

2025-2026 Youth Council Program Report



Photos: AAPI Youth Council Showcase June 2026



Prepared by:
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AAPIC Mission



Photo: AAPIC Small Grants Celebration June 2026

The Asian American & Pacific Islanders Commission (AAPIC) is the only permanent, state body dedicated to addressing the needs of AAPI communities, as well as celebrating AAPI contributions in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Commonwealth residents of Asian and Pacific Islander heritage often face overlooked issues that impact their social, cultural, economic, and political well-being. We tackle these challenges through programs, education, resources, and advocacy to the state legislature.

We act as a bridge between state-level agencies, community groups, and community members, fostering a more inclusive and supportive environment for all Massachusetts AAPI residents.

Youth Council



Photo: AAPIC Youth Council Showcase June 2025

The AAPIC Youth Council was envisioned by Education Committee in 2022, with support from Commissioners, staff, and the Asian Caucus. It was created in response to concerns from AAPI students about racism and the lack of concrete action in school districts with the goal to uplift young people's voices and promote leadership among AAPI youth across Massachusetts.

The mission of AAPIC's Youth Council is to empower and amplify the voices and experiences of AAPI youth, helping them grow as leaders and agents of meaningful change in their communities.

Starting in the 2024–2025 program year, the Youth Council introduced civic engagement projects, where each member designs and leads an independent community action project over the course of the program, culminating in a final showcase at the Massachusetts State House.

Asian Caucus Legislative Partnership



Photo: AAPIC Youth Council Showcase June 2026 with Rep. Chan, Rep. Sangiolo, and Sen. Howard

The Commission is deeply grateful for our partnership with the **Massachusetts Asian Caucus**, whose continued support plays an essential role in advancing our mission. We extend our sincere appreciation to **Representative Tackey Chan** and his office in sponsoring the House Members Lounge and providing an informative tour of the House Chambers. Thank you to **Senator Vanna Howard** and her office for their partnership and for her tour of the Senate Chambers. We are also grateful to **Representative Amy Mah Sangiolo** and her staff for joining. Finally, we thank all members of the Asian Caucus for their continued partnership and steadfast support of the Commission and its Youth Council.

