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EQUITABLE COLLEGE ADMISSIONS PRACTICES

Direct Admissions

Reimagining College Applications to Promote Equity

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Preface

Over 50% of American students in our public schools are Latinx, Black, Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (NHPI), or American Indian/Alaska Native (AIAN). Tapping into their talent and ensuring their access to a college education is essential to our future economic power and the success of our multi-racial democracy. Despite the historical exclusion and current underrepresentation of many Americans in our colleges and universities, in June 2023, the Supreme Court of the United States severely curtailed the use of race in higher education admissions, prohibiting the consideration of an applicant's racial status as part of that process.

Race-conscious admissions helped ensure America's colleges and universities were more diverse. Without it, there is a greater urgency for college leaders and policy makers to review current practices for equity, and to identify solutions that provide a fairer approach to preparing students for college, admitting them, and supporting their success. Towards that aim, the Campaign for College Opportunity is releasing a series of briefs, including this one, as part of our [Affirming Equity, Ensuring Inclusion and Empowering Action](#) initiative. The series will elevate practices that support the college preparation, admission, affordability, and success of Latinx, Black, Asian American, NHPI, and AIAN students, ensuring America does not return to an era of exclusion in higher education.

Overview

This brief describes the emerging practice of direct admissions, including how the practice has been designed, what outcomes it has produced, and considerations for policymakers debating the implementation of a direct admissions program in their state or system.

What Is Direct Admissions?

Direct admissions (sometimes also referred to as automatic, flipped, guaranteed, or proactive admissions) flips the script on the traditional application process by altogether eliminating the need for students to apply. Rather than asking students to collect and submit an immense amount of information that most colleges and universities do not need and will not use to make admissions decisions, direct admissions practices utilize information that is already available, such as students' high school GPA, course grades, and/or standardized test scores that are stored in state or district databases.

INSTEAD OF MAKING STUDENTS APPLY, SYSTEMS SHOULD DIRECTLY ADMIT ELIGIBLE HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS

Direct admissions programs proactively admit students to college, comparing students' performance against defined program rules to determine the set of colleges to which they can be admitted. Typically, all students are automatically admitted to open access institutions, and those who surpass a preidentified threshold for one or more performance measures are also automatically admitted to more selective institutions.

Without ever applying, students receive an official acceptance letter that guarantees their place in college, alongside personalized college-going information and a fee waiver to submit a simplified form, rather than a full application, to “claim their place” and enroll in college. Families, high school administrators, and other adults typically also receive information on their student(s) to establish a network of information and support for these students to complete subsequent steps on their college-going journey. In this way, direct admissions policies allow students to focus on deciding whether to go to college — and where to go — rather than on completing unnecessary administrative tasks.

Applying to college is anything but simple. The typical application process is a gauntlet that goes several steps beyond filling out an application form.¹ After an extensive process to search for and select institutions, students must then manage separate deadlines, various submission requirements, and multiple application portals; author and submit resumes and individual essays; request letters

of recommendation, test scores, and transcripts from many third parties; and complete individual application forms for each college, including navigating other requirements, like applying for an application fee waiver or filing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). The administrative burden, uncertainty, and complexity of this process keep many talented and eligible students from applying.²

Beyond the cumbersome nature of the admissions process is the fact that not all students face these obstacles on equal ground. Navigating this path requires substantial levels of financial, social, and cultural capital that are themselves inequitably distributed across racial and ethnic lines.³ Latinx, Black, underrepresented Asian American and NHPI, and AIAN students in the U.S. run this gauntlet without the same access to information, support, and financial assistance as their white and wealthier peers, and strategies to support students in this process tend to target students who are already advantaged.⁴ As discussed in other briefs in this series, college recruiters often engage in “recruitment redlining,” visiting predominantly Black and Latinx communities less frequently than communities with lower concentrations of minority students.”⁵

Too often, Latinx, Black, underrepresented Asian American and NHPI, and AIAN students navigate a grossly unfair and confusing pathway to college. The rising importance of educational attainment for social and economic mobility makes addressing these racial inequities in college admissions a social, moral, and economic imperative.⁶ [Rethinking recruitment practices like these, as well as practices like demonstrated interest, eliminating preferences for children of alumni, rethinking early-decisions policies, eliminating requirements for applicants to submit standardized test scores, and considering applications holistically and within the context of the applicant’s background,](#) are all ways that colleges and universities can eliminate admissions practices that structurally exacerbate racial inequity. Direct admissions complements these initiatives by strengthening the pathway between high school and college. Policy and research efforts over the past decade have sought to make the college application process more equitable.⁷ However, most strategies target only one piece of the larger puzzle, such as a common application to reduce the number of forms students must submit,⁸ a proactive fee waiver to eliminate the need to request one multiple times for every college of interest,⁹ or individualized application assistance.¹⁰ Instead of applying band-aid solutions to an inequitable process, we should ask: Why make students run this gauntlet at all? Community colleges are non-selective by design, and most universities are broad access institutions, admitting 70% or more of those who apply.¹¹ **Eliminating a confusing admissions application process would not only increase efficiency for all, but also promote equity by eliminating financial, social, and cultural obstacles associated with the admissions ordeal.** To achieve these goals, 10 states in the U.S. and hundreds of institutions nationwide have instituted direct admissions programs.¹²



Why Direct Admissions?

