



# SHEEO

STATE HIGHER EDUCATION EXECUTIVE OFFICERS ASSOCIATION

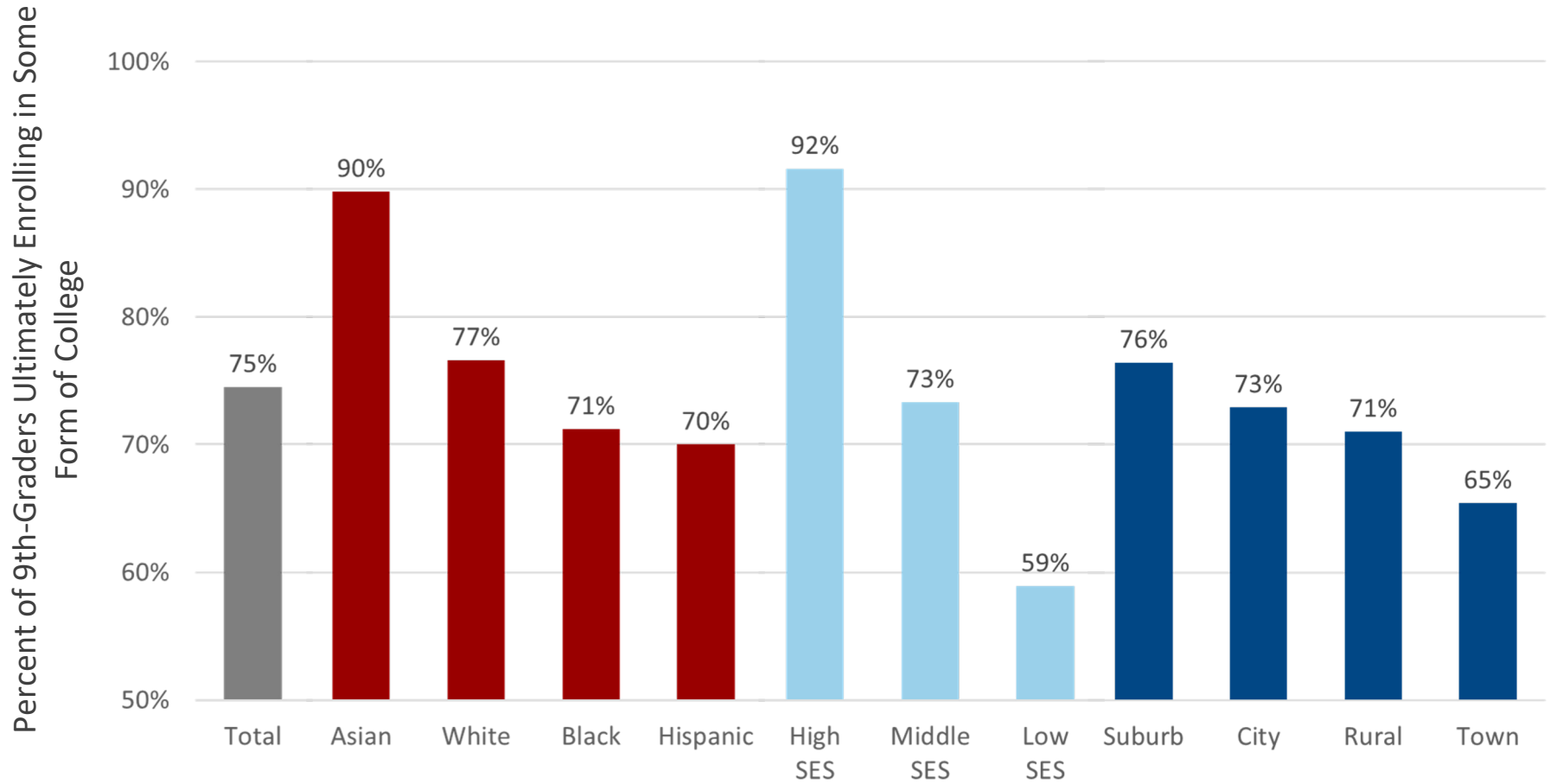
## Direct Admissions: Policies and Practices to Improve Access