*Photo: Rep. Chan
Tour of House
Chambers*



*Photo: Sen.
Howard Tour of
Senate Chambers
with Rep. Chan*

2026 AAPI Commission Youth Council Showcase: Building Massachusetts' Next Generation of AAPI Leaders



2025-2026 Youth Council Cohort Snapshot

14 YOUTH COUNCIL MEMBERS

12 MUNICIPALITIES REPRESENTED

4 MAJOR IMPACT AREAS

12+ COMMUNITY PARTNERS

COUNTLESS COMMUNITY MEMBERS REACHED

Projects by Impact Area

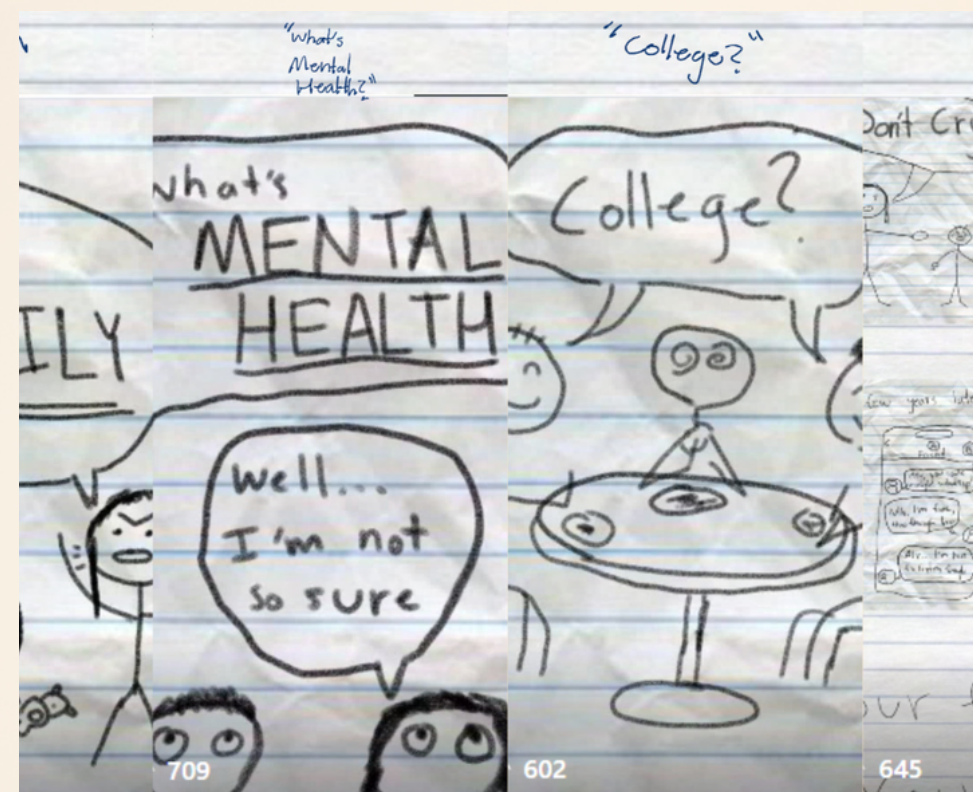
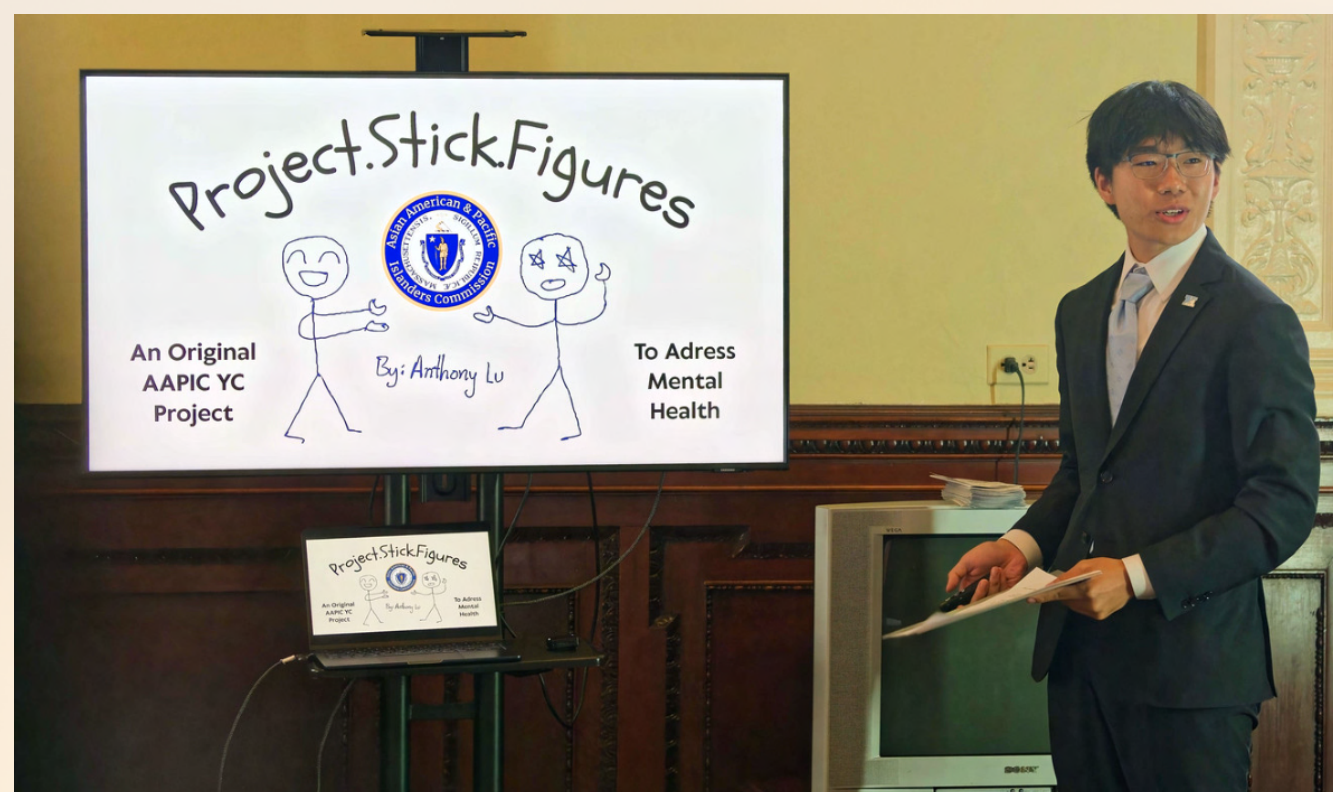
Issue Area	Youth Council Members
Mental Health & Wellness (5)	Anthony You-Cheng Lu (Natick), David Guo (Belmont), Ying Kay Leung (Belchertown), Juliet Dong (Acton), Rachel Huynh Roblinski (Monson)
AAPI Education & Curriculum (3)	Bhavika Kalia (Somerville), Diya Bhandari (Norwood), Vienna Dschung (Weston)
Cultural Identity & Storytelling (3)	Grace Zhang (Natick), Emily Wu (Lexington), Anika Niña Isabelle Mabano (Norwood)
Community Engagement & Civic Participation (3)	Chahat Kalia (Somerville), Skye Morishita (Boston), Jason Yin (Weston)

Mental Health & Wellness

Anthony You-Cheng Lu (Natick) Project.Stick.Figures



Anthony developed Project.Stick.Figures to engage AAPI youth and community members in conversations about mental health stigma. After recognizing that stigma often discourages open discussion, he collected survey responses documenting lived experiences, analyzed the findings, and transformed common themes into illustrated stick-figure stories shared through social media. The project combined research, storytelling, and digital advocacy to normalize conversations around mental health. Anthony intends to continue collecting stories while expanding the project's educational reach online.



David Guo (Belmont) Dragon Team



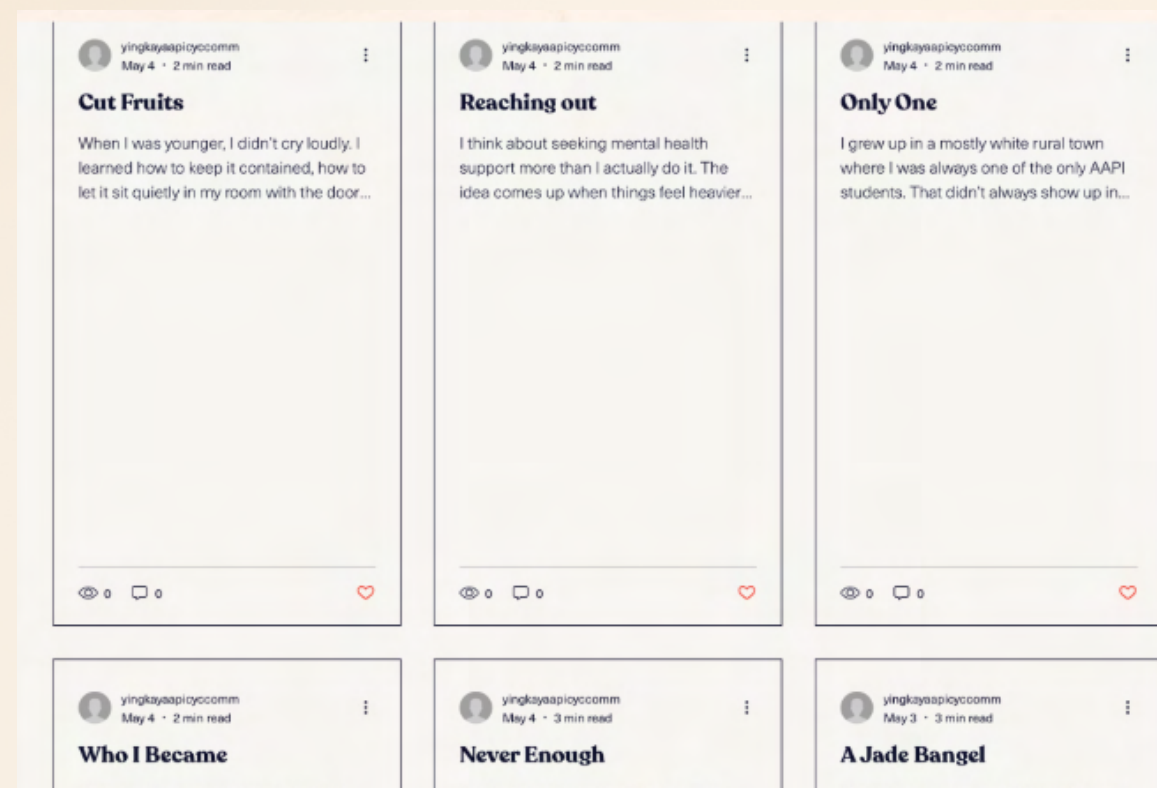
David engaged youth ages 12–18 from Belmont and neighboring communities by creating opportunities for leadership, physical wellness, and civic engagement through organized running events. Recognizing that many young people lack accessible opportunities to athletics, David coordinated a youth running team, the “Dragon Team,” while co-organizing three community 5K races in Belmont (May 3), Lexington (May 10), and Needham (May 17). David’s project successfully brought together youth participants across multiple municipalities to promote healthy lifestyles and community involvement. David successfully raised over \$1,500 to support his community project, and moving forward, David hopes to continue growing the program by expanding youth participation and supporting future races.



