

Asian American and Pacific Islander Serving Institutions: The Motivations and  
Challenges behind Seeking a Federal Designation

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## Abstract

This article examines the development of legislation to create a federal designation for Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) serving institutions. Specifically, the article draws from interviews with nineteen policy makers, congressional staffers, and community advocates in order to address their motivations for establishing this designation and the related challenges that they encountered. Besides the complexities of ushering legislation through Congress, one of the major challenges highlighted includes the lack of political infrastructure for advocating Asian American issues related to education. Recommendations for the future sustainability of federal support for AAPI serving institutions are also discussed.

## Introduction

On September 27, 2007, President George W. Bush signed the College Cost Reduction and Access Act (CCRAA) of 2007. Its passage into law was especially noteworthy because the Bush administration had previously threatened to veto the bill, which increased Pell Grant funding by eleven billion dollars (American Council on Education, 2007). Also folded into the CCRAA was a provision that would create a federal designation for Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) serving institutions and make five million dollars a year available over two years for eligible institutions.<sup>1</sup> Such a designation was first introduced to Congress five years earlier as H.R. 4825 by Representative Robert Underwood (D-Guam), but federal recognition of AAPI serving institutions did not become a reality until the President signed the CCRAA. Then, on August 14, 2008, President Bush signed the Higher Education Opportunity Act, which further expanded the eligible programs that AAPI serving institutions grants can fund and extended the program to at least 2013.

Why did the process to create a federal AAPI serving institution designation take more than five years when federal designations for minority serving institutions (MSIs) that target other racial/ethnic populations were already well established? First, achieving new federal designations for MSIs is an arduous task. After all, eight years passed between the first introduction of legislation to recognize Hispanic serving institutions (HSIs) and the signing of the 1992 Higher Education Act that formally recognized and allocated special funding to HSIs (Santiago, 2006). Besides HSIs, other MSI designations exist for Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU), Tribally

Controlled Colleges and Universities (TCCU), and Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian (AN/NH) serving institutions. Each of these designations was established under unique historical circumstances, and each underwent a separate process for attaining legislative approval (Gasman, 2008).

Second, convincing Congress to provide funding to strengthen institutions that serve a critical mass of AAPI students faced an uphill battle from the very beginning. According to Park and Teranishi (2008), one major obstacle was the widespread stereotyping of Asian Americans as the model minority success story of education, in which all Asian Americans are perceived as high achievers in higher education (Teranishi, 2008). Thus the educational needs of this diverse population are often misunderstood or ignored. As Lee (2008) asserts, the model minority stereotype contributes to the “de-minoritization” of Asian Americans. Arguably, the prior absence of AAPIs from the MSI grouping reflects this deminoritization, and efforts to bring AAPIs into the MSI group sought to reinforce the status of AAPIs as minorities for political, pragmatic, and symbolic reasons.

Because the recent addition of an AAPI serving designation to the set of other established MSI designations contributes to defining what it means to be a “minority” in educational and policy settings, it is especially important to examine how approval was made possible, as well as the challenges it faced along the way. To do this, we draw mostly from individual interviews in order to understand how this legislation emerged, evolved, and ultimately passed. Specifically, we focus on policy makers’ motivations for seeking the designation and some challenges related to advocating for its approval. We

conclude by addressing future concerns for the federal funding of AAPI serving institutions, as well as implications for advocacy efforts by AAPI communities in the area of education.

From August 2006 to May 2007, we conducted nineteen semistructured interviews with policy makers, employees of nonprofit organizations, and community advocates. We also examined documents such as policy memos and correspondences written by advocates working on the legislation. In most cases, pseudonyms are used for interviewees, except in some specific quotations related to the history of the legislation. In these cases, permission was secured from participants to use their names. We begin by recounting the history of this milestone designation.

#### Moving from Recommendation to Reality

As noted by Park and Teranishi (2008), the effort to establish a MSI designation for AAPIs began in the late 1990s. A series of events at that time made it clear that there continued to be widespread misunderstanding and ignorance regarding the educational needs of AAPI students. According to Park and Teranishi, policy makers and leaders of community-based organizations became increasingly frustrated with how AAPI educational needs were being mischaracterized and ignored. This frustration reached a tipping point shortly after the College Board released its report *Reaching the Top* (1999). The report only singled out the high achievement of middle-class East Asian American students and completely ignored any of the educational challenges that other AAPI students might face, suggesting to community advocates that the general policy community did not view AAPIs as having serious educational needs. The College

Board report ignited discussions around AAPIs in education, resulting in two congressional forums that addressed AAPI issues with a particular focus on the needs of Southeast Asian Americans. In June 1999, the White House Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders was formed, and in 2001, the commission issued an interim report that recommended the creation of a federal designation for AAPI serving institutions and organizations to expand the capacity of these groups to better serve the AAPI community (President's Advisory Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islanders, 2001). The effort to realize that particular recommendation is the major focus of this article.

