Under the Microscope:

Asian and Pacific Islander Youth in Oakland

Needs • Issues • Solutions

June 2003

Executive Summary

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1. Introduction

"There are not enough services for those [youth who are] 'sitting on the fence.' These are the ones we need to concentrate on. These youth are probably one incident away from either becoming a very productive citizen or another statistic." – Oakland Community Leader.

In November 2001, the Asian and Pacific Islander Youth Violence Prevention Center (API Center) in Oakland invited representatives from a number of local organizations to address the issues facing API youth in Oakland. Representatives from a vast array of community-based organizations, social service and juvenile justice agencies, the education system, and student groups gathered together as the API Center presented the need for a strategic plan aimed at preventing crime and violence among our youth.

Since then, the Community Response Plan (CRP) group has met monthly to strategize methods of data collection and weigh the implications of this data for the positive development of API youth. The majority of these tasks were carried out in three subcommittees each of which focused on education, juvenile justice, or behavioral health (the members of these subcommittees are listed in the Appendix). In the process, the group has compiled a comprehensive profile on the specific challenges and needs of API youth. The publication of *Under the Microscope* is just one fruit of the CRP collaboration. The data in this report will be used to direct future research as well as advocate for projects and policy changes that respond to API youth needs.

Under the Microscope is the first report of its kind across the nation to focus specifically on API youth, including data disaggregated by API ethnicity and gender. The research was led by community representatives, with technical assistance from the API Center staff who analyzed existing national and state datasets, and compiled valuable community agency data.

This executive summary highlights some of the major findings and recommendations in each of three areas: education, juvenile justice, and behavioral health.

The term *API* will be used throughout this summary to refer to both Asian and Pacific Islander youth. However, when agencies record data for both groups *separately*, each group will be properly specified (either as Asian youth or Pacific Islander youth).

2. Collaborators and Partners

Asian American Studies Department, U.C. Berkeley
Asian Community Mental Health Services*
Asian Health Services*
Asian Pacific American Student Development, U.C. Berkeley
Asian Pacific Islander Education Taskforce*
Asian Pacific Islander Legal Outreach, Asian Domestic Violence Collaborative*
Asian Pacific Islander Youth Promoting Advocacy and Leadership*
Asian Pacific Psychological Services*
Asian Youth Services Committee, Oakland Police Department*
Cambodian Community Development, Inc.*
East Bay Asians Against Tobacco*
East Bay Asian Youth Center*
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Kit Cho, Deputy Probation Officer, Alameda County Probation Department*
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Southeast Asian Student Coalition, U.C. Berkeley
United Laotian Community Development
Youth Alive!
Youth Leadership Institute*

*denotes core member

Technical assistance provided by:
API Youth Violence Prevention Center, National Council on Crime & Delinquency,
Oakland, California

3. Mission Statement

The diverse members of the CRP group are united by a key set of purposes:

"Through the collaboration of the Community Response Plan group, we are determined to further the healthy development and empowerment of Asian and Pacific Islander youth by:

Educating the community and **Promoting** further understanding
of the needs of and the issues facing the diverse API youth population in Oakland,

and

Identifying and **Advocating**
for specific mobilization of resources and policy changes."

4. Findings

Education

Contrary to popular belief, API students in Oakland's public schools are not *excelling in all academic areas. Data for the 2001-2002 school year show that API students are underperforming in a number of subjects and that particular API groups face additional challenges to their education.*

✦ Although Asian students in the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) performed well on the math portion of standardized tests, less than 50% of them met national standards in all other subjects (reading, science, social science). Meanwhile, less than 35% of Pacific Islander students met national standards in *any subject*.

✦ A majority of API students in OUSD (58%) were designated as Limited English Proficient (LEP). A major concern for LEP students is that they may not graduate because they do not qualify for the higher level English classes that satisfy OUSD graduation requirements. Between 2000-2002, LEP students in OUSD were *redesignated* into English proficient classes at *lower rates* than all of Alameda County and the state of California.

✦ On any given day, 10.9% of students in the OUSD were *absent*, costing the district a minimum of $28 million a year in Average Daily Attendance (ADA) funds. Given the direct relationship between attendance and grade point average, truancy is also costing students their education. For example, Laotian and Tongan students that were LEP averaged a high number of absences (20 and 21 days, respectively) and low grade point averages (1.77 and 1.47,

respectively). These absences and grade point averages are indicative of a lack of engagement with school, a noted risk factor for involvement with crime.

