

**Congress of the United States**  
Washington, DC 20510

March 7, 2023

Mr. James Kvaal  
Under Secretary  
U.S. Department of Education  
400 Maryland Avenue SW  
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Mr. Kvaal,

We write today to encourage the Department of Education (ED) to expand its collection of admissions data in order to help address long-standing racial and ethnic inequities in higher education access and attainment.

Despite a shrinking difference in racial and ethnic gaps of high school diploma attainment<sup>1</sup>, there remains a significant and worrisome gap between Black, Hispanic, and Native American adults and white adults in the attainment of bachelor's degrees. According to Census Bureau Data, the percentage of white adults that receive a bachelor's degree or higher is 41.9%, while Black adults and Hispanic adults attain bachelor's degrees at 28.1% and 20.6% respectively.<sup>2</sup> Such disparities reflect continued inequities in access to high quality, affordable education from early childhood through higher education resulting from centuries of discrimination against and redlining of Black and Brown communities.

We are deeply concerned with the persistent racial inequities in access to postsecondary education and in the attainment of bachelor's degrees; to adequately address the issue, researchers, leaders, and policymakers require more information. As such, we urge ED to use its authority under the Education Sciences Reform Act (Pub.L. 107-279) and with the additional funds provided to the Institute for Education Sciences in the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023 (Pub.L. 117-73) to expand its collection and dissemination of admissions data while also disaggregating that data by race, ethnicity and gender.

While ED's current efforts in data collection and dissemination through the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) have been exceedingly useful in creating a baseline of transparency and accountability, serious blind spots remain. Currently, ED does not collect disaggregated data for applicants or admitted applicants based on race or ethnicity. Nor does ED collect data on legacy preferences or early decision or early action plans' impact on admission, which have shown to have negative effects on diversity and equity at selective

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<sup>1</sup>“[Racial and ethnic gaps in the U.S. persist on key demographic indicators](#),” Pew Research Center, (2021)

<sup>2</sup>“[Census Bureau Releases New Educational Attainment Data](#),” United States Census Bureau, (2022).

colleges across the nation.<sup>3,4</sup> While we are pleased to see the inclusion of a question on the 2022-2023 IPEDS survey on whether a college considers legacy status of applicants, the data point will remain incomplete if IPEDS does not collect information on how many students actually benefit from these preferences.

The need for transparency in college admissions may become even more important should the Supreme Court end the consideration of race-conscious admissions policies later this year. Race-conscious admissions policies are a critical tool for advancing racial equity, diversity, and access in higher education. After the elimination of such practices in both California and Texas, admissions rates for Black and Hispanic students dropped precipitously, leading to long-term, negative effects on the income and social mobility of Black and Hispanic communities, many of whom were denied access to the personal, professional, and socioeconomic growth so often facilitated by higher education.

In pursuit of achieving the goal of greater transparency and accountability in the college admissions process, we ask that ED act on its directive under the Education Sciences Reform Act—to “collect, report, analyze, and disseminate statistical data related to the condition and progress of postsecondary education, including access to and opportunity for postsecondary education,”—by expanding its data collection to include:

1. Racial and ethnic demographic data for applications and admits, not just enrollments.
2. Whether an institution of higher education considers an alumni relation in its admissions process and, if it does, the number of applications, admits, and enrollments that fall under this category, disaggregated by race, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status when possible.
3. Whether an institution of higher education offers an early decision or early action plan as part of its admissions process and, if it does, the number of applications, admits, and enrollments that fall under this category, disaggregated by race, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status when possible.

The inclusion of these three components would allow for stakeholders to track racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic disparities throughout the entirety of the admissions process and see how the practices of legacy admissions and early decision impact access and diversity in higher education. Their inclusion also does not pose a meaningful administrative burden on institutes of higher education, as many already collect this data and use it for internal purposes. These new requirements would simply make the data public for the purposes of furthering transparency and accountability throughout the admissions process. Increasing transparency is a powerful signal that this administration can send about its commitment to diversity and access in postsecondary education.

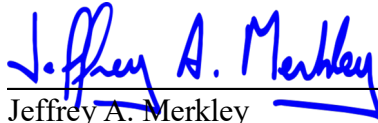
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<sup>3</sup> Abril Castro, “[Early Decision Harms Students of Color and Low-Income Students](#),” *Center for American Progress* (2019).

<sup>4</sup> Rucker C. Johnson, “[Segregation in Higher Education and Unequal Paths to College Completion: Implications for Policy and Research](#),” *American Council on Education* (2020).

We value the ED's commitment to equity and opportunity in higher education and welcome the opportunity to work with the agency to implement these changes and increased data collection.

Sincerely,



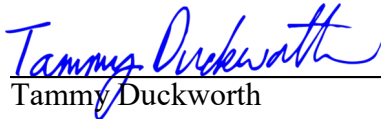
Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator



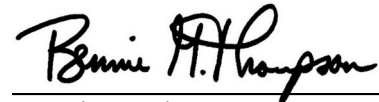
Jamaal Bowman, Ed.D.  
Member of Congress



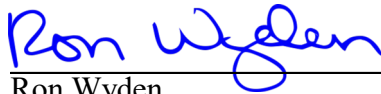
Frederica S. Wilson  
Member of Congress



Tammy Duckworth  
United States Senator



Bennie G. Thompson  
Member of Congress



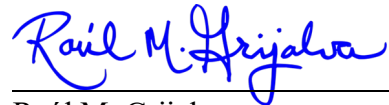
Ron Wyden  
United States Senator



Yvette D. Clarke  
Member of Congress



Cory A. Booker  
United States Senator




Raúl M. Grijalva  
Member of Congress



Jim Tokuda  
Member of Congress




André Carson  
Member of Congress




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Jasmine Crockett  
Member of Congress




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Shontel M. Brown  
Member of Congress



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Alma S. Adams, Ph.D.  
Member of Congress



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Troy Carter  
Member of Congress




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Joyce Beatty  
Member of Congress



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Greg Casar  
Member of Congress



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Emanuel Cleaver, II  
Member of Congress