
Waste and Custodian Awareness

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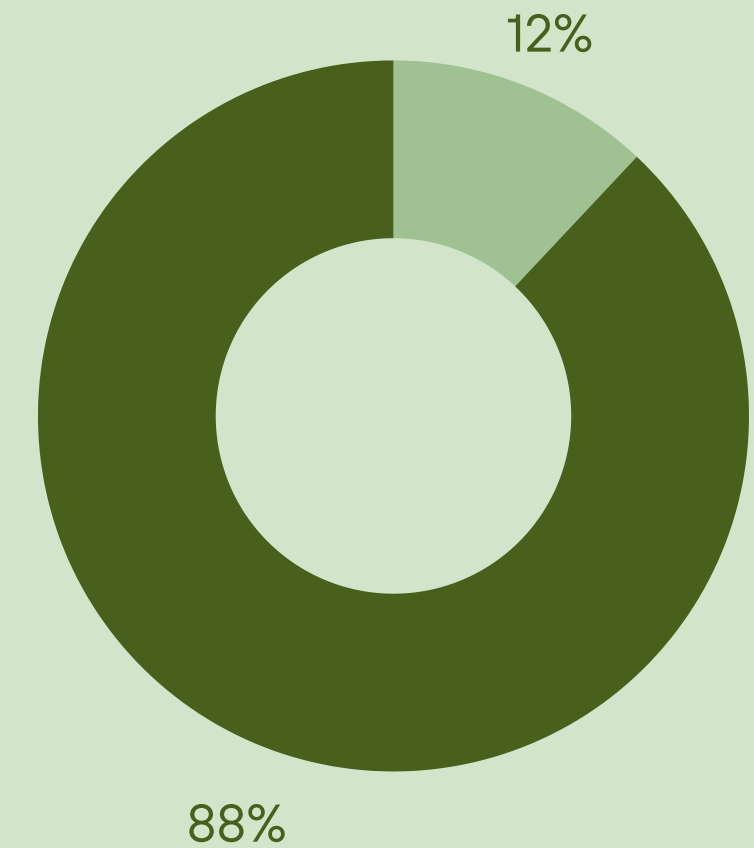
Foothill Symposium

