Children First IDRA Transforming Education

Staying on Course When Schools Steer Clear

A Community-Based Study on the Impacts of Texas' Diversity Policy Changes on High School Students and Tools to Expand Their College Pathways

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Executive Summary

College-bound high school students in Texas are encountering new state and federal policy changes in college admissions, academic programs and campus life. Restrictions on race-conscious admissions and diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives have altered college life for thousands of students.

IDRA maintains its mission to achieve equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college. It is necessary to understand the impact of these restrictions on college-bound high school students, especially those from historically marginalized backgrounds.*

This report contains the findings from IDRA's two-year study on the impacts of recent state and federal changes to college diversity policies on college access opportunities for Texas high school students. During the fall of 2024 through summer 2025, IDRA conducted 11 roundtables and 10 focus groups with a total of 92 participants who are high school students, college students, K-12 educators and counselors, parents and higher education professionals. We grouped findings by the impacts of policy changes on students and the subsequent needs that participants shared.

Participants overwhelmingly expressed that the policy changes compromised their sense of belonging on Texas college campuses. They also shared concerns about changes to affordability through targeted grants and scholarships based on students' backgrounds, safety and the lack of campus support for students' academic, social and mental health.

Based on these findings, IDRA worked with study participants and other stakeholders to develop three community-based toolkits that address major barriers to accessing college information and opportunities: building student networks, encouraging student leadership and developing parent knowledge-sharing networks. The published toolkits reflect the community-based approach to the study. These toolkits comprise a technical assistance package that high school counselors, educators, students and families can use to gain and share information about college readiness, application details and resources for preparing to successfully transition to college.

This report concludes with recommendations for state and institutional policies that support students' access to college. And it provides suggestions for future research to understand recent policy changes, their impacts on the college access pipeline, and ways to address persistent barriers for college-bound high school students in Texas.

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** The term "historically marginalized" in this study encompasses students who hold identities or experiences that have been excluded from college opportunities, especially related to race, ethnicity, socioeconomic background, and being the first-generation in their family to attend college. Participants in this study were not selected based on their identity and were only asked optional demographic characteristics in the survey following their roundtable or focus group session. Many participants disclosed an aspect of their identity or experience that was historically marginalized in relation to the ban on diversity, equity and inclusion offices, and some quotes reference these as well, i.e., due to immigration or veteran status.*

Study Background on Changes to College Access Policies

Every student should have equal opportunities to access college. Over the past several decades, many states and the federal government have invested resources in developing college readiness pathways, programs and affordability initiatives. Goals for students' college readiness and attainment are baked into nearly every state's education plans to support students in obtaining degrees or postsecondary credentials to meet workforce needs.

Yet, recent policy changes to how diversity, specifically racial/ethnic diversity, is considered in a student's journey to college quickly overturned decades of institutional policies, practices and programs that were designed to address historical and current barriers to accessing college.

Specifically, these changes affect the role a student's race/ethnicity play in their ability to access college. This includes students who are Black, Latino or from other minoritized racial/ethnic groups; students coming from low-income households; and students who are the first in their families to seek postsecondary education.

College Diversity Policy Changes

In Texas, a new state law restricting diversity, equity and inclusion offices and initiatives at public colleges and universities (Senate Bill 17, 2023) coincided with the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling that a student's race could no longer factor into college admissions decisions, per *Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard and UNC,* which effectively eliminated affirmative action in college admissions (see IDRA brief by Latham Sikes & Chowdhury, 2026). These changes to diversity policies marked a significant shift in how students' racial backgrounds and identities could inform their college applications.

Research on Equitable College Access Pathways

Research has consistently demonstrated that college access is shaped by early exposure to academic preparation, college planning and advising that begins as early as middle school and continues through high school and into college (Bojorquez, 2019; Feygin et al., 2022; Giani et al., 2023; Sattin-Bajaj et al., 2017).

Students benefit from sustained college and career readiness support, particularly through access to well-trained and adequately resourced school counselors who can assist with academic planning and college goal-setting (Bojorquez, 2023; Giani et al., 2023).

Eighth grade is a critical intervention point. In Texas, students and their caregivers begin to map high school graduation plans, including selection of an "endorsement" as a career focus that may or may not put students on a path for college. Eighth graders have the option to enroll in advanced coursework that keeps them on track for competitive college admission, but not all endorsements default into a college-readiness pathway (Bojorquez, 2023). These early plans are especially consequential for students, such as those from historically marginalized backgrounds, who may lack access to informal college knowledge networks.

For decades, college offices and initiatives on diversity, equity and inclusion offered targeted support to prospective and enrolled students, faculty and staff to address academic inequities and help orient historically marginalized students to college life (Harper et al., 2024). Research shows that such targeted support is especially important for historically marginalized students who may lack access to other college knowledge networks (Carter et al., 2013). For these students, K-12 schools often serve as pivotal sites for information about postsecondary pathways.

