

Beyond the Bans

How Legal and Policy Changes Limiting Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Practices Compromise Student Opportunity



IDRA Research Brief • by Chloe Latham Sikes, Ph.D., & Adiba Chowdhury • May 2026

For decades, access to college has been a cornerstone for students' achievement, opportunity and affirmation of civil rights in the United States. College graduates typically earn about 60% to 70% more than those with only a high school diploma and are half as likely to be unemployed. College graduates are significantly more likely to report good health, meaningful work and active civic engagement than those without a college degree.

Diversity, equity and inclusion policies arose following civil rights litigation and legislation in the 20th century to open doors to college for students who had been excluded through discriminatory practices. These policies, broadly referred to as "diversity policies" in this brief, have helped remedy discrimination against historically marginalized individuals as well as increase educational opportunity and access for all students for over 50 years.

Yet in recent years, a wave of legal and policy changes across the United States has restricted initiatives to promote diversity, equity and inclusion in higher education. Policies that support diversity, equity and inclusion have faced significant setbacks following the pivotal U.S. Supreme Court ruling in the *Students for Fair Admissions* (SFFA) cases and sweeping state-level legislation, including Texas' Senate Bill 17 (2023).

This research brief examines evidence on barriers to college access for students across racial groups and analyzes current legal and policy changes nationally and in Texas. Research suggests that recent policy changes have disrupted efforts to improve Texas students' access to and readiness for college, particularly for Black, Latino, Indigenous, and LGBTQ+ students and those with limited means who continue to face systemic barriers.

Racial Gaps in College Preparation and Readiness Persist in Texas

Disparities in access to college begin long before students set foot on a college campus, or even in their high school. Critical factors include access to comprehensive early childhood education programs, high quality teachers with strong educational backgrounds, and appropriate class sizes. The impact compounds over time and leads to disparate student outcomes in high school and college (Latham Sikes, 2025).

Many students of color do not make it to high school graduation. Forty years of research by IDRA show that, consistently, schools are one and a half times more likely to lose Black students and Latino students than their white peers (Quintanilla-Muñoz & Sánchez, 2025).

Access to college counseling is unbalanced. A 2023 IDRA study found that most eighth-grade counselors in regions serving predominantly students of color and low-income families reported lacking sufficient time to provide college and career counseling.

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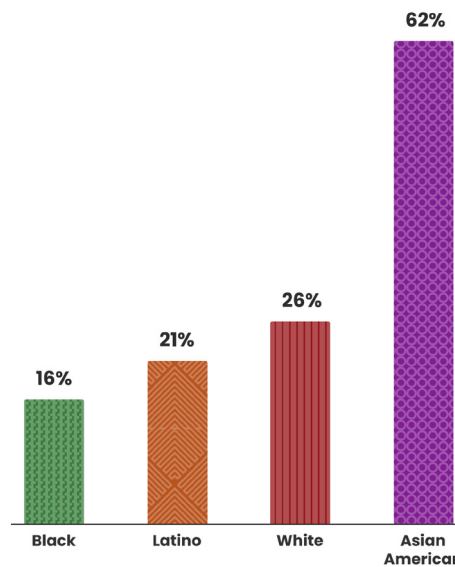
Counselors reported concerns about not having enough time to assist students with college and career exploration, like providing career day activities and information about scholarships, which influence both admissions and degree completion. (Bojorquez, 2023)

Dual credit, Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate and early college high school programs can accelerate students toward college success. But students across racial or ethnic groups access these courses at disparate rates. In 2023-24, Black students and Latino students took AP or IB courses at much lower rates than white and Asian American peers (Exhibit 1).

Among students who took at least one AP or IB exam, only 34% of Black students and 40% of Latino students scored high enough to earn college credit. That is less than half the passage rates for white and Asian American students (TEA, 2025).

Of course, high school graduation alone is not sufficient. Students must graduate prepared for college. Yet, as shown in Exhibit 2, Black and Latino students graduate high school ready for college at much lower rates than their white and Asian American peers.

