

Practitioner's Essay

Community to Capitol Advocacy Framework:

State-Level Advocacy for Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander Students in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

This essay introduces a practitioner framework, *Community to Capitol*, to guide advocates on making legislative changes that benefit Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) students at the statewide level. Sparked by the *Stop AAPI Hate* movement and building on the movements behind Assembly Bills 1460 (requiring ethnic studies courses for California State University undergraduates), 1040 (requiring California Community Colleges to offer ethnic studies at each college), and 101 (requiring ethnic studies in California public schools) to recognize the need for ethnic studies requirements in California, the historical and pivotal California AANHPI Student Achievement Program is the first state higher education program in the United States to serve low-income, first-generation, and under-resourced AANHPI higher education students. This paper describes the impetus behind the equity movement in the U.S. and recounts chronologically advocacy efforts behind the AANHPI Student Achievement Program, from its inception in 2019 to its enactment in 2022 enshrined in California's Education Code. This case study includes a reflective analysis to better understand the successes of the overall advocacy effort, weaving best practices including strategic leadership

from public representatives, community to institutional partnerships, coalition building, and cross-stakeholder collaboration to formulate the Community to Capitol advocacy framework as a guide for future state-based advocacy.

INTRODUCTION: A RACIAL RECKONING IN THE UNITED STATES

The Black Lives Matter Movement and the 2020 murder of George Floyd served as catalysts to further drive racial equity and social justice efforts in intentional, dynamic ways (Lee and Nguyen, 2022). The Atlanta spa shootings in March 2021 killing eight people, the majority of whom were women of Asian descent, escalated the *Stop AAPI Hate* movement and galvanized discussions that demanded holistic reforms promoting racial justice. These events triggered a moment of reckoning in the United States, prompting industries from government to higher education to reevaluate their policies. This national movement sought to dismantle systemic discriminatory practices and rules and replace them with Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) initiatives. The intent, to transform their institutions to become more equitable and inclusive for individuals that have been historically disadvantaged and marginalized, is an effort still ongoing today. In higher education, this process includes two-year community colleges and four-year universities focusing on the lived experiences of historically disadvantaged and underserved students.

For California's state universities, community colleges, and high schools, foundational ways to enhance students' civic engagement and understanding of social justice rose to the forefront during this time of racial reckoning (Venturanza et. al, 2022). Legislation like Assembly Bill (AB) 1460 (passed in 2020), AB 1040 (passed in 2021), and AB 101 (passed 2021) that added ethnic studies as a graduation requirement for California State University (CSU), California Community Colleges (CCC), and high schools respectively, swiftly passed in the California State Legislature. All of these efforts were led by coalitions of students, educators, organizations, and community members, harkening to the history of groups like the Third World Liberation Front who advocated for recognizing people of color in higher education curriculum and practice during the 1960s civil rights era. This current push for a culturally relevant curriculum gave momentum to and ran parallel with the advocacy effort to secure funding to address disparities within California's student populations.

This article highlights AB 1460 as foundational to the passage of AB 1040 and AB 101. These laws coincided with the California State Legislature passing the 166.5 million dollar Equity Budget (2021) sponsored by the Asian Pacific Islander (API) Legislative Caucus. This three-year funding addresses the surge in anti-AAPI hate and violence, as well as racial inequities that have harmed AAAP communities since the 1800s.

This article also introduces a practitioner framework, *Community to Capitol*, as a guide for advocates on making state-wide legislative changes to benefit AANHPI students and communities. We end with a specific example of the historical and pivotal California AANHPI Student Achievement Program (SAP). The California AANHPI SAP is an investment of eight million dollars, ongoing, to California State University, and eight million dollars, ongoing, to California Community Colleges to serve low-income, first-generation, and under-resourced AANHPI higher education students. Figure 1 provides a visual timeline of critical statewide advocacy leading to legislation that began with AB 1460.

