CACF

Coalition For Asian American Children+Families

ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICANS FOR EDUCATIONAL EQUITY

VALUES AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

BACKGROUND

Asian Pacific American (APA) students account for 16.2% of the New York City student population with over 180,000 APA students attending NYC public schools. Moreover, in NYC alone, the APA community consists of over 40 ethnicities, tens of languages and religions, and a multitude of cultures and immigration experiences. In fact, Bengali, Chinese, Korean, and Urdu are four of the top ten languages spoken in the City [1]. Yet, APA students' needs remain invisible in an education system that continues to overlook their challenges and barriers as well as their hopes and dreams [2].

Educational equity requires putting systems in place that acknowledge and address the specific challenges, histories, and needs impacting students from different backgrounds, to holistically support them as they learn [3]. Despite the systemic inequities APA public school students and their families face, they are often excluded from or misrepresented in discussions on educational equity issues including school integration, opportunity gaps, systemic racism, and poverty. However, APA students continue to be impacted by

overcrowding in schools, bullying, lack of quality language accessible and culturally-responsive services, underreferrals in special education, underfunding of programs for English Language learners, and more [4].

Model Minority Myth

We must continue to challenge the the Asian model minority myth, which erases the experiences of APAs such as English language learners, students with disabilities, low-income students, immigrant students (specifically those who are undocumented, refugee, and/or newly arrived), students in temporary housing, students facing homelessness, students in foster care, students in juvenile facilities, and students from underrepresented ethnic and language backgrounds, including those with families facing linguistic isolation due to requiring services in low-incidence languages - in other words, marginalized APA students [5]. Even more egregious is that the perceived success of 'Asian' students in education, particularly around testing, is consistently used as a reason to validate injustices against other students of color. Because our community is highly immigrant and mostly limited English proficient

(LEP), many lack the racial literacy to understand the racialized nature of these inequities [6]. Their vulnerability to misinformation and their fear and anger in response to reforms are rooted solely in the scarcity model [7].

As one of our Asian American Student Advocacy Project (ASAP) Youth Leaders says, "The APA community itself is rife with inequities, colorism, and anti-Blackness. Yet among the flurry of ignorant, accusatory voices, we are here and committed to working with our fellow students of color, immigrant students, and marginalized students for equitable access to resources and opportunities because, truthfully, we need it too."

APA Diversity

Just as the nuances of the APA community's positionality in racial justice and equity in public schools must be explored, its rich diversity must be recognized as an asset. The community is not a monolith, and continuing to treat it as such does a disservice both to its members and to any school environment. When they enter the classroom or interact with educators and school staff, APA students and families bring unique and valuable funds of knowledge. They may have recently emigrated to the United States, or their families may have arrived decades or over a century ago. They may have personal or deep-rooted experience with Western imperialism and/or colonialism. They may speak or understand multiple languages. They may observe a host of cultural or religious traditions. Inevitably, all of these traits and innumerable others impact APA students' and families' experiences in public schools - which may themselves be parallel or contradictory to one another. Whenever it interfaces with APA students and families, the education system must honor these characteristics, refusing to allow them to sustain the perpetual foreigner stereotype that has been directed at APA people since they first came to the US.

It is true that the complex diversity of our community can make outreach difficult within the current system [8]. **However, the Department of Education and schools can take key steps to address inequities that involve building and funding strong partnerships with community-based organizations who often have the language proficiency and cultural responsiveness to help support families, collecting and providing disaggregated data, and increasing the representation of APA educators and staff** [9].

