

Stanford University Decides Who Gets In By Who Knows Which Rich Family! California Banned Legacy Admissions at Private Schools. Stanford Is Sticking With It

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Stanford University campus on May 30, 2023. Stanford University said it will continue giving admissions preference to children and relatives of alumni by withdrawing from the Cal Grant program to avoid using state financial aid. *(Beth LaBerge/KQED)*

Stanford University will continue to use legacy and donor status in its admissions process by opting out of the state's Cal Grant financial aid program, a move that would allow it to skirt a statewide ban on legacy admissions.

The announcement comes just a few weeks before **Assembly Bill 1780**, which was signed into law last year, takes effect Sept. 1. The law **prohibits legacy or donor-driven preferences** in admissions at any university "that receives, or benefits from, state-funded student financial assistance or that enrolls students who receive state-funded student financial assistance," including private institutions like Stanford.

Colleges that receive state funding and continue to give legacy preference risk an increased burden of reporting requirements to the state government, as well

as being publicly listed as noncompliant on the California Department of Justice's website.

By withdrawing from Cal Grant, the state-funded financial aid program that provides millions of dollars a year to support hundreds of its students, Stanford will be able to continue those admissions practices without being subject to the law.

In a statement posted [online](#) July 29, university officials said Stanford will use university scholarship funding instead of state financial assistance programs, including Cal Grant.

A spokesperson for Stanford told KQED that the university will continue to evaluate how legacy status is considered in its admissions process.

(Rachael Myrow/KQED)

Assemblymember Phil Ting, who introduced AB 1780, has said he was inspired to target legacy admissions by the [Varsity Blues scandal](#), in which wealthy parents paid bribes to get their children into elite schools, including Stanford, USC, UC Berkeley and UCLA through side doors.

Student organizers, meanwhile, have also taken aim at university admissions policies that they say favor the children of wealthy and influential parents.

Ryan Cieslikowski, a Stanford alum who benefited from financial aid for students from less privileged backgrounds, said his experience there led him to [Class Action](#), a nationwide nonprofit of students, alumni and faculty members who advocate for tackling classism and inequality within higher education.

Now a lead organizer for the nonprofit, he said his research showed schools like Stanford accept “more students from the top 1% of the income distribution than the entire bottom 50%.”

His fellow Stanford organizers traveled to Sacramento three times to testify before the state Legislature when AB 1780 was still in the process of becoming law.

“These are the various students whose children stand to benefit from legacy admissions in the future,” Cieslikowski said. “Even the people who stand to benefit from it disproportionately don’t think that their institution should practice it.”

He said that while the Trump administration is “exploiting America’s mistrust” of elite education for political purposes, universities should be striving to demonstrate that they serve the public interest, but “Stanford’s decision to continue legacy and donor preference does the exact opposite of that.”

The university’s legacy admissions statement was posted just two days before it announced sweeping **layoffs** of over 350 employees and a \$140 million budget cut.

(David Madison/Getty Images)

“Stanford has decided that accepting the disproportionately privileged children of Stanford alumni and Stanford donors is more important than taking free money from the state of California in order to provide financial aid for their low-income students,” Cieslikowski said. “Especially in the face of massive layoffs.”

The Stanford spokesperson did not respond to a follow-up question seeking to specify whether the decision to substitute university funding for Cal Grant was a factor or point of discussion in the budget cut.

Cieslikowski referenced Leland Stanford's quote upon founding the institution in 1885: that "The children of California shall be our children."

"By clinging to legacy preference, the university is sending the exact opposite message," he said. "Saying that the children of wealthy alumni and donors come first, they shall be our children."