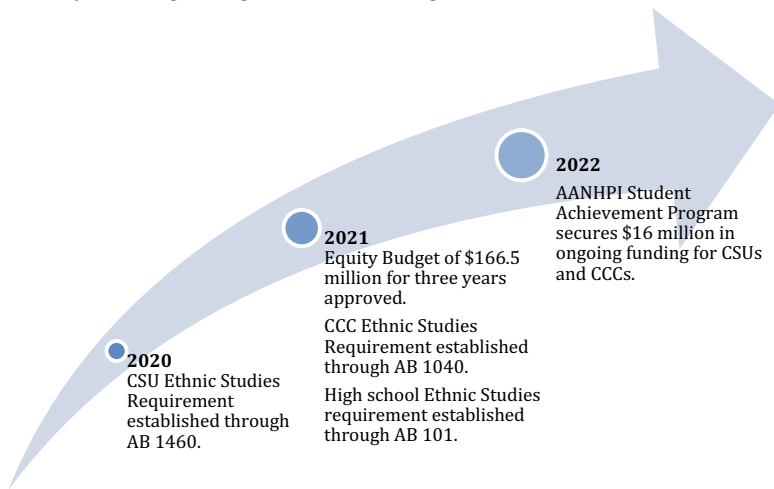


Figure 1: California Equity Timeline

The California Commission on Asian and Pacific Islander American Affairs and Author Roles as Commissioners

Created in 2004 by legislative statute, the California Commission on Asian and Pacific Islander American Affairs (CAPIAA) is the only ethnic-based state citizen commission in California. It is comprised of thirteen citizen commissioners appointed by the Governor, State Assembly, and State Senate, and charged to advise state policymakers

on how to respond most effectively to the views, needs, and concerns of the state's AANHPI communities (California Commission on Asian and Pacific Islander American Affairs, 2022).

Two commissioners serve as the chair and vice-chair of CAPIAA's Higher Education Equity Committee. In addition to sixteen years of teaching at the postsecondary level (eleven at San Joaquin Delta College in Stockton, California), Dr. Cirian Villavicencio has served as a gubernatorial appointee on CAPIAA since 2014. He served as chair from 2015-17 and is the current chair of the Higher Education Equity Committee at the time of this essay's writing. Dr. Villavicencio also possesses legislative experience working in California's State Capitol and on local, state, and U.S. presidential political campaigns. As CAPIAA's chair, Dr. Villavicencio helped pass data disaggregation legislation for the AANHPI community, human trafficking legislation, and advocate for Filipino World War II veterans to receive the Congressional Gold Medal.

Kirin Macapugay served on CAPIAA as a gubernatorial appointee in 2013, returning in 2020 as a senate appointee, and is currently vice chair of the Higher Education Equity Committee. With more than twenty years of building community-based civic engagement and health and human services nonprofits and initiatives, Macapugay has helped organize county, statewide, national, and international movements advocating for social, racial, and economic justice, including the Invest in San Diego Families coalition which helped drive policy and budget allocations for the County of San Diego. Now as tenured professor of Human Services at San Diego City College, she is co-director and co-creator of the college's Asian American Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institution (AANAPISI) program as well as director of the college's classroom to career program addressing homelessness—the first of its kind in the nation. Relevant to the advocacy efforts in this paper, Macapugay is currently a core member of the FIERCE (Filipinx Igniting Engagement for Reimagining Collective Em(POWER)ment) coalition, a statewide assembly of twenty Filipino American community-based organizations (CBOs), nonprofits, grassroots, and student groups.

REFLECTIVE ANALYSIS: PREPARING FOR THE FRAMEWORK

Within California's state universities and community colleges, which serve many of the state's first-generation, low-income students, renewed energy was given to address and reduce equity gaps. Higher

education leaders understood changes in organizational culture, the provision of wrap-around supports and services, and intentional programming that included the provision of culturally relevant curriculum were needed to address equity gaps and provide opportunities among disproportionately impacted students, which traditionally have been Black and Brown students (Bensimon, 2005). These student populations historically lacked support and have lower retention, persistence, and completion rates than their White counterparts.

