

1. Mark your confusion.
2. Show evidence of a close reading.
3. Write a 1+ page reflection.

NAACP Calls on Black Student-Athletes to Boycott Florida Public Colleges over Anti-DEI Policy

“If these institutions are unable to completely invest in those athletes, it’s time they take their talents elsewhere,” the leader of the civil rights organization said.

Source: Daniel Arkin, NBCNews.com, March 11, 2024

The head of the NAACP is calling on Black student-athletes to reconsider their decisions to attend public colleges and universities in Florida, challenging a new state policy that bars those institutions from using government funds on diversity, equity, and inclusion programs.

In a letter sent Monday to current and future student-athletes of the National Collegiate Athletic Association, NAACP leader Derrick Johnson implored college-bound Black athletes to “choose wisely.”

“Diversity, equity, and inclusion are paramount to ensuring equitable and effective educational outcomes,” Johnson said in a statement accompanying the letter, which was first reported by NBC News. “The value Black and other college athletes bring to large universities is unmatched.”

“If these institutions are unable to completely invest in those athletes, it’s time they take their talents elsewhere,” said Johnson, the civil rights organization’s president and chief executive.

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis last year signed a bill that largely prohibits public colleges and universities from using state and federal funds on programs commonly grouped together under the acronym DEI.

Johnson’s letter was sent 10 days after the University of Florida eliminated all diversity, equity and inclusion positions in accordance with a state rule — a move that drew condemnation from NFL Hall of Famer Emmitt Smith, an alum of the school, who said on X that minority athletes there should “be aware and vocal about this decision.”

In response to a request for comment Monday, a spokeswoman for DeSantis directed NBC News to a March 1 tweet from the governor. “DEI is toxic and has no place in our public universities,” he said on X. “I’m glad that Florida was the first state to eliminate DEI and I hope more states follow suit.”

In recent years, Republican politicians, conservative activists, and right-wing social media influencers have railed against DEI programs and an array of sociopolitical ideas they characterize as

“wokeness.” The proponents of DEI in education have argued that such efforts are essential to make schools more racially and socially inclusive.

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott, a Republican, signed a law last year ordering DEI offices at all state-funded colleges and universities to shut down. In the current legislative session, GOP lawmakers in more than 30 states have introduced or passed more than 100 bills to either restrict or regulate DEI efforts writ large, according to an NBC News analysis.

Meanwhile, the mayor of Birmingham, Alabama, said on social media last month that if his state passed a bill to block funding for DEI in public colleges, he would encourage student-athletes to seek out programs in other states.

Florida is a major player in Division I athletics. The University of Florida, Florida State University and the University of South Florida are homes to some of the most prominent football and basketball programs in the country.

Florida college athletics are also big business. The University of Florida’s sports teams, for example, generated more than \$177 million in revenue in a one-year period spanning July 1, 2021, through June 30, 2022, according to data compiled by the U.S. Department of Education.

NAACP leader Johnson, in his letter to student-athletes, said he recognized that not all Black student-athletes have the financial freedom to participate in a boycott of Florida’s public school system.

“While it is our duty to spread awareness, and encourage action around these egregious assaults, we also recognize that protest can come at a price,” Johnson said. “The sad reality is, for many Black student-athletes, collegiate sports may be their sole opportunity at achieving the upward mobility necessary to propel them into their rightful places in society.”

“This imbalance of power and profit demands a response,” Johnson went on to say, “particularly because these institutions reap considerable financial benefits from the very individuals they fail to stand by in matters of diversity, equity, and inclusion. If any institution is to reap the benefits of Black talent, it is only right that they completely invest in Black futures.”

Possible Response Questions

- What are your thoughts about DEI programs and the NAACP president’s call for athletes to avoid attending Florida universities? Explain.
- Did something in the article surprise you? Discuss.
- Pick a word/line/passage from the article and respond to it.
- Discuss a “move” made by the writer in this piece that you think is good/interesting. Explain.