Southeast Asian American students experience serious educational inequalities that are often masked due to their categorization as “Asian.”

- 34.3% of Laotian, 38.5% of Cambodian, and 39.6% of Hmong adults over the age of 25 do not have a high school diploma or equivalent (Data: U.S. Census Bureau 2010).
- 65.8% of Cambodian, 66.5% of Laotian, 63.2% of Hmong, and 51.1% of Vietnamese Americans have not attended college (Data: American Community Survey 2006-2008).

Why Are Southeast Asians Not Going To College?

Challenges that contribute to low educational attainment rates include the following:

- Limited English Proficiency which can impact the academic preparedness of students, and requires that students receive additional resources to become proficient. Low English proficiency adversely affects a student’s performance in college courses that require rigorous English proficiency, and often result in students dropping out of college. For example, an analysis done by Patricia Ryaby Backer of San Jose State University found that Asian American students who did not graduate also tended to fail their English courses.

Lack of High School Diplomas Across Southeast Asian American Communities

- 34.3% of Laotian Adults,
- 38.5% of Cambodian Adults,
- 39.6% of Hmong Adults over the age of 25 do not have a high school diploma or equivalent

(Data: U.S. Census Bureau 2010)

2 Ibid.
5 American Community Survey 2010, 1 year estimates.
6 Ibid.
7 Khmer Girls in Action. Step Into Long Beach: Exposing how Cambodian American youth are under resourced, over policed and fight back for their wellness, November 2017, 8.
**What are some local solutions?**

- Ensure that college outreach and mentorship programs target Southeast Asian American students.
- Provide high quality academic tutoring and support services to help all students become college and career ready.
- Provide funding to local community based organizations (CBOs) who currently prepare students for college.

**What are some federal solutions?**

- Increase investment in college outreach and preparation programs for first-generation college bound students such as the Trio program and Upward Bound, and partner with CBOs to implement these programs.
- Increase access to higher education for all students through legislation such as the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act (DREAM Act).
- Preserve need-based resources such as the Pell Grant program to decrease financial barriers to accessing higher education.
- Increase federal investment in, and support for the Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institutions (AANAPISI) Program, which provides competitive funding for institutions of higher education to strengthen programs that outreach to low-income, first generation and K-12 students. Support should also be allocated to develop programs and provide culturally appropriate academic and social retention services to college students. Finally, resources should also be allocated toward research about AAPIs and to develop courses on AAPIs.

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**Lack of College Attendance Across Southeast Asian American Communities**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>66.5%</td>
<td>Laotian Americans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65.8%</td>
<td>Cambodian Americans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63.2%</td>
<td>Hmong Americans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51.1%</td>
<td>Vietnamese Americans</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

(Data: American Community Survey, 2006-2008)

“We see major issues with transitioning to college [as] youth’s study, academic, and intellectual skills are due to low quality high schools … We see a lot of social and cultural infrastructure in university clubs that can build community, but don’t know if the same level of academic support is provided. A lot of young people are in remedial classes, on academic program, and are struggling to keep up with the material in college.”

-- Jacob Cohen, Assistant Director
Vietnamese American Young Leaders Association of New Orleans

“Students don’t have role models at home, and in schools there are too many students per counselor, so they are less likely to get career and future planning with higher education, and don’t know what their life will be like after high school. College preparation and filling out applications is challenging, and students don’t know how to do this. [CAGP staff] have been hosting college applications assistance, but we have limited capacity, and there is lack of initiatives from the schools. It would be really beneficial if schools prioritized counseling and guidance, and [provided] academic support for students to help them think through what they want to do.”

-- Rorng Sorn, Executive Director
Cambodian Association of Greater Philadelphia