



## **CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR SUPPORTING AFGHAN NEWCOMERS**

AISD International Welcome Center  
*Refugee School Impact Program*

# WHAT IS THE IWC?

The **International Welcome Center** is comprised of two teams, the **Refugee** Liaison Team and the **Newcomer** Liaison team.

Both teams help to enroll newcomer students with diverse backgrounds and support them throughout their first years as students in AISD and Austin.

We receive referrals from the local refugee resettlement agency, as well as referrals from schools when families show up to enroll and need extra support.

# REFUGEE TEAM



**Benafsha Qasemi**  
*Refugee Liaison*



**Samiullah Haidary**  
*Refugee Liaison*



**Andrew Johnson, LMSW**  
*Coordinator*



**Melissa Molina**  
*Newcomer Liaison*



**Hashmatullah Yaqub**  
*Refugee Support Specialist*



**Benjamin Decherd**  
*Refugee School Counselor*



**Carmen "Glo" Montgomery**  
*Newcomer Liaison*



**Gabriela Finetti**  
*Newcomer Liaison*

# ABOUT ME



## Samiullah Haidary (Sami)

USA

With AISD since Sep 2023

Previously worked with:  
Refugee agencies volunteer teams  
Afghan communities in Austin.  
Flextronics , Self Employed and ...

### *Afghanistan:*

Previously worked with US troops 9 Years  
Translator/Interpreter/Cultural Advisor & Journalist  
Human Rights Commission  
Media (Several)  
& Several other organizations ...

Played Soccer for Afghanistan National Youth Team  
Fluent in English , Dari (Farsi) , Pashto & Urdu



# AFGHANISTAN CULTURE

**Cultural Attributes:** Afghanistan has a rich cultural heritage, covering more than 5,000 years. Islam is the official religion (approximately 99.7%) are Muslims.

There were some very small residual communities of other faiths, including Christian, Sikh, Hindu, Baha'i and Jewish







Afghanistan is an incredibly diverse country with a rich cultural heritage and many diverse people from 35 cities. The following focuses on two *common* backgrounds of families who have been arriving to Austin from Afghanistan recently.

***What are some of the cultural differences that you may see with Afghan families arriving to Austin?***

## Afghanistan Bio

Afghanistan with a population of 48 Million people Total : 41 Million live inside & 7 Million live outside .

Afghanistan has 35 major Cities **KABUL** is the Capital with **22** District & **620** Sub district and **5** Million people

Afghanistan has 4 Seasons

Afghanistan is a beautiful country fully covered by mountains  
Most people are self employed & farmers

People are very hospitable



# CULTURAL DRESS

Afghan clothing worn by male students is called PERAN TUNBAN.

Black is a formal color in Afghanistan and may be worn for special occasions





# TRADITIONAL SPORTS

Buzkashi

Wrestling

# MODERN SPORTS

Soccer

Martial Arts

Cricket & Many More ...



# Afghan Handicrafts

Famous Qaraqol Hats

Qaraqol Coats and

World Famous Rugs ,

Handmade Jewelries

And many more...





# Afghanistan Fruits (Fresh,Dry) And Sweets





# TRADITIONAL DANCES

ATTAN , QARSAK & ....

They are group dances with specific musical instruments called Dool Soornai, Daira Toola (Flute)





# TRADITIONAL FOOD

Qabeli Palaw

Manto

Aashak

Boolani

Kabob



# Afghan Attan & Qarsak Dance



## FAMILIES FROM MORE RURAL OR REMOTE AREAS OUTSIDE OF KABUL

May be primarily Pashto Speaking first, may speak Dari , Pashai ,  
Uzbeki , Hazaragi and etc

May come from more conservative or traditional beliefs or  
backgrounds

May hold a blend of heritage cultural values (pashtun, tribal) and  
more conservative Islamic values

May favor a male-led decision making process

Eldest male students may be expected to work and contribute to  
the family

Female students may be expected to care for domestic duties  
such as cooking, cleaning and childcare.

May have more limited access to education throughout the family





**FAMILIES FROM URBAN AREAS,  
PARTICULARLY KABUL CITY  
(Capital)  
Mazar, Herat, Kandahar, Jalalabad...**

Primarily speak Dari, may also speak Pashto or a third language as well ( Farsi, Uzbeki & ...)

