



Prohibiting College DEI Programs Would Particularly Impact Marginalized K-12 Students

IDRA Testimony Against SB 17, submitted by Steve Kemgang to the Texas House Higher Education Committee, May 8, 2023

Dear Chair Kuempel and Honorable Members of the Committee:

My name is Steve Kemgang, and I have the honor of serving as an education policy fellow at IDRA, an independent, non-partisan 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.

IDRA opposes SB 17 due to the harmful ramifications prospective students will have to inevitably face. DEI programs and initiatives on college campuses are part of a set of legislative efforts to create more equitable college learning environments for historically-marginalized and underrepresented students.

Furthermore, outside of the higher education purview, DEI programs play crucial roles in developing pipelines for public school students to promote awareness of career opportunities and the value of pursuing higher education as a means to get there (Arsenis, et al., 2021).

For example, UT Austin's Neighborhood Longhorns Program was established to "encourage self-discipline, promote enthusiasm for learning and increase student success" among educationally disadvantaged youth (UT Austin, 2023). Other programs, such as YOUatUT, My Introduction to Engineering, and UT Girl Day with WiSTEM, are housed under existing DEI offices. They play huge roles in exposing students to STEM possibilities among students who otherwise may not have pursued these pathways. They also help address future workforce shortages, such as Texas' need for more engineers (Wallace, 2023).

At Prairie View A&M University, an HBCU, the Office of Multicultural Affairs hosts a number of K-12 student programs, such as Latino elementary and high school days, whereby hundreds of students are exposed to hands-on learning experiences with faculty and students. Studies show that early exposure to college culture and material, particularly among first-generation and low-income students, has a strong correlation with those students furthering their education journeys (Leflore, 2019).

Stephen F. Austin University's Office of Multicultural Affairs hosts both men's and women's empowerment summits to expose prospective students and community members to opportunities in leadership, mentorship, and health and wellness.

Although the list goes on and on with various K-12 impact programs housed under DEI offices, what is overwhelmingly apparent is that prohibiting the offices that support these initiatives would disproportionately affect Black, Latino, and other marginalized and underrepresented students the most.

SB 17 is a step backwards from the state's progress toward advancing college and career readiness. Other legislation this session has successfully emphasized expanding dual credit opportunities among underrepresented and economically disadvantaged students, who make up 60% of our total student population (TEA, 2022). Let's move forward to advance college opportunities, not backward with SB 17.

IDRA is available for any questions or further resources that we can provide. Thank you for your consideration. For more information, contact steve.kemgang@idra.org.

Resources

- Arsenis, P. Haskett, D. Lehman, M. Lopez, V. (2021). Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: Building the Pipeline of the Future. LEAD-YP. <https://www.dallaschamber.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/LEAD-YP-DEI-Building-the-Pipeline-of-the-Future-FINAL.pdf>
- Leflore, V. (2019). The Importance of Early Exposure to College for First-generation and Low-income Students. https://kenoshanews.com/news/education/uwex-the-importance-of-early-exposure-to-college-for-first/article_66d69556-a4aa-58ad-984b-30cec5eef74b.html
- TEA. (2022). PEIMS 2021-2022 Student Program and Special Populations Reports. Texas Education Agency. <https://rptsvr1.tea.texas.gov/cgi/sas/broker>
- UT Austin. (2023). Neighborhood Longhorns Program, Longhorn Centers for School Partnerships, webpage. University of Texas at Austin. <https://diversity.utexas.edu/schoolpartnerships/neighborhood-longhorns-program/>
- UT Austin. (2020). Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Plan. UT Austin Cockrell School of Engineering, webpage. University of Texas at Austin. <https://cockrell.utexas.edu/about/diversity-and-inclusion/plan>
- Wallace, J. (April 13, 2023). Killing diversity hiring programs in Texas colleges could hurt push for more engineers. Houston Chronicle. <https://www.houstonchronicle.com/politics/article/killing-diversity-programs-texas-hurt-push-17895370.php>

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 leading policy analyses and advocacy; dynamic teacher training and principal coaching; useful research, evaluation and frameworks for action; and innovative student, family and community engagement.