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Sara Scuder (Idaho)  
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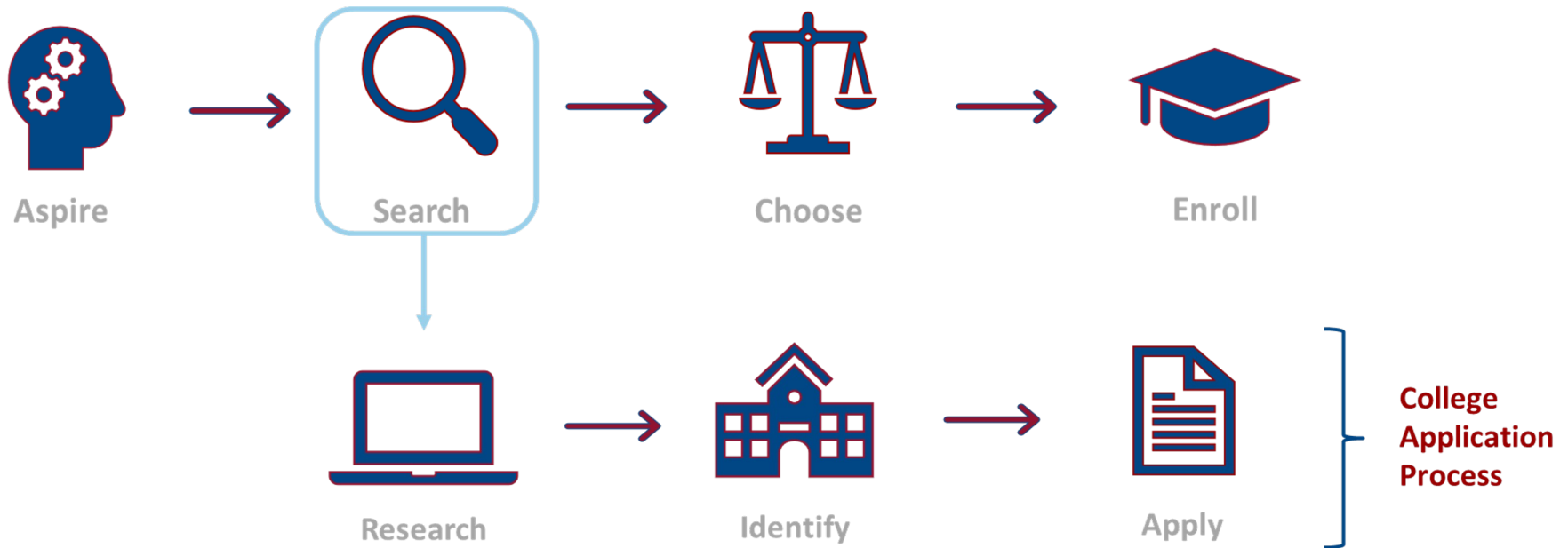
*We gratefully thank the Joyce Foundation for support of the SHEEO Direct Admissions and Common Application Community of Practice.*

# We have not solved the college access problem.



U.S. Department of Education, High School Longitudinal Study.

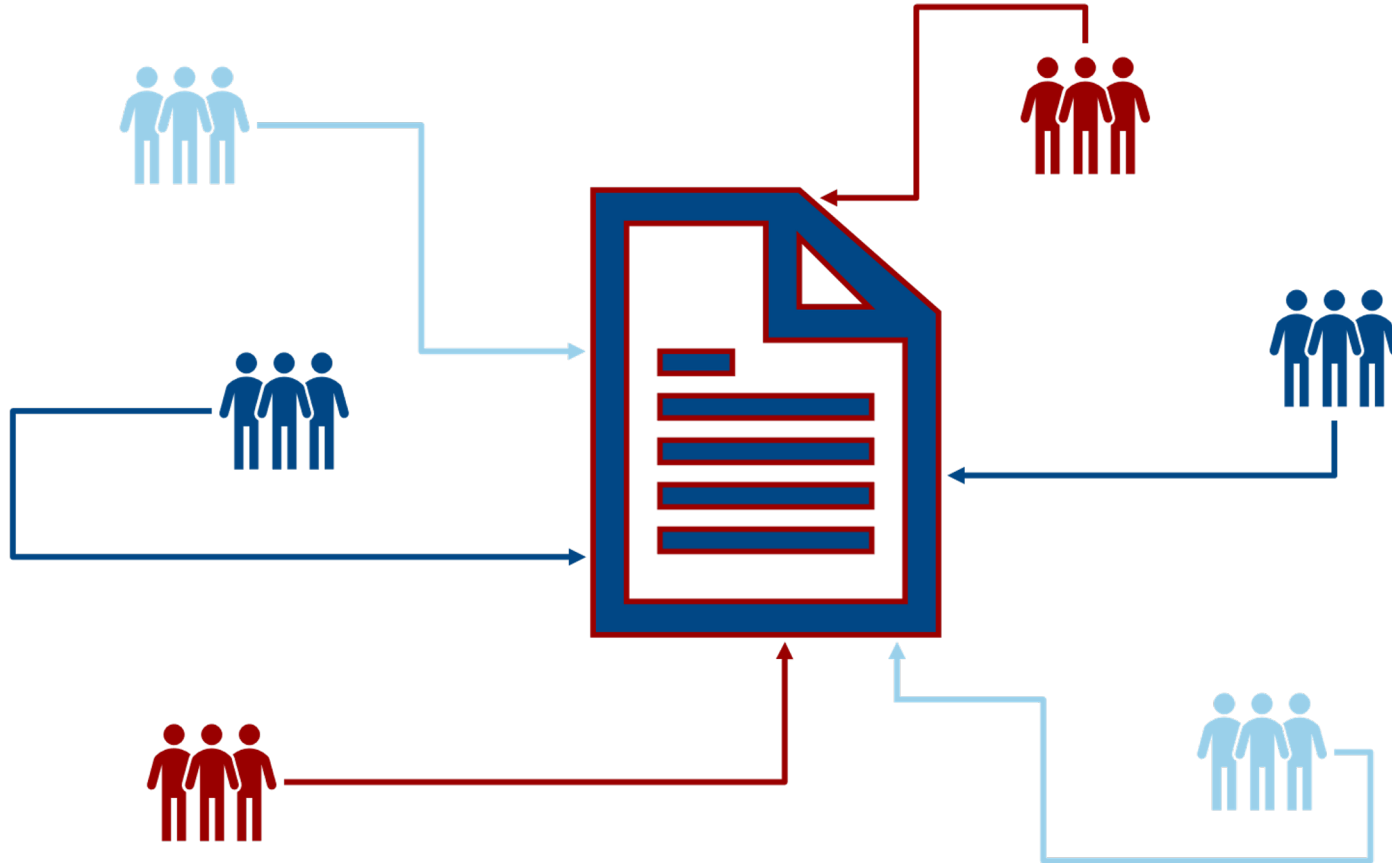
# Why? Getting to college is complex. We don't make it easy.