Values
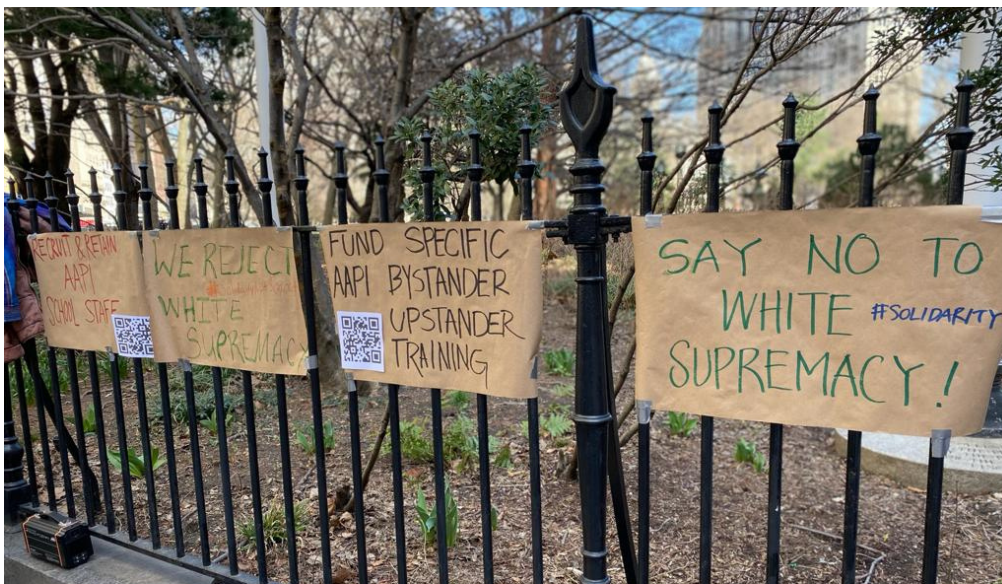
Even more so, as Asian Pacific American (APA) advocates for educational equity, we are calling for an education system that not only values diversity, inclusivity, and integration, but also stands in solidarity with and empowers all marginalized communities to have a voice in the system. This cannot exist until:

There exists a democratic, equity-minded education system that prioritizes the most marginalized learners and is powered by the input of students and families. Strong community-informed policies can be developed if we work through the hard discussions, including those about gender, race, class, immigration history, and ability. The Department of Education must create and support processes that capture and implement the input of families and students, policymakers and advocates, and educators from APA, Black, Latinx, and all other marginalized communities.

There is a reformed pedagogy that incorporates social-emotional learning and an inclusive curriculum, fostering a safe, healthy, and engaging school culture. We need our educators and school staff, including school counselors and social workers, to be trained in cultural responsiveness to better support APA immigrant students in their social-emotional learning. A truly inclusive curriculum requires fully implementing a culturally responsive-sustaining education framework (CRSE) that fosters a sense of belonging and incorporates various narratives from historically marginalized communities [10]. CRSE for APAs includes deconstructing the Asian model minority myth through data disaggregation, language access, and culturally responsive support. CRSE would not only allow for increased visibility and understanding of APAs, but also illustrate where they belong in conversations surrounding racial justice.

Student success measurements are used to help determine to what extent students are being adequately supported with their academic and emotional well-being, and are not wielded as justification to take resources away from classrooms. We believe that student success measurements should transcend traditional test-taking measures and expand to include non-traditional measures that holistically consider students' interpersonal experiences with peers and adults, academic abilities and interests, and physical and emotional wellness. To understand student learning and success, the system must also evaluate educational inputs, including school facilities and availability of high-quality teaching and resources. These will allow the education system to evaluate how well students are doing on a more comprehensive level and provide adequate and equitable resources to support them.

Recommendations

To address the inequities that APA students and their families face in the NYC public school system, the Mayor and the Department of Education must adopt recommendations in the following areas [11]:

1. **Admissions & Enrollment**

2. **Beyond Test Scores: Data Disaggregation in Education**

3. **Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning**

4. **Equity for English Language Learners**

5. **Equity for Students with Disabilities**

6. **Family Engagement & Support**

7. **Mental Health & Well-Being**

1. ADMISSIONS & ENROLLMENT

APA students in NYC will benefit from an integrated public school system that is inclusive of and responsive to their needs [12]. In the 2019-2020 school year, over 95% of all public schools in NYC served APA students [13]. While APAs are overrepresented in student bodies of a number of selective screened schools, the reality is that most actually attend non-selective schools that are often overcrowded and underfunded. Although public discourse about APA students has historically centered on the specialized high schools, according to the Independent Budget Office (IBO), of the 54,715 Asian students enrolled in grades 9-12 in 2019-2020, only 10,354 attended specialized high schools. In other words, over 80% of APA high school students do not attend a specialized high school. Moreover, when considering the entire school system, a mere 5.6 percent of all APA students, or 10,354 out of 184,160 students, attend a specialized high school [14]. A large majority of APA students in NYC are from first-generation immigrant and low-income, limited English proficient families.