State-level policy interventions aimed at expanding equitable access to higher education have historically acknowledged the structural disparities in early advising and college-readiness pathways. For example, the Top Ten Percent Plan, adopted by the Texas legislature in 1997, expanded higher education opportunities for students from historically underrepresented racial and socioeconomic backgrounds (IDRA, 2021; Long et al., 2010). The policy has served as an important admissions pathway for Latino students and Black students at public institutions, as well as for students from rural communities, low-income families and those who are the first in their family to attend college.

College admissions and recruitment strategies that explicitly acknowledge inequities in access to educational opportunity have functioned as critical mechanisms for broadening participation in higher education among students historically excluded from these institutions (Flores & Horn, 2015).

However, recent policy changes, like Texas' SB 17 (passed in 2023, effective in 2024) and the U.S. Supreme Court's decisions in the *SFFA v. Harvard* and *UNC* cases in 2023, impact these equity-oriented pathways by limiting institutional capacity to consider students' race, ethnicity and other aspects of their identities in targeted outreach and student support practices. In the absence of initiatives that explicitly recognize and respond to students' intersecting identities – such as race, language status and geographic location – high school students from historically marginalized communities may encounter reduced access to information and opportunities that support college-going trajectories (Valenzuela et al., 2025).

Research on peer-to-peer information sharing in programs such as Mexican American Studies (MAS) further suggests that access to culturally relevant academic spaces and student leadership opportunities play pivotal roles in shaping college aspirations and enrollment patterns (Hernández et al., 2024).

IDRA's study contributes to the body of research on the importance of equity-focused support across K-12 education and underscores the effects of higher education policy decisions on high school students' college access.

IDRA conducted the study summarized in this report to understand the impacts of the policy changes on high school students in their college journeys.

Research Questions

This study posed two research questions:

1. How have recent changes to postsecondary equity policies (*i.e.*, 2023 changes through Texas SB 17 and the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in the *Harvard* and *UNC* cases in 2023) impacted the college access pipeline for Texas high school students from marginalized backgrounds?

2. How are programs that support marginalized Texas students' college readiness, access and success affected by the changes to postsecondary equity policies?

Together, these questions aimed to assess the immediate impact of recent policy changes on college access opportunities and the experiences of historically marginalized high school students in Texas and to discern critical resources and tools that could be developed to alleviate existing or exacerbated challenges.

Methodology

This study used a community-based research design (Israel et al., 1998; Johnson, 2016; Strand et al., 2003). Community-based research prioritizes the experiences and expertise of directly impacted community members to explore and shape the research questions, share knowledge from multiple viewpoints and perspectives, and develop actionable solutions. In this way, community members are active participants in shaping the research, applying findings and developing solutions for their communities.

The community-based research approach was useful in evaluating policy impacts on education that directly affect the decisions and opportunities of students, parents and educators. It offered two primary benefits for addressing the research questions, including (1) a way for community members to examine and share the impacts of multiple, concurrent policy changes; and (2) a way for community members to collaboratively develop actionable solutions to the issues identified and to shared challenges of college access.

IDRA recruited participants for the study through open posting and organizational invitations in the fall of 2024. The team sought current high school and college students, counselors and educators, parents, advocates, and other interested community members. Students, parents and educators were eligible for a $20 gift card for participating.

We held 11 roundtables centered on how the policy changes affected participants' college access, programs and activities. Most roundtables were held via Zoom. Three were conducted on-site at a high school with a total of 50 roundtable participants. Discussions from the roundtables informed the preliminary report, published in March 2025 (Latham Sikes, 2025).

IDRA then conducted 10 focus groups in the summer of 2025 by participant group (*e.g.*, high school students only, higher education faculty only, parents only) with 42 participants. Two focus groups were conducted in person, and eight were conducted via Zoom.

Each roundtable or focus group session began with a brief overview of the policy changes to set the context for the discussion. Some participants reported very little familiarity with the policy changes or their origins, and some were very aware of the policy changes and sought out participating in the study to share their experiences. All roundtable and focus group discussions were audio-recorded and transcribed. We analyzed transcriptions via Dedoose, an online qualitative research tool. We also invited all participants to complete a closing survey to share their demographics and roles in education, rate the usefulness of the discussion to their experience or work, and indicate interest in continued participation.

While geographic distribution was not a part of the participant selection, participants were located across the state, with concentrations in Central Texas. North Texas, the Houston area, the Rio Grande Valley and San Antonio were all represented.

