



Equity Should Be Upheld in Top Ten Percent Plan

IDRA Testimony again SB 1091, Presented by Dr. Altheria Caldera to the Senate Higher Education Committee, April 28, 2021

Dear Chairman Creighton and the Senate Higher Education Committee:

My name is Dr. Altheria Caldera, and I am an Education Policy Fellow at IDRA, an independent, non-partisan, education non-profit committed to achieving equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college. I am testifying against SB 1091.

The Texas Top Ten Percent Plan (TTPP) provides students in the top 10% of their high-school class with automatic admission to any public university in the state. Since its inception almost 25 years ago, the Top Ten Percent Plan has opened doors to high-achieving students from families with limited incomes, rural communities, and communities of color – all groups typically denied access to the flagships.

SB 1091 would cap the percentage of students who are admitted through the Top Ten Percent Plan at 30%, meaning only 30% of a freshman class at any public university could be made up of Top Ten Percent Plan students. This would practically eliminate the benefits of the Top Ten Percent Plan for marginalized students. A 2020 study by the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER), a private, non-profit, non-partisan organization, revealed that historically underserved “students gained access to more selective institutions, with increased enrollment at the flagship campus” through the Top Ten Percent Plan.

IDRA’s research and data analyses have shown that 43% of students who were admitted to the University of Texas at Austin under the Top Ten Percent Plan in 2020 were Latino students and Black students. They represent more than 2,000 students of color who worked hard in high school, met the very rigorous academic criteria of the Top Ten Percent Plan, but may not have been able to access UT-Austin were it not for the Top Ten Percent Plan.

The Top Ten Percent Plan also opens the door for students from families with limited means: Their UT-Austin admittance rate through the Plan is more than twice the rate for non-Ten Percenters. And the Top Ten Percent Plan accounts for 85% of admitted rural students at UT-Austin.

I have included with my testimony a chart showing the impact of the Top Ten Percent Plan in each of your senate districts (IDRA 2021). You will see that thousands of hard-working students in your own communities have benefited from the Top Ten Percent Plan. This bill could take away college opportunities for many more students in your districts.

Rather than further scaling back on the Top Ten Percent Plan, we urge you to explore other equitable policies to complement the Top Ten Percent Plan and support increased college

enrollment and completion. For example, we urge you to fully fund state financial aid programs for students from families with limited incomes like the TEXAS Grant program, and support SB 1709, a current bill designed to enhance student success through recruiting and retaining a diverse faculty.

The students who benefit most from the Top Ten Percent Plan come backgrounds like my own. They are students of color from homes that are economically disadvantaged, and they are likely to be first-generation college students. They cannot draw upon money or legacy for admission to Texas' top institutions. They do not have fraternal connections or hidden knowledge to grant them access. The combination of hard work, academic achievement, ambition, and the Top Ten Percent Plan is their path to college acceptance. It is crucial that Texas continues to provide them this avenue to higher education.

Recommendations

IDRA encourages you to:

1. Maintain Texas' Top Ten Percent Plan in its current state;
2. Incentivize institutions of higher education to increase recruitment efforts at high schools that do not have a history of sending students to these universities and adopt programs to support diverse students and faculty at their institutions;
3. Provide equitable funding to strengthen achievement at Texas' underperforming high schools to ensure that all high school students are prepared for rigorous post-secondary education; and
4. Expand access to higher education opportunities by fulling funding financial aid programs for students from families with limited incomes.

IDRA is available for any questions or further resources that we can provide. Thank you for your consideration. For more information, please contact Ana Ramón, IDRA Deputy Director of Advocacy, at ana.ramon@idra.org.

Resources

Black, S.E., Denning, J.T. & Rothstein, J. March (2020). Winners and losers? The effect of gaining and losing access to selective colleges on education and labor market outcomes. NBER Working Paper Series.

IDRA. (2021). Policy Brief: The Texas Top Ten Percent Plan's Legacy in Supporting Equal Access to College (2021 Update). San Antonio: Intercultural Development Research Association.

