

Automatic admissions policies increased diversity at rural Texas high schools, says report

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A Rice University study found "race-blind" automatic admissions policies at Texas' state universities boosted diversity in highly segregated

school districts, especially in rural areas of the Lone Star State.

Jeremy Fiel, assistant professor of sociology at Rice University, examined how or if automatic admissions policies (AAPs) reduced [racial segregation](#) in Texas, California and Florida, and published his findings in *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*.

Also known as percent plans, AAPs guarantee state university admission to students above a class rank threshold in their [high school](#)'s graduating class. Fiel said "race-blind" AAPs rose out of political challenges to affirmative action policies on university campuses in the 1990s.

"By doing so (AAPs) redistribute school-based opportunities across high schools, boosting university admission opportunities at high schools where past graduates were underrepresented in admissions, including predominantly minority schools," Fiel wrote in the study.

Texas, California and Florida implemented AAPs in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The best known is Texas' Top Ten Percent Plan (TTPP), which led state universities to abandon the use of race as a determining factor in admissions. By guaranteeing admissions slots for all high schools, AAPs increased slots available to schools serving underrepresented students and boosted opportunities for [minority students](#), the study found.

"The evidence is clearest and the AAP effects appear strongest and most consistent with expectations in Texas, whose policy had the strongest benefit: enrollment at any state university for graduates in the top 10% of their high school class," Fiel wrote.

The TTPP boosted admissions of both Black and Hispanic students to Texas state universities, and most of the students who benefited were from predominately minority high schools. The plan also increased

applications and enrollments by minorities at Texas's most selective universities.

Due to stereotypes that predominantly minority high schools are less academically competitive, Fiel said it is possible that AAPs make those schools more appealing to students competing for admissions slots. That increased appeal could have the unintended effect of reducing segregation at predominantly minority high schools, which would undermine AAPs' ability to reduce [racial inequality](#) in university admissions, he said.

"Within-district analyses of school enrollments further suggest the AAP worked as hypothesized, reducing white students' aversion to high schools with relatively large Black enrollment shares," Fiel wrote. "One caveat is that the declining segregation in Texas was largely concentrated in nonmetropolitan districts with relatively small populations."

The analysis found that California's Eligibility in Local Context (ELC) policy had modest effects compared to those found in Texas, but the effects in California seemed more widespread and not as concentrated in rural areas, he said. In Florida, segregation in high schools appears to not have changed much after the implementation of Talented 20 (T20), according to Fiel.

Fiel argues that AAPs are unlikely to noticeably reduce large-scale racial segregation because they only redistribute a specific opportunity (admission to state universities) at a specific time (high school graduation) through a narrow mechanism (class rank).

More information: Jeremy E. Fiel, Opportunity Seeking Across Segregated Schools: Unintended Effects of Automatic Admission Policies on High School Segregation, *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* (2022). [DOI: 10.3102/01623737221078286](https://doi.org/10.3102/01623737221078286)

Provided by Rice University

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