

Uncovering Radical Efforts to Disguise DEI

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KEY TAKEAWAYS

Schools and other organizations are either attempting to hide their DEI operations or are disguising their DEI offices and positions.

The Administration is acting within its proper authority by requiring postsecondary institutions to comply with civil rights and other antidiscrimination laws.

Federal officials should be prepared to withhold funding from educational institutions at all levels when schools violate crucial civil rights protections.

Shortly after his second inauguration, President Donald Trump issued two executive orders condemning the racial discrimination caused by diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) offices and programs.¹ The first, Executive Order (EO) 14173, is directed at federal employment practices and prohibits federal government employees from conducting or engaging in DEI trainings and other DEI programs. The second, EO 14151, also calls for the eradication of DEI initiatives across the federal government and asks for investigations of private entities—including schools and businesses—that engage in DEI activities that demonstrate the use of racial preferences.

DEI initiatives that violate the U.S. Constitution and civil rights laws include professional development for staff that instructs employees to treat individuals differently according to race and employment practices that directly or indirectly tell employees to use

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racial preferences as a condition of hiring or performance evaluation. The orders correctly identify these and other DEI practices as violations of federal civil rights statutes.

EO 14173 also bars DEI conduct in institutions of higher education, which fall under the category of federal contractors and grantees.² The National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education and other higher education groups responded by filing suit in a Maryland District Court within days, arguing that the order violated the Constitution by threatening academic freedom.³ In addition, EO 14173:

- Calls for federal officials to take “all appropriate action” concerning the private sector and civil rights violations;⁴
- Calls for termination of “all discriminatory and illegal preferences, mandates, policies, programs, activities, guidance, regulations, enforcement actions, consent orders, and requirements” across the executive branch of the federal government;⁵
- Cites the federal authority of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and declares that DEI offices and activities “violate the text and spirit of our long-standing Federal civil-rights laws” through race-based and sex-based hiring and promotion policies in the workforce;⁶ and
- Revokes four executive orders and one presidential memorandum from former President Joe Biden’s Administration that promoted DEI throughout the federal workforce.⁷

The racist activities that result from DEI initiatives cannot be over-emphasized. DEI offices on college campuses advocated in favor of racial preferences in college admissions, a practice ruled unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court.⁸ State attorneys general have investigated private businesses for DEI-based hiring practices that appear to violate state and federal civil rights laws by employing racial hiring quotas.⁹ Public elementary and secondary school officials in districts with DEI offices have segregated students according to race for different programs, which also violates civil rights laws.¹⁰ College administrators have applied DEI practices by requiring job applicants to submit personal statements in favor of DEI when they apply for university positions.¹¹

This is why EO 14173, which includes schools and businesses, directs all executive agencies to “include in every contract or grant award” a

certification that a contractor or grantee “does not operate any programs promoting DEI that violate any applicable Federal anti-discrimination laws.”¹² It also directs the Attorney General of the United States to take “appropriate measures to encourage the private sector to end illegal discrimination and preferences, including DEI,”¹³ to propose “specific steps or measures to deter DEI programs or principles,”¹⁴ and to “identify...potential civil compliance investigations” to accomplish such deterrence.¹⁵ In addition, “the Attorney General and the Secretary of Education shall jointly issue guidance to all...institutions of higher education that receive Federal grants or participate in the Federal student loan assistance program under Title IV of the Higher Education Act.”¹⁶

Both orders identify the blatant hypocrisy that has become institutionalized, years after the passage of the Civil Rights Act, as “critical and influential institutions of American society, including...institutions of higher education have adopted and actively use[d] dangerous, demeaning, and immoral race- and sex-based preferences under the guise of so-called ‘diversity, equity, and inclusion’ (DEI)” to perpetuate a “pernicious identity-based spoils system” in America.¹⁷

On April 23, 2025, the President issued Executive Order 14279 citing higher education accreditation offices that condition their accreditation on schools’ enactment of DEI practices.¹⁸ Postsecondary institutions must receive accreditation to enroll students who acquire federal loans to pay tuition costs, and this gives these accrediting agencies significant sway over college and university policymaking. EO 14279 calls on the U.S. Secretary of Education to terminate the accrediting contracts if necessary. The same day, Secretary Linda McMahon issued a statement saying that, “[i]nstead of pushing schools to adopt a divisive DEI ideology, accreditors should be focused on helping schools improve graduation rates and graduates’ performance in the labor market.”¹⁹