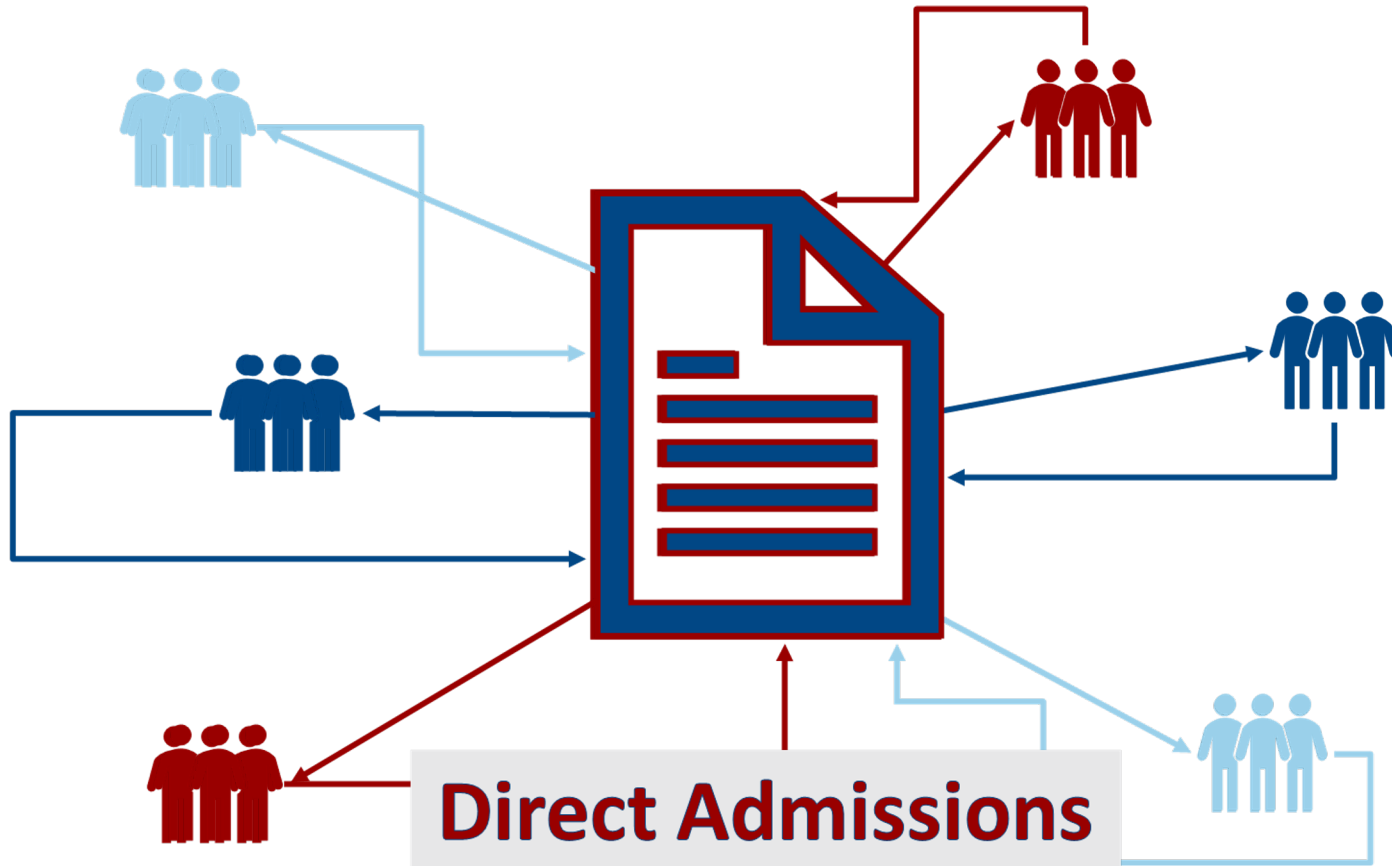


# Simplifying college admissions.



**Everyone follows a different path.**

## Send college to the student.



“Build it and they will come” is not an option.