95%

NYC schools serving Asian students

94%

Asian students (in all grades) who do not attend a specialized high school

81%

Asian high school students who do not attend a specialized high school

Recommendations

- Considering the vast diversity of the population, provide a more specific analysis of inequities in admissions and enrollment faced by marginalized pockets of the APA community.
- Repeal the Hecht-Calandra Act and eliminate the use of standardized testing as the sole measure for admissions.
- Eliminate the use of academic ranking for admissions to screened schools.
- Develop a system reliant on inclusionary and equitable admissions processes guaranteeing a diverse student body in all dimensions, in part by prioritizing seats for students marginalized by socioeconomic status, race, ability, and limited English proficiency [15].
- Increase investments in neighborhood or 'zoned' schools and build more high schools in northern Queens and southern Brooklyn, where many APA communities are concentrated and face limited local options for their children.
- Utilize language accessible and culturally appropriate outreach to ensure that families are not only informed about high school options, but also fully understand and feel secure about the options that best meet the needs of their children.

2. BEYOND TEST SCORES: DATA DISAGGREGATION IN EDUCATION

By erasing the individual, unique experiences of many APA subgroups, particularly those who are the most marginalized, the model minority myth perpetuates the falsehood that APA students comprise a monolith naturally successful in education. Clear, transparent data disaggregation dispels this myth and acknowledges the diversity of the APA community, while allowing for the opportunity to recognize and target APA students' needs. For example, data from Washington show that for the 2013-2014 school year, the graduation rate for Cambodian and Laotian students was below 70 percent, while it was at 95 percent for Japanese and Taiwanese students [16]. Researchers describe that Southeast Asian and Pacific Islander students are much more likely to be disciplined than their East Asian peers [17]. They conclude that although Laotian, Cambodian, and students of other ethnic groups face great structural barriers to their education, school officials do not notice these disparities and disregard their needs. Ultimately, because data remain aggregated in New York, we are unable to identify potentially similar trends and struggles affecting APA students city- and statewide.

Recommendations

- Collect and make transparent disaggregated enrollment data of APAs in all schools and districts by ethnicity, gender, home language, ELL status, ability, and socioeconomic status, and ensure the ability to cross tabulate between fields.
- Collect and make transparent disaggregated data on academic outcomes, suspension and discipline, IEP referral, and G&T enrollment of APA students by ethnicity, gender, home language, ELL status, ability, and socioeconomic status, and provide analyses of disparities in rates.
- Disaggregate NYC School Survey data by ethnicity, home language, ELL status, ability and socioeconomic status to identify patterns of communities that may be experiencing school culture differently.
- Use these data to transition to a performance-based assessment of learning, through mastery teaching and grading, which measures a student's competency based on the attainment of specific skills and content across disciplines rather than arbitrary test scores and grades [18].

3. CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING AND LEARNING

Although the percentage of APA students in NYC has doubled since 1990 to 16.2%, according to IBO, the share of APA teachers is only 7.2% in the 2018-19 school year. These disproportionate rates exist in spite of evidence showing that when students of color learn from teachers who look like them, they perform better academically and feel a greater sense of belonging. Similarly, ethnic studies courses across the country have resulted in academic, social, and emotional benefits for students who take them. Moreover, teaching Asian American history and culture as well as the history of solidarity between communities of color will provide all students with a greater understanding of our communities, which is a critical way to dismantle the model minority myth and counter anti-Asian sentiment. To ensure APAs are adequately supported, the education system must increase the representation of APA educators and other school staff. The presence of staff who speak the languages and/or are responsive to the cultures of families will facilitate schools becoming welcoming environments for families as well [19].
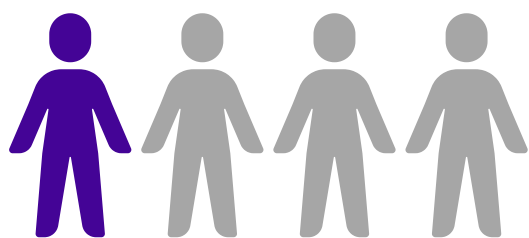
Recommendations