Appropriately, some businesses and colleges have closed DEI offices and no longer maintain DEI positions. University of Michigan officials, for example, closed the school’s DEI office in March 2025.²⁰ In early 2025, representatives at IBM and UnitedHealth Group, among other companies, removed their web pages dedicated to DEI and stated their withdrawal from DEI practices.²¹ Many high-profile corporations such as Walmart, Microsoft, and Molson Coors had already disbanded DEI practices in recent years after public pressure to abandon racist operations.²²

Harvard University has drawn a lot of attention from the Trump Administration, law enforcement, and the media for its opposition to White House directives against DEI. Because school officials are refusing to effect

substantive change in their DEI policies, Harvard is facing a panoply of legal consequences.²³ Other schools and organizations are either attempting to hide their DEI operations or disguising DEI offices and positions and continuing to violate state and federal civil rights laws. Policymakers should not be surprised by these actions, because organizations have tried to skirt civil rights protections before. For example, after California voters prohibited racial preferences in public services by adopting Proposition 209,²⁴ researchers found that administrators in the University of California system continued to use racial preferences in student recruitment and in scholarship awards.²⁵

Maintaining/Disguising DEI Offices in K-12 and Postsecondary Education

Some school districts and postsecondary institutions are continuing their DEI activities by hiding their efforts or refusing to change school policies. In a review of 262 colleges and universities in 2025, Defending Education found that 245 of these institutions still maintained DEI offices and programming.²⁶ In other research conducted by The College Fix, reporters reviewed 165 postsecondary institutions and found that 85 universities had simply renamed their DEI offices without removing positions or changing the functions of these offices.²⁷

Heritage Foundation research has uncovered examples at both the K-12 and postsecondary levels.

- In Maryland, Montgomery County Public School officials maintain a Department of Systemwide Equity. This department argues that student success is “predictable” according to race, and declares in its mission statement that it will “advance racial justice and cultural proficiency” by “interrupting systems of bias (implicit and explicit), oppression, and inequity in our policies” that “disproportionately impact the academic and social emotional success of students of color.”²⁸

The department also falsely contends that racism is institutionalized in the American government and that, to remove it, educators must “demonstrate culturally proficient policies, practices and behaviors.”²⁹ “Culturally proficient policies” are policies that treat individuals differently based on race or ethnicity. For example, educators who advocate in favor of DEI consider mathematics to be “culturally relevant” if the

skills are taught along with claims that capitalism is a product of white supremacy.³⁰ California educators designed the state's math standards according to this philosophy; an entire chapter in the state's model standards is entitled "Equity and Engagement."³¹

The executive director of the Montgomery County Public Schools Office of Strategic Initiatives created an online presentation entitled "How to Talk About Race" that posits alleged structural racism in the U.S. The presentation says that health care systems in our country are designed to underserve ethnic minorities and that the allegedly "disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on Latinos, Blacks, and Native Americans is due to the collective racist policies in healthcare, housing, and economic systems."³² The pandemic had tragic consequences for communities around the world, but no evidence exists to demonstrate that "collective racist policies" exacerbated the virus's effects on individuals or communities.

By considering a policy issue unrelated to race as an issue dominated by racial factors, Montgomery County school officials are adhering to the racially discriminatory beliefs in critical race theory and DEI. The Montgomery County Public Schools office still maintains an "Equity Resources Padlet" website that contains self-paced online courses on "How to Be an Antiracist and Antiracist Educator" and "Planning and Leading Culturally Responsive Meetings," as well as a "Culturally Responsive Family Engagement Planning Tool."³³

- The administration of Virginia's George Mason University is also engaging in dissimulation. On February 20, 2025, President Gregory Washington hosted a town hall and told students that there would be no significant changes in DEI operations at the school. Washington said there were "comprehensive plans to manage all of and retain the core aspects of what to do in the DEI space. It doesn't mean that you won't see things look a little different. You may see programs change and titles change, but the core aspects will remain." Washington also appeared to cast President Trump's anti-DEI initiatives as an effort to keep people of certain races out of universities, which is the opposite of what the orders will do by prohibiting DEI. Washington told students to "understand that, for lack of a better way of saying this, we are in an ideological battle. There are real forces that don't want certain people here."³⁴

In an email to university stakeholders on February 28, 2025, Washington again said that whatever changes the university was introducing in the field of DEI were merely cosmetic and would fall short of ceasing and desisting. However, in response to a “Dear Colleague” letter that the Education Department sent to universities on February 14 demanding an end to “race-based decision making,” he indicated that the school already follows the new directives. The letter demanded that race-based practices cease and called for the end of all efforts to circumvent the new policies. Universities in noncompliance risk losing federal taxpayer funding. Washington’s email claimed compliance and cited as an example the renaming of the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, which he said had been “updated to the Office of Access, Compliance, and Community.” He argued that this change was not superficial but represented a significant policy redirection: “This is a more intuitively accurate reflection of its charter. This is not an attempt to evade compliance through clever wordsmithing—it affirms our actual compliance through more precise naming,”³⁵

