

National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education

**Statement of
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and the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus
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Introduction

I am Robert Teranishi, Assistant Professor of Education at New York University, and co-director of the CARE Project, which is the National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education. The CARE Project consists of a national commission, an advisory board, and a research team at New York University that collectively engages in actionable research and policy work that serves the AAPI student population. This project is founded on the simple premise that educational policy and practice must be based on fact, not fiction, if they are to be of value to teachers, students, parents and society as a whole.

Lyndon B. Johnson said of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 that “Education is the key to opportunity in our society, and the equality of educational opportunity must be the birthright of every citizen.” Johnson said this to proclaim America’s commitment to providing equal access to opportunity and mobility for all.

The State of Asian American and Pacific Islander Education

My comments to you today about the state of Asian American and Pacific Islander education are in the context of three imperatives if we are to live up to America’s commitment to equality of opportunity in our educational system:

- First, we need to expand the way education leaders, policymakers, and the public understand the complexities, inequities, and strengths of the U.S. educational system.
- Second, we need to continue to discuss how societal distinctions of race, class, language, and other factors are constituted in the day-to-day operations of American schools.
- Third, we need to develop schools that will meet the demands of an increasingly competitive and global environment *and* advance the principles of equality and justice.

Through my work, I have met with thousands of AAPI students, educators, administrators, and community advocates. It is clear that AAPIs are not only committed to these imperatives, but are also an important part of achieving them. Despite the importance of this population to our educational goals, AAPIs have historically been missing from discussions about educational policy and remain in the shadows of America’s commitment to equality and social justice. Rather, the treatment of AAPIs is driven by assumptions and stereotypes, rather than empirical evidence and thoughtful consideration.

I ask that you consider three demographic trends that help to dispel myths about the AAPI population, and are indicative of the state of AAPI education.

1. AAPIs are the fastest growing racial group in the U.S. Therefore, while their national presence has mostly been concentrated in a few states, like California, New York, and Hawai'i, the population is rapidly growing in communities that have historically not had a large AAPI presence.
 - The presence of AAPI communities in the West and Northeast continue to grow numerically and proportional. Consider that in 2000, AAPIs were more than 15% of the total population in Seattle, which is the single largest racial minority group in that city. In fact, the number of AAPIs is greater than the number of Blacks and Hispanics combined in Seattle.
 - AAPIs are also growing in the Midwest. In Southeast Michigan, the AAPI population increased by 83% between 1990 and 2000. Population projections into 2025 and 2050 estimate that these trends will continue.
 - Nevada is a good example of how the AAPI population growth is outpacing the overall population growth. While Whites make up more than 80% of the population that is over 50 years of age, among the Nevadans under the age of 18 – which is the fastest growing sector of the state's population – the majority are now non-White. AAPIs have contributed to this trend with a 150% increase from 1990 and 2000.

2. AAPIs are also the most diverse racial groups in the U.S. It is critical for educators and policy makers to recognize that there is no simple description that can characterize Asian American and Pacific Islander students or communities – In fact, there are more differences than similarities between many of the groups.
 - According to the 2000 U.S. Census, there are 48 ethnic groups that comprise the AAPI racial category.
 - Individuals who comprise this group occupy positions along the full range of the socioeconomic spectrum, from the poor and under-privileged to the affluent and highly-skilled. In other words, AAPI ethnic groups vary widely in their social and economic outlook with some AAPIs that are doing very well, while others are struggling due to a lack of cultural and economic capital that is necessary to negotiate the educational system for their children.
 - Also, consider that while 79 percent of AAPIs students speak a language other than English at home, the language needs of AAPIs vary quite dramatically when disaggregated by ethnicity. AAPI students need to be assessed better, assisted more, and recognized as an asset – rather than a deficit – for their language and cultural proficiencies.

3. There are tremendous demographic shifts occurring in the AAPI population, including a widening distribution of socio-economic status within the AAPI community. These demographic trends have been found to have several implications for the educational experiences, opportunities, and progress of Asians.
- A recent study conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA found that while the number of colleges AAPI students apply to is going up, the number they are admitted to is going down and there is a growing number of Asian American freshmen who report plans to pay educational expenses with full-time employment.
 - The relationship between socioeconomic status, English language ability, and other educational outcomes is also emerging. This trend is further exaggerated by residential patterns of different ethnic populations, particularly for ethnic communities that are residentially concentrated.
 - Consider the Hmong community in St. Paul, Minnesota, which has a considerably higher rate of families with children under 18 that are living below poverty at 33.4 percents. A poverty rate that is nearly 3 times the national rate.
 - Among Native Hawai'ians along the Wai'anae Coast of Oahu, 78.5% of the adults have a high school diploma or less as their highest level of education, compared to a national average of 28.6%.

Conclusion

Unless educators and advocates dispel and replace the myths about Asian American and Pacific Islander students, both our education system and society as a whole will miss the opportunity to fully develop and engage these students, who have much to contribute to our schools and our communities. We call for a renewed public vision for implementing policies and practices based on the unique needs of the Asian American and Pacific Islander community.

In conclusion, I ask for your help in implementing the following changes to educational practices and policy:

- We need to change the data collecting and reporting mechanisms, which will help us know who the AAPI students are in our schools and help us better identify their particular needs. This would require collecting information on ethnicity, generational status, language spoken at home, and other diagnostic information.
- We need to create better systems and mechanisms to improve the tracking and delivery of programs and services for AAPI students. We need a broader range of services to: 1) help monitor the needs and outcomes of AAPI students, 2) conduct better language assessment, and 3) improve coordination between schools and community services.
- We need to encourage development among educators, administrators, and support staff to be educated and skilled in recognizing and working with different AAPI student populations. This includes a greater representation of AAPI educators and administrators to serve as role models for Asian American and Pacific Islander students, and to provide subject matter expertise for policy and programmatic development.