



## Founded in

2007

## Number of Schools, Location(s)

Two:  
One in **Clarkston, GA**  
One in **Columbus, OH**

## Number of Students

124 across two schools

## Number of Teachers / Teacher Retention

29 across two schools

82% retention

## Per-Pupil Cost<sup>1</sup>

Approximately \$15,000

## Sector

Private

## Grades Served

6th through 12th

## Student Demographics

0% Hispanic  
0% White  
31% Black  
36% Asian  
33% Middle Eastern or North African

12% students with disabilities (note, Fugees reports this as students with IEPs, even though they believe some students have been misdiagnosed in prior settings)  
100% English language learners  
100% students eligible for free or reduced lunch  
100% refugees (nearly 40 countries of origin and 45+ languages are represented at the school)

## Teacher Demographics

62% teachers of color  
38% White  
28% come from an immigrant or refugee background

<sup>[1]</sup> Note we use cost instead of funding for this case, given Fugees' status as a private school (i.e., it does not operate under public per-pupil funding).

## Anchoring to Established Cognitive Developmental & Educational Theories

### Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development — Constructivism<sup>2</sup>

**Researcher:** Jean Piaget

**Theory's Key Tenets:** Children learn as an artifact of factors both internal and external to the child. Children learn best by doing and through engaging in their environment and with the adults and peers around them.

### Sociocultural Theory<sup>3,4</sup>

**Researcher:** Lev Vygotsky

**Theory's Key Tenets:** Children learn through hands-on experiences. Everyone in the child's environment and the overall culture and society are responsible for developing higher order cognitive functions. Learning is inherently a social act. Adults facilitate children's knowledge development through scaffolding and the Zone of Proximal Development — the space between a child's prior background knowledge and what they can do on their own, and the new knowledge, understandings, or skills that they need support mastering.

### Ecological Systems Theory<sup>5</sup>

**Researcher:** Urie Bronfenbrenner

**Theory's Key Tenets:** Children learn through both internal and external factors by engaging in several environmental or ecological systems:

- Microsystem (e.g. family, caregivers, school)
- Mesosystem (refers to relationships between those within the child's microsystem, such as parent-school partnerships)
- Exosystem (refers to larger social systems that impact the child's development, such as community-based resources or parent workplace environments that may cause stress on parents that lead to stress for children)

<sup>[2]</sup> Jean Piaget, "Piaget's Theory," in: Bärbel Inhelder, Harold H. Chipman, and Charles Zwingmann, eds., *Piaget and His School* (New York: Springer-Verlag Berlin Heidelberg, Springer Study Edition, 1976).

<sup>[3]</sup> Lev Vygotsky, "The Development of Higher Psychological Functions," *Russian Social Science Review* 18, no. 3 (1977): 38.

<sup>[4]</sup> James P. Lantolf and Aneta Pavlenko, "Sociocultural Theory and Second Language Acquisition," *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* 15 (1995): 108–124. doi:10.1017/S0267190500002646.

<sup>[5]</sup> Urie Bronfenbrenner, "Ecological Systems Theory," in Ross Vasta, ed., *Six Theories of Child Development: Revised Formulations and Current Issues* (London, England: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 1992), 187–249.

- Macrosystem (refers to cultural values, customs and laws)
- Chronosystem (refers to dimensions of time and the interplay between time and a child's external life changes and circumstances as well as the child's internal development and identity)

## Introduction

As the daughter of a refugee, Luma Mufleh identifies as a refugee, an Arab, and a Muslim. In 1964, Mufleh's grandmother fled Syria. She was three months pregnant when she drove to Jordan with her five children, seeking safety for her family, and not knowing what the future held. A month later, Mufleh's grandfather followed the family to Jordan after his brothers were tortured and his factory was taken over by the government. Together, Mufleh's grandparents rebuilt their lives from scratch. Growing up in Jordan, Mufleh often visited refugee camps with her grandmother. At the camps, her grandmother instilled in her a valuable lesson: "Don't feel sorry for refugees — believe in them."