Exhibit 1: Study Participants by Race/Ethnicity, Self-reported

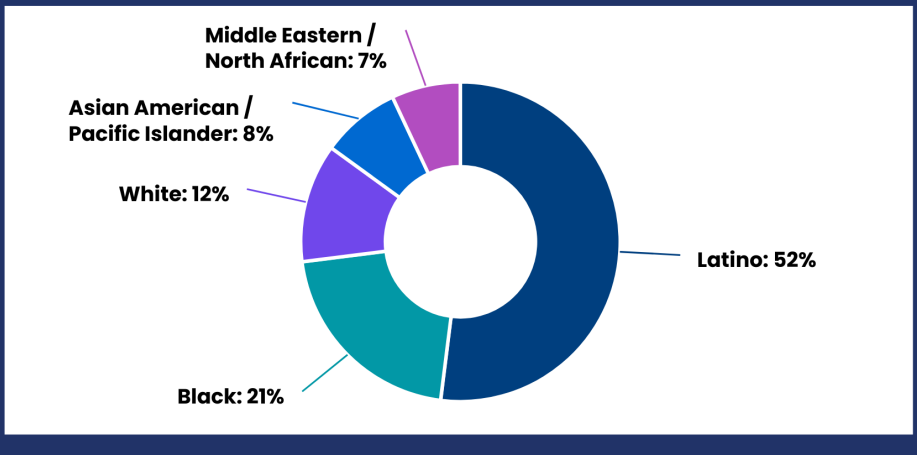
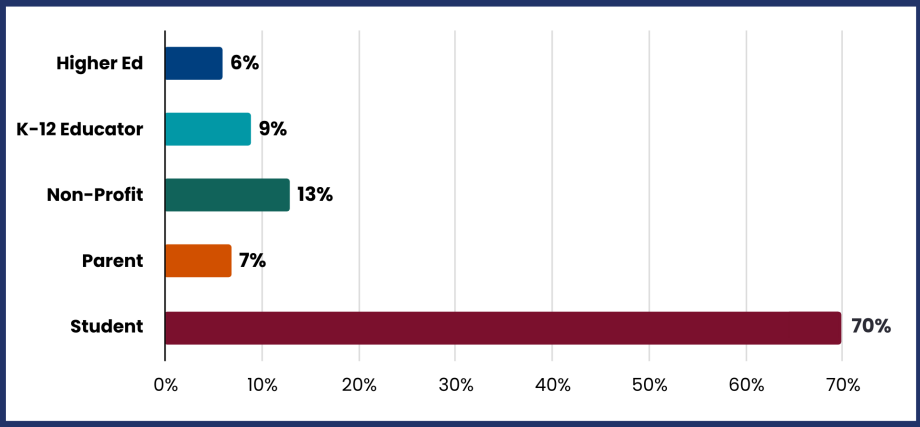
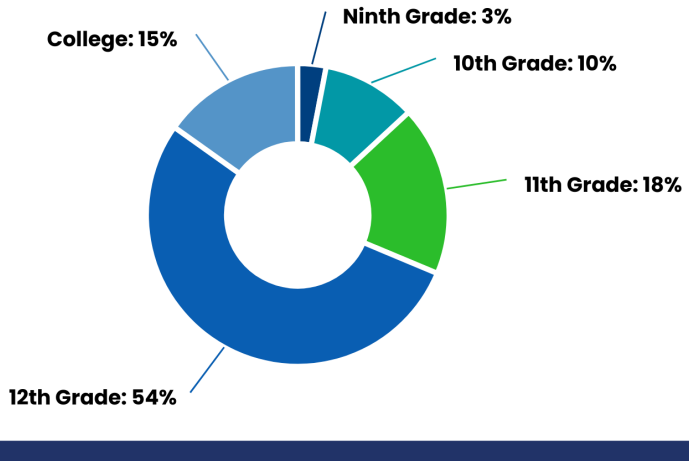


Exhibit 2: Study Participants by Role, Self-reported



Of the 60 student participants, 51 (85%) were in high school, with 12th graders constituting the majority.

Exhibit 3: Students Participating in the Study by Grade Level, Self-reported



Based on the roundtables and focus groups, IDRA developed community-based toolkits to address the outstanding needs and barriers to college access that they expressed. We invited past participants and additional stakeholders to a virtual convening in October 2025 to review these toolkits and provide feedback. The community feedback informed the final development of the toolkits for students, families and educators.

Major Findings

Who is Impacted by the Policy Changes?

While this study focused on how historically marginalized high school students in Texas experienced the impacts of the diversity policy changes, participant recruitment was not limited to any specific demographic group of students or other stakeholders. However, as participants spoke about their own experiences or those of the students they serve, they pointed to the changes most impacting students who identify as students of color (*e.g.,* "Black and Brown"), are from households with low incomes, and are the first in their families to go to college.

Several participants shared impacts on students who identify as LGBTQ+, identify as having a disability, or are immigrants or have family members who are immigrants. Others also identified as non-traditional college students, including military veterans and transfer students.

Impact of Policies on Texas High School Students

Participants reported that recent policy changes have negatively impacted college access for historically marginalized students.

Across the study, participants voiced that the recent changes to diversity policies in colleges have negatively impacted college access for historically marginalized students in Texas. They expressed immediate negative impacts from the removal of diversity, equity and inclusion resources to comply with the new state law, such as physical spaces and designated support services and staff on college campuses. The changes disrupted students' sense of stability and access to key programs for academic support and student success.

