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Practitioners Essay

No Data, No Justice: Moving beyond the Model Minority Myth in K–12 Education

Rita Pin Ahrens and Souvan Lee

As America becomes more ethnically diverse, we must ensure that all students—regardless of race—can reach their full potential. In education, this begins with data. . . . When all students count, all students can succeed.

Marc Morial, President of the National Urban League¹

Abstract

Due to the “model minority myth,” Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) students are often left out of the national discourse on educational equity. As a result, obtaining more data on AAPI students (i.e., data disaggregation) has become the primary civil rights issue in education for AAPIs. This paper examines challenges facing AAPIs in elementary and secondary public schools, passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act, and progress made to disaggregate data on AAPI students. The authors highlight additional opportunities and strategies for advocates at the local and national level to improve educational outcomes for all AAPI students by 2040.

Introduction

In 2015, we witnessed a number of historical moments and controversies in American public education: students of color became the new majority in public schools; a movement emerged to opt students out of standardized state tests; and the long overdue reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, a fifty-year-old civil rights bill whose primary purpose is to increase educational opportunities for traditionally underserved and disadvantaged students, occurred. Against this backdrop, Asian American and Pacific Islander

(AAPI) students and advocates rallied to be recognized, seen, and heard within K–12 educational policy and the American K–12 public school system. Because of the pervasive mainstream assumption that AAPIs are academically successful and economically secure, dubbed the Asian “model minority myth,” AAPI students were often not included in the national discourse that highlights disparities for students of color and seeks solutions for closing the achievement gap. As a result, AAPI advocates coalesced around obtaining more data on AAPI students and families as their primary civil rights priority in education in 2015. If the AAPI community wins the fight for transparent and available disaggregated data, by 2040 the community can move beyond dispelling the model minority myth to focus on family and student engagement in the development, funding, and implementation of K–12 education.

Demographic Changes and Masked Disparities

Fueled by the lifting of race-based immigration restrictions in the mid-1960s combined with favorable political refugee policies, the AAPI population increased tenfold between 1970 and 2010. Between 2010 and 2040, the population is expected to roughly double again. Today, AAPIs constitute 6 percent of the total U.S. population and are projected to increase to nearly 10 percent by 2040 (Ong, Ong, and Ong, 2016).

The student population within K–12 public schools reflects large demographic shifts across the United States in the last four decades. AAPI student enrollment grew fourfold from 1979 to 2009, with expected growth by another 31 percent by 2019 (Hussar and Bailey, 2013). The total share of AAPI enrollment in K–12 public schools is projected to increase to 6 percent of all enrollees over the next six years, compared to 4 percent in 1995. This means that by 2022, AAPI enrollment is estimated to reach more than three million students, compared to 1.7 million in 1997 (*ibid.*). These shifts are particularly significant compared to African American and Native American students, whose populations are projected to remain steady, and to white students whose enrolled populations are declining. If AAPI student enrollment continues to increase by approximately 2 percent every ten years, based on current trends in AAPI immigration, the share of AAPI student enrollment could be approximately 10 percent by 2040 (*ibid.*).

Looking at aggregate statistics of the AAPI student population overall, these students show remarkable academic achievement and educational attainment. AAPIs appear to be “the model minority.” Compared to the overall U.S. population, AAPIs overall are better educated. A total

of 85.7 percent of AAPIs have a high school diploma or higher (compared to 86.3 percent of the general population), and 50.7 percent of AAPIs have a college degree or higher (compared to 29.1 percent of the general population) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). Once the AAPI data is disaggregated, however, an alarming picture emerges. Stark disparities in educational attainment and economic status among AAPIs become visible.

Just as aggregated data prior to the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act masked the achievement gaps between students of color and their peers, aggregated AAPI data—which combines forty-eight ethnicities who speak more than two hundred languages into one category—masks the achievement gaps for particular subgroups within the AAPI community. Of particular note are the dramatic differences in the achievement of the Southeast Asian American and Pacific Islander groups. Examining the figures for bachelor’s degree attainment or higher, it is clear that the high academic achievement of Asian Indian (70.5 percent) and Chinese Americans (52.0 percent) masks the performance of smaller ethnic groups such as Hmong (15.6 percent), Cambodian (15.5 percent), and Samoan (13.4 percent) (*ibid.*).