After college graduation, Mufleh applied for and was granted political asylum in the United States. Despite her extensive education in Jordan, she found her first years in the U.S. to be challenging. After bouncing from state to state and job to job, she eventually found herself in Atlanta. Mufleh's life in the U.S. took on new meaning as she saw a group of refugee children from Afghanistan, Sudan, and Liberia playing soccer in a parking lot.<sup>6</sup>



The children reminded Mufleh of her home in Jordan and inspired her to build a soccer team. As a soccer coach, Mufleh developed strong relationships with her team. She experienced the children's joy and growth on the soccer field and witnessed their lives off the field. The team members' parents worked tirelessly at the local chicken processing plant or warehouse. Despite such hard work, there were many days

<sup>[6]</sup> For more on Mufleh's story, see her [TED Talk video here](#).

when those families did not have enough to eat. The young players also experienced bullying for being different or for not speaking fluent English, and Mufleh realized that they were often overlooked at their schools. As a result, refugee students did not have the resources and tools that they needed to be successful.

To address this unmet need, Mufleh expanded her soccer team to what is now Fugees Academy. Today, the organization serves refugee students in two cities (Clarkston, Georgia and Columbus, Ohio). Fugees students represent nearly 40 countries of origin, speaking nearly 50 languages. Fugees' mission is "devoted to working with child survivors of war" and "to empower refugees to integrate successfully into their new country by providing them the support and structure they need to realize their vast potential."

Fugees supports this mission through an intensive program that addresses the range of needs of its refugee student population. Students are typically at Fugees Academy 11 hours per day during the school year. In the summer months they have five weeks of academic programming from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.



Fugees students attend a full day of rigorous academic courses. These courses are designed for the school's population of English language learners, many of whom have had significant gaps in their formal education as a result of their refugee experiences. The result of this intensive academic program is significantly accelerated growth. By 11th grade, students are prepared to leverage dual enrollment opportunities to take classes at a local college.

As important as the academic program is Fugees' approach to students' holistic development. As Mufleh explains, "We are committed to the successful integration of our students by finding ways for them to be proud of their home/birth culture and identity and their new identity as Americans. They have to understand both and how they impact life in order to be successful." As such, the school dedicates significant time in and out of the classroom to explore and celebrate students' home cultures and family stories. Additionally, Fugees recognizes the mental health and social-emotional needs of its student

population. As such, Fugees invests in schoolwide programming such as mindfulness exercises, a daily yoga class, and an intensive focus on art and music.

Soccer, which first inspired Mufleh to start the school, plays an especially vital role in the program. Every Fugees student is a member of a team, and students refer to Mufleh as "Coach." Mufleh describes the broad-reaching impact of this core programmatic element: "Our way to connect is through sports. There's power to being on a team, especially when you feel isolated or feel like you don't belong. When students come to Fugees, they're automatically on a soccer team with 14 kids who have their back on the field. You suffer and win together. It's something that's familiar, but not associated with trauma. The soccer ball at refugee camps is an escape. It transcends ethnic identity, religion, and your city or village experience. On that soccer field, when you're struggling together, kids come together. Soccer will break you physically, mentally, and emotionally. The team will bring you up. On a Fugees soccer team, you see a kid you've been taught to hate, maybe someone from a warring faction. When you see them struggling on the field, you are forced to bring them up or you let the team down."

The soccer experience is a particularly powerful vehicle for Fugees' approach to education, which leaders describe as "offering children a bridge from isolation to socialization and learning. The school gives students the support, guidance, and direct instruction necessary to put them on a path to better adjustment, high school graduation, and further successes. We have demonstrated that in a highly structured environment where rules and expectations are clear, and creativity and individuality are nurtured, refugee children don't just catch up – they become stellar performers who can meet rigorous academic standards."

While the Fugees model is unique to its refugee population, Mufleh believes that the school's design has lessons for a broader audience. As Mufleh said, "If you can design a school that can allow the most vulnerable population to succeed, then that design could be applied to anyone. We want to prevent the cycle of poverty, and elements of what we do [at Fugees] can be applied to other schools."

## Defining and Measuring Success

**Definition of student success.** Mufleh describes a broad-reaching vision of student success: "We want students to be independent, whether they're filling out job applications or navigating bills and health insurance. We want kids to be confident in who they are and to understand their role and identity as a refugee. We want them to be healthy athletes. We want them to value community over individual. We want them to have experiences to give back."





- 87% students come in at sixth grade performing “low” in reading informational text on the NWEA MAP assessment. However, by ninth grade, that number is cut in half, and by junior year, 100% are at or above average, with 42% performing in the “High” or “HiAvg” quartiles. Within one school year, students achieve learning gains of 2 to 2.5 times that of NWEA MAP averages.

