



April 11, 2008

Plan: Top students to get priority at Mich. universities

Public colleges likely to oppose admission change

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Associated Press

A state lawmaker is drawing up a proposal that would give the top 10 percent of graduates at each of Michigan's high schools automatic admission to state universities.

Rep. Rick Jones, a Republican from Grand Ledge, said Thursday he hopes to get action on the upcoming legislation before the Legislature adjourns at the end of the year. The plan would help give first choice to qualifying Michigan students at the state's 15 public universities over students from out-of-state or other countries.

Jones said the plan would give equal chance of acceptance to all state universities for top students from all Michigan communities - inner city, rural or suburban.

"With this plan, you achieve a greater geographic, economic and racial diversity," Jones said.

Mike Boulus, leader of the Presidents Council representing Michigan's public universities, said the plan will draw opposition from universities. A primary concern is that the top 10 percent of some Michigan high schools is not academically equal to the top 10 percent of others.

"It would take carefully thought-out processes at each university and turn them topsy turvy," Boulus said.

Impact might vary

The plan would come in the aftermath of a voter-approved 2006 measure that bans the use of race and gender preferences in Michigan public university admissions.

The new plan likely would have the most impact on Michigan's most competitive universities, such as the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor and Michigan State University. But the plan likely wouldn't change admissions at some universities where standards aren't as stringent and relatively few out-of-state students apply.

Jones estimates the plan could have an effect on admissions policies at roughly half the state's public universities.

The plan largely is modeled after one used in Texas.

The University of Texas at Austin, the state system's flagship, now has a higher minority enrollment than at any time in the decade since lawmakers enacted the top 10 percent law. The university reserved a record 81 percent of its fall admission offers this year to students guaranteed a spot on campus under the Texas law.

The University of Texas- Austin faces a federal lawsuit because of its admissions policies from

a white student who finished in the top 12 percent of her high school class but was rejected for admission.

Good faith effort

The Texas automatic admissions law was adopted a decade ago after a federal appeals court decision made affirmative action illegal in Texas college admissions. In 2003, the U.S. Supreme Court allowed universities to use race as one of many decision-making factors. The lawsuit argues that the Supreme Court's ruling required universities to make a good-faith effort to improve diversity using race-neutral policies before resorting to racial preferences.

Officials at the University of Texas say they are confident their admissions policies are legal and comply with the Supreme Court ruling.

Michigan's 2006 constitution change already may address some of the issues raised in the Texas lawsuit.