Defining the New Narrative for Educational Equity: “No Data, No Justice”

Disaggregated data on AAPI students and families is critical for ensuring educational equity and providing opportunities for disadvantaged students within the AAPI community. In K–12 public schools, federal (and often state and local) funds are allocated specifically toward closing achievement gaps. Without precise data revealing the challenges and disparities in education outcomes within the AAPI community, schools are unlikely to direct resources and interventions to better support specific struggling groups of AAPI students. As a result, AAPI data disaggregation has been identified as the primary civil rights issue in education for AAPIs.

National advocacy organizations representing the AAPI community, as well as the broader civil rights community, have embraced the idea of social justice through further data disaggregation, including AAPI data disaggregation, as a key priority for the reauthorization of the ESEA and subsequent deliberations of the final ESEA bill, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). In January 2015, more than 180 national, state, and local organizations endorsed a letter calling for AAPI data disaggregation in K–12 public schools, and more than one thousand photos were submitted by students and communities to the #AllStudentsCount cam-

paign to show support. Respected advocacy organizations representing other communities of color, such as the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, NAACP Legal Defense Fund, the National Urban League, the League of United Latin American Citizens, and National Council of La Raza joined national AAPI advocacy organizations such as the National Council for Asian Pacific Americans, the Southeast Asia Resource Action Center, OCA—Asian Pacific American Advocates, Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance, and the Japanese American Citizens League in pushing congressional leadership to champion and support AAPI data disaggregation.

The first proposed federal legislation, the All Students Count Act, called for disaggregating AAPI data using U.S. Census categories across K–12 public schools. It was introduced in Congress in July 2014 by U.S. Representative Mike Honda (D-CA17) and then reintroduced in February 2015 with a Senate companion bill from U.S. Senator Mazie Hirono (D-HI) (Hirono, 2015; Honda, 2014, 2015). Ranking member of the Committee on Education and the Workforce U.S. Representative Bobby Scott (D-VA3) included AAPI data disaggregation using U.S. Census categories across all states in his substitute amendment to the Republican-sponsored Student Success Act. The amendment, unfortunately, did not make it to the final House bill, nor did the proposed bills from Honda and Hirono move out of their respective education committees. Nevertheless, these proposed pieces of legislation set the stage for debate and the inclusion of data disaggregation language in the long overdue reauthorization of the ESEA of 1965. With bipartisan support from U.S. Senator Dean Heller (R-NV), the Hirono-Heller amendment to the U.S. Senate ESEA bill called for AAPI data disaggregation in school districts with one thousand or more AAPI students. It was narrowly defeated 47-50 in July 2015.

Even with no language in the House or Senate ESEA bills for further disaggregating AAPI data, civil rights advocates were able to secure acknowledgment from federal policy makers on both sides of the aisle that AAPI data disaggregation is a critical issue. The final ESEA bill, the ESSA, contains conference report language that recognizes that current race and ethnicity categories “can mask particular challenges that ethnic minorities within each subgroup face. The Conferees encourage States that collect disaggregated data on ethnic minorities within individual subgroups, such as disaggregated data for Asian and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students using the same race response categories as the decennial census of the population, to make such information publicly available, so long

as such disclosure does not reveal any personally identifiable information for any student” (U.S. House Committee on Education and Workforce, 2015, 454). More importantly, the final ESEA bill includes statutory language for technical assistance currently offered by the U.S. Department of Education for state education agencies interested in disaggregating AAPI data and using that data to improve educational outcomes.

Importantly, interest in AAPI data disaggregation has not been limited to the federal stage. The Rhode Island General Assembly (H 5743) and the California State Legislature (AB 1088) both tried to pass data disaggregation legislation in 2011 (Diaz, Slater, and Cimini, 2011; Eng, 2011). California’s bill, AB 1088, passed. It targeted the Department of Industrial Relations and Department of Fair Employment and Housing rather than education-related state agencies, but it was still a positive step forward. In 2015, another bill, AB 176, attempted to involve more state agencies (the University of California and California State University systems) in collecting disaggregated AAPI data (Bonta, 2015). AB 176 received near-unanimous support in both chambers of the California State Legislature before it was ultimately vetoed by California Governor Jerry Brown, so advocacy groups are determined to try again. Also in 2015, both New York (A02430) and Washington State (HB 1541) attempted to pass legislation asking state agencies to collect disaggregated AAPI data (Kim, 2015; Santos, Tharinger, and Orwell 2016). Advocates were successful in Washington, and on March 30, 2016, the state became the first in the nation to have a law to collect and publicly report disaggregated AAPI data. Efforts to pass AAPI data legislation continue in Minnesota, California, and Rhode Island, providing models for advocacy groups in other states where AAPI communities are concentrated.