Exhibit 1: Percent of Texas Students Taking at Least One AP or IB Exam, 2023-24

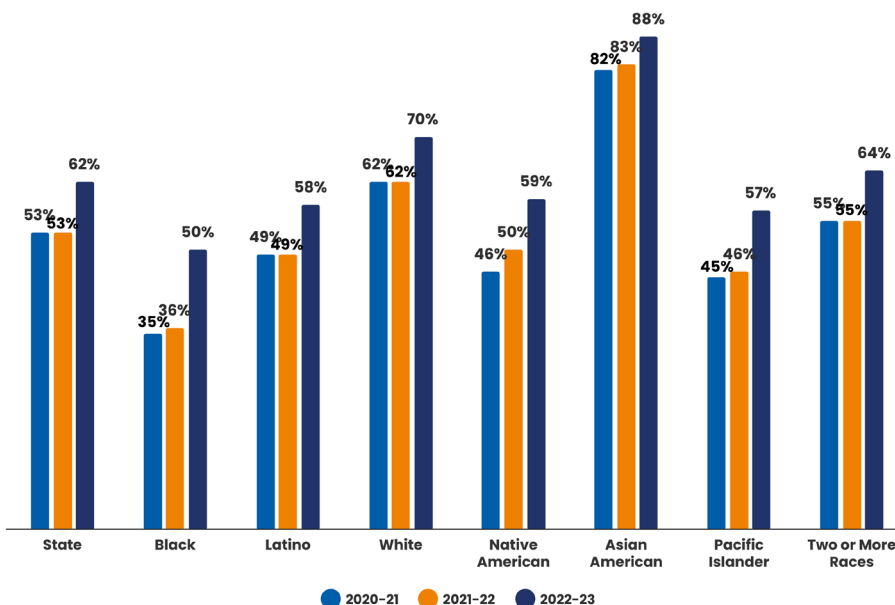


Data source: TEA. (2025, June). Advanced Placement Examination Results. Texas Education Agency.

IDRA, 2026

Dual credit, Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate and early college high school programs can accelerate students toward college success. But students across racial or ethnic groups access these courses at disparate rates.

Exhibit 2: Texas College Ready High School Graduates by Race/Ethnicity



Data source: TEA. (2024). Texas Academic Performance Report, 2023-24. Texas Education Agency.

IDRA, 2026

These embedded and longstanding racial disparities in college access and completion carry over into adulthood. Among more than 1 million Texas students who began eighth grade between 2011 and 2013, fewer than 10% of economically disadvantaged Black students and Latino students completed a bachelor's degree from a Texas public university within 11 years of starting the eighth grade (Decker, 2024).

In 2023, just 19% of Latino Texans aged 25 and older and 30% of Black Texans had earned a bachelor's degree or higher compared to 43% of white Texans (Potter, 2025).

These differences in educational attainment do not reflect differences in student potential, but rather the cumulative impact of systemic barriers in access to academic opportunities, guidance and support. Without intentional intervention, these gaps persist and widen at each stage of the educational journey.

Diversity Policies Provide Tailored Support

Targeted diversity, equity and inclusion practices address barriers before they become roadblocks to college access and readiness for historically marginalized students.

Following landmark rulings like *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 and the passage of the *Civil Rights Act of 1964*, institutions adopted strategies to boost enrollment of students of color and integrate schools. Diversity, equity and inclusion offices and affirmative action policies emerged to help meet the law's mandate of equal educational opportunity by using race and gender as factors in decisions, such as college admissions or employment, to address historical and ongoing discrimination.

Inclusive teaching practices and representation in the classroom matter. In a widely cited study, the National Bureau of Economic Research found that Black students who had at least one Black teacher by third grade were 13% more likely to enroll in college. That figure rose to 32% for students who had two Black teachers by that grade. (Gershenson et al., 2021)

In a study of several San Francisco high schools, assignment to an ethnic studies course increased ninth-grade attendance by 21%, GPA by 1.4%, and the number of credits earned by 23% (Dee & Penner, 2017).

These outcomes reflect the importance of cultural connection and role modeling, something diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives can help facilitate through hiring practices and professional development.

At the elementary and secondary school levels, inclusive policies can reduce punitive discipline and foster a greater sense of belonging (Adukia et al., 2025). Further, inclusive curricula, coupled with diverse faculty, have been linked to lower suspension rates, stronger student engagement and improved academic outcomes (Dewsbury et al., 2022).

