



Policy Brief

The Texas Top Ten Percent's Legacy in Supporting Equal Access to College

April 27, 2021

As Texas continues to graduate a more diverse group of students from its public high schools, competition for limited seats at the state's flagship universities grows tighter each year. While not a stand-alone solution to achieving equal access to those universities, the Top Ten Percent Plan has led to greater racial, socioeconomic and geographic diversity of qualified students admitted to and enrolled at the University of Texas at Austin (UT-Austin).

Rather than further scaling back on the Top Ten Percent Plan, policymakers should explore other equitable policies to complement the Top Ten Percent Plan and support increased college enrollment and completion (see recommendations below).

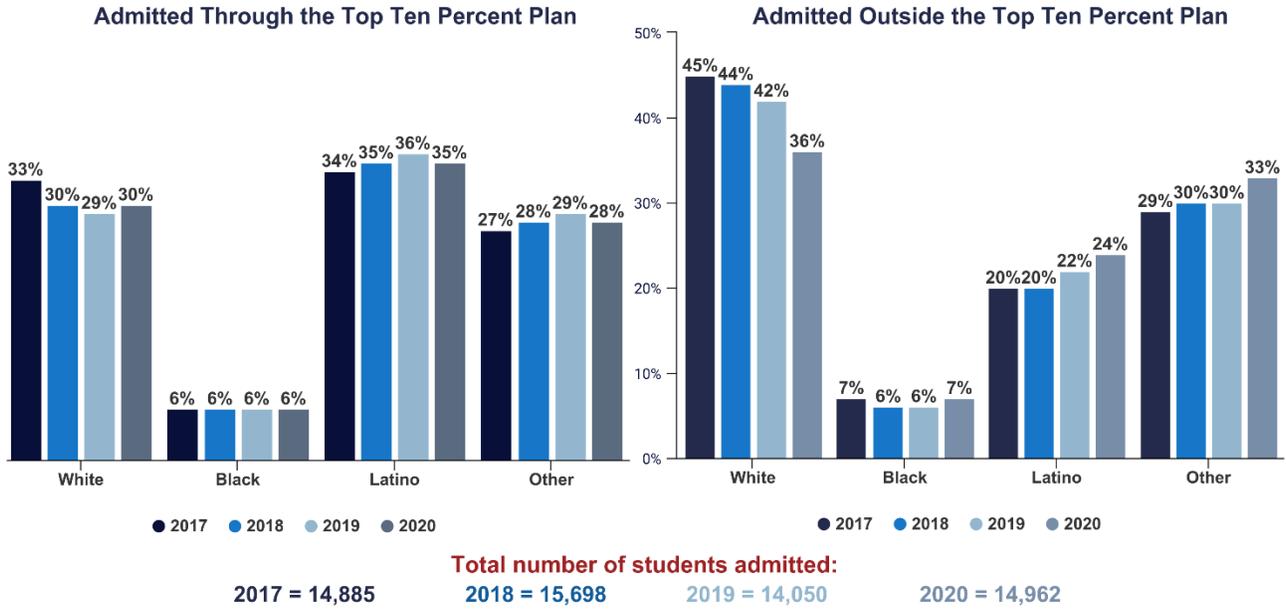
Increased Access for Underrepresented Groups

Since its inception, the Top Ten Percent Plan has opened doors to students from low-income families, rural communities and communities of color – all groups typically denied access to the flagships. IDRA's analyses show the following.

- The Top Ten Percent Plan helped increase the number of feeder high schools, excluding charter and private schools, into UT-Austin, from 622 in 1996, to 792 in 2000 (Montejano, 2001), to 992 in 2016, to 833 in 2018 (UT-Austin, 2016; 2019).
- Rural schools continue to benefit from the plan, with UT-Austin admitting a total of 99 students from 93 rural schools in 2020, up from 85 students and 65 rural schools in 2010 (UT-Austin, 2010 & 2020). **The plan accounted for 85% of admitted rural students at UT in 2020.**
- The Top Ten Percent Plan is the principal admissions driver for Latino, Black and Asian American students into UT-Austin, with 82% of admitted Latino students coming from the plan, 73% for Black students, 74% for Asian American students and 69% for White students in 2020. In contrast, UT-Austin's subjective admissions plan disproportionately favors White students, who comprise over a third of non-Top Ten Percent Plan admitted students but only one of four Top Ten Percent Plan students.

