



# Artspiration: 2023 ¡Viva el mariachi! Showcase

Annual Evaluation Report



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## Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	3
Project Background.....	4
Methodology.....	5
Data Collection .....	5
Analyses.....	6
Findings.....	6
Demographics.....	6
Students.....	6
Educators.....	10
Audience Members .....	10
Impact of Mariachi and the Showcase.....	12
Mariachi, Identity, and Cultural Pride .....	12
Meaningful Connections with Friends, Family, and Community .....	14
Cultivating a Community Space for Latino Arts and Culture.....	15
Looking Ahead: Feedback and Suggestions for Future Events .....	17
Conclusion.....	18
References .....	19

## Executive Summary

Artspiration is a county-wide initiative to expand and foster the arts and integrated learning for all Santa Clara County public school students. In the 2022-2023 academic year, Artspiration began a 3-year project to support mariachi education programs in schools as a strategy for improving student and family engagement and promoting culturally sustaining arts programming in schools. Every year, mariachi student groups in the county are invited to perform at the ¡Viva el mariachi! Showcase alongside a professional student mariachi group to uplift mariachi music to the larger Santa Clara community. The project aims to illuminate the benefits of mariachi programs in schools and cultivate a community space for Latino arts and culture within Santa Clara County.

The questions guiding the evaluation of this project are as follows: (1) How do mariachi education programs in schools impact students' identity development and sense of belonging? and (2) How do community-based events that showcase mariachi and mariachi education programs impact students, families, and other members of the community?

Using survey and observational data collected from students, educators, and community members, the project evaluation found key insights that shed light on the importance and benefits of mariachi education programs and cultural arts events on the identity development and sense of belonging of students. Additionally, findings demonstrate that the showcase facilitated the cultivation of a community space that celebrate Latino arts and culture. The main findings of the evaluation study include:

- Mariachi education programs provided a form of artistic expression for young Latino students to learn about their culture, express their cultural identity, and feel proud of who they are.
- Participating in the showcase further supported the cultural identity development of these students by providing another platform for students to express their cultural identity.
- Playing mariachi also helped students connect with their peers and family, make meaningful friendships, and feel connected to their community.
- Community members were able to connect with the larger community in a space that was specifically cultivated to celebrate Latino arts and culture.

Additional feedback included suggestions to improve the logistical aspects of the showcase, but in general, students and audience members were satisfied with the showcase and called for more events like the mariachi showcase to celebrate students, their talents, and cultural arts programming.

## Project Background

Since 2007, the Santa Clara County Office of Education (SCCOE) has put forward an arts education initiative known as Artspiration. Artspiration partners with public schools, arts organizations, and the greater community to advocate for equitable, high-quality education in the arts and integrated learning for all Santa Clara County public school students. In 2022, Artspiration began a 3-year project to promote mariachi education in Santa Clara County public schools as a meaningful strategy for increasing student and family engagement and promoting culturally sustaining arts programming in schools.

Mariachi music, originating from rural cultural celebrations of Mexico, has gained popularity in the United States since the 1960s. Beginning in the late 1980s, there has been a rise in mariachi education programs in schools for young students to help them learn about their own cultural traditions as well as those of other countries.<sup>1</sup> Mariachi education has been shown to be essential to the identity development of Latino students and beneficial to their educational experience.<sup>2</sup> Artspiration aims to build upon the work of mariachi education programs by extending cultural arts programming to the community and showcasing mariachi education and Mexican culture to the larger community.

As part of the project, every year, a professional youth mariachi group is invited to tour and perform at SCCOE schools as well as the annual ¡Viva el mariachi! Showcase. The 2022-2023 showcase featured student mariachi groups from grades 3 to 12 across 12 different schools in the Alum Rock Union School District (ARUSD) and San Jose Unified School District (SJUSD). The guest performer was Los Gavilanes de Monaco Middle School from Clark County, Las Vegas. The goals of this project are to illuminate the benefits of mariachi programs in schools and cultivate a community space for Latino arts and culture within Santa Clara County.

The evaluation of this Artspiration project aimed to answer the following questions: (1) How do mariachi education programs in schools impact students' identity development and sense of belonging? and (2) How do community-based events that showcase mariachi and mariachi education programs impact students, families, and other members of the community? The following section discusses the methodology that was utilized to answer the evaluation questions for this project.

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<sup>1</sup> Clark, S. (2005). Mariachi music as a symbol of Mexican culture in the United States. *International Journal of Music Education*, 23(3), 227-237.; Salazar, L. (2015). Mariachi Music as a Pathway to Higher Education in the United States. *Journal of the Vernacular Music Center*, 1(1).

<sup>2</sup> Smith, V. L. (2018). *The Influences of a Mariachi Education on Student Perceptions of Academic Achievement, Academic Attainment, and Student Engagement* (Doctoral dissertation, University of the Pacific).

# Methodology

## Data Collection

For the first year of the project, three surveys were developed to collect data from students, mariachi educators, and audience members of the showcase. The student survey was designed to collect data from students that performed in mariachi groups at the showcase. This survey queried students' experience with mariachi programs, the impact of mariachi programs on their identity development and sense of belonging, and students' experience performing at the mariachi showcase. A mix of close-ended questions (i.e., Likert items) and open-ended questions were used in the survey. In contrast, the educator survey was administered to mariachi educators and consisted of mainly open-ended questions to gain more in-depth information on their thoughts on mariachi education, its impact on students, and their students' experience in the showcase. A third survey, designed to collect feedback from audience members of the showcase, was structured similarly to the student survey and contained a combination of close-ended and open-ended questions. Audience members were asked about their experience with the showcase, opinion on mariachi education programs, and thoughts on the impact of the showcase.