In higher education, diversity initiatives play a central role in ensuring that students not only enroll but also succeed (Harper et al., 2024). Diversity, equity and inclusion offices provide mentorship, mental health resources, community spaces and retention initiatives designed specifically for first-generation college students, students of color, LGBTQ+ students and other students who report feeling isolated, disconnected or disoriented as they navigate education systems in which they have often been excluded.

Additionally, offices of diversity, equity and inclusion introduce historically marginalized students to academic and career opportunities where they are underrepresented, such as STEM pathways, which helps address workforce shortages in those fields (Wallace, 2023).

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Decades of research show that increased racial diversity in higher education leads to higher rates of student satisfaction with their educational experiences, increased racial understanding and cultural awareness, and the incorporation of more diverse learning materials in classes (Milem, 2003). These benefits extend across undergraduate, graduate and professional education. For example, white medical students attending more racially diverse schools were better prepared to care for patients of color and reported stronger beliefs in health equity (Saha et al., 2008).

Equitable access, inclusive pedagogy and diverse learning environments are essential to student success.

Recent Changes to Diversity Policies

Affirmative action cases and subsequent diversity, equity and inclusion policies and practices have a long history through education. The following provides an overview of the background and context of specific recent actions by the U.S. Supreme Court, lawmakers and higher education officials regarding diversity, equity and inclusion policies and practices.

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Affirmative Action Law in College Admissions

Origins of Affirmative Action in Law and Policy. The goal of affirmative action was originally to ensure fair treatment and consideration of applicants in employment procedures, regardless of race, religion, color or national origin (LII, n.d.). It was extended to include sex and gender, and resulting practices are designed to eliminate and guard against unlawful discrimination. The principle has been applied in a variety of policy contexts, including employment and education.

For decades, the U.S. Supreme Court recognized affirmative action as a lawful way to redress discriminatory exclusion, such as slavery, segregation and denial of opportunity based on an individual's legally protected status.

The term first gained legal significance as a result of the 1960s Civil Rights Movement, which pushed President John F. Kennedy to issue executive orders requiring federal contractors to take proactive steps ("affirmative action") to increase opportunities for historically marginalized individuals (particularly Black people and women) to apply and be fairly considered for employment. Building on the mandate of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) to ensure equal educational opportunity, affirmative action principles were subsequently adapted to admissions policies at colleges and universities to create pathways for students historically denied access to traditional means of demonstrating their qualifications and credentials.

Use of Affirmative Action to Increase Opportunity for Diverse Students. In higher education, affirmative action admissions policies helped open doors for students of color to enroll and succeed at institutions where they had long been excluded, not only through legal segregation but also through entrenched patterns of institutional discrimination. These include disparities in K-12 education, where students of color are more likely to attend underfunded schools with less advanced coursework options and fewer certified teachers (Najarro, 2025).

Standardized testing and admissions criteria also tend to reflect cultural and socioeconomic bias, placing additional burdens on historically excluded applicants (Churchill, 2023). In 2022, researchers at the Stanford Center for Education Policy Analysis confirmed that 50 years after its formal end, racial segregation persists and continues to correlate with achievement gaps across the country (Reardon et al., 2022).

In 1978, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of affirmative action in *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke*, holding that achieving racial diversity in

higher education serves as a compelling state interest. As a result, universities lawfully considered an applicant's race as one of many factors to build a diverse student body representative of our nation's multicultural population.

Texas' Unique Role in Shaping the Law of Affirmative Action. In Texas, there is a long and complex legal history surrounding race-conscious admissions. Texas was home to the successful legal challenge in *Sweatt v. Painter* (1950) to the "separate but equal" doctrine established in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, thereby desegregating the University of Texas' graduate and professional programs. The case, challenging the exclusion of Heman Sweatt, a Black Texan, from the University of Texas School of Law, became one of the foundational cases supporting desegregation throughout public programs.

Of note, Texas' admissions practices were hampered by litigation challenging a version of the University of Texas's affirmative action policy in *Hopwood v. Texas* (Fifth Circuit, 1996). Texas lawmakers enacted the still-active Top Ten Percent Plan in 1997 as a race-neutral alternative to promote diversity (*Hopwood v. Texas*, 1996).