## How Fugees Facilitates Comprehensive Student Development

Fugees demonstrates integration across multiple domains of Comprehensive Student Development (CSD). In the sections that follow, we explain what Fugees’ model looks like. We also clarify how the model fuels CSD.

The following aspects of Fugees’ model are critical to its success in facilitating student development:

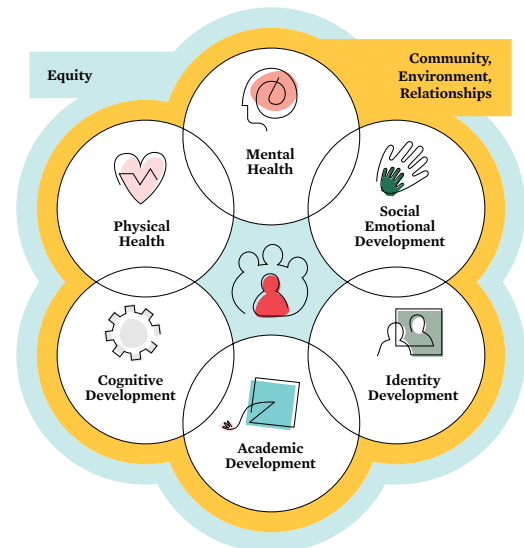
1. Positive focus on students’ refugee identities and home country cultures
2. Athletics as an educational tool
3. Emphasis on arts education
4. Strict and nurturing environment
5. Comprehensive support of families

**Current and desired ways of measuring success across domains.** In addition to the traditional, expected metrics (standardized test scores, graduation rates, and college attendance, to name a few), success for students of Fugees Academy can be measured as a series of “firsts.” Currently, 85% of the school’s students are the first in their families not just to go to college, not just to graduate from high school, but to even complete middle school. In this way, success is about setting families on paths that were not previously accessible to them, and ideally preventing the generational cycle of poverty from the beginning. Mufleh is also interested in a more amorphous measure of success: Do students know who they are? Are they confident? Are they happy?

**Academic success.** Fugees has an impressive graduation, college attendance, and standardized test results (via the NWEA MAP assessment):

- Fugees has 92% graduation rate and a 100% college acceptance rate
- Fugees students achieve learning gains 2 to 2.5 times that of NWEA MAP averages

### Comprehensive Child Development



1. Positive focus on students’ refugee identities and home country cultures

Cognitive	Physical	Academic
Mental	Social Emotional	Identity

■ Primary Domain   ■ Secondary Domain

Fugees’ model empowers students to explore their identities and develop pride in them. This focus fosters student development across multiple domains.

Fugees students report that, in previous U.S. school situations, their identities made them “different” or caused them to be bullied. This led to experiences of isolation and sometimes made students hide or be ashamed of their identities.

At Fugees, students are taught to proudly identify as refugees, to honor the sacrifices their parents have made to bring them to the U.S., and to maintain a connection to their home cultures. Students are consistently reminded that being a refugee is not something to be ashamed of; it is something that demonstrates the student and family’s strength and resilience. While the school is “English only” to accelerate students’ language learning and prevent segmentation of students by home language, students are constantly encouraged to make connections between what they are learning and their cultural context. They are also provided many opportunities to share important aspects of their cultures (e.g., a special food, dance, holiday celebration, or story) with others. Students are thus supported to see their refugee identities and native cultures in a positive light, and they are also encouraged to share themselves and their cultures with others. This exploration and sharing of identity creates an environment where students build deep understanding of and respect for each other. Students develop connection over shared experience as refugees; they also engage with each other’s differences.

This focus on students’ identities supports multiple domains of development. Students experience intensive identity development as they explore a personal identity (or an answer to the question “Who are you?”) as refugees, learners, and athletes at the school.<sup>7</sup> They build cultural identity as school assignments and traditions prompt them to explore and embrace their home cultures.<sup>8</sup> Coming together as students, soccer team players, and fellow refugees at Fugees, students also develop a collective identity, or “An individual’s self-concept that derives from his/her knowledge of and attitudes toward membership in a social group coupled with the value and

emotional significance attached to that membership.”<sup>9</sup> As students learn about each other’s identities, they experience important **social-emotional development**. This takes the form of students’ sense of belonging at the school and their greater social awareness. Positive focus on identity also has significant impact on students’ **mental health** (e.g., emotional health), especially in comparison to the emotionally detrimental experiences students report from prior schools. Additionally, positive focus on students’ home cultures is known to be an important enabler of English language learners’ **cognitive and academic growth**. The following vignettes show examples of how the school’s focus on identity supports development:

