

# MISSOURIAN

## Islamic School of Columbia celebrates accreditation

BY ANNE SHIFLEY

June 15, 2008 | 9:03 p.m. CST

COLUMBIA — Unperturbed by cloudy skies and a cool breeze, more than 130 people met for a barbecue celebration for the accreditation of the Islamic School of Columbia on Sunday evening.

"Accreditation is a big thing for us," Principal Lina Wahid said. "This means expansion for the school. We can think about starting a sixth and seventh grade, possibly a new building, more funding for early childhood education, and we're now eligible for grants."



Hend Alrawi, 10, left, gets a pink butterfly painted on her face by Marwa Ithman. ...

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RACHEL SWETNAM

With water dripping down his face and shirt, Yaser Alrawi, 4-years-old indulges in a blue snow cone at the Islamic School of Columbia's cookout Sunday.

Wahid said the grants would give financial resources to programs such as English as a Second Language, reduced lunch and transportation to the school, which has 53 students enrolled.

Wahid said the Islamic School's application process for accreditation began three years ago. Not all of the celebration's attendants were students or families of students

at the school at 408 Locust St., but the pride felt for it was universal.

"This is something we've been looking forward to for a long time," said Hani Jaouni, a school board member, as he and several other board members flipped burgers for guests. "The community has contributed so much to the school in terms of funding and support during the last few years."

Adults chatted while the pile of shoes outside of and the shrieks of children's laughter coming from the bounce house increased in volume. Kids also had their faces painted and ate snow cones.

Rashed Nizam, chairman of the school's board, said the task of earning accreditation can be complex but acts as a source of pride.

"Financial aid and establishing credibility are difficult for private schools," Nizam said. "Accreditation has helped give the school recognition on the national and local level."

According to the Web site for the Missouri Nonpublic School Accrediting Association, the Islamic School of Columbia, along with other accredited private schools, has successfully completed an evaluation of its educational program, developed a plan for future educational improvements and met the current educational standards held by the association. The association also noted on the site that schools are judged mostly in terms of their individual mission and philosophy, and accreditation is "based on a school's ability to demonstrate adherence to certain standards or conditions that provide potential for quality education."

Salsabil Alshaar and Hend Alrawi recently finished fifth grade at the Islamic School and said they are sad to be leaving the school behind as they head to Smithton Middle School next year. But the friends were excited to see the Islamic School earn accreditation.

"Now the school will be recognized as a real school," Alshaar said as she munched on a grape-and-blueberry-mixed snow cone. "God willing, people will send more of their kids here now and they can get grants and a bigger school. It will be really cool."

Soumaya Necibi, 14, will be attending Rock Bridge High School next year but went to the Islamic School through fourth grade. She knows that accreditation means great improvements.

"The school is missing a lot of amenities compared to the public schools — enrollment numbers, a gym, a cafeteria. We really need a cafeteria and a gym here," Necibi said.

Lamya Najem's 10-year-old son attends the school. Najem said the trailer the school currently uses for classes is good, but she also hopes a new building with a gymnasium will be among the school's improvement efforts.