After the U.S. Supreme Court reaffirmed the legality of such policies in *Grutter v. Bollinger* (2003), Texas public graduate and professional schools saw a measurable shift. In 2006, the proportion of Black, Latino and Native American students enrolled increased by 3.4% (Garces, 2013).

The U.S. Supreme Court subsequently upheld the use of affirmative action to remedy past discrimination and advance the compelling governmental interest of increasing diversity in student bodies twice in 2013 and 2016, both in cases involving the assessment of the University of Texas admissions policies (*Fisher v. University of Texas*, 2013; 2016).

From *Sweatt* to *Hopwood* and the *Fisher* cases, Texas has remained central in shaping the national debate on affirmative action.

What Happened

In June 2023, the U.S. Supreme Court issued decisions on two lawsuits brought by Students for Fair Admissions (SFFA), an organization led by Edward Blum, a conservative legal strategist who seeks to eliminate race-conscious civil rights policies and promote a "colorblind" legal framework. SFFA was founded as part of a broader effort of prominent conservative donors to eliminate the consideration of race in college admissions. SFFA has filed similar lawsuits against fellowships for students of color in law and healthcare fields.

One lawsuit was brought against the public University of North Carolina and the other was against the private Harvard University. In its ruling, the Supreme Court prohibited the use of race as a factor for the consideration of a student in most college admissions processes. This ruling effectively eliminated affirmative action in higher education admissions.

What You Should Know

The Supreme Court ruling in the *SFFA* case declared that universities remain able to consider student essays that explain "how race affected [that student's] life." However, as made clear in Justice Sotomayor's dissenting opinion, this caveat is also called into question by the ruling. She wrote: "This supposed recognition that universities can, in some situations, consider race in application essays is nothing but an attempt to put lipstick on a pig. The court's opinion circumscribes universities' ability to consider race in any form by meticulously gutting [universities'] asserted diversity interests" (*Students for Fair Admissions*, 2023).

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The ban on affirmative action has the potential to lead to reduced diversity on college campuses (Latham Sikes, 2025). The ruling also has emboldened challenges to race-neutral policies like the Texas Top Ten Percent Plan, as some state officials question the legitimacy of diversity-related programs more broadly (McGee, 2023).

Texas SB 17: Ban on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Higher Education

The Texas state legislature passed Senate Bill (SB) 17 in 2023 to ban diversity, equity and inclusion offices and related school-sponsored clubs, centers, training and other activities in higher education. The law stipulates:

- Universities cannot maintain offices established for the purpose of diversity, equity and inclusion, especially relating to race, color or ethnicity, with narrow exceptions for compliance with federal law.
- Hiring boards cannot consider race or sex or require diversity statements.
- Mandatory training related to diversity, equity and inclusion for students is not allowed.
- To receive state funding, universities must certify compliance annually. Noncompliance risks loss of funding and potential legal action.

University system leaders across the state testified at a Texas Senate hearing in May 2024 on the actions they took to comply with the new law (Mangan, 2024). Several chancellors and leaders highlighted the number of staff who had been fired or reassigned from prior diversity, equity and inclusion offices and the estimated cost savings from payroll changes and the closure of campus centers and offices.

For example, UT Austin fired over 40 staff members and UT Dallas fired 20 from their positions in the process of implementing the new law. Conversely, faculty members testified to lost grant funds or funding opportunities due to the changes. And faculty, staff and students shared testimony, in part, about the personal toll of shuttered student support offices, centers, activities and staff changes.

What Happened

Over the past three years, Texas universities have adopted a range of institutional responses. Eliminating designated offices of diversity, equity and inclusion and related staff, per SB 17's language, is the most common action. Some institutions restructured where certain offices, centers, departments and other units are organized within the university with corresponding name changes and adjusted activities. Many made changes to staff and student training and adopted other institutional policy changes related to SB 17.

IDRA reviewed media reports and documents of institutional responses to SB 17 from public universities and university systems, as of August 2025, finding the following responses (listed from most reported to least):

- eliminated offices or centers,
- made staff changes,
- restructured office or unit,
- made policy or language revisions,
- made training changes,
- eliminated programs or events,
- ended external affiliations, and
- made curricular changes.