Ying Kay Leung (Belchertown) Voices of Who We Are



Building upon his Youth Council project from the previous year, Ying Kay continued developing an online storybook platform that shares authentic mental health experiences from AAPI youth. Recognizing the continued need to reduce stigma surrounding mental health, he collected six stories while expanding the platform's collection of lived experiences. The project provides a safe and accessible space for youth voices while encouraging open dialogue around mental health. His next step is completing the remaining stories and continuing to grow the platform as an ongoing community resource.



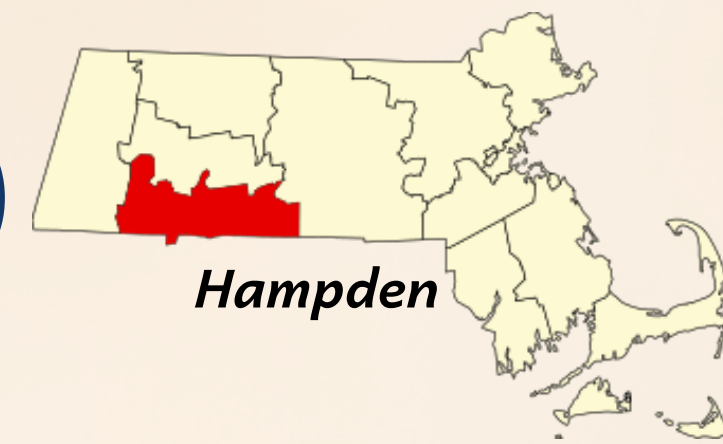
Juliet Dong (Acton) Special Needs Dance Therapy



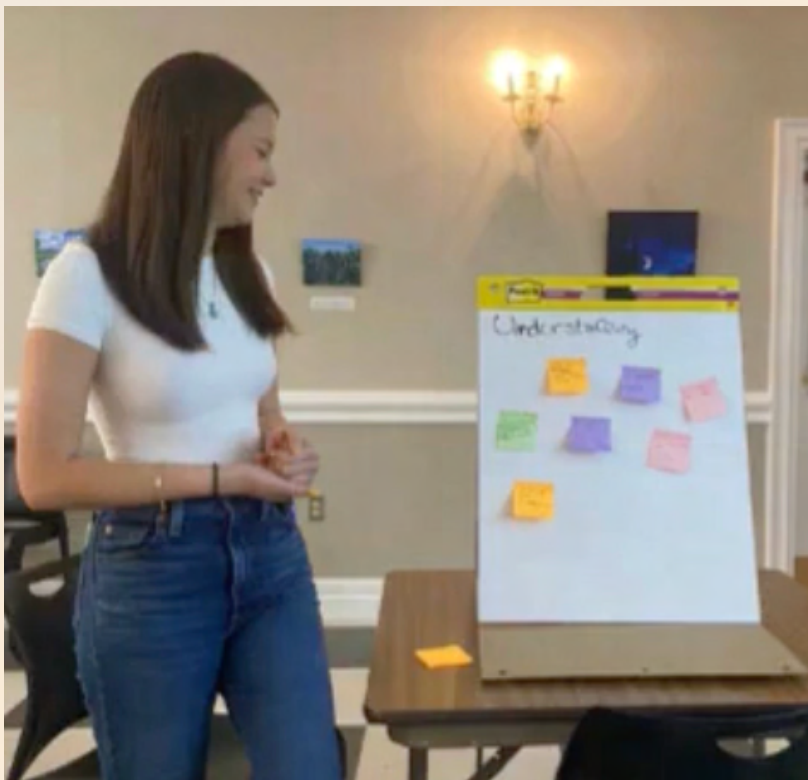
Juliet partnered with Riverside Family Support Center in Burlington to provide dance therapy programming for youth with disabilities and special needs. Building upon an existing partnership, she coordinated multiple dance sessions throughout the spring to increase access to inclusive recreational and therapeutic activities. The project successfully expanded programming by scheduling seven additional sessions and created meaningful opportunities for movement, expression, and social connection. Juliet plans to continue supporting the program beyond her Youth Council term.



