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Top 10 Myths of the Top Ten Percent Plan

Proposals Could Break Promises to 15,000 Texas High School Students

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On Thursday, March 19, the Texas Senate will be voting on whether or not to water-down the Texas Top Ten Percent plan adopted in 1997 to expand access to Texas' top universities to more diverse students and to more high schools. The measures under consideration would place caps on the number of top students that would be guaranteed admission, reducing the number of automatic admissions by as many as 15,000 students.

If caps are put in place, high-achieving Texas students may or may not be admitted, depending on the criteria and priorities of a few university officials.

Originally, Top Ten Percent plan was a response to a federal court ruling that prohibited the use of affirmative action in college admissions decisions. The Top Ten Percent Plan has evolved into a simple, transparent merit-based plan that ensures that all top Texas students from all of the state's high schools have an equal opportunity to attend whatever state-funded college or university they want to attend.

Much of the debate has been distorted by major myths about the Top Ten Percent Plan, its impact on universities and its probable effects if changed. IDRA believes that such an important public policy debate should be informed by facts rather than fiction and offers the following myths and myth-busters to help inform and elevate the upcoming debate.

Specific high-school-by-high-school impact projections of the proposed caps on the Top Ten Percent students are available online, as well as projections by school district and county:

- Look up a high school <http://www.idra.org/tenpercentlosses/>
- Look up a school district <http://www.idra.org/tenpercentdistrictlosses/>
- Look up a county <http://www.idra.org/tenpercentcountylosses/>

Myth #1: UT-Austin has too many Top Ten Percenters.

Mythbuster: Why is this a problem? Major universities usually want *more* top students, not fewer.

Myth #2: Capping Texas' Top Ten Percent Plan will not affect the number of students guaranteed admission.

Mythbuster: If Texas caps the Top Ten Percent Plan, more than 15,000 top students from Texas high schools will no longer be guaranteed admission to Texas' top universities. Find out how many of your high school students will be denied admission at http://www.idra.org/Education_Policy.htm/ by school and county.

Myth #3: Capping Texas' Top Ten Percent Plan will not affect diversity and minority access to UT-Austin and other state-funded colleges and universities.

Mythbuster: While minority student enrollment is not where it needs to be at the state's major universities, minority enrollment has been increasing since the adoption of the Ten Percent Plan. If Texas caps the Top Ten Percent Plan, some high-achieving minority students will be denied admission even though they have earned the few top academic slots.

Myth #4: Capping Texas' Top Ten Percent Plan will only affect minority students.

Mythbuster: In 2007, half of all Top Ten Percent students were White. If Texas caps the Top Ten Percent Plan, it will close the university door for both White students and minority students.

Myth #5: All Texas high schools will be equally impacted if the Top Ten Percent Plan is capped.

Mythbuster: The bigger the school and its graduating class, the bigger the hit. Find out how many of your high school students will be denied automatic admission at http://www.idra.org/Education_Policy.htm/ by school and county.

Myth #6: All Top Ten Percenters apply to UT-Austin, and every Top Ten Percent student who is admitted to UT-Austin enrolls.

Mythbuster: Only one out of three of all of Texas' Top Ten Percent students apply to UT-Austin, and only one half of those admitted actually enroll there.

Myth #7: Capping Texas' Top Ten Percent Plan will affect all Texas state-funded colleges and universities.

Mythbuster: If Texas caps the Top Ten Percent Plan, only UT-Austin and Texas A&M are affected; no other major state universities are similarly impacted at this time.

Myth #8: UT-Austin's Top Ten Percent students don't stay in school and graduate.

Mythbuster: Persistence and graduation rates of Top Ten Percenters have increased at UT-Austin since the adoption of the Top Ten Percent Plan.

#9: The 0.19 GPA difference between the top half of the Top Ten Percenters at UT-Austin and the bottom half matters.

Mythbuster: What do you call students who graduate from UT-Austin with a 2.83 or a 3.02 GPA? – Alumni. Furthermore, Top Ten Percenters as a whole do better academically than non-Top Ten Percenters.

Myth #10: Capping Texas' Top Ten Percent Plan will equally affect Top Ten Percent students in Texas and those from out of state.

Mythbuster: If Texas caps the Top Ten Percent Plan, only Texas' Top Ten Percent students will be denied slots at UT-Austin. Only Texas' top students will be expendable – every other state's Top Ten Percenters will still be welcome here.