

National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education

**Statement of
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My name is Robert Teranishi. I am assistant professor of higher education at New York University and Co-Director of the Commission on Asian American Research in Education – a project funded by The College Board.

The goal of CARE is to inform policy by compiling existing research and supporting new studies that shed light on indicators of educational inequality that exists for Asian American sub-populations throughout the U.S. educational system.

I am here today to highlight some of the educational conditions and outcomes for Southeast Asian students related to access to higher education.

Specifically, I will make three points:

1. Despite the perceived success of Asian Americans, as a whole, in education, sub-populations of APAs are not immune to educational inequality.
2. The educational inequalities faced by some Asian American sub-populations is compounded by economic and social conditions that can be worst than or equal to other racial minority groups.
3. These educational and social conditions should be of the utmost concern, given the lack of attention and consideration these communities receive in policy and research.

For the sake of time, I will be brief in showing you how this plays out for many Southeast Asian youth in their pursuit of higher education.

Nationally, students today are more likely to attend a racially segregated school than 50 years ago. Asian Americans are not immune to such trends. There are a number neighborhoods in the U.S. that are increasingly concentrated with emerging Southeast Asian immigrant and refugee populations. In California, these communities join a number of existing enclaves that exist for Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, and Filipinos.

However, for Southeast Asian enclaves, this has resulted in a high concentration of ethnic, linguistic, and economic isolation. This has substantial consequences for schools in these neighborhoods.

If you compare schools that are in SEA enclaves to schools in Chinese enclaves, you will find significant differences.

Among eight schools located in Southeast Asian neighborhoods in California, there are very different characteristics and opportunities for higher education than eight other schools located in Chinese American neighborhoods.

The compositions of these schools are very different. Schools in Southeast Asian neighborhoods have a higher rate of English Language Learners (31.5%), a higher proportion of students with parents without a high school diploma (33.6%), and a higher proportion of students receiving AFDC (26.1%) than schools comprised of Chinese Americans.

While there are notable demographic differences, the most compelling contrast between Southeast Asian schools and schools comprised of Chinese Americans can be found in the postsecondary outcomes.

Graduates of schools in Chinese enclaves are four-times more likely to attend a UC campus than graduates from schools in Southeast Asian enclaves. Rather, nearly half of the students graduating from schools in Southeast Asian neighborhoods attend community colleges (45.6%), compared to less than a quarter (22.3%) of students living in Chinese neighborhoods.

As we all know, not all schools are the same. In fact, structurally, schools do different things by design.

Schools in Hmong neighborhoods lack academic rigor, informed guidance counseling, and the culture that is essential to providing students with a full range of postsecondary opportunities. In many ways, the goal of these schools is to get students to graduate rather than to get students to college.

One of the most concerning aspects of these trends is that students living in Southeast Asian enclaves are the least likely to have resources at home to augment the shortcomings of their schools.

In a recent study of over 500 Asian American high school students in California, we interviewed a Hmong student who had the following to say about her situation at home.

“My parents don’t have any education and have minimum wage jobs. They don’t even work full-time. Both of them can’t even make as much as a single person with a good education. They have been on-and-off welfare or working a minimum wage job ever since they’ve been in the U.S. I can’t go off to college because I need to stay at home to translate for them.”

This student’s description of her home situation is representative of the conditions in which Hmong students must consider their postsecondary plans.

Given these conditions in the home and at school for Southeast Asian students, I have the following recommendations.

Recommendations

Broader inclusiveness of APAs in policy decisions

- ◆ Inclusiveness in immigration and language policy discussions
- ◆ Inclusiveness in policies that impact access to higher education
- ◆ We need more accurate data on Asian Americans

Policy decisions are informed by data and research and the data on Asian Americans is insufficient and misleading.

We also need more research to inform the educational experiences and outcomes of APAs on both national and regional levels.

We need more APA teachers, staff, and counselors in our schools.

- ◆ Sensitive to the language and cultural issues faced by a diverse Asian Am. population
- ◆ Reduce the need for a dual frame of reference that students often use to bridge the cultural gap between home and school
- ◆ True also in colleges and universities (esp. community colleges)

We need more support for community-based outreach

- ◆ Reach out to students in ethnically isolated communities
- ◆ Work with parents in their own language to inform *them* about college

SEAs need more access to scholarships

- ◆ SEAs have the highest poverty rate of any ethnic or racial group in the U.S.
- ◆ Reconsider the goals and outcomes of merit-based support
- ◆ This support should be regionally and ethnically targeted

Students with the most need are the least likely to attend schools that enable them to compete.

There needs to be a coordinated effort for these resources. If improvements are made in one of these areas and not others, the likelihood of success is minimal.

Thank you for your time.