Given the steady increase in community and bipartisan political support, legislation mandating the disaggregation of AAPI data in K–12 public schools could be enacted within the next few years. If AAPI advocates are successful by 2040, AAPI data collection, analysis, and reporting to inform student needs could be institutionalized in public elementary and secondary schools. The conversation could shift to ensuring resource equity, providing differentiated supports and interventions for specific communities, and prioritizing those identified supports. Community stakeholders may also utilize publicly available AAPI data to improve direct support services and create programs where gaps exist. Access and good use of data to improve student outcomes could also create stronger relationships between schools and the community in determining and providing appropriate supports to students and families.

Other Challenges in America's Public Schools: 2015 and 2040

A Lack of AAPI Educators

Other challenges affecting AAPIs may or may not be resolved by 2040. For example, despite dramatic shifts in student demographics over the past twelve years, teacher demographics in public schools have not shifted to match the student population. Currently, more than half of all students are students of color, but only 16.9 percent of teachers identify as teachers of color (Bristol, 2015). The current subset of these teachers who are AAPI is even smaller, at 1.4 percent, compared to the current enrollment of AAPI students at 5.2 percent (*ibid.*). Teacher recruitment programs must increase efforts to diversify the educator workforce in general, but ought to pay particular attention to attracting and retaining AAPI educators within the next twenty-five years. A diverse general pool of teachers trained appropriately in cultural and linguistic competency may be able to understand and address better the needs of AAPI students and communities, particularly new immigrants and refugees. However, the particular cultural and historical experiences an AAPI teacher brings to his or her teaching may provide relatable context for AAPI students that cannot simply be learned in the teacher certification and licensure process.

Bullying and Harassment

In recent years, with the popularity of racially charged stereotypes like “model minority” and “perpetual foreigner,” AAPI K–12 students have increasingly suffered from bullying and violence. Limited English proficiency, economic instability, religion, and point of arrival into the country are factors that increase the likelihood of getting bullied. Bullying is defined by the federal government as “unwanted, aggressive behavior among school-aged children that involves real or perceived power imbalance where the behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time” (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2016b). According to the U.S. Departments of Justice and Education, 54 percent of Asian American students have been bullied (Robers, Zhang, and Truman, 2010). Asian American males are also the most likely students to be bullied, more than their white, black, Native American, or Hispanic peers. This contrasts with a study conducted by the Asian American Psychological Association Leadership Fellows Program in May 2012 that found that only 17 percent of Asian American students reported being bullied, the lowest of any racial group for the same category (Tran, 2012). It is important to highlight that this data reflects the

reported accounts of bullying rather than the actual incidents.

Harassment, by contrast, can “[take] many forms, including verbal acts and name-calling; graphic and written statements, which may include use of cell phones or the Internet; or other conduct that may be physically threatening, harmful, or humiliating” (Ali, 2010, 2). While Congress has no federal law directly addressing bullying (although some states and districts have adopted antibullying policies), the Office of Civil Rights is empowered by federal law to ensure students are not harassed based on their race, color, national origin, sex, or disability (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2016b). According to AAPI Data and the Center for American Progress, 37 percent of Asian Americans report being harassed, but for Hmong Americans it is a staggering 71 percent (Ahmad and Ramakrishnan, 2014). Filipino, Cambodian, and Vietnamese Americans are also highly likely to report being harassed.

Sikh Americans also experienced significant increases in bullying and harassment after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Research conducted by the Sikh Coalition in Fresno, California, found that 87 percent of Sikh American students experience bullying to some degree at school (Sikh Coalition, 2014). Studies in other major cities with prominent Sikh populations found similar results. While students are generally the ones bullying their peers, teachers, administrators, and other adults have also been guilty of bullying.

In response to increased reports of bullying, some states have adopted anti-bullying policies, though each state maintains a different definition of bullying. Bullying legislation at the federal level has been introduced, though not successfully passed, and Senator Casey (D-PA) and Senator Franken (D-MN) championed the issue during the reauthorization of ESEA. Both U.S. senators have pledged to continue pushing antibullying legislation, particularly for LGBTQ students. Also, in November 2014, the Obama administration created an AAPI Bullying Prevention Task Force to address specifically the bullying of AAPI students (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). In the meantime, the U.S. Department of Education can continue to address harassment by enforcing existing policy. We are hopeful that with this momentum, schools will be better equipped to address bullying, harassment, and school climate issues in general by 2040, and will be held accountable for doing so.