Inside Higher Ed

<https://www.insidehighered.com> > article > 2

## Direct admissions continues to

Jan 29, 2023 — In direct admissions, students  
makes

### Automatic college admissions boon to students and



Stephanie Hughes

Aug 15,

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FORBES > LEADERSHIP > EDUCATION

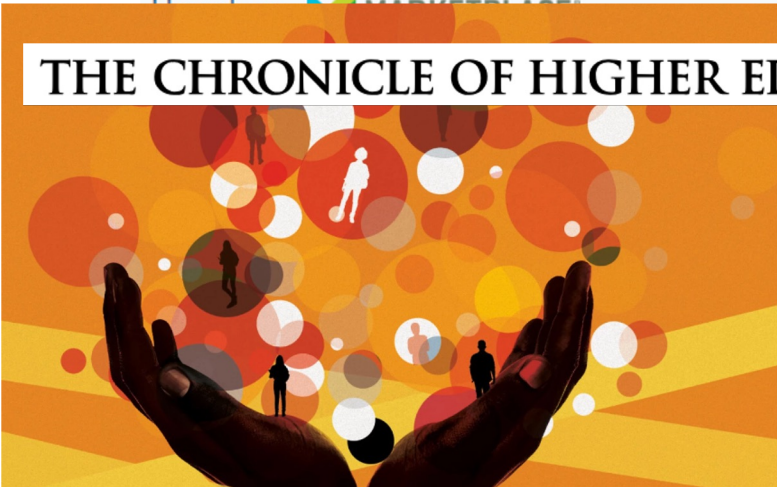
# Direct Admissions: How Students Can Be Accepted To College Without Ever Applying

Michael T. Nietzel Senior Contributor @

*I am a former university president who writes about  
higher education.*

Follow

THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION



**Congrats! You Didn't  
Apply, but We Admitted  
You Anyway.**

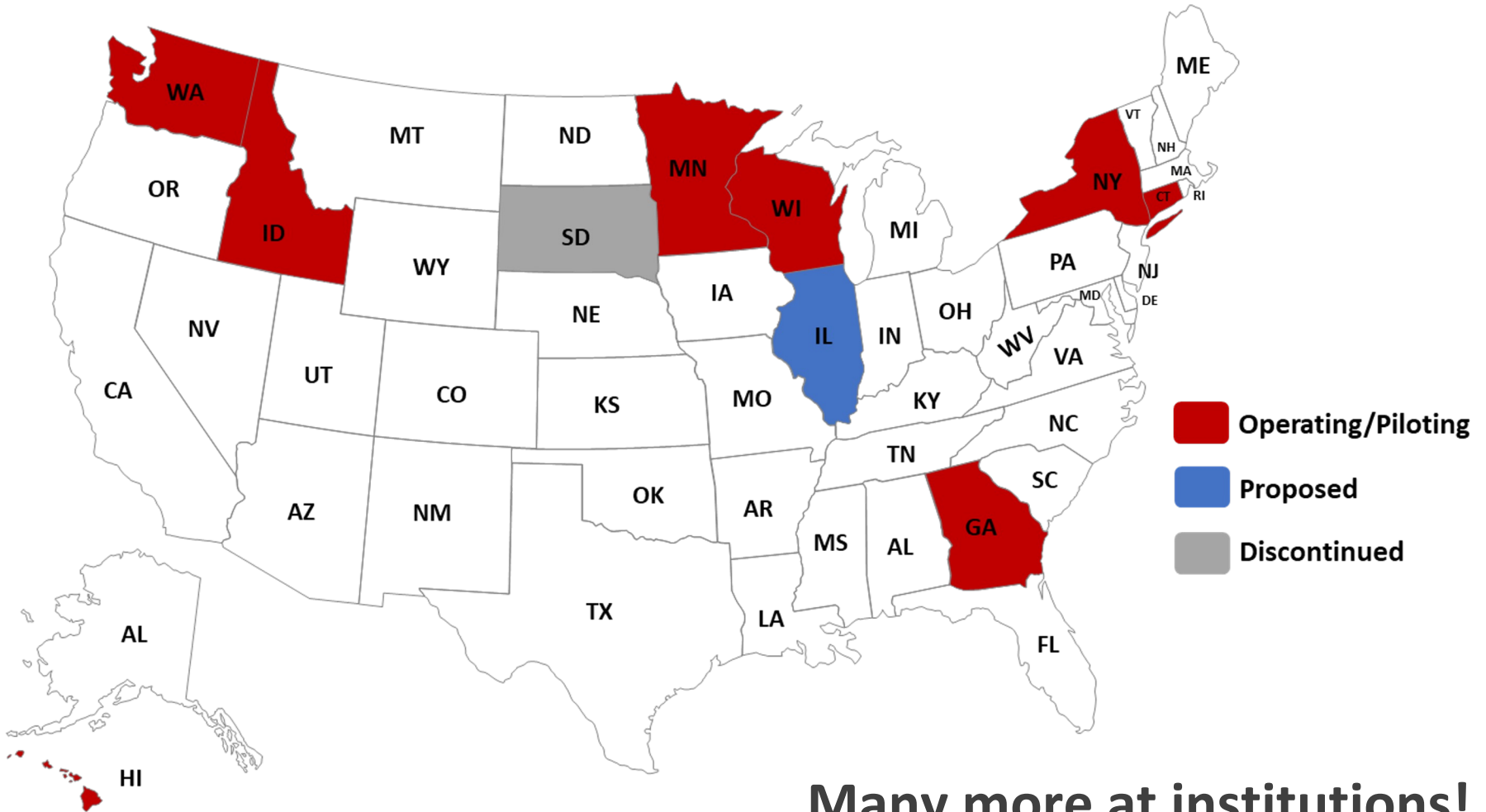
**New experiments are short-circuiting the  
admissions process. Here's why they  
matter.**