Although there were many individuals involved in the discussions and advocacy that eventually led to the introduction of an official legislation to designate AAPI serving institutions, a few key individuals played particularly pivotal roles during the early stages. Lisa Hasegawa, for example, served as the community liaison for the White House Initiative and became aware of the influential role of MSIs in community development. She moved to the National Center for Asian Pacific American Community Development (NCAPACD) in 2001 as its executive director and helped to mobilize community-based organizations around the AAPI serving institution effort. Another pivotal person was Esther Kia'aina, who at the time worked as chief of staff and legislative director to Representative Underwood, the first primary sponsor of the legislation. Kia'aina was assisted by Cherry Cayabyab, an intern from NCAPACD. When the time finally came to draft the legislation, Kia'aina recounted:

I had the green light to move forward so what I had Cherry do was work with the Congressional Research Service and pull all of the serving institutions legislation and do a comparative analysis of all the actual words. So the question is “what will we craft to get there?” and I gave her the options. I said we can create something new, we can look at all the various legislation and see what can apply to us, what we can learn from each of them, and then we can make a determination on how to move forward. I told her that it was wise to take a conservative approach and look at what the commonalities were. So we started again with the commonalities that would be helpful for us, the best of each that were not similar, and anything that was uniquely tailored for the community. . . . My feeling at the time was you don’t introduce something new when you’re trying to sell something on the Hill; that’s sort of like equity. . . . You don’t create something new that others don’t have because what you want to sell is that this is no different than anything else and it is simply an extension of a privilege that is given to other minority groups. And so it’s an extension of federal policy as opposed to newly created rights.

Kia’aina’s explanation of the legislative process points to why the term *AAPI serving organizations*, an original recommendation from the White House Initiative, was eliminated when H.R. 4825 was later introduced. Because no designation existed for “serving organizations” amongst existing designations for minority communities, it seemed more politically expedient to adopt the existing model of MSIs and “sell” AAPI

serving institutions as an extension of already existing programs. She also noted that it was critical to be especially prudent in a Republican-controlled Congress.

These preliminary actions resulted in H.R. 4825, which was first introduced in 2002. This resolution proposed to expand Title III of the Higher Education Act to include a MSI designation for colleges and universities with at least a 10 percent AAPI student enrollment and a specified threshold of low-income students. Title III and Title V already provided MSI designations for HBCUs, HSIs, TCCUs, and AN/NH serving institutions. Thus, the addition of an AAPI designation only expanded already existing legislation, as Kia'aina noted.

Although the resolution was first introduced by Representative Underwood, after January 2003 Representative David Wu (D-OR) became its primary sponsor. Over the years, the House resolution experienced several bursts of momentum. During the summer of 2003, the National Asian American Student Conference (NAASCon), a group composed mainly of Asian American college student advocates, launched a campaign to create grassroots support for the legislation (Park, 2006). The campaign resulted in a number of new cosponsors. A Senate version of the bill was later introduced by Senators Barbara Boxer and Daniel Akaka (D-CA, D-HI), with a findings section with supporting evidence documenting specific challenges that AAPI students face in accessing higher education. In 2005, an understanding was struck between Representative Wu and Representative Howard "Buck" McKeon (D-OR, R-CA), then head of the Education and Labor Committee. McKeon agreed to help advance the legislation if the Government Accountability Office (GAO) found adequate evidence



supporting the need for AAPI serving institutions. Subsequently, Wu requested a report from the GAO in order to assess the educational needs of AAPIs in higher education. However, if the report did not make a strong case, the future of the legislation would be uncertain.

