
Waste and Custodian Awareness

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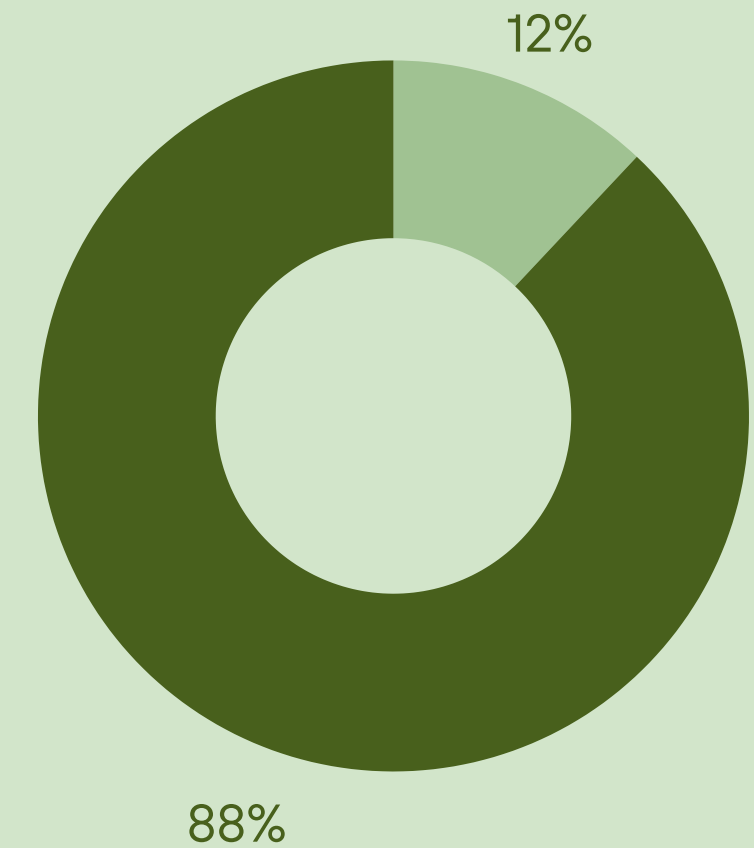
Foothill Symposium

Social Justice AAR

May 2025

Background

- A student's learning is heavily impacted by their environment
- Cleanliness is one of the most important factors to academic success
 - Unsanitary schools lead to worse performance, such as on standardized testing (Ogbeba and Muluku)
 - **"The learning environment determines to a large extent how a student behaves and interacts"**

