



WHAT IS DATA DISAGGREGATION?

What does data disaggregation mean?

Data disaggregation means *breaking down large data categories into more specific sub-categories*. When data are broken down and disaggregated by ethnic groups, they can show the unique differences among groups and reveal significant disparities. For Southeast Asian Americans (SEAs), measures of educational attainment like high school graduation rates, or health indicators like insured rates and the prevalence of certain diseases, reveal challenges that uniquely impact SEAA students, elders, and community members. With this information, we can better identify which communities need better support.

Why do we need race and ethnicity data?

Race data are essential for

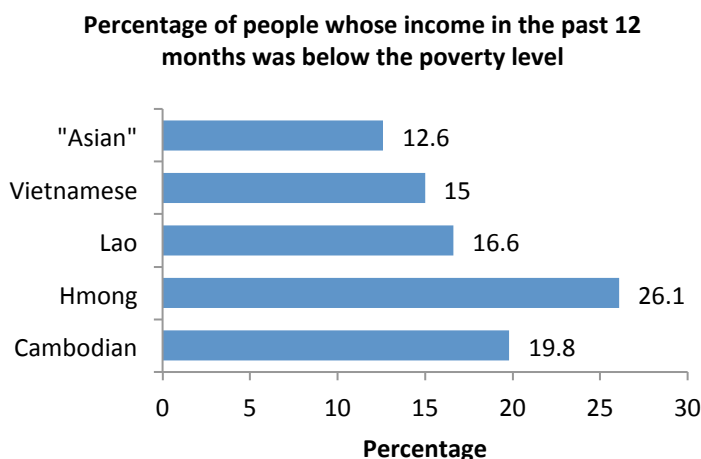
- planning and funding government programs,
- evaluating programs and policies to make sure they serve all communities equitably, and
- preventing discrimination.

Without data on race, policymakers cannot make sound, data-driven decisions to allocate resources equitably to meet the needs of all people.

What's the problem with current data collection and reporting?

Federal agencies, like the Department of Education and the Department of Health and Human Services, are required to report racial and ethnic data in at least these categories: Hispanic/Latino, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, and White.¹

However, Asian Americans and Native Hawaiian / Pacific Islanders (AANHPIs) are tremendously diverse. The US Census Bureau reports data annually on at least 22 distinct, self-identified AANHPI groups, each with unique linguistic, cultural, and historical differences.²



When government agencies report only averaged aggregate data under the “Asian” category, they conceal significant differences and inequities among the many distinct AANHPI groups. For SEAs, the mass collective trauma from war, genocide, displacement, and the stressors associated with relocation — like English language difficulties and cultural conflicts — affect health and socioeconomic outcomes.

¹ Office of Management and Budget. (1997). *Revisions to the Standards for the Classification of Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity*. Retrieved from <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-1997-10-30/pdf/97-28653.pdf>

² US Census Bureau / American Community Survey. Retrieved from https://factfinder.census.gov/bkmk/table/1.0/en/ACS/17_1YR/S0201//popgroup~04|-05

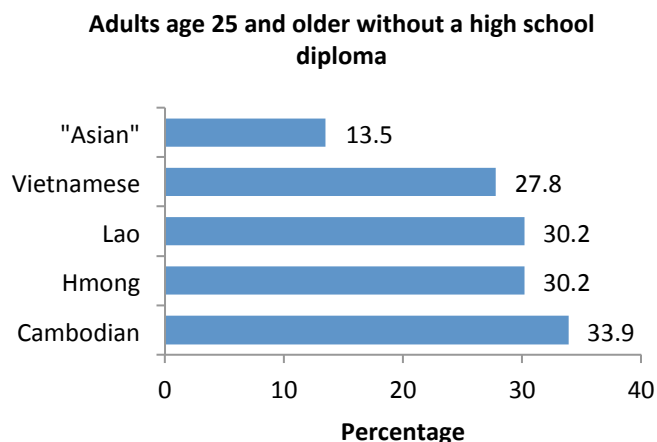
Debunking the myths

♦ *Will disaggregating data on AANHPI groups create an “Asian registry?”*

No. Disaggregating data on AANHPI groups simply helps policymakers figure out how to best support unique communities in education, health, and more. Without knowing through data who lives in each community, how many people live in each community, and what their unique needs are, policymakers cannot know how to provide for their needs. For example, knowing the disaggregated data on the higher-than-average rates of cervical cancer among Hmong Americans would help health policymakers and practitioners provide better, more targeted care for Hmong Americans than if they only had data on one large “Asian” group. Also, all race and ethnicity information are voluntary, and individuals can and are encouraged to self-identify – no one is forced to identify as any specific race or ethnicity to create a registry.

♦ *Isn’t it better to identify as a unified “Asian,” “Asian American,” or even just “American?”*

In a world where historical and structural inequalities no longer dictate who gets resources, yes. However, SEAs continue to experience the combined effects of war, genocide, displacement, and relocation to a country where they further face racism and xenophobia. These factors continue to prevent SEAs from accessing high-quality education, health care, and more, because they are marginalized and rendered invisible. Disaggregating data would help fix this by making visible the needs of SEAA communities and providing the facts behind equitable public policies. Disaggregated data would provide numerical power to specific SEAA communities and ensure that SEAA communities receive their just share of resources and support.



♦ *Why should anyone else care about disaggregating data?*

Data disaggregation could benefit not just SEAs, but also other AANHPI communities and communities of color. For example, in 2017, 68% of refugees worldwide came from just five countries, including South Sudan and Somalia.³ They may require specific government services, educational support, or health programs because of their unique status as refugees than can be identified if they are lumped under the aggregate category of “Black or African American,” which includes Black Americans, African immigrants who came to the US voluntarily, and others.

