 -2008	MEF collaborates with EPSB Argyll Center for Home Learning to begin a Home School Enrichment Program at Argyll Center for Home Learning
2008-2010	Enrichment Program becomes an EPSB-approved Sakinah Circle Pilot Program at Argyll Monthly meetings at Centre for Education to establish an alternative program, with Gloria Chalmers and her team of EPSB personnel and MEF (Elma, Lena, Mariam, Hassan). During these months, curriculum documents were developed by Elma Harder along with Mary Jane Arthur, under direction of Sandy Forester (from the Curriculum and Development branch of the District)
March 23, 2010	Board of Trustees’ of Edmonton Public Schools approves Sakinah Circle as an Alternative Program
April 27, 2010	Initial Alignment Meeting between Principal of Grace Martin and MEF (Dean Couette (principal), Tracy (GM Curriculum Coordinator), Dr. Muzaffar, Elma, Hassan, Mohammad Ali, Shahana
June 2010	School year ends without clear plans in place for Sakinah Circle in September. The Principal states that he is still waiting information from the District about how many teachers/students are coming from Argyll
August 2010	Teachers are hired at the end of August, without taking into consideration MEF input as stipulated in the founding documents MEF approaches the Principal for classroom enrichments, reconfiguration of space to meet one of the three requirements of the Alternative Program (Space, content, delivery). Request is denied. There are no classes available until School starts in September; classrooms are being used as storage; they are packed with excess furniture
August 2010	MEF establishes Sakinah Society (SS) to take care of the operational needs of the Sakinah Circle initiative
September 2010	School year starts with sudden and ad hoc arrangements A Sakinah Society versus teachers binary comes into existence
September 2010	Sakinah Circle is not welcomed at Grace Martin

	<p>Consecutive Sakinah classrooms will not be assigned; “We do not want a Muslim ghetto at Grace Martin”</p> <p>92 students registered (new students plus those who came from Argyll)</p> <p>KG= 26, Grade 1 = 22, Grade 2=17, Grade 3=15, Grade 4=12</p>
September 15, 2010	MEF approaches the District. A “Program Alignment Meeting” takes place with Ron McLean and Tanni Parker (assistant superintendents), Sandy Forester (Curriculum), Elisa Grave (Policy), Dean Couette (principal), Tracy (GM Curriculum Coordinator), Elma Harder, Shahana, Hassan
October 2010	Situation continues to worsen (details in the SC history document). The Principal has a habit of putting his hands on the shoulders of female staff and squeezing them. We dread this to happen to any Muslim; Dr. Iqbal, Hassan, and Mohammad Ali meet him and explain Islamic rulings about physical touch between opposite sexes
November 15, 2010	Two incidents at the school leading to Dr. Iqbal’s letter to Edgar Schmidt, Superintendent of Edmonton Public Schools, requesting his direct intervention
November 27, 2010	Mr. Caouette does what was dreaded: He came behind a female member of Sakinah Society and squeezed her shoulders; Mohammad Ali writes to Mr. Edgar Schmidt, Superintendent of Edmonton Public Schools
	Mr. Caouette goes on leave; a temporary principal is put in place
December 6, 2010	GM full staff meeting with Tanni Parker, Ron McNeil, Bonnie Zack
January, 2010	Glen Wilcox assigned as principal of Grace Martin
September 2011	<p>As the new school year starts, the “Program Specialist” position disappears. During the initial negotiations, the District had indicated that it will fund the position only for the first year; that is the District policy for alternative programs. MEF did not have the foresight to realize what would happen after the first year</p> <p>Without developments of new resources, Sakinah alternative starts to become a regular program with some sprinkling of Islamic content on ad hoc basis. Elma is made into an “Art teacher” who goes to different classrooms to teach aspects of Islamic civilization</p>
Feb/March 2012	<p>GM Staff Alignment Meetings “Spiraling up together”</p> <p>MEF hires Farooq Maseehuddin for resource development</p> <p>SC Two-Year Resource Development Plan by Farooq, Glen Wilcox (principal)</p>
Jan. 13, 2013	MEF meeting “Focus on the Integrity of Sakinah Circle”
2013, 2014	Groundwork for a new site at Donnan School for 2014-15. Monthly meetings with Donnan Principal. At registration time, there were inadequate number of applications. The plan didn’t move ahead
July 17, 2014	Alignment Transition Meeting for change in principal: Glen Wilcox, Lon McMullen, Elma Harder, Hassan El-Ramly, Mohammad Ali, Zahid Ally
Spring 2014	Discussions for “Mutual Commons”
Spring 2017	Initiated work on “Request to Amend Alternative Program”
June 2, 2017	Meeting to present the Request at Centre for Education with Valerie Leclerc, Lon McMullen (principal), Elma Harder, Dr. Muzaffar Iqbal, Maleeha, Hassan, Shahana. No follow-up.