- Expand current pipelines used to recruit APA educators, and further develop pipelines to increase APA representation among teachers, guidance counselors, social workers, and administrators.
- Establish specific pipelines for multilingual and APA educators to expand and improve programs for ELLs, as well as multilingual and APA special education teachers and related service providers to better serve students with disabilities.
- Collect and provide disaggregated data by ethnicity and languages spoken on educators, administrators, and school staff including guidance counselors and social workers.
- Center diverse APA experiences in all aspects of the CRSE framework, including standard academic courses and by launching ethnic studies courses, and infuse CRSE into accountability measures.
- Institute ethnic studies in K-12 that elevate the visibility of APAs throughout American history and society as well as support all students to recognize our connections to other historically marginalized communities, centering the history of solidarity. Curricula should provide ways for students to explore their family's immigration history as a part of healthy identity development [20].
- Train educators and school staff on the history of anti-Asian discrimination, the racialization of Asian Americans, the contributions of APA people, and how to interrupt and intervene in anti-Asian hostility and harassment in schools.
- Fund and implement implicit and belief-based bias training for teachers and administrators to address their own biases against APA students. Trainings should incorporate APA educators' experiences and culture.

4. EQUITY FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

At 23.22%, APA students make up the second highest group of ELL students in New York City [21]. Of the top ten languages ELLs speak at home, five are languages spoken by APAs, including Chinese, Arabic, Bengali, Urdu, and Punjabi [22]. Arabic, Chinese, Bengali, and Urdu are also all within the top ten languages spoken by Students with Interrupted/Inconsistent Formal Education (SIFE), at second, third, fourth, and eighth highest respectively [23]. 42 unidentified languages spoken by SIFE are included as "other," and due to the high numbers of APA languages in NYC, it is likely that additional APA languages are spoken by SIFE [24]. As a whole, ELL students remain largely invisible in conversations on educational equity, even as their needs are significant and they continue to be underserved in the school system.

Nearly 25% of all ELLs in NYC public schools are Asian.

50%

Of the top ten languages ELLs speak at home, five are languages spoken by APAs: Chinese, Arabic, Bengali, Urdu, and Punjabi.
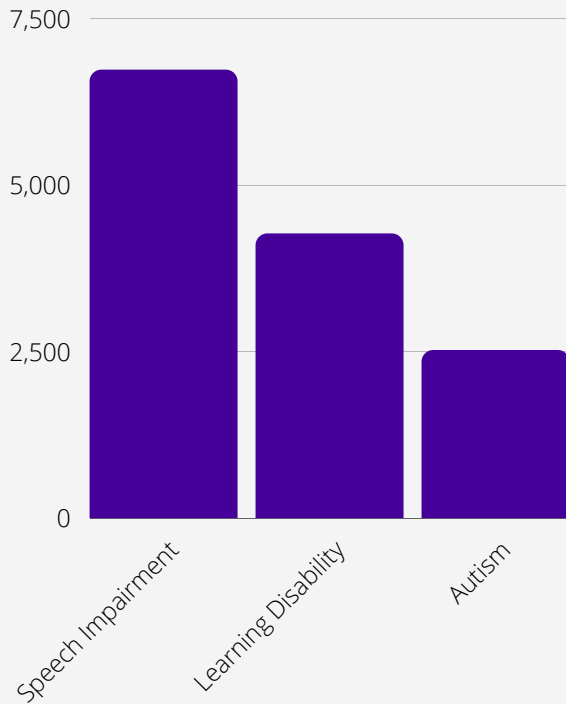
Recommendations

- Disaggregate data on APA ELLs by specific subpopulation based on language and ethnicity.
- Collect disaggregated data on graduation and TASC/GED diversion for marginalized pockets of APA ELLs.
- Provide disaggregated enrollment data of ELLs in screened high schools.
- Fund additional support for ELLs, such as ESL teachers to work with students after school. This is particularly critical for those who struggle with English language and reading comprehension, which are gaps that bleed into struggles with other subjects.
- Provide enrichment for ELLs addressing the fact that those who test out of ELL identification often have inconsistent levels of English proficiency and may not receive adequate support with English language acquisition.
- Reevaluate ELL assessments to ensure that they are accurately designating ELL status.
- Reassess the screening tool and its implementation for Students with Interrupted/Inconsistent Formal Education (SIFE) to more explicitly incorporate the ways in which students' educational experiences differ.
- Improve collection and availability of data on SIFE, including ethnicity, academic outcomes, graduation rates, and those with disabilities [25].