The narrative is complicated for Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) students. Since AANHPI students are oftentimes aggregated and categorized as one monolithic group, the data misleadingly reports AANHPI students as thriving educationally, sometimes superseding their White counterparts. This reinforces the misconception that AANHPI students are the Model Minority, the false and often misleading narrative that asserts AANHPI students do better than their Black and Brown counterparts and do not need help. When data is aggregated, it masks the reality that inequities and disparities exist within AANHPI subpopulations (Lee and Nguyen, 2022).

Community leaders and advocates historically called for more data disaggregation among AANHPI subpopulations to reveal these disparities. The Campaign for College Opportunity's report on *The State of Higher Education for AANHPI Californians* (2022) shows educational disparities exist especially among Southeast Asian (SEA), Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (NHPI), and AANHPI male student populations (Reddy, Lee, and Siqueiros, 2022). AANHPI students are more likely to be enrolled in remedial English classes, and SEA populations suffer higher poverty rates compared to their East Asian counterparts. The report's recommendations emphasize the need for higher education institutions to better support these disproportionately impacted AANHPI students, better disaggregate AANHPI data, and support closing equity gaps.

Demystify the Model Minority Myth (MMM)

This framework is presented at a time when the social and political climate is optimal for moving decades-long educational initiatives for AANHPI communities. Advocating for AANHPI students is challenging since they are oftentimes perceived as the Model Minority. In 1965, Dr. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, under the direction of the office of President Lyndon B. Johnson, wrote the controversial Moynihan Report. The report suggested that the disintegration of the Black

nuclear family was to blame for the significant poverty within these communities, thereby shifting the focus and blame for racial inequities from systemic racism to Black families (Patterson, 2010). The following year, William Petersen's *New York Times Magazine* article "Success Story, Japanese-American Style" heralded Asian Americans as a model minority. A 2017 article on Nicholas Hartlep's research found that Asian Americans were intentionally framed as a model minority narrative to shift negative attention. Petersen's article, released during the height of the Civil Rights Movement, was a tool for negating the systemic racism Black and other communities faced.

The Model Minority Myth (MMM) set a false narrative that Asian American and Pacific Islander communities still combat to this day. For example, in recent U.S. Supreme Court cases, *Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. (SFFA) v. President & Fellows of Harvard College (Harvard)*, and *SFFA v. University of North Carolina (UNC)*, Nos. 20-1199 & 21-707, Asians were used as plaintiffs under the guise of the Model Minority to falsely argue that affirmative action negatively affected them, when in reality, this narrative was created to limit affirmative action programs that benefited other underrepresented racial minorities.

This misleading narrative perpetuates the stereotype that all AANHPI students succeed and do not require additional support. Proponents of the MMM typically present the following arguments: *Why invest in AANHPI students when the data show that they are thriving educationally, sometimes superseding their White counterparts? Why provide this group with extra support when reports indicate that AANHPI students are overrepresented in America's most prestigious colleges and universities?* These preconceived notions of the Model Minority distort the true reality many of them face. When data is disaggregated among AANHPI student subgroups, it becomes clear that not all of them succeed. Certain subethnic groups, especially NHPs and SEAs, do not fare as well compared to their East and South Asian counterparts (Ramakrishnan and Ahmad, 2014). Data also reveals that the majority of AANHPI students do not attend America's prestigious colleges as the Model Minority myth purports, but rather attend community colleges (Teranishi, 2012; Teranishi and Kim, 2017).

Learning how to dismantle the MMM is one of the first important lessons advocates must learn to effectively champion the needs of AANHPI students. While convincing policymakers in a progressive state like California was not overly difficult—for example, an initial

meeting with State Senator Richard Pan, a physician by profession, he understood that educational and health outcomes affect diverse sub-ethnic groups differently—advocating in less progressive states may be more challenging, especially if policymakers perceive AANHPIs as a monolithic community and as the Model Minority. To convince policymakers that AANHPI students have unique needs, it is important to dismantle the MMM with accurate data and counter/narratives.