On April 17, George Mason’s Board of Visitors debated a resolution on compliance with President Trump’s mandates to end DEI programs. The Faculty Senate and the student body president voiced strong objections. Student Body President Maria Alejandra Romero Cuesta said that “we strongly urge [you] to reject the resolution to dismantle the programs that promote access, diversity, equity, and inclusion.... [The] misconception that this board has on DEI directly harms students and cannot continue.”³⁶ Faculty Senate President Solon Simmons claimed that “ninety percent of our colleagues don’t want you to pass” the resolution requiring compliance with President Trump’s orders. On March 20, Cuesta joined fellow student body presidents from Virginia Commonwealth University, Virginia State University, Norfolk State University, and Longwood University in releasing a statement calling on state legislators to “challenge any federal enforcement of the ‘Dear Colleague’ letter.”³⁷

On May 1, Sharnia Artis, Vice President for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion and Chief Diversity Officer at George Mason, updated the board on the changes in and reforms of the university’s DEI programs and policies. During her presentation, she said that the changes had been approved by the Office of University Counsel, which in fact was not the case.³⁸

On July 1, 2025, the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights opened an investigation into a complaint filed against George Mason and, less than two months later, announced the university violated Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Acting Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights Craig Trainor said, "In 2020, University President Gregory Washington called for expunging the so-called 'racist vestiges' from GMU's campus. Without a hint of self awareness, President Washington then waged a university-wide campaign to implement unlawful DEI policies that intentionally discriminate on the basis of race."³⁹

- At Harvard University, whistleblower Omar Sultan Haque accuses his university of continuing race-based policies in admissions and faculty promotion and hiring, despite the U.S. Supreme Court's *Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard* decision⁴⁰ and President Trump's new mandates. Haque, who spent 23 years at Harvard as a graduate student, as a postdoctoral fellow, and finally as a member of the faculty, stopped teaching last year and since then has been exposing the racial preferences driving his former employer's policies. "The university may have changed the official name of its DEI office to use more nebulous euphemisms, but DEI and 'Diet DEI' (a diluted form) have the same effects in practices, norms, and the larger culture of orthodoxy and taboo," Haque told the Manhattan Institute's *City Journal*. "Diet DEI is just more dishonest."⁴¹
- In April 2025, U.S. Department of Education officials sent a letter to state education agencies requesting that policymakers certify that K-12 schools are in compliance with the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard*.⁴² The letter states that both federal civil rights law and the Court's decision prohibit denying opportunities to students or treating students differently because of their race and that school personnel must sign a statement affirming that schools operate within the law. Federal officials told state policymakers that state personnel must complete the certification form by April 25. Education administrators in fewer than half of all U.S. states stated their intent to comply just days before the deadline.⁴³

Notably, some of the largest districts in the U.S. are in states where policymakers refused to certify that their schools complied with civil

rights laws. For example, Chicago Public Schools (CPS) still employs a Chief of Equity, Engagement and Strategy,⁴⁴ and the CPS Office of Equity still posts equity-related resources, including instructional materials, on the CPS website, including a statement declaring that “[t]o achieve equity in our district, we must take a targeted approach to eliminating racialized outcomes caused by structural racism.”⁴⁵ Similarly, the Madison, Wisconsin, Metropolitan School District employs an entire Department of Engagement, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion;⁴⁶ the Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Public School District still maintains an Office of Equity, as well as a group of Student Equity Advocates and an Equity Advisory Panel;⁴⁷ and the Los Angeles Unified School District operates an Office of Human Relations, Diversity and Equity.⁴⁸