Language Access

Language access is critical for AAPI students and families to participate meaningfully in schools, and the U.S. Department of Education

recently released guidance to mitigate language barriers in education (Lhamon and Gupta, 2015). As the student population becomes increasingly diverse, communities are beginning to demand their language access rights. For example, local community members in New Orleans lodged a civil rights complaint with the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights about the lack of access to translators for Individualized Education Program meetings and to translated communications in both Vietnamese and Spanish to students and families in the New Orleans school district (Mariadason and Nguyen, 2013).

Changes in ESEA and the steady volume of language access cases before the U.S. Department of Justice and the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights may force districts and schools to recognize their legal obligation to serve non-Spanish-speaking populations. In the 2013–14 academic school year, more than 161 cases involving language access were filed with the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). The current reauthorization of ESEA includes English proficiency as an indicator in state accountability systems and requires additional reporting at the state and local level on the performance of English learners. Together, these should lead to a decrease in language access violations, especially for AAPI communities, by 2040.

However, schools and districts need to work harder to engage AAPI communities (U.S. House Committee on Education and Workforce, 2015). Traditional parent organizations like the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) have low membership enrollment for AAPI parents, and to our knowledge, the PTA has never been led by an AAPI director. In response to persistently low engagement of AAPI parents and community members in education policy, SEARAC, along with other national groups, has been collecting a list of community members ready to advise policy makers as they implement the new federal education law (SEARAC, 2016).

Advocates are working to address all of these issues to improve education outcomes for AAPI students: increasing the proportion of AAPI educators, preventing bullying of AAPI students, providing appropriate language access for AAPI students and families, and empowering parents and students to engage decision makers. We are hopeful that by 2040, our students will have teachers and elected school board members who understand and share their particular cultural and historical heritage, they will feel safe in a school climate free from bullying, and their families will be able to navigate their school systems in their preferred language.

The Every Student Succeeds Act and AAPIs

A discussion on the landscape of public K–12 education would be incomplete without a brief discussion of the passage of ESSA, the reauthorization of the ESEA, and how that impacts the AAPI community. Broadly, ESSA shifts tremendous power from the federal government back to the states in a number of ways, from defining teacher effectiveness to determining what will happen when schools fail to meet the needs of traditionally underserved students. The law gives states and local districts more flexibility in their accountability plans, with the federal government no longer determining the consequences for failing schools or the interventions that will be used. In addition, states are required to “meaningfully engage” and “consult” with public stakeholders in crafting the interventions and supports that will be used to address achievement gaps for traditionally underserved students. AAPI communities potentially have the opportunity to engage schools and districts to carefully define the interventions, but must take care to understand the process and timeline for such engagement.

At the same time, ESSA also contains strong provisions for English language learners (ELLs), with ELLs now directly included in Title I state accountability plans. States must now report the English language proficiency rates of ELLs, as well as use the performance of ELLs in acquiring English proficiency as one of multiple indicators used for identifying low-performing schools that need corrective action. Combined with the new cross-tabulated reports that can examine ELLs by race and ethnicity categories, as well as disabilities, the AAPI community has the opportunity to determine whether schools and districts are meeting the specific needs of AAPI ELLs. Prior to the passage of ESSA, such data has not been consistently available to the public. Within the next few years, such data will reveal whether schools and districts have been adequately serving AAPI ELLs and whether more resources need to be targeted to specific groups of AAPI students. By 2040, longitudinal data on how schools have been serving AAPI ELLs should allow stakeholders to better advocate for supports and resources for AAPI ELLs.

ESSA also has a provision for the development of state assessments in languages other than English, which may be of interest to AAPI students and families who are recent arrivals to the United States. In its state plan, each state must identify the languages that are present to a “significant extent” within the state and indicate for which languages assessments are not available and are needed. This particular provision

is part of the requirement that states include ELLs in the annual assessments, test them in a valid and reliable manner, and provide appropriate accommodations, which could include assessing in a language other than English. Technical assistance to develop such assessments in other languages is now available to states, upon request. With pressure from advocates, by 2040, each state could have assessments available in multiple languages, as AAPI languages are within the top five languages for nearly every state, with the exception of Montana and New Mexico (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

ESSA also includes a provision for the U.S. Department of Education to provide technical assistance for state education agencies interested in disaggregating AAPI data and using that data to improve educational outcomes. This technical assistance is important for creating buy-in for states and districts that may be uncertain about the burden of implementing AAPI data disaggregation or lack the capacity to implement the changes necessary in local and state data collection processes and systems. The technical assistance is also important for states and districts that already collect disaggregated AAPI data but are unsure how to analyze and report it for program improvement. However, the AAPI community must show that there is demand for such technical assistance and AAPI data disaggregation by ensuring that districts and states take advantage of the technical assistance—or risk losing technical assistance in a future reauthorization of the ESEA. If districts and states continue to express interest in disaggregating AAPI data, the U.S. Department of Education should provide guidance documents and best practices for disaggregating AAPI data by 2040, if such practices are not already institutionalized by states and districts by then.

