



Opportunity for Some

Gov. Jeb Bush's Record on Higher Education in Florida

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In portraying his tenure as governor of Florida, Jeb Bush often presents himself as the Republican candidate with appeal to emerging demographic groups that are beyond the typical conservative base. In the early stages of his presidential campaign, he expressed concern about how “it’s harder for people in poverty to move up”¹ and promised to “make opportunity common again.”² However, Bush’s record as governor shows that he was responsible for creating new barriers to opportunity in Florida.

This fact sheet examines the impact of former Gov. Bush’s signature initiative to bar affirmative action programs for African American students at four-year, public universities in Florida, finding that:³

- African American fall enrollment at four-year, public higher education institutions in Florida fell 10.9 percent between 2000 and 2013.
- Over the same time period, African American enrollment at four-year, public universities nationwide increased 3.5 percent.
- If African American fall enrollment had decreased at the same level nationally as it did in Florida, there would have been 13.9 percent fewer black students enrolled in four-year, public universities in 2013—a total of 85,726 fewer African American college students.

Economic benefits of higher education

Earning a college degree is a crucial step on the path toward achieving economic security. On average, young college graduates earn 63 percent more each year than the typical high school graduate.⁴ Moreover, college graduates today are one-third as likely to be unemployed as high school graduates.⁵

For students of color, college is even more essential to achieving economic opportunity. African American students experience the largest employment and earnings benefits if they receive a college education.⁶ For instance, a professional degree offers a black male a 146 percent larger increase in employment probability than the same degree does for a white male.⁷ Similarly, a bachelor's degree raises the median wage for black men by \$10,000 per year—or 28 percent—compared to those with an associate's degree. In contrast, a bachelor's degree boosts the median income of a white male by only 13 percent—or \$6,100 per year.⁸

Unfortunately, the rate at which these students complete college is far below that of their white peers. For example, only 20.8 percent of black men ages 25 to 29 have a college degree compared with 37.7 percent of non-Hispanic white men of the same age group.⁹

Affirmative action is a crucial way to improve postsecondary completion rates for students of color. It also preserves diversity on college campuses by taking positive steps to end discrimination, prevent its recurrence, and create new opportunities for students of color.¹⁰ As a result of affirmative action policies, students of color see an increase in graduation rates and economic outcomes, according to a University of Chicago study.¹¹ Although opponents of affirmative action argue that these policies amount to reverse discrimination, a wide breadth of research shows that race-neutral and class-based admissions policies drastically reduce the number of students of color enrolled in universities.¹²

In addition to providing opportunity for communities of color, affirmative action yields broader social benefits. For example, diversity in the classroom is linked to higher levels of academic achievement and the improvement of intergroup relationships for all students.¹³ Campus diversity also leads to a more diverse workforce, which business leaders agree fosters innovation and creativity.¹⁴ Furthermore, the American people support race-based admissions: According to a 2014 Pew Research Center poll, 63 percent of Americans said they support affirmative action on college campuses, including 84 percent of African American respondents, 80 percent of Hispanic respondents, and 55 percent of white respondents.¹⁵

Sherrilyn Ifill, president and director-counsel of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, highlighted the continued need for affirmative action policies after the Supreme Court's decision in *Fisher v. University of Texas*: “The promise of equal opportunity will ring hollow unless colleges and universities can ensure meaningful access to students of all races.”¹⁶

Jeb Bush's repeal of affirmative action

In 1999, Jeb Bush became the first governor to sign an executive order banning the implementation of affirmative action in college admissions.¹⁷ The initiative, called One Florida, eliminated the use of race-based affirmative action policies in Florida state

If African American enrollment decreased nationwide at the same rate it did in Florida, there would have been 85,726 fewer African American students enrolled in public universities in 2013.

universities, as well as state government employment and contracting.¹⁸ Gov. Bush still champions his bar on affirmative action programs. At a recent conference of conservative activities, Bush said, “We ended up having a system where there were more African American and Hispanic kids attending our university system than prior to the system that was discriminatory.”¹⁹

That is, in fact, not true. After Gov. Bush’s affirmative action executive order, African American enrollment at Florida universities fell 10.9 percent from 2000 to 2013.²⁰ In contrast, at public universities nationwide, black enrollment rates actually increased 3.5 percent during that same timeframe.²¹

Moreover, Florida’s dramatic drop in black enrollment happened even as the African American share of the state’s population increased 7 percent from 2000 to 2013.²²

If African American enrollment decreased nationwide at the same rate as it did in Florida, 13.9 percent fewer black students would have been enrolled in public universities nationwide in 2013—a total of 85,726 fewer African American students. That is five times more than the number of black students enrolled in all California public universities combined.²³

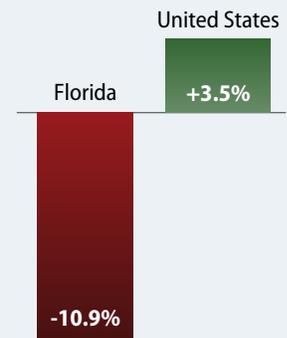
Conclusion

Former Gov. Bush has painted himself as a candidate who promises to give a wide array of Americans the chance to rise up the economic ladder. Yet his higher education policies in Florida kicked the ladder of economic opportunity out from under many in the state. Bush’s anti-affirmative action executive order resulted in fewer African Americans in Florida having access to college and, in turn, increased economic opportunity. If Bush’s record as governor is any indication of what his policies as president could be, it would mean opportunity for only a select few.

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FIGURE 1
African American enrollment at four-year, public universities in Florida and nationwide

Percent change between 2000 and 2013



Source: CAP Action analysis based on National Center for Education Statistics, “Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System,” available at <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/> (last accessed June 2015).

Endnotes

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- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Forbes Insights, "Global Diversity And Inclusion: Fostering Innovation Through a Diverse Workforce," available at http://images.forbes.com/forbesinsights/StudyPDFs/Innovation_Through_Diversity.pdf (last accessed July 2015).
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