The Research and Evaluation (R&E) team at SCCOE worked together with the Arts Coordinator to design and administer the surveys. After the final versions of the surveys were completed, the surveys were professionally translated to Spanish to increase accessibility for audience members, students, and teachers that would prefer to take the survey in Spanish. An online version of the surveys was created, and both QR codes and URLs were generated and utilized for administering the surveys. Audience members were instructed to take the survey at the conclusion of the event. The surveys were also sent out through email to both audience members and mariachi educators on the day following the event. Educators were instructed to take their survey and asked to administer the student survey to the students that performed at the showcase.

The surveys were administered to approximately 121 students, 4 educators, and 400 audience members, and the approximate response rates for the student, educator, and audience surveys are 60%, 100%, and 16%, respectively. The completion rates of each survey vary, ranging from 80% to 100%. Data from incomplete surveys were incorporated into the final analysis. It is also important to note that students from ARUSD did not complete the survey; thus, the survey responses and findings do not capture the insights and experiences of students from ARUSD. Future efforts will include additional collaborative efforts between the Arts Coordinator and mariachi teachers to improve representative response rates that capture students' experiences from all participating schools.

In addition to the survey, an observation was conducted on the day of the mariachi showcase in order to collect additional data. The focus of the observation was to examine the students, their interactions with their peers and teachers, their preparation for the showcase, the audience members, and their reactions to the performances. Some students were asked about their experience playing mariachi. Observation notes were compiled, and a diagram of the venue was developed to supplement the field notes.

## Analyses

Both quantitative and qualitative methodologies were employed for this evaluation. Basic descriptive analysis was used to analyze the responses to the close-ended questions, such as demographic questions and Likert questions. The responses to the open-ended questions were analyzed using content and thematic analyses: primary themes were first identified for responses to each question, and the responses were then coded by the identified themes. Observation notes were also analyzed for themes and key insights which were used to corroborate main findings from the survey responses.

## Findings

The findings of this report are mainly based on the responses from the student, educator, and audience member surveys. Additional information is pulled from observation notes, publicly available data, and other anecdotal evidence. This section begins with a summary of demographic information of participants, which is then followed by key findings and themes from the survey responses.

## Demographics

### Students

There were approximately 121 students that participated in the showcase with a mariachi group, and 72 of those students completed the student survey. Table 1 below depicts the breakdown of students by grade level. About 75% of respondents were in high school, either attending Lincoln High School or San Jose High School. The rest of the students who took the survey attended Hoover Middle School. All three schools are in the San Jose Unified School District; student performers from ARUSD did not complete the student survey.

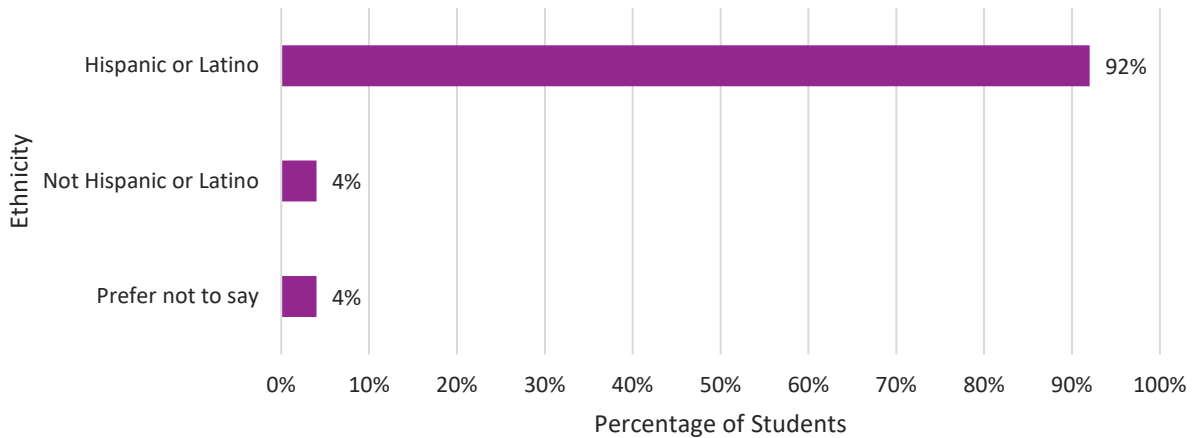
**Table 1: Frequency of Students by Grade Level**

Grade	Count	Percentage
6th	5	6.9%
7th	8	11.1%
8th	5	6.9%
9th	11	15.3%
10th	20	27.8%
11th	12	16.7%
12th	11	15.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Note: The survey responses did not include students from ARUSD. These students are mostly in the elementary grades.

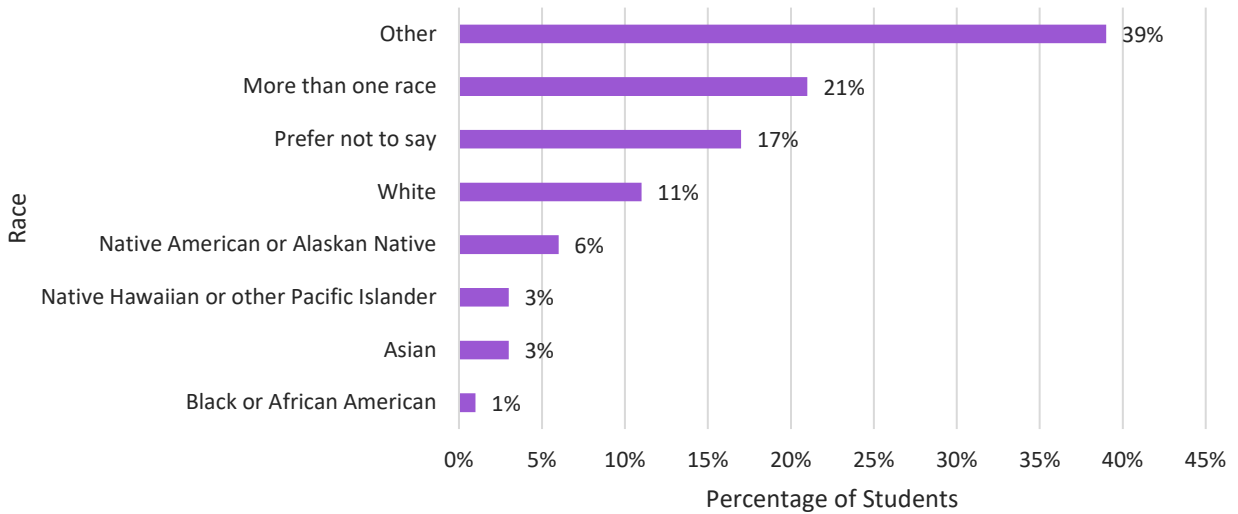
Ninety-two percent of students who completed the survey identified as Hispanic or Latino (see Figure 1 below). Figure 2 provides the racial background of the students who completed the survey. Nearly 40% of students chose “Other” and specified their racial identity rather than selecting a racial category from the list of predetermined categories. About one-fifth of students chose “Two or More Races,” and 17% preferred to not disclose their racial identity. Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, Asian, and Black students were also among participants of the mariachi showcase.

