

A Community-Based Study on the Impact of Texas' SB 17 on Marginalized College-Going Students



Preliminary Findings – Roundtable Report

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Background

Texas colleges and universities have faced a dramatic shift in diversity policies in the past two years. In June 2023, state lawmakers passed a new law, Senate Bill 17, that banned diversity, equity and inclusion offices and services at public colleges and universities. That same month, the U.S. Supreme Court decided in two cases to significantly limit race-conscious admissions in higher education for marginalized college-going students, effectively eliminating affirmative action policies in college admissions (see *Students for Fair Admissions v. University of North Carolina* and *Students for Fair Admissions Inc. v. President & Fellows of Harvard College*, 2023).

These two new changes led colleges and universities to dramatically shift their diversity, equity and inclusion policies, practices, services and personnel, particularly related to students' racial and ethnic backgrounds, gender identity and sexual orientation. While Texas' SB 17 exempted admissions and recruitment initiatives, it altered how student services, support, and funding can go to groups or initiatives with a focus on diversity.

The Supreme Court decisions directly relate to college admissions and recruitment activities that are attentive to students' racial backgrounds and identities. Combined, the state and federal policy changes sought to limit how students' racial backgrounds are part of college admissions decisions and how students' racial and gender identities are acknowledged in college support systems, centers and programs.

The Study

In May 2024, IDRA began a two-year study on the impact of Texas Senate Bill 17's ban on college offices of diversity, equity and inclusion and the U.S. Supreme Court's 2023 decision to significantly limit race-conscious admissions in higher education on marginalized college-going students. The study explores the impact of those changes on high school students' access to college and opportunities for equitable admissions, financial aid and student support at Texas higher education institutions.

In 2023-24, the majority of Texas high school students were Latino, at 53%. Black students comprised 13%, Asian American students made up 5% of high school

“This is really affecting a student's choice... [They're left] really wondering, ‘Is a four-year university something that's really for me if I'm not going to be in a place that really, truly cares about my identity?’”

– Non-profit college advisor

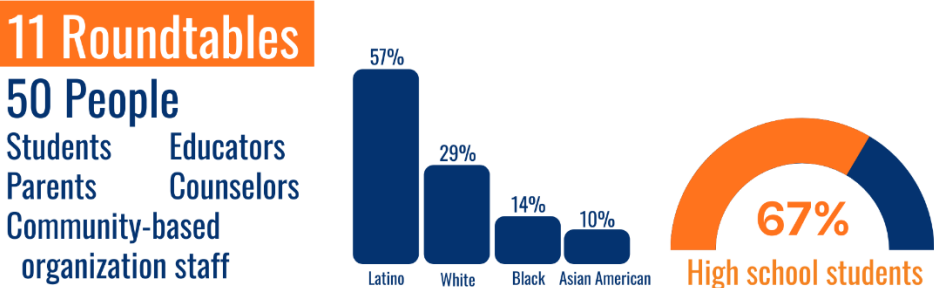
students, and white students accounted for about 26%. The roundtable participants generally reflect this breakdown (TEA, August 2024).

Texas high schools lose nearly one in four students by graduation, and gaps between Black students and white students have nearly doubled in the past three decades (Quintanilla-Muñoz & Sánchez, 2024). For graduating high school students, the percentage of Black and Latino students graduating college-ready fall far below that of white and Asian American peers, with the greatest gap between students who are Black (50% college-ready) and those who are Asian American (87% college-ready) (TEA, 2024). The recent policy changes raise new questions about how to support all students to access and succeed in college.

The study’s objectives are to establish a baseline understanding of the combined impacts of these policy changes on students and their needs in accessing college, to identify gaps in the systems meant to support students’ access and transition to college, and to develop targeted strategies to address these needs and gaps as shared by students and other stakeholders.

In doing so, this study sheds light on strategies to increase college access opportunities for all students, especially students who are Black, Latino, from low-income backgrounds and first-generation college-goers.

The IDRA team held 11 roundtables with 50 students, parents, educators, counselors and community-based organization staff in the fall of 2024. The majority of participants identified as Latino, followed by white, Black, and Asian American, and 67% of participants were high school students.



Roundtables took place either virtually or in-person. Many participants signed up for roundtables with some prior knowledge of the policy changes based on their networks, peers, media reports, or counselors and teachers. Each roundtable began with a brief overview of the policy changes to set the context for the discussion. Some participants did report very little familiarity with the policy changes or their origins but were still able to share their perceptions of how the changes would impact their ability to effectively access and afford college. Eighty-two percent of participants shared that they learned some or a lot of new information in their roundtable session.

Participants discussed the policy changes in relation to their college aspirations, sources of support for accessing and attending college, where they get their information about college, and their college and career goals.

Preliminary findings from these participants' input and state data are part of this early report.

Roundtable Findings

Roundtable participants report a range of impacts on high school students. The primary impacts relate to how students think they belong in college given their identities, how they can build community in college, and how they can find necessary support systems.

Students, parents and educators report that recent policy changes have negatively impacted college access for historically-marginalized students. Participants say high school students have encountered barriers in finding helpful college information, funding opportunities, key student services and staff personnel to help them access and succeed in college.

Students worry about belonging in college and finding friends and community. High school students question whether they belong in college given the policy changes. Students are especially concerned about student centers and organizations that have closed or lost funding.

