



Prohibiting Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Offices on College Campuses in Texas Hurts Students' Academic and Enrichment Opportunities

TLEEC Testimony against SB 17, Submitted to the Texas House Committee on Higher Education, May 8, 2023

Dear Chair Kuempel and Members of the Committee:

The Texas Legislative Education Equity Coalition (TLEEC) is a collaborative of over 30 organizations and individuals with the mission to improve the quality of public education for all children, with a focus on racial equity. We advocate at the local, state and national levels for high-quality teaching, curriculum and instructional practices and bilingual education for emergent bilingual students, as well as fair funding and enhanced college access and success.

The 39 undersigned organizations oppose SB 17 because it prohibits public colleges and universities in Texas from performing any duties aligned with diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) policies and initiatives. Diversity in the higher education landscape enriches the student educational experience by fostering learning environments where students interact and engage with people with different backgrounds and life experiences, which is reflective of the workforce and society they will transition into after graduating.

DEI policies and initiatives in state supported campuses include efforts to intentionally create diverse and inclusive learning environments where students – particularly those who come from first-generation, underserved and marginalized backgrounds – feel respected, valued and supported as they navigate their higher education journeys. They are an embedded set of practices and policies that are widely recognized as industry-standard for academic accreditation, targeted student success programs and NCAA Division I participation and to ensure students' federal protections against discrimination, including through programs for Title VI and Title IX protections and that provide accommodations for students with disabilities (Bohannon, 2022).

Additionally, these efforts have been put in place to guard against decades of racial and gender discrimination. DEI initiatives address the systemic failures in recruiting and hiring racially diverse faculty, improve academic and graduation outcomes for students who are Black, Latino, and first-generation college-goers, and extend across departments to ensure that all students feel like a part of the community. For instance, programs tailored to students' first-year experience with academic and mentorship support often are part of DEI initiatives.

While targeted toward specific student groups, DEI initiatives create opportunities for all students to improve their critical thinking and cognitive skills (AERA, 2010) and positively affect their attitudes toward others (TCF, 2015). Research also shows that these initiatives positively affect and inform students' morals

and value systems (Enberg, 2007). This is in part because they foster inclusive spaces where students, especially from underrepresented communities, can flourish in their academics given the support systems that they critically need. Students are better equipped to work with others from different communities than theirs and are more inclined to learn from others through DEI programs. This is especially important in dismantling the dangers of stereotyping, which often lead to incidents such as bullying and harassment.

Banning state funds for DEI programs in higher education would negatively impact our students of color, students from families with low incomes, and first-generation students in higher education and would greatly compromise their learning experiences. It would also lead to a lack of support systems (which are often led by diverse staff), greater feelings of racial isolation, continued declines in enrollment and participation from underrepresented students, and poorer college outcomes among economically and educationally disadvantaged students. TLEEC strongly urges the committee to oppose this legislation.

For questions, please contact TLEEC either through Dr. Chloe Latham Sikes at IDRA (chloe.sikes@idra.org) or Jaime Puente at Every Texan (puente@everytexan.org).

Resources

- Bohanon, M. (2022). DEI in Accreditation. Insights into Diversity. <https://www.insightintodiversity.com/dei-in-accreditation/>
- Plessy v. Ferguson. (1992). Legal Information Institute. Cornell Law School. <https://www.law.cornell.edu/supremecourt/text/163/537>
- Tsuo, K. (2015). Diversity for All: The Importance of Racial and Socioeconomic Diversity in Higher Education. The Century Foundation. <https://tcf.org/content/commentary/diversity-for-all-the-importance-of-racial-and-socioeconomic-diversity-in-higher-education/>
- Engberg, M. (2006). Educating the Workforce for the 21st Century: A Cross-Disciplinary Analysis of the Impact of the Undergraduate Experience on Students' Development of a Pluralistic Orientation. Research in Higher Education. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11162-006-9027-2>
- Bowman, N. (2010). College Diversity Experiences and Cognitive Development: A Meta-Analysis. American Educational Research Association. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40658444>

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TLEEC Member Organizations

ARISE Adelante	National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies (NACCS)
Austin Justice Coalition	– Tejas Foco
Breakthrough Central Texas	San Antonio Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
Coalition of Texans with Disabilities (CTD)	Texas American Federation of Teachers
Children at Risk	Texas Association for Bilingual Education (TABE)
Dr. Hector P. García G.I. Forum	Texas Association for Chicanos in Higher Education (TACHE)
Easterseals Central Texas	Texas Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education (TADOHE)
Educators in Solidarity	Texas Association of Mexican American Chambers of Commerce (TAMACC)
Ethnic Studies Network of Texas (ESNTX)	Texas Center for Education Policy, University of Texas – Austin
Every Texan	Texas Hispanics Organized for Political Education (HOPE)
Houston Community Voices for Public Education	Texas League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)
IDRA (Intercultural Development Research Association) Measure	Texas NAACP
McNeil Educational Foundation for Ecumenical Leadership	Texas State Teacher Association
Mexican American Civil Rights Institute (MACRI)	The Arc of Texas
Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF)	UnidosUS (formerly known as NCLR)
Mexican American School Boards Association (MASBA)	

Other Signatory Organizations

Black Brown Policy Dialogues	PLATICAS dba USA PLATICAS (Brownsville, Texas)
La Fe Policy Research and Education Center	Texas Association of College Teachers (TACT)
Latino Texas Policy Center	Texas Faculty Association
NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF)	Texas Freedom Network