

# Prioritizing DEI in Ohio Public Schools

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## Overview

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Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) is a term encompassing a broad range of initiatives designed to ["promote the fair treatment and full participation of all people, especially in the workplace, including populations who have historically been underrepresented or subject to discrimination because of their background, identity, disability, etc."](#) While DEI is a conceptual framework, the term may include various programs and policies addressing historic disparities and inequities among differing socioeconomic statuses, races, genders, religions, and abilities.

DEI initiatives in school settings have been proven to [improve cognitive skills, increase civic engagement, and foster mutual respect among diverse cultures](#). Unfortunately, the Ohio General Assembly has chosen to ignore these benefits and put forth House Bill 155 (HB 155) and Senate Bill 113 (SB 113), both of which would prohibit all forms of DEI in Ohio's public schools. This raises the questions: are DEI programs an effective way to educate the next generation, and if so, what harm(s) will result from attempts to ban them?

In this brief, we examine the most recent studies concerning the benefits of diversity initiatives in public education spaces and answer those questions, outlining the negative impact that would result from ending DEI in Ohio's public schools.

## What is HB 155?

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Sponsored by State Representatives [Beth Lear \(R-61\)](#) and [Josh Williams \(R-44\)](#), [HB 155](#) seeks to prohibit all forms of diversity, equity, and inclusion in Ohio's public schools. The ban would include training sessions, orientations, and courses that promote diversity, as well as the continuation of DEI offices. The bill, which is currently in the House Education Committee, further prohibits replacement of these programs with anything that "serves a similar purpose."

## What is SB 113?

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Primarily sponsored by State Senator [Andrew O' Brenner \(R-19\)](#), [SB 113](#) also seeks to prohibit all forms of diversity, equity, and inclusion in Ohio's public schools, including training and orientation courses and diversity offices. The bill is currently in the Senate Education Committee.

## What are the benefits of DEI in schools?

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DEI programs have been shown to consistently benefit the educational attainment of young people in K-12 settings and colleges and universities by [contributing](#) to behavior improvements and increased in-class engagement. Additionally, for marginalized youth—who are more likely to experience ethnic and socioeconomic-related [bullying](#) in schools—DEI programs such as cultural awareness workshops and curriculum-based interventions can invoke a sense of belonging. Likewise, DEI can combat bias and stigma among groups of the majority, foster empathy and understanding, and strengthen intercultural relationships.

## What would banning DEI in Ohio public schools mean?

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As used in HB 155 and SB 113, the term DEI is overgeneralized and fails to outline specific practices which would be prohibited. This could result in administrative confusion for staff and ending programs that provide proven benefits for student interaction and success. Programs like cultural exchange events and socioeconomic diversity initiatives—which aim to address barriers to higher education for students from low-income families—would be at risk. In Ohio, where 28 percent of [public-school attendees](#) are students of color and 60 percent are from families with low incomes, ending these initiatives is likely to present significant social and psychological ramifications, such as increased mental distress among marginalized groups.

Moreover, a ban on diversity initiatives would likely undermine multiple aspects of student development and well-being. Many student-led DEI programs—such as peer support groups and cultural identity organizations—are informal and entirely voluntary, allowing students to engage based on their interests and values. Eliminating these programs not only removes opportunities for meaningful exploration and dialogue but also strips students of the agency to shape their perspectives—an [essential component](#) of a well-rounded public education.

Further, prohibiting formal DEI initiatives—such as those mandated for school personnel—may have detrimental effects on students, as [substantial research](#) highlights the prevalence of both conscious and unconscious biases among educators. These biases disproportionately affect Black and low-income students, often resulting in disparate treatment compared to their White counterparts—an inequity that DEI efforts are specifically designed to address. Banning DEI also fails to aid students' sociological understanding of their backgrounds and experiences—a practice

shown to improve [intellectual performance](#) and learning outcomes, potentially elevating the academic rankings of school districts.

DEI bans, however, do not just negatively impact racial and socioeconomic minorities; they pose adverse consequences for White and more affluent students, who equally benefit from the continuation of these programs. DEI has been shown to have positive effects on student learning environments. Notably, a large proportion of most racial groups, including [70 percent of White students](#), have received higher education funding from programs associated with DEI. Most diversity program funding at universities is designated for first-generation students, [46 percent](#) of whom are White. As such, DEI bans significantly threaten economic mobility and higher education access for young White people as well. Research has also found that diversity initiatives benefit White communities by [eliminating](#) subconscious racial bias and fallacies and increasing [cultural empathy](#).

## Conclusion

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HB 155 and any legislation banning diversity, equity, and inclusion programs overlook the benefits of these initiatives as proven public-school interventions. Successful DEI initiatives help improve critical thinking, advance academic achievement across racial and ethnic identities, and improve community interactions. Banning DEI in public schools would pose serious social and cultural risks for Ohio's public education system and would inevitably cause systemic harm to various student groups. **Therefore, the 136<sup>th</sup> Ohio General Assembly should avoid the adoption of HB 155 and SB 113.**

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