- Ms. Bev, co-leader of the Clarkston campus, said, “The question of identity is complicated, but the identity of Fugees is not. We take the complicated concept and start peeling it. We start with the shared identity of an athlete and of a classmate. Then we explore differences in language, faith, and historical context.”
- Every Friday, at whole school assembly, Fugees students recite the Fugees Creed, which spells out “PRIDE” to describe perseverance, respect, integrity, dedication, and excellence. At the end of the Fugees Creed, students chant: “I take pride in where I’m from. I take pride in my community. I take pride in my future. I take pride in being a Fugee!”



- Fugees teachers intentionally craft the curriculum to highlight differences among cultures, enabling students to think critically about the tensions between cultural and personal values as they develop their English language skills. For example, in sixth grade, students have a unit on Little Red Riding Hood. Students read the American version as well as the English translation of the Korean and Iranian versions of the story. The fables have subtle cultural nuances, and students compare and contrast the stories and discuss the “why” behind differences. The close reads of additional versions add rigor and complex-

<sup>[7]</sup> Vignoles, et al.  
<sup>[8]</sup> Jackson.

<sup>[9]</sup> Templeton& Eccles.

- ity; they develop age-appropriate literacy standards while using approachable English language learner texts.
- One of the first assignments at Fugees is the writing prompt to “tell the story of your name.” This activity, and many others at Fugees, encourages conversations with parents. Instead of asking students to write about their experiences as a refugee, this activity asks students to reflect upon birth, history, and culture. Students share the stories of their names with each other and build knowledge and understanding. At Fugees, the importance of students’ names extends beyond the first assignment. Teachers spend hours learning to pronounce every student’s full authentic name correctly.<sup>10</sup> Students are encouraged to use their full name, and not Americanize or abbreviate for the convenience of others. “Your name is Mohammed, not Mo,” seniors say to a middle school student, encouraging him to be proud of his name as a symbol of his identity.
  - Students are supported to tell their refugee stories, an act that requires tremendous vulnerability. Often, it is a multi-year process for a student to have the confidence and sense of safety to do so. As Mufleh shared, “A lot of our Burmese students come from refugee camps in Thailand. When they first come here, they will say they’re Thai. Over time, they’ll say they’re born in Thailand but ethnically Burmese. Eventually, they may say they are Rohingya. It’s about giving students space to do that and to do that with each other. One kid had been with us for four years when he finally was able to self-identify as Rohingya. He was shaking. Another kid, who was part of a different faction, said thank you and recognized the courage it took to share.”
  - At Fugees, celebration of culture is not an annual event but a daily event, giving students, families, and educators alike the opportunity to affirm their home cultures. As a senior described it, “Fugees is a family. This is where you connect. You feel at home. Everyone welcomes you.”
  - Culture is honored as students write about their home cultures via academic assignments and as students share the meaningful festivals, words, foods, and dances associated with their culture throughout the year. For example, students celebrate and honor traditions ranging from Ramadan to Holi.
  - Celebrations of culture and cuisines are also extended to the broader community. Each month, parents cook food at Fugees and invite local families, friends, and neighbors to the meal. The cafeteria is often packed with 50 to 60 guests, ranging from toddlers to aunts and uncles.

- Many Fugees students and alumni have dreams of giving back to their native cultures and communities.<sup>11</sup> A senior shared his ambition: “My family are all farmers. When I was a kid, I helped out picking the crops and have experienced the bad working conditions there. In college, I’ll major in agriculture. I want to help out my country, to go back and improve the working conditions and create more options.” Similarly, a Fugees alum who is currently a sophomore in college shared her goal after graduation: “I want to go back home to build schools and orphanages. I can take what I’ve learned at Fugees and in college to help make a difference.”

2. Athletics as an educational tool

Cognitive	Physical	Academic
Mental	Social Emotional	Identity
■ Primary Domain   ■ Secondary Domain		

Soccer is at the core of the Fugees experience. Fugees uses soccer as a tool for students’ comprehensive development across domains.

