

## Open Letter

### Mayor Bill de Blasio and Chancellor Richard Carranza

We believe in school integration and educational equity for our Asian children.

May 7, 2019

Dear Mayor de Blasio and Chancellor Carranza:

We are Asian Pacific American parents with children currently in NYC public schools. We are also school integration advocates.

Asians in the United States have suffered systemic oppression from the day we arrived in the mid-18th century. We have been lynched, interned, excluded from citizenship, segregated in public schools, red-lined and more. We have also fought for racial justice alongside our Black and Latinx sisters and brothers. During the Civil Rights movement, we were instrumental in securing the rights of farm workers and in organizing students of color for reforming college campuses. We marched, we protested, we struck, we fought and we got arrested, all for the common cause. We were not labeled the Model Minority of overachieving, obedient and quiet strivers until it was politically convenient for the white power structure to do so. When not used as an excuse to maintain the racist system, we are not seen and subsumed or are an asterisk to the dominant culture. And, yet we are also still seen as “the other.”

Our shared history and struggles morally bind us to align ourselves with other people of color. As allies in the racial justice movement, we

- 1) reject the label of Model Minority, which robs us of our individual stories and pits us against Black and Latinx people in order to perpetuate white supremacy;
- 2) denounce the narrative of deficiency (“anti-blackness”) used to denigrate Black and Latinx students and families; and
- 3) commit to fight against preserving our advantage and privilege at the expense of Black and Latinx students.

Largely because of the Model Minority myth, our public education system has often ignored the needs of Asian families and students. Test score based accountability has further reduced the visibility of Asian Pacific American (APA) students many of whom are able to score high on standardized tests and thus assumed to have very little needs. Hidden behind simple test score statistics and the broad brush characterizations of “Asians” are highly varied experiences of

Asian students, who are very diverse in countries of origin, cultures, languages, socioeconomic status and immigration history. It does all of us grave injustice to ignore our stories, to deny us our voice, and to sweep us under the Model Minority rug.

Many of us, parents and guardians of children in public schools, are angered by the way we and our children are treated by this society. We are ready to take action to stand up for our rights. But our voice must not be for maintaining a system that has discriminated against Black and Latinx students, even if some of us have benefitted from such a system. We must recognize that the current public school system is rooted in the same racism that has denied and continues to deny us our humanity.

Instead we raise our voice for creating an equitable public school system, one that is not based on a zero-sum equation and that is framed on “and” rather than “or.” We believe school integration and equity in education benefit all students, including APA students. Diverse and inclusive classrooms have been shown to create healthier and more positive learning environments for all students. Students from different backgrounds and with diverse histories and stories interacting daily will broaden each other’s horizon, make them more compassionate, and begin to dismantle implicit biases that are so harmful to students of color, including APA students. The Model Minority myth masks the reality that harmful stereotypes bar APAs professionally (for example, APAs are underrepresented in managerial positions of top corporations). Only by creating space for students of all types - races, socioeconomic statuses, abilities, gender expression, etc. - to learn together, can we begin to break down these barriers.

Furthermore, we believe in pedagogy that honors and values our cultures and stories as well those of other students of color. We want our children to learn and be proud of the contributions to society made by their ancestors as well as respect and honor the contributions made by other people of color. We believe in our children learning from teachers who look like them and understand them as well as from teachers who look different from them and can push our children to go beyond their comfort zone. We want schools that do not criminalize our children but instead uses restorative justice that teaches students accountability and individual responsibility for the collective good. Finally, we want resources that are adequate to provide a robust and rich education in every single school and that are distributed equitably, not equally.

These are the reasons why we stand in support of the recommendations released by the School Diversity Advisory Group. We believe the 5Rs framework is the way to achieve real school integration. As API parents of children in public schools, we urge the Chancellor to accept then implement the recommendations put forth by the SDAG.

We know that the Model Minority myth was created to make us the wedge between dominant culture and other people of color. We know that whatever “status” and “freedom” we have gained as the Model Minority are illusions to keep us complacent: our status in the racial hierarchy can be taken away tomorrow by those in power. We know that our children will not

gain their full rights as American citizens, free from “othering” and other forms of oppression, unless we work to liberate all oppressed peoples. We are ready for the challenge.

Sincerely,

**Chhaya Chhoum**, Mekong NYC

**Amy Hsin**, Queens College

**Wayne Ho**, Chinese American Planning Council

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\*\*Affiliations included for identification purposes only.