✦ Among all students in OUSD, the three main reasons for suspensions were *injury to another person*, *defiance of authority,* and *violence not in self-defense*. These three categories alone accounted for over 80% of total suspensions for all youth. Furthermore, the number of suspensions for *injury to another person* dramatically increased from 5th grade (112) to 6th grade (670). These patterns of suspension for violence and defiance were also reflected in data for Asian students.

Juvenile Justice

When youth engage in crime, the rest of the community is affected. Given this point, the following findings on arrests and adjudication in Oakland for the year 2000, are troubling for both the API youth involved and the entire API community.

✦ Compared to Caucasian, African American and Hispanic youth, API youth were arrested at lower rates but *convicted* at higher rates (28%) and consequently placed into institutions at higher rates (23.4% of those convicted).

✦ Disaggregated data show that Samoan, Vietnamese, and Laotian youth had among the highest juvenile arrest rates (after African American youth).

✦ Felonies (mainly property crimes) made up 68% of the offenses for which API youth were arrested. Moreover, the number of felony arrests for API males was ten times the number for API females.

✦ Although total female API arrests were much lower than API males, the number of females arrested has been steadily increasing from 1990 to 2000.

✦ Compared to other juveniles, Asian youth were arrested more on weapons charges and less on person offenses.

✦ Victimization data show that API youth were most likely to be victimized by other API. Thus, increasing amounts of crime among API may indicate more victimization *within* the API community.

Behavioral Health

Data on substance abuse, teen pregnancy, self-reported depression, and suicidal thoughts in API youth demand that greater attention be paid to their behavioral health needs. In Oakland, some API groups are more affected by these issues than others.

✦ Marijuana abuse is rising among API youth in Oakland. The number of API youth who were placed in drug treatment facilities for abusing marijuana more than doubled from 12 in 1999 to 30 in 2000.

✦ OUSD's bi-annual Healthy Kids Survey found that Chinese, Laotian, and Vietnamese youth were overrepresented among lifetime users of cigarettes, alcohol, and inhalants. Moreover, while API youth constituted 37% of the high school sample, they made up 50% of all ecstasy users in high school.

✦ Data based on API receiving drug treatment in Oakland suggest that a peak in first drug use occurs between the ages of 12 and 14. Furthermore, nearly half (48.2%) of all API in drug treatment say they started using drugs at age 17 or younger.

✦ In a national sample, a rise in the number of substances youth reported using was associated with a rise in antisocial behavior. While this association was consistent across most API subgroups, it was most severe among Pacific Islander multi-substance users, who committed nearly *8 times* as many antisocial acts as their counterparts who reported no substance use.

✦ National data show that API youth have among the highest levels of depressed feelings and the highest rate of suicidal thoughts among all youth.

✦ The most frequent diagnoses in two Oakland health agencies serving API youth were *adjustment disorder* and *mood disorders* (e.g., depression). Both disorders have important implications for delinquent behavior because 1) adjustment disorder—a maladaptive reaction to a stressful event or life change—often involves acting out and other behavioral problems; and 2) there is an association between antisocial behavior and self-reported depression.

✦ In Alameda County, the percentages of Thai, Cambodian, Guamanian, Samoan, and Hawaiian girls (ages 15-19) who gave birth exceeded state and national rates for all API, as well as state and national rates for non-Hispanic Caucasians.

Other Findings

As we examined how Oakland's API youth were faring in the education, juvenile justice and behavioral health arenas, three broader themes emerged, cutting across all three areas.

✦ Disaggregation of API groups: When gathering and analyzing data, the CRP group has disaggregated the data into API ethnicities whenever possible. In doing so, important differences were uncovered among the various API subgroups. Southeast Asian (Cambodian, Laotian, Thai, and Vietnamese) and Pacific Islander (Hawaiian, Guamanian, Samoan, and Tongan) youth, in particular, have been the most affected by issues in our three areas of concern. Knowing which API youth are

in need is just the first step in developing culturally appropriate interventions.

✦ <u>Language access for parents:</u>The high proportion of API youth whose parents are immigrants indicates a need for outreach, information, and communication in appropriate languages. A key to language accessibility for parentsof API youth is to provide a context for instructions and notices so they will understand the implications of the information they are receiving.

