Direct Admissions: Policies and Practices to Improve Access

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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.

Percent of 9th-Graders Ultimately Enrolling in Some Form of College

Why? Getting to college is complex. We don’t make it easy.
Applying to college is not “simple.”
Simplifying college admissions.

Everyone follows a different path.
Send college to the student.

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

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-partison support
## Academic Tiers

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

Direct Admissions

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 Direct Admissions communication, information about the pilot program, and a contact form for any questions or concerns.

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

- 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

Will the student graduate from an approved Idaho High School? → YES → Does the student have an ACT or SAT score? → YES → Does the student have a GPA of 3.0 or higher? → NO → Does their GPA, multiplied by the student’s Total Highest SAT Score equal 2,835 or higher?

- NO → Not eligible for Direct Admissions
- NO → Direct Admission to SIX Colleges
- YES → Direct Admission to EIGHT Colleges
- NO → Direct Admission to SIX Colleges
- YES → Direct Admission to EIGHT Colleges

GPAs 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
Will the student graduate from an approved Idaho High School?  

YES

Does the student have a GPA above ___?

NO

Not eligible for Direct Admissions

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

Direct Admission to SIX Colleges

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

Direct Admission to EIGHT Colleges

GPAs 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

Idaho State Board of Education
## Historical Perspective

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

Every year had a requirement of credits earned >= 12.
Direct Admissions

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
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

• 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 pieces, one for the Letter of 6 recipients and the other for the Letter of 8 recipients
  - Postcard – This year’s first touchpoint
  - Tri-fold Letter – This year’s second touchpoint
Questions

College and Career Access
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t: (208) 488-7580

boardofed.idaho.gov
nextsteps.idaho.gov
Discussion/Q&A

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- **Staffing**
- **Governance/Policy**
- **Politics**
- **Data/FERPA**
- **Communication**
- **Budget**
- **Challenges**
- **Implementation**
...more!