<https://idra.news/TTP21>

IDRA. (2021). Top Ten Percent Plan in Texas, webpage. https://www.idra.org/education_policy/top-ten-percent-plan-texas

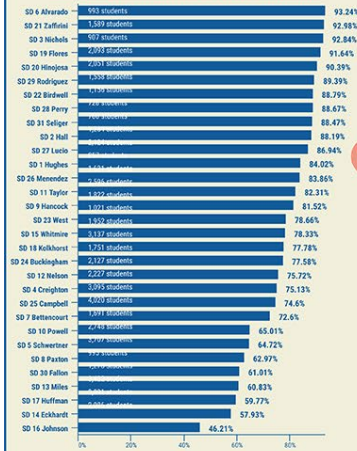
IDRA is an independent, non-profit organization led by Celina Moreno, J.D. Our mission is to achieve equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college. IDRA strengthens and transforms public education by providing dynamic training; useful research, evaluation, and frameworks for action; timely policy analyses; and innovative materials and programs.

Top Ten Percent Plan Expands College Access Across Texas

The Texas Top Ten Percent Plan has opened the doors of Texas' public universities to low-income students, rural communities and communities of color – all groups who were typically denied access to many public universities, particularly the University of Texas at Austin. IDRA conducted an analysis of the entering freshman class who received automatic admission at UT-Austin during the years 2009 through 2020.

Expansive Access

Percent of the Entering Freshman Class who Received Automatic Admission at UT-Austin, 2009-2020 by Texas Senate District



Over time, UT-Austin alone has been allowed to adopt a lower threshold for automatic admissions. The graph above reflects the following enrollment: 2009: 100%; 2010: 100%; 2011: 80%; 2012: 70%; 2013: 70%; 2014: 60%; 2015: 70%; 2016: 60%; 2017: 60%; 2018: 60%; 2019: 60%; 2020: 60%.

* Traditional public schools only

Background

The Texas Legislature adopted the Top Ten Percent Plan in 1997 in response to declining enrollment of students of color at UT-Austin and Texas A&M University. With bipartisan support from policymakers from both rural and urban districts, the plan required Texas' four-year public universities to admit high school students graduating in the top 10% of their class. Starting with its 2011 class, UT-Austin alone was allowed to limit those students to 75% of the freshmen class. In 2016, the top 7% of students in each high school graduating class were automatically admitted to UT-Austin. Since then, the percentage has been the top 6%.

Impact

The Top Ten Percent Plan has expanded higher education opportunities for students of color, students from rural communities, students from low-income families, and students whose parents did not attend college.

The plan has helped increase the number of feeder high schools into UT-Austin, from 622 in 1996, to 792 in 2000, to 992 in 2016, to 833 in 2018.*

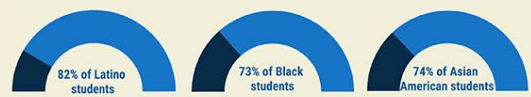
Rural schools continue to benefit from the Top Ten Percent Plan, accounting for 85% of admitted rural students in 2020.

The plan is the principal admissions driver for Latino, Black and Asian American students into UT-Austin, with 82% of admitted Latino students coming from the Top Ten Percent Plan along with 73% of Black students and 74% of Asian American students in 2020.



Students Admitted to UT-Austin through the Top Ten Percent Plan are More Diverse

Most students of color at UT-Austin are admitted through the Top Ten Percent Plan



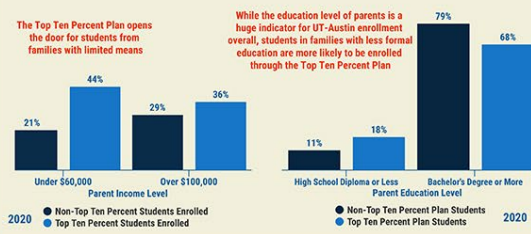
Latino students are about twice as likely to be admitted through the Top Ten Percent Plan than by outside the plan

● Non-Top Ten Percent Plan Students
● Top Ten Percent Plan Students

Total number of students admitted in 2020: 14,962

The Top Ten Percent Plan has opened the doors of Texas' flagship universities to students of color, students from rural communities, and students from families with limited means – all groups that have historically been denied access.

The Top Ten Percent Plan is the Best Chance for Students in Families with Limited Means and with Less Formal Education to Get into UT-Austin



For more information see <https://idra.news/TTP21>