Rachel Huynh Roblinski (Monson) Healthy Steps



Rachel's Healthy Steps project supported AAPI residents in the Monson area by increasing awareness of healthcare resources and recognizing the contributions of AAPI healthcare professionals. She organized two community educational sessions explaining Medicaid and Medicare enrollment while connecting residents with local health resources. The project improved access to information and strengthened community awareness of available healthcare services. Rachel hopes to continue expanding community health education efforts in the region.

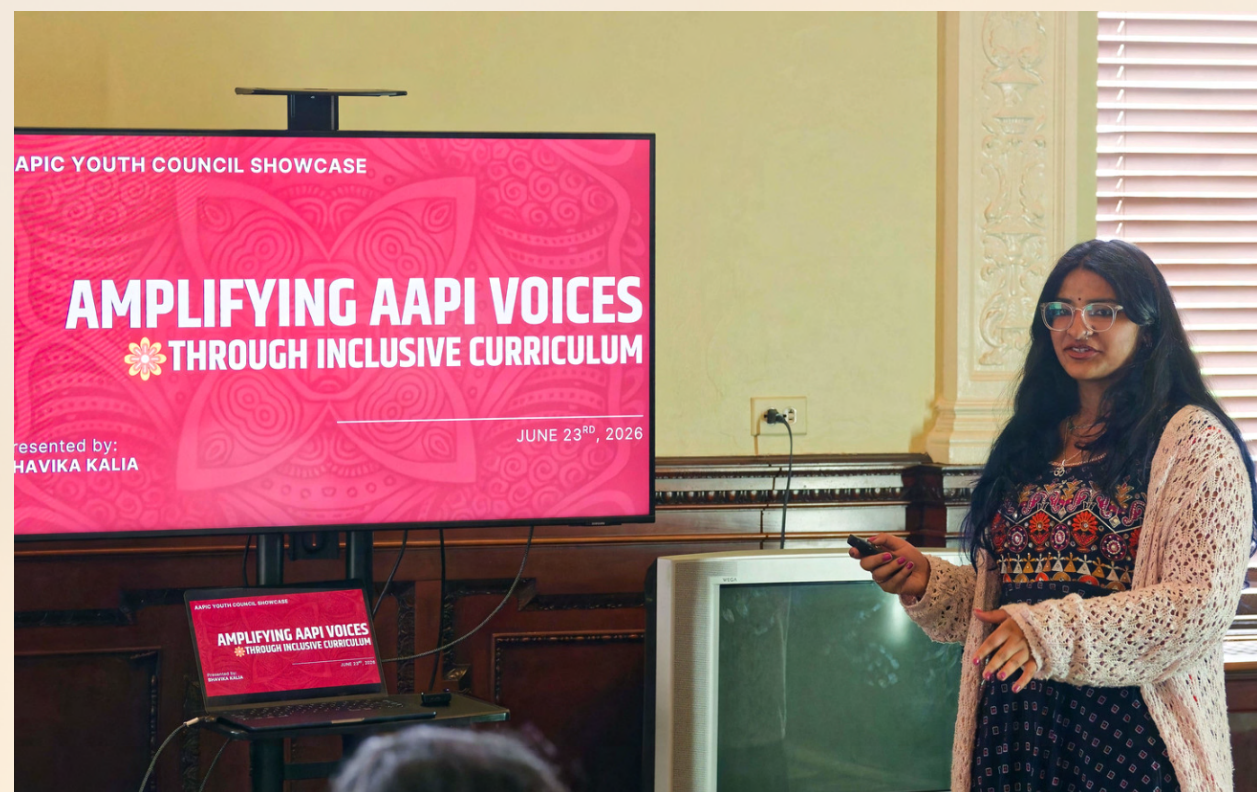


Education & Curriculum

Bhavika Kalia (Somerville) Inclusive AAPI Curriculum



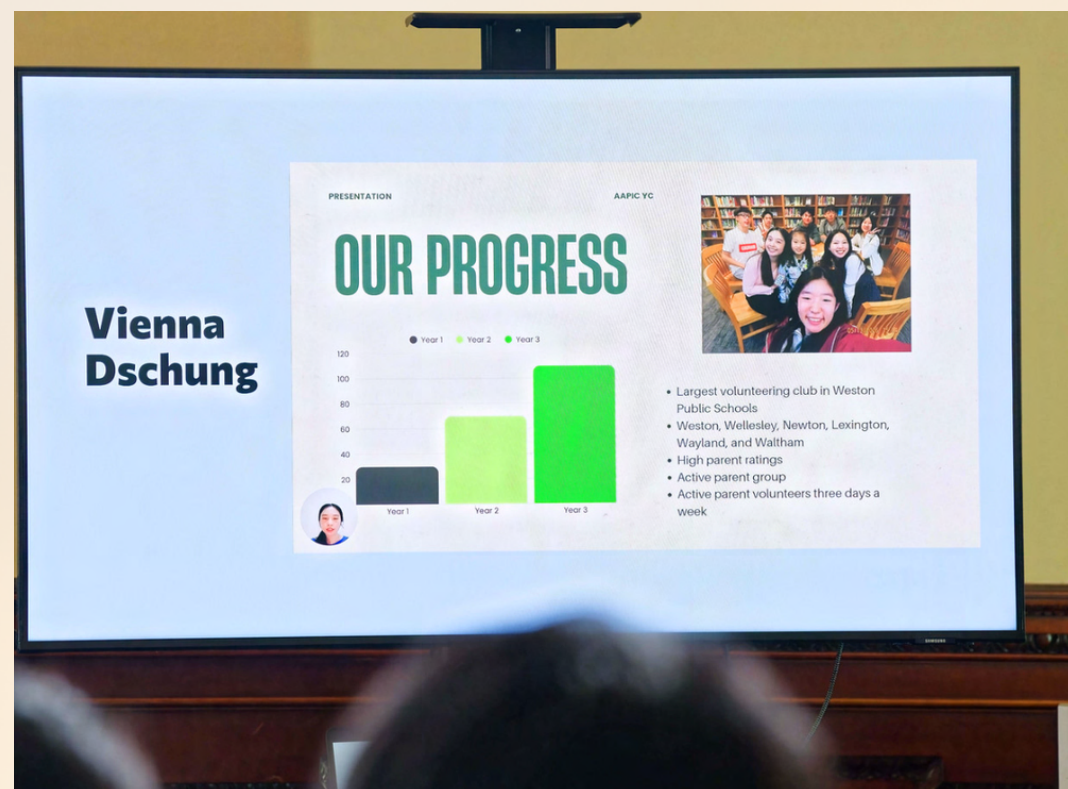
Bhavika's project addressed the lack of meaningful AAPI history within K-12 education by creating educational materials for students and educators in Somerville. She developed a lesson on birthright citizenship and Asian American immigration history, collaborated with her history teacher, Ms. Chung, to implement the curriculum during AAPI Heritage Month, and presented recommendations to the Somerville School Committee advocating for district-wide curriculum integration. Her work demonstrates a practical model for increasing AAPI representation in classroom instruction, with future efforts focused on expanding implementation across the district.