On October 6, 2005, Representative Wu submitted the request for the GAO to conduct a study to assess the need for AAPI serving institutions. A year and a half later, the GAO released a report on the need of AAPIs in higher education. The report confirmed the wide disparities in educational attainment within the AAPI population. It also noted differences in AAPI students' academic preparedness and access to educational resources; for instance, only half of Southeast Asian American students were in college preparatory tracks during high school, and more than half of Southeast AAPI students were in lower socioeconomic quartiles. It also suggested that the Department of Education could facilitate information sharing between institutions regarding how to better serve AAPI students (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2007). Several months after the report was released, a critical event occurred when the Democrats took control of the House and the Senate. Representative George Miller (D-CA) replaced Representative McKeon as the head of the Education and Labor Committee. As will be discussed later in the article, interview participants recounted that having the Democrats take control was no guarantee for the legislation's success as Miller and other Democrats were not convinced that having a special designation for AAPI serving institutions was necessary. Nonetheless, as is often the case in the day-to-day uncertainty of legislative work, an auspicious opportunity emerged to include a

federal designation for AAPI serving institutions within the College Cost Reduction and Access Act.

That a federal designation for AAPI serving institutions got as far as it did is surprising given the popular stereotypes regarding Asian American success in higher education. Many of the policy makers who were interviewed from 2006 to 2007, a time period with little activity for the legislation, expressed doubts that the designation would ever pass. However, most of them remained adamant that such a designation was important for symbolic and pragmatic reasons. In the next section, we discuss some of the advocates' motivation for seeking an AAPI serving institutions designation.

#### Motivating Factors for Advocacy

Three key themes related to the motivations behind the advocacy for an AAPI serving institution designation emerged from our analysis. First, advocacy was a meaningful way for some to refute stereotypes about AAPIs, which they experienced in their personal and policy worlds. Another strong motivating factor was related to the importance of having AAPIs codified as a minority group in federal legislation. Lastly, many of those interviewed also noted that such a federal designation might encourage other federal agencies outside of the Department of Education to consider AAPIs for future funding opportunities. We discuss each of these three themes separately in the following text.

#### **Challenging the Model Minority Myth**

Many participants from our study recounted how personal experience with the model minority myth, particularly during their college years, fueled their activism in advocating for the legislation. A former congressional staffer, Miles, noted:

Symbolically it would just be more of a recognition of our history, our history as API people and the struggles, disavowing the whole model minority myth. I think I saw it as a huge opportunity to help people. I thought back to my college experience and granted it was like 35% AAPIs, so it could have given the school more money and more resources for our communities and when I was a student, we were fighting for them. So it was very personal for me, I felt very impassioned and willing to bust my ass for this and I did.

As a college student, Miles lobbied with other students to get a student affairs position that specifically served AAPI students on his campus; they experienced many difficulties due largely to the widespread belief that AAPI and in particular Asian American students did not have distinct and pressing needs that required dedicated attention. Given such experiences, he developed a strong personal connection with the legislation and viewed it as a way to help other students facing similar obstacles related to obtaining much needed resources on their campuses.

Deep frustration with stereotypes about AAPI students also influenced the course of events leading up to the introduction of the AAPI serving institutions legislation in 2002. In recounting the political climate of the time, another former congressional staffer reported an incident that encapsulated the extent to which AAPI needs in education were regularly overlooked. As discussed earlier, the omission of

AAPIs in the College Board report, *Reaching the Top* (1999), was a pivotal catalyst in sparking discussions in the AAPI community-based organization and policy communities about the widespread lack of awareness concerning AAPI educational needs. Around the same time, the Gates Millennium Scholars (GMS) program was launched. The program initially excluded AAPIs from eligibility but eventually included them after being made aware of the oversight. The initial omission, however, seemed to echo the same message that the College Board report sent, namely that AAPIs were a community without unique educational needs. A former staffer explained:

I don't think that you could separate the quest for an AAPI national scholarship fund from the issue of AAPI serving institutions legislation because they all happened at the same time and all of the people, students, policymakers, and advocates knew what was going on at that time. It was against that backdrop all of these things just started, you know building up like a tidal wave as far as we were concerned. It was evident to us that colleges were not looking after our interests, nor the College Board, and then billionaires like Gates who are trying to help increase minority access to college. We're left out there so what other recourse do we have? Is our government also going to forget us?

To this former staffer, recurring events like the College Board report and then the initial omission of AAPIs from the GMS program further contributed to a general frustration within the AAPI policy community that their communities' needs were invisible or being ignored.

