

# ‘SEGREGATION FOREVER?’:

## The Continued Underrepresentation of Black Undergraduates at the Nation’s 122 Most Selective Private Colleges and Universities

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In 2020, The Education Trust released a report titled, [“Segregation Forever?”](#), which explored the continued underrepresentation of Black and Latino first-time, full-time undergraduate enrollees at the nation’s 101 most selective four-year public colleges and universities in 2000 and 2017. This analysis provided evidence that Black and Latino students remained vastly underrepresented at these institutions, based on the population demographics of the states in which these public colleges and universities were located, with Black students having less access in 2017<sup>1</sup> than they did in 2000.

As a follow up to this critical work, authored by the late Dr. Andrew Nichols, we explored access for these same student groups at the nation’s 122 most selective four-year private colleges and universities by looking at the years 2000 and 2020, to see how well Black enrollment at these institutions matched the demographics of Black residents in the states from which first-time students came. While the share of Black student enrollment grew at nearly 3 in 4 of these institutions between 2000 and 2020, enrollment failed to represent the demographics of the states from which students came. While population parity is not the ultimate goal, it is the most reliable benchmark for comparison based on available data at the time of our analysis. This report specifically analyzes access for Black students, and a similar analysis for Latino students is forthcoming.

Access scores, ranging from 0-100, measure how well each institution’s Black enrollment reflects the racial and ethnic demographics of the states from which first-time undergraduate students migrated. (See “How Colleges and Universities Were Graded” on page 14 for more details.) Letter grades were then applied based on an institution’s access score. Scores of 90 or higher received A’s. Scores in the 80s, 70s, 60s, received B’s, C’s, and D’s, respectively. And scores below 60 received failing grades or F’s.

## UNPACKING ACCESS & ACCESSIBILITY

In this report, we analyze access through the lens of enrollment for Black residents who are between the ages of 18-24. At The Education Trust, we believe enrollment is just one component of higher education access, and that retention, completion, and student outcomes should be considered as well.

While nearly 74% of the institutions in our sample have increased their Black undergraduate student enrollment since 2000, our findings show that these increases were slight, and that overall, very little progress has been made. The overwhelming majority of the nation's most selective private colleges and universities remain inaccessible for Black first-time, full-time undergraduate students. From 2000 to 2020, the percentage of institutions receiving D's and F's for Black student access only fell by one percentage point, from 81% to 80%. See [Black Student Appendix](#) for a comprehensive list of the access grades, scores, and enrollment benchmark data for each institution.<sup>2</sup> The lingering underrepresentation of Black students is especially concerning, since the Supreme Court has banned the use of race as a factor in higher education admissions. Already, we have seen the detrimental impacts of banning affirmative action in states like California, where Black student enrollment plummeted following the 1996 adoption of [Proposition 209](#).<sup>3</sup>

Additionally, we know that boosting racial and ethnic diversity has a positive effect on campus racial climate and student success, so making these institutions more accessible for Black students would benefit [all students](#).<sup>4</sup>



## OUR FINDINGS

- Even though Black undergraduate student enrollment increased at 74% of the 122 most selective four-year private colleges and universities in the U.S. from 2000 to 2020, **a similar percentage of institutions (71%) received failing grades for Black student access in 2020.**
  - **The average increase** among the nearly three quarters of institutions that grew their Black undergraduate student enrollment from 2000 to 2020, 2.3 percentage points, **was lower than the average decrease** of 3.7 percentage points among the 26% of institutions where Black undergraduate student enrollment declined between the two years.
- In both 2000 and 2020, the average Black Student Access score **among all institutions in our sample** was a D grade, moving only from an average score of 62 to 68 in the 20-year span.
- **Kentucky, Michigan, Mississippi, Oklahoma, and Tennessee** had the highest statewide median Black student access scores in 2000 and 2020.
- **All eight Ivy League institutions earned D or F grades for Black student access in 2000 and 2020** — earning an average score of 45.1% in 2000, and 52% in 2020.
- Not surprisingly, in 2000 and 2020, most of the institutions with the highest Black student access scores were **predominantly Black institutions (PBIs) or Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)**, which were established specifically to serve Black students.<sup>5</sup>
  - In 2000, **6 of the top 10** Black student access scores were held by HBCUs or Predominantly Black Institutions (PBIs).
  - In 2020, **7 of the top 10** Black student access scores were held by HBCUs or PBIs.

The pattern of Black student underrepresentation highlighted in this report is not by chance, but by choice. Many of these institutions have some of [largest endowments](#) of all degree-granting postsecondary institutions in the U.S., which suggests that limited fiscal resources are not to blame for the continued underrepresentation of Black undergraduates among first-time, full-time enrollees.<sup>6</sup> That said, financial resources alone will not be enough to move the needle in a higher education system that was built on racism, oppression, and white supremacy. Higher education leaders and policymakers must intentionally work to expand access and be held more accountable.

## OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

Here are four actions education leaders and policymakers can take to ensure that more Black students have a chance to attend the nation's most selective private colleges and universities:

1. Develop recruitment strategies that increase access.
2. Assess and improve campus racial climates.
3. Leverage federal accountability.
4. Increase accountability from accreditors and accreditation organizations.

1. 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." The Education Trust. <https://edtrust.org/resource/segregation-forever/>.

2. The Education Trust. "Segregation Forever Privates Graphics & Appendices." (2023). <https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/the.education.trust/viz/SegregationForeverPrivatesGraphicsAppendices/FullDashboard>.

3. Legislative Analyst's Office. Proposition 209 - Prohibition Against Discrimination or Preferential Treatment by State and Other Public Entities. (Legislative Analyst's Office, November 1996). [https://lao.ca.gov/ballot/1996/prop209\\_11\\_1996.html](https://lao.ca.gov/ballot/1996/prop209_11_1996.html).

4. The Department of Education. Advancing Diversity and Inclusion in Higher Education. (U.S. Department of Education, November 2016). <https://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/research/pubs/advancing-diversity-inclusion.pdf>.

5. The Department of Education. United States Department of Education Lists of Postsecondary Institutions Enrolling Populations with Significant Percentages of Undergraduate Minority Students. (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/edlite-minorityinst.html>.

6. National Center for Education Statistics. (January 2022). Table 333.90. Endowment funds of the 120 degree-granting postsecondary institutions with the largest endowments, by rank order: Fiscal year 2020 [Data table]. In Digest of Education Statistics. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d21/tables/dt21\\_333.90.asp?current=yes](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d21/tables/dt21_333.90.asp?current=yes)