**Figure 1: Percentage of Students by Ethnicity**





**Figure 2: Percentage of Students by Race**



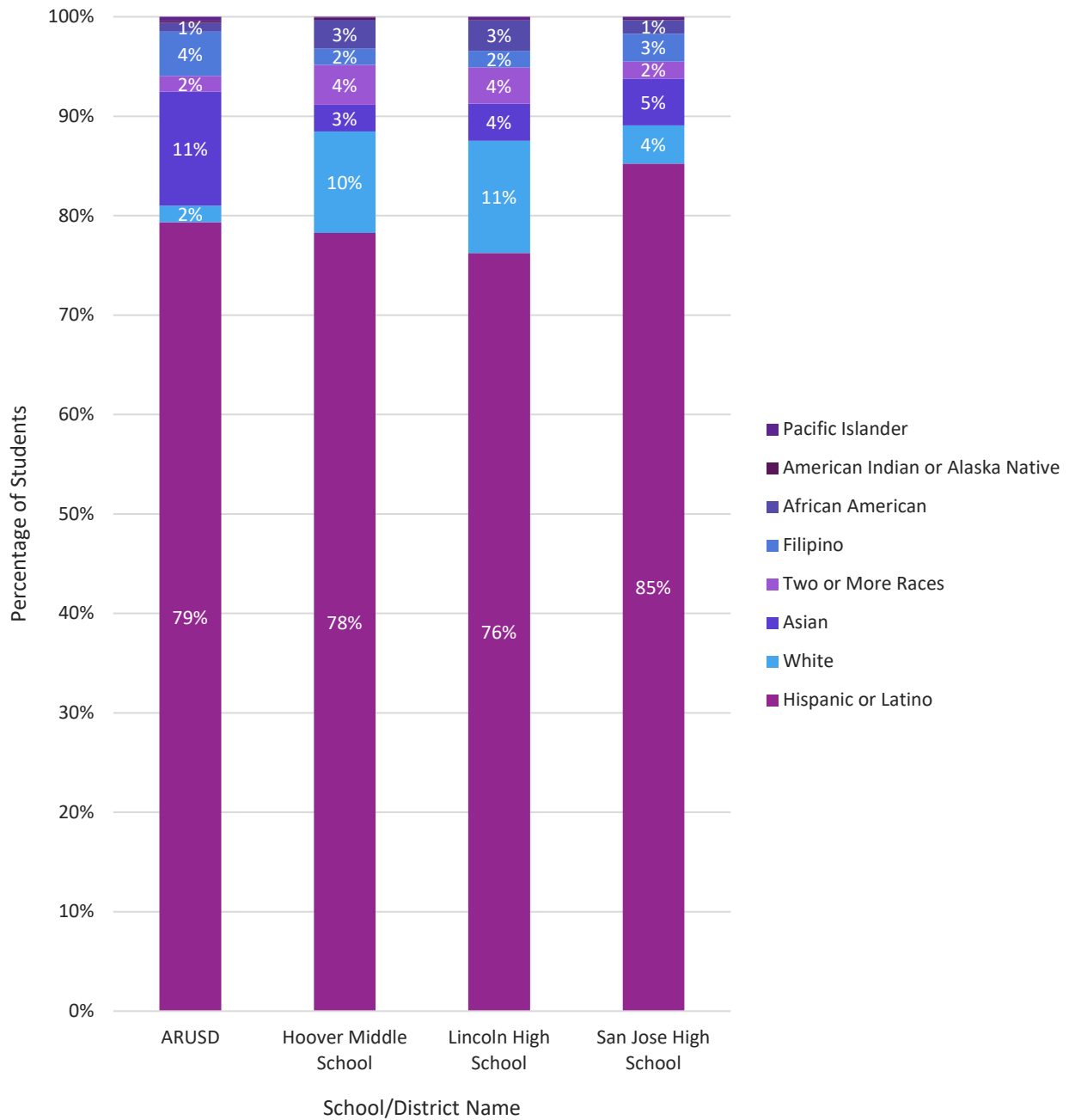
Among the students that selected “Other” and manually entered a response for their racial identity, almost half (46.4%) identified as being Mexican or Mexican American (see Table 2 below). An additional 46% reported their racial category as Hispanic or Latino. Two students indicated uncertainty regarding their racial categorization.

**Table 2: Frequency of Students by Self-Defined Racial Category**

Self-Defined Racial Category	Count	Percentage
Mexican	11	39.3%
Mexican American	2	7.1%
Hispanic	7	25.0%
Latino	3	10.7%
Hispanic/Latino	3	10.7%
I don't know	2	7.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>99.9%</b>

Figure 3 on the following page shows the racial/ethnic distribution of the students at the school and district sites where the mariachi groups were located. All four mariachi groups were located at schools and districts that were mostly Hispanic or Latino. The racial/ethnic breakdown of the students that participated in mariachi programs demonstrate that these programs were mostly serving Hispanic or Latino students. In other words, these mariachi programs were serving the largest student population, in terms of race/ethnicity, at their school sites (Hispanic or Latino students) and provided access to culturally sustaining arts programming.

