



John A. Sutter Middle School - 2022-2023 Case Study

Who We Are

This case study explores the 2022-2023 school year at John A. Sutter Middle School. Our campus, spanning 17 acres in northwest Los Angeles, provides a dedicated learning environment for middle school students in grades 6-8. Grounded in a commitment to historical consciousness, John A. Sutter Middle School acknowledges its location on the traditional territories of the Fernandeño Tataviam Band of Mission Indians and the Tongva people. As a public educational institution in the North Region of the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), we honor our roots and equip our students for their academic and professional journeys, instilling them with a strong sense of responsible and active citizenship. Nestled in the heart of Winnetka, California, a community with a population of 48,481 residents, our school is a vibrant learning hub.

Our school community at John A. Sutter Middle School is enriched by students hailing from reputable elementary schools, including Winnetka E.S., Sunny Brae E.S., Melvin E.S., Mosk E.S., Shirley E.S., and Fullbright E.S. After developing their potential with us, these students continue their educational journey at highly-regarded high schools such as Cleveland H.S., Taft H.S., Reseda H.S., Canoga Park H.S., El Camino H.S., Chatsworth H.S., and Birmingham H.S.

A Closer Look at Our Student Population: Embracing Cultural Wealth

The focus of this section is to discuss the unique composition of our student body. Our school is home to 862 students enrolled across various programs, including the STEAM and Leadership Magnet. The grade breakdown is as follows: 294 sixth graders, 288 seventh graders, and 288 eighth graders. Of these, 229 students are part of our Magnet program, while 164 receive Special Education services. Approximately 27.5% of our students are emergent bilingual language learners, and 2% are foster youth. We are acknowledged as a Title I School of Action within the LAUSD, and 93.9% of our student population falls under the "socioeconomically disadvantaged" category. But we see beyond these labels, recognizing the richness of our students' varied experiences and cultural wealth, as highlighted in Dr. Yosso's Cultural Wealth Model.

The Cultural Wealth Model identifies six forms of cultural capital that students bring to their learning environments: aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistance capital. Our students possess aspirational capital, holding onto dreams and hopes despite persistent structural barriers in education, employment, healthcare, and housing. They demonstrate linguistic capital through their multilingual skills and vivid storytelling abilities. Familial capital is evident in the love, wisdom, and life lessons they draw from their families, reinforcing that familial wisdom, traditions, and stories can be invaluable resources. Social capital comes to life through their community connections and networks, while navigational capital enables them to maneuver through social institutions. Lastly, their resistance capital is a testament to their resilience and courage to challenge inequality.

Recognizing and nurturing this cultural wealth is integral to our school community and the district's ethos, guiding our everyday practices. By embracing these diverse forms of cultural capital, we reaffirm our commitment to enriching our learning environment and supporting student growth. Engaging with Yosso's Community Cultural Wealth model has empowered our staff to appreciate our students' strengths, build stronger ties with our community, and recognize the strengths within ourselves.

Our vision at Sutter is to create an innovative learning environment that integrates Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics through approaches promoting 21st-century skills: critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and creativity. As global citizens and lifelong learners, our students will evolve into reflective, proactive problem solvers, empowered to employ tools of inquiry and innovation to tackle present and future challenges within their local and global communities.

Purpose

What is the Quaglia Institute for School Voice and Aspirations partnership?

Continuing our partnership into the 2022-2023 school year, we remain committed to the Quaglia Institute for School Voice and Aspirations (QISVA). This collaborative approach is premised on the belief that students who feel heard and self-confident become active learners, leading to heightened academic motivation, achievement, and post-secondary success. In addition, emphasizing purpose and belonging encourages students to develop high aspirations, fostering community pride and nurturing an environment of trust and respect.

Notably, when students feel their voices matter in school, they are:

- 3x more likely to experience self-worth in school.
- 5x more likely to be engaged in school.
- 5x more likely to find a sense of purpose in school.

Our partnership with QISVA provides school-wide access to Student Voice Surveys, including a comprehensive survey and the more targeted iKnow My Class Survey administered at the classroom level. These surveys underscore the importance of students' voices and serve as practical tools for our educators to be better informed of their students' thoughts, feelings, and needs to enhance their success.

In our context, these surveys serve multiple roles - they are a pedagogical tool, a means for community-building, and a resource for classroom management and positive-behavior implementation strategies. Our staff can build classroom space grounded in trust and respect by analyzing survey data in collaboration with students. These surveys become a bridge for building relationships, differentiating instruction, and continually assessing students' perceptions of the classroom, roles, and expectations for learning and engagement.

