



**April 28th, 2021**

Dear Chairman Creighton and Members of the Committee,

Texas PACE consists of organizations from across Texas committed to equity in college affordability, access, completion, and student supports. We are writing to express our concerns with and position **against Senate Bill 1091**, which would drastically limit the critical automatic admission program, frequently referred to as “Top Ten Percent,” at higher education institutions across Texas.

The Top Ten Percent Program has benefited thousands of students and families, increasing access to Texas’ public universities for students of color, students from rural communities, students from low-income families, and first-generation college students. **Rolling back the program would limit educational and economic opportunities for many Texas students.**

Currently, at least 75 percent of enrollment capacity at most public higher education institutions in Texas is designated for first time Texas undergraduates who qualify through the Top Ten Percent Program, meaning most public institutions in Texas automatically admit a student who earned a GPA in the top 10 percent of their high school graduating class.

As the program is currently designed, Texans from all backgrounds, whether from rural or urban communities, from the Rio Grande Valley or the state’s Panhandle region, can access public academic institutions across the state if they qualify for automatic admission based on high school class rank. The Top Ten Percent program as we know it is a major driver of equity in college access for Texas students because it balances the field of competition for students who have no control over the varied quality of their public K-12 education opportunities.

**SB 1091 would reduce the designated enrollment for students who qualify for the Top Ten Percent Program to a mere 30 percent of institutional enrollment capacity, thus drastically limiting its impact.**

This type of change would reduce access for low-income students and students of color at state public four-year institutions. Black and Latino students are already significantly underrepresented at the state’s most selective four-year institutions. Black 18-24 year-olds in Texas make up nearly 14 percent of the population but less than 6 percent of students enrolled at these institutions, and Latinos make up over 45

percent of 18-24 year-olds in the state but less than 25 percent of enrolled students at these institutions.<sup>1</sup> Texas colleges should better represent the diversity of the taxpaying residents in our state. **Significantly reducing the Top Ten Percent Program would further exacerbate the issues with college access in Texas and close the doors of opportunity for many Texas students.**

**Texas higher education loses out when racial and ethnic diversity declines.** Research shows that a lack of diversity can negatively affect campus climate, which can in turn have a negative influence on engagement, sense of belonging, and degree completion.<sup>2</sup> Increased diversity and inclusion on Texas campuses helps to dismantle stereotypes, reduce prejudice, build cross-racial understanding, encourage relationships across racial lines, and makes the social fabric of our colleges healthier and more inclusive.<sup>3</sup>

Additionally, according to a recent Trellis report, 41 percent of White Texans have a bachelor's degree or higher but the rate for Black Texans is only 30 percent and for Latino Texans is only 16 percent. **This change will grow those disparities by closing off access to selective public institutions in Texas and could pose a threat to the attainment of the Texas 60x30TX plan.**

Before the Top Ten Percent Program, half of UT Austin's entering class came from just 64 schools from predominantly wealthy suburban districts. The entering freshman class in 2007 represented 865 Texas high schools. The Top Ten Percent Program has increased diversity in institutions of higher education, ensuring that the students who are graduating from Texas high schools are able to access education opportunities and go on to contribute to their communities.

**As students face increasing barriers to accessing higher education in Texas following the pandemic and economic shifts, now is the time to protect, not diminish, this critical access program.**

Sincerely,

The following members of Texas PACE (Postsecondary Advocates Coalition for Equity):

Breakthrough Central Texas

Every Texan

Feeding Texas

IDRA (Intercultural Development Research Association)

Jolt Action

The Education Trust in Texas

Young Invincibles

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<sup>1</sup> Nichols, A.H. (2020). 'Segregation Forever?': The continued underrepresentation of Black and Latino undergraduates at the nation's 101 most selective public colleges and universities.

<https://edtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Segregation-Forever-The-Continued-Underrepresentation-of-Black-and-Latino-Undergraduates-at-the-Nations-101-Most-Selective-Public-Colleges-and-Universities-July-21-2020.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Museus, S.D. (2014). The culturally engaging campus environments (CECE) model: A new theory of success among racially diverse college student populations. In *Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research* (pp. 189-227). Retrieved from <https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.860.3084&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Milem, J.F., Chang, M.J., & Losing Antonio, A. (2005). Making diversity work on campus: A research-based perspective. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities. Retrieved from <https://www.aacu.org/sites/default/files/files/mei/MakingDiversityWork.pdf>