WE CAN'T SERVE WHO WE CAN'T SEE
DEMOGRAPHIC DISAGGREGATION FOR THE UTILITY DISCOUNT PROGRAM

INTRODUCTION:

The City of Seattle's Demographic Disaggregation Task Force (DDTF) is a cross-departmental group charged by City Council to change the way the City collects race/ethnicity data in order to equitably target city services.

Our project is a pilot of demographic disaggregation at the Utilities Discount Program (UDP), which provides discounted electric utility rates for low-income households.

WHAT IS DATA DISAGGREGATION?

Most government agencies group race and ethnicity into broad, or aggregated, categories such as "Asian" or "Hispanic/Latino." Each of these categories contains a diverse group of ethnicities.

When we disaggregate, we unmask the various identities and backgrounds contained in each category, giving us a clearer picture of the cultural diversity of our city. This information is vital to policymakers looking to ensure equitable services for all Seattleites.
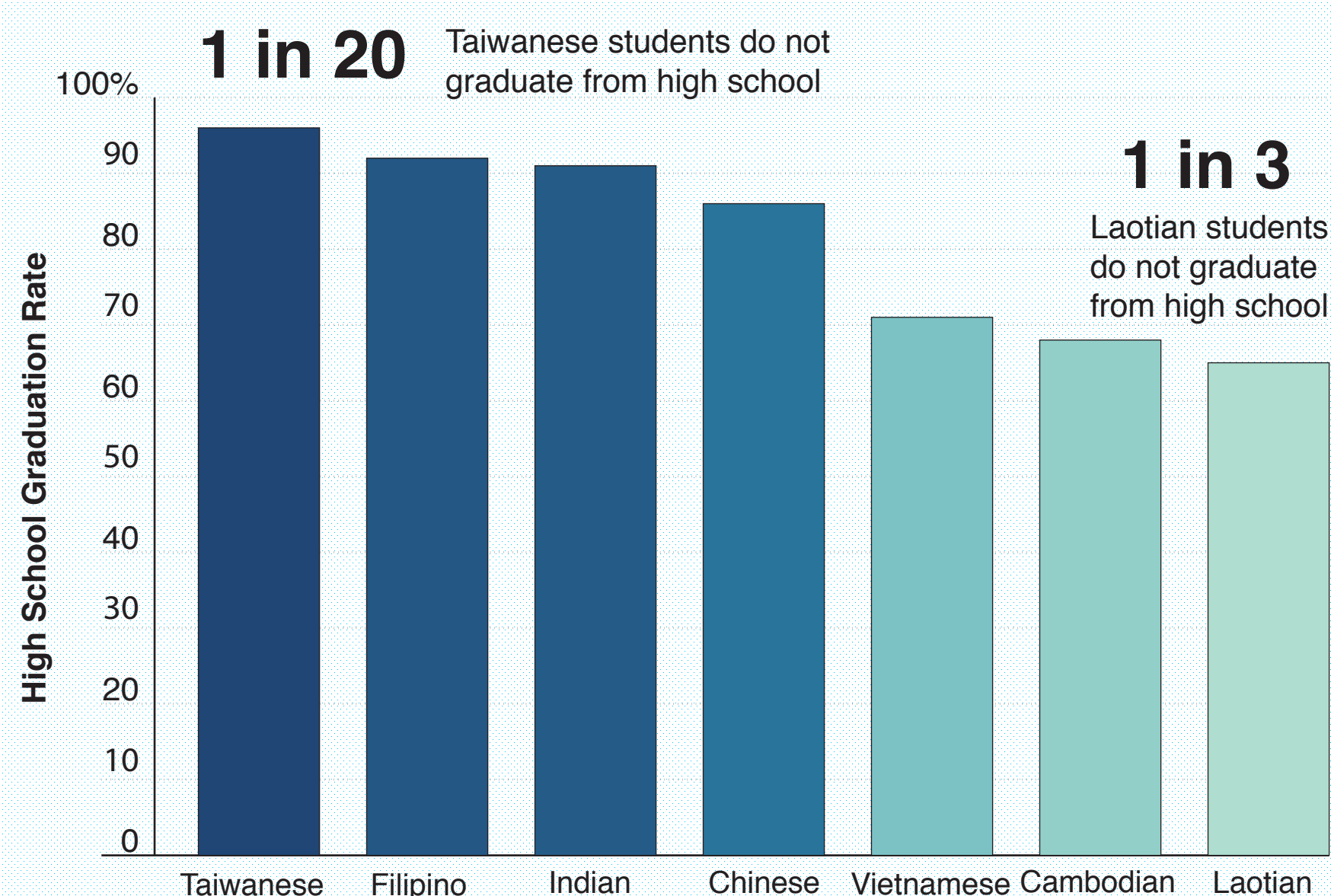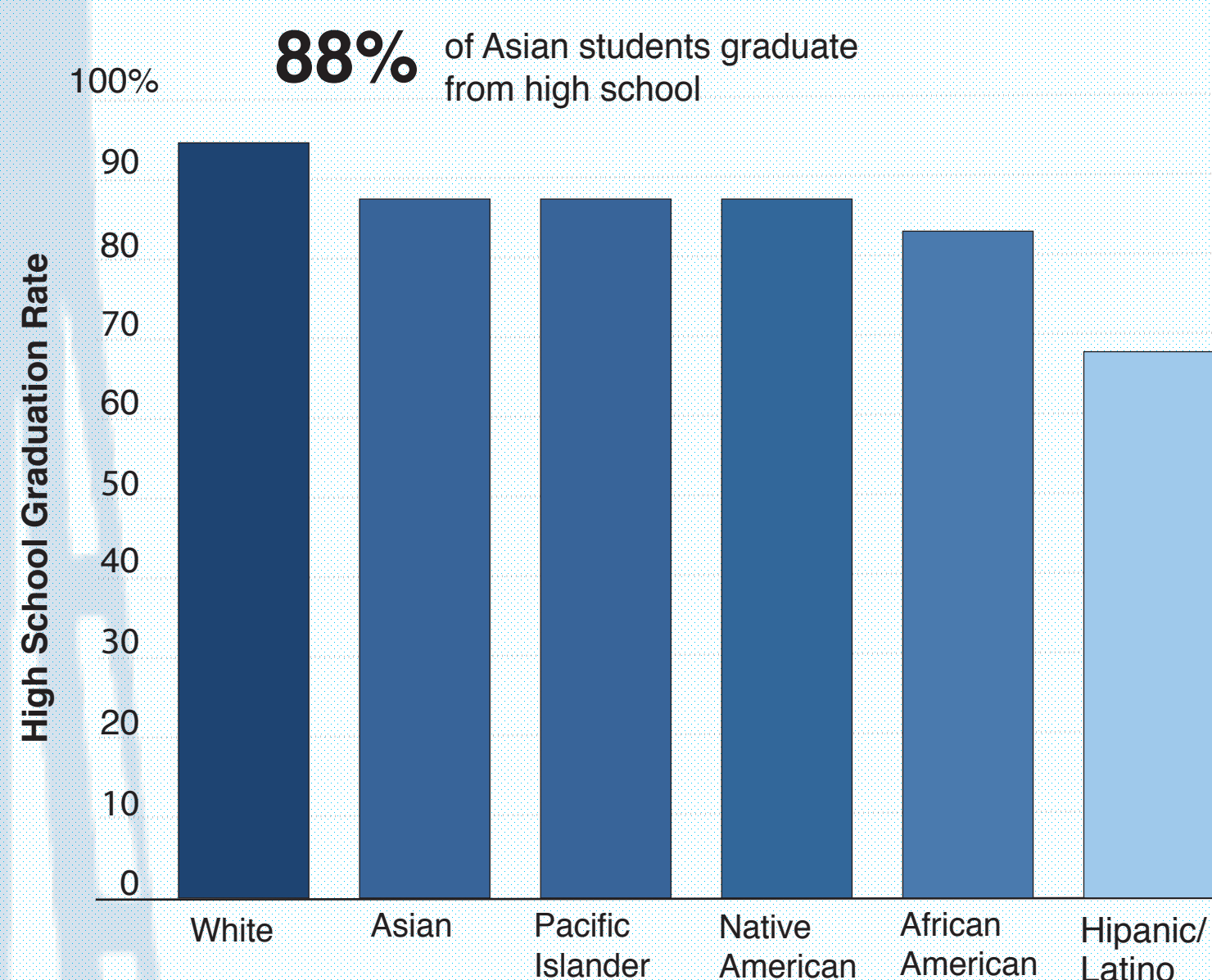
The graphic to the right shows how the current aggregated categories will be disaggregated to reflect a more accurate portrait of our community
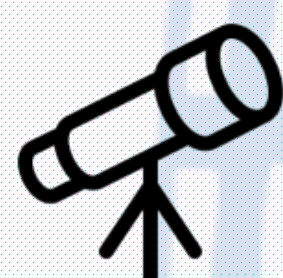
WHY DISAGGREGATE?