Implementation Review

This year, we've integrated various school-wide programs informed by the Quaglia Institute for School Voice & Aspirations (QISVA) framework. The training on effective deployment of the Student Voice Surveys is just a piece of the extensive support QISVA has provided to our school. In addition, the QISVA Aspirations Framework has guided many of our program decisions throughout the 2022-2023 school year. Our goal is to weave these conditions into our school culture at Sutter, embedding them as part of our day-to-day ethos.

These Guiding Principles and Conditions include:

Self-Worth: Belonging, Heroes, Sense of Accomplishment

Engagement: Fun & Excitement, Curiosity & Creativity, Spirit of Adventure

Purpose: Leadership & Responsibility, Confidence to Take Action

Our focus this year has been on fostering a sense of belonging, encouraging leadership and responsibility, and promoting fun and excitement.

The upcoming sections in this case study will reflect on our progress and efforts throughout this school year.

Fall Professional Development: "Quaglia: Student Voice and Aspirations"



[Link to PD HERE](#)

In the fall, we launched a professional development program titled "Quaglia: Student Voice and Aspirations." This session was focused on introducing and emphasizing the importance of the Quaglia Institute's Aspirations Framework, an innovative model designed to boost student engagement and nurture their aspirations.

The critical aspect of this professional development program was exploring the framework's essence and its crucial role in teaching and student engagement. The team underscored that this framework would enable educators to be more intentional in teaching methods and approaches.

Benefits highlighted in the session included:

Guided Teaching and Engagement: By utilizing data from the Student Voice surveys, we can tailor our teaching strategies and engagement methods to meet our students' needs.

Mental and Emotional Awareness: The survey data gives us a clearer insight into our students' mental and emotional states, allowing us to respond effectively to their socio-emotional needs.

Enhanced Learning and Engagement: The ability to adjust lessons based on survey insights maximizes student learning and engagement, creating a more effective and dynamic classroom environment.

Improved Teacher-Student Relationships: The surveys offer open dialogues with students, making them feel heard and understood. This, in turn, enhances the relationships between students and teachers.

Identification of Socioemotional Needs: The surveys help identify students with socio-emotional needs, especially those who may not readily express their struggles, enabling us to provide the necessary support.

Better Overall Outcomes: Building stronger relationships with students leads to better outcomes, including decreased disruptive behaviors and non-engagement.

Promotion of Conducive Learning Environments: The insights gathered from the surveys can stimulate conversations about improving our learning environments, making them more conducive to our students' needs.

This professional development program also emphasized the influential role of the "I Know My Class Survey" as a tool to build a stronger classroom community and foster reflective pedagogy. This survey can be used to promote a more inclusive, engaging, and responsive classroom environment, leading to improved student performance and satisfaction.

Through the "Quaglia: Student Voice and Aspirations" professional development program, we stressed the importance of shared objectives between educators and students. Using Student Voice Survey reports, teams of educators and students can collaboratively inspire meaningful improvements within our school, further reinforcing our commitment to fostering an environment that values students' voices and continually aspires to enhance our educational approaches.

Spring Professional Development: "Student Voice World Café"



As part of our continuous efforts to enhance student engagement and aspirations, we organized a professional development program titled "Student Voice World Café." This platform enabled our faculty to review, analyze, and leverage data from the Aspirations Framework to devise actionable steps for future progress.

The main objectives of this professional development program were to:

Review the insights gained from previous Student Voice and Aspirations professional development initiatives.

Analyze the School Survey Report in-depth to understand current trends and areas requiring attention.

Facilitate a student focus group to glean more granular insights directly from our learners.

Devise 'Next Steps' to actively address the issues identified and improve our students' educational experience.

During this collaborative session, our faculty members embraced their roles as educators and learners. They engaged in thought-provoking discussions and proposed solutions for improvement across different facets of our school's learning environment based on the Aspirations Framework. Here are the solutions faculty members presented:

Belonging: The faculty proposed conducting ongoing activities throughout the year to enhance the feeling of inclusion and acceptance among students. These activities foster connections, strengthen bonds, and create a sense of belonging among students.

Heroes: To inspire students and highlight role models, teachers will introduce themselves, their accomplishments, and their roles during school-wide fun assemblies. Additionally, team-building activities will be conducted to build rapport and mutual respect between students and their 'heroes.'