Challenges to Making Progress for AAPI Communities

In the last few years, substantial progress has been made in federal- and state-level policies to improve educational outcomes for AAPI students, but public stakeholders, advocates, and policy makers must be mindful that this progress is not lost. A number of challenges and obstacles may hinder or slow the trajectory toward improving educational outcomes for AAPI students through AAPI data disaggregation, targeted resources, and other supportive policies. These include, but are not limited to:

- **Shifts in the political landscape at the federal level.** The outcome of the 2016 and subsequent presidential elections may present a significant challenge to making further

progress for improving the outcomes of AAPI students. The president selects the next secretary of education and has the power either to prioritize supportive education policies or to slash funding for initiatives that improve educational equity overall.

- **Multiple reauthorizations of ESEA and a new Congress.** Over the next few decades, shifts in the political balance of power in Congress may also determine whether it prioritizes meeting the needs of AAPI students and their communities. ESEA will also have to be reauthorized—and probably a few times—and each Congress may or may not include the priorities of AAPI students and families.
- **Shift in power from strong federal oversight to state flexibility.** Now that ESSA has taken power away from the federal government in favor of state flexibility, community stakeholders at the local level must be more vigilant regarding the implementation of the new law. Ensuring that services are maintained and improved will require more organization at the local level, as national civil rights organizations will not have the capacity to carefully watch implementation in all fifty states and the District of Columbia to hold state and local officials accountable. This is especially challenging for AAPI students and families, unless they have the support of strong community-based organizations or other advocacy groups carefully monitoring education programs and policies at the local and state level.

Getting There by 2040: The Next Twenty-Five Years

To further educational opportunities for all students within the diverse AAPI community, advocates and researchers must work hand in hand over the next twenty-five years to ensure that the particular priorities of AAPI communities are included in the public narrative around public education. The following recommendations address the critical need for our communities to be informed and organized to enact lasting policy change in order to ensure student success in America's public schools:

- **Setting Policy Priorities for Reauthorizing the ESEA.** In 2015, AAPI advocates set a remarkable precedent by actively collaborating with other civil rights advocates in conversations with policy makers about meeting the needs of AAPI students and families within the context of the ESEA reauthorization. ESEA is due for reauthorization at least two

more times by 2040, and AAPI organizations and advocates should think proactively about what policies will further advance educational opportunities and outcomes for AAPI subgroups that still face challenges in educational attainment.

- **Passing Data Disaggregation Legislation at the State and Local Level.** As ESSA shifts more power to states, advocates are increasingly interested in passing data disaggregation legislation at the state level, and we are optimistic about enacting state legislation nationwide by 2040. With the new law that includes AAPI data disaggregation in the state of Washington, and state legislatures currently considering similar bills in California, Minnesota, and Rhode Island, the momentum for AAPI data disaggregation will grow with sustained community pressure. We recommend that advocates and researchers continue to voice demand for data disaggregation legislation, targeting districts and states with large or emerging AAPI populations. In addition, advocates can add to the momentum for nationwide policy change by showing how such data collection has been useful in increasing educational opportunities and sharing best practices. Advocates should also pressure state legislatures to adopt disaggregated data collection and reporting policies and user-friendly public disclosure of such data while ensuring student privacy.
- **Changing Teacher Preparation and Professional Development to Include Cultural and Linguistic Competency.** AAPI student enrollment is projected to be 10 percent within the next twenty-five years, based on current rates of new AAPI immigrants and refugees, many of whom have limited English proficiency (Hussar and Bailey, 2013). We recommend AAPI advocates demand that teacher preparation programs mandate cultural and linguistic competency training for all student teachers and all professional staff, including school and district administrators. At 10 percent, AAPI student enrollment rates are similar to the current enrollment rates for students with disabilities, for whom there is mandatory training in teacher preparation programs. We also recommend advocates push for the investment of additional funds for culturally and linguistically relevant professional development and training programs.
- **Amplifying the AAPI Voice in Education.** As AAPI student enrollment grows, the broader AAPI community must ensure there are sufficient advocates and organizations engaging in