Soccer brings students together on the field. Students practice daily in their grade-level teams; they are often coached by older Fugees students or alumni. The focus on soccer also impacts students’ experience in school, however. The team mentality forged on the field improves student culture. Students practice yoga daily at school and eat healthy foods during lunch to support performance on the soccer field (as well as myriad other benefits). Students are uniquely motivated to do well in their classes given the academic performance prerequisites for playing on the team.



<sup>[10]</sup> Rita Kohli & Daniel G. Solórzano, “Teachers, Please Learn Our Names! Racial Microaggressions and the K-12 Classroom,” *Race Ethnicity and Education* 15, no. 4 (2012): 441-462, DOI: 10.1080/13613324.2012.674026.

<sup>[11]</sup> Clifton B. Parker, “Sense of Youthful Purpose Driven by Action, Passion, Says Stanford Researcher,” *Stanford News*, April 14, 2015.

Thus, soccer at Fugees has broad impact on students’ development across domains. Daily soccer practice supports **physical health** as students exercise and develop strength, flexibility, and endurance. Fugees also directly teaches students about the importance of good nutrition to fuel success on the soccer field and the importance of yoga practice to increase flexibility. Soccer is a source of fun and exercise, but it is also a source of community, supporting **social-emotional development**. As they play together on a team, students experience an important sense of belonging and they practice relationship skills.<sup>12</sup> Students experience **identity development** as they develop a strong, shared identity as a team. Soccer also supports students’ **mental health** given connections between exercise and positive functioning and emotional health. The following examples highlight the critical role of athletics at Fugees:

- Soccer is a daily routine, with practice from 4 to 5:30 p.m. at a neighborhood field. During the grueling practice of running and drills, students encourage each other, and Coaches emphasize teamwork and collaboration over individual success.
- Students build strong relationships on the field. One senior reflected: “Even on weekends, we play soccer. You can make friends easily. When I first came here, I only had two friends. Now I know the whole school. It’s a friendly environment all parts of the day, but especially during practice.” As a teacher said, “So much growth happens in conversations, and that’s super true on soccer fields, with so many coaching moments. We see those pay dividends in classrooms.”
- Students develop a strong bond as a team that enables them to endure very trying circumstances. During a recent game in Clarkston, students played against a local team whose supporters shouted taunts like “Go back home” to the Fugees players. During this experience of adversity, players clung to and supported each other. In another experience, a referee would not let a student wearing a hijab play in a game. He claimed that the hijab was against regulation (though the league policy actually explicitly permits players to wear hijabs). Rather than play without their teammate, students decided to forfeit the game in a show of solidarity. The students later wrote letters to protest the referee’s actions.
- Soccer is a motivator for academics. An alumnus shared his early middle school experience at Fugees: “I was really into soccer, but Coach made me realize that I had to do well in academics too in order to play. I learned to balance schoolwork and soccer.” Incentivized to have the full team eligible for games, teammates frequently tutor each other.

- Soccer encourages students to focus on their holistic wellness. For example, Fugees starts the day with a full-school yoga exercise with Ms. Stephanie, the yoga teacher. Through synchronized breathing, Ms. Stephanie reminds students about how their yoga practice will help them with flexibility on the soccer field. She also uses the opportunity to encourage students more broadly to use their physical bodies throughout the day, to practice listening, to have courage to use their voice, and to go about the day with open minds and open hearts. The breathing exercise concludes with connecting hands, reminding staff and students that the community exists to support each other. A middle school student said of his experience with yoga, “It gives me more energy, gets my blood running, helps with thinking, and helps me stay awake.” A mother of a Fugees student explained that soccer encouraged her daughter to focus on nutrition and to develop more confidence: “When my daughter came here, she was worried about her body. Other people bullied her before Fugees, but now she’s playing soccer and running. She came home to tell me we have to change the food we’re eating... we’ve added more salads and eliminated juices. We used to fry all the food, and now we don’t fry everything. Now, my daughter feels good about her body and the soccer helps with her heart problem.”

3. Emphasis on arts education

Cognitive	Physical	Academic
Mental	Social Emotional	Identity

■ Primary Domain   ■ Secondary Domain

Fugees emphasizes student engagement with the arts as a way for students to explore their identities and express themselves. This supports student development across multiple domains.