Direct admissions policies address the barriers associated with the admissions process. Direct admissions removes complexity, simplifying the college application process, saving students time and money, and eliminating barriers that disproportionately impact students from minoritized backgrounds due to unevenly distributed social and cultural capital. Direct admissions policies provide students with an early guarantee of college admission at a critical point in high school. This guarantee of acceptance signals the students' college-going potential and reduces the uncertainty and risk of applying. This guarantee may change many students' initial college-going attitude from "no college" to "college," placing more students on (and further along) the college-going pathway. Direct admissions programs also proactively push information to students to overcome knowledge gaps and address other unevenly provided college-going supports. Direct admissions programs tell students that they are college material and that there is a place for them. This holds the potential to overcome wide racial gaps in college-going beliefs.¹³



- **Remove complexity**
- **Simplify the process**
- **Save students time and money**
- **Eliminate barriers**

Direct admissions uses preexisting data within an automated process. Admission letters are generated and sent automatically, making the strategy low-cost and low-touch for states and systems. **Direct admissions can provide proactive and tailored information to students, guarantee them at least one higher education option after high school, centralize important college-going information, and simplify the steps they must take to enroll.** Importantly, direct admissions programs do not stop students from applying to colleges or universities to which they were not directly admitted, nor is admission binding for recipients, should they choose to attend elsewhere or forgo college.

Who Is Doing Direct Admissions?

In 2015, Idaho adopted the nation's first direct admissions system, proactively admitting all high school graduates to a set of in-state public institutions.¹⁴ Since then, nine other states and hundreds of postsecondary institutions have implemented some form of direct admissions, with several more currently designing or piloting new systems.¹⁵ Below are summaries of how Idaho, Hawai'i, and Minnesota have adopted and designed direct admissions programs for the public institutions in their states. These states vary in their student populations, higher education governing structures, and political environments, as well as in the numbers and types of institutions that participate. Each has adapted direct admissions to meet its own state goals, including to increase higher education enrollments, reduce out-of-state migration or brain drain, and foster equity in college access.



Table 1. Characteristics of Direct Admissions Programs in Idaho, Hawai'i, and Minnesota

	Idaho	Hawai'i	Minnesota
Program	Next Steps Idaho	UH Fast Pass	Direct Admissions Minnesota
Organization(s)	Office of the State Board of Education	University of Hawai'i (UH) and Hawai'i P-20 Partnerships for Education	Minnesota Office of Higher Education, institutions, and K-12 districts
Authorization	Board policy	Regents policy	State statute
Scope	All public institutions and K-12 schools; privates may opt-in	All public K-12 schools; UH campuses only	Opt-in for public and private institutions and K-12 schools
Start Date	2015-16	2020-21	2022-23
Eligibility	GPA	GPA	GPA and course grades
Data Source	Idaho ISEE Data System	Hawai'i Data eXchange Partnership	Individual K-12 data vendors



IDAHO

Idaho was the first state to adopt direct admissions, proactively admitting all 2016 public high school graduates to a group of the state’s public colleges and universities.¹⁶ The state has a centralized governing board for all of K-12 and higher education (the Office of the State Board of Education, or OSBE) that coordinates the program. All students in the state are proactively admitted to its open access two-year colleges, and those that surpass a specific GPA threshold (which has varied from 2.6 to 2.8, over time) are also admitted to the state’s selective universities.¹⁷ The OSBE uses its longitudinal data system to compare students’ high school performance against their GPA criterion to determine whether they’re admitted to all institutions or only to open access colleges.¹⁸

In the fall of their senior year, students receive an official college acceptance letter in the mail, informing them of their guaranteed admission to a list of institutions. It includes links for students to access other college-going resources housed at OSBE, including how to find the “right college for you.” Parents and high schools also receive notifications. Students are encouraged to discuss their college options with these “trusted adults.”

To enroll, students need only select a college and submit a free form to claim their place. This form allows students to also select their intended major field of study and provide additional information. It takes approximately 15 minutes to complete.¹⁹ Private high schools and private institutions of higher education have begun to participate in Idaho’s direct admissions program, and postcards are now sent in the mail at the beginning of students’ senior year in high school to let them know that their official direct admissions invitation will arrive in the mail later in the month. More information about Idaho’s program, including program videos and example letters, can be found on the [Next Steps Idaho](#) website.



