

National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education

Statement of
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Introduction

Members of Congress and my fellow educators, I am honored to be a part of the first ever CAPAC Education Summit. I want to thank the CAPAC staff, along with Congressman Honda for extending me an invitation to participate in this historic event. I am Robert Teranishi, associate professor of higher education in the Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development at New York University. I am also co-director and principal investigator 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 NYU that collectively engages in actionable research and policy work that serves the AAPI student population.

The research I share with you today is derived from a recently released report, which represents the collective work of the CARE Project, NYU, and the College Board. The title of the report, *Facts, Not Fiction – Setting the Record Straight*, reflects the fundamental philosophy of the CARE Project. Specifically, this project was founded on the simple premise that education policy and practice must be based on fact, not fiction, if they are to be of value to educators, students, parents, and society as a whole.

How Does it Feel to Be a Model of Success?

AAPIs have long been disregarded in education research and policy, and remain in the shadow of America's commitment to equality and social justice. Instead, the treatment of AAPIs has been driven by assumptions and stereotypes that characterize the population as the "model minority." The consistent message in the academic and policy arenas, and the mainstream media, is captured succinctly in a 1997 New York Times article that declared that "stellar academic achievement has an Asian face" and that others would be "fools" not to learn from these "perfect" students.

We began the CARE Project by interrogating the evidence of this claim – challenging that which has become an intuitive supposition. We quickly learned that there is actually very little empirical evidence to either support OR refute the model minority myth, but despite the lack of interrogation the model minority myth remains an enduring stereotype connected with the population. So much so that the treatment of AAPIs in research and policy has been based largely on deductive reasoning, rooted in the idea that the AAPI population does not face educational challenges and does not warrant attention or resources. In many cases, studies exclude AAPIs altogether, and the research that does include AAPIs often misrepresents the population through inaccurate data.

Over the next three years, we mined federal, state, and institutional data, and worked closely with our constituents to try to shed light on the extent to which the model minority myth could either be confirmed or refuted. Today, I share with you some of the key results of this work. Specifically, I highlight three interrelated trends that we have identified about the AAPI student population relative to postsecondary access and participation that challenge the model minority myth.

Demography, Opportunity, and Educational Mobility (Summary of Key Results)

1. **There are important AAPI demographic trends that are often overlooked in research and policy**, including tremendous diversity that exists *within* the population. It is critical for educators and policymakers to recognize that there is no single story that represents the AAPI educational experience. AAPIs represent different populations with different experiences and opportunities for mobility. Individuals and communities that comprise the AAPI population occupy positions along the full range of the socioeconomic spectrum, from the poor and underprivileged to the affluent and highly-skilled. In fact, there are more differences than similarities between many of the sub-groups that comprise the larger population.

- o The U.S. Census Bureau indicates that there are more than 15 million Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in the United States representing nearly 5 percent of the total population. While their regional representation is mostly 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.
- o AAPIs have a great deal of ethnic diversity. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 48 ethnic groups fall under the larger AAPI racial category. These groups represent different immigration histories with many differences in the conditions under which they arrived to the U.S. Evidence of the varied immigration histories can be found in the differences in English language usage and proficiency that varies widely across different ethnic populations. AAPI immigrants bring more languages to the United States than any other segment of the U.S. immigrant population. Even among immigrants originating from the same country, there can be many different languages and multiple dialects.
- o Social indicators vary widely across different ethnicities including differences in poverty and educational attainment. Some AAPI ethnic populations have a poverty rate that is similar to or even below the national average, while others are experiencing higher poverty rates than any other sector of the U.S. population.

2. *The differences across groups are further exacerbated by residential segregation* and the degree to which sub-populations concentrate residentially. The residential concentration of AAPIs has resulted in a number of AAPI ethnic enclaves that are unique demographically and characteristically. The uniqueness of each AAPI ethnic enclave means that the population warrants a local treatment, as opposed to applying blanket assumptions based on generalizations that exist about the population as a whole.