On top of a rigorous course load of English and math, every Fugees student takes a visual arts and a music class each day. Mufleh explains that Fugees intentionally prioritizes this arts education for its English language learner (ELL) student population: “For students, especially ELL students, music and arts are different ways of expression. If a student has a hard time with verbal expression, he or she needs other opportunities for expression.”

This focus enables students’ **academic development** in the areas of arts and music; however, the positive benefits extend beyond into other core content areas given connections between arts education and student achievement. Arts education has an impact on students’ **social-emotional development** as it has been shown to impact motivation and engagement, habits of mind, creative thinking, and social competencies. The arts

<sup>121</sup> Ramón Spaaij, “Refugee Youth, Belonging and Community Sport,” *Leisure Studies* 34, no. 3 (2015): 303–318, DOI: 10.1080/02614367.2014.893006.



also enable students to explore and express their identities in creative ways, thus fueling **identity development**. Lastly, research shows arts education has an impact on **cognitive development** by promoting attention, focus, and working and long-term memory.<sup>13</sup> The following vignettes demonstrate how art education enables student development in these areas:

- Students connect art and music classes to their emotional well-being and enjoyment of school. A senior said of his favorite class, “In music, we do rap, we dance, we sing. We also had instruments and learned how to play trombone, flute, drums, or trumpet. So many different fun things!” For other students, art and music provide refuge and voice. One student recalled a vulnerable moment. “When my stepfather passed away, I was voiceless. Life was just movement and background. Drawing animation saved me during that period of time. I drew, and that made me feel better. I used animations to tell the story of what I’d gone through.”
- Students explore their identity through visual art projects. For example, high school students create self-portraits. While drawing themselves using a variety of mediums and art techniques, students illustrate elements of their personalities and cultures. They complement the visual work with a concise written piece. Through the self-portraits, students reflect on where they’re from, the skills they are proud of, the activities that bring them joy, their role model, and their dream for the future.
- Students build confidence and voice through the arts. As one student shared, “My favorite class is music when we played instruments like trombone, flute, drums, trumpet. At first, I thought I could never play a trombone. After a few weeks, we could play a few different songs. Eventually, we played in front of the whole school. I played the flute. You can’t really hear the flute, but the whole school was engaged in what we were working on in class.”
- Fugees’ lauded music program enables students to practice English language in song. As Mufleh shared, “A kid who doesn’t speak English might sing perfectly in English. Artists like Michael Jackson and Celine Dion are popular amongst immigrants from many places. That brings students together. Music is important to culture. Here, it’s meaningful that students learn to sing the national anthem.”



4. Strict and nurturing environment

Cognitive	Physical	Academic
Mental	Social Emotional	Identity

■ Primary Domain   ■ Secondary Domain

Fugees strikes a unique balance of establishing a safe, nurturing community and maintaining very strict structures. When asked to describe the school, staff and students most frequently note “family” and “discipline.” Such an environment of values-based structures and discipline enables student development across multiple domains.

The family-like environment at Fugees promotes **social-emotional development** as it enables students’ sense of belonging, attachment, relationship skills, and social awareness. Consistent structures and discipline at the school are not necessarily punitive or repressive; instead, students experience the structure as a sign of the school’s care. The school’s structures and routines also promote **cognitive development** as they provide scaffolded supports for inhibition, self-control, and self-regulation. The transparent accountability structures at the school enable **identity development** as students are taught that the structures reflect the school’s shared values and students are empowered to take responsibility for not only themselves but for their team, class, and community. Ultimately, the nurturing, strict environment creates an important foundation for **academic development**. Students are supported to be persistent in their learning through structures like Fugees’ mandatory after-school tutoring program, daily soccer practice, and other school routines. The following vignettes demonstrate Fugees’ unique environment:

<sup>13</sup> President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities, *Reinvesting in Arts Education: Winning America’s Future through Creative Schools* (Washington, DC: May 2011).



- “Our school is military meets Montessori,” Mufleh said. Indeed, elements of Fugees’ model have strong similarities with military academies: Students wear uniforms; the day is highly structured with activities from dawn to dusk; there are clear rules and transparent consequences. On the other hand, Fugees also shares commonalities with Montessori schools, where the environment emphasizes autonomy and independence. A Fugees alumnus said, “Discipline helped me for college to make great choices here. I’m not out there partying. I know how to manage my time with homework and personal time.”
- The impact of discipline goes beyond punctuality and rules; strong habits also enable resilience. An alumnus shared a story of an encounter on the soccer field: “During one of our games at Fugees, we were winning by a lot, and the opposing team started talking off to our teammates, calling them words. I was really proud of my teammates for not responding back. The other team wanted us to react. Instead, we showed that we have good character. We don’t let words bring us down. That’s strong discipline.”