**Figure 3: Percentage of Students by Race/Ethnicity at Participating School/District Sites (2022-2023)**

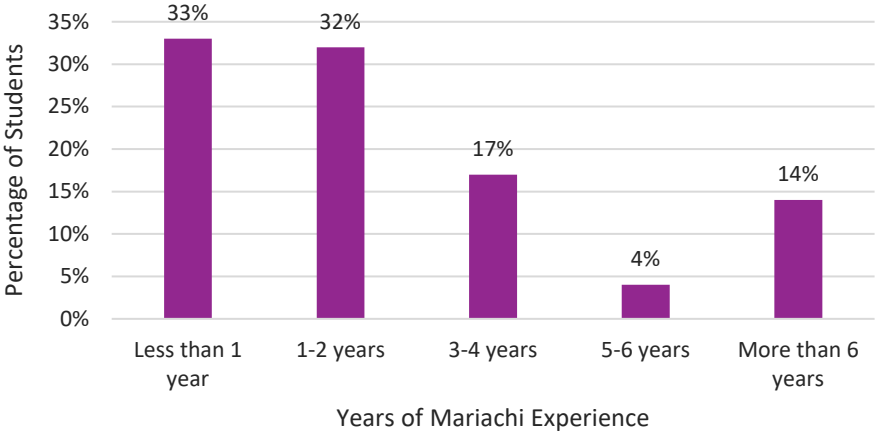


Source: DataQuest (California Department of Education). (2023). 2022-23 Enrollment by Ethnicity and Grade [Data Report]. Retrieved from <https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/>

Figure 4 on the following page represents the percentage of students by their years of experience playing mariachi. The majority of students who took the survey have 2 years or less of experience in mariachi. Notably, approximately 14% of students have more than 6 years of

experience playing mariachi; these students chose to continue with mariachi for a long period of time.

**Figure 4: Percentage of Students by Years of Experience in Mariachi**



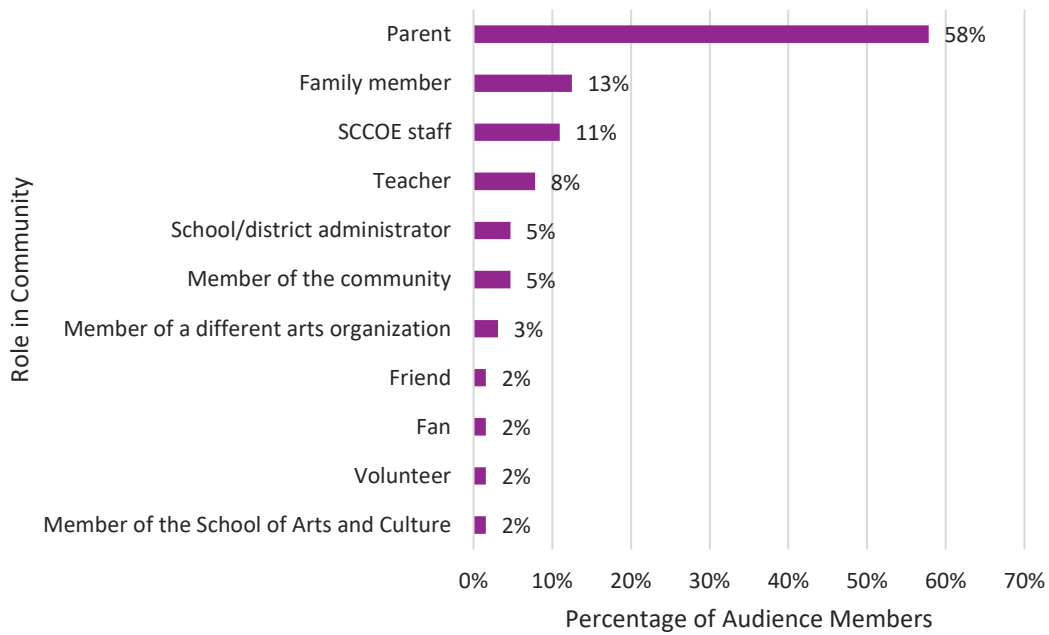
### Educators

Four mariachi teachers, one at each school site, were involved with the mariachi showcase this year and led a mariachi student program at their respective sites. Participating sites were ARUSD, Hoover Middle School, Lincoln High School, and San Jose High School. Two of the teachers were solely mariachi teachers, and the other two teachers taught other areas such as orchestra and math. Most of the teachers had taught mariachi for more than 5 years. All participating educators completed the survey.

### Audience Members

As presented in Figure 5, audience members included parents, school or district administrators, and friends. Over half of the audience members described their role in the community as parents and another 13% as family members. Approximately 24% were educators, administrators, or SCCOE affiliates.

**Figure 5: Percentage of Audience Members by Role in Community**



Most of the members of the audience lived in Santa Clara County (see Figure 6). Other audience members resided in Alameda, Santa Cruz, Calaveras, Yolo, or Monterey County.