## **“An Authentic Minority Group”**

The common practice of excluding AAPIs from educational reports and programs that target minorities reflects the inconsistent and tenuous status of AAPIs as a minority group in education and society at large (Park and Teranishi, 2008). On the one hand, many AAPI students report that they experience discrimination and marginalization within higher education (Chang, 2000; Kotori and Malaney, 2003), as well as barriers to access (Lew, 2006; Teranishi, 2008), but their aggregate success leads to faulty conclusions that they are a monolithically successful group and are thus virtually indistinguishable from white students (Chang et al., 2007). The many pressing needs of Pacific Islander and Southeast Asian American students, in particular, go unrecognized and unaddressed. The same tension exists in the broader political spectrum in which AAPIs, and particularly Asian Americans, are not always viewed as minorities with unique needs. In recollecting the origins of the serving institutions legislation, Ji, a staffer, referred to how an MSI designation had the potential to tilt perceptions of AAPIs from honorary whites to “an authentic minority group.”

They wanted one designation for AAPIs as an authentic minority group, then they would get other funding through things like Health and Human Services [HHS]. Until there was some type of formal recognition and authenticity of AAPIs as a minority group, then the population wouldn't get the funding through things like HHS. Yeah it is a rubber stamp basically. It is an authentication.

Other advocates noted the importance of having AAPIs be recognized within federal legislation as a minority group in order to codify the minority status of the AAPI community. As observed by Ji, this recognition would enable AAPIs to be better served by other federal agencies. In this way, the designation had symbolic and practical ramifications – namely that solidifying the identity of AAPIs as minorities could lead to a greater recognition of the unmet needs of AAPIs, which in turn gives the community access to increased funding opportunities.

### **Opening Doors**

David, from a nonprofit organization, expanded on the preceding point and explained how the AAPI serving institutions legislation had ramifications that extended beyond the realm of higher education:

People think of it only in the context of the education aspect, but this designation opens up so many doors in federal programs. There are many, many programs that we don't have access to because we don't have this designation. For example, in the Department of Housing and Urban Development, they actually have funding for universities to partner with community-based organizations to help revitalize the neighborhood around the university and to encourage local kids to attend the university. We don't have that money because we don't have that designation. It also puts minorities on sort of the radar screen of federal agencies as people who they need to outreach to. It's a bigger ripple effect than just the education stuff, which is really important.

Accordingly, another key motivation for seeking the designation was to increase the chances that AAPIs would be included in funding opportunities that targeted minority groups or partnerships with MSIs outside of the Department of Education. With respect to the latter, participants were keenly aware of how agencies used MSI designations as a way to disseminate information about grant funding opportunities, and in some cases, such opportunities were specifically targeted toward MSIs. Without a MSI designation, the AAPI community was at times shut out of those critical opportunities.

Despite the strong motivations that policy makers and community advocates had for advancing the AAPI serving institutions legislation, they uniformly expressed that the legislative process had been challenging. In the next section of the article, we discuss some of these challenges. Specifically, advocates faced external challenges from Congress and other MSI advocates and internal challenges to sustaining community support for the legislation due to the lack of infrastructure for education advocacy.

Key Challenges: An Uphill Journey

### **Congressional Politics**

Because the majority of interviews were conducted while the Democrats were a minority in the House and the Senate, many individuals cited the Republican majority as one reason for why the legislation had stalemated in Congress. They noted that Republicans were generally opposed to expanding domestic spending as well as funding that was targeted at minority communities. In light of the Iraq War, seeking money for a new program like AAPI serving institutions seemed almost futile given that domestic spending was being cut all-around due to other budget priorities.

However, some participants noted that the lack of Republican support was not the only obstacle that AAPI serving institutions faced in Congress. Although H.R. 2616 had twenty-four Democratic cosponsors, some Democrats had expressed skepticism that the designation was necessary. Representative Miller, a key Democrat, inherited the chairmanship of the Education and Labor Committee after the Democrats took control of the House and Senate in 2006. Lois, a former staffer, recounted Representative Miller's reaction to the legislation:

George Miller asked Congressman Wu, "You know, so what is this . . . like who's the money actually going to go to? Is it going to go to Berkeley? Is it going to go to Harvard? That's where all the Asians are you know." That was his assumption, actually the assumption of the majority of the members of Congress, for any bill serving Asian Americans. If it's a school with a lot of Asian Americans you don't think community colleges, you think Berkeley, you know. Ironically, Representative Miller's district covers the Bay Area of Northern California, an area with a high concentration of Asian Americans. As Lois commented, the assumption that Asian Americans only attended colleges like Berkeley and Harvard and not community colleges or less elite institutions was a critical obstacle for obtaining support for the legislation, not only with Republicans but also with Democrats. Eventually Representative Miller did help advance the legislation as part of the CCRAA, but similar to many members of Congress, his support was far from immediate.



