



Ensuring Racial Literacy Success for New Asian American K-12 Policies

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The early 2020s has seen a tide of ethnic studies bills centering Asian American history in k-12 curricula sweeping the nation. These policies are one response to the flood of anti-Asian sentiments and attacks as **reported** in 2022 by Stop AAPI Hate, an organization which started collecting this data in 2020. Stop AAPI Hate's report included a community survey of Asian American and Pacific Islander respondents to identify what they thought were the most effective means of combating hate against Asians in America; k-12 education that would strengthen our country's racial literacy was a clear favorite, an idea which has since been supported by organizations like Asian Americans Advancing Justice, the Asian American Education Project, and others.

As a Filipino American father, seeing support for these educational interventions brings me so much joy and relief. However, as an educator, former teacher-coach, and current researcher on ethnic studies policy, my expertise suggests that **states likely need resources and well-outlined best practices to effectively address the complexity of teaching Asian American history**. Focusing on creating standardized curricula that leave room for nuance, teacher training, and proper evaluation can ensure the new k-12 efforts actually strengthen our country's Asian American racial literacy.

Curriculum

Where bills calling for statewide curricula changes have been passed, the policy language is vague and allows local school boards or districts to decide on an undefined "model curriculum." **Putting the decision to school boards can lead to further inequalities between districts; as it stands, most school board leaders do not have the needed level of Asian American racial literacy to design these curricula**. One way to address these issues is through the standardization process, which would ensure all k-12 students would engage with some of the same narratives, lessons, and ideas regardless of their classrooms' demographics, as designed by proper experts. Standardizing processes can improve the quality of how a system or policy operates and even **combat inequities within the systems**. One example of positive standardization would be a national curriculum showcasing Asian American leadership representing all areas of the Asian-diasporic community with diverse and overlapping identities.

While standardization is helpful to create a national dialogue, it is equally essential that content is allowed to be localized. Asian Americans are the **fastest-growing ethnoracial group in the United States**, representing 48 countries and 2300 languages (not including dialects). This diversity and complexity is not well represented by aggregate ethnographic data that lumps all Asian Americans together. One way to address this may be for state and local education committees to survey what local Asian-ethnic communities exist in their larger communities, and then **localize their curricula based on this better understanding of local demographics**. Localizing the curriculum should also be a community participatory process directly engaging local Asian Americans.

Teaching

In addition to creating a standardized and more localized curriculum, we may also need to look at how our teachers are trained. Culturally Responsive Sustaining Education (CRSE) is the latest version of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy originated by scholar Dr. Gloria Ladson-Billings. This type of teaching, by definition, must strive to create a welcoming and affirming environment, foster high expectation and rigorous instruction, use an inclusive curriculum and means of assessment, and engage in ongoing learning and support. Mandated ethnic studies policies can only scratch the surface of fostering better racial literacy unless we strengthen

educators' Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Teaching Skills at scale.

Evaluation

Evaluating teacher practice is a complex process. In addition to determining the elements that evaluations should include and identifying who should perform them, there is also the question of whether teachers with varying levels of teaching experience require different evaluations. My experience as a teacher-coach leads me to recommend **NYS Ed's CRSE educational framework** and the consultant Elena Aguilar's equity **rubric** in *Coaching for Equity* as robust and practical resources. And because knowing what to expect and how to spend one's time is half the battle, a first-year teacher's experience is drastically different from a third-year teacher. This understanding supports a **difference in how first- and second-year teachers are evaluated versus their peers in year three and beyond.**

Lastly, **who performs evaluation and their level of racial literacy expertise matters.** This role would most likely fall upon administrators and instructional coaches who, without proper training, are not prepared to give feedback on Asian American concepts and history. State education committees can partner with universities that offer robust Asian American studies programs or hire organizations to train their district leaders.

What's Possible

Positive examples from **Connecticut, New Jersey, and Illinois** show that **quality legislation that addresses curricula standardization and localization, teacher training, and appropriate evaluations, can be passed.** Once state and local education committees refine their approach to Asian American education policy design and implementation, we might start seeing students' knowledge, mindsets, and habits shift and embody allyship towards Asian Americans. If the right legislation is passed, these changes will enable all U.S. k-12 students to recognize Asian Americans as pivotal figures in narratives of social justice and nation-building. Additionally, more Americans will be well-informed on how to respond when encountering instances of anti-Asian sentiment or racism in their daily lives.

Read more in Anthony Byrk, Louis M. Gomex, Alicia Grunow, and Paul LeMahieu, *Learning to Improve: How America's Schools Can Get Better at Getting Better* (Harvard Education Press, 2017); Katrina Bulkley, "Conceptions of Equity: How Influential Actors View a Contested Concept." *Peabody Journal of Education* 88, no. 1 (2013): 10-21; Rebecca Rogers and Melissa Mosley, "Racial Literacy in a Second-Grade Classroom: Critical Race Theory, Whiteness Studies, and Literacy Research." *Reading Research Quarterly* 41, no. 4 (2006): 462-495; and Yolanda Sealey-Ruiz, "The Critical Literacy of Race: Toward Racial Literacy in Urban Teacher Education," in *The Handbook of Urban Education 2nd edition*, edited by H. Richard Milner IV and Kofi Lomotey (Routledge, 2021), 281-295.