HAWAI’I

Beginning with the 2021 high school graduating class, the University of Hawai’i (UH) Fast Pass program began providing direct admissions to eligible in-state students at the three campuses within the UH system. Hawai’i only has one public K-12 school district and one higher education system, which are separately governed. These entities engage through a cross-agency state collaborative, Hawai’i P-20 Partnerships for Education, which houses the state’s early childhood through workforce data system.

In Fast Pass, students with a high school GPA of 2.7 or above at the end of their junior year receive a conditional offer of admission to UH West Oahu and UH Hilo.²⁰ This offer is conditional upon students graduating from high school and completing the state’s core course requirements for admission to any institution of higher education (e.g., 4 units of English, 3 units of math). Students are also informed that they are welcome to apply to any of the state’s seven community colleges. For those with a 3.5 GPA or higher, students also receive a special invitation to apply to the flagship, UH Mānoa, alongside an application fee waiver and the promise of expedited application review. Students receive their respective Fast Pass letters in the fall of their senior year and are provided with information on how to submit their free college enrollment form.²¹ The state’s program also hosts a website with information for students, parents, and counselors. More information on the UH Fast Pass program can be found [here](#).



MINNESOTA

Direct Admissions Minnesota began during the 2022-23 academic year. Though the policy is targeted at all college goers, Minnesota’s plan carries an explicit goal to “reduce equity gaps” and address “significant disparities in educational attainment [that] exist for Minnesota’s Black, Indigenous, and other communities of color.”²² Minnesota has a statewide coordinating board for higher education (the Office of Higher Education, or OHE) that oversees the program. Given this role, neither schools nor institutions are required to participate. Rather, they opt in, and the state has adopted a phased pilot approach. In the first year, 39 high schools (representing nearly 7,000 students) and 51 colleges participated.²³ This has grown to 129 high schools (representing nearly 24,000 students) and 55 colleges as the program prepares for its second year.²⁴

Under OHE’s leadership, a working group designed Minnesota’s program. It decided that all students in participating high schools who are on track to graduate, including those at public and private schools, would be admitted to the state’s participating open access institutions (“Tier 1” of the program). Students who additionally met identified academic thresholds based on their GPA and high school course grades in math, English, and science would be admitted to selective participating colleges across tiers that increase with students’ performance: from Tier 2 through Tier 6. Institutions select which tier of students they would provide direct admission to, ranging from 28 institutions admitting students from Tier 1 to three institutions admitting students from Tier 6. At the end of students’ junior year, high school counselors review their GPAs and grades and assign them to tiers. High schools then use formal letters with standardized templates to notify students and parents/guardians where the students have been admitted. Students then tell the high school which institution(s) they wish to be directly admitted to. High schools transmit this information to OHE, which then verifies each student’s tier and provides the student’s transcript to the institution(s) of higher education.

Minnesota does not have a centralized data system that captures course grades. This requires OHE to work with five independent vendors that can facilitate the connection between individual school district records and the centralized program. Once colleges receive students’ information and transcripts, they reach out to students and ask them to complete a free enrollment form and provide important information on next steps, financial aid, and more. Like in Hawai’i, Minnesota students’ direct admissions offers are contingent upon high school graduation. Additionally, students are expected to maintain their current tier of academic performance during their senior year and to file the FAFSA. More information about Minnesota’s program can be found on the [OHE website](#).

OTHER STATES AND INSTITUTIONS

Direct admissions programs have spread across the nation.²⁵ South Dakota began direct admissions in 2018 and admits students based on 11th grade Smarter Balanced state assessment or ACT scores, followed by Washington state in 2022.²⁶ Connecticut, Georgia, Indiana, New York, and Wisconsin will begin piloting or operating direct admissions programs in fall 2023 using some combination of a student's GPA, class rank, and/or standardized test score.²⁷

In addition to these states' efforts, hundreds of independent postsecondary institutions currently operate direct admissions through third-party providers, such as the Common App, Concourse, Niche, and Sage Scholars, which connect prospective students from their large databases of applicants who use their systems with partner colleges.²⁸ Some institutions may also have individual partnerships with school districts to provide direct admissions to eligible students at nearby high schools. These parties engage in a memorandum of understanding to share student data and coordinate communications without the need for a third-party vendor.

It is important to recognize that direct admissions is not the same as other guaranteed admissions policies. Plans like the Texas Top 10 Percent and several other state or institutional policies establish uniform criteria for admission.²⁹ However, students must not only be aware of these policies, but they must also complete a full application and take other steps to ultimately enroll in an institution. This benefits the well-informed and the already advantaged. Even for students who would qualify under these plans, the college admissions gauntlet and its immense complexities and costs remain.



Guaranteed admission is a meaningless policy if students are not aware of the guarantee, or if they must still follow an inequitable pathway to receive that guarantee. Instead, direct admissions programs proactively inform all students of their guaranteed acceptance, putting personalized information directly in their hands and simplifying the steps they need to follow to enroll in college.

