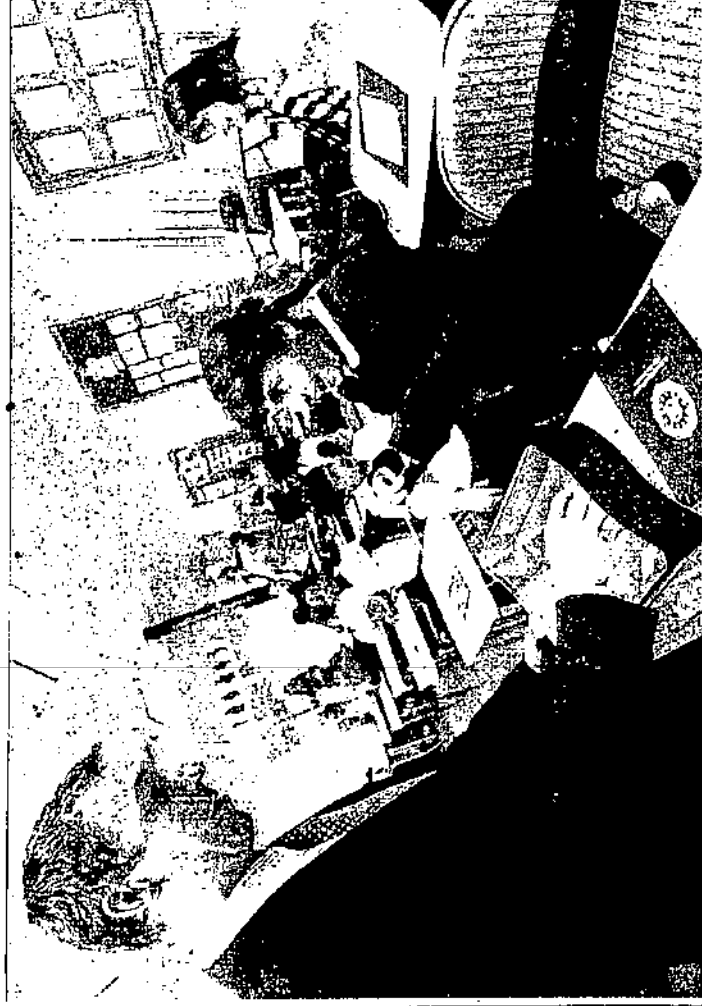


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Special Agent Joseph Schadler last week leads a game with fifth-graders from the FAME Public Charter School in Fremont. The school is testing the agency's Junior Special Agent Program.

ARC GRAB/STAFF

Character building, FBI style

By Linh Tat

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FREMONT — A charter school in Fremont has been selected to pilot-test an FBI character-education program that has not been delivered in Bay Area schools for more than a decade.

Twenty-five fifth-graders at FAME Public Charter School will spend the next several months learning to make wise choices as part of the federal agency's Junior Special Agent Program.

Students will learn how to handle challenges such as bullying, gangs violence and Internet safety. Each lesson will focus on developing students' self-esteem.

Maram Alaiwat, founder and director of FAME, said she believes

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the school was selected in part because of its emphasis on developing "global citizens" who are bilingual, environmentally conscious and taught to listen to different perspectives.

The school caters to Middle Eastern and Southeast Asian immigrants and hopes to start a full English-Arabic immersion program next year. It's also working toward becoming a "green" school.

"It would make sense that (the FBI) would want to embark on this program where leaders are being developed," Alaiwat said. "I think our school is, in the FBI's eyes, a role model of what they would like schools to look like."

During their first gathering last week, students played charades as part of a team-building exercise before watching a video about decision-making.

FBI Special Agent Joseph Schadler, who led the class, said the program targets fourth- through sixth-graders who are entering a period

of their life when they will face greater peer pressure than ever.

"They're at the end of their innocence. If we can get to them early and teach them the skills to be confident... we win," he said.

Students will meet with FBI staff members during 15 classes throughout the school year. Those who complete the program will participate in a graduation ceremony, where they will receive a certificate, badge and Junior Special Agent credentials.

Sakina Magomedov, 9, said she's interested in learning how the FBI operates and "I want to learn how to be a good citizen."

Her classmate, 10-year-old Ay'a Karaca, is looking forward to a field trip later this year to the FBI building in San Francisco, where students will meet with members of the SWAT team.

"I learned that the FBI is cool," she said.

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