Vienna Dschung (Weston) Empower



Vienna's Empower project focused on high school students seeking meaningful volunteer opportunities. After identifying that students often struggle to find accessible and centralized volunteer resources, she built upon the largest volunteering club at Weston Public Schools by developing two new online resource guides through her Empower website. While the initial work centered on her school community, the long-term vision is to expand these resources to students across additional school districts. Future efforts will focus on growing school partnerships and increasing statewide access to volunteer opportunities.

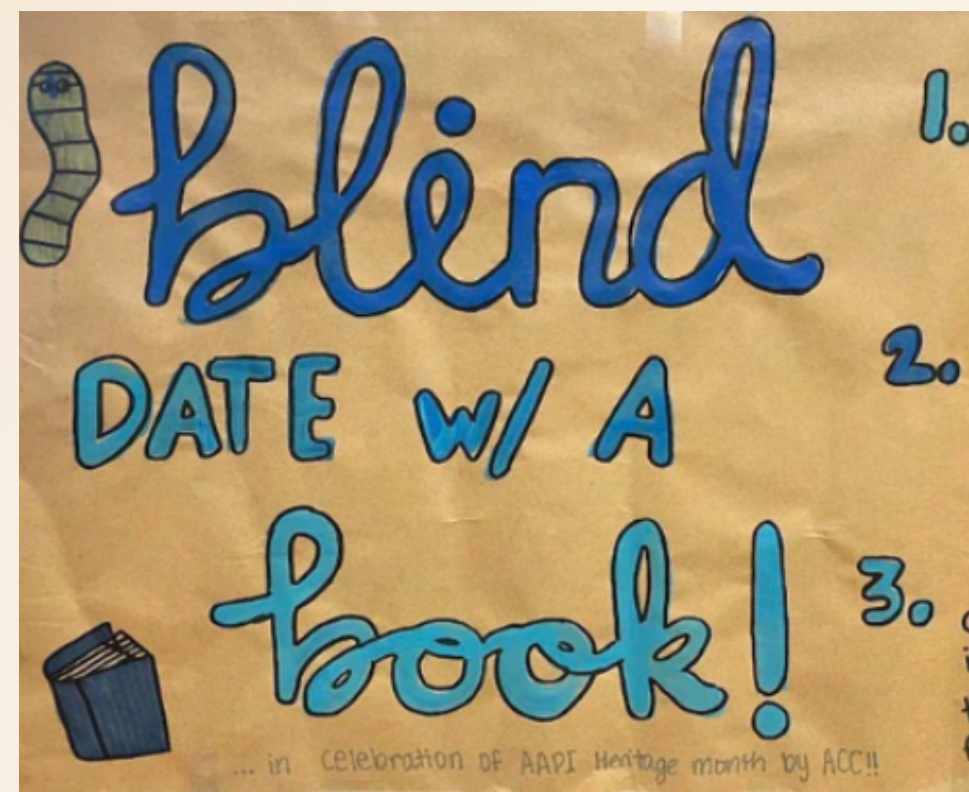


Diya Bhandari (Norwood) AAPI Book Blind Dates



Norfolk

Diya created AAPI Book Blind Dates to encourage students and educators to engage with AAPI literature while addressing the lack of diverse representation in school libraries. Partnering with her school librarian and Asian Culture Club, she established an interactive book display that introduced students to AAPI authors in an engaging way. She also developed a resource guide explaining the importance of incorporating AAPI literature into schools, which will be shared with neighboring districts and through Commission resources. The project lays the groundwork for expanding culturally representative reading initiatives beyond Norwood.



Cultural Identity & Storytelling

Grace Zhang (Natick)

AAPI Unmuted



Grace launched AAPI Unmuted, a social media storytelling campaign highlighting the significance and personal stories behind AAPI names. Recognizing that names are often misunderstood or mispronounced, she created feature videos that celebrated cultural identity while educating broader audiences. The campaign allowed 13 AAPI name stories to be shared, and reached more than 10,000+ viewers through social media. Grace intends to continue expanding the campaign by featuring additional community members and increasing public engagement.



Emily Wu (Lexington) Honoring AAPI Veterans



Emily's project centered on preserving and amplifying the stories of AAPI veterans in Lexington, recognizing that these voices are often absent from local historical narratives. She helped organize Lexington's Memorial Day observance and interviewed Isabello "Bill" Solano, CWO3, who served 20+ years in the Coast Guard and is of Phillipino descent. She is working to document their military service through a feature article in the Lexington Town Observer. By combining civic engagement with local journalism, Emily helped ensure these important stories become part of the community's historical record. She plans to continue documenting underrepresented community histories through journalism and oral history projects.