To accomplish this, advocates need to plan and strategize their lobbying visits by considering the following:

1. Promoting data-driven decision-making among policymakers. Ask policymakers to suspend their preconceived notions about a community and consider decisions from data presented to them. With the realities of the lack of statewide and federal disaggregated data, advocates should utilize localized and partner research organizations with the resources to provide more accurate statistics of AANHPI communities. In the case study provided, data came from institutions who took initiative and resources to disaggregate data on student admissions, persistence, and completion, as well as reports from organizations like The Campaign for College Opportunity.
2. Using disaggregated data (if available) to highlight inequities that exist among AANHPI groups.
3. Promoting an equity mindset by encouraging policymakers to “view inequalities in the context of a history of exclusion, discrimination, and educational apartheid” (Bensimon, 2005, 102). When policymakers are made aware that these inequities stem from historical, social, and economic contexts, they should become more conscious to focus on the root causes of these inequities and find solutions to close these gaps (Bauman, 2002).

Considering the Political and Economic Environment

Policy change is often preceded by political urgency. An example of community to capitol advocacy is the passage of AB 1460 mandating that all twenty-three CSU campuses require an Ethnic Studies course for a baccalaureate degree. The advocacy for this began as early as 1966 during the height of the Civil Rights Movement, when Black students at San Francisco State College (now University) called for a Black Studies department. Joining these students were faculty and staff who went on strike. Within days, a coalition of Black, Brown, Native American, and Asian American students organized the Third World Liberation

Front in the spring of 1967 (Beach, 2021). Ending on March 20, 1969, the strike resulted in a Black Studies department and what would become the College of Ethnic Studies after expanding to include programs in Chicano, Asian American, and Native American Studies. The 2020 pandemic and most recent call for anti-racist initiatives led to the greater call for community members, students, and higher education leaders to grow Ethnic Studies from primary to secondary education. At the writing of this paper, Ethnic Studies programs have been established in over fifty California community colleges (Blake, 2021). This collective advocacy led to AB 1460, introduced by then-Assemblymember Shirley Weber in August 2020, mandating an Ethnic Studies requirement for bachelor's degrees awarded by CSU (Beach, 2021).

It is important to remember the impetus behind the AANHPI SAP was brought by Dr. Timothy Fong of California State University Sacramento (Sacramento State), whose Full Circle Project program was directly affected by the U.S. Senate's decision to reauthorize the Higher Education Act which provides higher education federal grant funding for Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) (United States Department of the Interior, 2023). Current social issues and mobilizing advocacy coalitions with specific requests are key factors of successful advocacy (Willems and Beyers, 2023). The ninety groups who sent in support of the AANHPI SAP, including African American/Black and Latinx/a/o/x-led advocacy groups, were pivotal points in the formation of the SAP. The request was also strategically planned and shifted as needed. CAPIAA and its advisory board initially considered proposing a one-time funding request to create a workgroup to investigate the needs of higher education AANHPI students, knowing the challenges an ask for continuous funding would pose.

At the onset of quarantine, CAPIAA received news of numerous incidents of COVID-related hate against AANHPI communities. Elevating the public's call for solutions, CAPIAA continued to meet virtually with policymakers to advance legislative priorities. The recognition of life-threatening hate aimed towards Asian American communities served an unfortunate but timely socio-political climate to advocate for multiple initiatives—including California's Stop the Hate program initiated in 2021, which issued 91.4 million dollars in funding over three years to 173 organizations under California Government Code § 8260—in consultation with CAPIAA. For higher education, this resulted in the 1.5 million dollar appropriation to CAPIAA in July 2021. This time period paralleled California's gradual lifting of COVID

restrictions and the economy's reopening. Initial reports from the California Department of Finance and the Legislative Analyst's Office in early 2022 indicated that California would have a forty-seven billion dollar budget surplus (Petek, 2023). This brighter economic outlook enabled the CAPIAA advocacy group to pivot and reasonably ask for a higher amount in an ongoing education program, resulting in the creation of the AANHPI SAP.

The key lesson for advocates is to strategically understand timing as well as the social, political, and economic environments. Advocates need to stay aware and sensitive to current events relevant to their issues, be knowledgeable of the legislative process, and adapt to unexpected situations while remaining patient and persistent. Advocates should be ready to deploy resources, time, and energy when favorable conditions arise to advance their legislative goals.

