

Creating a Comfortable Cafeteria: Adapting the Every Moment Counts Program at Kapālama Elementary

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Introduction

- Unstructured times in the school day, such as lunch, can present challenges for children's social participation, self-regulation, and sense of belonging.
- Occupation-based, tiered interventions within the natural school context can promote mental health, social connection, and participation (Bazyk et al., 2015).
- **Every Moment Counts: Comfortable Cafeteria (EMC)** program was developed to create positive mealtime environments that support emotional well-being, inclusion, and engagement (Bazyk et al., 2015).
- At Kapālama Elementary School in O'ahu, Hawai'i, cafeteria staff and the principal identified a need to enhance lunchtime routines.
- This capstone partnered with the school community to implement and culturally adapt the *Comfortable Cafeteria* program, aligning it with Kapālama's values and practices. The program integrates Hawaiian cultural principles of Aloha (kindness), Mālama (care), and 'Ohana (community).

Project Description

The **Every Moment Counts: Comfortable Cafeteria** program was adapted for first-grade students at Kapālama Elementary. The intervention focused on promoting self-regulation, positive peer interactions, and environmental supports during lunch. The program included four essential components: 1) hand signal systems for effective cafeteria communication, 2) "malama questions" conversation starters, 3) culturally responsive visuals, and 4) student/teacher/cafeteria staff training.

The project aligns with the curricular threads and values of Hawai'i Pacific University's OTD program by reflecting:

- Aloha: Cultivating kindness and empathy during shared mealtimes.
- Kuleana: Promoting student responsibility and respect for the cafeteria space.
- Pono: Encouraging fairness and mindful choices in social interactions.
- Kōkua: Supporting others through teamwork and care.
- Laulima: Collaborating with teachers, staff, and students toward a shared goal.

Purpose/Aims

To promote a calm, inclusive, and culturally grounded lunchtime environment that supports first-grade students' social participation, emotional regulation, and overall well-being.

Primary Aims:

1. Adapt and implement **Every Moment Counts: Comfortable Cafeteria** program with cultural and developmental adaptations for Kapālama Elementary first graders.
2. Foster a positive and predictable cafeteria environment that promotes social inclusion and emotional regulation.
3. Equip cafeteria staff with consistent strategies and shared language to reinforce cafeteria expectations and values across school contexts.
4. Align weekly teachings with Kapālama's "*Take care of yourself, take care of others, take care of this place*" values.

Methods

A systematic, occupation-centered approach guided the project's planning, implementation, and evaluation phases.

Phase 1: Completed a needs assessment with Kapālama Elementary School staff, cafeteria observations, and informal student feedback identify participation barriers and sensory-social challenges.

Phase 2: Designed and adapted EMC materials to reflect Kapālama's culture, incorporating Hawaiian values, and student-friendly visuals. Developed new resources, including hand signals, malama questions, conversation starters, and aloha voices.

Phase 3: Delivered one staff in-service training and four program seminars to first graders to introduce hand signals and social expectations. Facilitated weekly cafeteria observations to monitor student engagement and staff carryover.

Phase 4: Gathered quantitative and qualitative evaluation data through observation logs, informal staff feedback, and individually administered paper surveys for faculty/cafeteria staff & group-administered surveys for 1st grade students.