Anika Niña Isabelle Mabano (Norwood) Nourished by Culture



Anika's Nourished by Culture project challenged misconceptions surrounding Asian cuisine by highlighting nutritious traditional foods and recipes. Through interviews with community members, she documented culturally meaningful meals and created a digital platform featuring healthy recipes and personal stories. The project promotes culturally inclusive perspectives on nutrition while celebrating diverse food traditions. Future work will focus on expanding the recipe collection and incorporating additional community voices.

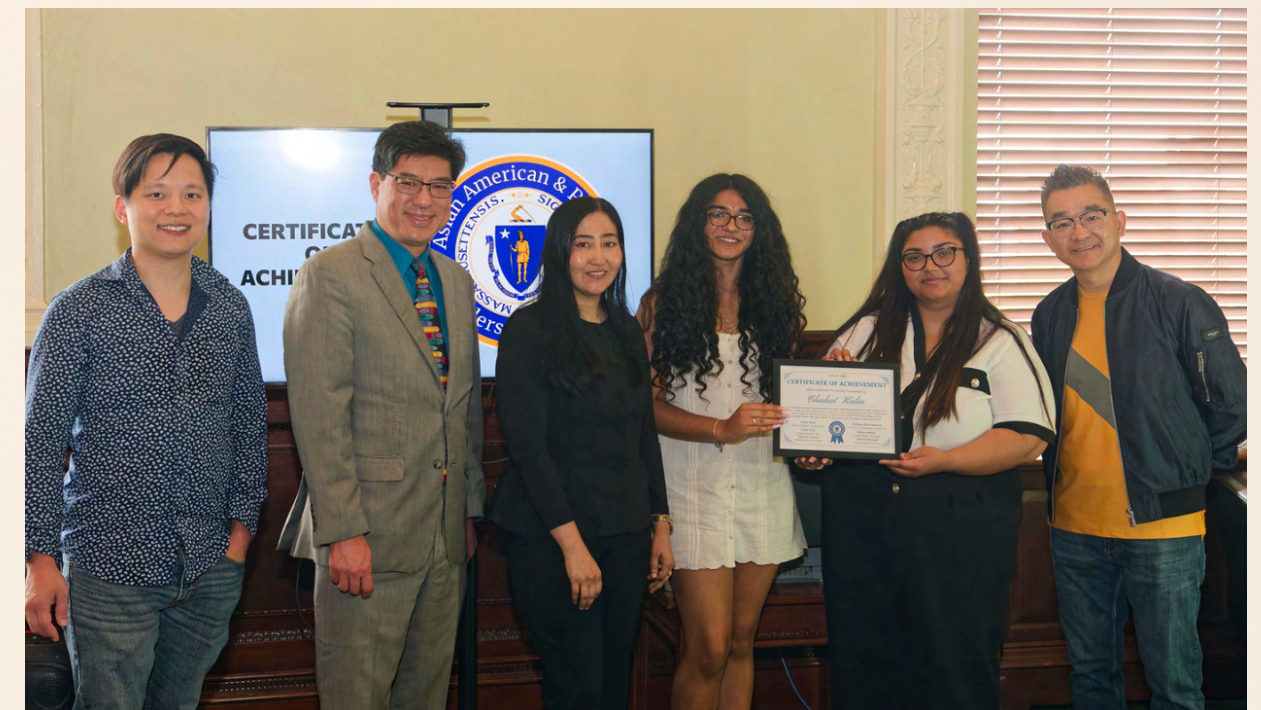
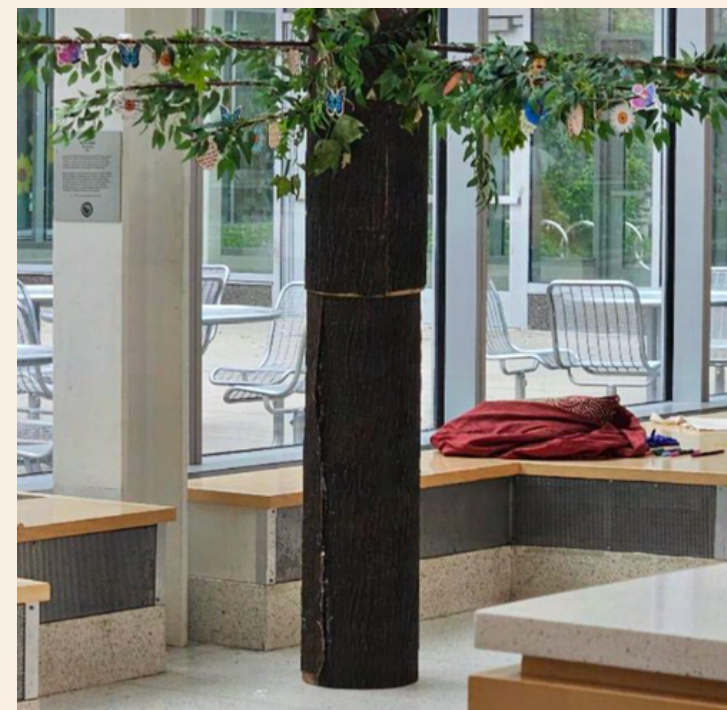


