



## DATA DISAGGREGATION v. AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

What's the difference?

### 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.

### What does affirmative action mean?

Affirmative action and other race-conscious policies in education are when schools *voluntarily consider all aspects of an individual's identity*, including race or ethnicity, in order to pursue the educational benefits of a diverse student body.<sup>1</sup>

Affirmative action is **not**:

- × Negative action against certain groups. Historically, affirmative action began when some colleges and universities decided to contribute to racial equity by acknowledging the harmful effects of years of racial segregation and other exclusionary laws in the United States. In these early policies, affirmative action meant considering race as a favorable and “matter of fact” part of an individual application. It benefitted Black students, Asian American students, and other students of color, and importantly, the policies were *not* designed to benefit some groups at the expense of others.
- × A fight for seats at top colleges and universities. Education should not be a limited or exclusive asset—it is a right for all people. To say that Asian Americans must fight other communities of color to access only the same limited set of educational benefits afforded to people of color is not justice. It's an injustice that conceals the actual problem of Asian Americans being exploited as the wedge group against other communities of color, while admissions policies continue to honor legacy or wealthy students before anyone else. Instead, we must be fighting in solidarity with all communities to invest more into education at all levels and broaden access to all people.



<sup>1</sup> Garces, L.M., & Poon, O. (2018). *Asian Americans and Race-Conscious Admissions*. The Civil Rights Project / Proyecto Derechos Civiles. Retrieved from [https://www.civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/college-access/affirmative-action/asian-americans-and-race-conscious-admissions-understanding-the-conservative-opposition2019s-strategy-of-misinformation-intimidation-racial-division/RaceCon\\_GarcesPoon\\_AsianAmericansRaceConsciousAdmi.pdf](https://www.civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/college-access/affirmative-action/asian-americans-and-race-conscious-admissions-understanding-the-conservative-opposition2019s-strategy-of-misinformation-intimidation-racial-division/RaceCon_GarcesPoon_AsianAmericansRaceConsciousAdmi.pdf)

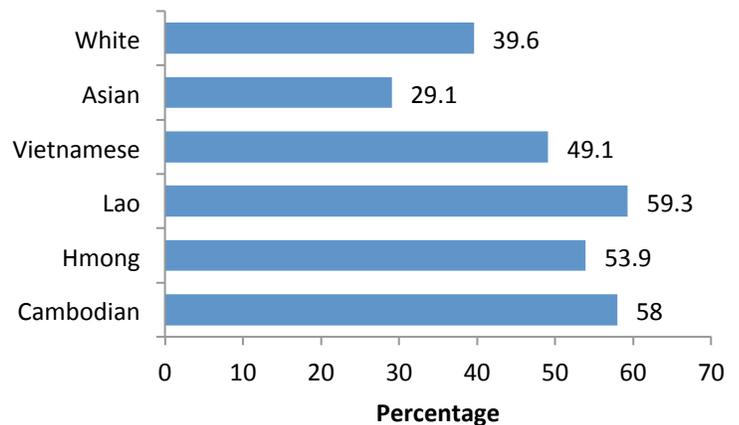
### Data disaggregation and affirmative action are not the same thing!

Data disaggregation in education is unrelated to race-conscious admissions policies at colleges and universities. Disaggregating education data simply helps policymakers figure out how to best support unique communities by showing them who lives in each community, how many people live in each community, and what their unique needs are. If all colleges and universities disaggregated their data, we would actually have better information on how to make college admissions equitable for all students. However, since only a few institutions currently disaggregate data, affirmative action and other race-conscious admissions policies exist to ensure that student populations are diverse and benefit all students.

### How does affirmative action impact Southeast Asian Americans and Asian American students?

Southeast Asian Americans continue to face extreme challenges to attaining a college education. As students from low-income, refugee communities, SEAA youth find it difficult to bridge the gap between aspiring to attend college and actually achieving this goal, due to a lack of awareness on how to navigate the college admissions process. Because many SEAA students represent the first generation in their families to attend college, they need support in preparing for a college-level curriculum. Yet limited support exists for students to access, afford, and complete higher education.

Adults age 25 and older who have not attended college for any period of time



### We must remember that...

- ✓ Equitable solutions like affirmative action are critical to eliminating deep and persistent gaps in educational attainment, as admissions criteria like test scores are often shaped by socioeconomic and racial privileges.
- ✓ Affirmative action uplifts a broad range of student experiences as valid and authentic ways to gauge a student's potential for academic success.
- ✓ Policies like affirmative action and holistic review that consider broad indicators of college readiness—as well as the formative life experiences that contributed to who applicants are—are not just ways to achieve individuals' successes, they work toward racial and social justice for **entire** communities.