policy making at the local, state, and national levels, as well as offering direct services to AAPI students. We recommend advocates train parents and families to engage schools and districts in the decision-making opportunities that will emerge as ESSA is implemented. We also recommend that community advocates connect and collaborate through coalitions such as the National Council of Asian Pacific Americans. Advocates should also consider connecting with larger organizations that have AAPI initiatives, such as the Teach for America Asian American & Pacific Islander Initiative and the White House Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.

- **Creating Models for Educational Equity for AAPI Communities.** Some cities with high concentrations of AAPIs, like Long Beach, California, Seattle, Washington, Austin, Texas, and the Twin Cities, Minnesota, have seen the growth of language immersion schools, culturally relevant programs, and charter schools tailored to specific cultures, languages, and communities. California’s first English-Vietnamese dual-language-immersion program recently opened in Orange County, California, and English-Vietnamese dual-language-immersion schools have also cropped up in cities with large Vietnamese communities in Austin, Texas, Portland, Oregon, and King County, Washington. In Minnesota, the Saint Paul Public School District has two AAPI language immersion schools, Chinese and Hmong, and offers “dual-language-immersion pathways” from elementary school through high school. Minnesota and California have also seen the emergence of charter schools that have bilingual teachers and school officials. Some of the Hmong charter schools in Minnesota even serve cultural Hmong food and integrate the Hmong language into the curriculum. There were not many language immersion schools ten years ago but the recent emergence of a handful of these schools suggests a growing trend. We anticipate more language immersion schools, especially for AAPI languages in areas where the community are strong and populous. In addition, local nonprofits like the Vietnamese Friendship Association (Seattle, Washington) and Khmer Girls in Action (Long Beach, California) partner with local schools to provide culturally relevant programming and academic services for high school students. The culturally relevant programming and partnership between schools are important for AAPI students and are present in these charter schools and language immersion schools. We recommend more funding for such programs and more partnerships

between community-based organizations, schools, and school districts.

- **Working in Broad Coalitions to Further Educational Opportunity for All Students.** By 2040, one in ten Americans will be AAPIs and half of Americans will identify as a person of color. This major shift in the makeup of American society promises a shift in the current discourse about whether schools are serving specific, smaller groups of students within our public schools or whether schools are serving the majority of students within our schools. The change in demographics toward a new majority consisting of people of color is accompanied by the potential for greater political power, if broad coalitions are formed and utilized to push educational equity for all students. For AAPIs to truly advance educational opportunities for disadvantaged AAPI students, we recommend that advocates for AAPI students work hand in hand with other community groups with similar concerns to advance policies that support multiple communities. The year 2015 set a precedent at the federal level with the civil rights community advocating specifically for AAPI students and families, which resulted in greater progress overall for all students.

Conclusion

With the recent federal acknowledgment in ESEA (and ESSA) that there are disparities in educational outcomes within the diverse AAPI community, the model minority myth is well underway to being dispelled. As more and more disaggregated data comes to light—from researchers, public disclosure of currently collected data sets, and new data collections—it will be easier to pinpoint the needs of our students and families, as well as craft tailored interventions and policies to solve them. However, we cannot be complacent once the model minority myth has been dispelled, for the work will have only begun to define who we are as a community.

AAPI public stakeholders—parents, students, teachers, business owners, corporate employees, refugees, retirees, and many others—must recognize that to be included in the national discourse to improve educational opportunities for all students, we must be engaged at all levels, from the local school to the highest levels of our government. To improve language access for our students and families, we must challenge schools and agencies to provide the supports we need and file complaints with the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Civil

Rights when our rights to meaningfully participate are violated. To improve school climate, we must challenge the high rates of bullying and harassment that our students face and demand safe spaces for learning from teachers and principals, and if that fails, from those who represent us at the state and federal level. To have more AAPI educators and decision makers, we have to encourage community members to pursue the teaching profession and other positions of authority, while working with recruiters on how to better attract and support our students.

AAPI advocates, researchers, and community members must continue to mobilize and voice the desires, dreams, and demands for change to ensure that not only do all of our students count, but all of them will succeed in our public schools. Only then can we hope for educational equity by 2040.

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Notes

1. Personal correspondence, from Marc Morial to author, 2014

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