



Asian Americans for Equality

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THE COALITION FOR ASIAN AMERICAN CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

JOINT TESTIMONY OF

**ASIAN AMERICANS FOR EQUALITY (AAFE)
COALITION FOR ASIAN AMERICAN CHILDREN AND FAMILIES (CACF)
*PROJECT COLLEGEBOUND***

**Before the NYC Council Higher Education Committee Regarding
CUNY Graduation and Retention Rates**

Thursday, Oct. 21, 2010

Good afternoon, my name is Ailin Chen, and I am the Education Policy Manager for the Coalition for Asian American Children and Families (CACF). Since 1986, CACF is the nation's only pan-Asian children's advocacy organization, and works to improve the health and well-being of Asian Pacific American children and families in New York City in three key policy areas: education, health and child welfare. CACF challenges stereotypes of Asian Pacific Americans as a "model minority" and advocates on behalf of underserved families in our community, especially immigrants struggling with poverty and limited English skills. CACF promotes better policies, funding, and services for East Asian, South Asian, Southeast Asian, and Pacific Islander children, youth, and families.

I am joined here by my colleague Peter Gee, Associate Director of Resource Development and Programs for Asian Americans for Equality (AAFE). Established in 1974, Asian Americans for Equality, Inc. (AAFE) is a non-profit community-based development and civil rights organization. AAFE serves thousands of seniors, low-income and working individuals and families each year, offering an array of programs that encompass the organization's comprehensive approach to community development, including affordable housing preservation and development; housing, immigration, and social services; community planning; advocacy and community education; homeownership assistance; small business development; and youth leadership development and education. AAFE's client base is multiethnic and multicultural from all five boroughs of New York City.

We would like to thank Chair Rodriguez and members Higher Education Committee for holding this important oversight hearing to explore barriers and opportunities to improve CUNY graduation and retention rates.

CACF and AAFE are here today to provide recommendations for how to better prepare new immigrant students for college and careers, based on lessons learned from Project Collegebound,¹ a collaborative project of AAFE and CACF serving Asian Pacific American new immigrant students at Flushing International High School and Flushing High School. Project Collegebound staff are on-site four days a week and provide an array of supports including know your rights trainings, college admissions and financial literacy workshops as well as youth and parent leadership programs to increase their capacity to be effective self and community advocates. Project Collegebound serves approximately 200 number of youth and parents annually.

The Facts

As New York City begins to align itself more closely with state and federal education priorities, it is imperative that both the Department of Education (DOE) and City University system take a more nuanced look at the college and career readiness needs of New York City's diverse student population and communities. Consider the following:

- More than 12% or 1 million of New York City's population is Asian American.
- 4 out of 5 Asian Pacific Americans are foreign-born (69%).
- Asian Pacific Americans have the highest rate (28%) of linguistic isolation, meaning that no one over the age of 14 in a household speaks English well.
- 60% of Asian Pacific American children are born into poverty.

¹ Project Collegebound is one of four New York City collaboratives funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in conjunction with the Deutsche Bank Americas Foundation as part of the College Ready Communities Initiative which aims to improve educational outcomes and promote a college ready culture for students in high-needs communities.

- 26% of Asian Pacific Americans live in poverty, the second highest of all racial groups in New York City (NYC Center for Economic Opportunity, 2008).

With regard to education outcomes, the Asian model minority myth and stereotype continues to be pervasive² and as a result, APA students who make-up 13% of the New York City student population and who have a diverse range of educational service needs remain largely invisible in on-going education reform debates. CACF and AAFE is working hard through Project Collegebound, and joint education advocacy efforts to change that. Consider these facts:

- 1 out of 4 Asian Pacific American high school students does not graduate on time or at all.
- 1 out of 5 Asian Pacific American students is an English Language Learner.
- 1 out of 5 English Language Learner students is Asian Pacific American.

The City University of New York higher education system is the most accessible higher education option for new immigrant students and for many students the community colleges in particular are the first point of entry towards achieving a four-year and/or post-graduate degree. As research has demonstrated, while Asian American students often enter community colleges at a higher rate, it often takes them longer to graduate or they are at great risk for dropping out because they are unprepared for the academic, social and financial responsibilities that are required for success.³

Project Collegebound: Lessons Learned and Recommendations

Preparing new immigrant students to succeed in college is critically important. Results from a preliminary evaluation conducted earlier this year of New York City-based College Ready Communities collaboratives indicated that many of these steps can be successfully introduced at the high school level and need not wait til college admission. For new immigrant students, the road to college and career readiness requires not only English language acquisition and high school graduation but also a full array of intensive, social, cultural and family supports to ensure that they can access and succeed in college.

CACF and AAFE urge the New York City Council to work with both the NYC Department of Education (DOE) and the City University of New York (CUNY) to **develop and market a package of college and career readiness resources for new immigrant students and their families that includes:**

- **College admissions and financial aid materials and workshops that are provided in languages that reflect the ethnic composition of the New York City student population.** For example, in New York City, the Asian-Pacific-American population consists of 12% of the total population and consists of more than 45 distinct ethnic groups speaking over 200 different languages and dialects. Although the DOE is required to provide language translation services, there is no such requirement in the CUNY system and additionally, both systems often lack the capacity to find appropriate language translation services for specific ethnic languages.
- **Cultural competency training for DOE and CUNY teaching and counseling staff so that they can provide new immigrant students and their parents with counseling that addresses the challenges of acculturation and learning to navigate a K-12 and higher education system and approach to education** that can in many instances be significantly

² The National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education and The College Board. *Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, Facts, Not Fiction: Setting the Record Straight*. 2008. Available online: <http://professionals.collegeboard.com/profdownload/08-0608-AAPI.pdf>.

³ The College Board. *The Educational Crisis Facing Young Men of Color*. January 2010. Available online: <http://professionals.collegeboard.com/profdownload/educational-crisis-facing-young-men-of-color.pdf>.

different from that in their native countries. For example, at parent teacher meetings, Project Collegebound staff often find that parents lack an understanding of what it means to be college ready and what college admissions officers value in the admissions process. As a result, parents place an enormous amount of pressure on their children to succeed academically and achieve high grades to the exclusion of youth development driven measures of college readiness (e.g. developing social skills, leadership qualities, and a sense of future orientation)

- **Designing an integrated college and career ready curriculum and pedagogical approach that enables new immigrant students to achieve the multiple learning goals of English language and subject matter acquisition, along with acquiring college and career ready skills.** Project Collegebound students often spend the bulk of their time and energy improving their English skills or focusing on passing the Regents exams in order to achieve their educational and career goals. However, despite their diligence, many of our students are unable to fully engage in college or the job market because they lack practical knowledge about how to navigate college and career, in addition to the self-advocacy skills needed in order to achieve their goals. New immigrant students require comprehensive support to gain entry into and succeed in college and career.

Additionally, DOE and CUNY must increase the number of DOE and CUNY college counseling and advisement staff and reduce caseloads. With caseloads of approximately 378:1 at large, and 80:1 at smaller high schools within the College Ready Communities network, it is nearly impossible for school staff to provide the level of guidance and support that any student would need during the college advisement process, let alone immigrant students who have specialized needs. While both DOE and CUNY have experienced resource constraints at the local level in recent years, we urge you to allocate new federal dollars to reducing caseloads and improving the quality of college advisement services.

Finally, as both DOE and CUNY develop, track, and measure college and career readiness, of New York City public school students we urge the Council to work with both institutions to ensure that student demographic and educational outcome data is disaggregated by both race and ethnicity and made publicly available in order to more effectively identify needs and target college and career readiness resources.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify and we would be happy to answer any questions you may have.