

Background

Asian American and Pacific Islanders (APIs) are a diverse population whose heritages represent more than 50 ethnic groups and over 100 languages. One of the fastest growing groups in the nation, APIs comprised 5.4 percent of the U.S. population in 2006, compared to 2.9 percent in 1990 and 1.5 percent in 1980. Two factors playing important roles in this growth were changes in restrictive immigration laws in 1965 and refugee resettlement after the Vietnam War ended in 1975.

APIs have made enormous contributions to the civic, cultural, and economic fabric of America, but many have faced discrimination and stereotyping throughout U.S. history, including the stereotype of being seen by some as “perpetual foreigners” no matter how long their families have lived in the United States. This idea of foreignness helped lead to the unconstitutional Japanese American internment program as well as laws lasting well into the 20th century restricting immigration and citizenship. Today, the stereotype can still make a child feel as though he or she does not “fit in” at school.

APIs also face the challenge of the “model minority” myth, which inaccurately portrays (often using aggregate income, educational attainment, or test data) all APIs as uniformly doing well when there are large differences in average income, educational attainment, and other socioeconomic characteristics between API ethnic groups. The model minority myth is particularly dangerous since the idea of uniform achievement can divert resources from individual communities that may face disadvantages and challenges as a result of unique historical circumstances, including Southeast Asian and Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander communities.

Education Issues

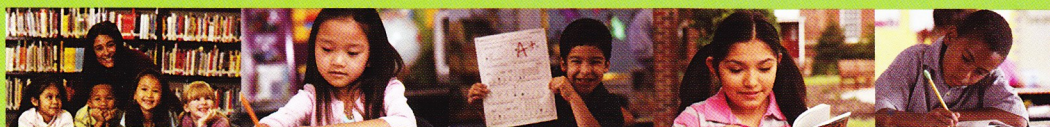
The API community faces educational issues similar to other minority groups, including the need for adequate funding for schools serving minority and

disadvantaged students, as well as other issues with a special impact on the community:

- Student achievement gaps need to be aggressively addressed for those ethnic groups facing unique challenges. For example, the percent of APIs age 25 and older without a high school education in the 2000 census ranged, depending on the Asian American ethnic group, from half the national average of 19.6 percent to nearly three times the national average.
- There is a need for more educational research focusing on individual API ethnic groups in order to better understand how each group of students is experiencing school and what steps need to be taken to support each group.
- With multiple languages spoken within the API community, there is a need for greater accommodation of English language learner students on assessment tests and in the classroom, as well as the allocation of more resources to involve parents who are non-native English speakers.
- A greater effort should be made to recruit and retain API educators. While over 4 percent of the K-12 student population is API, APIs constitute less than 2 percent of the teaching population.
- Programs should be increased to prepare educators to work with diverse students, and API history, culture, and issues should be covered in school curriculums.

API Community Issues

- Reducing language barriers in attaining social services, including education and health care
- Ensuring enforcement of anti-discrimination and hate crimes laws
- Reducing backlogs in family immigration and promoting immigrant rights



- Increasing political empowerment
- Securing proper funding for government safety net programs, such as Medicaid and the State Children's Health Insurance Program
- Continued funding of new legislation creating a higher education API serving designation

Demographics

- There are approximately 14.9 million U.S. residents who describe themselves as Asian alone or Asian in combination with one or more other races.
- There are approximately one million residents who describe themselves as Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander, either alone or in combination with one or more other races.
- Two-thirds of all Asian Americans are foreign born.
- The ten states with the largest API populations in 2000 were California, New York, Hawaii, Texas, New Jersey, Illinois, Washington, Florida, Virginia, and Massachusetts.
- The ten largest Asian American ethnicities are, in order: Chinese, Filipino, Asian Indian, Vietnamese, Korean, Japanese, Cambodian, Hmong, Laotian, and Pakistani.
- The six largest Pacific Islander ethnicities are, in order: Native Hawaiian, Samoan, Guamanian, Tongan, Fijian, and Marshallese.
- According to the 2000 census, the poverty rate for Asian Americans was 12.6 percent, similar to the national average of 12.4 percent—but among individual ethnicities, poverty rates varied from 6.3 percent to 37.8 percent. The poverty rate for Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders was 17.7 percent.

Resources

- General information and resources on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders can be found on the NEA web site at <http://www.nea.org/mco>.
- C.A.R.E: Strategies for Closing the Achievement Gaps is a new guide from the National Education Association providing a multi-themed approach to closing the achievement gaps. It can be found at http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/mf_CAREbook0804.pdf. For more information, contact NEA Human and Civil Rights, 202-822-7700, hcrinfo@nea.org.
- For more information on English Language Learners see <http://www.nea.org/tools/30405.htm>.
- NEA's 2005 Report on the Status of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in Education: Beyond the "Model Minority" Stereotype is available at http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/mf_aapiereport.pdf.
- U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Special Reports, *We the People, Asians in the United States*, (Washington, D.C.), <http://www.census.gov/prod/2004pubs/censr-17.pdf>.
- U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Special Reports, *We the People, Pacific Islanders in the United States*, (Washington, D.C.), <http://www.census.gov/prod/2005pubs/censr-26.pdf>.

