Jay Guan  
Board Chair  
Chinese American Parent Association, Montgomery County

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Members of the Board, and Superintendent Smith,

My name is Jay Guan. I am the Board Chair of the Chinese American Parent Association, Montgomery County (CAPA-MC). Today, I want to share a story with you.

This is a story of a kid. The place? San Gabriel Valley of Los Angeles, CA. This kid went to a high school named Arroyo High School, in the City of El Monte, CA. It was a school of about 2000 students, most of which are low income (~ 55%), among them, about 22% of identifies as Asian, ~66% Hispanic. He was among the low income families in that school. His parents worked in a garment factory (back then they used to have those in LA), and spoke limited English. He recently moved there and enrolled as a sophomore. He didn't know anyone. Worst of all, he had not a clue as to where to go after high school and how to get there. Military? Community college? What's the difference between community colleges and four-year universities? Extracurricular activities? What are those? The kid was lost.

The kid’s parents were understandably concerned, they asked the kid if he wanted to go to Arcadia High instead, they would even risk using a “relative’s” address to send him to there. Arcadia High School was then a school with about 3000+ students, 63% of which identifies as Asian, ~13% Hispanic. Only ~15% is considered FARM/low-income. It was (and still is) considered one of the “good” high schools in the area. In the parents’ minds, the kid would be better off if he go to a “good” school.

However, the parents did not know that Arroyo had an array of support services - dedicated college application counselor, college & career center, translation services, and caring teachers who pointed the kid in the right direction - Ms. Hunter (the English teacher), Mrs. Bolen (Chemistry and Physics teacher), Mr. Wang (the Calculus teacher).

The kid gave the parent’s offer some thought, and said no. The additional commute would be hard on everyone (an additional 30 minutes each day). Most importantly, the kid did not see how going to Arcadia would help. Arcadia did not have the aforementioned services. If the kid did go there, what would the kid do? Bug his would-be classmates to no end?

Fast forward to the present, I am happy to report the kid graduated college with a degree in engineering, gainfully employed in said field, and started a family. In all sense of the word, the kid was considered upwardly mobile when compared with his parents. He made it so to say.

I would know all of this, because that kid was me.
I am where I am today because of the support I received. I am where I am today because of the dedication of the teachers at Arroyo. I am where I am today because I chose not to go to Arcadia (as strange as that sounds).

The moral of story? I was not aware of so-called FARM disparity. I was not aware that I and my friends were “segregated”. I was not aware that my FARM status will impact my “outcome”. I was only aware that helps were there when I needed it.

It is often said that indicators of poverty is highly correlated with poor educational achievement. We must remember that correlation does not causality make. So when moving forward with this effort, we should keep in mind what that kid actually needed, not just some quantified metrics and their relationships. After all, education is about the kids. This is about the kids, right?

Reference:
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