



Education | Healthcare | Public Services

## The Consequences of Attacks on Higher Education for HBCUs and Minority-Serving Institutions

Politically driven attacks on higher education—including budget cuts, curriculum restrictions and efforts to dismantle diversity, equity and inclusion programs—are disproportionately harming historically Black colleges and universities, tribal colleges and universities, and other minority-serving institutions. These institutions play a vital role in advancing racial equity, economic mobility and social justice within our union and in society. Undermining them weakens the broader landscape of American higher education and deepens systemic inequities across the societal spectrum.

### Background

HBCUs, tribal colleges and other minority-serving institutions educate a significant portion of the nation's underrepresented and underserved students, often with fewer resources than predominantly white institutions. They serve as cultural and intellectual hubs, provide critical support networks and drive economic development in marginalized communities. Despite this, they remain underfunded and politically targeted. Below are several ways attacks on higher education funding puts these institutions at risk. These attacks:

- 1. Exacerbate chronic underfunding.**

Attacks on public higher education intensify long-standing funding inequities. Cuts to state and federal budgets disproportionately affect HBCUs, tribal colleges and other minority-serving institutions, which already operate on lean margins. Reduced funding limits access to scholarships, infrastructure upgrades and faculty support.

- 2. Threaten DEI efforts and academic freedom.**

Efforts to ban DEI initiatives and restrict discussions of race, history and systemic injustice directly undermine the missions of HBCUs, tribal colleges and other minority-serving institutions. These policies erase the experiences of marginalized communities and limit intellectual freedom.

- 3. Create enrollment and student support challenges.**

Political hostility toward minority-serving institutions and inclusive education may deter prospective students. Simultaneously, attacks on student services—including mental health care, cultural centers and wraparound support—hurt retention and graduation rates.

- 4. Lead to workforce development setbacks.**

HBCUs and other minority-serving institutions produce a large share of Black professionals, including in fields like teaching, STEM and healthcare. Defunding and destabilizing these institutions undercuts workforce diversity and limits opportunities for social mobility.

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The AFT is a union of professionals that champions fairness; democracy; economic opportunity; and high-quality public education, healthcare and public services for our students, their families and our communities. We are committed to advancing these principles through community engagement, organizing, collective bargaining and political activism, and especially through the work our members do.

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**Recommendations**

Assaults on higher education are not only ideological; they are material and structural threats to institutions that have long uplifted communities of color. To ensure an equitable future, we recommend:

- Equitable and sustained investment in HBCUs, tribal colleges and other minority-serving institutions at the state and federal levels.
- Protection and expansion of DEI efforts, especially those rooted in racial justice.
- Support for academic freedom and culturally relevant curriculums.
- Enhanced accountability for funding disparities in public education systems.

HBCUs, tribal colleges and other minority-serving institutions are engines of opportunity. Weakening them weakens us all.