The categories that City departments use currently do not reflect the realities of Seattle's population. Aggregating into large categories masks disparity.

For example, Asian students graduate from Seattle's high schools at almost the same rate as their white counterparts. However, disaggregated graduation rates reveal large disparities within the Asian community. *

Identifying these disparities enables policymakers to direct resources to underserved communities that are concealed by broad racial categories.
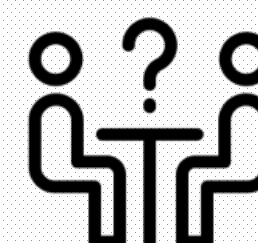

88% of Asian students graduate from high school

1 in 20 Taiwanese students do not graduate from high school

1 in 3 Laotian students do not graduate from high school

PROCESS

Investigate: Meet with stakeholders to understand project goals. Collect documentation about UDP organization, processes and data flow. Research change management best practices

Observe: Shadow eleven Public Intake Representatives (PIRs) to observe how UPD staff collects race and ethnicity data.

Interview: Interview UPD staff members about data collection, perceptions about race and ethnicity data, and potential barriers to success.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Education: Provide staff and citizens with information about how race and ethnicity information is used

Support: Alleviate staff discomfort by providing suggested language for inquiring about race and ethnicity

Redesign: Produce a new application form which encourages applicants to self-identify using disaggregated categories

Technology: Work with Seattle IT to improve the backend database, not only to incorporate disaggregated categories, but to improve usability

Engage: Work with community partners to raise awareness about the value of data disaggregation

Serve: Utilize this information to improve outreach to newly identified underserved communities

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