school  
g benefits

# Direct Admissions

- Direct admissions policies eliminate traditional college applications, where students are instead **proactively** admitted to college.
- Leverage **existing** state or system datasets (e.g., SLDS), which connect K-12 students to postsecondary institutions.
- Students may be (i) universally admitted or (ii) assigned via thresholds around high school academic performance (e.g., GPA, ACT/SAT, Smarter Balanced, credits).
  - Students and responsible adults are **informed** of admissions decisions.
  - Admission offer and criterion are transparent.
- Once admitted, students need only **“claim their place”** (simple, fee-free application) and follow enrollment steps.
- All students can still apply to any college. Enrollment is not binding.
- Admission and financial aid functions are still critical in supporting **yield**.

# State or System Direct Admissions Programs



Many more at institutions!

## What do we know?

### ***Direct admissions increases college applications.***

- *Experimental* work with the Common App shows direct admissions increased the likelihood of (1) applying to college and (2) applying to more colleges.
- Impacts were highest among Black, Latinx, and first-gen students.
- Idaho reported an 88% increase in applications following direct admissions.

### ***Direct admissions increases college enrollments.***

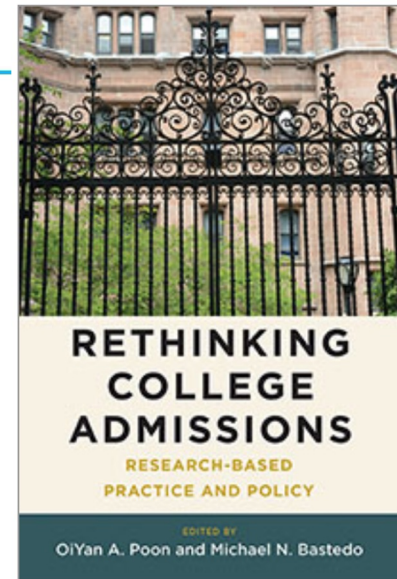
- Idaho experienced a 3.1% increase in FTE within one year.
- Direct admissions *caused* a 4-8% increase in FT UG enrollment per campus.
- Enrollments were driven by more in-state students attending.
- Most enrollment gains were at open-access, 2-year institutions.

### ***More evidence coming soon (HI, MN, Common App)!***

# Follow the Instructions Ask Questions/Learn with Us

## *Principles of Direct Admissions*

- **Proactive**: Preemptive information to students
- **Guaranteed**: College admission is “a sure thing”
- **Universal**: Postsecondary options are available for all students
- **Transparent**: Admission criteria are plain and clearly known
- **Simple and personalized**: Send straightforward, individualized information
- **Low-cost**: Repurpose existing data for bigger impacts
- **Trusted Adults**: Involve parents and high schools in the process



## *SHEEO Community of Practice*





# Direct Admissions Minnesota



## Minnesota's Direct Admissions Overview

- Agency goal: help close the degree attainment gap between white students and students from historically excluded populations
- Project goals:
  - increase the number of Minnesota high school graduates that enroll in college in the fall immediately after high school graduation
  - reduce anxiety around the “will I get in?” question and help ensure that all high school graduates think of themselves as “college material”
  - increase FAFSA completion
  - unofficial goal: increase number of students staying in Minnesota for college
- Decentralized model:
  - multiple K-12 student information system vendors; Department of Education doesn't collect information needed to do academic review of high school students (transcripts)
  - multiple college/university systems (Minnesota State, University of Minnesota, MPCC schools, tribal colleges)
  - Need to build web portal for program management to facilitate data exchange between high schools, OHE, and colleges. Created by state IT agency