**Figure 6: Number of Audience Members by County**

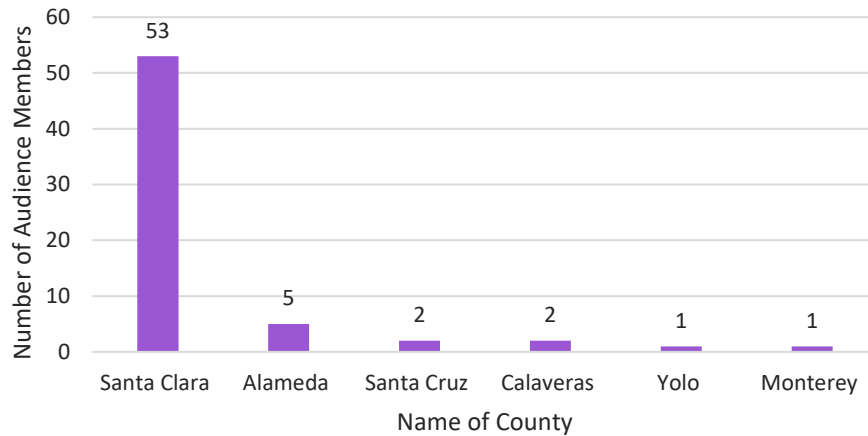
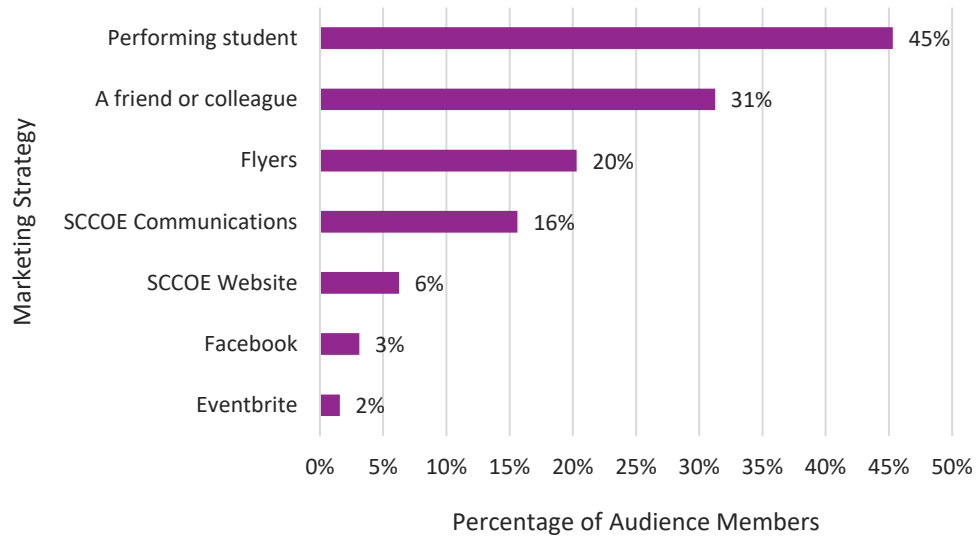


Figure 7 on the following page displays the percentage of audience members by how they discovered the event. Approximately 45% of audience members were family members of performing students and attended to support their student. Approximately a third of audience members heard about the event from a friend or colleague. Others discovered the event through flyers, SCCOE communications, or social media.

**Figure 7: Percentage of Audience Members by Marketing Strategy**



### Impact of Mariachi and the Showcase

The following sections take a deeper dive into the key findings of this year’s project evaluation of the showcase. Each section focuses on a high-level domain, including student identity development, student sense of belonging, and community engagement.

#### Mariachi, Identity, and Cultural Pride

For many students, playing mariachi is a form of artistic expression that helps them connect with their culture, learn more about themselves, and express their cultural identity. Some students joined the mariachi program at their school for these reasons.

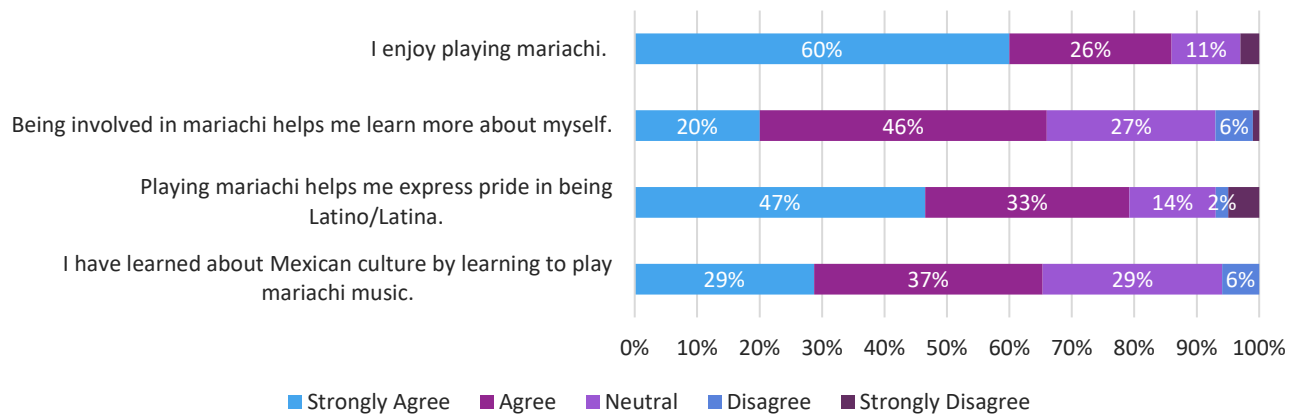
In general, students joined their schools’ mariachi programs for a variety of reasons, including earning performing arts credit, satisfying their parents’ desire, making new friends, and learning to play an instrument. However, many of them joined specifically for mariachi: some joined because they enjoyed mariachi music (n=13, 20%), while others joined because they wanted to continue playing music (n=11, 16%). There were also several students that joined because they wanted to learn more about Mexican culture (n=5, 7%) and connect with their roots and culture (n=6, 9%). One student commented that they enrolled in their school’s mariachi program because they wanted to learn “how to play mariachi style music” and “learn more about [their] own culture.” On the day of the showcase, another performing student said that the reason he joined the mariachi program was for his heritage and to “connect to [his] roots.”

