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In Support of AB 2374 to Establish California's Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander-Serving Institution Designation

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During the 2026 legislative session, California policymakers are considering Assembly Bill (AB) 2374, which would establish a state-level Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander-Serving Institution (AANHPI) designation to recognize colleges and universities that demonstrate a commitment to serving Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander (AA&NHPI) students.

The *state-level* AANHPI designation comes at a critical time, as *federal* Minority-Serving Institutions (MSI) across the United States have come under attack, including Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions (AANAPISI) in California.

As we near 20 years since the establishment of the federal AANAPISI designation and program, there is an opportunity to recommit to AANAPISIs through a state-level designation. Following community advocacy, the federal government established AANAPISIs to address the neglect of AA&NHPI students and the institutions that enroll them. The federal AANAPISI designation and U.S. Department of Education-administered grant programs have funded over 50 colleges and universities across the United States and the U.S.-Affiliated Pacific Islands since their codification in 2007. Institutions have leveraged these capacity-building AANAPISI grants to support academic and student support services, leadership and mentorship opportunities, and research and resource development.



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AANAPISIs are the Backbone of California Higher Education

Federally eligible AANAPISIs represent about 6.1% of all colleges and universities in the United States, but they enroll over 40% of all AA&NHPI undergraduates. Moreover, the number of federally eligible AANAPISIs has continued to grow, with 208 eligible in 2025.

In California, over 7.2 million Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders call the state home. Unsurprisingly, there is significant representation of AA&NHPI students in California higher education. In 2025, over 40% of federal AANAPISIs were in California, the majority of which were public institutions. This includes every University of California undergraduate institution, half of the California State University campuses, and 40% of California Community Colleges.

California AANAPISIs enroll 77% of all AA&NHPI undergraduates across the state's 253 public and private not-for-profit two- and four-year institutions. Furthermore, most California AANAPISIs are dual- or multi-designated as Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs), which demonstrates that AANAPISIs enroll racially and ethnically diverse students. Indeed, more than half (53%) of *all* California undergraduates were enrolled in AANAPISIs in fall 2024.

This Bill Will Improve How California Higher Education Institutions Serve AA&NHPI Students

Enrolling a significant concentration of AA&NHPI students across California does not automatically mean California institutions are intentionally *serving* these students. The California AANHPI-Serving Institution or AANHPISI designation can be leveraged to impel institutions to do so.

This proposed state-level designation requires California colleges and universities to demonstrate a commitment to support AA&NHPI student success and to be accountable in their commitments to serving AA&NHPIs. As part of the bill, these commitments include actions such as explicitly aligning institutional missions, strategic plans, and campus resources to address and promote AA&NHPI student success.

Requiring such commitments and accountability facilitates meeting AA&NHPI student needs and promoting AA&NHPI student success. This is especially important given the longer history of the AA&NHPIs being excluded from equity conversations and initiatives, including in higher education, and the continued (in)visibility of AA&NHPIs as a panethnic community.

Looking at AA&NHPI communities separately reveals variation in traditional academic outcomes and resources, such as baccalaureate attainment and share of unmet financial need.

The bottom line is that the AB 2374 state-level designation will lead to stronger support for AA&NHPI students.

Pass AB 2374 to Support AA&NHPI Students

California state legislators should support and vote to advance AB 2374. The AANHPISI designation would be an important step toward institutional accountability at the state level. The AANHPISI designation anchors institutions' commitment to truly *serving* AA&NHPI students and communities more broadly.

In the spirit of Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month this May, we must be reminded of our collective responsibility to serve AA&NHPI communities who have been part of the fabric of this nation, and the establishment of the California AANHPISI designation offers one meaningful way forward to recommit to current and future generations of AA&NHPIs.



Scan for the digital version, including full references and sources.

Kristine Jan Cruz Espinoza, Ph.D., is a proud alum of two-year and four-year broad-access public Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs), including Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions (AANAPISIs) across California, Hawai'i, and Nevada. She is an Assistant Professor in the Graduate School of Education at California Lutheran University, an incoming Assistant Professor at UC Davis (effective July 1, 2026), a Faculty Fellow with the MSI Data Project at UCLA, a member of the AANAPISI Executive Council at UC Davis, and a member of the Hispanic-Serving Institution Research Colectiva.