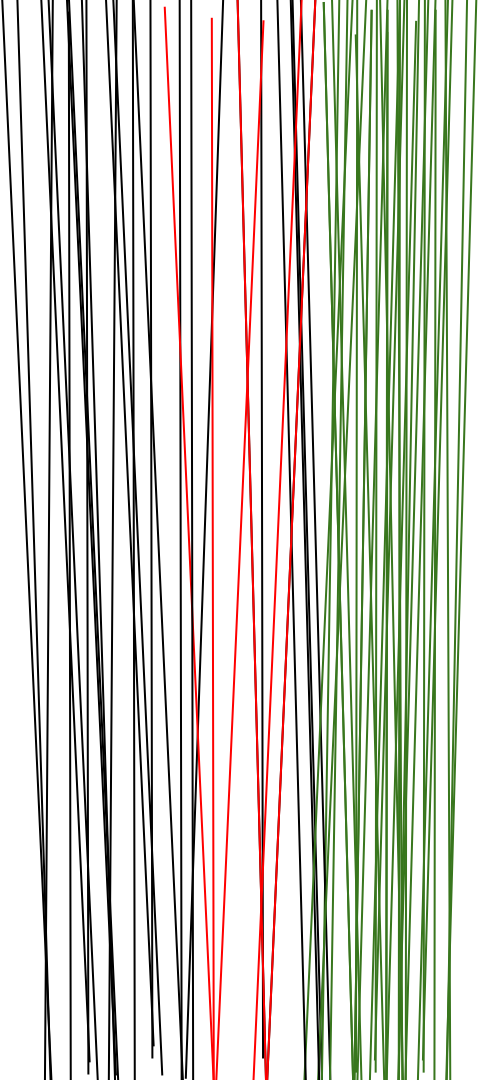
May have access to more developed educational systems, medical care government offices embassies , consulates , airport , international organizations post services and etc

May wear more western clothing, women may not wear hijab





This is not an exhaustive list nor is it a truth for everyone. These are just based on our office's observations of recently arrived families we have worked.



What are some of the  
common misconceptions of  
school staff when talking  
about Afghan students or  
families?

## Common Misconception:

Afghanistan is located in the Middle East.

We often hear things like "*the middle eastern students...*"

This can cause confusion with the language that is assumed that student speak.

## Correction:

Afghanistan is actually located in Southwest Asia and has extremely diverse cultures and languages.



# COMMON MISCONCEPTION:

Assuming Afghan students speak Arabic

National languages of Afghanistan are **Dari** (closely related to Farsi) & **Pashto**.

These languages are spoken by nearly all families that arrive to Austin from Afghanistan.

There are several regional languages including Uzbek, Hazaragi, Turkmeni, Balochi, **Pashayi**, Nuristani and many more ...





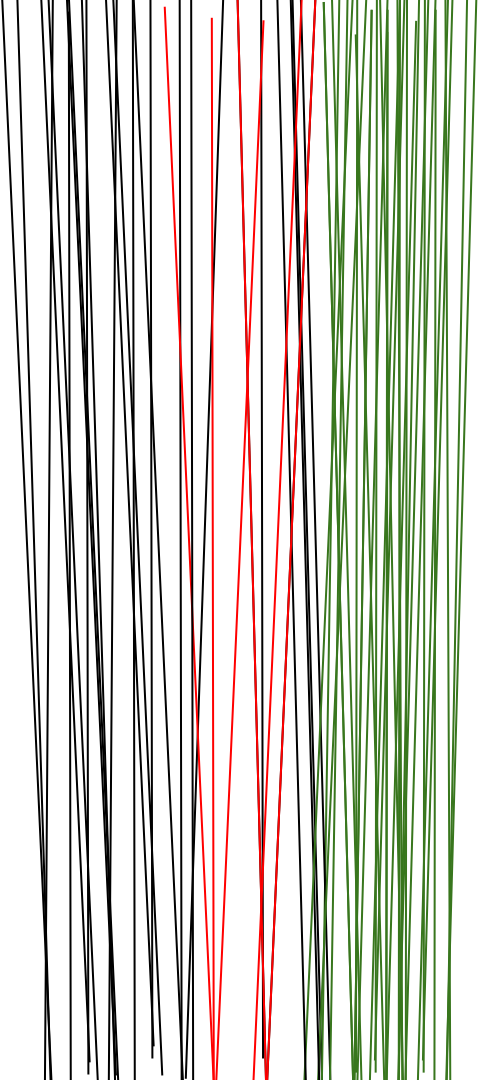
## COMMON ERROR:

Referring to students as  
*afghani* students

*An Afghani* is currency  
*Afghan* is nationality

When referring to Afghan families, it is correct to use **Afghan** to describe nationality.





What are some important  
culture considerations for  
interacting and communicating  
with Afghan families?