Community Engagement & Civic Participation

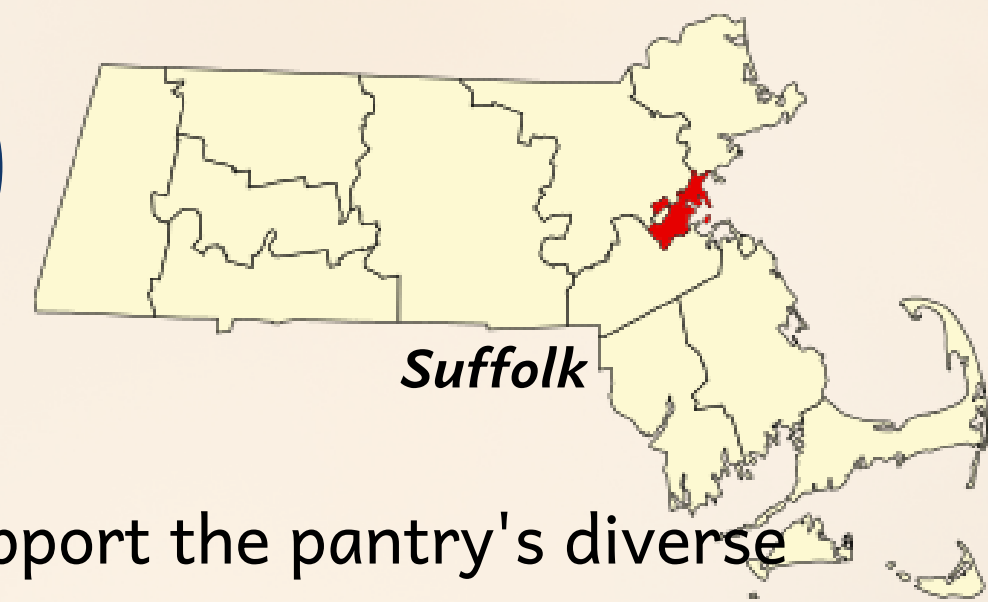
Chahat Kalia (Somerville) Community Tree Project



Chahat's Community Tree Project brought together AAPI community members through collaborative public art. Partnering with Dear Asian Youth, she facilitated workshops where participants collectively designed and built a three-dimensional community tree sculpture that was later unveiled at the Camberville (Somerville-Cambridge) Asian Festival. She recieved help from Somerville High School's DAY Club to built the tree from its foundation. Chahat's project created an opportunity for community members to express shared identity and belonging through art, and future efforts will explore additional collaborative public art initiatives.



Skye Morishita (Boston) Red Cross Food for Me

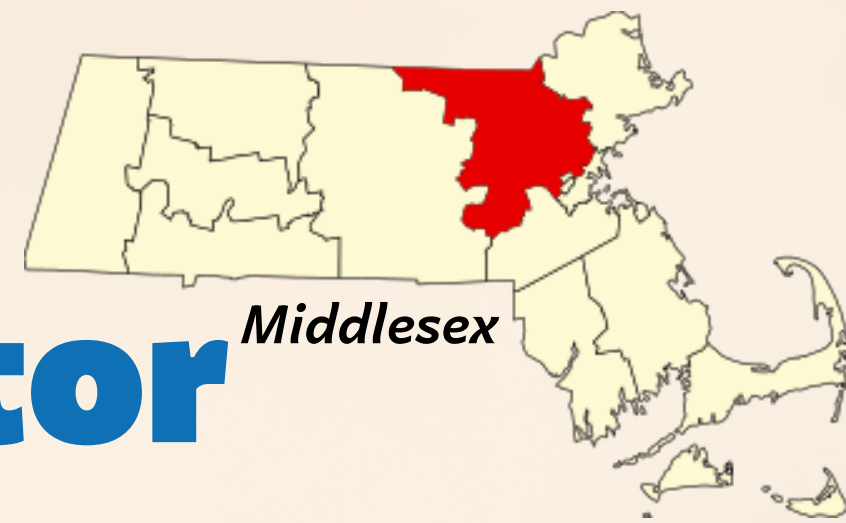


Skye partnered with the Boston Red Cross Food Pantry to better understand and support the pantry's diverse clientele, specifically its significant AAPI community. Having volunteered at the pantry for the past 2 years, Skye recognized that there was limited information about clients' experiences and whether available services reflected the cultural needs of the community. Working closely with leadership, including Sharon Curry and David Andre, Skye conducted outreach that documented the experiences of 45 AAPI clients. The project identified a strong desire for more culturally relevant food options, providing valuable insights that can help inform future pantry purchasing and service decisions. Moving forward, these findings will support ongoing efforts to make food assistance more culturally responsive and better aligned with the needs of the AAPI community.