Exhibit 1

Percentage of Students Admitted to UT-Austin



Data Source: University of Texas at Austin. Office of the Executive Vice President and Provost. (December 2020). Report to the Governor, the Lieutenant Governor, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives on the Implementation of SB 175.

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Exhibit 2

UT-Austin Numbers of Students Admitted and Enrolled, 2020				
	Admitted Students		Enrolled Students	
	Top Ten Percent Plan	Non-Top Ten Percent Plan	Top Ten Percent Plan	Non-Top Ten Percent Plan
White	3,048	1,369	1,477	873
Black	712	265	319	166
Latino	4,101	913	1,743	573
Asian American	2,661	937	1,397	589
Other	656	300	284	172
Total	11,178	3,784	5,220	2,373

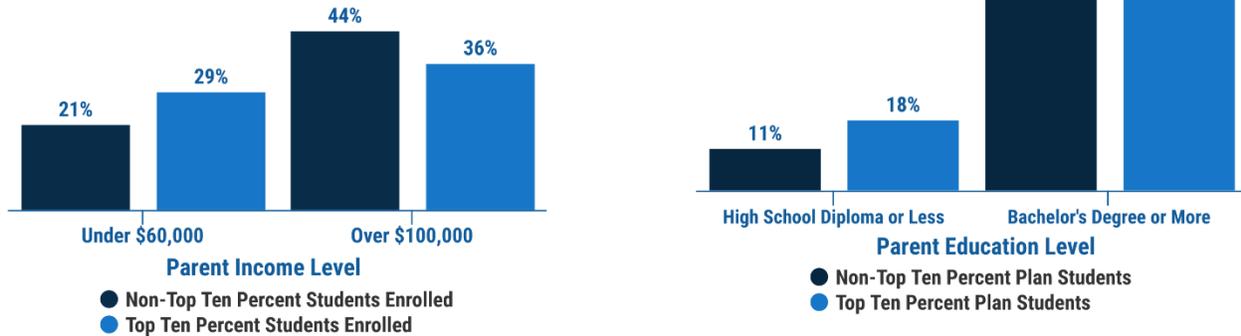
Source: University of Texas at Austin. Office of the President. (December 2020). Report to the Governor, the Lieutenant Governor, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives on the Implementation of SB 175.

Exhibit 3

The Top Ten Percent Plan is the Best Chance for Students in Families with Limited Means and with Less Formal Education to Get into UT-Austin

The Top Ten Percent Plan opens the door for students from families with limited means

While the education level of parents is a huge indicator for UT-Austin enrollment overall, students in families with less formal education are more likely to be enrolled through the Top Ten Percent Plan



Data Source: University of Texas at Austin. Office of the Executive Vice President and Provost. (December 2020). Report to the Governor, the Lieutenant Governor, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives on the Implementation of SB 175.