Students, parents and educators are concerned about scholarship opportunities and other funding that help make college affordable. Students and educators report that some scholarship opportunities for underrepresented students have been cancelled or severely restricted. Finding funding for college is a key factor in families' plans for students to apply to and attend college.

Students and parents worry about their physical and mental safety on college campuses. Participants report concerns about how historically marginalized students could be protected from racial and gender-based discrimination, bullying and harassment in college given the policy changes. Students and parents are scared about the policy changes and unchecked discrimination.

Students and educators report that there are fewer campus supports for them to access and succeed in college. Many high school and college students report that they seek supportive staff to help them navigate their educational choices. High school staff may not have the information or resources to provide sufficient guidance. At the college level, support staff have now been dismissed or scattered across colleges. Students report confusion and concern about knowing where to get important support services, like food assistance, financial help, academic support, and mentorship and career opportunities. Counselors report apprehension about how to advise high school students to find and access these types of supportive offices and services.

Trends in Texas Higher Education Enrollment

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board released its first biennial report on SB 17 in December of 2024, per the law's requirements. The report's data offer a baseline measure of college access and success for Texas students by sex and race/ethnicity from fall 2022 and 2023.

"In the college I want to go to, I'm looking for a lot of diversity... I don't think I'd consider going to a college if it didn't have some threshold of diversity and community for minority students."

- High school student

"My whole entire family, they're [state university] people... Even so, I don't think I want my child going there, especially as an undergrad...I mean, it's that bad. To me, it just seems like he's going to be lost."

- Parent of high school student

"I have spent a lot of time in the last year convincing kids that colleges still want them. About 80% of my campus are Black or brown kids, and a large percentage of them belong to the LGBTQ+ community, and so they feel very concerned about whether their presence is even welcomed at some different universities."

- High school college counselor

The most recent data reported for fall 2023 show that students applying to and attending four-year colleges for the first-time had increased from the prior year across all groups, by race and sex.

Four-year colleges and universities accepted Asian American applicants at the highest rates (89%) and Black students at the lowest acceptance rates (83%) among noted racial groups.

Enrollment rates declined slightly from 2022 to 2023 across all student groups, except Latino students. Racial gaps for Black and Latino student progress to and through college from first year to graduation continues to lag behind their white and Asian American peers. For instance, as the table below shows, 29% of students who are Black graduate from a four-year college in four years compared to 64% of students who are Asian American.

| Percent of Students Progressing at Each Step in College Access and Success by Sex and Race/Ethnicity, for Four-Year Texas Colleges, 2023 | | | | | | |
|--|--------|------|----------------|--------|-------|----------------|
| Progress Toward College Success | Sex | | Race/Ethnicity | | | |
| | Female | Male | Black | Latino | White | Asian American |
| Acceptance into college | 88% | 84% | 83% | 87% | 87% | 89% |
| Enrolling in college | 51% | 54% | 53% | 50% | 60% | 61% |
| Persisting from first to second year | 87% | 85% | 78% | 85% | 89% | 95% |
| Graduating in four years | 50% | 38% | 29% | 38% | 53% | 64% |

Data Source: THECB, (December 1, 2024). Senate Bill 17: Biennial Study. Only actual racial/ethnic categories are included here, *i.e.*, not “Other.” Terminology for racial/ethnic groups used in the report mirrors THECB data terminology for consistency.

Over the past five years, enrollment rates for first-time undergraduate students in Texas across racial and ethnic groups have dropped. College enrollment for white and Asian American students dropped the most from 2019 to 2023. Asian American and Latino students experienced the greatest drop since the COVID-19 pandemic.

| College Enrollment in Texas | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|-------|--------|-------|----------------|
| Time | Black | Latino | White | Asian American |
| 2019 | 58.5% | 54.0% | 65.0% | 69.2% |
| 2020 | 54.2% | 50.0% | 61.0% | 65.0% |
| 2021 | 54.7% | 52.9% | 61.0% | 66.1% |
| 2022 | 55.6% | 50.0% | 60.7% | 64.7% |
| 2023 | 53.2% | 49.7% | 59.6% | 61.4% |
| Five-year difference | -5.3% | -4.3% | -5.4% | -7.8% |
| Change since COVID-19 (2021-2023) | -1.5% | -3.2% | -1.4% | -4.7% |

Data Source: THECB. (2025). THECB Data: Applicants, Acceptance and Enrollment, Fall 2019-2023.

Student admission, acceptance and enrollment data from the past five years reveal clear trends in

racial disparities for accepted students to enroll as undergraduates. While white and Asian American students have demonstrated the largest decline in the past five years, Black and Latino students' rates of enrolling after college acceptance have consistently been lower.

Historically, lower enrollment rates for Black and Latino students correlate with lower academic preparation in high school and affordability barriers (Reber & Smith, 2023).

The preliminary findings reported here indicate that recent policy changes have affected how college-going students from historically marginalized backgrounds access college information, funding and scholarships, and information about campus resources that could impact their decisions to apply and enroll in Texas colleges and universities.

The next phase of this study will convene focus groups and events to discuss ongoing impacts of the policy changes on high school students.

How to Get Involved in the Study

We want to hear from you!

In the next phase of this study, IDRA will hold focus groups with students, parents and educators to start developing community resources and tools to navigate policy changes. Fill out the survey at the link below to learn more and sign up to participate.

<https://idra.news/InterestForm>

Contact Chloe Latham Sikes, Ph.D., deputy director of policy and lead researcher for the study, at chloe.sikes@idra.org.

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