

Threat 6: Attacks on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Initiatives

Since the beginning of President Trump's second administration, the president has aggressively targeted DEI efforts through executive orders, legal challenges, broadened enforcement and oversight, [grant award cancellations](#), and regulatory and sub-regulatory guidance. This anti-DEI push has created significant pressure and uncertainty across the higher education landscape. In its first 100 days, the Trump administration took executive action to dismantle DEI programs and tie federal funding to compliance, prompting many colleges and universities to eliminate or rebrand DEI offices, programs, and initiatives to avoid funding risks. Although some successful legal challenges have followed, including rulings striking down some anti-DEI guidance, the broader policy climate has already led numerous institutions to scale back DEI work, drop grants, reduce staff, and rethink partnerships and research tied to diversity efforts.

RISK: Deepen Racial and Economic Inequities and Widen Achievement Gaps for Black and Latino Students and Students From Low-Income Backgrounds

DEI initiatives in campus programming help close equity gaps by fostering a sense of belonging, which can lead to higher graduation rates. These initiatives create environments where all students, especially Black, Latino, Native, first-generation students, and students from low-income backgrounds, can succeed. Eliminating these programs risks weakening the support systems that help students persist, graduate, and thrive in educational settings. Without DEI support, underserved students may feel isolated, lose access to targeted information about available resources, and face barriers to completing their education and entering the workforce.

How State Advocates Can Drive Change

Advocates should urge state legislators to:

Increase investment in HBCUs and other minority-serving institutions (MSIs): Close any potential federal funding gaps by boosting state support for HBCUs and other MSIs that are under-resourced. Additionally, the [16 states](#) identified as having historically underfunded HBCUs must prioritize closing longstanding funding gaps to ensure equitable and sustained support.

Advance equity through data-driven access strategies: Leverage state longitudinal data systems and performance-based funding formulas, and pursue evidence-based strategies to meaningfully improve access and outcomes and address equity gaps for students of color and students from low-income backgrounds (e.g., implementing direct admissions programs; expanding access to dual enrollment and advanced coursework; investing in K-12 school counselors, career advisers, and college-access programs; and more).

Invest in evidence-based college completion programs: Prioritize investment in evidence-based college completion programs that combine financial support with structured academic and wraparound services shown to improve outcomes for underserved students.

Example: The City University of New York's [Accelerated Study in Associate Program \(ASAP\)](#) helps students earn an associate degree within three years by providing financial, academic, and personal support.

Strengthen support services for high-need students: Continue to invest in services for high-need students, such as advising, mentoring, basic needs support, and emergency aid, to ensure they have access to the necessary resources to succeed.

Build robust P-12 to workforce data systems: Invest in robust longitudinal data systems that connect P-12, postsecondary, and workforce data. These systems enable policymakers to make evidence-based policy decisions, strengthen workforce alignment, and improve accountability for student success and economic mobility.

How Advocates Can Engage Institutions to Drive Change

Advocates should engage institutions to:

Adopt a Student Bill of Rights: Establish and institutionalize a Student Bill of Rights that affirms every student's right to access, belonging, academic support, and fair treatment, regardless of background.

Examples: See the Student Bill of Rights adopted by the [University of Iowa](#); the protections outlined for K-12 students by [New York City Public Schools](#); and the guidance on student rights provided by the [ACLU](#) for college students.

Use data to identify students' needs and offer holistic support: Leverage institutional and state data to identify students' needs and provide comprehensive supports — academic, social, mental health, and financial — that are backed by evidence to improve student outcomes and success.

Build cross-sector partnerships to sustain services: Establish partnerships with cities, counties, higher education institutions, and community organizations to supplement and, if needed, backfill program funding and services.

Target resources to students with the greatest needs: Implement systems to ensure that students most in need receive the appropriate services and supports to succeed.

Ensure policies are legally sound and clearly communicated: Rely on legal experts, general counsel, and trusted [community resources](#) to review and update policies. This ensures that practices are legally sound, rights and obligations are clearly communicated to stakeholders, and confidence is built to sustain inclusive student support and success initiatives.