Joel, another employee of an AAPI nonprofit group, commented about how convincing members of Congress was an even harder job than working with advocates of existing MSIs:

We developed a relationship with the United Negro College Fund [UNCF] and Hispanic Scholarship Fund and leaders in those communities dealing with higher education issues. They've been a part of the discussions and they've seen the data in regards to Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders where there are disparities; it wasn't as hard in terms of convincing them about the need for this legislation. It's really those more on the outside, like other members of Congress.

He noted that representatives from the AAPI community had already worked with UNCF on GMS and in other capacities such as the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, a coalition of civil-rights organizations. Congress was the greater challenge.

### **Getting a Piece of the Pie**

Although efforts to establish AAPI serving institutions received some support from organizations outside of the AAPI advocacy community, study participants expressed mixed thoughts about how other minority groups viewed efforts to create AAPI serving institutions. Whereas Joel mentioned that representatives from other MSI advocacy groups understood the need for AAPI serving institutions, some participants observed that others seemed somewhat reluctant to support these institutions. Within Congress, some members of the Congressional Black Caucus and the Congressional Hispanic Caucus cosponsored the AAPI serving institutions legislation, and representatives from the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus (CAPAC)

worked with legislative aides from the Congressional Black Caucus and the Congressional Hispanic Caucus to advance the legislation. However, policy makers advocating for this legislation noticed that some members representing other communities of color seemed particularly uneasy about supporting federal grant funding for AAPI serving institutions, as one participant noted:

I don't think it's going to be easy because some of the other groups kind of feel that there's a certain amount of pie and if you take some more for the Asians that takes some away from the Blacks, Hispanics and Native Americans.

The "pie" analogy was invoked by several participants in order to depict the idea that in a climate of limited resources, one group's advancement would likely have to come at the expense of another group.

It also appeared that other communities of color feared that the advocacy for federal recognition of a new MSI designation might unintentionally draw negative attention to funding for already existing MSIs. According to Daniel, an analyst from a MSI advocacy organization:

With Asian Pacific Islander Institutions, there might be concern that after this is pushed we're just not sure what the backlash will be. Will people say, "Well we think all institutions that use some kind of figure to determine whether they get a designation are hereby considered [using] quotas." You know what I mean?

Certainly, the precariousness of race-conscious policies such as affirmative action at the time did not help ease concerns about negative attention. Despite the fact that racial quotas are illegal in university admissions, the public still associates race-

conscious policies or programs that cater to specific racial/ethnic populations with quotas (Golden, Hinkle, and Crosby, 2001). Even though MSIs have gained bipartisan support, Daniel explained that one prevalent fear was that advocating for an AAPI serving designation might draw negative attention to how institutions are identified as MSIs, leading some to wrongfully associate the effort with racial quotas. For example, although HBCU designations are based on historical record (Wolanin, 1998), eligibility for HSIs is still determined in part by the percentage enrollment of Hispanic students, which could be viewed as resembling a quota. However, Daniel further noted that AAPI serving institutions were not the only development that could draw negative attention in this way to MSIs. Around the same time, other advocates were lobbying for a designation for Predominantly Black Institutions (PBIs), which would benefit colleges that served a high percentage of black students but lacked the historical background to qualify for HBCU designation. Ultimately the PBI designation passed at the same time as the AAPI one, but these two expansions to MSI policy raised some uneasiness about the risks of expanding MSI designations. It should be noted that there appeared to be little, if any, active resistance within the existing MSI community to establishing an AAPI serving designation, but at the same time there was little enthusiasm.

### **Sustaining Support**

Some study participants also noted challenges to sustaining grassroots support within AAPI communities for the legislation. Although periodic boosts of momentum occurred after the legislation was reintroduced, in particular during the student campaign launched by NAASCon, advocates noted that sustaining long-term interest

was difficult given the lack of concrete dividends. Phil, a former executive director of an Asian American nonprofit organization, recalled:

I think it didn't latch on so much because you reach a sort of tipping point with legislation where there's a real chance that it will pass and if you put in some effort. And we've never reached that; we've never gotten close to that tipping point. When I was the executive director, I felt like I couldn't afford to get people excited about putting a lot of effort into this unless we were going to be able to show results because I knew that would discredit our organization just because of the way the world works and the way people understand things.