THE COMMUNITY TO CAPITOL ADVOCACY FRAMEWORK (CCAF)

The following six-part practitioner framework is designed to help advocates for future state-level advocacy. It uses elements from the above case study to build on evidence-based practices from coalition building (Willems and Beyers, 2023), social capital (Putnam, 1993; Ledyard, 1995), community capital (Flora and Flora, 2004), cross-sectoral partnerships (Bauer et. al, 2022), and advocacy. The following elements underpin the Macapugay-Villavicencio Community to Capitol Advocacy Framework (CCAF).

1. Know the Facts

The authors designed the CCAF to be deployed from a social justice perspective. It begins by first identifying a need that exists in traditionally under-resourced and marginalized communities. Through data disaggregation, policymakers are given a more accurate picture of the disparities these communities face. Building on census data, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data Systems (IPEDS) federal data, locally disaggregated data sets, and institutional student recruitment retention, persistence, and completion data is integral to making the case for necessary support. By having a diverse picture of the state of the AANHPI student experience, combined with qualitative information to shed light on their struggles, advocates help identify the root cause of those inequities and gives advocates an opportunity to formulate a policy solution to address those gaps. The CCAF framework requires

advocates, when devising a policy solution, to determine which institutions—whether public, private, nonprofit or a combination of sectors—have the capacity and jurisdiction to address those needs.

2. Recognize Stakeholders

Center the voices of those most impacted by these policies. As advocates collect data, identify stakeholders, and begin gathering the narratives to share with policymakers, it is critical to include leadership and center those who will ultimately be most impacted. Various stakeholders will be engaged throughout the advocacy effort process. In the case of the AANHPI SAP, student experiences, data (both quantitative and qualitative), and their involvement in the advisory board as voices equal to the college presidents and researchers on the board were intentional by design. The authors recommend advocates utilize Niklas Luhmann's 2012 systems theory as starting points to recognize and identify the various stakeholders who may influence, as well as benefit from, the policy changes an effort hopes to make. Luhmann believed politics is one of society's many functions to arrive at collective decisions, and that communication and relationships between various systems were critical to the collective decision-making process (Albert, 2016).

3. Identify Champions

There is always strength in unity. Advocates must identify "champion" advocates, as well as "grasstop" leaders to build momentum in key influential circles (Fokas, 2016). These grasstop leaders may be the presidents of higher education institutions, chief policy staff for legislators (capitol partners), executive directors of advocacy and civic engagement nonprofit and community organizations, individual donors, or the chief executive officers of businesses and industries. In this case study, CAPIAA Higher Education advisory board members were identified for their expertise in AANHPI student higher education as well as their working relationships to policymakers. Capitalizing on relationships with political allies built momentum to the SAP, leading to legislators who would sponsor changes to the state educational code.

4. Organize and Mobilize a Community Coalition

In this case study, timing and opportunity brought like-minded community partners with shared values and beliefs to create the SAP.

Attendees at CAPIAA Higher Education Equity Committee meetings had an interest in serving AANHPI students. These included students, faculty, administrators, directors of AANAPISI programs, and community members. The commission utilized the expertise of the advisory body. Community champions like Dr. Timothy Fong and Dr. Rowena Tomaneng, both affiliated with state and national groups supporting minority-serving institutions, were willing to share their expertise and networks with CAPIAA staff and commissioners. As the incoming president of Asian Pacific Americans in Higher Education (APAHE), which holds annual national conventions addressing AANHPI higher education issues, Dr. Tomaneng helped uplift advocacy for the SAP on a national level. Because of her partnership, CAPIAA was provided an opportunity to share its budget proposal at the APAHE national conference before an engaged audience.

In addition, The Campaign for College Opportunity's Dr. Vikash Reddy and his research team were completing *The State of Higher Education in AANHPI Californians* report, pivotal in reinforcing the need for California to invest in AANHPI students. When the time came to submit support letters to key legislative policymakers and committees, community partners were mobilized given the commission's responsibility to form these important coalitions.