# Minnesota's Timeline

- Pilot approved and funded by state Legislature in 2021
  - budget of \$1 million dollars
- Pilot year 2022-2023:
  - 51 participating colleges/universities
  - 40 high schools/7000 students
  - Phase 1:
    - Convening working groups: Cross-functional overview group, K-12 stakeholders, higher education working group
    - Call for participation: emails, webinars, individual information sessions
    - Internal work: reaching out to technology vendors, determining program champions, budget planning, timeline creation
  - Phase 2:
    - Confirming participating schools and confirm free applications for participating colleges/universities
    - Setting tiers
    - Contracts, data sharing agreements, prepping high schools for transcript reviews
  - Phase 3:
    - Communications work: creation of documents, translations, vetting with stakeholders, student/parent focus groups
    - High school prep for communications release
  - Phase 4: Letters out! (Eventually...)
  - Phase 5: Data exchanges from OHE to colleges/universities
  - Phase 6: College/university follow up to students
- Legislative approval in 2023 to continue the program with largely bi-partisan support

# Academic Tiers

Academic Tier	Unweighted GPA (4.0 scale)	Qualifier	Course Grades in 10th and 11th Grade in Math, English, and Science	Estimated Percent of MN 12th graders (2022 N=74,250 students)	Colleges* accepting Direct Admissions	Total Colleges appearing on the Student's Notification
<b>1</b>	Less than 2.50	n/a	n/a	30%	25 Community & Technical Colleges; 3 tribal colleges	28
<b>2</b>	2.50-2.74	n/a	n/a	8%	3 colleges	31
<b>3</b>	2.75-2.99	n/a	n/a	4%	3 colleges	34
<b>4</b>	2.75-2.99	AND	C average or higher in all 3 course areas	4%	4 colleges	38
<b>5</b>	3.00+	n/a	n/a	26%	10 colleges	48
<b>6</b>	3.50+	AND	C average or higher in all 3 course areas	27%	3 colleges	51
<b>Total</b>	all	n/a	n/a	100%	51 colleges	

# Communications

## Direct Admissions

**mi OFFICE OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

### Direct Admissions Frequently Asked Questions for College Partners

- #### 1. What is Direct Admissions?

The Minnesota Office of Higher Education's Direct Admissions pilot is designed to encourage all high school seniors to view themselves as "college ready" and to help alleviate some of the anxiety around the college search process by proactively informing students of colleges who are committed to admitting them, if the student opts to participate. Students receive a communication (see FAQ #2) indicating they have met the criteria for admissions to participating Minnesota colleges and universities and outlines the steps required for students to indicate schools that they would like to get more information about and to share their contact information with. Students are encouraged to apply to their top choice institutions using the standard admissions application.

There are over 50 Minnesota colleges and universities and 40 high schools (representing about 7,000 seniors) in the pilot program for 2022-2023.
- #### 2. How do students hear about Direct Admissions?

Students will receive a communication from the Office of Higher Education, co-signed by their high school, in early October that notifies them that they have Direct Admissions options. They will also receive a FAQ guide to their paper letter.

**Materials include: student letter, student/parent FAQ guide, HS poster, fact sheet. FAQ/fact sheet translated into Spanish, Oromo, Somali, Hmong, and Vietnamese**

## Direct Admissions Materials

**mi OFFICE OF HIGHER EDUCATION** Your Future. Our Mission.

### Direct Admissions Minnesota

*Your higher education journey starts with direct admission.*

The Direct Admissions pilot program is designed to make sure all high school students know that they have college options. Through Direct Admissions, students don't have to ask themselves that "will I get in?" question because everyone will get a personalized list of colleges and universities that are committed to admitting them.

This fall, you will receive communication indicating which participating colleges are ready to admit you based on their admissions criteria and your academic performance. This communication will outline your next steps so you can get more information and secure your spot.

#### Direct Admissions

**mi OFFICE OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

You are college ready. You have options.

*Your higher education journey starts with direct admission*

**Watch for your Direct Admissions communication**  
You're In! In October, seniors will receive a personalized list of all the participating colleges and universities they are proactively invited to.

**Find your best fit - and get ready to apply!**  
Explore Your Options! Complete applications for all the schools you are considering. Remember - your applications will be FREE!



#### Direct Admissions AT A GLANCE

"Direct Admissions" means a student has gained conditional or guaranteed admission to a college or university, depending on the institution.

Students must complete the college's application (fees waived) and submit additional information to officially confirm their admission to the colleges of their choice.

During the 2022-23 Direct Admissions pilot program, there are:

- 40 participating high schools
- 7,000+ participating seniors
- 50+ colleges from technical, tribal, and community colleges to public and private universities, there are great schools from all over Minnesota participating in the Direct Admissions program.