Sense of Accomplishment: To instill a sense of achievement among students, our faculty suggested introducing specific topics for recognizing student accomplishments and maintaining consistency in recognizing these achievements.

Fun & Excitement: To ensure learning is a joyous and exciting experience, more fun-filled and engaging activities will be incorporated into our academic calendar.

Curiosity & Creativity: Acknowledging the importance of student needs and desires, faculty members committed to being more responsive and acting upon student requests to foster their curiosity and creativity.

Spirit of Adventure: Faculty members proposed the introduction of professional development sessions with a focus on scaffolding techniques to promote a spirit of adventure in learning.

Leadership & Responsibility: The faculty suggested using professional development time to address SMART goals, thus instilling a sense of leadership and responsibility among students.

Confidence to Take Action: To empower students, faculty members proposed initiatives such as developing portfolios/resumes before they proceed to high school, discussing career options other than college, and normalizing certain qualities, thus boosting their confidence to take action towards their goals.

Through the "Student Voice World Café" professional development program, we have taken another step forward in our commitment to making John A. Sutter Middle School an environment where student voices and aspirations are at the forefront of our educational mission. We are excited to implement these proposals and see their positive impact on our students.

Focus Groups: Engaging Student Voice in School Improvement

Leveraging the insightful data from the Student Voice surveys, we set up focus groups to delve deeper into our students' perspectives. This initiative aimed to engage students as active collaborators in our school's ongoing improvement efforts, emphasizing their crucial role in shaping our educational environment.

[Focus Group Link Responses Here](#)

Organization and Composition

Diana Zepeda, our dedicated Psychiatric Social Worker, played a vital role in forming these focus groups. Ms. Girard and Ms. Lyons facilitated the focus groups. She randomly selected eight students from all grades, ensuring a diverse representation of our student population. In addition, Diana took great care in explaining the purpose of these groups to each participant, establishing their comfort with expressing their opinions, and assuring them that their responses would remain anonymous.

The focus group session was held on Friday, January 20, 2023, from 8:15 a.m. to 9:15 a.m. In addition, to accommodate all students, we ensured support for a student requiring a BII and another needing translation assistance, with Ms. Ochoa graciously stepping in for this role.

Key Discussion Points

The focus group discussions centered around five vital questions designed to elicit student views on various aspects of their school life at Sutter Middle School:

Sutter Middle School Perception: Participants were asked to describe Sutter Middle School in a single word, with responses ranging from "Good" and "Home" to "Peaceful" and "Crazy."

Recognition at School: Students shared mixed experiences about recognition at school for positive achievements. They agreed that distinction is essential and should occur in public and private settings, according to individual comfort levels.

Excitement and Concerns about the Future: Students expressed excitement about their futures, mentioning their future jobs, friendships, further education, and memorable events like grad nights. Concerns mostly related to financial stability, work-life balance, and potential loss of family members. They suggested the school could support their future preparedness more through subjects like math and history and life skills like managing taxes and bills.

Value in School Community: Participants provided thoughtful insights on feeling valued at school, highlighting being listened to, being recognized for achievements, and experiencing care from teachers and friends.

School Rules: Constructive criticism of school rules was offered, with suggestions for changes to mobile phone storage policy, dress codes, and regulations about wearing hats and beanies. The group also advocated for a more extended lunch period for more time to eat and socialize.

Respect for Teachers: Respect was tied to adherence to rules and guidelines, attentiveness, and the absence of distractions. Reciprocated respect from teachers was also seen as a vital factor in respecting teachers and understanding teachers who provided some flexibility in students' learning methods.

The Magic Wand Question

In a concluding exercise, students were asked to suggest a single change they would make to improve Sutter Middle School for all students if they possessed a magic wand. Suggestions included more field trips and breaks, fun activities, movie sessions, smaller classes, and peer-oriented activities. This focus group proved a significant step towards recognizing and embracing our students' voices in their educational journey at Sutter Middle School. The thoughtful responses and insightful suggestions provided are invaluable for our mission of continuous improvement aimed at creating a more inclusive, engaging, and productive learning environment.

