



National Council of Asian Pacific Americans

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March 26, 2010

The Committee on Education and Labor
1713 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

RE: Comments on the Proposed Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act

Dear Chairman Miller and Committee Members:

The National Council of Asian Pacific Americans (NCAPA) appreciates the opportunity to submit our comments and priorities for the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), formerly known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB).

NCAPA is a coalition of twenty-seven Asian Pacific American organizations around the country that represents the interests of the greater Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community and provides a national voice for AAPI issues. As a result of the “model minority myth” – a misconception that all Asian Americans excel academically and face no obstacles – the educational needs of many AAPI students and entire AAPI subgroups are often overlooked and any actions that should be taken to address these disparities never come to fruition.

NCAPA applauds the Committee on Education and Labor for taking initiative to seek bipartisan reform and recommendations from the public. In order to ensure that the educational needs of all AAPIs are met, we hope that the reauthorization of ESEA will address the following needs:

I. Disaggregated Research and Data

While we believe the gathering and reporting of disaggregated data by race, gender, disability, language and economic status is the step in the right direction to ensure equitable education for all our students, we recommend that the reauthorization of ESEA further strengthens data collection by disaggregating data by not only race but also by ethnicity (e.g. Vietnamese, Chinese, Samoan). Aggregate test data on AAPI students often reinforce the “model minority myth.” In reality, the AAPI category is comprised of individuals and ethnicities with incredibly diverse backgrounds, experiences, challenges, educational achievement and needs. NCAPA believes that ESEA should be amended to:

- Require states and school districts with significant proportions of AAPI students to collect, report, and utilize achievement and education attainment data that is disaggregated by ethnicity to better reflect the real experiences and needs of individual AAPI ethnic student subgroups.

II. Educational Services and Assessments for all English Language Learners

Nearly one out of four AAPI students is an English Language Learner (ELL) and/or lives in a linguistically isolated household where one or more parents have limited English proficiency¹. Unfortunately, most school districts are not required to and therefore do not provide sufficient services for ELL students, especially in some cases for those who speak a language other than Spanish. Additionally, as stated above, the AAPI category is comprised of communities that are incredibly diverse and thus AAPI ELL students are also very diverse. Some are recent immigrants and refugees while others are American born; some would benefit from native language assessments while others may not be able to read and write in their second language. NCAPA believes that ESEA should be strengthened to:

Services and Programs:

- Create and fund policies for states and school districts to develop, implement, and maintain funding for robust bilingual programs.
- Encourage school districts to improve the processes for assessing newly enrolled students for ELL services and for identifying when ELL students become proficient in English.
- Increase the resources for the preparation and training of all teachers with ELL students, as well as increasing and diversifying the number of ELL specialists.
- Increase the resources available to ensure cultural competence of teachers working with AAPI students.

Assessments:

- Provide incentives for states to develop and utilize native language assessments for ELL populations that utilize population triggers at the district or county level to determine mandated use.
- Mandate and provide funds for states to develop accountability systems that are based on multiple measures in addition to testing.
- Ensure that school accountability systems are designed to bring additional resources to diverse school populations, instead of diverting resources.

III. School Interventions and Innovation for Struggling Schools

NCAPA is committed to NCLB's goal of supporting students in struggling schools. However, we also believe that any school intervention must be in the best interest of students, parents, and community members. NCAPA believes that in school intervention, ESEA must:

¹ Randolph Capps, et al. *The New Demography of America's Schools: Immigration and the No Child Left Behind Act*, Urban Institute (2005).

- Require schools, districts, and states to create programs to closely monitor and support students at-risk of dropping out, including ELL students, to ensure that such students are not illegally or unfairly discharged, pushed out, or faced with a loss of services through the intervention process.
- Ensure that that new schools continue to enroll and serve the student populations of the communities in which these schools are located.

IV. Safe School Environments for All Students

Students cannot fully engage and take part in their education at school if they do not feel safe. NCAPA recommends that ESEA should be amended to:

- Require schools to take additional steps to prevent, keep records of, and report bullying and harassment.
- Require schools to create and/or support programs within the school that are run by community-based organizations and that are meant to increase inclusiveness and educate school administrators, teachers, staff, and students about issues of diversity.

V. Integration and Discrimination

Our nation should be committed to ensuring that all students are welcomed at school, regardless of immigration status, that students from all neighborhoods, regardless of wealth, have a real opportunity to achieve, and that our schools are integrated. ESEA should therefore:

- Create and fund policies that promote school integration, adequate and equitable school funding, and the elimination of achievement gaps.
- Ensure that schools are rigorously following the Supreme Court's decision in Plyler v. Doe and are not inquiring, directly or indirectly, into immigration status.

VI. Diversity in the Education Workforce

APIs are under-represented in the teaching profession at a time when diversity is important in welcoming a diverse student body to our public schools. For example, while Asian American students make up 4.4% of the student population, Asian American teachers only represent at most 2% of teachers nationwide. ESEA should:

- Provide resources that will help schools recruit and retain a diverse workforce that reflects the makeup of local student populations.

VII. Parent Involvement

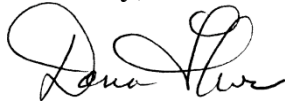
In order to ensure that schools are accountable to our students, parents need to be fully engaged. According to the 2000 Census, one out of four AAPI households are linguistically isolated – meaning that no member over the age of 14 speaks only English

or speaks English “very well”—and for some AAPI subgroups the proportion is even larger. For example, 45%, nearly half, of Vietnamese American households are linguistically isolated. Without the proper culturally and linguistically appropriate services, AAPI parents may not be able to fully engage with their child’s education. NCAPA believes that ESEA needs to:

- Provide funding for school districts to provide mandated interpretation for important school meetings and translation services for school documents.
- Create and fund policies that require schools to implement parental-involvement plans that are culturally compatible and linguistically accessible.
- Support policies and funding for communities to engage parents in local schools.
- Fully fund schools to provide culturally and linguistically competent home-school counselors.

If you have any questions regarding these comments, please contact Monica Thammarath at 202.667.4690 or monica@searac.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Doua Thor". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Doua" being more prominent and the last name "Thor" following in a similar style.

Doua Thor

Education Task Force Co-Chair, National Council of Asian Pacific Americans (NCAPA)
Executive Director, Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC)