

# Education

## Part of the “State of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders” Series

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Asian American and Pacific Islanders are an increasing share of students today and in the future

As the United States undergoes large demographic shifts and becomes increasingly diverse, so too will its student population. The face of the nation is already changing: The majority of babies born today are babies of color, and before the end of this decade, the majority of all youth will be children of color.<sup>1</sup> Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, or AAPI, youth have been a major contributor to this shift for decades and will continue to be. In fact, AAPI enrollment in K-12, has already undergone significant changes; for example, K-12 AAPI enrollment from 1979 to 2009 grew fourfold and is expected to grow another 31 percent by 2019—just short of the growth rate of Latinos at 36 percent.<sup>2</sup> As Table 4.1a shows below, the share of AAPI enrollment in K-12 public schools is projected to increase to 6 percent of all enrollees, compared to its 4 percent share in 1995. While this percentage may not seem significant, it is important to the education sector in the long run as college enrollment of AAPIs is projected to increase to 1.4 million students—nearly twice the amount of AAPI students enrolled in college in 1995, as indicated in Table 4.1b.

**TABLE 4.1a**  
**Asian American and Pacific Islander enrollment in K-12 public schools**

|       | Number    | Share |
|-------|-----------|-------|
| 1995  | 1,668,000 | 4%    |
| 2000  | 1,949,000 | 4%    |
| 2005  | 2,278,000 | 5%    |
| 2010  | 2,467,000 | 5%    |
| 2015* | 2,678,000 | 5%    |
| 2020* | 2,922,000 | 6%    |

**TABLE 4.1b**  
**Asian American and Pacific Islander enrollment in colleges and universities**

|       | Number    | Share |
|-------|-----------|-------|
| 1995  | 797,000   | 2%    |
| 2000  | 978,000   | 2%    |
| 2005  | 1,134,000 | 2%    |
| 2010  | 1,303,000 | 3%    |
| 2015* | 1,337,000 | 3%    |
| 2020* | 1,400,000 | 3%    |

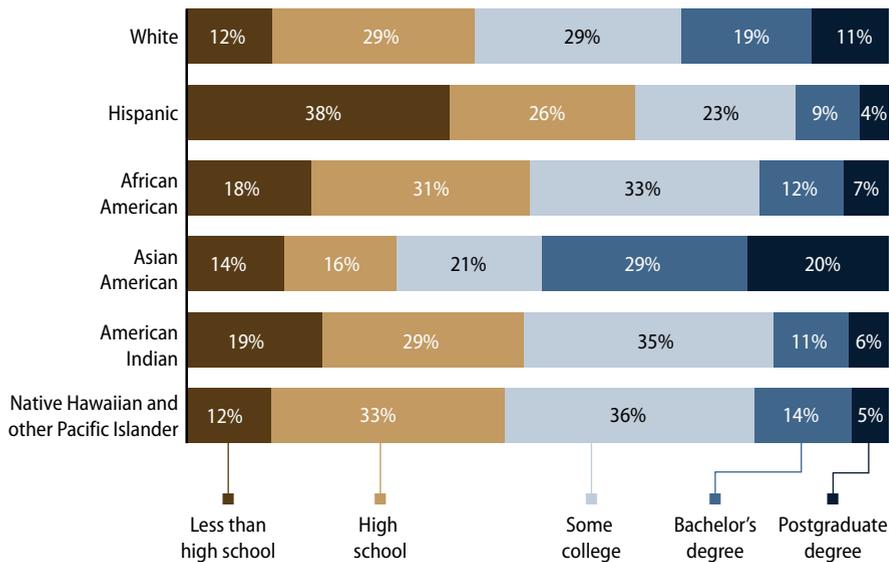
Note: Figures with \* are projections.

Source: William J. Hussar and Tabitha M. Bailey, "Projections of Education Statistics to 2022" (Washington: National Center for Education Statistics, 2014), available at <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2014/2014051.pdf>.

## High average levels of education among Asian Americans mask important subgroup differences

Figure 4.1 illustrates that 49 percent of Asian Americans currently have a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 30 percent among whites; 19 percent of African Americans; and 19 percent of Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders, or NHPIs; 17 percent among American Indians and Alaskan Natives, or AIAN; and 13 percent among Latinos. Racial differences in educational attainment are particularly pronounced among those with postgraduate degrees. These account for 20 percent of the Asian American population, 11 percent of whites, 7 percent of African Americans, 5 percent of NHPIs, and 4 percent of Latinos. The proportion of Asian Americans and NHPIs with less than a high-school education is also lower than the rates for African Americans and Latinos.

**FIGURE 4.1**  
**Educational attainment by race, for ages 25 and older**

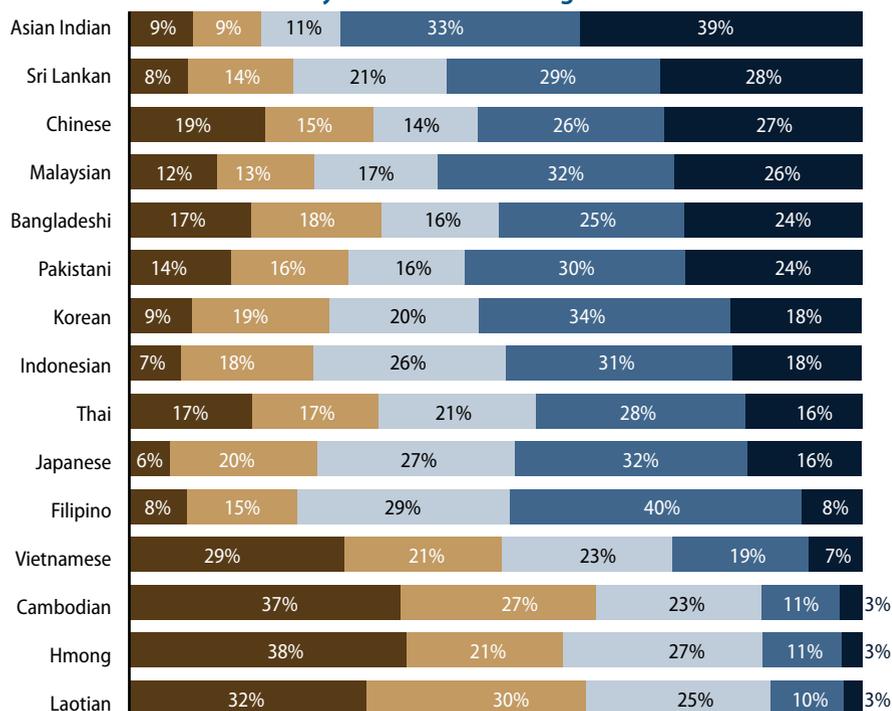


Source: Authors analysis of Public Use Microdata Sample from Bureau of the Census, "2008–2012 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates," available at [http://www.census.gov/acs/www/data\\_documentation/2012\\_release/](http://www.census.gov/acs/www/data_documentation/2012_release/) (last accessed March 2014).

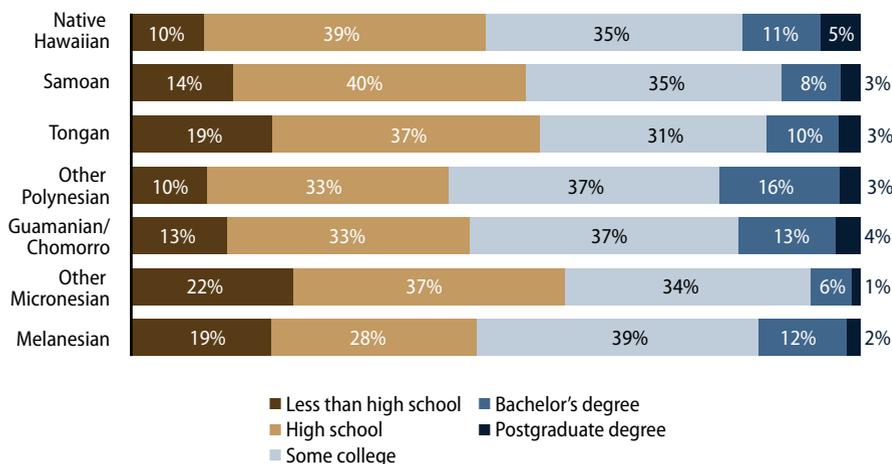
At the same time, the high level of educational attainment among Asian Americans masks significant differences across national origin groups. Among Asian Americans, Southeast Asian refugee populations tend to have the lowest levels of educational attainment, while national origin groups with a high proportion of employment-based visas tend to have the highest levels of educational attainment. Thus, for example, fewer than 15 percent of Cambodians, Hmong, and Laotians have a bachelor's degree or higher compared to 72 percent of Asian Indians, 57 percent of Sri Lankans, and 53 percent of Chinese Americans.

The selectivity of these Asian migration streams is further highlighted by the fact that the educational attainment of Indian and Chinese immigrants in the United States is considerably higher than the average rates of educational attainment in their countries of origin.<sup>3</sup> Finally, among NHPIs, there are smaller yet still significant differences in educational attainment across subgroups. Tongans and Samoans have a lower proportion of adults who have completed high school, while Guamanians/Chamorros and Native Hawaiians have the highest proportion of adults with a bachelor's degree or higher—17 percent and 16 percent, respectively.

**FIGURE 4.2a**  
**Educational attainment by Asian national origin**



**FIGURE 4.2b**  
**Educational attainment by Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander subgroup**



Source: Authors analysis of Public Use Microdata Sample from Bureau of the Census, "2008–2012 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates," available at [http://www.census.gov/acs/www/data\\_documentation/2012\\_release/](http://www.census.gov/acs/www/data_documentation/2012_release/) (last accessed March 2014).

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## Gender differences in educational attainment vary by nativity

Educational differences among Asian Americans are also apparent by gender. Among first-generation immigrants, women are less likely than men to have completed high school and are less likely to have postgraduate degrees. This reflects, to a large extent, the gender composition of migrants entering on employment-based visas and gender disparities in educational attainment in Asian countries.<sup>4</sup> Importantly, however, these gender disparities disappear among native-born Asian Americans. Indeed, among the native-born population, women actually have slightly higher levels of educational attainment than men, with a slightly higher proportion earning bachelor's degrees and postgraduate degrees. Finally, there are no significant gender differences in educational attainment among NHPIs.

**TABLE 4.2**  
**Differences in educational attainment by gender and nativity, Asian Americans**

|                       | Foreign born |        | Native born |        |
|-----------------------|--------------|--------|-------------|--------|
|                       | Male         | Female | Male        | Female |
| Less than high school | 14%          | 18%    | 5%          | 5%     |
| High school           | 15%          | 17%    | 17%         | 15%    |
| Some college          | 18%          | 19%    | 30%         | 29%    |
| Bachelor's degree     | 28%          | 29%    | 31%         | 32%    |
| Postgraduate degree   | 25%          | 17%    | 17%         | 19%    |

Source: Authors analysis of Public Use Microdata Sample from Bureau of the Census, "2008–2012 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates," available at [http://www.census.gov/acs/www/data\\_documentation/2012\\_release/](http://www.census.gov/acs/www/data_documentation/2012_release/) (last accessed March 2014).

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## Varying rates of educational attainment show the need for accessible, disaggregated data

Exceptional variations in educational attainment and other socioeconomic indicators such as health, poverty, and income between national origin groups show how incredibly important disaggregated data—or data broken down by national origin—are to understanding the Asian American community, determining different access to opportunities, and crafting policy targeted to address the needs of the AAPI community. For example, disaggregated data were used by the University of Guam to identify various student needs and then to create specific programs to address success and retention. The university ultimately used the data to become an Asian American Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institution, or AANAPISI, which helped it increase efforts in recruitment, retention, and graduation rates. The university eventually increased the rate of course completion and student satisfaction among Pacific Islander students.<sup>5</sup> A recently published report of pilot intervention programs in three community colleges that used AANAPISI funds suggests substantial gains for disadvantaged AAPI students in terms of academic performance, time it takes to earn a degree, and rates of transfer to four-year colleges.<sup>6</sup>

Finally, some institutions of higher education have used disaggregated data to study inequalities that exist among AAPIs applying for admission. A 2010 study of disaggregated data at the University of California, Berkeley, revealed that certain AAPI groups were underrepresented compared to their proportion of the population of the state of California. Groups with particularly low representation included Pacific Islander applicants—Samoans, Guamanians, Tongans, and Native Hawaiians; Southeast Asians—Laotians, Cambodians, Hmong, and Vietnamese; and Filipinos.<sup>7</sup> These variations reveal a critical aspect of college admissions often overlooked: Higher-education institutions should not view all AAPIs as the same when making admission decisions. All AAPIs are not the same, and diversity does matter.

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## References

Newly released reports and infographics at <http://aapidata.com/policy-issues/education/>.

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## Acknowledgements

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## Endnotes

- 1 Vanessa Cárdenas and Sarah Treuhaf, eds., *All-In Nation: An America that Works for All* (Washington: Center for American Progress and PolicyLink, 2013), available at <http://allinnation.org/ms-content/uploads/sites/2/2013/10/AllInNation.pdf>.
- 2 National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education, "The Relevance of Asian Americans & Pacific Islanders in the College Completion Agenda" (2011), available at [http://www.nyu.edu/projects/care/docs/2011\\_CARE\\_Report.pdf](http://www.nyu.edu/projects/care/docs/2011_CARE_Report.pdf).
- 3 The World Bank, "World Development Indicators: Participation in Education, Table 2.11," available at <http://wdi.worldbank.org/table/2.11> (last accessed March 2014).
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- 6 Katie Tran-Lam, Nora Scullin, Tia T. Gordon, eds., "Measuring the Impact of MSI-Funded Programs on Student Success: Findings from the Evaluation of Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions" (National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education and Asian & Pacific Islander American Scholarship Fund, 2014) available at [http://www.apiasf.org/pdfs/2014\\_peer\\_report/APIASF\\_and\\_CARE\\_PEER\\_Report\\_April\\_2014.pdf](http://www.apiasf.org/pdfs/2014_peer_report/APIASF_and_CARE_PEER_Report_April_2014.pdf).
- 7 Educational Testing Service and New York: National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education, "iCount."