These were collected from published institutional documents and media reports and do not reflect a comprehensive list, as changes are made on an ongoing basis. However, the

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high number of eliminated offices and centers related to diversity, equity and inclusion, and changes in university staff, add context to the policy landscape that incoming students navigate on university campuses.

What You Should Know

Senate Bill 17 is a state law that does not supersede federal laws and protections. This includes Title VI of the *Civil Rights Act of 1964*'s prohibition against discrimination based on race, color, and national origin and Title IX of the *Education Amendments of 1972*'s prohibition against discrimination based on sex or gender in programs and activities receiving federal financial assistance.

As written, the restrictions to diversity, equity and inclusion in SB 17 do not extend to classroom conversations, student or faculty research, creative works, guest speakers, student organizations, or recruitment and admissions initiatives. However, all may face changes in institutional support. While enforcement under SB 17 is serious, stripping an institution of state or federal funding requires a lengthy, formal investigation process that includes multiple opportunities for appeal, reconciliation and legal defense.

Federal and Texas State Executive Orders

On January 20, 2025, the newly-inaugurated President Trump signed Executive Order 14151 titled “Ending Radical and Wasteful Government DEI Programs and Preferencing,” which, in part, directed federal agencies to terminate all “equity-related” grants or contracts (Executive Office of the President, 2025a).

He also signed Executive Order 14173, “Ending Illegal Discrimination and Restoring Merit-Based Opportunity,” requiring federal contractors to certify that they don’t “promote” diversity, equity and inclusion. A provision directed the U.S. Attorney General to take deterrence measures against diversity, equity and inclusion programming in the private sector, including opening civil compliance investigations against businesses pursuing such initiatives. (Executive Office of the President, 2025b)

Just over a week later, Texas Gov. Greg Abbott signed Executive Order No. GA-55, which modeled the federal executive order, directing state agencies to eliminate what Abbott called “racist DEI policies” to ensure state government is “color-blind” (Governor of the State of Texas, 2025).

What Happened

A federal district court initially issued a nationwide preliminary injunction blocking portions of Executive Orders 14151 and 14173. The administration appealed, and the Fourth Circuit first stayed and later vacated the injunction in February 2026, allowing enforcement of the challenged provisions to proceed while litigation continues (*Nat'l Assoc. of Diversity Officers...*, 2026).

To date, there is no publicly reported decision addressing a legal challenge to Texas Gov. Greg Abbott's directive (GA-55).

What You Should Know

The U.S. Attorney General is still allowed to monitor and investigate diversity, equity and inclusion programs (Burney & McCann, 2025). The order does not prevent people from filing complaints alleging that agencies or organizations have violated the diversity, equity and inclusion ban (King & Korando, 2025).

Contractors and grantees can still be denied contracts or grants, including if the agency or contracting officer believes their diversity, equity and inclusion policies and practices are illegal (Burney & McCann, 2025).

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Under the U.S. Constitution, the president cannot unilaterally rewrite laws passed by Congress or supersede constitutional rights. Accordingly, federal contractors and grantees, as well as private sector employers, can and should continue their commitments to diligently comply with federal civil rights laws, including monitoring and regularly assessing opportunities to increase access and belonging (LDF, 2024).

Dear Colleague Letter from the U.S. Department of Education

On February 14, 2025, the Trump Administration's Department of Education issued a "Dear Colleague" letter, a type of informal regulatory guidance that explains how the department's Office for Civil Rights will interpret and enforce the law.

The guidance sought to reinterpret Title VI by erroneously asserting that the Supreme Court's holding on affirmative action in the *SPFA* cases empowered the agency to categorically restrict diversity, equity and inclusion efforts. This letter stated that the department would revoke federal funding from any school or college that continued its diversity programming. In the letter, Acting Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights Craig Trainor stated: "Although *SPFA* addressed admissions decisions, the Supreme Court's holding applies more broadly... Federal law thus prohibits covered entities from using race in decisions pertaining to admissions, hiring, promotion, compensation, financial aid, scholarships, prizes, administrative support, discipline, housing, graduation ceremonies, and all other aspects of student, academic and campus life. (Trainor, 2025)

To further chill lawful diversity practices, in February 2025, the U.S. Department of Education launched an online platform called the "End DEI" portal for members of the public to report possible discrimination based on race or sex in K-12 public schools.