The Impacts of Direct Admissions

In the year immediately after Idaho began direct admissions, the state reported a 3.1% increase in enrollment across all public colleges and universities, with enrollment at Boise State University increasing by 8%.³⁰ The state also saw the number of graduating high school seniors who immediately enrolled in college rise 6.7%, while the number of students moving out of state for college fell three percent.³¹ More rigorous research found that direct admissions raised enrollment levels by 4-8% (50-100 students per campus).³² These gains came predominantly from the number of students enrolling at colleges in-state and from increased enrollments at open access, two-year institutions (where the majority of students had been automatically admitted). Initial research did not find that direct admissions raised the number of low-income students who enrolled in college in Idaho. Evaluations of direct admissions programs in Hawai'i and Minnesota are currently underway. Early evidence indicates that direct admissions programs in both states have raised overall state and institutional enrollment levels, particularly among in-state students.





In addition to these statistics, there are growing accounts of students' experiences in direct admissions programs. In a survey of over 1,400 students in Idaho's direct admissions program, one respondent noted that the application process **“can be scary for teens, and rejection is not easy. So it was nice to get a letter of preapproved acceptance for some colleges.”**³³ Others said: **“I didn't think any college would accept me, but I was wrong,”** and **“I knew I wanted to go to college, but I wasn't sure how I felt about it. Once I got the letter, my whole mindset changed. I knew I could do it.”**



Subsequent student interviews with reporters revealed similar sentiments: **“My parents didn't have the chance to go to college, and yet, here I was, first-gen, and had direct admission to all the colleges in Idaho. ... It was one of my proudest moments where I felt, ‘This is possible.’ ... a lot of kids ... just completely rule themselves out as college material.”**³⁴ These quotes underscore the reality of how direct admissions can signal hope and inspire students to attend college.



These sentiments also resonate with admissions professionals. One senior institutional leader noted: **“We've always got to remove barriers to entry. And what's the ultimate barrier to entry? The application.”**³⁵ Another asked, **“If we could be doing it in this easier way, why, for so long, have we been putting ourselves through so much tedious work? Hours and hours of tedious work?”** **“Most of us are not Harvard, Princeton, and Yale,”** another said. **“The process doesn't need to be so difficult for students applying to the vast majority of colleges.”**

The strongest evidence of the impacts of direct admissions comes from a pair of experiments conducted in partnership with the [Common App](#), a national nonprofit organization that serves over 1.2 million students per year. In the first year (2020-21), researchers partnered with three Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) to offer direct admission to nearly 3,300 Black, Latinx, first-generation, and low-income students to one in-state institution in Maryland, Tennessee, or Virginia.³⁶ The research team used GPA information that students provided in their Common App profiles to determine the list of participating colleges where they would be directly admitted. A set of students, chosen at random, received direct admissions letters notifying them of their admission via email. Selected students also received an application fee waiver. This application was not a full application and resembled many states' simplified form that students submit to connect with an institution and claim their place in the entering class.



Students who received a letter were four times more likely to apply to the institution and 30% more likely to also apply to another college. Results revealed stronger impacts for Black and first-generation students.

In a subsequent study (2021-22), six institutions across four states—including public and private institutions, HBCUs, Hispanic-Serving Institutions, and research-intensive (R1) universities — worked with the same research team to randomly assign nearly 32,000 students to a large-scale direct admissions experiment.³⁷ Students who were directly admitted (and given a fee waiver and simplified application form) were 12% more likely to submit the simplified form, overall, and nearly twice as likely to apply to the institution where they were offered admission.



The impacts of direct admissions were larger for racially minoritized students (they were 12-20% more likely to submit a college application), first-generation students (13%), and low-income students (9%).



Findings also revealed that students were more responsive to direct admissions offers when they were proactively admitted to larger, higher quality institutions, including schools that had larger undergraduate student bodies and higher graduation rates. This work has expanded to encompass 14 additional participating institutions.³⁸

While these experiments reveal that direct admissions students were more likely to apply to college by completing the simplified form, thereby signaling their intent to enroll, they did not show that students were more likely to actually enroll. Our evidence suggests that this is due, in large part, to the ultimate cost of attendance. The act of applying to college is a good outcome, as exposure to postsecondary institutions through an application process allows students to receive enrollment support and tailored information on college options, majors, and financial aid. However, **pressing constraints on students' ability to pay for the upfront cost of college remain a barrier.** That is, even if Black, Latinx, and other underrepresented groups are directly admitted to college, they either think they cannot afford to attend, or they actually cannot afford to attend. Increases in tuition rates have long outpaced improvements in need-based aid and led to declining college affordability for many students.³⁹ This means that direct admissions can improve important college-going outcomes — like increasing the submission of college applications and raising educational aspirations — by signaling postsecondary opportunities, simplifying the college-going pathway, and connecting students with institutions. But this alone is insufficient to fully close gaps for Black, Latinx, low-income, and first-generation students.