³ UNHCR. *Forced Displacement In 2017*. Retrieved from <https://www.unhcr.org/5b27be547.pdf>

What can community groups do to advocate for data disaggregation?

◆ **Contact your elected officials**

Legislative solutions would require government agencies to disaggregate their data and ensure that SEAA are counted in policy and programmatic decisions. Reach out to your representatives in local, state, and federal governments, and educate them on why data disaggregation is critical — you can even send them this fact sheet!

◆ **Work with state education agencies to ensure that implementation of the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) holds schools responsible for the achievement of disaggregated student groups**

At a minimum, states are required by federal law to hold schools accountable for the academic performance of each of the broader seven ethnic and racial groups. Community groups can advocate for state education agencies to be even more thorough and require the additional reporting of student achievement data for major AANHPI subgroups. ESSA requires states to engage parents and communities in decision-making, so be sure to exercise your voice and power.

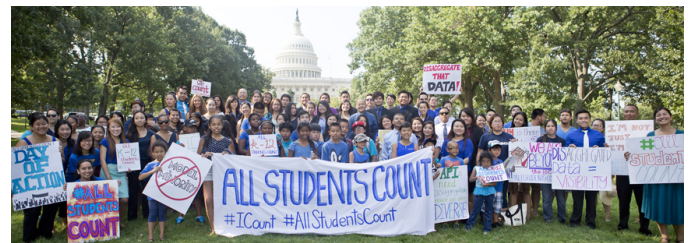
◆ **Partner with researchers and government agencies to analyze data that is collected by some agencies, but not reported out**

Some government agencies and school districts collect data on AANHPI subgroups but do not publicly report the data. The US Department of Health and Human Services collects data on the same race and ethnicity categories as in the census, and some states, including RI, MN, and WA, have already passed laws requiring state or local education agencies to disaggregate student achievement data. Community groups and researchers can work with such agencies to further analyze the data and help better serve diverse communities.

What can local and state policymakers do to support data disaggregation?

◆ **Begin collecting and reporting on disaggregated student data**

Local changes set precedents for other local actions to happen across the country and provide other institutions with knowledge on the feasibility and effectiveness of data disaggregation. Local data collections of detailed AANHPI groups can help the creation and implementation of policies that benefit local populations when federal efforts are too broad to support small, local communities. These changes can also further encourage federal policymakers to call for national changes if they can see real life examples of multiple entities that are effectively disaggregating data and using that data to serve communities' needs.



◆ **Seek federal resources, partnerships, and cost-sharing or cost-effective ways to implement data disaggregation**

Federal grant programs, such as the Race to the Top challenge, the Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems Grant Program, and the D2 program, have allowed funds to be used to pursue data disaggregation practices and policies. In addition to pursuing federal assistance through such programs, state and local agencies can also form partnerships with private companies to update data systems. Additionally, in California, agreements between California State University and University of California provide examples of cost-sharing across institutions to develop data disaggregation systems that serve multiple campuses.

Neglecting to disaggregate data denies Southeast Asian American communities the resources and support they need to thrive. Without disaggregated data, SEAs and other AANHPI groups are made unseen, and their needs are not considered in important policy and programmatic decisions. As a result, they are “caught in the vicious cycle of invisibility, marginality, and persistent underrepresentation.”⁴

What can federal policymakers do?

◆ ***Revise agency policies to expand racial and ethnic data collection and reporting***

Different agencies have varying requirements for data collection and reporting of race and ethnicity as long as the data reflect the minimum government-wide categories of American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, and White. The US Department of Education (ED) requires education entities to collect and report data in only these broad groups, but the data standard at the Department of Health and Human Services is more granular and follows the disaggregation of the minimum standards as implemented by the American Community Survey (ACS) and the 2000 and 2010 Decennial Census. Federal agencies like ED that do the bare minimum should emulate the standards set at agencies like HHS to ensure that all communities are being counted and served.

◆ ***Increase availability of federal resources and assistance to states for disaggregating data***

The federal Asian American and Pacific Islander Data Disaggregation Initiative D2 Program provides grants to state and local educational agencies to obtain and evaluate disaggregated data on English Learner (EL) AAPI subpopulations beyond the existing seven racial and ethnic categories. For SEAs that already disaggregate beyond the existing seven racial and ethnic categories, the grant supports data analysis to identify targeted strategies for closing educational opportunity gaps. Congress should continue to fund grant programs like D2 during annual appropriations as well as create new ones that encourage and support state and local entities to disaggregate data.

◆ ***Pass legislation and allocate sufficient funds to equip states and municipalities to disaggregate their data***

In 2012, ED issued a Request for Information (RFI) to gather and share information about practices and policies regarding existing education data systems that disaggregate data on sub-groups within the AANHPI student population. It found that school districts, state education agencies, and institutions of higher education consistently did not disaggregate data beyond what is mandated or “required” by the federal government. Congress should therefore pass new laws that require agencies and institutions to disaggregate their data to ensure that all communities are counted and represented in critical policy and programmatic decisions. A federal mandate also ensures consistency in how data are disaggregated by providing the minimum guidelines for states to follow. Additionally, states and local governments should disaggregate further for smaller communities not covered by federal mandates to account for their unique local needs.

⁴ Um, K. (2003). *A Dream Denied: Educational Experiences of Southeast Asian Youth*. Washington, DC: Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC). Retrieved from <https://www.ocf.berkeley.edu/~sasc/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/A-Dream-Denied.pdf>