## What Went Well

- Hit diversity targets organically in year one (47% BIPOC students, 29% FRL eligible, 44 counties represented)
- Strong working groups for both k-12 and higher education partners
- Student/parent focus groups for communications
- No budget concerns in year one
  - biggest expenses: K-12 staff time, modifications to K-12 info systems (Infinite Campus), OHE IT modifications
  - But: we didn't charge the project for OHE staff time and that would have been significant
- Positive coverage, great student stories, FOMO from non-participating schools

## Challenges

- Staffing in year one: this was an “add on” for Director of Research and Asst. Commissioner
- Decentralized model= so many contracts
- Some k-12 student info vendors weren’t interested in engaging
- Protecting against project focus creep
- Unexpected questions (P/F grades, competency based learning, etc), delayed timelines, and concerns around “senior slump”
- Some pilot high schools dropped out, some took a long time to get letters out
- Student engagement with colleges after Direct Admissions



## What's Next for Minnesota

- Projecting 120-130 high schools in year two
- Increasing to 55 colleges and universities
- Goal to scale to all 800+ high schools in the next five years
- Hiring a full-time Direct Admissions coordinator
- Adjusting budgets to account for more high schools
- Pushing for an earlier letter timeline
- Assessing year one outcomes and reporting to Legislature

# The College Invite

Direct Admissions

# Direct Admissions Goals

- Promote** → College-going culture
- Connect** → With Idaho students earlier
- Remove** → Barriers from school-to college opportunity landscape
- Expand** → Definition of success through learning

# Direct Admissions Model

## Centralized

### ➔ Program Administration

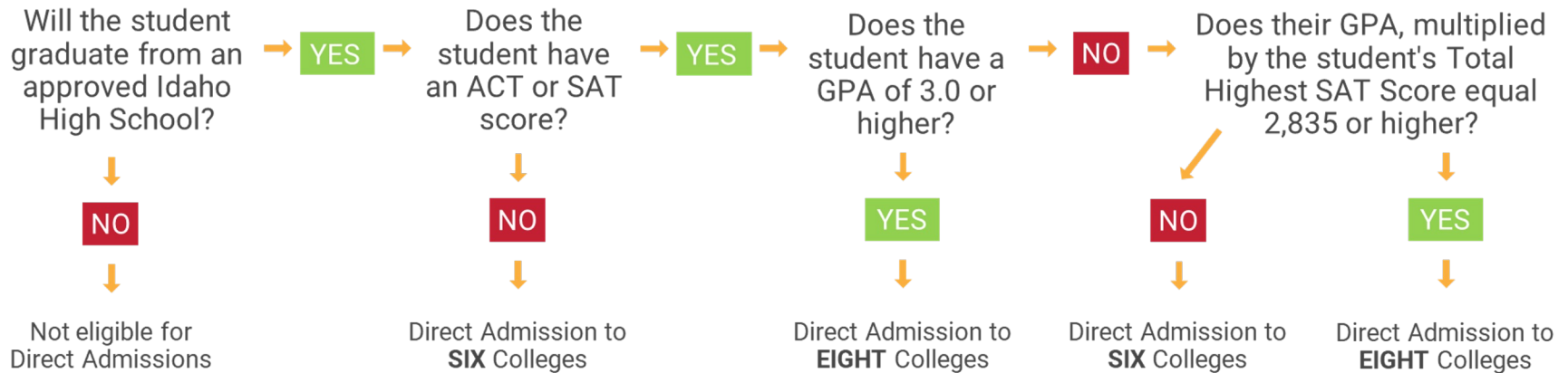
- Policy
  - [III.Q Admissions Standards](#)
- Communication
- Collateral
- Training
- Data
  - Source: Idaho ISEE system (K-12 SLDS) / individual district files

### ➔ Statewide Common Application

# Direct Admissions **Timeline**

- January - March** ➔ Establish annual Cut Score
- June** ➔ Finalize Postcard & Letter Language
- June** ➔ Update Direct Admissions Resource Page
- March – July\*** ➔ Gather Mailing Addresses
- August** ➔ Assign students to letter group
- First Week of Sept** ➔ Mail Postcards
- Third Week of Sept** ➔ Mail Letters & Letters available in Apply Idaho

# Benchmark Pre-Covid



GPA's are obtained from School District ISEE uploads  
(as of mid-July prior to senior year)

**Unweighted** – Required by institutions for scholarship determination  
**Weighted** – May be ↑ or ↓ than Unweighted on a high school transcript  
**Calculated** – Based on records available for a student via ISEE



# Benchmark Post-Covid

Will the student graduate from an approved Idaho High School?

YES

Does the student have a GPA above \_\_\_\_?

NO

Not eligible for Direct Admissions

NO

2020: GPA < 2.8  
2021: GPA < 2.6  
2022: GPA < 2.6  
2023: GPA < 2.6

Direct Admission to SIX Colleges

YES

2020: GPA ≥ 2.8  
2021: GPA ≥ 2.6  
2022: GPA ≥ 2.6  
2023: GPA ≥ 2.6

Direct Admission to EIGHT Colleges

GPA's are obtained from School District ISEE uploads (as of mid-July prior to senior year)

**Unweighted** – Required by institutions for scholarship determination  
**Weighted** – May be ↑ or ↓ than Unweighted on a high school transcript  
**Calculated** – Based on records available for a student via ISEE





