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Board Extends Saudi School's Lease

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Supervisor Finds No Reason for Concern Over Textbooks, Teachings

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The [Fairfax County](#) Board of Supervisors extended the lease of county-owned property to a private Islamic school funded by the [Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia](#).

The Islamic Saudi Academy on U.S. Route 1 in southern Fairfax County has attracted attention in the past year because of concerns that the school could have been using the same kinds of curriculum materials as Saudi Arabia, which critics say promote religious intolerance and violence against people of other faiths.

[Supervisor Gerald W. Hyland \(D-Mount Vernon\)](#), whose district includes the Saudi-backed school, said he reviewed the academy's materials with the help of an Arabic translator. After Hyland found no reason for serious concern, he and other board members agreed Monday to extend the lease of the school, which has about 1,000 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 12.

"We had no indication they are teaching terrorists, or are teaching students to hate and kill," Hyland said. "The bottom line," he said, is that the textbooks used at the Fairfax school "are not the same" as those used in Saudi Arabia.

The [U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom](#) recommended in October that the [State Department](#) close the school until the academy can prove that it does not teach religious intolerance or promote terrorism. Fifteen of the 19 Sept. 11, 2001, plane hijackers were from Saudi Arabia, and commission officials have said the country continues to export militant religious teachings.

The State Department, however, has taken no action in the case.

Andrea Lafferty, executive director of the Traditional Values Coalition, testified before the board in opposition to the extension of the lease, saying she believed that the Fairfax supervisors were making a mistake in granting the lease extension. She said Saudi Arabian schools promote jihad, or religious war against nonbelievers.

She said she believes that county officials had made their decision out of "political correctness" and that it was a problem to have a school teaching violence so near [the Pentagon](#) and the [White House](#). Lafferty said Hyland was a "patsy" for the school.

"If anything else happens as a result of that school being there, it will be on the shoulders of every board member," Lafferty said.

Hyland said, however, that the issue was one of religious tolerance. "There's a great reluctance on the part of the board to be judgmental as to people's religions," he said.

There also are monetary concerns. The school will pay Fairfax County \$2.2 million for the lease of the property. The school occupies the site of the former Walt Whitman Intermediate School at 8333 Richmond Hwy. in Fairfax.

Officials at the school could not be reached for comment but previously have said educators there would "never teach such things." The school has offered to allow reviews of its educational materials by officials and newspaper reporters. American-born teachers who are Christian and work at the school told officials they have seen no evidence of religious intolerance.

Civic associations in the area testified in support of the lease extension, saying that the school, which has operated there since 1989, has been a good neighbor and maintains the grounds well.

The board granted the school a one-year lease extension and agreed the academy could ask for two more one-year extensions.

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