



## **SB 37 Lowers Quality of Texas Higher Education**

**TLEEC Testimony Against SB 37, submitted by Vivek Datla to the Texas House Committee on Higher Education, May 6, 2025**

Dear Chair Wilson and Honorable Members of the Committee,

My name is Vivek Datla, and I am an IDRA Education Policy Fellow testifying on behalf of the Texas Legislative Education Equity Coalition (TLEEC) against Senate Bill 37. Our coalition is a statewide collaborative of more than 38 organizations and individuals with the mission to improve the quality of public education for all children, with a focus on racial equity. We advocate at the local, state and national levels for high-quality teaching, curricula and instructional practices, bilingual education, fair funding, and enhanced college access and success.

TLEEC opposes SB 37 due to concerns that it could censor students' exposure to diverse curricula and classroom discussions that are taught and moderated by experts. This bill threatens to limit students' free thought and academic judgement, undermining their development as critical thinkers.

### **Shared Governance Structures Promote Fair Curricula, Critical Thinking and Free Expression**

Texas' public universities excel at preparing students for the workforce and consistently rank among the nation's best institutions. They are powered by the principles of shared governance developed jointly in the 1960s by the American Association of University Professors, the American Council on Education, and the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges.

University faculty, school leaders, and governing board members have long recognized that collaboration and freedom of expression are essential for higher education. Their shared interests should, as they correctly describe, create an educational process that enables students to "be stimulated by it to become independent adults" and that transmits to them "the cultural heritage of the larger society," including the "strength, freshness of view and idealism of the student body."

Research shows that when students engage with curricula that challenge previously held beliefs, they become more civically engaged and are better prepared to cooperate with others in their workspaces and in their communities (Son Holoien, 2013).

Decisions concerning curricula and instructional methods are best left – as they are today – to experts in the field. These are the faculty who work directly with students every day. They introduce students to diverse subjects, help develop their creative and analytical thinking, and prepare them for careers that require collaboration, problem-solving, and independent judgement.

### **SB 37 Creates Vague Requirements and Processes that May Have a "Chilling Effect" on Curriculum and Instruction**

SB 37 imposes vague and potentially harmful limits on what students can learn, while shifting control over curriculum and instruction from faculty to new review committees controlled by governing boards.

We are particularly concerned about Sections 51.315 and 61.031, which threaten faculty members' ability to teach complex or sensitive topics – especially those related to race, sex, ethnicity, and political, religious, or social issues. This bill weakens the ability for faculty to do what they have been hired to do, which is teach what they know and deliver world-class educational experiences.

The unclear language and severe penalties in the bill could lead professors to avoid essential topics out of fear, depriving students of the open, thought-provoking education they need to become critical thinkers and effective leaders in our society. If professors are afraid to fully teach, then our students cannot fully learn.

### **TLEEC Urges the Following Recommendations**

- Maintain and strengthen shared governance structures that allow for engagement with diverse curriculum curated by experts.
- Support Texas colleges to offer students a diverse range of perspectives, experiences and opportunities that will prepare them to be critical thinkers, innovators and leaders.

For questions, please contact TLEEC either through Kaci Wright at IDRA ([kaci.wright@idra.org](mailto:kaci.wright@idra.org)), Dr. Chloe Latham Sikes at IDRA ([chloe.sikes@idra.org](mailto:chloe.sikes@idra.org)) or Jaime Puente at Every Texan ([puente@everytexan.org](mailto:puente@everytexan.org)).

### **Resources**

Son Holoien, D. (September 2013). Do Differences Make a Difference? The Effects of Diversity on Learning, Intergroup Outcomes, and Civic Engagement. Princeton Office of Institutional Equity and Diversity. <https://inclusive.princeton.edu/sites/g/files/toruqf7151/files/pu-report-diversity-outcomes.pdf>

*Texas Legislative Education Equity Coalition (TLEEC) is a collaborative of organizations and individuals with the mission to improve the quality of public education for all children, with a focus on racial equity. The coalition convenes organizations and individuals who advocate in the interest of public school students at the local, state and national levels.*

### **TLEEC Member Organizations**

ARISE Adelante	National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies (NACCS) – Tejas Foco
Asian Texans for Justice	San Antonio Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
Austin Justice Coalition	SEAT (Students Engaged in Advancing Texas)
Big Thought	Southwest Region Youth Legislative Action Center
Black Parents and Families Collective	Texas American Federation of Teachers
Breakthrough Central Texas	Texas Association for Bilingual Education (TABE)
Coalition of Texans with Disabilities	Texas Association for Chicanos in Higher Education (TACHE)
Culturingua	Texas Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education (TADOHE)
Dr. Hector P. García G.I. Forum	Texas Association of Mexican American Chambers of Commerce (TAMACC)
Easterseals Central Texas	Texas Center for Education Policy at the University of Texas – Austin
Educators in Solidarity (EIS)	Texas Hispanics Organized for Political Education (HOPE)
Ethnic Studies Network of Texas (ESNTX)	Texas League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)
Every Texan	Texas NAACP
Houston Community Voices for Public Education	Texas State Teachers Association (TSTA)
IDRA	The Arc of Texas
McNeil Educational Foundation for Ecumenical Leadership Measure	UnidosUS (formerly known as NCLR)
Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF)	UP Partnership
Mexican American School Board Members Association (MASBA)	