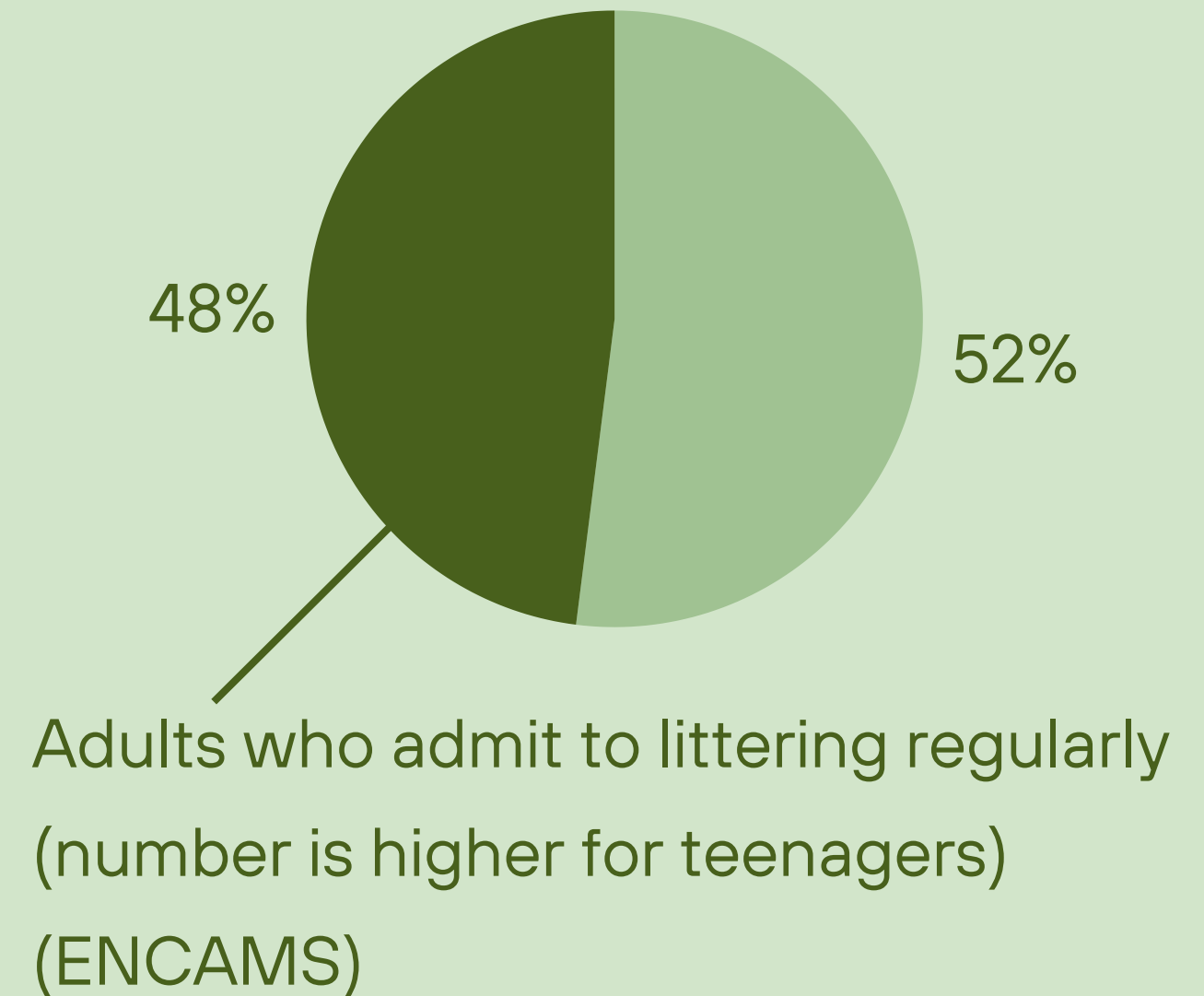


People who are distracted by an unclean environment (BYU)



Background

- Unfortunately, high schoolers are not great at picking up their trash
 - Main reasons include inconvenience, lack of knowledge of its negative effects, and lack of caring
 - Teenagers tend to suffer little guilt over littering (ENCAMS)



Background

- We talked to **Kristina Granlund-Moyer**
- She believes that the problem at the high school level is partially with motivation: the “everyone else is doing it” mentality”
 - It can be difficult to push an agenda that’s against the status quo onto teenagers
- ...and with the idea that it’s too big of a problem to tackle
 - “I haven’t been able to find people that feel like it’s a problem they can meaningfully contribute to” (Granlund-Moyer)

“The nature of teenagers, they tend to be either inward-looking or attuned to their own little group.”



Background

- We also spoke with the school's custodial manager, **Luciano Hernandez**
- He told us about the extent of the problem
 - "There's a **lot** of trash, just everywhere, you know. We [custodians] try our best, but as a whole we gotta do a better job. There's so much waste...so much waste in every department" (Hernandez)
- Frustrated with the student body for not simply putting their trash in the bins

Waste is "preventable, but, you know, it's like changing the whole culture."



The need

- Average student **doesn't know just how much of an impact a single piece of trash makes**, because it is near-immediately cleaned up by the custodians
- More than half of the student body is leaving trash out → overwhelming for the small custodial staff
- Students don't tend to realize this, **not paying much attention to the custodians at all** (Granlund-Moyer)
 - No student asked could name a single custodian
 - Awareness of the custodians' roles and lives might make the student body more likely to clean up after themselves



The need

- **Not a purely local issue;** many people believe custodial staff deserve more respect than they get
 - “[Custodians] are seen as second-class citizens,’ [a parent said]. ‘They take care of our schools and they’re taking care of our kids. Their work should be valued more’” (New York Times).
- No recent initiatives to increase custodian appreciation locally
- **Gap:** significant lack of respect for custodians → littering!