5. EQUITY FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

In the 2019-2020 school year, 15,805 APA students in NYC had an Individualized Education Program (IEP) [26]. In addition, 2,323 APA students attended District 75 schools, which provide highly specialized instructional support for students with significant challenges [27]. Overall, APA students are more likely to be diagnosed with speech or language impairments than their peers, partly because ELL students are disproportionally classified as having these impairments. Indeed, the highest disability classification for APAs in NYC was speech or language impairment, at 6,278, followed by learning disability, at 4,269, and autism, at 2,519 [28]. In addition, a number of APA students are ELLs with disabilities: five of the top ten home languages spoken by ELLs with IEPs are APA languages, namely Chinese, Arabic, Bengali, Urdu, and Punjabi, along with 105 other unlisted languages which likely include APA languages as well [29]. At the same time, throughout the school system, APA students in NYC have been consistently underrepresented of those receiving special education services. APA girls comprise 7.84% of students in NYC but only 1.81% of students receiving special education services, while APA boys are 8.47% of all students and 4.55% of those receiving services [30]. Similar to ELLs, APA students with disabilities are often overlooked in policy discussions, even while they and their families frequently face large barriers to accessing a free appropriate public education, including lack of access to translation and interpretation that may be essential, or not receiving adequate legally mandated services.

THREE HIGHEST DISABILITY CLASSIFICATIONS FOR ASIAN AMERICAN STUDENTS IN NYC

ASIAN AMERICANS STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES UNDERREPRESENTED


- APA BOYS
- APA GIRLS
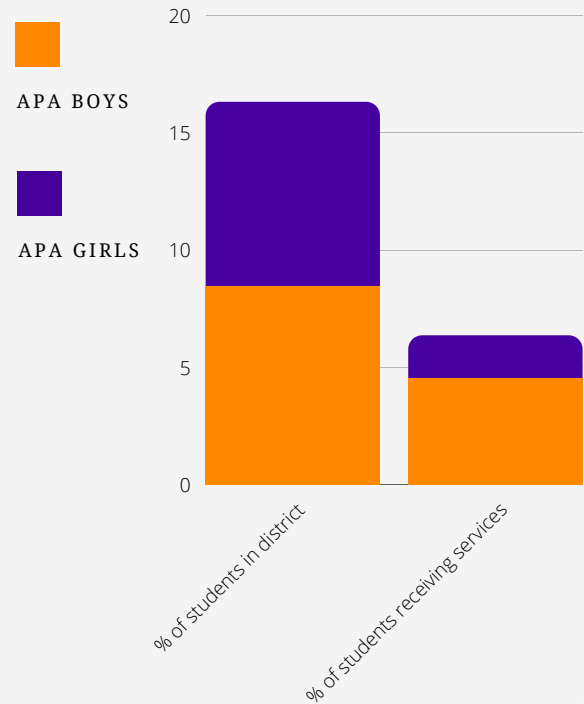
Recommendations

- Address the under referral of APA students for special education services to ensure that need are properly identified and met.
- Develop and provide professional development for teachers and administrators on distinguishing between language acquisition and special education needs.
- Provide in-language information and culturally responsive processes for school-based communications to address the needs of APA students with disabilities and their families.
- Fund the language access mandate for IEP translations.
- Provide oversight on the misuse of language paraprofessionals.
- Collect and provide disaggregated data by ethnicity and language on students with disabilities as well as related service providers.
- Develop a pipeline for representative special education teachers and related service providers.
- Partner with community-based health organizations that can help with early intervention in ensuring that parents are able to connect to the DOE supports when children enter the education system.

6. FAMILY ENGAGEMENT & SUPPORT

Compared to the citywide rate at 25%, nearly half of APA New Yorkers of working age are limited English proficient, and LEP rates of specific languages, including Chinese at 63% and Korean at 52%, are higher [31]. Moreover, at 42%, APAs have the highest rate of linguistic isolation of any group in NYC, meaning that no one in the household over the age of 14 speaks English well or at all [32]. These LEP rates make language-accessible and culturally-responsive outreach even more essential for APA families to be truly included into their children's school communities. Meaningful family engagement is more than simply celebrating cultural holidays or reserving a bit of time for families to describe their traditions in the classroom, both of which are common ways to superficially include APA parents. Schools must cultivate environments where educators and families can develop authentic relationships, families are viewed as leaders, and language access and cultural responsiveness are prioritized, not treated as an afterthought.