These financial barriers highlight the need to address challenges related to financial aid and college affordability by addressing equity in financial aid for higher education. This includes supporting all high school seniors to submit a FAFSA and reviewing income-verification policies that disproportionately affect applicants from minoritized backgrounds, awarding financial aid based on need rather than merit or other non-need-based factors, expanding need-based programs like the federal Pell Grant and state-level equivalents, and examining financial aid practices for equity implications at the institutional level. Research and recommendations on these policy reforms are included in both published and forthcoming briefs that are part of the [Affirming Equity, Ensuring Inclusion, and Empowering Action](#) initiative.

Direct admissions may be most effective when combined with other equity-minded supports, such as application assistance, college coaching, or financial aid.⁴⁰ When considering how to pair direct admissions with other policies, research shows that providing students with information, college coaching, and application workshops can further promote equitable access.⁴¹ Affordability is one of the largest barriers to equitable access.⁴² Need-based aid promotes access and supports retention and completion.⁴³ Furthermore, programs that simplify the college-going pathway and guarantee financial support — like the Michigan High Achieving Involved Leader (HAIL) scholarship program — show large impacts, especially for low-income students.⁴⁴ Research also shows that developing or adopting a common application reduces the frictions students face by simplifying the number of steps they must complete.⁴⁵

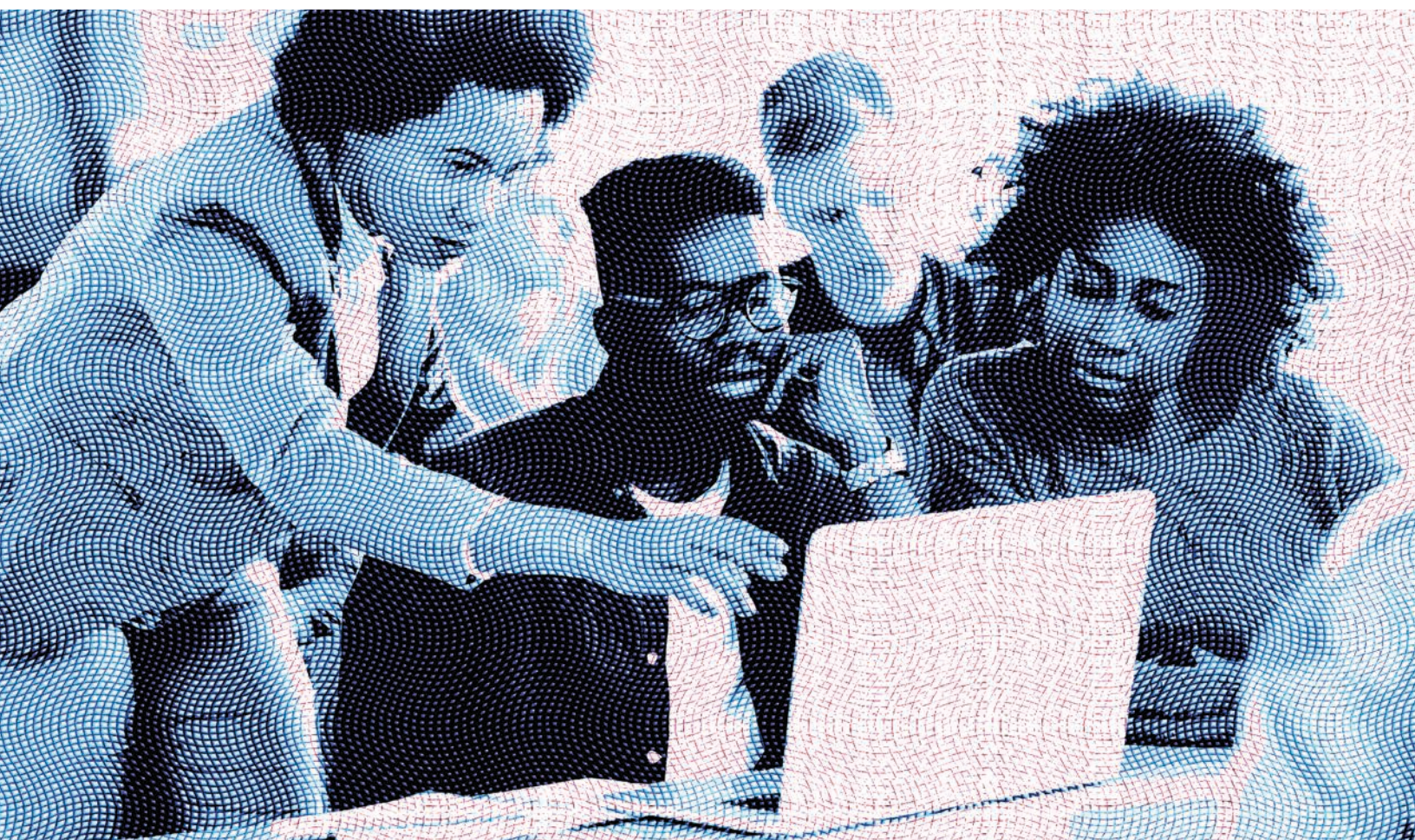


Other Necessary Supports

- **Information**
- **Coaching**
- **Financial Aid**

When considering the positive impacts of direct admissions, it is also important to think through potential unintended consequences. First, by proactively admitting students to open access colleges or only providing two-year options, those who would otherwise qualify and succeed at more selective institutions may “undermatch,” leading them to enroll in institutions with fewer resources and to subsequently lower baccalaureate attainment rates.⁴⁶ While this has not yet been documented under

existing direct admissions programs, policymakers should make sure they include four-year institutions and provide students with information to help them choose the right college for them. Second, when considering which institutions to include, policymakers should consider allowing private, nonprofit institutions to participate — ultimately providing students with more college choices — but excluding private, for-profit institutions, which, on average, have fewer resources, lower completion rates, and poor labor market outcomes, particularly for already marginalized students.⁴⁷ Finally, it is important to ensure that a direct admissions program does not unintentionally reduce access by adding more barriers for students. Some emerging programs, particularly those from third party organizations, require students to complete additional steps, like developing a portfolio, to gain direct admission. Such steps are likely to reduce efficacy by adding complexity to the college application process and exacerbating inequality, as only those who complete the steps can benefit.



How Can States and Systems Implement Direct Admissions?

While the details of direct admissions may differ from state to state or institution to institution, there are seven key principles that collectively distinguish it from other college access policies.⁴⁸ The design of any direct admissions policy should include these features:

