Southeast Asian American Education Needs in Rhode Island

Southeast Asian Americans in Rhode Island

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cambodian</td>
<td>5,961</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hmong</td>
<td>1,015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laotian</td>
<td>3,380</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
<td>1,615</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Southeast Asian Americans</td>
<td>11,971</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Education, Linguistic and Poverty Characteristics of Southeast Asian Americans in Rhode Island

- **Education Attainment** – Southeast Asian Americans have lower rates of education attainment when compared to the Asian population and the total population in Rhode Island. According to the American Community Survey 2010:
  - 4.6% of Cambodian and 10.4% of Laotian Americans over the ages of 25 had a bachelor’s degree compared to 18.5% of the total population and 23.2% of Asian respondents.\(^2\)

- **Language Barriers & Poverty** – The majority of Southeast Asian Americans in Rhode Island face extreme language barriers and lives in poverty. According to the American Community Survey 2010:
  - 21.1% of Cambodian and 19.4% of Hmong American families lived in poverty in Rhode Island, compared to 8.4% of total families in Rhode Island.\(^3\)
  - 40.2% of Cambodian, 42.1% of Hmong, 50.7% of Laotian, and 37.0% of Vietnamese Americans speak English less than very well, compared to 8.8% of the total population in Rhode Island.\(^4\)

- **English Language Learners** – Since school year 2007-2008, Central Khmer has been ranked within the top five languages spoken by English language learner students in Rhode Island. The top five languages spoken by English language learner students in Rhode Island are listed below in order of frequency.
  - 2007-2008: Spanish, Portuguese, Creoles and pidgins- Portuguese-based (Other), Chinese, Khmer;
  - 2008-2009: Spanish; Castilian, Portuguese, Creoles and pidgins- Portuguese-based (Other), Central Khmer, French;
  - 2009-2010: Spanish, Castilian; Creoles and pidgins, Portuguese-based (Other); Portuguese; Central Khmer; Chinese;
  - 2010-2011: Spanish, Creoles and pidgins (Portuguese-based), Portuguese, Central Khmer, Chinese;
  - 2011-2012: Spanish, Creoles and pidgins (Portuguese-based), Portuguese, Central Khmer, Chinese.\(^5\)

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\(^3\) American Community Survey, 2006-2010, 5-Year Estimates, DP03: Selected Economic Characteristics.
Education Needs of Southeast Asian American Students in Providence Public Schools

- A 2010 study by Providence Youth Student Movement (PrYSM) found pervasive educational barriers for Southeast Asian students in Providence, RI:
  - **Male Graduation Rates** – While data from the Rhode Island Department of Education is not disaggregated by Asian American sub-groups, it still showed serious educational challenges: Asian males graduated at lower rates than the general population in 2001-2002, 2004-2005, 2005-2006, and 2006-2007 school years. If it were possible to disaggregate data by ethnicity, the problem of low educational attainment could appear even more dramatic for Cambodian, Laotian, and Hmong students.
  - **High rates of Truancy** – Truancy for Southeast Asian youth is widespread and serious. PrYSM’s Southeast Asian Youth Survey that reached over 15.0% of the youth population found that 33.1% of survey respondents between the ages of 19-28 reported having dropped out of school. Three out of four Southeast Asian youth reported skipping school, while over 66.0% of those who skipped said they did it more frequently than once a month.
  - **Repeating Grades** – Repeating grades was also linked to both absenteeism and overall dropout numbers. 40.8% of the PrYSM youth survey respondents who skipped school also stayed back a grade. 72.1% of dropouts were once held back in school.

Spotlight on Community-Based Partner Organizations in Rhode Island

- **Providence Youth Student Movement (PrYSM)** – PrYSM was founded on November 8th, 2001 when a series of repeated Cambodian gang fights and resulting deaths inspired youth and local college students to fight for positive change in the community. The first campaign that PrYSM organized was against the deportation of Cambodian American refugees, who were being sent back to the country from which they fled a genocide and civil war. Today, PrYSM is a 501c3 non-profit youth organization which challenges and supports Southeast Asian youth to become leaders, organizers, and critical thinkers by offering educational workshops, leadership opportunities, mentorship, and oversight of youth-led community organizing projects. To learn more, please visit their website at [http://www.prysm.us](http://www.prysm.us).

- **Center for Southeast Asian Americans (CSEA)** – The mission of the Center for Southeast Asians (CSEA) is to promote the prosperity, heritage and leadership of Southeast Asians in Rhode Island. CSEA was founded in 1987 by a collaboration of Mutual Assistance Associations to serve four Southeast Asian communities (Cambodian, Hmong, Laotian and Vietnamese) who arrived in Rhode Island as refugees. Today, CSEA continues to serve Southeast Asians and their families and, as is their tradition, invites other community members to participate in and benefit from their programs and services. To learn more, please visit their website at [http://www.cseari.org](http://www.cseari.org).

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7 Ibid page 18.

8 Ibid page 19.