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Exhibit 4

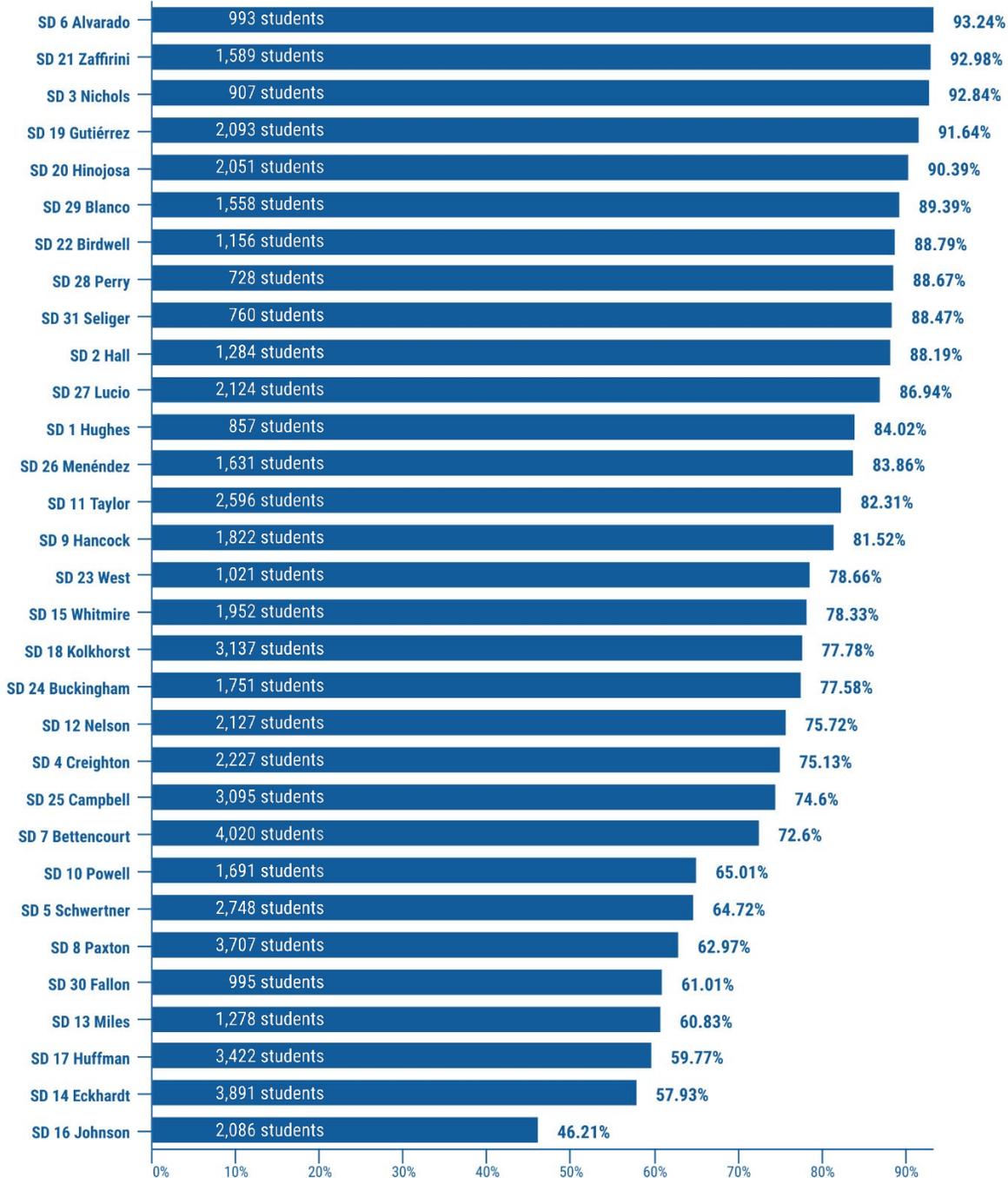
UT-Austin Family Characteristics, 2020				
	Admitted Students		Enrolled Students	
	Top Ten Percent Plan	Non-Top Ten Percent Plan	Top Ten Percent Plan	Non-Top Ten Percent Plan
Parent Income				
Under \$60,000	29%	20%	29%	21%
Over \$100,000	35%	44%	36%	44%
Parent Education Level				
High school diploma or less	21%	10%	18%	11%
Bachelor's degree or more	65%	80%	68%	79%

Source: University of Texas at Austin. Office of the President. (December 2020). Report to the Governor, the Lieutenant Governor, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives on the Implementation of SB 175.

Impact of the Top Ten Percent Plan by Senatorial Districts

IDRA analyzed UT's data and the impact of the Top Ten Percent Plan on Texas senatorial districts between 2009 and 2020.

Exhibit 5



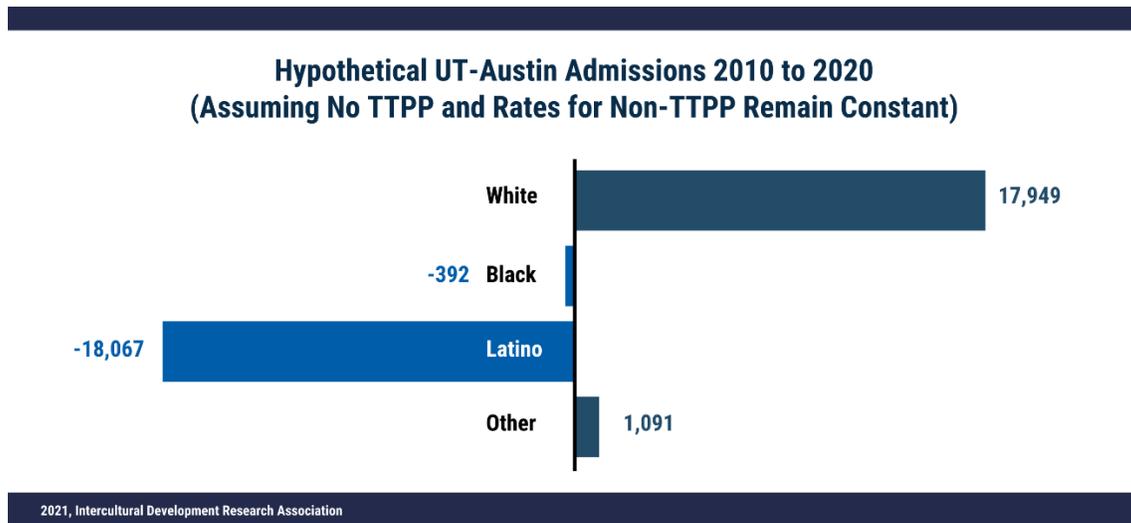
UT-Austin’s Subjective Admissions Plan Favors Schools in Only Six Senatorial Districts