Students and educators expressed feeling scared, worried, anxious, confused and upset.

Many participants spoke to the immense emotional toll of the policy changes. Many educators in higher education, high schools and outside organizations reported feeling isolated within their networks about how to discuss diversity, equity, and inclusion and the impacts of these changes.

Students and educators expressed feeling scared, worried, anxious, confused and upset. Students were scared and worried about the future of student organizations and spaces and the faculty and staff who supported them. They felt overarching uncertainty as policy changes unfolded across institutions.

Educators voiced frustration and anxiety about being unable to advise students and families about what the changes really meant for their college experiences, especially for students of color and students who identified as LGBTQ+.

One college counselor shared the emotional impact on students as the new changes took effect: "Students were afraid of everything, really. Were there going to be faculty? Would I be welcome as a student? Would I be physically safe? And trying to talk students down from those ledges was really hard."

A high school student shared how the changes impacted his college search: "A saying I kind-of go by… is, 'Don't be somewhere where you're not wanted.' And I don't want to be in a campus where the environment, the people, your professors or just staff in general are not welcoming."

Students worry about belonging in college and finding friends and community.

Colleges quickly implemented the state policy changes by dissolving and restructuring student centers, groups, and scholarship funds and by firing staff and faculty working within diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives (McGee & Mohamed, 2024; Zhu & Fogel, 2024). Many of our study participants voiced that these changes had led them to lose a sense of belonging in college. High school students questioned whether pursuing college, especially if they were the first in their family to do so, would be worthwhile given the changes.

For college advisors working with first-generation students, their job became more difficult as their students of color and first-generation students voiced feeling unwelcome and unwanted by state universities.

One college advisor said: "Especially for incoming students and also students who have been there, even just literally having a physical space is impactful. And then having designated staff who are trusted to go to when they need support, someone who looks like them, someone who's had a common experience that they've had. That not being there is really, really significant."

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– College advisor

Another college advisor said that the policy changes prompted his students to question: "'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 and wants me to explore my identity?' It's a conversation that we have day in and day out about college fit and really convincing the populations there that we just have to find our community."

Students, parents and educators are concerned about scholarship opportunities and other funding that help make college affordable.

The policy changes have exacerbated concerns from students and parents about college affordability. Affordability is a longstanding barrier to accessing college, but many participants were familiar with and accustomed to seeking scholarships that value diversity.

One student reported that a corporate scholarship she had earned through her university that recruited students of color and those from low-income households was canceled for future cohorts. The program had provided her with a hands-on computer engineering experience, funding and mentorship from company employees of color who provided representation in the field that deeply influenced her desire to be a computer engineer.

In addition to some diversity-oriented scholarships being discontinued, students shared that they believed they would no longer receive targeted support or information to even pursue scholarships based on their backgrounds due to the broad ban against diversity, equity and inclusion (Douglas-Gabriel, 2024). Targeted support from colleges and schools had dissipated since the policy changes.

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One former high school teacher and higher education professional told us: "With the new policy changes, before I left [working in a] high school, it was very disheartening because of the fact that we had a lot of our students who had gotten scholarships to different universities, and they didn't know if they were going to get those scholarships due to all the diversity policy changes. They were just in limbo… I don't think people realize when they did all the college diversity policies, parents had no idea how that was going to affect them, money-wise, going to school or just everything when you take all of that out."

A high school student said: "Our school's been trying to steer clear of anything that's just for a specific group of people. And because of doing that, a lot of things get overlooked… even specific competitions, like, for the NAACP and things like that, our school hasn't shared any of that. Everything that I've been able to do [to look for scholarships] has been outside [of school]. They don't tell us anything about those kinds of scholarships."

Students and parents worry about their physical and mental safety on college campuses.

Some students and parents expressed that the policy changes made them think they or their children would be less safe on college campuses. Black and Latino participants shared that they were concerned about how colleges now handle racist incidents or discrimination on campus and that they would not experience the same protections due to the policy changes.

Diversity, equity and inclusion offices provided spaces for student support, such as multicultural centers, where students could seek resources if they experienced racism, sexism, homophobia or other forms of discrimination. Many of those centers were closed or repurposed following the diversity policy changes.

A recent college graduate and education advocate said: "Taking away any instance of diversity centers obviously impacts all the colleges, but especially for the smaller colleges it has an even bigger impact. That's what I think of that, especially with also having gone to go to a school in a… town where every semester there was a racist incident or homophobic incidents, something of that nature, too, and even actually experiencing from a staff member a racist incident. When you take those college diversity centers, the multicultural centers, the LGBTQ centers, you're left with those incidents that you've experienced on campus… It gives you less reason to stay."