Art Night

The Family Art Night event, conceived and executed by our dedicated Student Voice & Aspirations Team, was inspiring and demonstrated our community's strength. We turned our school into a lively community hub, with families exploring our campus, savoring delicious food, and participating in various activities, from planting plants to face painting. The Winnetka Neighborhood Council's presence added to the sense of community, unity, and involvement. The experience energized our students, and their excitement was palpable and enduring as they continued to chat about the night for weeks after. The success of Family Art Night underscores the magic that can occur when we unite as a community. We now eagerly anticipate hosting more events like this in the future.



Sutter Takes 20

"Sutter Takes 20" is our weekly webinar assembly, conceived to maintain school-wide connections during distance learning. Even as we transitioned back to in-person instruction, we've continued this impactful practice. During these weekly sessions, members of the Sutter family make important school announcements, acknowledge student and staff accomplishments, and engage students in digital literacy exercises.

Ongoing Reflections:

Sutter Middle School's pursuit of centering student voices and aspirations is a continuous and evolving process informed by regular dialogue, assessment, and recalibration. Around a third of our teachers are in their initial years of teaching, and we are advocating for a focused professional development plan. In October 2022, we acquainted them with the *iKnow My Class* surveys to further drive student engagement and foster a sense of belonging and achievement in their classrooms.

In November 2022, we conducted a school-wide survey, compiling responses from 629 students. The insights from this survey facilitated the organization of a diverse student focus group, with representation across age, gender, grade, racial heritage, and English Language Learner status. As we enter Spring 2023, we plan to disseminate our findings from this survey and the focus group during our staff's "World Cafe" professional development session.

The survey showed us that 58.4% of students perceive our school as a "welcoming and friendly place," and 49.8% take pride in being a part of Sutter Middle School. We acknowledge the crucial role a sense of belonging plays in a student's well-being, social engagement, and sense of competence. With this understanding, we are laying the groundwork for more events like Family Art Night next school year to reinforce this sentiment. This event aims to foster positive interactions among students, families, and teachers and strengthen the sense of community within our school.

We continue to debrief and reflect on our school practices through weekly and monthly meetings and engage in ongoing efforts to prioritize student voice and aspirations at Sutter Middle School. We remain committed to further cultivating an empowering educational environment for our students.

Analysis of Current Data and Goals for the 2023-2024 School Year:

Our data from the 2022-2023 academic year provides valuable insights into our successes and areas requiring attention. Acknowledging and celebrating our progress while understanding that we can continue our growth trajectory with deliberate and concentrated efforts as a school community is crucial.

Based on our data analysis, we propose action items for the upcoming year.

1. Form a Committee:
 - a. To facilitate better decision-making and communication, we plan to form a committee that regularly reports to the Shared Decision-Making Council. This committee will focus on amplifying student and teacher voices and enhancing parent engagement to ensure a comprehensive and inclusive approach to school improvement.

2. Community Building and strengthening student, family, and staff connections.
 - a. We suggest regular clubs and community nights; this aims to establish a routine for clubs and community nights, recognizing their potential to foster a sense of belonging, develop leadership skills, and strengthen school-community ties. A leadership club provides a platform for students to develop and exercise their leadership skills, while community nights bring together students, parents, and teachers in a relaxed, social setting.
 - b. A student mentorship program in which older students offer peer-to-peer advice and guidance would be beneficial for our community.
 - c. We also want to enhance parent engagement: Recognizing that parental involvement is vital to successful education, we aim to foster greater parent engagement in the upcoming year. This will include encouraging parental participation in school events, parent-teacher conferences, specific times for family engagement, and volunteer opportunities.

3. Continued Focus on Growth:
 - a. We will focus on our students' academic and personal growth. This includes striving for improved outcomes in standardized tests and developing skills and character traits such as resilience, empathy, and curiosity. We also suggest a time to grow our Stakeholder Voice Team and time to reflect on practices and utilization of the framework.

By implementing these strategies, we hope to continue our growth trajectory and further enhance our students' learning environment and overall experience in the 2023-2024 school year.

Quotes:

Reflecting on his experience with the Student Voice and Aspirations framework, Mr. Dominguez, a History teacher, shared these thoughts:

“This framework has given me tools to create a supportive and restorative environment in my classroom. Discussing the 'I Know My Class Survey' has built a bridge of understanding between my students and me. We've created clear expectations and strategies that pave the way to success.

I've seen our whole school unite, transforming our campus into a true community hub. It's brought in community members to join our events, with all staff contributing to make them a hit. This framework caters to our unique needs. It's been key in building bridges, meaningfully connecting us with our students and each other."