- ✓ **Proactive communication.** Direct admissions places simple, transparent, and personalized college-going information directly into students' hands without the need for them to opt in.
- ✓ **Guaranteed admission.** Direct admissions is a guarantee, a “sure bet” for students that removes uncertainty in the application process.
- ✓ **Universal access.** Direct admissions serves everyone, regardless of their race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, geography, or other contexts. Every student receives at least one postsecondary education option.
- ✓ **Simple and transparent steps.** Direct admissions uses clear and comprehensible steps to decide where students are admitted and how to claim their place in college. Then, students can understand how they were admitted and what to do next.
- ✓ **Personalized.** Direct admissions centers the students and their college-going journeys. A letter details their performance, their options, and resources designed for them. It does not provide generic information that students must decipher to determine whether or how it applies to them.
- ✓ **Low-cost.** Direct admissions is free for students and low-cost for states and institutions. The practice relies on existing data and should require minimal administrative coordination.
- ✓ **Involves trusted adults.** Direct admissions recognizes that students rely on others when making college-going decisions and uses this network.⁴⁹ Adults in students' networks are also notified of acceptances, informed of next steps, and given available resources.



LEVERAGE OTHER EQUITY-MINDED PRACTICES WITH DIRECT ADMISSIONS

When designing a direct admissions program, policymakers and institutional leaders should leverage other equity-minded policies. Taken with direct admissions' core principles, these policies can maximize the impact of direct admissions and target other barriers to access:

- ✓ **Integrate direct admissions and financial aid.** When aid is available, direct admissions letters should include this information. In addition to simplifying the application process, direct admissions can reduce uncertainty and complexity in the financial aid process by proactively informing students of their financial aid eligibility and outlining the steps they need to take to secure this aid.
- ✓ **Use a common and simplified enrollment form.** A key feature of direct admissions is that students claim their place using a simple and free form. When implementing direct admissions, consider co-implementing a state or systemwide common application that would allow students to claim their place or to submit a full application to other institutions using the same submission portal or form. This increases the likelihood that they will apply to college at all and apply to more colleges. Most states with direct admissions have a common application, including Hawai'i, Idaho, Minnesota, New York, and Wisconsin.⁵⁰
- ✓ **Focus on information and other targeted supports.** There are substantial informational barriers that keep Latinx, Black, underrepresented Asian American and NHPI, and AIAN students out of higher education. Direct admissions can be used to systematically reduce these barriers by proactively providing important and personalized college-going information. Direct admissions letters can also serve as a megaphone to alert students, families, and other stakeholders about other supports, such as application assistance or FAFSA help. Direct admissions should be implemented alongside these strategies.