California's FIERCE coalition of twenty-plus community-based organizations advocating for AB 101 as part of their legislative advocacy platform is another example of the power of grassroots coalitions. FIERCE includes several educators from K-12, California Community Colleges, California State University, and the University of California, along with higher education students. Together with other advocates, they galvanized support through assemblymember staff to share constituent testimony on virtual platforms as well as at the capitol in Sacramento during legislative visits. These testimonies all focused on the impact of AB 101 on Ethnic Studies and the need to systematically incorporate it as a requirement in California's public high schools. Assemblymember Weber's (currently serving as California Secretary of State) collaboration with students and educators led to her authoring AB 1460 as well, which was successfully signed by Governor Gavin Newsom.

5. Leverage Political Power of Boards and Commissions

Boards and commissions elevate and legitimize community issues through public hearings and listening sessions. These platforms serve

to create and transmit a uniform message (in this case, helping first-generation, low-income AANHPI higher education students) that attracts support from other stakeholders who share a common understanding of the problem and solution (Sotirov and Winkel, 2016). It also provides coordination among allies who interpret evidence and information through a similar set of preexisting policy core beliefs.

Boards and commissions exist at various levels of government, from city, to county, to state, to national. The authors recognize that certain boards and commissions may not exist in one's state; for example, not every state has an Asian American Pacific Islander-focused commission. However, replicating their functions in community building and providing technical expertise is vital to successful advocacy campaigns. Board and commission members typically serve in an advisory role to help direct policy by making suggestions and recommendations to elected policymakers and government agencies. This system is intended to be representative of and responsive to the communities they serve. The task of bridging the community with elected policymakers is significant since most boards and commissions with professional staff have the capacity to do outreach within the community, as well as provide technical knowledge and access to policymakers. They conduct community listening sessions, hold hearings, and elevate issues of importance and concern for the public. As political appointees, board and commission members may influence by virtue of their political authority tethered to community interest.

Boards and commissions are responsible for leading the advocacy effort by coordinating community and capitol partners to work in concert. The CCAF is based on applying a cross-sectoral approach to coalition building that gives strategic focus to the advocacy effort (Bauer et. al, 2022). Rather than having individual stakeholders advocate individually in separate silos, boards and commissions play an integral role in helping to organize, sustain, centralize, and spearhead the advocacy campaign. Therefore, boards and commissions actively work within the community and the capitol to build support for policy initiatives.

6. Build Relationships with People at the Capitol

Unique to the CCAF is the recommendation to strategically place advocates geographically close to the state capitol. Although virtual meetings can be equally effective, in-person interactions make for more meaningful interaction and collaboration, especially in collegial

settings (Valenti et. al, 2021; Bousema et. al, 2020). More affluent interest groups may hire a cadre of lobbyists to advance and protect their political interests in the halls of power. However, modestly funded community-based organizations lack the time, resources, and funds to even lobby themselves, much less afford contracting professional lobbyists.

Under the CCAF, boards and commissions address this challenge by allowing the community to utilize commission influence along with their staff and technical expertise. These individuals can devote time and resources, offer knowledge of the legislative process, build meaningful relationships with key legislative and executive staff, and are well-positioned to track and support legislative bills. This exponentially increases the possibility of gaining political support. In the case study, CAPIAA's executive director and higher education policy analyst worked diligently behind the scenes communicating with policymakers and legislative staff.

Forming a capitol coalition is equally important to mobilizing a community coalition when it comes to advancing political change. It is important for advocates to help and guide legislative and executive staff (and vice-versa) to navigate one's initiative through appropriate legislative committees and avoid pitfalls that could kill the bill. It is critical to have paid staff to build trusting relationships with legislative/executive staff and policymakers as well as navigate the legislative process.