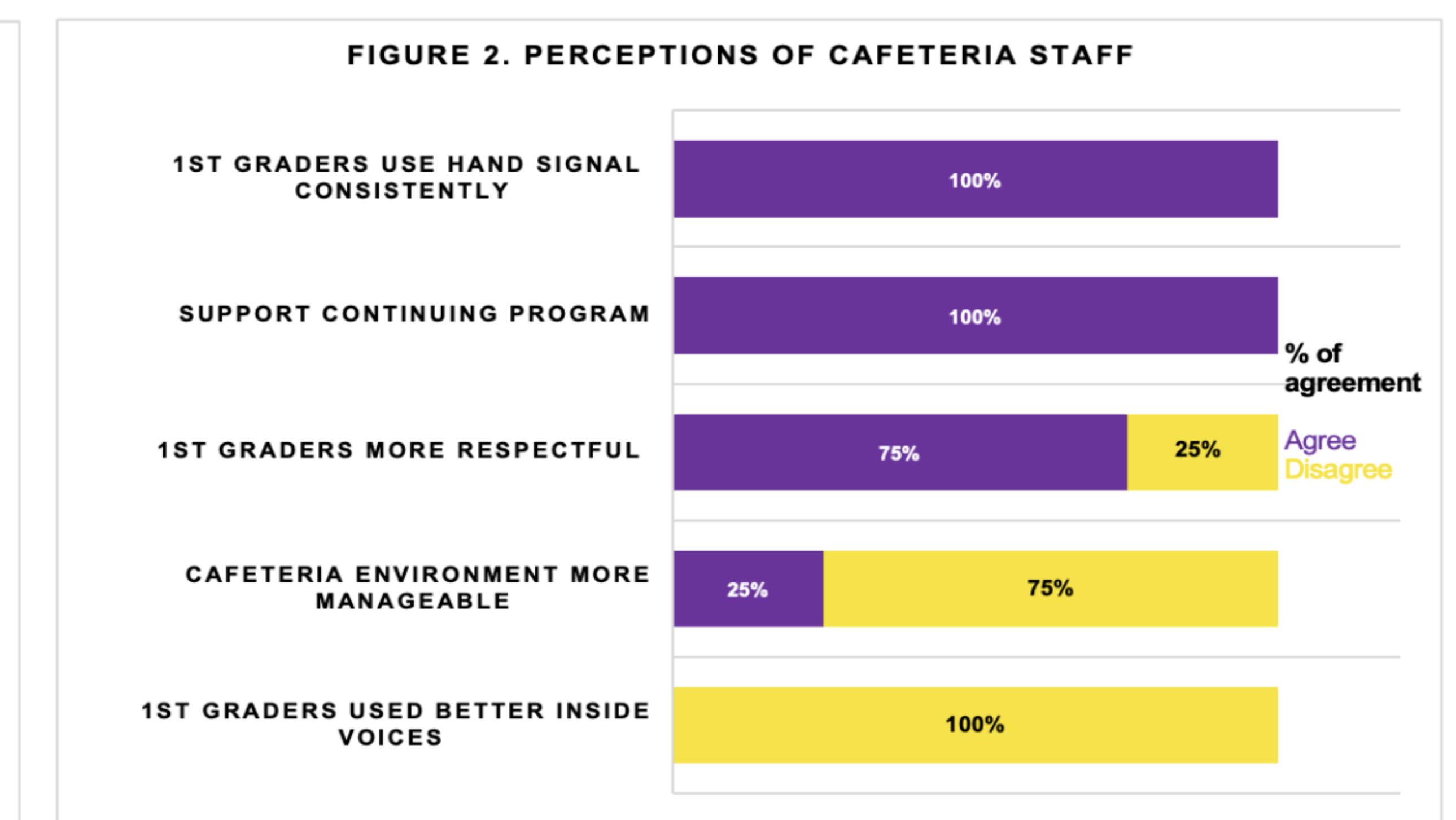
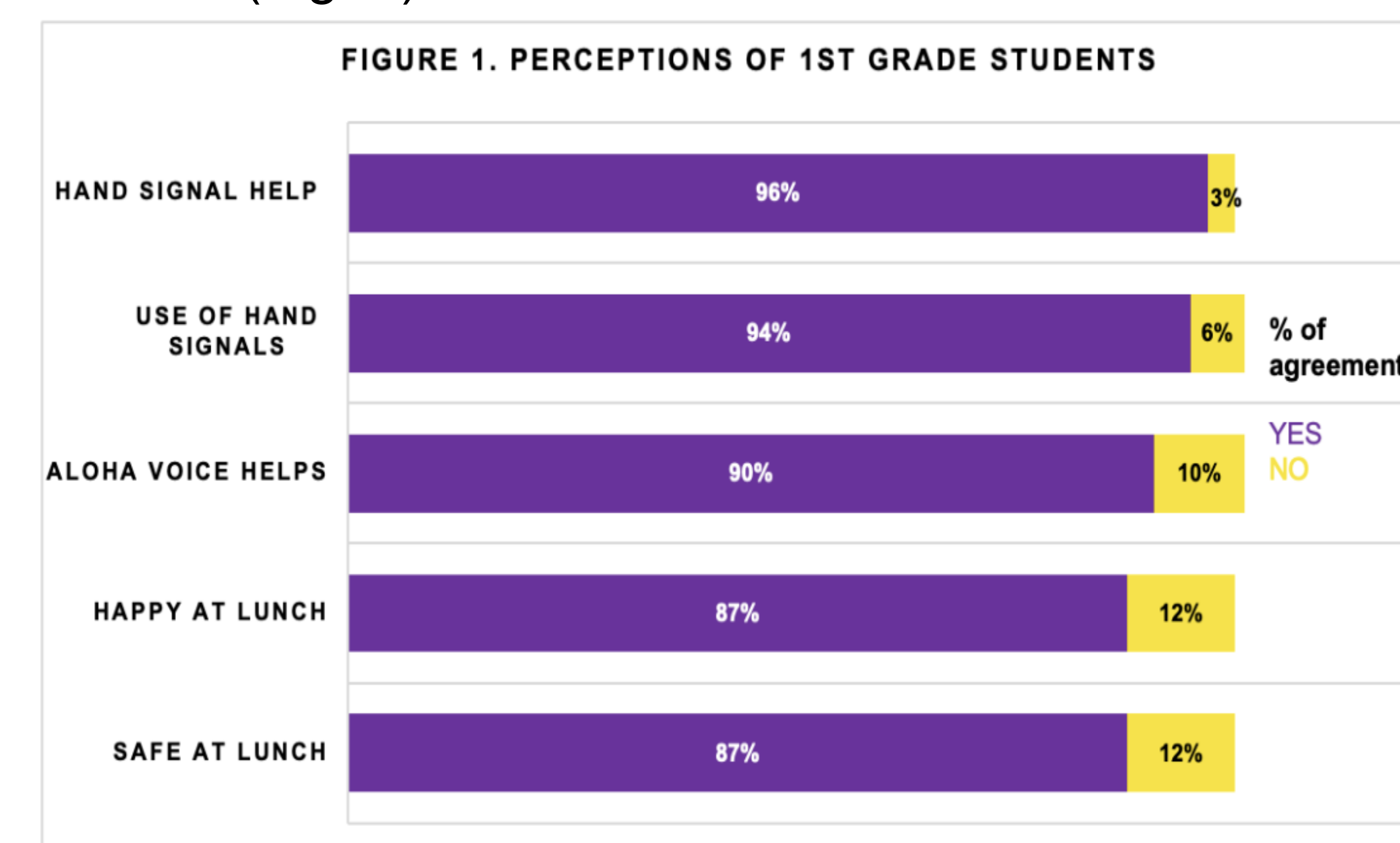
Results/Outcomes