- At Fugees, discipline is not mere punishment or consequence for breaking a rule. Instead, discipline is the development of strong habits. Fugees implements detentions, and students run laps if they miss after-school practice, but each structure intentionally instills values of respect, timeliness, and perseverance. For example, a school leader shared how detentions are operated: “Kids respond well to detention and are motivated to stay out of it, fueling good traits. If a student does get a detention, there’s a process of helping them articulate what they would do differently next time.” Fugees students agreed. One called it a contrast with earlier experiences: “At the old school, you just get suspended for fights, but kids just repeatedly fight. Here, they help us learn and get better.”
- Parents find resonance with Fugees’ warm discipline. One parent contrasted Fugees with his child’s previous school experience: “At the school before, it was complete chaos. Kids were fighting, there was no homework, lots of anger

and frustration. In the first few months here, he was learning. There’s discipline and structure. Every kid is expected to do well. My son started learning, training, and physically doing better.” As alumni reflect on their Fugees experiences, they share how school structures helped them develop. One alumnus noted: “Fugees has taught me how to be a well-disciplined person with leadership characteristics that I’ve carried on to college. Discipline is broad. It means being on time, respecting ourselves and our elders, and setting a high bar.”

5. Comprehensive support of families

Cognitive	Physical	Academic
Mental	Social Emotional	Identity
■ Primary Domain   ■ Secondary Domain		

In addition to encouraging students to value their families, Fugees also provides a variety of wraparound services to help families. This supports families’ physical health and social-emotional and identity development.

Fugees recognizes that family members play a critical role in enabling the development of the whole child. While Fugees staff can support and develop students within the hours of the extended school day, family partnerships fuel a 24-hour approach to student development. To support **physical health**, Fugees helps families access medical services and health insurance. Fugees’ direct support of parents supports their **social-emotional development** in areas such as self-efficacy, sense of belonging, and stress management. These areas are particularly important for Fugees’ parent population of refugees who are relatively new to America. Fugees also supports families by helping them plan and problem-solve in areas like financial management; this supports **cognitive development** of executive functioning skills required to thrive as an adult. While providing necessary supports, Fugees also reinforces parents as primary educators of their children about the family’s home culture; this builds parents’ and children’s **identity development**. Here are some examples of Fugees’ support for families:

- With limited or no English skills, most Fugees parents work in low-wage processing jobs at local businesses that are known to hire refugees, including a chicken processing plant, salad packaging plant, and distribution warehouse. Fugees supports students, who quickly outpace their parents in their English language abilities, to take on greater responsibilities at home. Fugees provides financial literacy classes to juniors and seniors in high school in which

they practice creating a budget, managing bank accounts, accessing health insurance, and locating other services. In the class, students are required to practice skills for the benefits of their families. For example, after role-playing with a teacher, one student called the local cable provider to lower the family's rates and arrange a payment plan.

- Fugees' wraparound services are supported by teaching, coaching, and support staff. They are the bridge between school and home, helping to translate letters, fill out paperwork, and schedule doctor appointments. Fugees also hosts community events such as immigration FAQs, where an expert is invited to help families understand and adjust to the latest immigration policy.
- Fugees staff ensure that parents are engaged at the school and feel welcome. Fugees offers transportation and brings in translators for parent meetings, helping to eliminate barriers and enabling active parent engagement. Fugees staff show deep respect for families. For example, if a parent comes to a meeting and takes his or her shoes off at the door, Fugees staff will do the same to respect and honor the parent's culture.
- Families are grateful for the supports. A father of a Fugees student said (via a translator): "It's nice to see a school that cares as much about parents as they do about kids. We get help with food stamps and health appointments, and we're cared for. I don't know the language, so it's always helpful to know someone who can help me navigate that."

## Conclusions

Core elements of the Fugees model — positive focus on identity and culture, athletics, arts education, a strict and nurturing environment, and comprehensive support of families — enable Comprehensive Student Development. Across its model, Fugees demonstrates integration across all six domains. The particulars of the model are deeply informed by Fugees' focus on refugee students and status as an independent school. However, themes elevated in this case study about what development in these areas looks and feels like and details about how this development occurs are designed to be broadly applicable.