COMMUNITY TO CAPITOL IN PRACTICE: CALIFORNIA'S AANHPI STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT PROGRAM

An Urgent Request

In September 2019 during the Trump administration, Dr. Timothy Fong reached out to Commissioner Villavicencio and CAPIAA, concerned that a Republican majority senate may not renew federal grant funding for Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs). This critical funding, which Congress established from the Higher Education Act, helps MSIs better serve historically disadvantaged and underrepresented students (United States Department of the Interior, 2023). Over the years, these HEA programs assisted MSIs' expansion of critical educational services to serve a wide variety of student populations, including American Indian tribally-controlled colleges and universities, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian-serving institutions, predominantly Black institutions, Native American-serving, nontribal

institutions, and Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions (AANAPISIs) (Nguyen, 2020). With the possibility that Congress might not renew the HEA, Dr. Fong, whose institution has been a long-time recipient of MSI funds to support student success, inquired whether CAPIAA could help advocate for California to bridge the gap to provide this critical funding given that a third of all AANAPISI institutions were in the state.

In October 2019, after several meetings, Dr. Fong and Dr. Villavicencio were joined by Dr. Rowena Tomaneng and Mr. Nathan Dietrich, Sacramento State's Associate Vice President for Public Affairs and Advocacy, to meet with key state legislative staff of the California Asian American and Pacific Islander Legislative Caucus (AAPILC). Senator Richard Pan, Assemblymember Evan Low, and Assemblymember Al Muratsuchi's offices agreed to meet with the group to explore the possibility of creating a state program that would serve first-generation, lower-income, underrepresented AANHPI higher education students. The group explained that similar state programs existed, such as the *Puente Project* and *Umoja Community* program serving California's Hispanic/Latinx and Black/African American students, and there was a need for a similar program to serve our disproportionately impacted AANHPI students (Puente Project, 2023; UMOJA, 2023). While there was interest in the idea, the global pandemic hit in March 2020 and the group's advocacy efforts stalled as California and the rest of the world shut down to face an uncertain future.

From Tragedy to Opportunity

During the global pandemic, the Atlanta spa shootings on March 16, 2021 escalated the need for California and the U.S. to respond to the increase in hate incidents and hate crimes against AANHPI communities. This motivated CAPIAA to engage in conversations with the community, the AAPILC, and other legislative allies about a statewide effort to fund anti-hate initiatives throughout the state.

As part of that conversation, Dr. Villavicencio was surprised to learn higher education funding had not been included in the initial proposals. Commissioner Villavicencio urged the commission's executive director, Nkauj Iab Yang, to directly advocate for the inclusion of higher education in anti-hate initiatives. As institutions well-positioned to provide culturally relevant curricula to address prejudice against AANHPI communities, the conversation also highlighted the

need to support AANHPI students who suffered from mental health challenges and trauma exacerbated by the global pandemic.

CAPIAA's advocacy efforts succeeded, and higher education funding was included in the bill. Packaged together, these initiatives became known as the Asian Pacific Islander (API) Equity Budget and were presented to legislative leaders and the governor's office. With the support of advocates from over two hundred community-based organizations, the partnership with AAPILC, and budget and legislative staff, Governor Newsom signed the API Equity Budget into law on July 13, 2021. The budget would include a historic three-year investment of 166.5 million dollars to directly address hate incidents and hate crimes, as well as the lack of investment in California's AANHPI communities. Because of Commissioner Villavicencio and Executive Director Nkauj Iab Yang's advocacy, the API Equity Budget also included 1.5 million dollars for higher education directly appropriated to CAPIAA to create a workgroup to address the needs of AANHPI students.

Justifying the Need

On receiving the funding in October 2021, Commissioner Villavicencio was appointed as the inaugural chair of CAPIAA's Higher Education Equity Committee. Commissioner Macapugay was appointed Vice-Chair, and with Commissioner Rajan Gill joining the committee, all three members had professional experience in higher education. Wanting to draw in community input from students and higher education leaders, the committee created an advisory body and held its first meeting on February 7, 2022. The advisory shared collective data, best practices, and recommendations for the commission to build an evidence-based case for the state to fund AANHPI student-centered higher education programs.

In March 2022, the commission hired Jamari Robinson to serve as CAPIAA's first Higher Education Policy Analyst. Mr. Robinson was instrumental in providing research and strategic planning. After consultation with the advisory board, the committee decided to pursue a request for 10 million dollars in ongoing funding for an AANHPI Consortium for on-campus student support programs and research funding. This felt like a reasonable budget request since sibling programs Puente and Umoja were being funded at similar levels by the state. During the April 2022 Higher Education Equity meeting, the committee informed the public of its budget proposal plans.