Our initial idea

- We planned to arrange a longer project in which custodians wouldn't clean up after students for 2-3 days
 - Piled up trash → visualization of impact
 - Volunteer opportunity for students to help the custodians clean up the trash
 - Cons: campus hygiene and safety



Our project

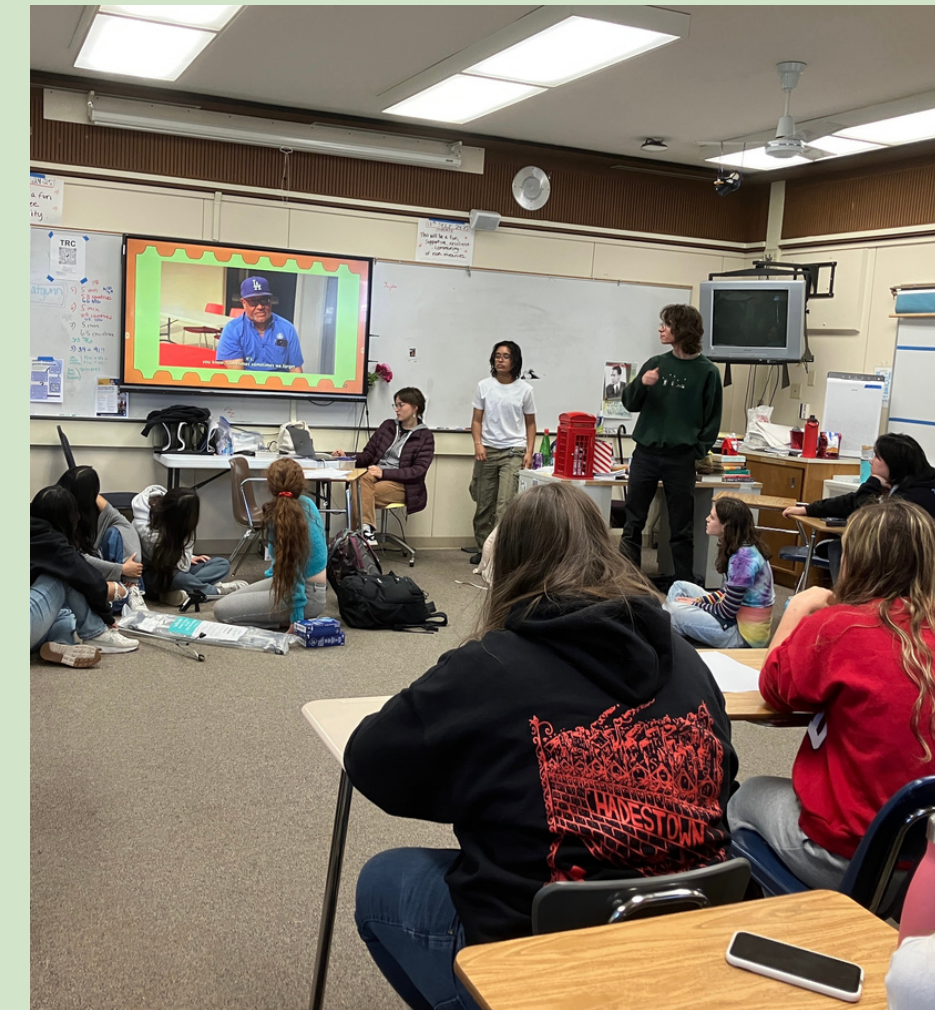
- We decided to instead hold the project during a single lunch
 - Supervised by custodians after during SELF post-lunch
 - Visualization of littering impact → understanding impact on those who have to clean it up
- Also: video interview with **Gordon Goodspeed**, one of the custodians
 - Questions about custodial duties & experiences and about him as a person
 - Shown during the SELF class

“Learning what your impact is on the environment is social-emotional learning.”



Prototyping

- Prototyped presentation in AAR class
- Asked preliminary questions like the ones we planned to ask the final group of students
 - E.g. about their knowledge of the custodians' duties
 - Helped us form an idea of what the actual group would answer
 - Tips on improving clarity and ensuring honesty
- Asked what kinds of information about the custodians they think would be effective in the video interview



Findings!

- The students followed our and the custodians' guidance very well!
 - Picked up the vast majority of trash across campus
- **Every** student who answered the survey who previously did not always pick up their trash said that their likelihood of cleaning up litter increased.
 - One person said that they were also more likely to clean up others' trash
- “Thank you so much for the help, it helps [us] a lot!” - **Nestor Vidonia**, one of the supervising custodians