Regardless of their reason for joining mariachi at their school, students reported that they enjoyed playing mariachi and saw the positive influence that mariachi had in their lives (see Figures 8 and 10). For these students, being involved in mariachi helped them learn more about

themselves, their identity, and their culture. Importantly, they were able to connect with their culture as well as express pride in their cultural identity. A student expressed that mariachi “allowed [them] to express [their] culture differently” and that “[playing mariachi] is also a part of [their] identity since mariachi is a part of [their] identity.” One of the mariachi teachers also commented on the impact of playing mariachi on students’ identity development:

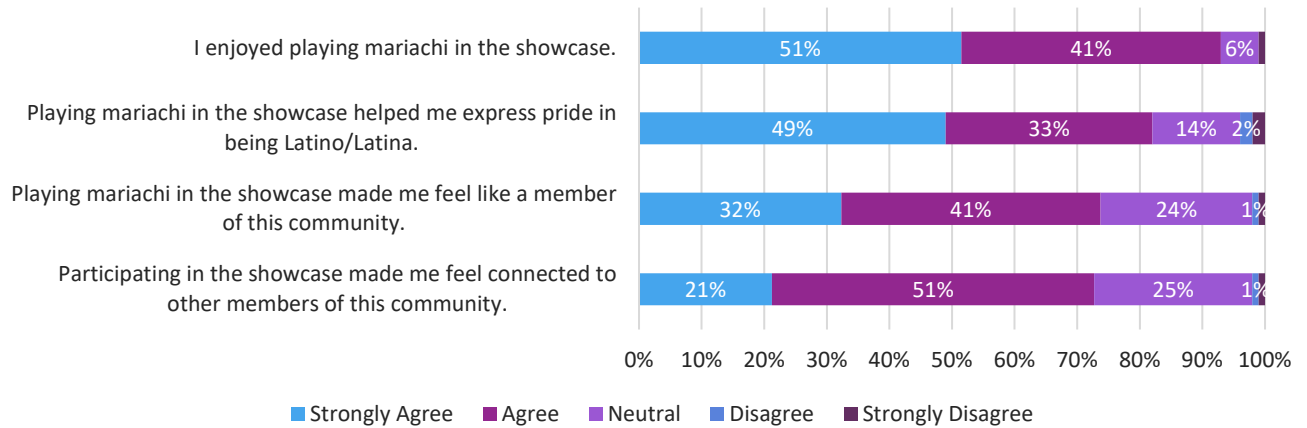
*“It gives students the opportunity to express themselves artistically while positively impacting their cultural identity. In our experience it has impacted their lives as children of immigrants or as immigrants themselves, and if they are not Mexican it influences appreciation for the culture, language and art.”*

**Figure 8: Student Responses to “Identity Development” Likert Items**



Playing mariachi at the ¡Viva el mariachi! Showcase provided another avenue for students to express pride in their cultural identity and appreciate their culture. Over 90% of respondents reported that they enjoyed playing mariachi at the showcase, and over 80% felt that they were able to express Latino pride by playing at the showcase (see Figure 9). Playing mariachi at the showcase allowed students to express themselves and their culture on a larger platform. One student conveyed their appreciation for being able to show other people their talents and skills, in addition to expressing their racial and cultural identity: “It showed me how not to be ashamed of my race and how I should express myself more. And showing people what I can do and how to learn something different in life.” Students felt proud of their identity and culture; one student stated that “playing at the showcase really made [them] appreciate being Latino and showed [them] how beautiful [their] culture is.”

**Figure 9: Student Response to “Impact of Showcase” Likert Items**



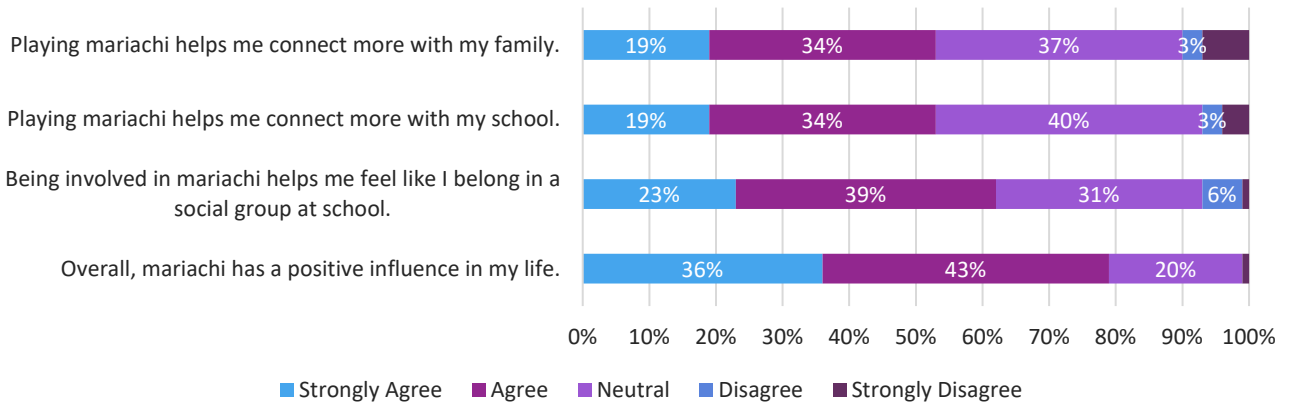
Overall, playing mariachi provided students with an opportunity to express themselves, their identity, and their culture. They were able to further connect with and appreciate their roots as well as feel pride in being Latino.

### Meaningful Connections with Friends, Family, and Community

In addition to expressing and developing their cultural identity, playing mariachi also helped students cultivate a sense of belonging in schools and their community and develop stronger relationships with their families. Figure 10 shows students’ responses to Likert items that queried their sense of connection with their family and sense of belonging in school. The majority of respondents (53%) agreed that playing mariachi helped them connect more with their family and school.

Notably, over 60% of respondents said that being involved in mariachi helps them feel like they belong in a social group at school. Open-ended responses from these students showed that their connection to school may partially be linked to the friendships that they have created with their peers in their mariachi group. Many students revealed that being involved in mariachi allowed them to make meaningful friendships and connections with their peers (n=13, 19%). One student stated that they were able to make a lot of friends through the mariachi class, which made their “high school experience more memorable.”