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"**

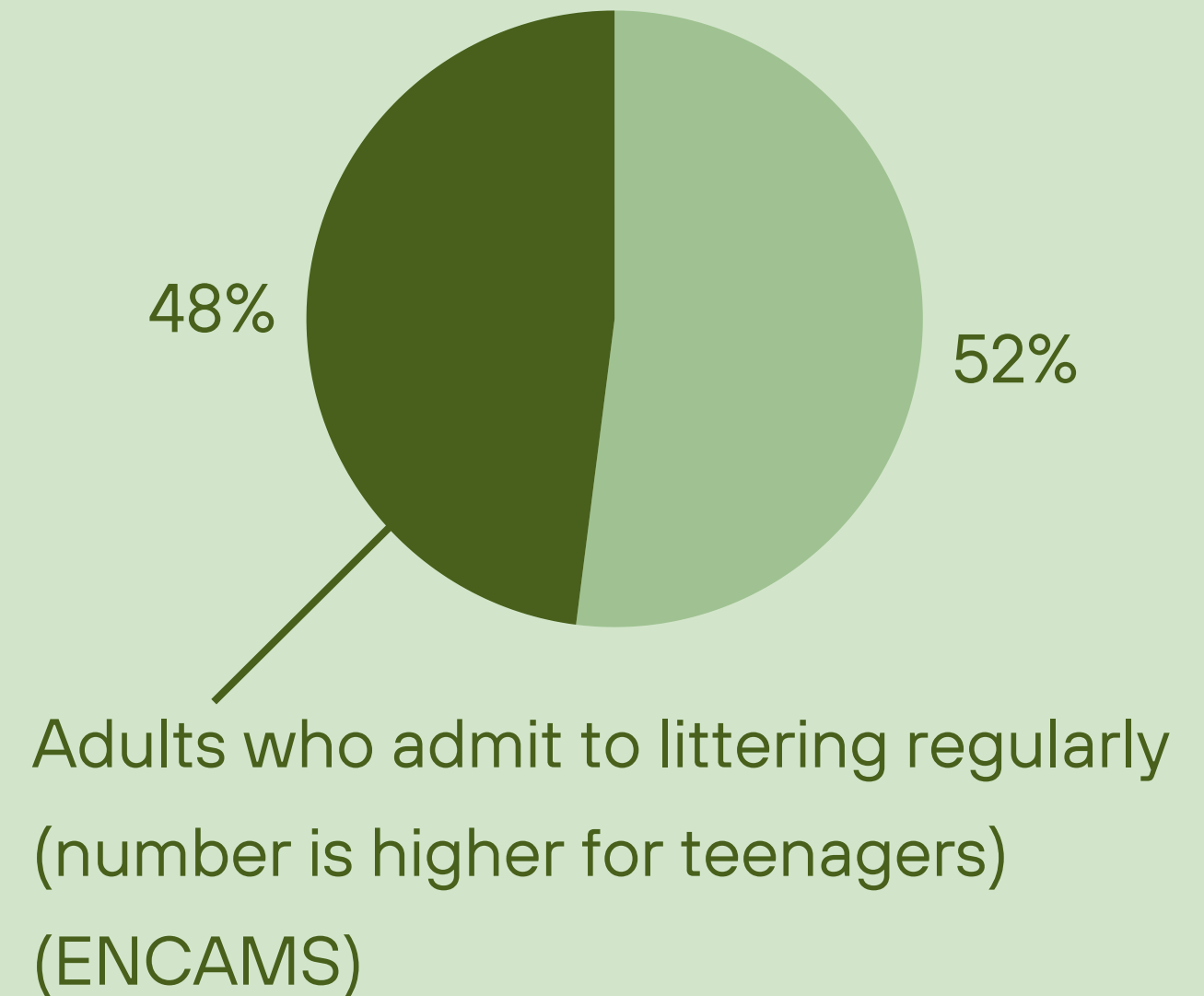


People who are distracted by an unclean environment (BYU)



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

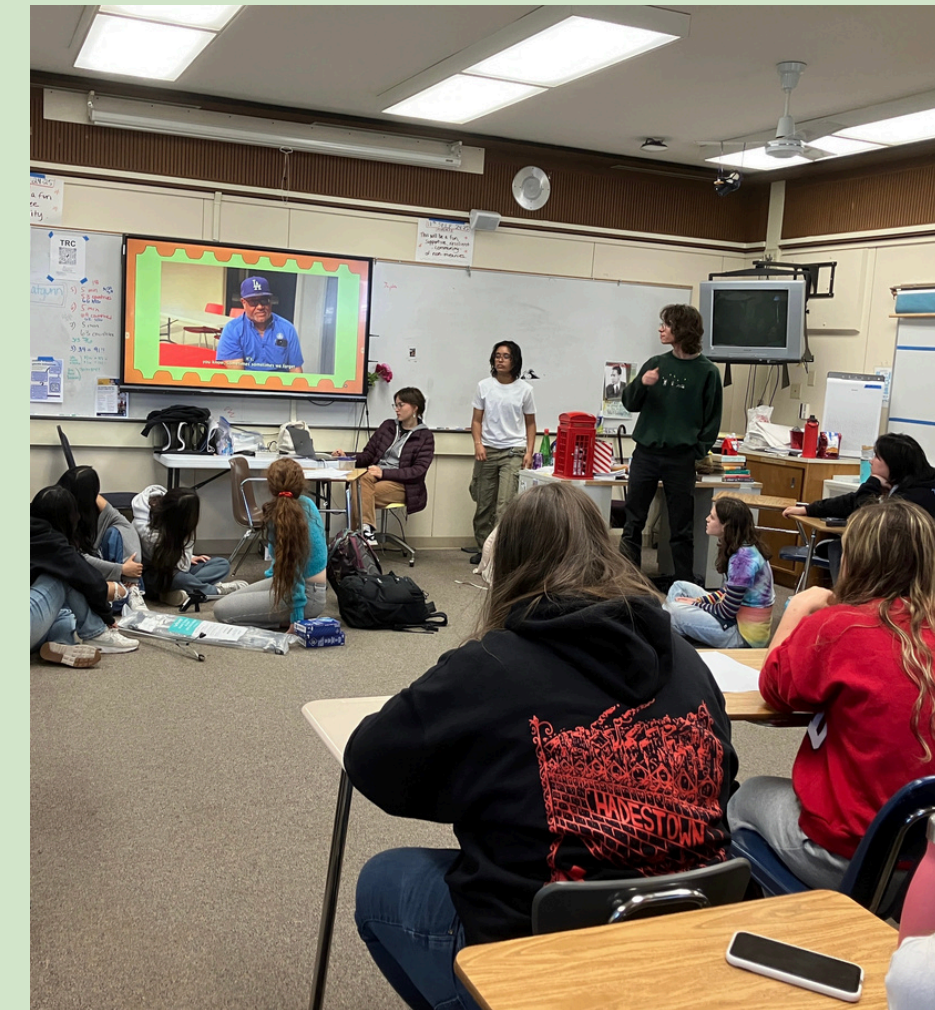
- We decided to instead hold the project during a single lunch
 - Supervised by custodians after during SELF post-lunch
 - Visualization of littering impact → understanding impact on those who have to clean it up
- Also: video interview with **Gordon Goodspeed**, one of the custodians
 - Questions about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