What Happened

The February 14, 2025, Dear Colleague Letter has been successfully challenged in federal court and is no longer in effect.

Multiple lawsuits were filed in 2025, including actions brought by national education and civil rights organizations, arguing that the letter misstated federal law, violated constitutional protections and was issued without required rulemaking procedures.

In September 2025, a federal district court in Maryland vacated the Dear Colleague Letter nationwide under the *Administrative Procedure Act*, finding it unlawful on several grounds, including procedural defects and constitutional concerns.

Following that ruling, the U.S. Department of Education abandoned efforts to enforce the letter, and in early 2026, the administration dropped its appeal.

What You Should Know

The U.S. Department of Education cannot legally control school curricula or censor differing viewpoints (Alvarez, 2025; Gonzalez, 2025), and federal courts have declared the Dear Colleague letter invalid and unenforceable. Accordingly, the department's "End DEI" portal has been deactivated, and the department cannot enforce its anti-diversity, equity and inclusion stance from the February 14 letter or compel schools to adopt it (Gonzalez, 2025).

In September 2025, a federal district court in Maryland blocked the Dear Colleague Letter nationwide, finding it unlawful on several grounds, including procedural defects and constitutional concerns.

Texas SB 12: Legislation Relating to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Bans in K-12 Schools

In 2025, the Texas Legislature passed a new ban on diversity, equity and inclusion in K-12 public schools (SB 12). This law builds on SB 3, which was 2021 legislation that restricts teaching and classroom conversations related to race, ethnicity, gender and their influence on history and current events education.

What Happened

SB 12 went into effect in September 2025, banning school districts from offering offices and activities related to diversity, equity and inclusion. Training and programs on those topics are also banned unless they are required by federal law. The ban applies broadly to any activities or programs involving district staff, contractors or volunteers that relate to race, color, ethnicity, gender identity or sexual orientation (Tex. State Leg., 2025a). Public schools cannot authorize or sponsor clubs based on sexual orientation or gender identity. Parents have to give written consent for their children to join any school clubs.

SB 12 requires school districts to adopt a policy to discipline employees (which could include termination) who knowingly take part in diversity, equity and inclusion-related activities. If an employee is terminated on this basis, they have a right to appeal.

School districts are now required to certify each year that they are complying with the diversity, equity and inclusion ban. The law has several exceptions related to how race, ethnicity and gender are part of state learning standards, accountability data and federal requirements, all of which are important for student learning.

Key provisions of the law have been challenged in court for violating students' free speech protections and the federal *Equal Access Act*, leading to preliminary injunctions in three school districts issued in February 2026 (ACLU, 2026). At the time of this writing, these specific injunctions are still in effect.

What You Should Know

The ban on diversity, equity and inclusion practices for K-12 public schools, along with other requirements in the new law, could potentially weaken student support services, clubs, community partnerships and school efforts to improve learning outcomes. Training for teachers in culturally relevant teaching and student support could also be discontinued.

Federal laws prohibiting discrimination based on race, color, national origin, and sex or gender still apply in programs and activities receiving federal financial assistance.

Texas SB 37: Legislation Relating to Centralized Governance in Public Colleges and Universities

In late February of 2025, Texas state senators threatened not to increase state funding for public universities over accusations that they had failed to fully comply with SB 17 from 2023. This built on tensions between state leaders and university faculty councils about academic freedom and governance (Priest & Dey, 2025).

What Happened

SB 37 is an omnibus bill that transfers curriculum authority from faculty to politically appointed governing boards, converts elected faculty senate positions into appointed positions, and strips faculty of their due process rights during the disciplinary process (Tex. State Leg., 2025b).

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The bill establishes a state-level committee to recommend the courses required for graduation. Each public university system's governor-appointed board of regents, which oversees each university campus or school's operations, must also create committees to review curricula. The committees can reject any course they deem ideologically charged or not aligned with workforce demands. Campus-level committees comprised of university leadership also must review minor degrees and certificates for workforce alignment and enrollment and make decisions to potentially consolidate or eliminate them.

The bill also creates a state office with the power to investigate universities and could threaten their funding if they do not comply with the law.