LINGUISTUIC CHALLENGES
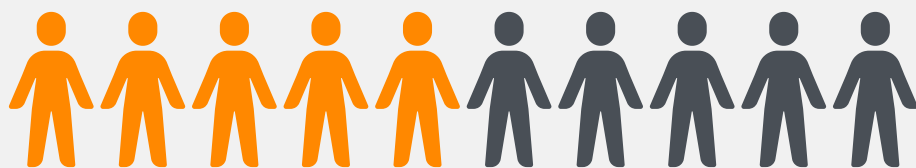
Nearly half of APA New Yorkers of working age are limited English proficient, and LEP rates of specific languages, including Chinese at 63% and Korean at 52%, are higher.

42% of APA households are linguistically isolated, meaning that no one in the household over the age of 14 speaks English well or at all.

Recommendations

- Invest in more school and community-based organization (CBO) partnerships in school districts with APA immigrant populations that are often hard to reach, to provide language accessible and culturally responsive related social support and enrichment programs. Examples include expanding models like the community schools, which prioritize family and community engagement as a core evidence-based feature and have been shown to positively affect student attendance, teachers' reports of shared responsibility for student success, and students' sense of connectedness to others in the school building [33].
- Prioritize timely and comprehensive communication with CBO partners on systemwide updates to avoid disruptions in services and fully include CBO staff in planning.
- Provide CBO-specific trainings or webinars for staff to build capacity and skills.
- Ensure that CBOs are included in the development of family engagement initiatives, so that they are not solely pulled in after all key decisions have been made.
- Convene service providers across schools on a regular basis to share best practices with one another and with the DOE.
- Allocate additional funding for schools to expand language access support to better reach limited English proficient parents and students. One program that can be particularly effective at schools with smaller APA populations: Develop a professional pipeline by compensating parents to train and serve as interpreters and/or liaisons for their communities.
- Communicate with families through multiple means, including phone calls, emails, mail, and other methods.
- Provide more school-based resources for economic opportunities for APA immigrant parents and families.
- Work with immigrant families and communities to incorporate cultural practices into the school environment.
- Ensure that trainings for parents and families are inclusive of and relevant to APA communities, cognizant of APA experiences, and responsive to the ways in which APA individuals may encounter difficult conversations or situations.

7. MENTAL HEALTH & WELL-BEING

Due to cultural stigma, lack of culturally responsive providers, and lack of knowledge, APAs are less likely to seek support for mental health concerns than other groups. However, these supports are pivotal to their well-being - in 2017, APAs were the sole racial/ethnic group for which suicide was one of the top ten leading causes of death in NYC [34]. The COVID-19 pandemic has also exacerbated anti-Asian sentiment and violence across the country. Between March 19, 2020 and February 28, 2021, 3,795 anti-Asian incident reports on COVID-19 have been collected by STOP AAPI HATE [35]. 13.62 percent, the second largest percentage nationwide, of those reporting incidents were in New York State [36]. In 2020, more than 80 percent of 10- to 18-year-old Chinese Americans directly experienced or witnessed COVID-19-related discrimination or harassment either in person or online [37]. Higher levels of Islamophobia have also been reported [38]. These events have further illuminated the need for comprehensive mental health services for our students in schools. Yet - mental health support is often perceived by the APA community as a Western solution to a Western problem, and considering the dearth of culturally responsive providers, this summation is not entirely inaccurate. Fully incorporating social emotional learning and emphasizing how vital it is to helping students handle these challenges will allow APA to students develop a strong sense of identity, self-confidence, and belonging, as well as help them navigate changing perspectives and beliefs in the world around them.

Recommendations

- Collect and provide data on guidance counselors, social workers, and other staff who support mental health and well being, disaggregated by ethnicity and languages spoken.
- Address anti-Asian and xenophobic bullying among students without resorting to traditional disciplinary measures.
- Provide in-language culturally responsive outreach and education to our communities regarding social emotional learning and Respect for All so that families are not inclined to undermine efforts by schools to emphasize it. Include clear language about how these programs address bullying, and explain how they are equally as important as academics for student learning.
- Publicize and provide language accessible and culturally responsive social and emotional supports specifically designed for or explicitly relevant to APA students and their families, perhaps emphasizing peer support models grounded in collectivism, with targeted support for immigrant students and families.
- For older APA students, particularly immigrants, adopt interventions that provide a safe space for students to seek and receive support without isolating them from their families in light of cross-cultural intergenerational conflicts, and without resorting to assumptions or stereotypes of the presence of these conflicts.

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