Building Community & Legislative Support

In April 2022, at the annual APAHE Conference, APAHE leadership invited Executive Director Yang and Commissioner Villavicencio to share advocacy efforts during a plenary session, building community support for the budget request to the state that would support first-generation, low-income, and underserved AANHPI students. Coincidentally, The Campaign for College Opportunity was also completing its report on *The State of Higher Education for AANHPI Californians*, co-authored by Dr. Vikash Reddy, Douglas Lee, and Michelle Siqueiros. Since Dr. Reddy was a member of the CAPIAA Higher Education advisory body, Commissioners Villavicencio and Macapugay as well as Executive Director Yang were invited to peer review the report. The report, published on May 21, 2022, legitimized the need for California to invest in AANHPI students through anecdotal experiences as well as both qualitative and quantitative data.

Executive Director Yang and Higher Education Policy Analyst Robinson continued to meet with key partners within the state legislature. Through their advocacy, they were successful in including the CAPIAA budget proposal on the Senate Education Budget Committee's agenda. Executive Director Yang took the initiative to formalize the name of the program, which became known as the AANHPI SAP. In June 2022, with strong support from community leaders, advocates, and allies totaling ninety letters of support, Governor Newsom and the State Legislature passed the state budget that included the AANHPI SAP—with a few important modifications from our original budget proposal.

First, this historic state funding would support California AANAPISI-eligible CCCs and CSUs that served first-generation, lower-income AANHPI students, and other underserved students. Second, the original budget proposal increased from ten million dollars to sixteen million dollars of ongoing funding: eight million dollars, ongoing, for CCC, and eight million dollars, ongoing, for CSU. Matching this historic investment, the California Education Code added Section 79510 for the CCCs and Section 89297 for CSUs to legislate AANHPI SAP into law “to provide culturally responsive services to enhance student educational experiences and promote higher education success for low-income, underserved, and first-generation AANHPI students and other underrepresented students.” Ensuring this program in California Education Code protects funding for the AANHPI SAP. This historic legislation created the first

state-funded higher education program in the United States that serves low-income, first-generation, and underserved AANHPI higher education students.

CONCLUSION

At the time of this writing, the U.S. Supreme Court has ruled affirmative action unconstitutional. Several conservative-leaning states are rolling back DEIA initiatives. Florida has enacted legislation limiting the teaching of ethnic studies and critical race theory (Russell-Brown, 2023). If we are to create a more inclusive and just society, it becomes imperative that we continue to galvanize multi-sector support to enact legislation like California Assembly Bills 1460, 1040, and 101 to institutionalize the teaching of culturally relevant curriculum as part of anti-hate efforts and create a more just society overall. Legislation is part and parcel of programs like California's AANHPI SAP, created to provide for our most disproportionately impacted students who do not have equitable opportunities to succeed.

The historic legislative victory that created California's AANHPI SAP serves to close equity gaps and strengthen the identity of our most vulnerable and under-resourced AANHPI students in the state, leading to higher completion and student success. The advocacy effort that led to its passage also serves as a transformative example of what can emerge when communities come together in a collaborative and intentional way to influence decisionmakers. The purpose of the framework is to help advocates bridge the gap between the community and their state's capitol.

When community activists work in concert with boards and commissions, legislative staff, and policymakers, transformative policy change can be achieved. The hope is this framework will inspire advocates to pursue similar endeavors in their respective states. As the country becomes more diverse and multicultural, disproportionately impacted students deserve to be supported. To achieve equal opportunity and justice for all, higher education needs to ensure it does not leave out those rendered invisible by harmful narratives. It is time to build social capitals and strengthen work at state capitols to ensure all marginalized people are made visible and uplifted.

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Nkauj Iab Yang, former Executive Director, California Commission on Asian and Pacific Islander American Affairs

Jamari Robinson, former Higher Education Program Analyst, California Commission on Asian and Pacific Islander American Affairs

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