- California Institute of Technology (CalTech) officials announced the “promotion” of CalTech’s “assistant vice president for diversity, equity, inclusion, and assessment” to “associate vice president for campus climate, engagement, and success.”⁴⁹ CalTech continues to maintain a Center for Inclusion and Diversity.⁵⁰ Investigative reporting from *The Washington Free Beacon* notes that CalTech operates NASA’s Jet Propulsion Laboratory and that officials at this lab eliminated 900 jobs “due to budget cuts” but initially kept the lab’s “chief inclusion officer, Neela Rajendra,” and changed her title to “Chief of the Office of Team Excellence and Employee Success.”⁵¹ After President Trump issued his executive order removing DEI positions from government agencies, officials eliminated the position. In addition, the University of California, Berkeley still operates a Division of Equity and Inclusion that works “with and for students, staff, and faculty to integrate equity, inclusion, diversity, belonging, and justice into all aspects of campus life.”⁵²
- Janique Sanders, Assistant Director of Leadership and Community Engagement at the University of North Carolina Charlotte, revealed to an undercover reporter that administrators were still engaging in DEI activities. “We’ve renamed, we’ve reorganized, we’ve recalibrated, so to speak,” Sanders told an undercover reporter for Accuracy in Media.⁵³

Sanders, unaware that she was being taped by hidden camera, made clear that she and others conducting the hidden DEI work would not say the letters “DEI” openly. She said, “If you’re looking for an outward

DEI position, that's not going to happen. But if you're interested in doing work that is covert, there are opportunities."⁵⁴ The University of North Carolina's Board of Governors banned DEI offices and programs systemwide one year before President Trump's executive order.⁵⁵ On June 4, one week after Sanders' comments were made public, a university spokeswoman told the *The College Fix* that Sanders no longer worked at the university.⁵⁶

- Princeton has added a new "Diversity and Non-Discrimination" statement to its website⁵⁷ and says that, despite long-standing civil rights laws, "diversity and inclusion are core values of the University."⁵⁸ Princeton officials have developed a record of supporting DEI and racial preferences. In 2020, President Christopher L. Eisgruber, contending that "racist assumptions from the past also remain embedded in the structures of the University itself," pledged to combat this supposed racism with more racial preferences, proposing to hire more faculty based on race, create a new faculty advisory committee on diversity, establish race-based contracts with companies that perform services for the school, and more.⁵⁹

Eisgruber's letter prompted the first Trump Administration to open a federal investigation into racism at Princeton.⁶⁰ Eisgruber denied that racism was a problem at the school, contradicting his earlier correspondence,⁶¹ and President Joe Biden's Administration dropped the investigation.⁶²

- Northeastern University officials have changed the name of the university's Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion to Belonging at Northeastern.⁶³ Its website says the office seeks to "harness the power" of diversity and promotes "affinity groups,"⁶⁴ which are racially segregated groups.
- Following the promulgation of President Trump's executive order, University of Colorado Boulder administrators removed the word "diversity" from their Critical Needs Hiring Program but maintained one of their key missions: to "attract and retain a more diverse faculty and staff."⁶⁵ Despite the Supreme Court's 2023 *Students for Fair Admissions* decision and Trump's 2025 executive orders, the office website includes a 2023 DEI statement that "the university must focus on underrepresented populations and those who have faced barriers to access, inclusion and opportunity."⁶⁶

- Clemson’s Division of Community, Engagement, Belonging and Access is carrying out the functions of a DEI office. Clemson is one of 45 schools that the U.S. Department of Education is investigating for violating the Trump executive orders. School officials, using one of the key words in DEI, say they want to “[provide] an inclusive and supportive environment.”⁶⁷ The school also operates several student commissions that include (among others) an Asian Pacific Islander Desi American Commission, a Commission on the Black Experience, a Commission on Latino Affairs, a Lavender Commission for LGBTQIA+ people, and a Commission on Women.⁶⁸ While not officially labeled “DEI,” such groups continue the identity politics–related activities carried out by DEI staff.

Policy Recommendations

State and federal lawmakers can enforce civil rights laws and protect individuals and communities from the segregation and discrimination that comes from racial preferences. For their part, federal lawmakers should:

- **Withhold federal taxpayer funds from universities that violate the Civil Rights Act of 1964.** The U.S. Department of Justice should investigate universities where officials maintain DEI offices or use racial preferences in enrollment decisions, employment, and scholarship awards.
- **End federal taxpayer funding of K–12 education from states that refuse to sign statements affirming that officials will follow federal civil rights laws.** The U.S. Department of Education sent a letter to state education personnel in all 50 states and the District of Columbia requiring affirmation that state institutions would adhere to civil rights law. Policymakers in some states, such as Illinois, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin, have refused to comply.⁶⁹

Conclusion

President Trump’s Administration is reinforcing its commitment to civil rights by requiring public school officials to certify compliance with federal statutes. Moreover, the Administration is acting within its proper authority when it requires postsecondary institutions to comply with civil rights and other antidiscrimination laws. Federal officials should be prepared to

withhold federal taxpayer spending from educational institutions at all levels when schools violate crucial civil rights protections.

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