✦ <u>Ages 12-14 – a critical period:</u> In OUSD, suspensions for injury to another person peak during the middle school ages of 12-14. The number of youth who begin using drugs also rises during this age. Other studies show that youth who are arrested for the first time before age 15 are more likely to be repeat offenders. Furthermore, teen birth rates among some API groups (ages 15-19) make the 12-14 age group a criticaltarget for prevention as well as intervention.

5. Recommendations

Education

❖ **Outreach to the API community to increase parental awareness.** Parents must be involved in the process of improving attendance and thereby the academic performance of API students. One topic in need of immediate publicity is the OUSD graduation requirement (which affects LEP studentsin particular). It is imperative that any outreach effort be in multiple API languages and target such media as the ethnic press (e.g., newspapers, television and radio stations). Notices for parents should be made in appropriate languages and posted in areas where API congregate (community organizations, churches, etc.).

> "They should just talk to us instead of basing [LEP placement] on test scores."
>
> -Youth Participant

> One youth participant felt that English Language Development classes were not helpful and that she learned more in regular English classes because they were taught better.

❖ **Create a mechanism for communicating more effectively and directly with non-English-speaking parents of API youth about their children's education,** such as videotapes or parent conferences. Ethnic-specific parent conferences are currently held by the OUSD API Education Taskforce, providing opportunities for educators to connect with parents in environments they find comfortable.

❖ **Include youth in discussions on truancy.** Youth need to be included in discussions on truancy as well as playing a proactive role in identifying and implementing solutions. One suggestion is to conduct surveys with students to find out why they do not attend school and what would entice

> When asked what to do about reducing absences, one youth said, "Instead of just doing paper stuff, there should be more interactive stuff. More hands-on than mental stuff. A lot of people don't feel they are learning anything."
>
> -Youth Participant

them to return. These surveys are best conducted at the start of school year, when attendance rates are high.

❖ **Establish API Centers in each middle school and high school.** These resource centers would include academic and extracurricular programs and provide information on juvenile justice and behavioral health topics in various API languages. As a recognized resource, an API Center would bridge the gaps between child, family, and community, helping both parents *and* youth understand how various issues (e.g., suspensions and truancy) impact the school and the children's education and development. Although API Centers would be based in schools, their value lies in advocating for API youth in *all* arenas—not education alone.

Juvenile Justice

❖ **Develop one-on-one mentoring programs**. Adult mentors serve as role models for troubled youth, providing them with support in academics and life skills. Dedicated mentors help youth become resilient and less likely to engage in delinquent behavior.

❖ **Help parents of different ethnic backgrounds to understand the juvenile justice system**. Parents that understand the system are better able to advocate for their children. However, API youth are at a disadvantage when their parents speak little or no English. One solution is to create videos informing

parents of the juvenile justice process in their own language so that they are aware of both their child's rights and their rights as parents.

❖ **Make organizations, judges, police, and families aware of *alternatives* to the traditional juvenile justice system and incarceration**. Alternatives like McCullum Youth Court (in which youth are faced by and participate in a jury of their peers) exist but are under-utilized. One way to increase awareness is by creating a resource guide that lists Oakland youth organizations and the services that they provide. Such a guide would educate those who use it, and help various community groups establish relationships with each other.

❖ **Further research the high rates of conviction and institutional placement among API youth.** One possible reason that API youth are more likely to be convicted and placed is that language barriers prevent

> "I don't know. Today, we got some bad kids. Youth programs would help but there's always gonna be crime. Also, if a program has 200 kids, they're gonna form two groups and not like each other."
> -Youth Participant

parents from speaking to the judge on their child's behalf. The lack of understanding between API families and court officers may discourage more lenient sentences. However, such an observation needs to be supported by further analyses.

Behavioral Health

❖ **Further study substance use and abuse among Oakland's API youth.** Data show that the number of API youth entering drug treatment facilities (particularly for marijuana abuse) has increased sharply from 1999 to 2000. More research is needed to determine

> "I'm depressed all the time; I drink and I feel better. It's just a lot of stuff from my past…"
> -Youth Participant

whether this rise is due to increasing substance abuse or increased policing. In addition, knowing *why* API youth use certain substances is necessary for developing a plan to decrease the use of those substances (e.g., cigarettes, alcohol, marijuana, and ecstasy).

