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Overview

Educational Data, Research Methods, Policies, and Practices that Matter for AAPIs

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The oft-cited proverb "It takes a whole village to raise a child" is clearly inadequate in the twenty-first century. To educate today's youth, who are more diverse in race, culture, family background, and life experiences than ever before in this nation's history, takes more than top-down educational reform. It takes an entire nation and the full participation of all constituents and institutions. Particularly for overlooked groups, it also requires policies and programs that matter, support and advance their needs, and include their input. Asian American and Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (NHPI) students are such groups.

Asian Americans and NHPIs have faced three major conundrums in addressing their educational issues. First is the problem of stereotypes. Asian Americans are seen publically as a "model minority," whereby, despite contrary evidence, all Asian Americans are deemed academically successful. NHPIs are made "invisible," lumped with Asian Americans, or discounted as distinct entities. These stereotypes contribute to the benign neglect they suffer by educators, researchers, and policy makers, which results in limited data and research on their education, and the unmet academic needs of segments of these populations. Second, even though the U.S. Census Bureau collects data on twenty-four Asian American ethnic categories, they are treated statistically and socially as a homogenous group, oftentimes combined with twenty-four ethnic categories of NHPIs, in much other data collection and research information. Asian American or Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) aggregate data is insufficient; disaggregated data uncovers their complexity in order to better serve sectors of these diverse groups. Third, racism and anti-immigrant biases have not vanished for Asian Americans or NHPIs, contrary

to the belief of many in U.S. society. Consequently, they should be included in policies, programs, and funding available to underserved racial and ethnic minority groups, from which they are often left out (CARE, 2008; Hune and Chan, 1997). The five policy briefs in this section provide new insights, findings, and recommendations regarding these three matters.

Four of the briefs make suggestions to strengthen research design and data collection. First, Julie J. Park discusses the value of survey research by using the disaggregated data in the UCLA Higher Education Research Institute's Cooperative Institutional Research Program's Freshman Survey, namely, gender and income level. The data reveal how Asian American first-year college students have changed over time from 1971 to 2005 and in what ways their experiences and attitudes have remained much the same. Park identifies "potentially troubling findings." For example, Asian American students' report lower self-perceptions of their leadership abilities compared to other groups. She makes recommendations for survey research design to enhance the collection of rich and nuanced data from Asian American students upon which educators and policy makers can act in order to improve educational outcomes.

In the second brief, Dina C. Maramba focuses on Southeast Asian American (SEAA) college students, an overlooked group. She also affirms the importance of disaggregated data that identifies SEAAs as having more economic and educational challenges than other Asian American groups. Maramba finds qualitative studies equally valuable in informing policy, calls for meaningful research on SEAAs, using both quantitative and ethnic-specific qualitative approaches, and advocates for collaboration with SEAA community organizations. She also recommends effective collection of disaggregated data at all stages of the pipeline in order to develop appropriate policies and support services for SEAA college students.

Two case studies by Nga-Wing Anjela Wong and Jacob Cohen and OiYan A. Poon, respectively, focus on the K-12 sector. They adopt qualitative methods and community-based research as valued modes of data collection, incorporate students' interviews and observations, and illustrate the role that Asian Americans do play and can play in the educational arena, if they are included. They point out such activities are insufficiently recognized by educators, researchers, and policy makers to the detriment of students' academic development.

The third brief by Wong views community-based organizations (CBOs) as a form of "community cultural wealth" and reinforces Maramba's suggestion to include CBOs in family-community-school partnerships. Based on ethnographic research, Wong documents the role and impact of an East Coast CBO she calls Harborview Chinatown Community Center and its out-of-school time (OST) programs in supporting low-income youth and their immigrant families in their efforts to navigate and negotiate the disconnects among school, home, and U.S. society that may hinder student success. Her recommendations include greater recognition and funding for culturally relevant CBOs and OST programs as well as suggestions for researchers.

The fourth brief by Cohen and Poon challenges the "charter school miracle" in post-Katrina New Orleans for Vietnamese Americans and other students. This study adopts a community-based Youth Participatory Action Research methodology that involves students as researchers in the evaluation of six New Orleans high schools, a marked contrast from quantitative measures used by officials. In incorporating students' views and experiences regarding academic rigor and access to quality teachers, for example, the study finds the persistence of disparities whereby Vietnamese American students are severely underserved. To expand the democratic process and increase the validity and relevance of research findings, Cohen and Poon recommend methodologies that incorporate the input of youth in educational policy reform in which they are the subjects being acted upon and from which they are currently excluded in what is largely a top-down process.

In the final brief, Robert T. Teranishi raises the national visibility of the Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions (AANAPISI) program and considers its importance in meeting the needs of AAPI students with economic challenges. This initiative is part of the federally funded Minority-Serving Institutions (MSI) program. In evaluating how the initial fifteen AANAPISI-designated campuses have used their funds, he finds that the three areas common to most academic and student support services, leadership and mentorship opportunities, and research and resource development, are having a measureable impact on the access and success of low-income AAPI college students. Teranishi's recommendations to strengthen the AANAPISI program include the full recognition of AANAPISI-designated institutions as MSIs and increasing their number and funding.

Collectively, these five policy briefs provide valuable new data. They also make recommendations for improved data collection, research approaches, policy development, and program funding to meet Asian American and NHPI educational needs.

References

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