A parent said: "[The impact of the policy changes] has made me more cautious… and also intentional about choosing a college that not only offers strong academics but also provides a safe and supportive environment for my daughter, especially in the absence of DEI programs… Without DEI, how is the university ensuring that all students especially those from historically underrepresented backgrounds, feel safe, supported and included on campus?"

Another parent voiced concern about how racial isolation for students on college campuses may affect their mental health. She shared an anecdote about her friend's son's experience of racial isolation in high school as a young Black man. She said: "He's Black, and he doesn't feel seen and accepted. And there's really no way in his school for him to hang out with other Black boys who are like him."

She continued to explain that potential mental health issues could be exacerbated in college if students with similar experiences did not have clear organizations and communities, such as a Black Student Union, that affirmed their racial identities. Participants connected real mental and physical safety concerns to the policy changes and their ongoing implementation.

Students and educators report that there are fewer campus supports for them to access and succeed in college.

Participants shared experiences and voiced concerns about being unable to access college and find the academic, social and health support they need to succeed once enrolled. These concerns came from both big changes, like the closure of student centers, and small changes, like changes to faculty members' titles or the cancellation of tabling events that display campus resources and information. In some cases, this prompted high school counselors and educators to provide extra convincing and encouragement to students to go to college.

A high school educator said: "The policy changes are already influencing some of the key areas that matter most for building strong college aspirations in high school students. Some of my kids are students of color and are concerned about facing less institutional supports than anticipated."

A university faculty member said: "I was always invited to participate in [new student] summer orientation. I was able to table and share information about the course offerings of my [diversity and gender studies] department. That went away."

"[The impact of the policy changes] has made me more cautious… and also intentional about choosing a college that not only offers strong academics but also provides a safe and supportive environment for my daughter, especially in the absence of [diversity, equity and inclusion] programs."

– Parent

The faculty member added that they have had to use new strategies to reach out to students: "So I put all of my stuff about [my center] with candy and chips and pamphlets and everything about the courses that we offer on a table outside… my hallway."

This concern that fewer resources were available to support students or that they were harder to find also led, in some cases, to students intentionally under matching their college options. For instance, some participants shared that students planned to apply to less-selective colleges than their academic qualifications would prepare them for or planning to enroll in a two-year program rather than a four-year degree-granting program.

A high school student said that based on "all the reports on the schools that are definitely shutting [DEI programs] down and not supporting it, it has definitely, changed my perspective on which colleges I'm even going to apply to, because I obviously don't want to be on a campus that doesn't support me and doesn't want to see me succeed in those spaces necessarily or support other students who look like me or are going through the same things… I've definitely just taken at least five colleges off my list just based on the DEI [response and them] not supporting students whatsoever when it comes to this."

A college advisor at a community-based organization said: "I think that on top of this post-COVID world we're living in where our teens and youth are experiencing high anxiety rates and trying to get back into a social realm of life, that this [policy change] is very easily a deterrent from pushing through some of those barriers that are already existing… So they might consider, instead of going to a four-year program, getting a two-year program or going to a certification, trying to find something quick to move through that feels less awkward, feels safer and feels like it's going to be cheaper and easier to do on their own than what they would need from an institution where they could earn a bachelor's degree."

Another college advisor at a community-based organization said: "Something I am already beginning to see with some of the students who I work with regarding policy changes is adjusting academic goals or postsecondary goals a little bit. I know something that we start struggling with when our seniors start applying for school is under matching, maybe putting more time and energy into applying to and paying attention to applications for schools that they're a shoo-in for. It's already a little difficult to get them to aim higher. I see a lot of our students shifting toward… options that don't necessarily challenge them."

"I've definitely just taken at least five colleges off my list just based on the DEI [response and them] not supporting students whatsoever when it comes to this."

– High school student

Program Changes and Student Needs

One of the clearest impacts of recent policy changes is the shift in organizational support for programs that address the specific needs of students according to their racial, ethnic, socio-economic backgrounds or gender identities. In community-based organizations and school districts – which are not under the scope of SB 17 or the court rulings to universities – participants shared that programs had shifted away from targeted support and more toward "neutral" programming open to "everyone."

A professional at a community-based organization said: "We did remove programs focused explicitly on race and LGBTQ themes in educational or [the] hiring context… Our workshops still teach inclusive leadership and empathy, but it's now more framed through neutral lenses like communication building and college readiness."

Some high school students reported that their school districts were resistant to their efforts to share student leadership skills or establish clubs that offered targeted, equitable support for college information.

While framing a school program as open to everyone is very inclusive, some participants felt it compromised their ability to support students who needed it most, like first-generation students in high school.

A high school student said: "Schools are scared. Admin are scared to do these [college access] programs or to educate students or to have the groups [for historically marginalized students]. It's hard to start even those clubs. We wanted to have an advocacy group, and our own principal was just like, 'Hey, I don't want to tell students, I don't want to educate students on how to speak at these board meetings or whatever, or voice their concerns if we don't even have the funding for it.' Just being afraid to have student advocacy groups or these things because they don't want to be controversial."