❖ **Research the impact and effectiveness of drug prevention and intervention programs.** Scant attention has been paid to the effectiveness of current programs in treating or preventing substance abuse among API youth. If more culturally competent programs were available, would there be a rise in the use of these services by API youth? Without a better understanding of how programs have succeeded or failed API youth, they cannot be improved.

❖ **Provide more confidential services for API youth**. Topics like substance abuse, mental health, and teen pregnancy are sensitive in nature, making it difficult for affected youth to seek help. Confidential services may break down these barriers. In addition, it is important to understand the help-seeking behaviors of immigrant and U.S.-born API youth, and acknowledge the importance of friends as sources of support and as targets of outreach.

"If I were suicidal, I wouldn't talk to my parents or doctors. I'd talk to my boys before talking to someone I don't know."

-Youth Participant

❖ **Continue to support programs that target reproductive health issues in API youth.** In Oakland, there are few API health agencies that, as Family PACT (Planning, Access, Care & Treatment) providers, are able to provide free contraception, testing for pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, and counseling to low income adolescents. There are also few multilingual programs that help API families speak with their youth about sex and teen pregnancy. These programs have been effective in preventing teen pregnancy, but are in danger of losing funding due to withering state budgets. Although it is important to improve current programs for the API community, the few programs that do exist must be protected.

Improving Our Tools and Resources

In addition to the above recommendations, three broader obstacles to better serving API youth were noted. The following recommendations are relevant to all three areas of concern (education, juvenile justice and behavioral health).

Disaggregate the API category. Although the CRP group has presented disaggregated data when possible, the greatest challenge to providing a more complete portrait of API youth has been the inconsistency with which agencies have recorded the specific ethnicity of API youth.

- ❖ Creating a set of API ethnic categories that can be used uniformly across various agencies would allow for comparison of information across agencies and create a greater wealth of information about specific API ethnic groups, helping to clarify the issues that they face.

Break down language barriers. Of the 18,343 households in Oakland in which an Asian or Pacific Islander language is spoken, 47.9% are *linguistically isolated*, meaning that they cannot access information in English. Without knowledge of the issues facing youth and the resources available to them, API parents cannot advocate for their children.

- ❖ Throughout each area, recommendations to overcome the language barrier have included videotapes, parent conferences, and other educational materials in parents' own language to inform them about issues in education (e.g., truancy, LEP status), juvenile justice (e.g., legal rights, the adjudication process) and behavioral health (e.g., substance use, mental health, and teen pregnancy).

Fund more research. A number of issues would be illuminated by further research on the needs of Oakland's API youth. These areas include the factors behind API youth truancy and substance use, as well as the mental health issues and service utilization patterns of specific API ethnic groups.

- ❖ Both quantitative and qualitative research are valued, as well as collaboration between researchers and community-based organizations. Three groups deserve particular attention: Pacific Islander and Southeast Asian youth, API Females, and middle school youth (ages 12 to 14).

6. Closing Statements

The CRP group reflects and represents the diversity of Oakland's Asian and Pacific Islander communities. Strengthened by our different backgrounds, we united under the goal of providing our youth with the opportunities for growth and development that they deserve. Over the past year and a half, we have identified the issues facing API youth and some of the steps that must be taken to resolve them. It is a critical start to a larger process that will involve advocacy and implementation.

Our collaboration is a testament to the value of collective effort, and such an effort must continue to expand if we are to respond to the needs of our youth. Because API youth are as diverse as the challenges they face, an effective response will entail an increasing involvement and cooperation among federal and private agencies, community-based organizations, and most importantly API youth, their parents, and the community.

7. Appendix

Subcommittee Members

Education
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Youth Input Subcommittee
Khin Mai Aung, Youth Leadership Institute
Jennifer Lee, Asian Health Services
Mike Lok, University of California, Santa Cruz
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Youth Input Sessions
Danfeng Koon, Dewey Academy

