

Lifting Up BUSD AAPI Voices



“My mom is an inspiration to me because she immigrated from China to Taiwan to Boston to San Diego, where I was raised. Each step of the way, she had to adapt and persevere through challenging situations, using her heart and mind to uncover a moral path of justice and generosity. She taught me to value all of the parts of myself, from Chinese culture to Finnish culture to American culture, and to never give up on the possibility for greater peace in my own life and in society.”

Mikko Jokela

7th Grade Humanities Teacher

Martin Luther King, Jr. Middle School

Favorite Food: Chinese onion pancakes

Favorite TV Show: *Shanghai Noon*

Ideal Dinner Guests: Mother Teresa, Thich Nhat Hanh, Nelson Mandela

When Not Working: Nothing is better than going to Hawaii with my wife

AAPI Heritage Month

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When I think about the fact that families send their children to school and entrust me to provide a valuable education, it feels like an incredible honor and opportunity. Learning about history is a path to philosophical freedom, which comes from understanding the influences of culture and society on our choices, and using that knowledge to shape our own identity and actions in the world. Developing the skills of communication in writing, oratory, listening, and art, gives students the opportunity to express themselves and make a positive impact on others. That's why being a humanities teacher is a place of love and joy for me each day.

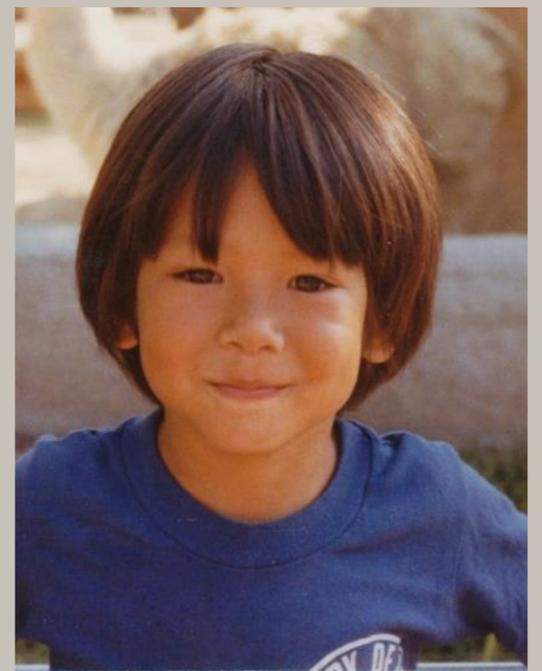
Mikko Jokela

7th Grade Humanities Teacher
MLK, Jr. Middle School

I am so grateful for the role Ethnic Studies has played in my personal education. There was a sense of internal liberation for me when I started studying it in college, and it led me to become a student leader around issues of race. Being Asian and mixed race, it felt beautiful to learn about things that reflected my experiences in America.

When I think back to my education K-12, I realize that I did not see myself in the curriculum. I learned to accept what was provided for me and study what other people said was important without question. From my recollection, all of my teachers were of European ancestry, with the exception of an Asian American teacher in kindergarten and one in 7th grade. In my opinion, life for me was normalized through the perspective of whiteness. In my classroom, I now try to introduce something everyday which provides a different perspective, and I call it "DiverseStory" instead of "History."

Being with my students is bringing so much joy to me because they are heroic in their efforts to grow as humans and in community. Giving a student a book is one of my favorite things in life, and I have the unique opportunity in my classroom to hand out books every single day. It is so fun to look a student in the eye and say, "I have read this book, and I believe you will like it because of who you are." Every student is different, and showing them that they are valued for what they bring to Room 202—that always lights my heart on fire.



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