Another high school student said: "They [school leaders] kind of just want to steer clear of anything that is not for everyone… Even with our first-generation mentorship program, they wanted to expand it to everyone."

These student reflections raise serious questions about how school leaders are impacted by the policy changes and how their support for students who need it most is compromised. In these instances, students suffer the consequences of diminishing school support for college access and student leadership opportunities.

Stretched Counselor Capacity to Offset Access Challenges and Provide Additional Student Support

One persistent challenge is the lack of one-on-one college counseling in high schools. High school counselors in Texas often have large caseloads averaging 391 students per counselor – which is over 100 students above the recommended ratio of 250:1 – and they are unable to individually counsel every student (ASCA, 2024).

This echoes prior research on the need for more robust support for middle and high school college counselors and advisors (Bojorquez, 2023; Giani et al., 2023). Some students in this study advocated or created peer-to-peer college access and information networks by joining outside organizations or creating their own clubs.

Parents expressed a desire to know more about the college access process to help their student.

College counselors offer critical support but need a broader network of teachers, parents and alumni to relay college knowledge.

Students shared that their college counselors are essential sources of information, but that counselors' stretched capacity limits the information and attention students can get, especially with new policy changes.

A high school student said: "For example, at our school, it's pretty much a gap because, yes, we can go to our college and career counselor, but she is packed and busy. So when that option isn't available, people tend to go research online, and especially with today's news going on, and people are just, like, spreading things. So honestly, I think it's a pretty big gap."

Counselors, educators and parents look to schools for ways to engage in college access conversations.

Few students reported that their parents were a key resource for college access. This echoes research on first-generation students, whose parents may be unfamiliar with the college application process and thus must seek support from educators at school, older students, online or elsewhere.

One high school student reflected on her friend's experience as she navigated college applications, parent pressures to enter the workforce and a lack of targeted counselor support: "She wasn't encouraged to go to college at all by her family because she's a first-generation American, and her parents didn't go to college. No one in her family went to college. Her dad was saying that she doesn't even need to go to college. She can just get a job… There are so many students like that in our school district. They are not really being talked to specifically by these counselors."

Participants shared that different community meetings, workshops and multilingual materials would help strengthen parent engagement in college conversations at school.

One educator shared: "Here in our population [we have a lot of parents] who did not attend college and who don't speak English. So yeah, just getting the information out there. But I think also offering alternative solutions, like scholarship workshops, help with the FAFSA application, and making sure that they are bilingual so that there is support on both sides."

Similarly, the parents who participated in this study expressed a desire to know more about the college access process to help their student. They lamented English-only materials and wished they could access more information earlier in their student's schooling, meaning prior to high school.

One Spanish-speaking parent shared, "I'd like to take English classes for parents and [get information] in Spanish so that we could communicate, integrate and help them [students] more" (translated).

Another parent encouraged more parent engagement, saying: "I think we need, like parents as with students, they lack motivation. They have put in their minds that they just need to finish high school and that's all, start to work. No. I think we need to speak more about the process and that they go to college because, something I've seen and shared with some parents about this program [TRIO program] is that it shouldn't be the only one, there should be more programs."

With earlier, more accessible college information, parents could be more engaged in their student's college application process.

Students need additional support to develop or further their social, study and navigation skills for a successful transition to college.

Building on the impacts of the policy changes on student support centers and programs, participants shared that high school students need pathways to cultivate essential skills for transitioning to college.

One college student shared, "True college success depends on not only academic success but on whether students feel emotionally supported, socially included and empowered to strive as your full selves."

A professor at a large university reflected that historically marginalized students who would have previously been served by her university's DEI programs need special outreach and "bridging" into college. She shared: "I want to say that these students need these skills, learning skills, but we as a community need to also build new systems to create these bridges, these new practices to support this… new cohort of students that are vulnerable. I think they're a little bit more vulnerable because of the anti-DEI policies that have stripped a lot of these resources at different levels in higher ed and also in K-12."

Participants overall voiced that early and consistent skill development is critical for students to build the skills needed for college success in light of policy changes. These included thorough academic support, student leadership opportunities and intentional "bridging" programs from higher education institutions to high schools.

"True college success depends on not only academic success but on whether students feel emotionally supported, socially included and empowered to strive as your full selves."
– College student

Community-Based Resource Toolkits and Use

The findings from this study indicate that there is a breakdown in visible support systems in higher education for historically marginalized students. While some of the findings echoed long-standing challenges to college access and success for students of color, LGBTQ+ students, first-generation students and students from low-income households, participants identified the policy changes as exacerbating those challenges.

To address this, IDRA engaged participants and additional community stakeholders in a virtual workshop to develop three resource toolkits:

Toolkit 1: How to Build Student-to-Student Networks

Toolkit 2: How to Encourage Student Leadership for Transitions to College

Toolkit 3: How to Support Parent College Knowledge

We drew the resources and toolkits directly from data produced by the roundtables and focus groups. IDRA used qualitative analysis methods to organize and draft the resources and to incorporate feedback from the community workshop. Key participants were then invited to review the revised toolkits for content, usefulness and accessibility.

