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# New York's Dwight School Plans New Campus—in Dubai

Private school is among the latest to venture into fast-growing Mideast business hub



Dubai has 299 English-language international options for preschool through high school, more than any other city in the world. People stroll around the Global village in Dubai. PHOTO: AHMED JADALLAH/REUTERS

By Leslie Brody

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As the private Dwight School in Manhattan gears up to open a new campus, it is recruiting dozens of American teachers with perks such as free housing and tuition for their children.

The rub is that the new site is almost 7,000 miles away in Dubai, a city on the Persian Gulf where summer days often top 105 degrees, public kissing by couples is frowned upon and women are expected to dress conservatively.

Jaya Bhavnani, a 65-year-old science teacher at Dwight's Upper West Side campus who has lived in Dubai before, says she is thrilled to be joining the school's newest branch. "It's the most Westernized city in the Middle East, as long as you can respect some basic social norms" while there, Ms. Bhavnani said.

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Dwight is among the latest schools to venture into Dubai in the United

Arab Emirates, a federation of monarchies where Islam is the official religion. A fast-growing business hub, Dubai has 299 English-language international options for preschool through high school, more than any other city in the world. They cater largely to transient expats and local families seeking educations they believe will prepare their children to get into top universities in the U.S. and elsewhere—as well as careers in a global economy.

Dubai's embrace of English-language international schools is part of a proliferation, especially in the Middle East and Eastern Asia. Now 9,319 operate world-wide, up from 2,584 in 2000, according to ISC Research, which tracks such data. They serve more than 5 million students in preschool through high school and earn more than \$47 billion in fees. The group predicts these numbers will nearly double in a decade.

Currently, the United Arab Emirates, with 626 of these schools, and, China, with 807, have the most. "Demand for English-language schools with the best practices and pedagogy keeps growing," said Keith Cincotta, a director at International Schools Services, a Princeton-based nonprofit that helps them operate. Having spent a decade in Dubai, Mr. Cincotta said its population is highly mobile, and many parents "want an education system for their kids that will be equivalent to where they go next."

Dwight School, which also has branches in London, Seoul and Shanghai, is launching the new site as a for-profit entity with a local partner, Bloom Education. Tuition will range from \$20,300 to \$31,700.

It recently hired Rebecca Skinner, who founded the private International School of Brooklyn, to serve as associate head of school. She said her trilingual 14-year-old twins are excited to move in January. "The experience of living abroad and immersing themselves in another culture, it only adds to their understanding and ability to contribute in a global context," Ms. Skinner said.

Some New York City parents may worry their favorite teachers will be poached. Recruiters say the teachers with wanderlust who head abroad usually return after a few years, bringing back deeper knowledge and richer perspectives.

Critics of American education point to U.S. teenagers' mediocre results in international rankings, such as the "PISA" tests, or Programme for International Student Assessment. But Janecke Arneas, head of Dwight School Dubai, said many parents overseas like the way successful American private schools focus on the individual child's well being and promote

critical thinking over rote memorization. She said there is great demand for the International Baccalaureate program, a curriculum offered by Dwight and many schools world-wide.

Dubai's government is trying to attract more American private schools, and hosted hundreds of educators in a December presentation at the United Arab Emirates' embassy in Washington, D.C., in December.

Kalthoom Al Balooshi, executive director of education development at Dubai's Knowledge and Human Development Agency, said it wants to provide families with a wide range of options, and the most popular include those with American, British and Indian curricula.

"This choice is crucial for our growth," she said by email. "By building new schools, Dubai has positioned itself as a leading regional education hub."

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