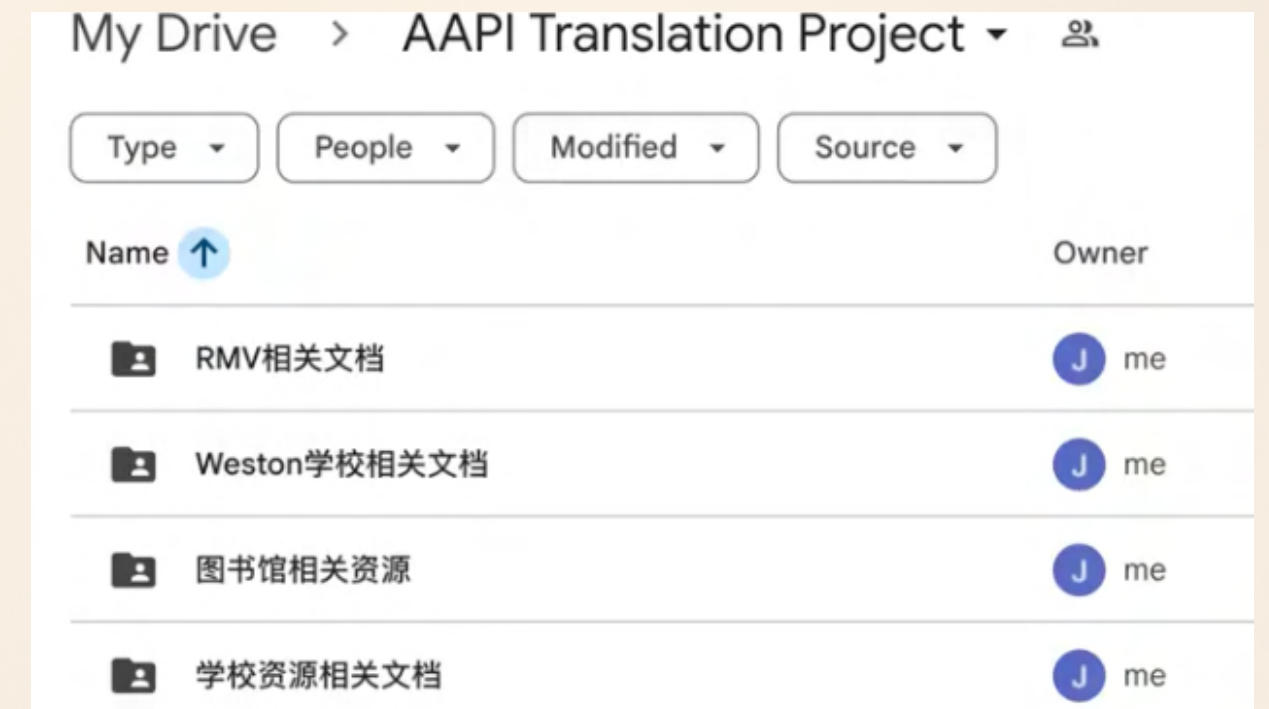
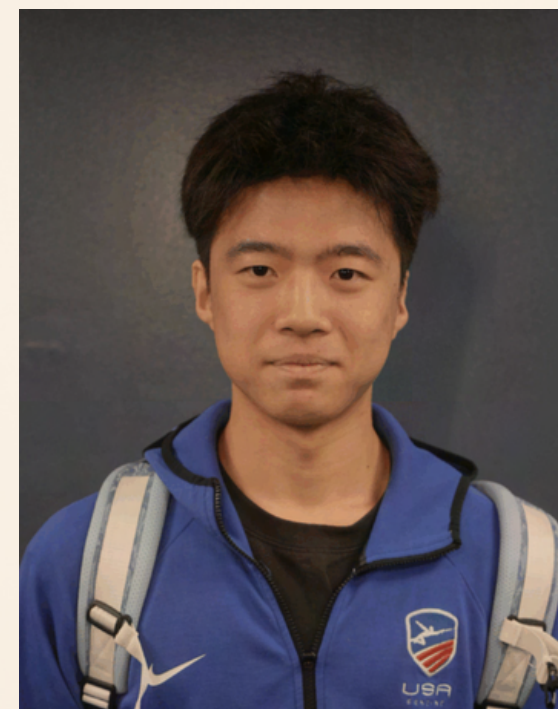
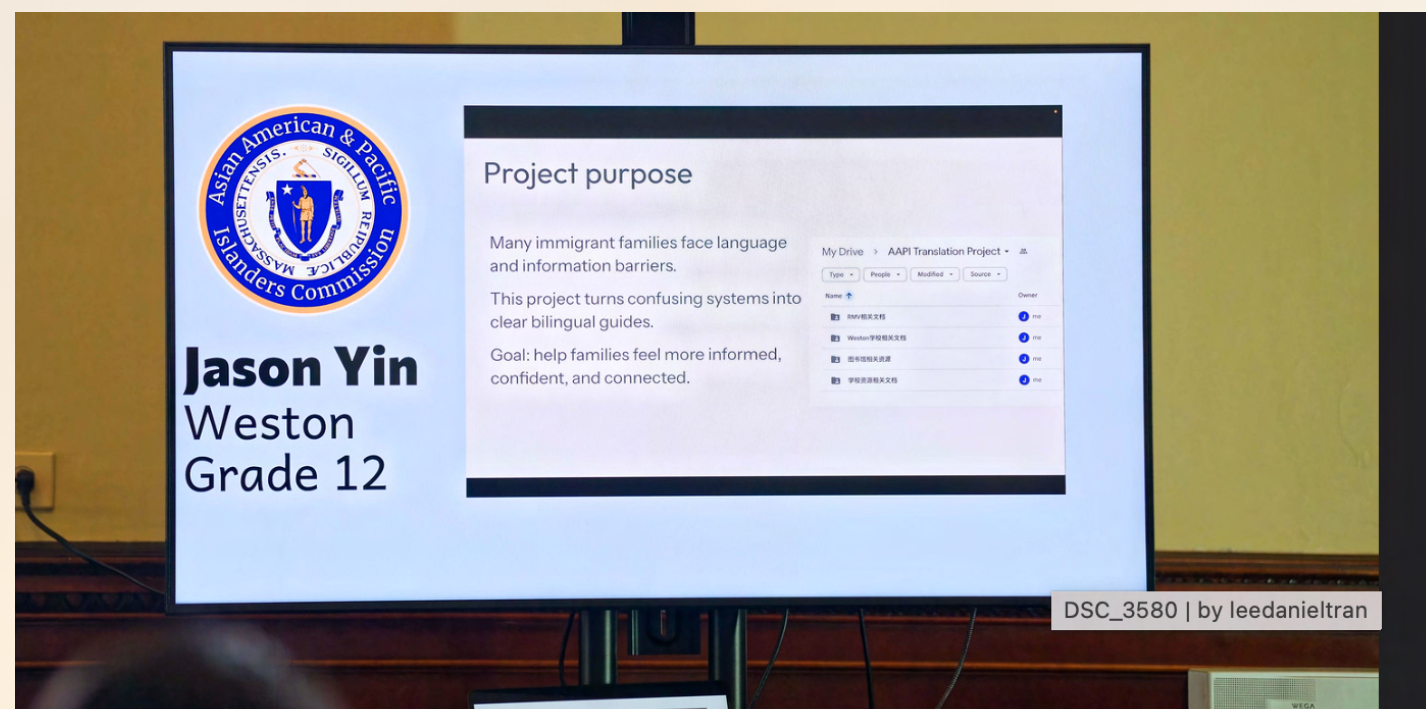


Jason Yin (Weston)

AAPI Youth Resource Navigator



Jason developed the AAPI Youth Resource Navigator program to support newly arrived immigrant families within Weston Public Schools who often face language barriers when accessing school and community services. After identifying gaps in language accessibility, he organized community listening sessions, identified priority resources, and began translating essential information into multiple languages. The project improves access to critical services while helping schools better support newcomer families. Future work will focus on expanding translated materials and strengthening partnerships with immigrant communities.



Thank You!



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