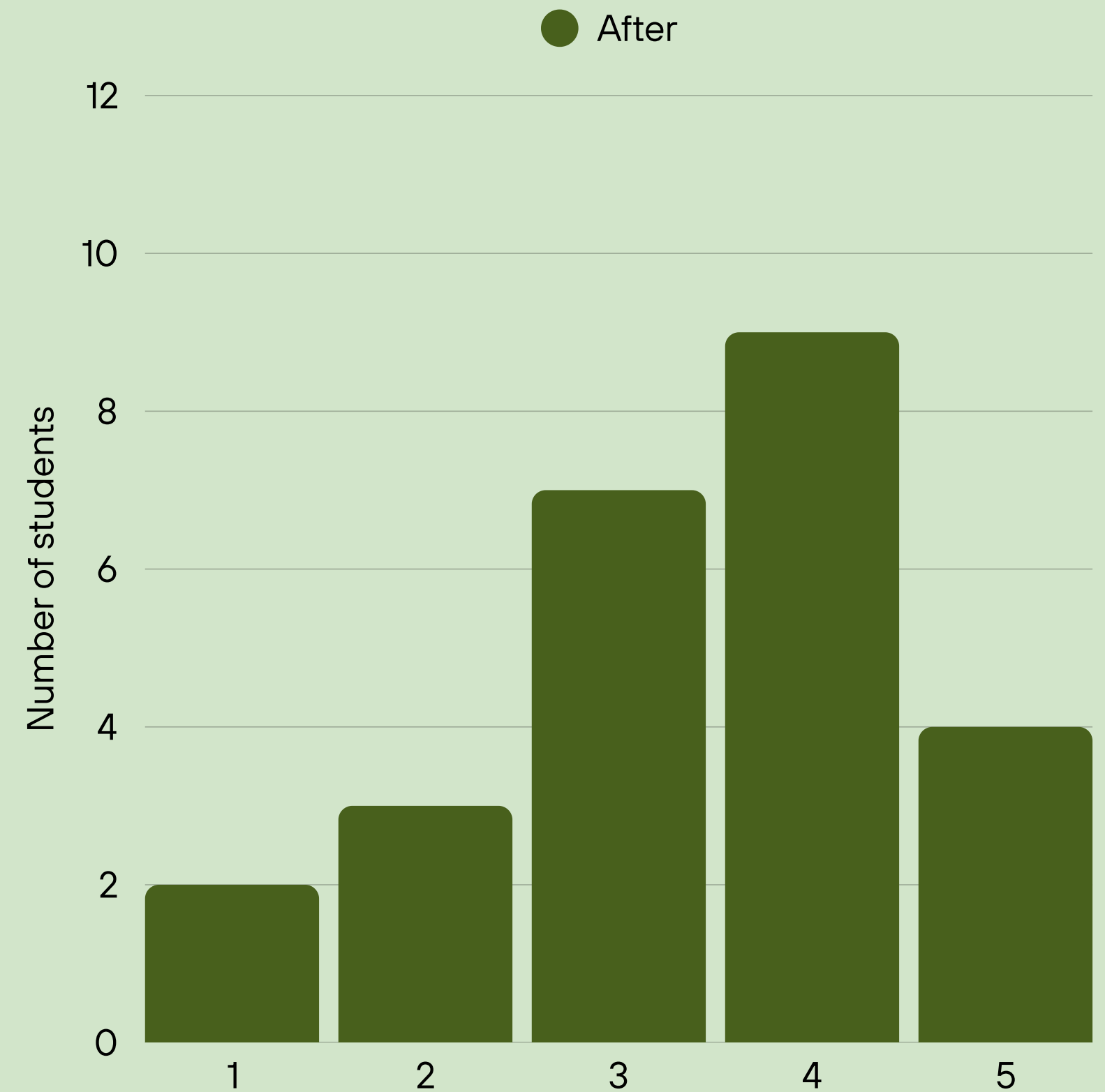


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How well do you think you know the tasks and duties of the Gunn custodians?



The future

- Partnered with the school's student executive council to establish a Custodian Appreciation Day during Earth Week
 - Paint-by-number mural to help beautify the custodial office
 - Used our video interview with Gordon Goodspeed
 - Hopefully becomes annual!
- Learned about: research and environmental issues, and the importance of interpersonal connection
- We hope that custodial staff are more appreciated in schools and other venues!



Thank you!

...to the Foothill Symposium for this incredible opportunity

...to the PAUSD AAR-SJ program, and to Tara Firenzi, the best mentor ever

**...to the Gunn Custodial Staff—especially Gordon Goodspeed, Luciano
Hernandez, and Nestor Vidonia**

...to Tara Bhushan for helping us film our interview

...to you!

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