

WHAT WORKS FOR TODAY'S STUDENTS: INCREASING DIVERSITY AT SELECTIVE INSTITUTIONS



Policy interventions at the state and institutional level can help high-achieving Black, Latinx, and low-income students overcome barriers to enrolling at selective institutions.

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Only 34 percent of low-income students who score in the top 10 percent of SAT/ACT scores will enroll in the nation's most selective colleges, compared to 78 percent of students in the highest economic quartile.¹ And only 19 percent of Black and Latinx students with high SAT/ACT scores go to selective public colleges, compared to 31 percent of white students with similar scores.² Barriers—including a lack of access to college counseling resources and college admissions policies—contribute to preventing high-achieving low-income, Black, and Latinx students from applying to, enrolling in, and succeeding at selective institutions.³ But several policy interventions at the state and institutional level have shown some progress towards improving diversity at selective institutions.

▶ DIRECT OUTREACH & TARGETED AID

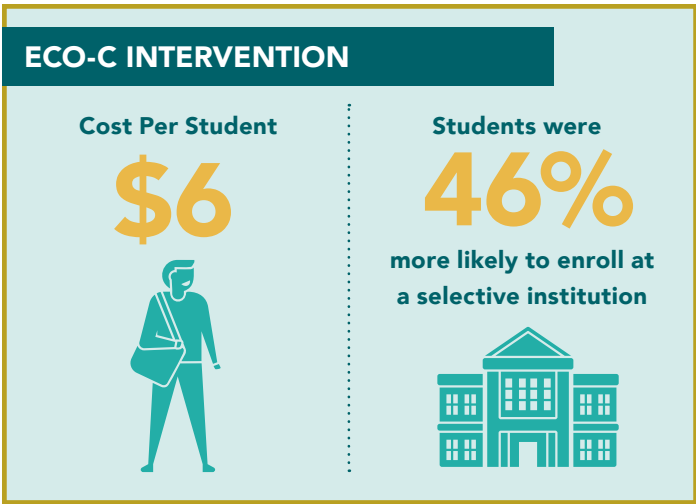
There are barriers that prevent high-achieving, low-income students and students of color from applying to selective institutions at which their academic experiences show they could succeed.⁴ These barriers include a lack of resources, counseling, or information. Interventions that directly target high-achieving high school students who are low-income or students of color with information on applications, assistance in applying, and targeted aid to pay for their education have been shown to increase the enrollment of these students in schools with admissions requirements that more closely match their academic achievements.

EXPANDING COLLEGE OPPORTUNITIES PROJECT RESEARCH INTERVENTION⁵

The Expanding College Opportunities Project (ECO-C), a research project undertaken by professors at Stanford University and University of Virginia in 2012, illustrated the power of targeted

outreach to low-income students. The experiment identified 3,000 high-achieving, low-income students and provided these students with a packet of information, including a list of selective public institutions the students were qualified to attend, as well as information on what the cost of attendance would be with financial aid. Students were also provided with application fee waivers to apply to the schools that they were identified as being qualified to attend. Many of these students would already have been eligible for fee waivers, but the ECO-C package granted fee waivers without any additional paperwork, as these students had already been identified as low-income.

The ECO-C intervention cost only \$6 per student, but had a significant effect on low-income student enrollment at selective schools. Students who received the ECO-C materials were 46 percent more likely to enroll at a selective institution that matched their academic achievement.



UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN HIGH ACHIEVING INVOLVED LEADER (HAIL) SCHOLARSHIP

A pilot study from the University of Michigan used targeted outreach to increase applications and enrollment from low-income students. The campaign, called the High Achieving Involved Leader (HAIL) Scholarship, involved sending personalized mailers to high achieving, low-income students at Michigan high schools. These students were offered an unconditional full tuition scholarship to attend University of Michigan.⁶ This was not new aid—the mailers just guaranteed students in advance a scholarship they would have received anyway after admission. As a result, the intervention only cost the institution \$10 per mailer.⁷

Two-thirds of the low-income students in the pilot program applied to the University of

▶ GUARANTEED ADMISSIONS

States such as California, Texas, and Florida have instituted “guaranteed admissions” programs—programs in which high school students who are at the top of their class are guaranteed admission to a public state university. A key component of these programs is outreach—when students are guaranteed admission, they receive that information from the state. By eliminating the uncertainty for minority and low-income students who are

Michigan, as opposed to just a quarter of similar students in a control group who did not receive the mailer. Enrollment at the university was 27 percent for students in the program, compared with 12 percent from the control group.⁸ By simply informing students directly that they were qualified to attend the university and that they were eligible for financial aid, the University of Michigan made it easier for low-income students to enroll in their program.

▲ CHALLENGES

Targeted outreach programs do not always increase applications and enrollment of every student subgroup, depending on how students are targeted. While the HAIL program increased enrollment of low-income students, it did not have a substantial impact on the race of applicants and enrollees, and the University of Michigan continues to have a Black student population that is well below the national average.⁹ While the ECO-C study was effective at increasing enrollment of the highest performers, those in the 90th percentile, earlier interventions may be able to help lower-performing students improve before the time for college applications even begins.¹⁰ Targeted outreach programs may need to adopt such multi-pronged approaches in order to ensure they are increasing accessibility for all underrepresented students.

undecided on whether or not to submit a costly application to a selective state school, guaranteed admissions programs reduce undermatching in their respective states.

