



## Dismantling Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Programs Undermines Higher Education Opportunities and Work Force Growth

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Students of color are the majority enrolled in public schools and higher education institutions. Yet, diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in higher education are under assault through racial and ethnic distortions and harmful legislation catalyzed by **Senate Bill 17**.

Under the guise of promoting meritocracy and colorblindness, SB17 has enabled universities across the state to dismantle DEI programs and curriculum revamping that threatens an ever-widening campaign of racial/ethnic, cultural, and linguistic suppression. It will lessen Latino faculty representation and leadership, as well as enrollment and graduation of the majority workforce for a future Texas.

In the 2021-22 school year, 5.4 million children were enrolled in Texas public schools. The Fall 2021 enrollment headcount in higher education was 1,551,000. Students of color comprised 72.2% and 59.9% of public school and higher education enrollment, respectively. Latino enrollment was 52.7% and 40%, respectively.

As the new majority (40.21%) of the state population, Latinos drive labor growth with increased economic effects. Indeed, the state's gross domestic product (GDP) in 2017 would have increased from \$1.84 to \$2.4 trillion if Texas had eliminated racial gaps in income – educational equity and achievement are central to addressing the gap. Instead, the Texas legislative leadership responded with SB17 and promised to do even more to ensure DEI dismantling and monitoring in the upcoming 89<sup>th</sup> legislative session.

The dismantling of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs will significantly impact Mexican-American students in higher education. At the University of Texas, the termination of DEI initiatives has caused ripple effects on students' well-being and sense of belonging on campus. The closure of the multicultural engagement center and the funding of the Latino community affairs organization at UT Austin have particularly affected support systems for Mexican-American students.

Eliminating DEI programs will worsen structural barriers to higher education and economic mobility. While Latina enrollment has steadily risen, anti-DEI policies are stalling progress. In 2022, the share of Latinos aged twenty-five and older with a bachelor's degree or more was half that of white Americans.

Anti-DEI efforts come at a time when Latino degree earning numbers are falling to keep pace with those of white students. The closure of multicultural centers and the elimination of programs and events supporting Mexican-American students (86% of Texas Latinos) are politically motivated and ideologically driven. These actions may result in decreased enrollment of students of color at state higher

education institutions, potentially forcing them to choose more expensive private or out-of-state universities that offer DEI support.

The dismantling of DEI programs has created significant challenges for Mexican-American students, affecting their sense of belonging, access to support systems, academic and career outcomes, and future economic opportunities.

In summary, the following are the key benefit outcomes of DEI programs that advance Latino student and faculty representation, careers, and incomes and strengthen Texas' economic future.

### **Representation and Opportunity**

Increase Latino representation in higher education faculty, leadership positions, and other areas where they continue to be underrepresented - opportunities for career advancement, decision-making roles, and a voice in shaping organizational culture and policies.

### **Addressing Systemic Inequities**

Assist in identifying and dismantling systemic barriers and biases that have disadvantaged advancement - pay inequity, lack of access to resources and opportunities, and discriminatory practices that have perpetuated racial disparities.

### **Creating Inclusive Environments**

Fosters institutional cultures in which the work and learning environment values and respects differences and where Latinos are comfortable in bringing their authentic selves.

### **Driving Innovation and Performance**

Sharing varied perspectives, experiences, and expert approaches boosts creativity, innovation, and overall organizational performance, demonstrating the value of racial and ethnic diversity in learning institutions.

### **Role Models and Mentorship**

Increase the number of faculty and administration role models and mentors for students and younger upcoming academic professionals, which is instrumental in career development and advancement.

### **Increase Enrollment and Graduate Rate**

Creates support (e.g., cultural and academic programs, mentorships, financial aid) environments where Latinos experience acceptance and equal opportunities to thrive and succeed educationally and professionally.

## **SOURCE MATERIAL**

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