DECISION POINTS AND CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESS

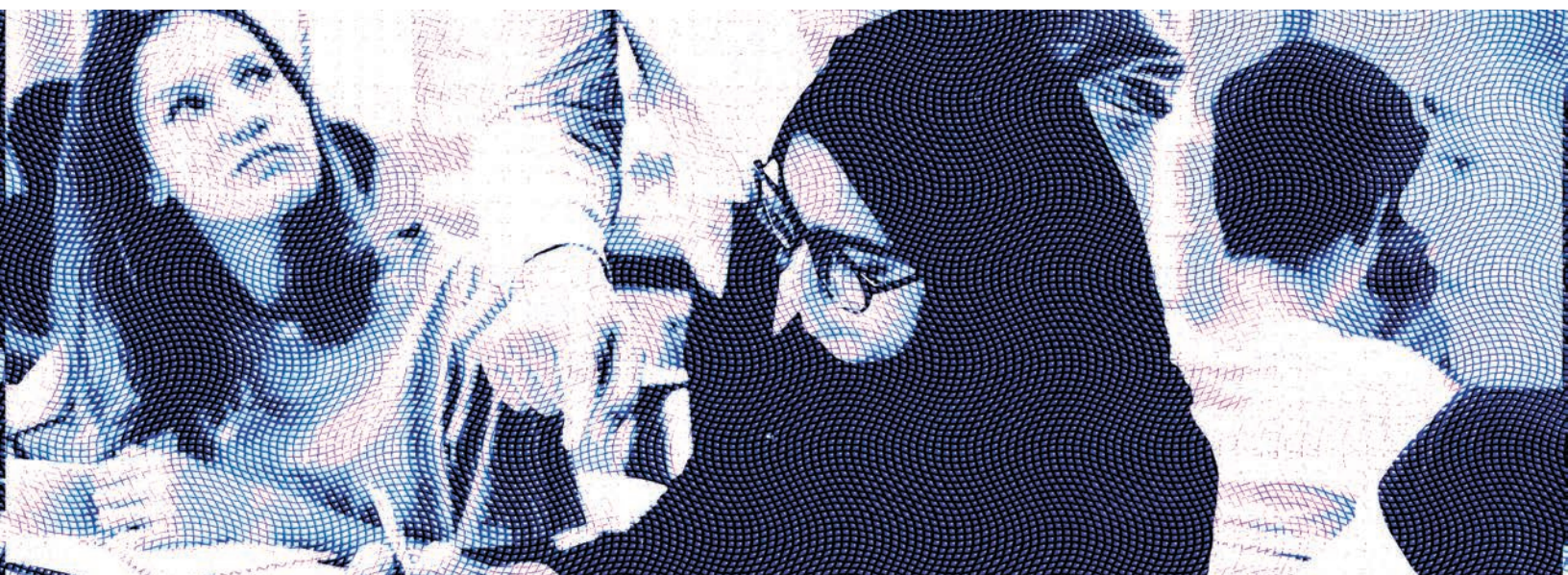
Direct admissions policies are not one-size-fits-all solutions. While maintaining key tenets of the practice, each program can be flexibly designed to meet the needs of states and institutions. When designing a direct admissions program, policymakers and institutional leaders will need to answer many questions, including:

- What information will we use? Decide what criteria will be used to admit students. Most systems rely on a student's GPA, while others use course grades, class rank, and/or standardized test scores. This is primarily driven by what data is available. If possible, use GPAs. They are simple, readily available, and are better (and more equitable) predictors of performance.⁵¹
- Where will data come from? You must be able to observe a standardized measure of a student's academic performance. Use your existing longitudinal data system, develop agreements with school districts, or engage with third parties that have this information.
- How will we contact students, parents, and high schools? Use multiple forms of communication, including mail and e-mail. Direct admissions should be widely publicized. Students, families, and high schools should know about direct admissions before a student ever receives a letter. Use informational campaigns and detailed web pages with resources and other information.
- How can we promote buy-in? Develop a core group of advocates across the K-12 and higher education communities who can provide input and clearly communicate the benefits of direct admissions. Unify communications across stakeholder groups.
- Do we need a state statute or board policy? Direct admissions practices should live in state or institutional policy. Author a bill or board policy to formalize the program. This may require other policies to be amended, such as those governing admission to public institutions.
- How much will it cost? Allocate resources to support your direct admissions program. Idaho has a centralized program that costs approximately \$30,000 annually, covered by OSBE's normal operations and staffing. Minnesota has a decentralized program that costs approximately \$500,000 per year and is provided by legislative appropriations.⁵²
- How do we know we are achieving our goals? Use quantitative and qualitative measures to study your direct admissions program, make improvements, and track progress toward equity goals. Consider partnering with an external research team.
- How can we learn from others? Join the State Higher Education Officers Association (SHEEO) direct admissions [Community of Practice](#). This is a venue for state and system leaders to engage in the design, operation, and evaluation of direct admissions policies.

Conclusion

Improving educational attainment and reducing inequity in college access begins with simplifying the college application process itself. The current practice of requiring students to jump multiple hurdles, and assuming they have perfect information and support to navigate a maze of admissions processes, is untenable, and our build-it-and-they-will-come approach exacerbates racial inequity by requiring students to face multiple barriers on unequal ground. Piecemeal repairs to this process have proven inadequate, requiring a systemic change to the way students are admitted to college.