IDRA found in 2019 that students in six senatorial districts (SD 5, SD 7, SD 8, SD 14, SD 16, SD 17) comprised 56% of admits under the subjective admissions plan versus only 32% of TTPP admissions.

Eliminating the Top Ten Percent Plan Would Devastate Diversity at UT-Austin

As noted above, UT-Austin’s Top Ten Percent Plan-admitted students and enrollees reflect a far more diverse group than students admitted under the subjective admissions plan. In a hypothetical analysis, IDRA applied the admission rates for non-Top Ten Percent Plan students (disaggregated by race) for the years 2010 through 2020 to the total number of students admitted and assumed the TTPP was non-existent. The results showed that thousands of mostly Latino students and Black students would likely have not been admitted, while White students would have been the greatest beneficiaries.

Exhibit 6



Policy Recommendations for Ensuring Access and Opportunity

A more diverse student body produces educational, social and economic benefits for all students. Diversity fosters critical thinking and problem-solving skills, helps reduce racial isolation, dispels racial stereotypes, promotes cross-racial understanding, and builds leadership to prepare students for life after college. A group of Fortune 100 companies called student racial diversity “a business and economic imperative” in the global market (2015).

As IDRA stated in its testimony before the Texas Legislature when the state previously considered the Top Ten Percent Plan, “it is ironic that at a time when expanding global competition requires better-educated citizens, Texas is discussing ways to limit access of its top students to its top institutions of higher learning” (IDRA, 2009). Texas can ill-afford to turn the clock back now as the results would likely be devastating, particularly for communities of color and rural communities (IDRA, 2009). Instead, IDRA recommends the following to ensure equitable access to Texas’ flagship universities.

Maintain the current blended admissions plan (Top Ten Percent Plan coupled with the subjective admissions plan). However, the subjective plan must be examined to ensure qualified Black students and Latino students are not being overlooked.

Re-regulate college tuition but ensure universities have adequate resources to help make up the difference. Texas lags in the percentage of its gross domestic product spent on public education, including post-secondary education (SHEEO, 2018; Baker, et al., 2018; Harris, 2012). If the state invests more in higher education, it can begin to rein in high tuition rates.

Provide more need-based financial aid. Texas must ensure students are not only admitted but also can afford to graduate without excessive debt. The state should increase funds for need-based financial aid, like the TEXAS Grant.

Texas must take major steps toward investing in at least five additional major flagship universities. With 80,000 additional students entering Texas schools each year, the state must develop more Tier 1 universities.

Texas must re-align its PK-12 curriculum and graduation requirements with college expectations. High schools must ensure all students receive a rigorous course of study that prepares them for college. Unlike its predecessor, the state's new default PK-12 curriculum adopted under HB 5 (2013) fails to meet many college entrance requirements and leads to channeling students by race, poverty and geography into less rigorous tracks.

Texas must fund its PK-12 public education system to prepare students for college and a career. Regardless of the Supreme Court of Texas decision on the legal merits of the recent school finance case, the needs of the state's growing diverse student population have not been met (Texas Taxpayer, 2014 & 2016). Texas must adequately and equitably fund public education to support college-readiness in all public schools.

References

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See infographic: <https://idra.news/TTP21ig>

The Intercultural Development Research Association is an independent, non-profit organization. Our mission is to achieve equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college. IDRA strengthens and transforms public education by providing dynamic training; useful research, evaluation, and frameworks for action; timely policy analyses; and innovative materials and programs