TEXAS TEN PERCENT PLAN

Texas adopted the Texas Ten Percent Plan (TTP) in 1996 in response to court decisions that limited the

 **CHALLENGES**

ability of higher education institutions to use race as a factor in admissions.¹¹ The plan guarantees the top ten percent of state high school graduates admission to a University of Texas (UT) campus of their choice. To qualify, students must provide a transcript that verifies that their class rank falls within the top 10 percent. The TTP also includes outreach efforts to students in the top ten percent, with eligible students receiving a notification of their guaranteed admissions status in the spring of their junior year.¹²

Researchers found that low-income students faced a lack of information about their college options, but that guaranteed admissions certainty influenced lower-income students to apply to selective public institutions that they were qualified to attend.¹³ A study conducted in 2018 found that the program increased the likelihood of low-income students enrolling in closely matched selective universities by 23 percent.¹⁴

The TTP in Texas allows a student to enroll in the UT campus of their choice, and without that component, guaranteed admissions can lead to gains being concentrated in less selective public universities. For example, the University of California (UC) public college system guarantees admission to students in the top 9 percent of the high school graduating class in California through a program called Eligibility in the Local Context (ELC).¹⁵ While the ELC has increased minority enrollment in the UC system, particularly for Latinx students, these gains are concentrated in a small number of schools that do not include the system's most selective institutions (UC Los Angeles and UC Berkeley).¹⁶ Because the California ELC program applies to the system as a whole and not to specific institutions, the program does not effectively increase selectivity at the state's most selective public institutions, as the TTP in Texas does.

TEXAS TEN PERCENT PLAN **23%**
INCREASE

of low-income
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 **TRANSPARENCY & ACCOUNTABILITY**

A transparent accountability system based on student outcomes, when utilized, contributes to greater equity in public postsecondary institutions. At a minimum, when states display the data for college admissions and degree attainment, they ensure that equity gaps at public institutions are seen by those who fund such institutions—taxpayers. Stronger accountability systems in states are characterized by ambitious goal setting to reduce or eliminate equity gaps and regulatory measures tied to institutional funding. Both of these approaches can incentivize institutions to address their lack of diversity.

INDIANA COMMISSION ON HIGHER EDUCATION EQUITY REPORT

In 2013, the Indiana Commission on Higher Education (CHE) passed a resolution to cut the achievement gap between low-income and higher-income students, as well as students of color and white students, in half by 2018 and entirely by 2025. The Indiana CHE measured the achievement gap by college-going rates, early success in college, and college completion (including four-year bachelor's degrees or two-year associate degrees/certificates) at public institutions.¹⁷ The Indiana CHE annually

publishes disaggregated data showing progress towards this goal at each public institution through their Equity Report.

Furthermore, the state of Indiana holds public institutions accountable through its funding formula, allocating dollars for increased degree attainment and on-time degree completion for Indiana students. Through this performance based allocation, the formula directly rewards schools for increasing degree attainment and completion for low-income students.¹⁸ This accounts for about 15 percent of the performance funding formula.

Other Indiana CHE efforts have helped broaden the pool of students who are seeking and prepared for a full range of postsecondary options. Indiana CHE's Padres Estrellas program empowers "star parents" to connect with schools, neighborhoods, and community partners and focus on helping Hispanic and Latinx students and families enroll in financial aid programs. Prompted by early success with the Padres Estrellas model as well as COVID-19 recovery efforts, similar programs are being developed now focused on reaching Black students.

Since setting these ambitious goals and establishing an accountability system around them, Indiana has shown progress in closing its achievement gap. Between 2013 and 2018, Indiana closed the college achievement gap by half for students of color and low-income students, both in enrollment and completion rates, and the state remains committed to meeting its 2025 goal.¹⁹

KENTUCKY PUBLIC POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION POLICY FOR DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

The Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE) created the Kentucky Public Postsecondary Education Policy for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in 2016. The policy calls on all public postsecondary institutions to "develop a plan to embrace diversity and equity..., commit to improving academic achievement for all students, create an inclusive

campus environment, and produce culturally competent graduates for the workforce."²⁰ Institutions' plans are submitted to Kentucky CPE for review and approval to ensure that the institution is setting appropriate equity and diversity goals. Moreover, institutions must report annually on their progress toward meeting the goals described in their plans. Kentucky CPE evaluates these reports based on both quantitative and qualitative measures, and institutions that have not made sufficient progress toward meeting their diversity goals are ineligible to offer new academic programs unless they submit a performance improvement plan which includes specific strategies to meet such goals.

Shortly after implementing this policy, Kentucky CPE's 2019 progress report showed that bachelor's degrees conferred to students of color increased 5.3 percent over the previous year. In addition, credentials awarded to students of color at the Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS) increased 7.4 percent.²¹

CHALLENGES

As with all accountability systems, policymakers must ensure that the incentives created by the system do not have unintended consequences that detract from the goal of improving access and quality. A recent study examined the potential unintended side effect of performance based funding models and found that when performance based funding is allocated for student success without specific equity measures, institutions are incentivized to shift away from accessibility in favor of serving students who are more likely to succeed without additional support.²² This can exacerbate inequities for already underserved students. However, when policymakers design accountability systems with these pitfalls in mind *and* include specific equity premiums within the system, the results are more likely to increase Black, Latinx, and low-income student enrollment.²³

Significant barriers exist in access to and success at selective institutions for low-income students and students of color. Research and pilot programs at institutions and in certain states have shown us that policymakers have multiple avenues to eliminate this problem. When high-achieving students are provided the necessary resources—including simple guidance on how to apply to and pay for selective institutions—they attend and succeed. Policy interventions such as guaranteed admissions and targeted outreach to low-income students and students of color also have been shown to boost enrollment of such students at selective institutions by eliminating informational and cost barriers that these students face when applying to college. These programs, however, can have mixed success depending on how broadly the interventions target all student subgroups. Outcomes-based accountability can further drive success by holding institutions to high standards, particularly in systems that leverage accountability funding or performance plans to directly influence institutional behavior.

ENDNOTES

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