# Historical Perspective

Academic Year	Admitted to EIGHT (8)	Admitted to SIX (6)	Total Admitted	% Admitted to 8	Benchmark for Admittance to 8	Test Requirement
2015-16	10,496	10,078	20,574	51.0%	(GPA $\geq$ 3.0 or SAT*GPA $\geq$ 2835)	NONE
2016-17	11,919	9,628	21,547	55.3%	(GPA $\geq$ 3.0 or SAT*GPA $\geq$ 2835)	NONE
2017-18	11,677	11,130	22,807	51.2%	(GPA $\geq$ 3.0 or SAT*GPA $\geq$ 2835)	SAT or ACT
2018-19	11,684	10,111	21,795	53.6%	(GPA $\geq$ 3.0 or SAT*GPA $\geq$ 2835)	SAT or ACT
2019-20	12,036	11,105	23,141	52.0%	(GPA $\geq$ 3.0 or SAT*GPA $\geq$ 2835)	SAT or ACT
2020-21	13,964	9,042	23,006	60.7%	GPA $\geq$ 2.8	NONE
2021-22	15,578	7,474	23,052	67.6%	GPA $\geq$ 2.6	NONE
2022-23	16,324	7,726	24,050	67.9%	GPA $\geq$ 2.6	NONE

Every year had a requirement of credits earned  $\geq$  12.

# Postcard



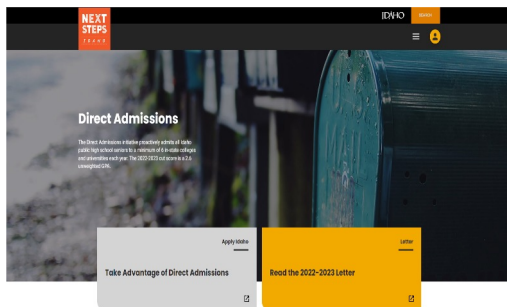
# Letter of Eight



# Letter of Six



# Resource Page



# Direct Admissions Staffing

## College & Career Access Team

Positions: College & Career Access Officer, College & Career Advising Program Manager, Next Steps Idaho Outreach Coordinator, Technical Records Specialist

*Duties: program management, outreach, communication, collateral, & training*

## Technology Services

Educational Analytics Systems Program Manager, Statewide Longitudinal Data System Data Analyst, Educational Data Systems Reporting Manager

*Duties: Data collection, letter assignment*

## Communications

Position: Chief Comms. & Legislative Affairs Officer

*Duties: Press Releases/Public Information Requests*

## Academic Affairs

Position: Chief Academic Officer

*Duties: Policy, Annual Benchmark*

## Research

Position: Principal Research Analyst

*Duties: Program Evaluation & Reporting*

# Direct Admissions **Budget**



**Annual Budget** ~ \$29,700

**All time** ~ \$238,000

# Direct Admissions Success

- The program was successful in reversing declining postsecondary enrollments and reducing out-of-state migration.
- Results from Direct Admissions Idaho demonstrate that the program increases the number of students applying for and enrolling at both two-year and four-year colleges immediately after high school, both overall and within the state.
- Delaney et al. (2019) found that Idaho's implementation of direct admissions was associated with a statistically significant increase in undergraduate enrollment of 11.0% at the institutional level, as well as institutional increases in in-state enrollment between 11.1% to 16.3%. Similarly, direct admissions was associated with a statistically significant, statewide increase in full-time equivalent (FTE) enrollment of 11.3%.

# Direct Admissions Lessons

- Allow more than 3-month lead time to conceptualize and implement a program that shakes up statewide admissions.
- Bring in ALL Stakeholders (K-12, postsecondary, state education entities) to help design the program
- Communicate early & often with ALL levels in K-12 and postsecondary is KEY.
- Have an ELEVATOR PITCH.
- Set clear program goals.
- Frame FAQs from POV of stakeholders, legislators, etc., & attempt to collect those data points upfront.
- Know how to measure/define success or effectiveness of program.
- Develop training for schools to support changing how they advise and support students through the college application process.

# Direct Admissions **Future**

- Full time Program Manager coming September 2023.
- Create an elevator pitch to clearly communicate the benefits: this should persuade best and brightest HS students to attend Idaho colleges -AND- lower GPA students to continue their education
- Clarify UVPs and messaging so they're easily absorbed by key audiences
- Bolster awareness, inspire excitement and increase response rates surrounding the program
- Explore renaming the program to mitigate confusion about the relationship to Apply Idaho
- Develop two (2) versions of each of this year's direct mail
  - + Postcard – This year's first touchpoint
  - + Tri-fold Letter – This year's second touchpoint





# Questions

## College and Career Access

Office of the Idaho State Board of  
Education

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t: (208) 488-7580

[boardofed.idaho.gov](http://boardofed.idaho.gov)

[nextsteps.idaho.gov](http://nextsteps.idaho.gov)



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Idaho Board of Education



## **Wendy Robinson**

Assistant Commissioner for Programs, Policy, and Grants  
Minnesota Office of Higher Education

## **Discussion/Q&A**

***Staffing***

***Governance/Policy***

***Politics***

***Data/FERPA***

***Communication***

***Budget***

***Challenges***

***Implementation***

***...more!***