Direct admissions is one strategy to build a more equitable college-going pathway. It eliminates the need for students to apply to many colleges altogether and structurally simplifies the steps students need to take to enroll. In doing so, direct admissions can increase equity and efficiency. Furthermore, the broad diversity of adopters shows that direct admissions is not a politically charged tool: Democratic and Republican leaders alike have endorsed these policies because they are a low-cost, low-touch way to signal college-going (and, in turn, workforce development) opportunities and to reduce the administrative burden on students and families. Evidence suggests that, when effectively paired with other equity-minded practices, direct admissions can help level the playing field for Latinx, Black, underrepresented Asian American, NHPI, and AIAN students while also benefiting first-generation students and those from low-income backgrounds. Direct admissions is not a panacea for inequitable K-12 and higher education systems, but it is one step in the right direction to reduce inequity and unnecessary barriers to educational attainment for all. Policymakers and institutional leaders should consider direct admissions as one piece of a larger agenda, a tool to use alongside test-optional policies, holistic review, and other equitable admissions practices.



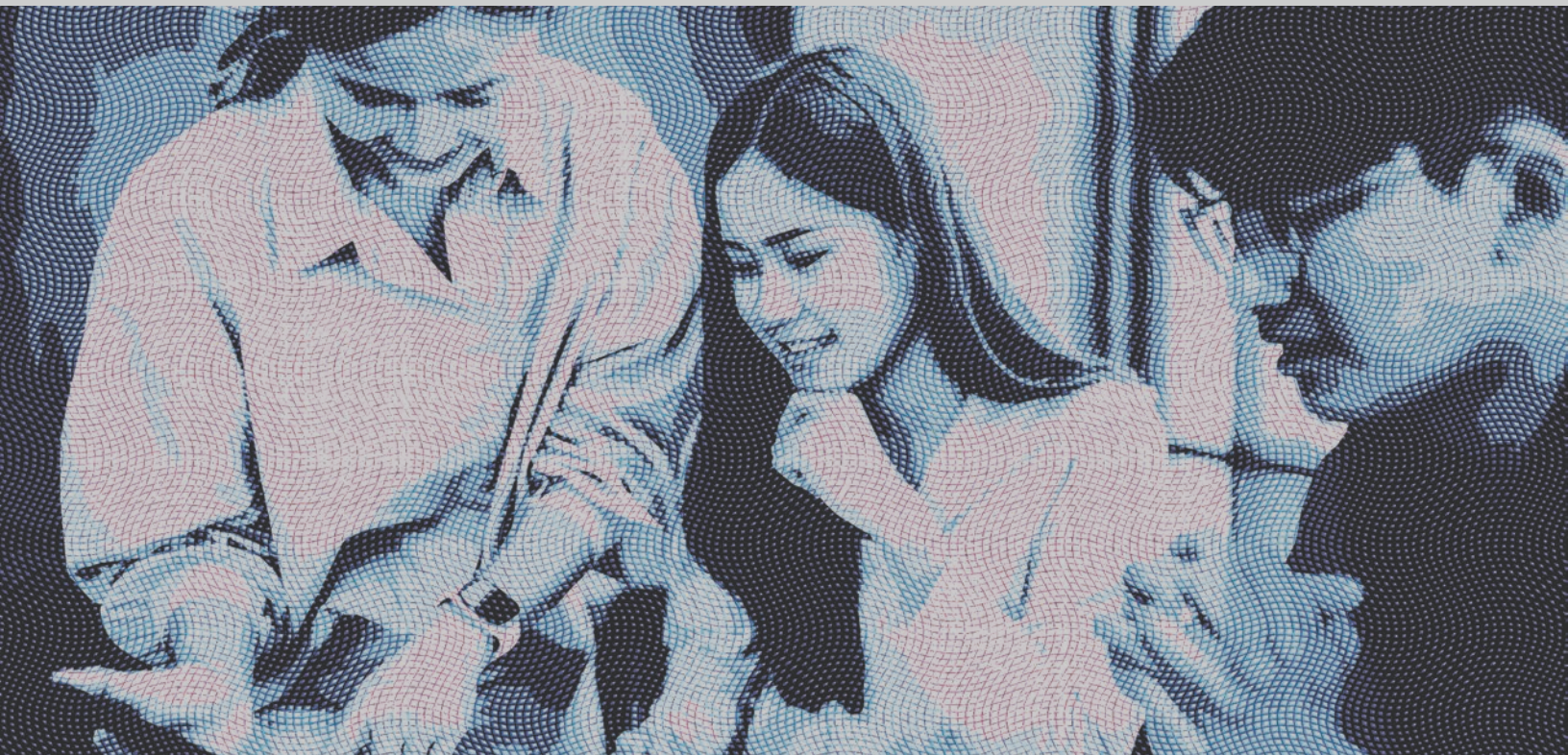
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