While the toolkits were developed to address the challenges to college access that participants expressed, they also were designed to adhere to state and federal laws. This enables them to be used with all students, families and counselors in school settings.

IDRA compiled the final set of toolkits (in English and Spanish) as an IDRA technical assistance package for counselors, students and families to use to prepare for transitions to college. High school counselors and other educators who advise high school students in college-readiness courses and opportunities will find the toolkits useful for increasing their capacity and engage students with activities and information. (See Community-Based College Access – Online Technical Assistance Toolkit at: https://idra.news/CollegeAccessToolkit.)

Recommendations for Policy and Future Research

Findings from this study suggest future policy and research needs.

Policy Recommendations

The institutional and state policies below would support students' college access considering prior policy changes.

Colleges and universities can consider policies that…

Ensure college is affordable to all students

Affordability challenges are a persistent barrier to college access despite other inclusive policies, like the Texas Top Ten Percent Plan. Colleges and universities can retain and expand targeted affordability initiatives, such as free tuition policies based on a student's household income limits or by county residence in order to promote access. They can also provide more information about private or foundation-based scholarships and promote greater awareness for various national scholarship search engines.

Protect students against discrimination

Students, parents and educators voiced concern about the possibility of racial and gender-based discrimination on college campuses and how to keep students safe without diversity, equity and inclusion resources. Colleges and universities should make their Title IX offices and procedures highly visible and accessible to incoming students and families and should adopt clear policies safeguarding against discrimination toward students based on Title VI violations, according to race, color and national origin.

Promote student support offices and support basic needs services

Colleges and universities should promote the offices that support student transitions, like academic tutoring and writing skills, time management, and student mental health and well-being. They should also continue to invest in essential basic needs services for students. These include access to affordable housing, free food pantries and dining options, healthcare services, emergency financial aid, resources for parenting students and accessible mental health services.

The state and school district leaders can consider policies that…

Support early and robust college advising and transition support

Comprehensive, targeted and individual college advising continues to be an invaluable step for students to access college. Individualized advising programs are shown to help students prepare for and transition to college. These supports require investments, training and strategies to broaden school advising capacity.

Ensure students can access rigorous, college-preparatory coursework early

Students are better prepared for college-level academic materials and transitions with early and equitable access to preparatory coursework, such as dual enrollment, dual credit, and AP and IB classes. Starting in middle school and continuing through high school, K-12 school systems must ensure that students are counseled into advanced graduation plans, college-preparatory pathways and coursework like advanced math (*e.g.*, Algebra I in eighth grade).

Multilingual policies at the district level that extend translation and interpretation services to college advising

School leaders should ensure that college advising conversations with students and parents take place in multiple languages and that informational resources are available in the languages spoken within the school district. Language access is a key component for parent and family engagement in these important conversations.

Future Research Recommendations

Additional research would shed light on remaining questions from this study, including the following.

- Study how investments in dual enrollment and dual credit courses in Texas result in increased college matriculation rates, particularly of students from low-income households who should benefit from new state policies (*e.g.*, House Bill 8, 2023).
- Examine how Texas college and university recruitment strategies, including summer "bridge" or enrichment programs, have changed under new policies.
- Study how changes from additional policy changes, such as SB 37 in 2025, altered curricular offerings and university departments and the impact on historically marginalized students entering those institutions.
- Monitor the long-term impact of Texas' SB 17 and the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling in *Students for Fair Admission* cases on student college matriculation and graduation, by disaggregated demographic groups.
- Continue research on how cross-sector coalitions can foster connection and protect against discrimination of students, as well as college staff and faculty.

Conclusion

Texas is home to a diverse population of college-ready and college-going students. Changes in college diversity policies had an immediate impact on the college access opportunities for historically marginalized high school students through tangible changes, such as lost funding, and intangible changes, including diminished perceptions of safety, belonging and support.

The impact of these policies on Texas high school students threatens years-long efforts to bolster college-going rates and opportunities for students who are Black, Latino, first-generation and from households with low incomes. Targeted support in K-12 systems and in higher education are needed to continue preparing and encouraging students to pursue a college education.

The toolkits that participants of this study helped to develop offer resources to engage students, families and educators in college access conversations.

However, state and institutional leaders must ultimately ensure that all students are able to access and afford college. The future of our Texas communities depends on it.

Publications

A Community-Based Study on the Impact of Texas' SB 17 on Marginalized College-Going Students
Preliminary report by Chloe Latham Sikes, Ph.D.
https://idra.news/AA-SB17studyPrelimReport

Beyond the Bans – How Legal and Policy Changes Limiting Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Practices Compromise Student Opportunity
Research brief by Chloe Latham Sikes, Ph.D., and Adiba Chowdhury
https://idra.news/BeyondBansPDF

Community-Based College Access – Online Technical Assistance Toolkit
https://idra.news/CollegeAccessToolkit

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IDRA's mission is to achieve equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college. To achieve our mission, IDRA uniquely advances system equity through four lenses: policy and legal advocacy; family and community engagement; educator and student support; and research and data analysis.

