

Protect AANAPISIs



Rising Up: The Southeast Asian American Educational Journey

Today, one in four or fewer Cambodian, Hmong, Lu Mien, and Laotian American adults have a college degree—far less than the national average. Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions (AANAPISIs) play a critical role in changing those statistics. The AANAPISI program provides federal funding to improve outcomes for Southeast Asian American, other Asian American, Pacific Islander, and other college students. They are effective: each year, AANAPISIs and other Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs) graduate a disproportionately high percentage of students of color across the country.

Yet the Trump administration has put AANAPISIs and other MSIs in its crosshairs. In 2025, the Administration decimated funding and threatened their legality—ignoring Congress’ express intent in supporting them. We demand immediate action to restore funding and protect the future of AANAPISIs and other MSIs.

What are AANAPISIs?

AANAPISIs are higher education institutions serving high concentrations of low-income students and students who identify as Asian American or Pacific Islander, such as Southeast Asian Americans. AANAPISIs are one of the seven types of MSIs, all of which enroll undergraduate populations of which at least half receive federal financial aid. Other MSIs enroll a high percentage of Black, Latinx, Native American, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian students.

Congress established the AANAPISI program in 2007 to improve college access and success for Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander students—including the stark and significant unmet need across Southeast Asian American communities.¹

How do AANAPISIs use federal funding?


Colleges and universities that are designated as an AANAPISI become eligible for competitive federal grants, which fund a variety of proven approaches to support Southeast Asian American, other Asian American, and Pacific Islander students. These initiatives include:

- academic advising
- peer mentoring
- faculty development
- institutional research
- leadership, and community engagement opportunities
- culturally relevant curricula.

AANAPISIs also use funds to improve institutional capacity for *all* students.²

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

22% of Cambodian
25% of Hmong
19% of Laotian
21% of Lu Mien
34% of Vietnamese
 ... adults 25 and older
 hold a bachelor’s degree.

 In comparison, 35% of all American adults 25 and older hold a bachelor’s degree.

Source: AAPI Data analysis of US Census data, 2025

AANAPISI DESIGNATION

To receive the AANAPISI designation, a higher education institution must enroll an undergraduate population of which:

At least 50% receives
 financial aid,

and

At least 10% identifies
 as Asian American or Native
 American Pacific Islander.

Source: US Department of Education, 2026

Why are AANAPISIs important?

AANAPISIs are an essential pathway for Southeast Asian American students to access and succeed in college and beyond. AANAPISIs and MSIs also improve academic outcomes for students of all backgrounds, not just the designated group.

FEDERAL FUNDING GAPS

Despite growing demand and proven effectiveness, the federal government provided funding for only **15%** of the almost 200 colleges and universities eligible for the AANAPISI designation in 2023.

Source: Nguyen et al, 2023

What is the current threat to AANAPISIs?

In September 2025, the Trump Administration canceled \$350 million in discretionary funding for MSIs, including \$18 million for AANAPISIs.³ In December 2025, the Trump Administration claimed that MSIs were unlawful, despite their long-standing legitimacy and Congress' clear intent in creating and supporting them.⁴ The AANAPISI and other MSI programs remain in peril, requiring immediate action to reinstate funding, reiterating Congressional intent and legal authorization, and continue supporting thousands of Southeast Asian American and other students of color across the country.

ECONOMIC OUTCOMES

Full-time students of all racial and ethnic backgrounds at public four-year AANAPISIs earned an average **\$8,700** more annually than their peers who did not attend AANAPISIs.

Source: TICAS, 2024

AA & NHPI REPRESENTATION

AANAPISIs represent only **6%** of all colleges and universities, yet enroll over **40%** of all Asian American and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander undergraduates.

Source: TICAS, 2024

Recommendations

- ✂ Demand that the federal government restore AANAPISI discretionary funding.
- ✂ Protect the Congressionally authorized AANAPISI and other MSI programs.
- ✂ Increase AANAPISI funding to meet demonstrated institutional demand.
- ✂ Ensure consistent US Department of Education implementation of AANAPISI and MSI programs.

About this fact sheet

This fact sheet is one in a series accompanying [Rising Up: the Southeast Asian American Educational Journey](#) (2026), a report on Southeast Asian American students from Southeast Asia Resource Action Center.

Suggested citation: Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC). 2026. Rising Up: Protect AANAPISIs [fact sheet]. Retrieved from www.searac.org//resources/rising-up-protect-aanapisis/.

REFERENCES

¹ Julie J. Park and Mitchell J. Chang, "Asian American and Pacific Islanders Serving Institutions: The Motivations and Challenges behind Seeking a Federal Designation," *AAPINexus: Policy, Practice and Community* 7, no. 2 (2009): 107–128, <https://www.aapinexus.org/2009/09/22/article-asian-american-and-pacific-islanders-serving-institutions/>

² Mike Hoa Nguyen, "Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institutions (AANAPISIs): Serving and Advocating for the Educational Needs of Southeast Asian American Students," *Journal of Southeast Asian American Education and Advancement* 15, no. 2 (2020): <https://doi.org/10.7771/2153-8999.1205>; Phitsamay S. Uy et al., "Asian American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions (AANAPISIs) Do Build Social Capital: Strategies Supporting the Success of Southeast Asian American Students," *Journal of College Student Development* 66, no. 5 (September/October 2025): 549–564, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/csd.2025.a970178>.

³ US Department of Education, "US Department of Education Ends Funding to Racially Discriminatory Discretionary Grant Programs at Minority-Serving Institutions," press release, September 10, 2025, <https://www.ed.gov/about/news/press-release/us-department-of-education-ends-funding-racially-discriminatory-discretionary-grant-programs-minority-serving-institutions>; US Rep. Judy Chu et al., "Reps. Chu, Takano, Meng and Senator Hirono Recognize Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institutions Week," press release, September 22, 2025, <https://chu.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/rep-chu-takano-meng-and-senator-hirono-recognize-asian-american-and>

⁴ US Department of Justice, Office of Legal Counsel, Constitutionality of Race-Based Department of Education Programs, memorandum opinion for the Acting General Counsel, December 2, 2025, 49 Op. O.L.C. ___, <https://www.justice.gov/olc/media/1421576/dl>