Phil's remark suggests that a grassroots campaign shares a unique mutually reinforcing relationship with community support. Without community mobilization, for example, it was difficult for the legislation to progress, but without noteworthy progress it was difficult to garner enthusiasm from the community. Interestingly, the designation ultimately passed with little fanfare or active public support, being slipped into a piece of broader legislation that was expected to be vetoed by the president. This is not to say that community support for AAPI serving institutions was incidental to the designation's success; it was actually essential to bringing a number of cosponsors on board. Still, participants noted that several factors converged in this case, which made it difficult to sustain support and interest in the legislation. First, retaining active and reliable support for a process that stretched over years with few tangible victories proved difficult. Student activists, for example, cycled in and out of college, and some participants joked that education issues were just not "sexy" enough to keep people's

attention. Second, several participants also noted that not all facets of the AAPI community demonstrated support for the legislation. They noted that some more conservative AAPIs questioned the need for the legislation, and others were ambivalent at best.

### **Insufficient Infrastructure**

The third key challenge to passing the legislation was the lack of infrastructure within the AAPI nonprofit community to advance the policy. Participants discussed how nonprofits are often understaffed and underpaid, with educational interests being just one of many issues that staffers juggle. At the time of the interviews, nonprofit employees noted that most of their energy was being invested in the immigration debates, leaving little time to invest in the AAPI serving institutions legislation. Although 501c(3) status prevents nonprofits from staking out political positions, representatives from community-based organizations worked in tandem with staffers from Capitol Hill to coordinate efforts around the legislation. One nonprofit employee noted the strain:

And it's like so frustrating because I'm getting five hours of sleep because of this bill and I know it's totally not even on my job description to be working 12 hours just on this bill every day.

Beyond the physical and emotional drain of working on the legislation, many advocates noted that part of the difficulty around coordinating efforts to advance the legislation could be attributed to the lack of infrastructure for advocacy around education concerns facing the AAPI community. As Phil explained:

One of the really big problems is that with API organizations, there's not a single full-time staff member who is dedicated to educational advocacy and that's always been true you know, at [Southeast Asian Resource Action Center] or [Organization of Chinese Americans]. Sometimes we would get little tiny grants you know, five or ten thousand so that we could focus on it a little bit, or sometimes we would just do it on our off work time or you know squeeze it in but you need to have a dedicated staff to really focus on it, to follow an issue and to develop positions and so on and we've never had that.

In the Washington, D.C., world of AAPI nonprofit organizations, different organizations have different foci. Although some serve as umbrella organizations around certain needs, such as the NCAPACD and the Asian and Pacific Islander American Health Forum, others serve certain constituencies such as the Organization of Chinese Americans (OCA) and Southeast Asian Resource Action Center. Some of these groups have staffers who focus on specific issues such as immigration, but at the time that the interviews for this study were conducted, there were no full-time staffers working on education issues.<sup>2</sup>

In contrast, the black, Hispanic, and Native American communities all have organizations that specifically address higher education issues: UNCF, the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU), and the American Indian Higher Education Consortium. Some of these groups were specifically started to mobilize around the needs of MSIs; the oldest, UNCF, began in 1943 as an educational philanthropy. When the GMS program began, OCA served as the liaison from the AAPI

community, whereas other communities of color were represented by nonprofit groups specifically dedicated to education. Since the start of GMS, the Asian and Pacific Islander Scholarship Fund formed as a national organization dedicated to serving the financial needs of AAPI students, but it does not actively track legislation related to AAPIs and education.