Participating students from:
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Life Academy, Fremont High School
Oakland Technical High School
University of California, Berkeley
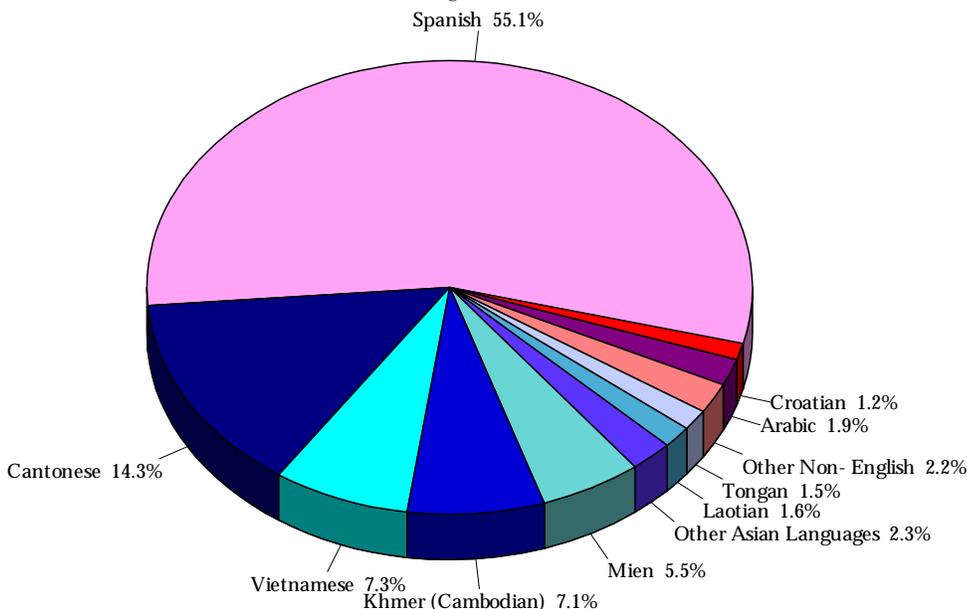
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Limited English Proficient (LEP) Students Language Breakdown

In All OUSD High Schools, 2001-2002

Spanish 55.1%
Cantonese 14.3%
Vietnamese 7.3%
Khmer (Cambodian) 7.1%
Mien 5.5%
Other Asian Languages 2.3%
Laotian 1.6%
Tongan 1.5%
Other Non- English 2.2%
Arabic 1.9%
Croatian 1.2%

Source: OUSD http://www.grantoffice.ousd.k12.ca.us Downloaded March 10, 2003

Demographics

Population of Oakland, 2000

	Population	Population 17 and under	% under 17 of Total Population
Total	399,484	99,759	25.0%
Caucasian	138,593	26,090	18.8%
Black/African American	150,139	42,933	28.6%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	6,767	1,898	28.0%
Hispanic*	87,467	30,197	34.5%
Total API	69,618	17,482	25.1%
Asian	66,400	16,248	24.5%
Asian Indian	2,321	567	24.4%
Cambodian	3,237	1,485	45.9%
Chinese	34,242	7,075	20.7%
Filipino	8,191	1,972	24.1%
Indonesian	171	37	21.6%
Japanese	3,162	548	17.3%
Korean	2,131	315	14.8%
Laotian	3,206	1,399	43.6%
Pakistani	120	26	21.7%
Thai	285	73	25.6%
Vietnamese	9,658	2,901	30.0%
Other specified Asian	116	10	8.6%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander:	3,218	1,234	38.3%
Native Hawaiian	547	168	30.7%
Samoan	514	217	42.2%
Tongan	1,129	535	47.4%
Micronesian	223	70	31.4%
Melanesian	111	36	32.4%

Source: U.S. Census 2000 Summary File 2 (SF 2) 100-Percent Data

All ethnicities are "alone or in any combination;" therefore percentages may add up to over 100%.

*Includes all persons reporting Hispanic ancestry.

Bangladeshi, Hmong, Malaysian, and Sri Lankan information is excluded because total population is less than 100
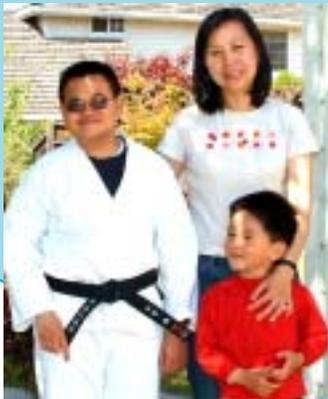
For more information about accessing the full report, *Under the Microscope: Asian and Pacific Islander Youth in Oakland, Needs-Issues-Solutions*, please contact Sharan Dhanoa, (510) 208-0500, Ext. 308, sdhanoa@sf.nccd-crc.org.

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