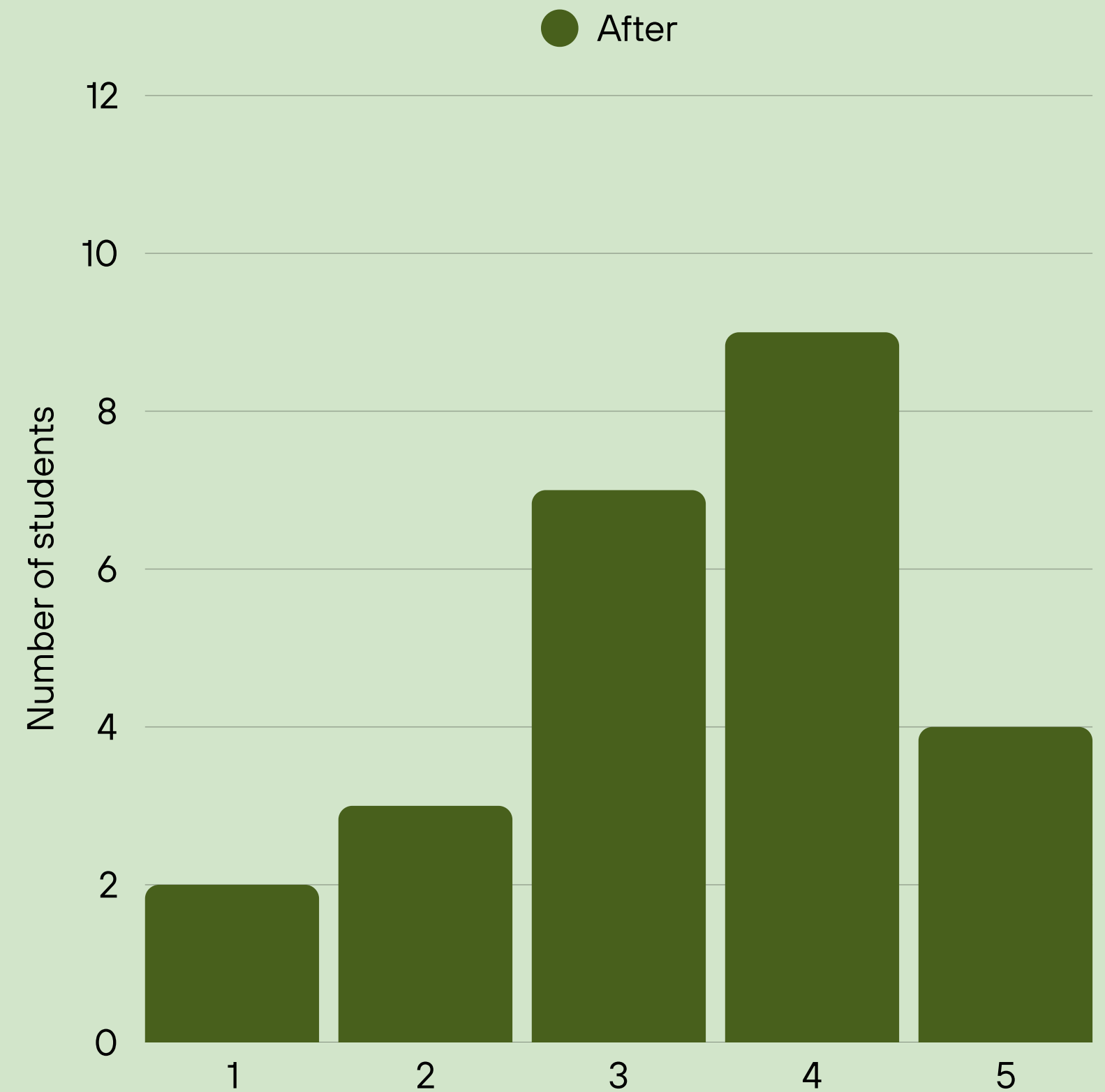
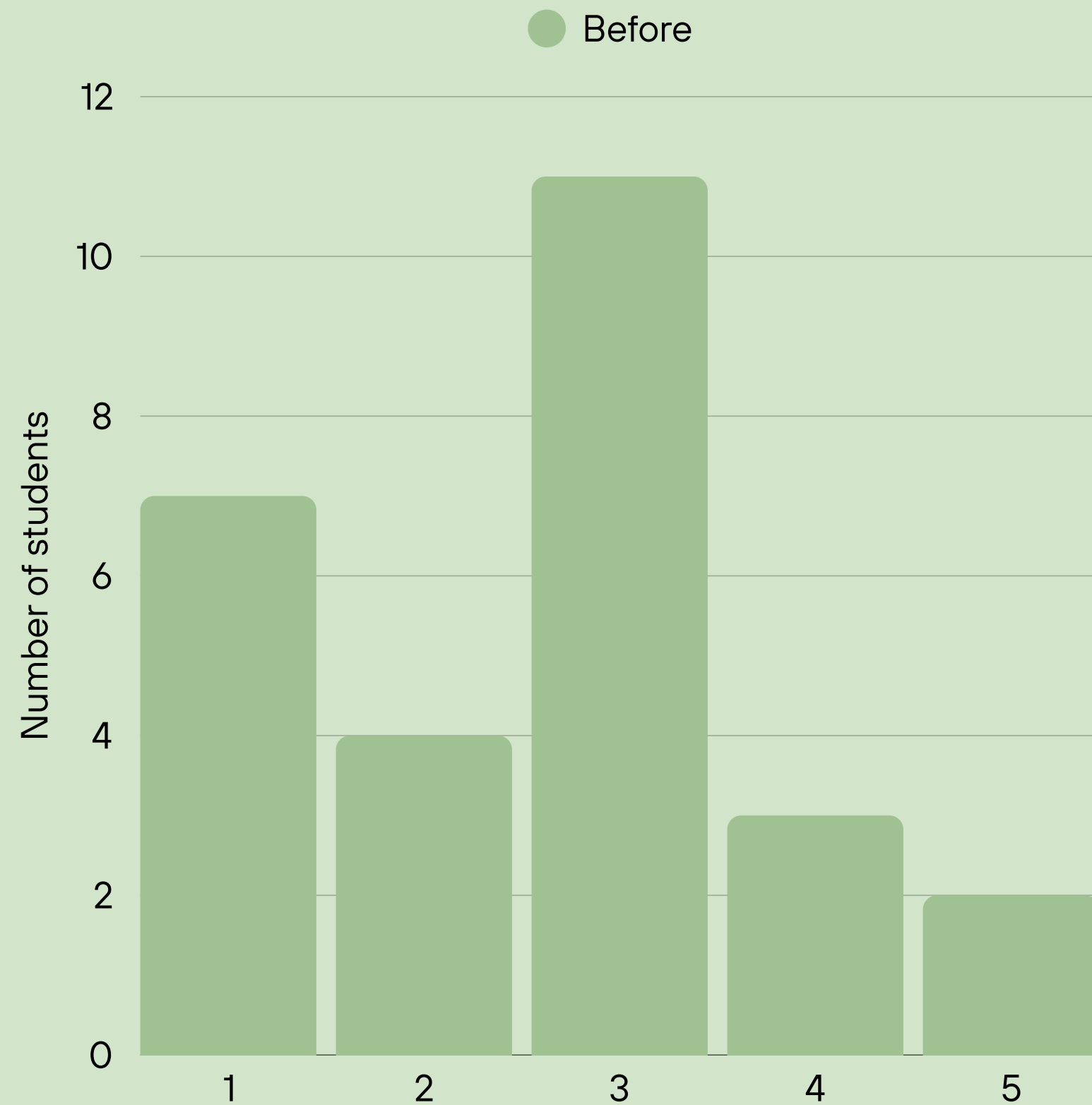


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How well do you think you know the tasks and duties of the Gunn custodians?



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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