

**From:** Elgenaidi, Maha  
**Sent:** Sunday, September 05, 2010  
**To:** Arne Duncan  
**Cc:** 'Elgenaidi, Maha'; 'Foster, Heather'; 'Dubois, Joshua'; 'Bedell, Kenneth'; 'Jennings, Kevin'; 'Monteiro, Paul'  
**Subject:** Dear Secretary Duncan - Reinforce Safe Schools Before 9/11 Anniversary



September 6, 2010

The Honorable Secretary Arne Duncan  
U.S. Department of Education  
400 Maryland Avenue, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear Secretary Duncan:

I am writing to urge you to take action on the issue of rising Islamophobia and racism which coincides with the beginning of the academic school year. Across the nation, as students return to school, the environment, which has generally not been healthy for South Asian, Arab and Middle Eastern students in recent years, will be even more toxic towards this group of students.

The few media articles that have addressed the issue of harassment of these groups highlight many of the issues faced by students from these backgrounds. These include ongoing harassment and bullying in classrooms, hallways, the lunch room, recess, and on the bus which can make the life of a child or youth miserable, with little recourse.

Additionally, administrators and teachers may have their own prejudices which may also impact these students. A story related in an article, "Suffer the Little Muslims," which was published in the San Francisco Chronicle a few years ago reflect experiences that many students of this background have experienced: <http://www.ing.org/about/islampage.asp?num=42>. The article describes the experience of a student for example named Laila being harassed publicly; when she brought up the issue with her teacher, she was met with similar prejudice and no recourse or response either from the teacher or administration. With the increased campaign of bigotry promoted in the media and by politicians, administrators and faculty may also fall prey to the acceptability of this prejudice at school.

ING is deeply appreciative of the steps the Department of Education has taken to address the issue of bullying, and your inclusion of representatives from these at-risk communities. These have included Kevin Jennings's meeting at the ING office in April of this year (<http://ing.org/latestnews/default.asp?num=213>), the invitation to ING to participate in the June community meeting with the Department of Education, and the recent conference on bullying

that was convened in August in which I participated. One of the many outcomes of the conference was publicizing to our affiliates and networks the new DoE website, Bullyinginfo.org. (<http://ing.org/latestnews/default.asp?num=223>).

In the light of these ground-breaking initiatives, the start of the school year, and the climate of fear and hate that has seized our nation, it would be appropriate to **issue a statement** that reflects all of the steps that have been taken so far, and builds on those initiatives, to urge particular attention to the at-risk population of South Asians, Arabs, and Middle Easterners. Such a statement could be issued to school districts, or directly to individual schools, as well as the media. Such a statement would reinforce the importance of this issue, and emphasize that there would be no tolerance for discrimination or harassment at any level in the school system.

We deeply appreciate your dedication to eradicating bigotry and harassment in our nation's schools and look forward to working with you further on this critical issue.

Sincerely,

Maha Elgenaidi  
President and Executive Director

Cc:

Kevin Jennings, Assistant Deputy Secretary, Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools  
Kenneth Bedell, Center for Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships  
Heather Foster, Center for Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships  
Joshua Dubois, White House Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships  
Paul Monteiro, White House Office of Public Engagement