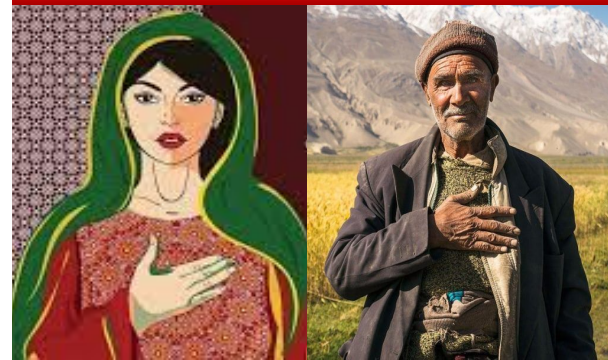
# CULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Handshaking may **not** be an appropriate greeting, especially between genders.

When approaching a Muslim woman (whether she wears the hijab, or not)—it's respectful to wait for her to offer her hand and give her the opportunity to show you if she doesn't mind shaking hands, or you can place your hand on your chest as a gesture of polite greeting.

Eye Contact has different cultural connotations, and a lack of eye contact may be a sign of respect, not ignoring , but steering or long term eye contact is a different word .

Nodding



# DIETARY CONSIDERATIONS

Most Afghan Muslim students eat only Halal food

- Halal means lawful or permitted
- Meat which is prepared in a manner prescribed by Islamic law

Most Muslim students do not eat pork (ham, bacon, pepperoni and any non-Halal meat) or food products with gelatin

If you see Afghan students eating meat in the cafeteria, please let the students know if it is pork or non-Halal



# CULTURAL DRESS

Hijab is considered a religious or cultural tradition for many Afghan families

Afghan female students in AISD may choose to wear any of the following options, although Niqab and Burka are a rarer to see.

## Head coverings worn by Muslim women



**Burka**

Full body, covers entire face, a mesh screen covers the eyes



**Niqab**

Veil for the face, eyes remain visible



**Hijab**

Square scarf covers head and neck



**Chador**

Full-body cloak



**Shayla**

Long scarf, wrapped around the head



**Al-Amira**

Two-piece headscarf



**Khimar**

Cape-like, covering hair, neck and shoulders

# EDUCATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

The educational history of refugee parents is very diverse. There are many parents and students that have no, little or interrupted education.

Literacy levels vary depending on which region in Afghanistan the person is from, as well as their migration journey.

**What is obvious to us is not always obvious to newly arrived refugee parents**

# NOTES ON ISLAMIC HOLIDAYS & Months

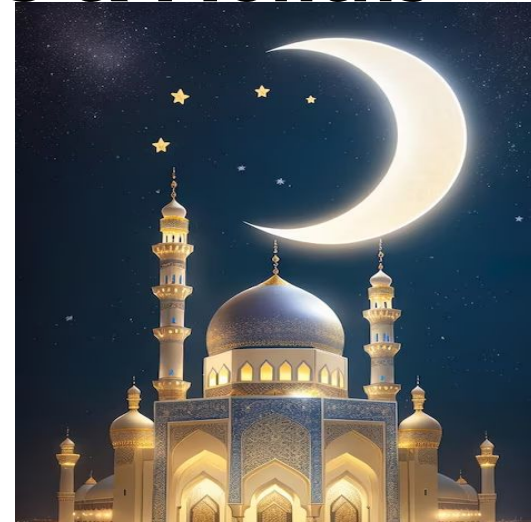
**Tuesday, March 21st, 2024: New Year** (Afghanistan)  
*(may affect attendance)*

**March 11th, 2024\*: Ramadan** begins  
*(may affect attendance, middle + high school students fasting during the day)*. Ramadan lasts one month.

**April 10th, 2024\*: Eid Al-Fitr** which lasts 3 days.  
*(may affect attendance) Dates change every year*

**June 17th, 2024\*: Eid Al-Adha** also lasts 3 days.  
*(may affect attendance) Dates change every year*

**July 7th, 2024\*: Muharram** religious month starts



\*



# ACCULTURATION IN SCHOOL

**Utilize Language Line whenever possible**

**Slow down** explanations & take time to explain things.

**Demonstrate** behavior and classroom expectations multiple times / different ways

**Pair student** with another current student who may speak the same language

**Prayer time** : 15 Minutes at noon , Students need a room , library or a quiet space , Boys and Girls separate

# ATTENDANCE SURVEY

[tinyurl.com/AISDRSI](https://tinyurl.com/AISDRSI)



**THANK YOU! TASHAKOR! MANANA!**