## What enables this success?

The section that follows summarizes aspects of the Fugees school model that enable its success in Comprehensive Student Development. This section is intended to demonstrate the intentionality and comprehensiveness of the school's approach.

### The "What": Mission, Vision, and Definition of Student Success

#### Mission/Vision

- Fugees is committed "to educate refugee children in an environment that understands their unique challenges." Rooted in this goal is the belief that even the most vulnerable students can and will achieve greatness when supported to develop in academics and beyond.

### The "How": Curriculum and Educational Approach

#### Community engagement

- Fugees is attentive to the unique needs, values, and traditions of families. This includes celebration of holidays and supports around transportation and language, as well as adherence to values and customs. For example, all staff members commit to pronunciation of students' full authentic names (not to Americanize or abbreviate); as a community, Fugees celebrates Ramadan, Holi, and other cultural holidays.
- Community and student events often use foods as a tool to learn about and celebrate cultures. Parents are chefs at Fugees, thus providing students with healthy, familiar, delicious home-cooked meals.
- Through wraparound supports, Fugees empowers family and proactively supports families in key areas such as health and financial management.

#### Instructional methods

- Most Fugees students are English language learners, and teachers approach every class as a way to build students' language skills. Because Fugees finds that most of its students lack the basic foundations for English language, they describe their approach as "starting from the bottom and working our way up instead of scaffolding backward."
- Fugees empowers students' voice and expression through a variety of journal writing, arts, music, and sports activities. These activities engage students and permit them to access education in different ways as they build language skills.

#### Curriculum and materials

- To provide age-appropriate content for students with language gaps, Fugees uses multiple versions of texts to increase the rigor of analysis. For example, to support students' analysis skills, Fugees may provide students with English translations of stories from different cultures, graphic novels, and other visuals.

- Classes include multiple opportunities for arts and expression, enabling students to express creativity. Classes include visual arts, music, and yoga.

### Student Culture

- Soccer is an important anchor of the culture at Fugees. Students' daily practices and experience of working on a team teach them valuable lessons in discipline and resilience while also establishing a strong community.
- The student culture at Fugees is one of unity. Students proactively help each other, whether it's tutoring after school, cleaning up at lunch, or playing on the soccer field.
- Fugees supports students in the development of pride in themselves, their community, and their home countries. Students recite and are empowered by the Fugees Creed (a chant that spells out PRIDE, recited during Friday whole school assembly); students write and share book reports or journal reflections about their experiences; many Fugees graduates have dreams of giving back to their communities.

### The "How": Operational Systems

#### Use of time

- Fugees' school day begins and concludes with movement: The day starts with morning mindfulness exercise and yoga, and every afternoon includes soccer practice.
- To accelerate language acquisition, Fugees offers extended direct instruction in English classes. There is also daily dedicated time for tutoring
- The 11-hour length of the school day also provides parents, who work long hours, the assurance that students are productively learning and engaging in healthy habits.

#### Use of physical space

- Fugees is creative with its use of limited resources — practicing on a soccer field with no goals, fostering student academic growth in classrooms that lack some of the latest technologies (e.g., Smartboards).

### The "Who": Talent

#### Leadership

- Much of Fugees' growth in impact has been achieved under the humble yet visionary leadership of Founder and Coach Luma Mufleh, an immigrant and daughter of a refugee. Through elements of storytelling and relationship building, Mufleh inspires the Fugees community to flourish. Her immigrant identity and fluency in Arabic enable her to establish special connections with many families.
- Each school is intentionally seeded with co-leaders, one leading academics and another leading athletics. Students refer to both leaders as "Coach," not principal. Among the school's current co-leaders is at least one Fugees alumnus.

#### Staff

- Fugees leverages full time teaching, coaching and support staff to provide wraparound services for students and families.
- To build on the culture of community and resilience, Fugees intentionally hires adults who can relate to students. As a result, 28% of staff are refugees or immigrants.
- Teachers report a collaborative and supportive staff culture in which teachers are empowered to act with autonomy in their classrooms in support of student growth.

Learn more at [chan Zuckerberg.com/whole-child](https://chan Zuckerberg.com/whole-child)