



## **Keeping Pathways to Opportunity Open** **June 11, 2023**

### **Introduction**

With the impending Supreme Court decision(s) on the use of race to promote diversity in higher education, Perception Institute, the Othering and Belonging Institute, Anthem of Us, and the ACLU, and PerryUndem sought to understand how people throughout the country understand the following values and ideas:

- The importance of keeping pathways to opportunity open for all students.
- Ensuring that every student has the freedom to explore their talents and reach their highest potential.
- Opportunity is still too often connected to where you live, your wealth and income, and your race and ethnicity.
- Students thrive when we actively invest in and support their learning, creativity, and growth.
- We need classrooms and communities where we can come together across race and ethnicity and learn what unites us while we build respect for one another, and cultivate a sense of dignity and belonging.

In a national survey, we found strong support for these themes across race, ethnicity, and age.

### **Reflections in Anticipation of the Decision**

This week, the United States Supreme Court may issue a decision prohibiting the use of an individual student's race as a factor in admissions to selective universities. If this comes to pass, we must not let it close doors of opportunity for young people across race and ethnicity.

Colleges and universities have been exploring - including in states where even now race can no longer be considered a factor - implementing different measures to combat potential drops in enrollment of underrepresented groups if and when affirmative action practices are curtailed by the Court. While focusing on other measures of opportunity, including socio-economic status, can be helpful, such measures need to be augmented by further investments and support for students across racial and ethnic backgrounds.

Our work going forward is to promote specific ways to protect and expand opportunities for students - and reimagine standards for excellence - that position all of us on the pathway to success.

- To accomplish our goal of keeping pathways open, we need messages that call upon universities to do more rather than less to make sure that students of all races/ethnicities have an "equal opportunity" to "follow their dreams" and are given "a fair shot."
- We must also ensure that students of all races/ethnicities feel empowered.
- We should emphasize that students must have the freedom to learn, to tell their own stories and share their passions, and to be - and feel - valued for who they are.

As an example of what institutions of higher education can do, [Northwestern](#) affirms its commitment to inclusion and, by doing so, makes clear that it will take steps to ensure genuine opportunities for admission for young people across race and ethnicity. Our hope is that statements such as this will also encourage young people of color to continue to apply to selective universities. Colleges and universities, too, need to be encouraged to reimagine how they welcome and support students, not by perpetuating stereotypes or by narrowing possibilities, but by recognizing the role these institutions play in changing the world by changing the lives and strengthening the perspectives of the students they educate.

To us, it is hopeful that in our national survey, we found broad support for the following statement;

A better future depends on people across walks of life respecting each other, working together, and doubling down on people's chance at a good life.

It seems like all we hear about is division. But there are signs of progress.

We've seen that when colleges create opportunities, students across every race, ethnicity, and income step into them - whether it's astronomy, engineering, medicine, teaching, or the arts.

For example, there's been a recent growth in Black and Latino Americans majoring in fields like science and engineering. Colleges are creating new opportunities for people of all backgrounds, from students in rural areas like Appalachia to first-generation Asian Americans.

No matter how the Supreme Court rules regarding affirmative action, colleges should keep this up.

Let's make sure our institutions of higher education choose opportunity over exclusion and all of us over some of us.

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We will follow up once the decision is released this week.