What You Should Know

SB 37 could lead to major changes in academic departments that offer education on the history of marginalized populations and issues of systemic inequalities.

Federal laws prohibiting discrimination based on race, color, national origin, and sex or gender still apply in programs and activities receiving federal financial assistance.

Why This Matters

The combined effects of recent federal legal decisions and Texas legislation are reshaping the landscape of college access, potentially deepening long-standing disparities.

The inaugural report by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board to evaluate the impact of SB 17 on enrollment and college completion trends reveals disparate trends across racial and ethnic groups. In 2023, only 48% of Black students at four-year colleges graduated within six years, compared to 84% of Asian American students, 73% of white students and 60% of Latino students. These trends establish a baseline for future assessment of enrollment data (THECB, 2024).

These disparities are not simply the result of individual choices or academic preparation; they reflect the cumulative impact of systemic barriers and the removal of policies designed to counteract them. A 2013 study found that bans on affirmative action in four states, including Texas during the *Hopwood* era, led to sharp declines in the percentage of graduate students of color across multiple disciplines: a 26% drop in engineering, a 19% drop in natural sciences, a 16% drop in social sciences and a 12% drop in the humanities (Garces, 2013).

A 2023 analysis further found that diversity declined by up to 17% at 23 public law schools in states with similar bans (Brooks et al., 2023).

These shifts are now accelerating nationwide. In 2024, the *Washington Post* reported that nearly 50 colleges, mostly public institutions, had eliminated or altered race-conscious scholarships following the *SFFA* decision, resulting in at least \$45 million in discontinued financial aid (Douglas-Gabriel, 2024).

Looking Ahead

Federal, state and institutional policies and responses to bans against diversity, equity and inclusion continue to change. Over the course of 2025, new federal and state executive actions against diversity, equity and inclusion programming and policies sought to restrict these practices further and withhold higher education funding as a means of enforcement.

The combined effects of recent federal legal decisions and changes in Texas legislation are reshaping the landscape of college access, potentially deepening long-standing disparities.

The Texas Legislature passed new legislation that centralizes college governance and restricts faculty members' academic and curricular decisions on campuses. New laws against diversity, equity and inclusion in public K-12 schools and educator preparation programs also took effect in the 2025-26 school year.

Research on the impacts on students' educational opportunities is more important than ever, given the new and evolving policy changes to diversity, equity and inclusion efforts.

Recommendations to Support College Access for All Texas Students

Recommendations for Policymakers

- Commission independent studies to continue to monitor the impact of laws like SB 17 on college access and success for all Texas students, particularly in relation to the state's broader educational and workforce development goals.
- Maintain college funding for student recruitment and outreach and for student support services.
- Preserve disaggregated data reporting to ensure all Texans are able to access and complete their college education.
- Adopt policies that support early and effective counseling for students to pursue college-ready coursework in high school and engage families in college access efforts.

Recommendations for Non-profit Research and Advocacy Organizations

- Monitor implementation and document impacts of current changes to diversity, equity and inclusion policies in education.
- Develop connections between school districts, colleges and community organizations to conduct applied research about the impacts of new laws and policies.
- Promote the voices of directly-impacted marginalized students and families in research, advocacy and direct services.

Recommendations for Educators

- Mentor student leadership and support student organizations, filling the gap left by the loss of diversity programming.
- Ensure that teaching and/or advising practices are accurate, evidence-based and focused on supporting student learning.
- Engage with professional development on student support and community engagement in the new legal and policy landscape.

The legal and policy landscape related to diversity, equity and inclusion in higher education is quickly shifting. New state legislation and federal action, including major cuts to minority-serving institutions of higher education and abrupt decisions to end longstanding policies like the *Texas Dream Act*, have upended prior pathways to college funding and student support, especially for students from historically marginalized backgrounds.

Ultimately, the voices of those directly impacted by these changes – the students – offer a guide to how accessing college should be accessible, affordable and available to all who seek it.

For more information about implementing these recommendations, contact Chloe Latham Sikes, Ph.D., IDRA Deputy Director of Policy (chloe.sikes@idra.org). Special thanks to Adiba Chowdhury for her contributions to this brief. Ms. Chowdhury is a law student in Texas and was an IDRA legal intern in 2025.

IDRA is a 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.

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