- o Westminster, California has one of the highest concentrations of Vietnamese Americans in the U.S. Over half (**55.4%**) of the adult population has educational attainment of "high school or less," and two-thirds (**67.2%**) of the adult population speaks English "less than very well" according to the U.S. Census Bureau.
- o Brooklyn, New York is home to a large and growing Chinese American community. Three quarters (**76.8%**) of the adult population in this community is foreign-born, and nearly two-thirds (**63.5%**) of the children speak English "less than very well."
- o St. Paul, Minnesota is home to the largest concentration of Hmong in the U.S. outside of Southeast Asia. In this region, **65.4%** of the Hmong adult population has an educational attainment of "high school or less" and the community faces a considerably higher rate of families with children under 18 that are living below poverty at **33.4%** - a poverty rate that is nearly 3 times the national average.
- o Another community, Wai'anae, Hawai'i in Oahu is home to the largest concentration of native Hawai'ians in the U.S. This community is faced with high poverty and poor educational prospects for children. Consider that among Native Hawai'ians in Wai'anae, **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%**.

3. *The differences in access to resources and postsecondary opportunities results in a wide distribution in college participation*, including students who attend the most selective universities, students who attend less-selective and non-selective institutions such as community colleges, and a sector of the population that does not attend college at all. In other words, there is a wide range of educational and social outcomes among AAPIs that is rarely recognized in education research and policy.

- o Consider the AAPI population in the community college sector, which is often overlooked. Despite the idea that AAPIs only attend selective universities, there is actually a greater number of AAPI students in public community colleges than any other sector of U.S. higher education. In California, Nevada, and Hawaii, three states with a significant number of AAPI college students, over half of all college students attend community colleges.
- o In terms of projecting future trends in AAPI college participation, it is important to note that the community college sector is where AAPI college participation has increased the most over the past decade. These trends warrant more attention to the AAPI population in this sector of U.S. higher education.
- o While there are many AAPIs who do attend selective universities, there are many AAPIs who are not afforded the same resources and opportunities to prepare them for competitive admissions. We found that on college entrance exams, AAPIs have the widest distribution of scores that contribute to the overall mean score, which is evident by the comparing the standard deviation. One study found that AAPIs were six times overrepresented among the top scores, but also five times overrepresented among the lowest scores. So, while many AAPIs are clearly performing well at the top of the curve, there are just as many who struggle at the bottom.

A Call for Action

In conclusion, we call on educators and advocates to dispel and replace the myths about Asian American and Pacific Islander students, so that higher education and society as a whole can fully develop and engage these students. In the report, we have examined data that encourages us to develop a renewed public vision for implementing policies and practices based on facts about Asian American and Pacific Islander students.

Transcending the model minority myth requires the following changes to better serve AAPI students and the educational system as a whole:

- o We need to collect and report data in a way that allows for further deconstruction of the variation within the AAPI racial category (by ethnicity, nationality, immigration history, and language background). This data would tell us more about the vast diversity among all students in our schools and colleges.
- o We need to hire more Asian American and Pacific Islander faculty, staff, consultants, and researchers to identify and guide work in education at every level, on behalf of all groups, including Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. These AAPI educators and professionals can also serve as role models for Asian American and Pacific Islander students and as subject matter experts for policy development.
- o Professionals in the K-12 and higher education sectors need to connect with AAPI community leaders and organizations to enhance the cultural capacity of our institutions and improve student outcomes. In the K-12 sector, these collaborations would result in a better connection between schools and AAPI parents, and improvements to curricula and language policy. In higher education, these collaborations will improve admissions, outreach, and financial aid practices, change the way we approach student services, and result in new institutional initiatives in the local community.
- o We need to move beyond a deficit model when it comes to dealing with language and cultural differences in our schools, and modify our desired learning outcomes to include curricula that reflect Asian American and Pacific Islander history, art, literature, and culture. This change will benefit all students in our increasingly globalized society where multicultural competence is imperative.