2018—2019	Lon is transferred; Dale Cooper appointed as the 4th principal of SC Dale Cooper shows great interest in supporting Sakinah Circle. His personal history is a strong motivation; he wants to promote “minority voices”. SC Assessment: Shahana presents an analysis of the Sakinah Program, Dale Cooper names it “Shahana’s 3-Year Plan”
June 24, 2019	Sakinah Teacher PD “Roots of Sakinah” Mr. Cooper posts a position for Assistant Principal position at Grace Martin. Sakinah teachers are encouraged to apply; Siraj Ahmed Hussain becomes Assistant Principal
June 2020	Dale Cooper is given retirement with some kind of handshake. There are specifics around this episode which are well-known to District, they impacted Sakinah Program, but are being omitted here intentionally Randy Witte is appointed the fifth principal of SC; just like several other principals of SC, he was also a vice-principal in another school
May 20, 2020	An online “Introduction to SC” is conducted by MEF for Randy Witte
March 2020	COVID-19 hits; parent and community involvement in the school stops MEF-Sakinah Society start an internal Review of SC
2020-2022	Simultaneous review of Sakinah Time continues
2020-2021	Covid “shutdown” continues

2022-2023 School Year

August 2022	Formal Review Initiated
September 2022	Meeting of Dr. Muzaffar and Hassan El-Ramly with Mr. Witte to determine the contours of an overall plan for Review of Sakinah Program. He promised to check with the District if any rubrics are available. He later sent an email: District has no rubrics
September 2022	MEF establishes parameters for an Internal Review
October 2022	Parent Committee elections, Review Process is the highlight of 2022-23 school year; parents are requested to be part of this process
November 2022	Timeline of Review Process added to the Sakinah Website; Parent Survey
December 2022	Meeting with Mr. Witte and Ms. Hussain about the ongoing review process Internal review results are shared with school administration, parents, teachers Findings are added to the Sakinah Website
January 2023 to April 3, 2023	Four meetings with Mr. Witte and Ms. Hussain about Program alignment: The year-long review has revealed the lack of any procedures to assess the Program alignment with its philosophy. There are obvious short-comings (downloaded content, teaching of Arabic is a huge mis-alignment, etc.)

Presentations were made; discussions were held about how to establish procedures for ascertaining authenticity of content and its delivery. “Litmus tests” were used to demonstrate how some of the content disregards all three pedagogical principles of the Program (nature focused, historically rooted, service oriented); Ten Foundational Principles, which have been used in the Islamic tradition for centuries as filters to ascertain authenticity of the content, were brought into discussions to provide a working framework; this was welcomed.

Principles were explained with specific applications to a Science, Social Studies and Language Arts.

But by March 2023, a binary starts to emerge: “This is a radical change from what has been happening until now. Why me? I have been only here since 2020... No previously principal has done it... this is a huge change, change needs process, process needs time...”

April 3, 2023

Mr. Witte categorically rejects the idea of using the Ten Foundational Principles which have served this purpose for centuries: “I first need to understand them.”

“Understanding these high-level philosophical principles require life-time of learning.”

Communication breaks down.

April 13, 2023

Dr. Iqbal’s letter to the Superintendent Robertson, requesting District support for Program Alignment

May 2, 2023

Dr. Iqbal speaks to Board of Trustees

May 2, 2023

Dr. Iqbal reached out to Mr. Witte, asking for a meeting to discuss school-level procedures

May 8, 2023

Mr. Witte suggests an online meeting for May 10th (1:15-1:45 pm)

May 10, 2023

The 30-minute online meeting with Mr. Witte and Ms. Hussain results in no resolution; Mr. Witte repeats: “administration has to first understand these Ten Foundational Principles”. Dr. Iqbal points out, one more time, it takes a lifetime of learning. The meeting ends without any plan of action.

Dr. Iqbal suggests that a meeting be held with teachers so that they are directly informed about these discussions, content and delivery and program alignment, and they should have known about our meetings all along. There is anxiety among teachers because they do not know “what is going on.”

Mr. Witte rejects this suggestion.

He also refuses to facilitate a parent meeting at Grace Martin and, instead, suggests that we go through the district rental to rent the gym if we want.

Parent meetings take place outside Grace Martin school and online

Suggestion to convert “Sakinah Time during the school day” to an “After-school Hifz and Foundations of Islam Program” emerges in these discussions when the review of that part of the Sakinah Program is analyzed

May 14, 2023

Parent Information and Planning Meeting at the Strathcona County Library and online via Zoom

After School Hifz and Foundations of Islam Program is discussed in some detail;

May 21, 2023 is set as due date for Parent intent to register for the proposed After-school Hifz and Foundations of Islam Program

May 17, 2023 Dr. Iqbal's suggestion (via email) to Mr. Witte to meet and resolve issues at school-level and discuss scheduling for 2023-24 school year

No response from Mr. Witte has come so far

May 21, 2023 Parents have shown great interest in the "Afternoon Hifz and Foundations of Islam Program", with several offering to volunteer

May 24, 2023 Request is made for a Delegation to speak to the Board of Trustees

Appendix

Sakinah Staffing (Principals and Teachers)

Principals 5	KG 5	Gr 1 3	Gr 2 3	Gr 3 2	Gr 4 3	Gr 5 3	Gr 6 3	Arabic 5 +supply	Music 4 +supply
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Number of hires for the positions

- Term of a principal - Shortest term was 3 months, longest term was 4 years
- Three principals arrived at Grace Martin coming from assistant principal positions
- There have been (approx.) fourteen teachers with year-long contracts.
- One teacher has 12 years of service in Sakinah, continuously since the beginning
- Six teachers have been with Sakinah for at least ten years.
- Six teachers started their careers with Edmonton Public in Sakinah Circle and moved on to other placements; Sakinah Circle was their training ground.
- Arabic teacher position has been hard to fill
 - no transition to the next teacher was seamless, always starting from scratch
 - scarcity of supply teachers
 - current teacher is in third year
- Music – 2010 started with a veteran teacher
 - many supply teachers
 - current teacher came as a first-year teacher and has “grown into” Sakinah