**Figure 10: Student Responses to “Belonging” Likert Items**



Moreover, students were able to form deeper connections with their family members by being involved in mariachi. One student reported that they appreciated the fact that their family members had opportunities to attend their performances and that this helped them grow closer to their family. Participating in the mariachi program allowed some students to connect with the music that they grew up listening to with their families. As one student explained, mariachi influenced their life positively and shared that they “have been able to sing along to the songs [their] parents play due to having played them in class.”

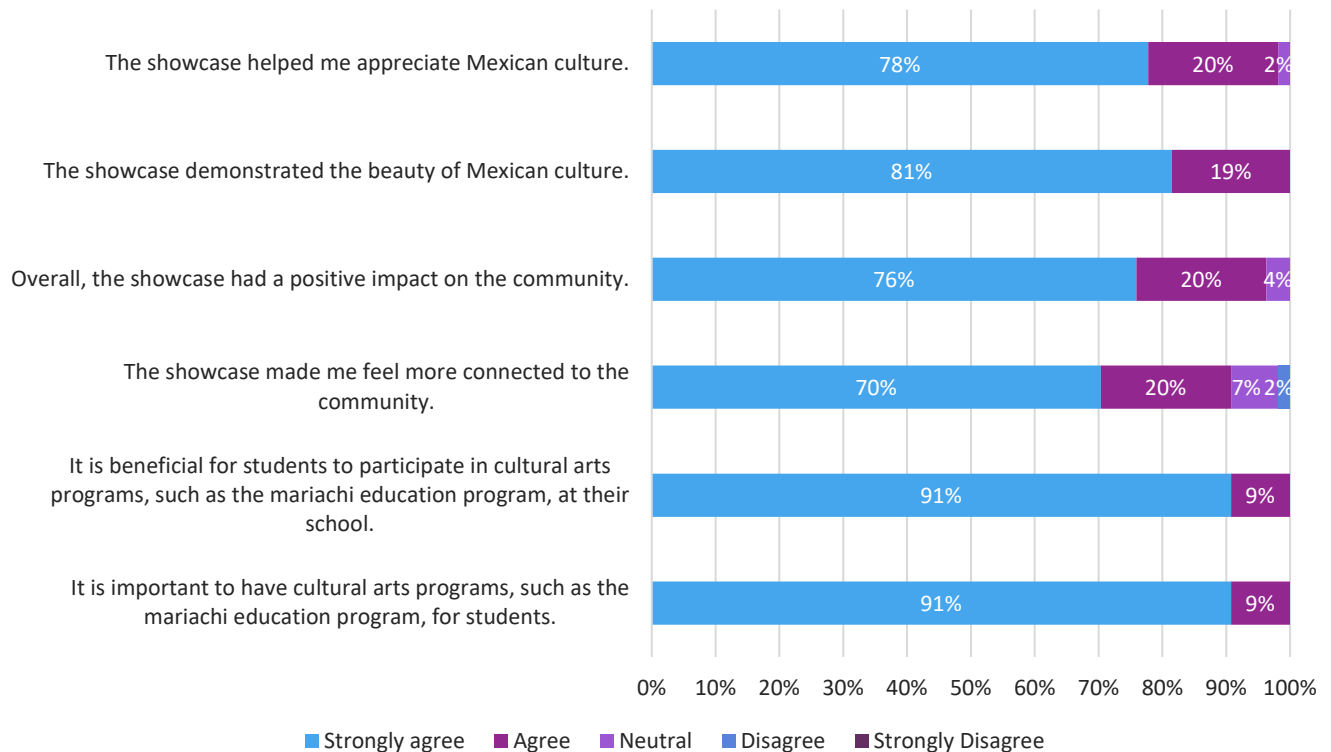
In addition to supporting relationships between students and their friends and families, the showcase also improved students’ connections with their community. Students performed in front of a large crowd that consisted of members of the community and connected with students from other schools and mariachi groups, which helped them develop a sense of belonging in their community. Respondents to the survey indicated that playing mariachi in the showcase helped them feel like a member of the community as well as feel connected to the community (see Figure 9). One student remarked that it was an amazing experience: “People loved the music and it made me so happy.” Students also enjoyed seeing other student mariachi groups play and appreciated the fact that they “all connected through [their] love of mariachi” during the showcase. Overall, participation in the showcase meaningfully improved students’ sense of connectedness with friends, family, peers, and their greater community.

### Cultivating a Community Space for Latino Arts and Culture

The ¡Viva el mariachi! showcase had another impact on the community – it fostered the development of a community space for Latino arts and culture. Specifically, audience members reported that the showcase demonstrated the beauty of Mexican culture and helped them appreciate Mexican culture (see Figure 11).



**Figure 11: Audience Responses to “Impact of Showcase” Likert Items**



Moreover, almost all audience member respondents indicated that they felt more connected to the community as a result of the showcase. Many commented that they enjoyed seeing young, talented students from the community performing mariachi onstage. They also reported that they viewed the event as very community-centric (n=8, 15%) and believed that students were able to connect with both their culture and community through this event (n=7, 13%). An audience member commented: “It is so thrilling to see how talented the little ones are and that they are continuing to learn about their culture.” Another audience member emphasized the need for more “positive activities like this one [for the youth in the community].”

The showcase also helped to highlight the importance of mariachi education programs in schools as well as the impact of culturally sustaining arts programming. Figure 11 shows that all audience members believed in the importance and benefits of cultural arts programs, including mariachi education programs, for students. They also urged for more cultural events and programs like the showcase to promote Latino culture and to provide opportunities for students to connect with their culture.