Survey results:

- 54 first-grade students, 4 cafeteria staff, 2 classroom teachers
- The use of hand signals was a strength of the program (Fig. 1 & 2)
- Cafeteria staff & teachers overwhelmingly want to continue the program (Fig. 2 & quotes)
- Future programming should explore ways to help 1st graders use inside voices (Fig. 2)

"Nonverbal signals were easy, effective and a joy to use". – teacher

"Extending the program to recess would be beneficial." - teacher

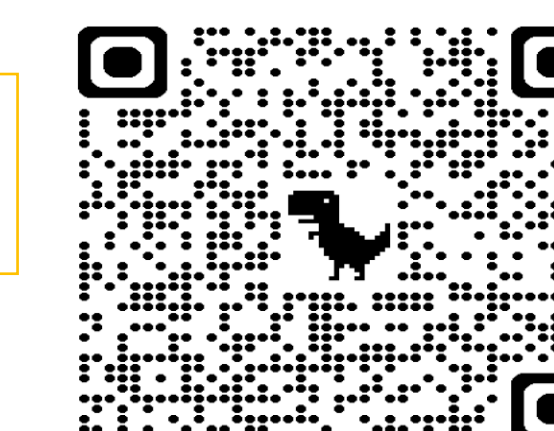


Discussion

- This project highlights the significance of occupation-based, Tier 1 interventions in promoting mental health and social participation within the natural school contexts.
- The success of adapting the **Comfortable Cafeteria** program for use at Kapālama Elementary and reflects the power of embedding evidence-based practices within culturally meaningful frameworks, aligning the program with Hawaiian values and Kapālama's "*Take Care*" philosophy of education, and developing quantitative-enhanced authenticity, sustainability, and engagement across staff and students.
- Limitations include the short duration of implementation and reliance on informal data rather than standardized measures.
- Future opportunities for this program include expanding training to additional grade levels for long-term impact measurement.

References/ Resources

Capstone Resources



EMC Comfortable Cafeteria Website

