



ASA 2023 Doctors Back to School Program Returns to the Classroom

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On a sunny October Monday in San Francisco, California, anesthesiologists from across the country gathered at the largest anesthesia meeting of the year. This morning, some had a different destination: Willie L. Brown Jr. Middle School. These anesthesiologists were part of the ASA Doctors Back to School (DBTS) program (*ASA Monitor* 2022;86:32-3). Established in 2016, DBTS provides early exposure to careers in medicine for underrepresented middle school students (*ASA Monitor* 2022;86:32-3; [asamonitor.pub/3QUBCK9](https://pubs.asanet.org/3QUBCK9)). This year marked the return of DBTS to in-person classrooms for the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic, along with new additions to the program, including interactive stations led with the help of medical students.

The importance of early exposure to medicine for students from underrepresented communities cannot be overstated, with growing disparities in representation within our field. In a 2023 survey for anesthesia trainees, 5.4% were Black (12.9% of the U.S. population), 8% Hispanic (18.9% of U.S. population), and 0.1% American Indian/Alaska Native (0.2% of U.S. population) (*ASA Monitor* 2023;87:13-5; *Anesth Analg* 2020;131:1201-9). While efforts are under way to diversify the field at all levels of training, engaging children at a young age opens their eyes to a career they may not otherwise have been exposed to and



Middle school students learn in wonder through interactive demonstration stations.

allows for interactions with physicians who share similar backgrounds.

As the school bell rang, 90 8th-grade students flooded into classrooms to find over 30 DBTS volunteers ranging from medical students to anesthesiologists. Willie Brown Middle School serves San Francisco's Bayview neighborhood, a historically and predominantly minority neighborhood, where 29.2% of the population is Hispanic/Latino, 24.7% is Black, and 63.1% speak a language other than English at home ([asamonitor.pub/3QTEpd9](https://pubs.asanet.org/3QTEpd9); [asamonitor.pub/40zdEho](https://pubs.asanet.org/40zdEho)). The program began with the question, "Who has had surgery before?" I was met by eager responses from the students, followed by a video about different careers in anesthesiology.

Students gasped while watching gaping wounds being sutured closed. "Are they awake? Does it hurt?" they asked, and then learned how anesthesia makes surgeries possible. In groups, they gained hands-on experience with tools used in anesthesiology through interactive intubation, epidural, and suturing stations, and they thoroughly enjoyed

using an ultrasound to see who had a full stomach! "I love being able to see how our body works," said Seth, amazed by a volunteer's heart beating on ultrasound. Finally, volunteers shared their personal journeys about how they overcame obstacles to pursue a career in medicine.

In a touching moment, one anesthesiologist lent his white coat to a young girl. She, and several other students, expressed newfound aspirations, saying, "I think I can be a doctor now." They saw the multicultural and multilingual faces among our volunteers from all over the U.S., representing the possibilities they could achieve in medicine. "You can do this. You can be a nurse, doctor, therapist, whatever you are excited about. People



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take many paths to get here." This was our primary message to convey to the students, and we are proud to have had the opportunity to do such.

If you would like to participate in future DBTS events and/or use the latest toolkit, please email Lauren Keith at l.keith@asahq.org.

Acknowledgements:

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ASA Participants: Fiyinfoluwa Ani, Joshua Asiaban, Richard Ballena, Odmara Barreto Chang, Darryl Brown, Kevin Burfeind, Tekuila Carter, Kathleen Daly-Jensen, Herodotos Ellinas, Sarah Endrizzi, Ryan Fink, Brittany Hatter, Dayle Hodge, Tomás Lazo, Bryan Mahoney, Lydiester Martinez, Christina Menor, Samantha O'Connor Campbell, John Patton, Niti Pawar, Kayla Postels, Bryan Ramirez, Demicha Rankin, Vernon Ross, Trevor Sutton, Roberta T. Tallarico, Connie Tran, Christine Vo, Tina Vu, Jean Yang, Mitchell Zekhtser, and Sara Zhou. ■



ASA Committee on Professional Diversity volunteers and medical students gather at Willie L. Brown Jr. Middle School in San Francisco for the 2023 ASA Doctors Back to School Program.