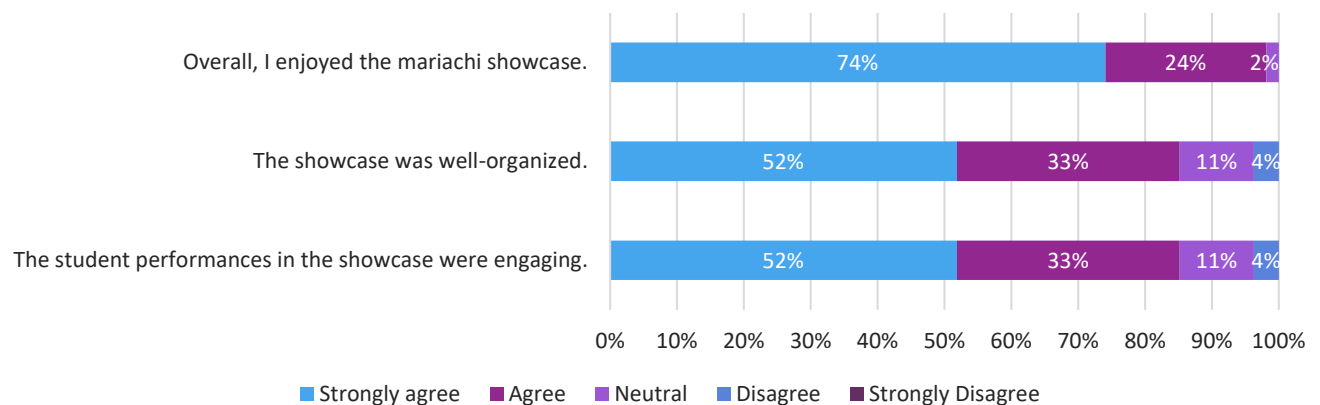
Through this showcase, members of the community had opportunities to appreciate Latino arts and culture and show support for the young, talented students of their community. Community members who responded to the survey recognized the importance and benefits of having

culturally sustaining arts programming for students and similar cultural arts shows for the community.

### Looking Ahead: Feedback and Suggestions for Future Events

Overall, audience members who responded to the survey enjoyed the showcase and the student performances; some respondents provided suggestions for similar events in the future. Figure 12 displays audience responses regarding their satisfaction with the event. Over 80% of audience members thought that the showcase was well-organized and that the performances were engaging.

**Figure 12: Audience Responses to “Satisfaction” Likert Items**



Audience member respondents also provided input on certain logistical aspects of the showcase that could be improved. For instance, many audience members disliked that the venue was outdoors because the cold weather made it uncomfortable to sit outside. They suggested providing space heaters, making the event indoors, or informing audience members ahead of time so they can dress appropriately. Additionally, audience members reported that holding the showcase on a school night was inconvenient due to students expressing tiredness after school hours. Suggestions for improvement included holding the showcase on a weekend. Several others also took issue with the sound quality of the show – it was difficult for them to hear the performers, especially the singers. Many audience members also suggested having food at the event to purchase from; some also mentioned hosting Mexican food and other artisanal vendors at the event to further showcase Mexican arts and culture.

Despite some technical and logistical dissatisfaction with the event, the audience members who responded to the survey generally enjoyed the showcase and wanted more offerings of similar programs and events to promote arts and culture of both the Latino community and other cultures within the community.

## Conclusion

The goals of the evaluation were to examine the impact of mariachi education programs and the ¡Viva el mariachi! Showcase on students and members of the community. The results of the evaluation demonstrate that mariachi education programs provide opportunities for young Latino students to help them learn about their culture and express their cultural identity. Some students cited these as the reason for joining the mariachi program at their schools, and many students reported that they found that their lives had been changed positively after being involved in mariachi. Students were able to express themselves and represent their culture in ways that were unique to them. Participating in the showcase further supported the cultural identity development of these students and provided another platform for students to express their cultural identity. Many also conveyed that they were able to feel pride in being Latino through their participation in the showcase. It is important to note that there were students who did not identify as Hispanic or Latino that also participated in their school's mariachi program. These students reported that they enjoyed playing mariachi and that participating in mariachi helped them learn about a culture different from their own.

Moreover, playing mariachi helped students connect with their peers and family, develop meaningful friendships, and feel connected to their community. Many students stated that they were able to make new friends and spend time with their friends by participating in their school's mariachi program. Others also mentioned that they were able to connect more with their family members by familiarizing themselves with the music that their families listen to. They also reported feeling an appreciation for the opportunity for family members to attend and watch them perform at shows and events such as the ¡Viva el mariachi! Showcase. The showcase also encouraged connections between these students and other members of the community who share a love of mariachi music, including students from other mariachi groups and the larger Latino community. For these students, performing in front of a crowd that enjoyed mariachi music was a meaningful experience.

Audience members reported that they were able to connect to the larger community as well. Audience members expressed how special and meaningful it was to see young and talented students from the community onstage, representing their culture. They also appreciated being able to access a space that celebrates Latino arts and culture. Respondents urged for more similar events for students to artistically express themselves and for the community to have further exposure to a variety of cultures.

Culturally sustaining arts programming is integral to the development of young students. Cultural events, like the mariachi showcase, have a pivotal role in bringing together all members of the community through a shared love of arts and culture. Survey respondents reported enjoying the mariachi showcase and called for additional cultural events like the

showcase. The findings of the evaluation demonstrate that cultural arts programs, like mariachi education programs, are not only beneficial to students but also to the larger community. It is especially important that these programs are hosted at school sites that serve majority Hispanic or Latino students, such as the sites involved in this project, as it provides Latino students opportunities to learn more about themselves, express pride in who they are and in their culture, and explore their identities within their community.

## References

Clark, S. (2005). Mariachi music as a symbol of Mexican culture in the United States.

*International Journal of Music Education, 23*(3), 227-237.

Salazar, L. (2015). Mariachi Music as a Pathway to Higher Education in the United States.

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Smith, V. L. (2018). *The Influences of a Mariachi Education on Student Perceptions of Academic Achievement, Academic Attainment, and Student Engagement* (Doctoral dissertation, University of the Pacific).