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Appendix

Texas College Enrollment Trends by Race/Ethnicity

Over the past six years, college enrollment rates for admitted first-time undergraduate students in Texas across racial and ethnic groups have dropped. College enrollment rates among Black students and Asian American students dropped the most from 2019 to 2024. Asian American students and Latino students experienced the greatest drop in the rate of college enrollment since the COVID-19 pandemic, though the number of students rebounded.

Exhibit 4: Enrollment Rates of Total Admitted Texas Applicants by Race/Ethnicity

Fall Term	Black Students	Latino Students	White Students	Asian American Students
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%
2024	48.0%	45.5%	55.3%	57.1%
6 year difference	-10.5%	-8.5%	-9.7%	-12.1%
Change since COVID-19 (2021-2024)	**-6.7%**	**-7.4%**	**-5.7%**	**-9.0%**

Data source: THECB, 2026a.

The disaggregated undergraduate enrollment rates across racial/ethnic groups vary between two- and four-year institutions of higher education. The two tables below show enrollment numbers and proportions of total fall enrollment by racial/ethnic group. Changes in the racial/ethnic composition of undergraduate students enrolling for the first time across Texas colleges reflect how institutions are building their incoming classes before and after the policy changes.

Since 2019, white students represent a declining proportion of students at two-year and four-year institutions. Students who are Black or Latino show slight growth in the actual numbers and proportions of two-year college fall enrollment since COVID-19 in 2021, though incoming fall enrollment numbers in 2019 were higher for both groups. Enrollment for Asian American students at two-year colleges has remained steady.

Exhibit 5: Enrollment Trend in Texas Two-Year Public Colleges

Fall Term	Black Students		Latino Students		White Students		Asian American Students	
	Number	Proportion	Number	Proportion	Number	Proportion	Number	Proportion
2019	97,139	13%	360,313	47%	230,778	30%	36,004	5%
2020	87,212	12%	322,269	46%	221,925	31%	34,247	5%
2021	84,646	12%	324,718	48%	202,432	30%	32,203	5%
2022	82,642	12%	326,431	49%	184,793	28%	32,788	5%
2023	86,023	12%	340,394	49%	184,177	26%	35,075	5%
2024	92,899	13%	358,554	49%	185,332	25%	36,398	5%
6 year difference	-4,240	0%	-1,759	+2%	-45,446	-5%	+394	0%

Data source: THECB, 2026a.

In contrast, at public four-year universities, enrollment has risen slightly for Black students, Latino students and Asian American students both in numbers and as a proportion of the total fall enrollment over a six-year trend.

Black student enrollment declined slightly in 2021 following the COVID-19 pandemic year but rebounded past pre-COVID levels by 2023. Enrollment trends for Latino students and Asian American students continued to climb through COVID-19 and to the present. The proportion of white students enrolling in four-year institutions declined six percentage points since 2019.

Since the policy changes examined in this report went into effect during the 2023-24 school year, the fall 2024 data provide a baseline for understanding enrollment trends by racial and ethnic groups. Future data analysis is needed to understand the impacts on admission, applications and enrollment. This study's findings relied more on qualitative data. Future research could be paired with enrollment trends to understand how the policy changes continue to shape college access opportunities for college-bound Texas students.

Exhibit 6: Enrollment Trend in Texas Four-Year Public Colleges

Fall Term	Black Students		Latino Students		White Students		Asian American Students	
	Number	Proportion	Number	Proportion	Number	Proportion	Number	Proportion
2019	77,949	12%	230,655	35%	236,818	36%	53,805	8%
2020	79,193	12%	241,507	36%	236,451	35%	56,609	8%
2021	78,518	12%	241,762	36%	228,066	36%	58,528	9%
2022	77,687	12%	243,039	36%	216,968	33%	59,515	9%
2023	79,403	12%	249,603	37%	212,042	31%	61,492	9%
2024	83,312	12%	258,680	38%	210,004	30%	63,867	9%
6 year difference	+5,363	0%	+28,025	+3%	-26,814	-6%	+10,062	+1%

Data source: THECB, 2026a.

Exhibit 7: Change in Enrollment Since COVID-19 (2021-2024)

Fall Term	Black Students		Latino Students		White Students		Asian American Students	
	Number	Proportion	Number	Proportion	Number	Proportion	Number	Proportion
Two-Year Public Colleges	+8,253	+1%	+33,836	+1%	-17,100	-5%	+4,195	0%
Four-Year Public Colleges	+4,794	0%	+16,918	+2%	-18,062	-6%	+5,339	0%

Data source: THECB, 2026a.

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