Some participants referenced the National Educational Association's AAPI community liaison as being particularly helpful in keeping them connected to education issues. Also, the National Coalition of Asian Pacific Americans, a coalition of AAPI organizations, listed AAPI serving institutions as a legislative priority. Coming from the White House Initiative, Lisa Hasegawa of NCAPACD played an instrumental role in initiating and coordinating efforts around AAPI serving institutions, as did numerous representatives from other AAPI nonprofits. Still, some MSI advocates noted confusion over who was the "official" voice for the AAPI community on education. Furthermore, advocates generally agreed that the broader infrastructure for effective educational advocacy was still lacking. Thus, the lack of cohesive infrastructure around educational advocacy made it difficult to coordinate efforts to advance the AAPI serving institutions legislation.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

The journey from the introduction of the AAPI serving institutions legislation to its passage five years later was challenging and unusual, yet auspicious and important. In the end, the efforts established a historic milestone that expanded the AAPI political and educational landscape. Although future sustainability of federal support for the

designation is uncertain, it is an important and rare recognition of the status of AAPIs as a minority community with distinct needs related to their minority status. Hopefully, this recognition will also open the door to better serving AAPIs through other federal agencies. However, the future success of the designation will depend on the ability of the AAPI community to sustain political support for this, and other similar legislation, and to show clear evidence that the grants allocated through the designation are actually improving the capacity of institutions to better serve AAPI students. Although the initial allocation of funds, ten million dollars over two years, may seem modest, it should be noted that the first appropriation of funds for HSIs was twelve million dollars in 1995, an amount that has grown substantially. In 2008, the appropriation for HSIs was \$93.2 million.

One point of concern is that some institutions that are well positioned to serve underserved subgroups within the AAPI population do not meet the 10 percent AAPI enrollment eligibility requirement. For example, many universities in Wisconsin and Minnesota are in close proximity to large Hmong American communities but do not have AAPI enrollments of 10 percent or greater. Given that protocols exist for institutions to request a waiver if they do not meet the minimum threshold for needy student enrollment, policy makers may want to explore the possibility of having a similar exemption process for institutions that can show that they are well positioned to meet the needs of traditionally underserved students due to the demographic makeup of their student body. Perhaps this can be done through census data or documentation of a commitment of outreach to these communities.



Whatever the case, expanding the eligibility requirement will only be worth doing if more funding is made available to fund a larger portion of the legitimate needs. Even using the existing 10 percent criterion, the need already exceeds the current level of funding, and only six institutions or districts received funding in the first cycle: City College of San Francisco (\$609,360); Seattle Community Colleges (\$1,170,450); University of Maryland, College Park (\$1,166,216); University of Hawaii at Hilo (\$405,463); Foothill-De Anza Community College District (\$663,570); and Guam Community College (\$969,068).<sup>3</sup> Congressman Mike Honda (D-CA) was able to secure \$2.5 million through the Fiscal Year 2009 Omnibus Bill, which is being used to fund top applicants from the 2008 grant competition who did not receive funding from the initial allocation. (Tung, 2009).

Another concern is the need for a stronger policy infrastructure in order to advance AAPI educational concerns. Currently, AAPI nonprofits address education as one of many issues, and the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association have liaisons to the AAPI community. However, there are no AAPI nonprofit groups that focus only on education. Creation of such an organization, similar to the role that HACU plays for the Latino/a higher education community, could significantly improve long-range planning and coordination around educational advocacy for AAPI interests. Although the AAPI serving institutions designation is a major step toward greater recognition of the needs of AAPIs in education, there are many other educational issues in which the AAPI voice is absent or insufficiently represented.

The struggle to establish a designation for AAPI serving institutions began in a context of increasing frustration regarding the lack of knowledge or interest in AAPI educational issues and subgroups that were underserved in the AAPI community. For policy makers and community advocates, this frustration has not disappeared. Legislation alone is insufficient and ill-equipped to change the broader public perception of AAPIs, given the deep entrenchment of the model minority myth in American culture. Still, the creation of a federal designation for AAPI serving institutions is a major step toward greater recognition and understanding of the needs of AAPI students, as well as a sign that AAPI advocacy on Capitol Hill is maturing. What remains to be seen is whether those pending needs of this continuously growing population of college students will be adequately served and whether the advocacy on behalf of AAPI interests will strengthen over time.

#### NOTES

1. In the CCRAA, AAPI serving institutions are referenced as “Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander serving institutions.” However, for the purposes of this article, we will use the term *Asian American and Pacific Islander serving institutions*.
2. However, at the time of the writing of this article, the Asian American Justice Center, a legal nonprofit, had an attorney devoted to working on affirmative action.
3. For more information about grantees and other information on the AAPI serving institutions program, please consult the Department of Education Web site: <http://www.ed.gov/programs/aanapicraa/index.html> (Accessed April 10 2010).

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