

Higher Education, Workforce Development, and the AAPI Community

The future of the U.S. workforce depends on the ability of America's education system to both prepare students for a knowledge-based society and continuously retrain workers to maneuver adeptly within and between industries. This policy brief highlights ways the AAPI population is relevant to current national education and workforce development goals. Specifically, this brief draws attention to the importance of expanding higher education opportunities for AAPIs by focusing on the relationship between educational attainment and workforce participation for AAPIs, highlighting key areas of the workforce where AAPIs are underrepresented, and demonstrating the need for AAPI leadership in the professions.

Educational Attainment and Workforce Participation for AAPIs

Despite high educational attainment rates for AAPIs in the aggregate, large sectors of the population suffer from high secondary school drop-out rates, low rates of college participation, and low two- and four-year college completion rates. Differences in educational attainment among AAPIs coincide with a wide distribution in unemployment rates between AAPI sub-populations. The unemployment rates of Pacific Islanders (Tongans, Samoans, and Native Hawaiians) and Southeast Asians (Hmong, Laotian, Cambodians, and Vietnamese) are three to five times greater than those of Japanese, Sri Lankans, Thai, Chinese, Asian Indians, Filipinos, and Koreans.

The Distribution of AAPIs in Workforce Sectors

There are many sectors of the workforce where AAPIs are underrepresented. In the field of education, for example, while AAPIs comprise 3.9% of the total enrollment in public elementary and secondary schools, they represent only 1.5% of the teachers. There are also significant sub-group differences in workforce participation within the AAPI population. While there are higher proportions of East Asians and South Asians employed in more lucrative jobs, such as in health and STEM fields, Southeast Asians and Pacific Islanders are relegated to lower paying and less secure jobs in production and transportation.

AAPIs and Positions of Leadership

AAPIs face barriers in access to positions of leadership. In the education sector, AAPIs comprised only 0.6% of public school principals in 2004, and less than one percent of college

presidents in 2003. While AAPIs made up 6.3% of the 2.5 million permanent workers across all federal agencies in 2008, they comprised only 2.3% of senior executives. In the private sector where nearly half of AAPIs (48.2%) are employed in management and professional occupations, they only comprise 1.5% of all Board seats of Fortune 500 Companies.

Recommendations

The public, private, and non-profit sectors need to identify, acknowledge, and be responsive to the lack of AAPIs in certain occupational sectors, and the lack of AAPIs in leadership and decision-making positions generally.

Colleges and universities need to hire more AAPI faculty, administrators, and student affairs professionals, along with other culturally competent staff members, to support AAPI students and families, and engage their local AAPI communities.

AAPIs should be included in pipeline programs that target the underrepresentation of minority students in key occupational sectors, including the federal government and state and local agencies.

¹ L. Darling-Hammond, *The Flat World and Education: How America's Commitment to Equity Will Determine Our Future* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2010).

² Committee of 100, *2007 Corporate Board Report Card: A Report on Directors of Asian Ethnicity on Fortune 500 Boards* (New York: Committee of 100, Inc., 2007).