

NEA HBCU 2023 Update: Continued Crisis for HBCUs

In “A Looming Crisis for HBCUs...” in December 2021, we examined funding disparities among the 21 land grant historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) and the 53 non-HBCU land grant institutions. At the time, we reported that while “HBCUs are beginning to see a turnaround in funding... many continue to struggle to receive matching funds from the states, and progress has been slow to come.”¹ Since then, a major development occurred in September 2023, when the Biden administration sent letters to governors in 16 states, outlining their disparities in funding between HBCU and non-HBCU land grant institutions over the last 30 years. In the letters,² former U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona and former U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack made suggestions for governors to increase funding to the land grant HBCUs through legislation and federal matching. Only two of the 18 states—Delaware and Ohio—that house land grant HBCUs did not receive such letters because their state funding is on par with that of the state’s non-HBCU land grant funding.³

This brief more closely examines trends in state funding for land grant HBCUs using recently released data.⁴ In addition, we analyze responses to the Biden administration letters and data from state representatives, institution leaders and faculty, students, and alumni.⁵

STATE FUNDING GAP

The Biden administration analysis used U.S. Department of Education Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) data to examine inflation-adjusted state funds provided to institutions via appropriations on a per-student basis over the 34 years between 1987 and 2020 and compared spending levels for each of the 18 public land grant HBCUs with the non-HBCU land grant institutions in the same state.

1 nea.org/resource-library/looming-crisis-hbcus

2 usda.gov/about-usda/news/press-releases/2023/09/18/secretaries-education-agriculture-call-governors-equitably-fund-land-grant-hbcus; <https://sites.ed.gov/whhbcu/files/2023/09/Secretary-letter-1890.pdf>

3 washingtonpost.com/education/2023/09/18/hbcu-land-grant-funding-disparities/; insidehighered.com/news/government/2023/09/20/states-underfunded-black-land-grants-13b-over-30-years#; washingtonpost.com/documents/cb8a378d-dc1b-4bfd-b06d-1f761519a3ea.pdf?itid=lk_inline_manual_2

4 This report also served as the basis for a session presented during the 2024 NEA Higher Education Conference in Atlanta, GA.

5 Given the rapidly changing climate around education and funding, some information in this brief may have changed since it went into publication.

Table 1. Cumulative Difference in State Appropriations per Student, Public Non-HBCU Land Grants Compared with HBCU Land Grants, 1987 to 2020

State	Non-HBCU Public Land-Grant College	HBCU Public Land-Grant College	Funding Difference
TN	The University of Tennessee-Knoxville	Tennessee State University	\$2,147,784,704
NC	North Carolina State University at Raleigh	North Carolina A & T State University	\$2,079,934,848
FL	University of Florida	Florida Agricultural and Mechanical Univer	\$1,973,081,216
TX	Texas A & M University-College Station	Prairie View A & M University	\$1,135,496,704
LA	Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College	Southern University and A & M College	\$1,126,149,248
WV	West Virginia University	West Virginia State University	\$852,622,464
GA	University of Georgia	Fort Valley State University	\$603,156,480
AL	Auburn University	Alabama A & M University	\$527,280,064
SC	Clemson University	South Carolina State University	\$469,956,832
OK	Oklahoma State University-Main Campus	Langston University	\$418,986,272
MO	University of Missouri-Columbia	Lincoln University	\$361,569,760
AR	University of Arkansas	University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff	\$330,935,712
MD	University of Maryland-College Park	University of Maryland Eastern Shore	\$321,181,312
VA	Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University	Virginia State University	\$277,544,416
MS	Mississippi State University	Alcorn State University	\$257,807,216
KY	University of Kentucky	Kentucky State University	\$172,135,168
OH	Ohio State University-Main Campus	Central State University	-\$23,448,348
DE	University of Delaware	Delaware State University	-\$366,767,424

Source: NCES Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, Finance and Enrollment data, 1987 to 2020.

Among the states with a cumulative deficit over the three decades, the total deficit ranges from a low of \$172 million in Kentucky to a high of \$2.1 billion in Tennessee; states' average deficits range from \$5 million to more than \$63 million per year. On a positive note, Ohio provided about \$23 million more to their land grant HBCUs than their non-HBCU counterparts, and Delaware provided \$367 million more over the 34 years.

RECENT PROGRESS

These cumulative data do not reflect progress made in some states over recent years. Between 2015 and 2020, Arkansas, Kentucky, Maryland, South Carolina, and Virginia provided equal or more funding to their respective state's land grant HBCUs compared with the non-HBCU land grants, reversing the trend of earlier years.

State Funding Match

Recent data also show that some states are making progress in fulfilling their federal matching requirements for funding land grant HBCUs. The Morrill Act, which established land grant institutions (both

Table 2. State Funding Match as a Percent of Federal Evans-Allen Land Grant Appropriations, FY 2011 to FY 2022

		FY 2011	FY 2014	FY 2017	FY 2020	FY 2022
Alabama A&M University	AL	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Tuskegee University*	AL	85%	77%	88%	78%	73%
Univeristy of Arkansas, Pine Bluff	AR	82%	88%	100%	71%	50%
Delaware State University	DE	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Florida A&M University	FL	50%	50%	60%	71%	61%
Fort Valley State University	GA	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Kentucky State University	KY	85%	52%	100%	100%	100%
Southern University and A&M College	LA	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Eastern Shore-University of Maryland	MD	100%	100%	84%	87%	75%
Lincoln University	MO	69%	78%	100%	50%	100%
Alcorn State University	MS	100%	62%	51%	100%	100%
North Carolina A&T State University	NC	83%	86%	87%	76%	100%
Central State University	OH	†	†	100%	92%	100%
Langston University	OK	70%	56%	45%	50%	100%
South Carolina State University	SC	50%	89%	100%	100%	100%
Tennessee State University	TN	73%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Prairie View A&M University	TX	60%	51%	50%	50%	50%
Virginia State University	VA	80%	100%	70%	100%	100%
West Virginia State University	WV	70%	74%	54%	100%	71%
Number with less than 100% match.		12	11	9	9	6

* Private institution.

† Became land grant in 2014.

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Institute of Food and Agriculture, *Allocations and Matching report*, various years. Available: <https://www.nifa.usda.gov/grants/programs/capacity-grants>.

HBCUs and non-HBCUs), makes institutions with land grant status eligible for federal funding but requires states to match the federal dollars. For non-HBCUs, one-to-one matching is required by the state; however, at HBCUs, one-to-one matching is required if these institutions secure at least 50 percent of their allocation amount from non-federal sources. Waivers may be granted if a non-federal match is not procured, but HBCUs lose all funding—including federal dollars—if the waiver is not granted. (For more background on land grant history and funding, see nea.org/resource-library/looming-crisis-hbcus.)

The result: Non-HBCUs receive all of the land grant funding for which they are eligible, but HBCUs often do not. Note, land grant institutions can and do receive funding from the state in addition to these regulated land grant funds. As displayed in Table 2, 12 of the 19 land grant HBCUs did not receive their full state matching in fiscal year 2011. But over the years, more states have fully matched the federal dollars, and in 2022, only six did not fully match. Some states never fully match, such as Texas, where Prairie View A&M University typically receives 50 to 60 percent of their federal funds, and Florida, where Florida A&M University never sees a full match. Alabama,⁶ Delaware, Georgia, and Louisiana matched 100 percent of their public land grant HBCUs in all years examined.

STATE RESPONSES TO UNEVEN FUNDING

In addition to quantitative data, we examined updates to the status of HBCU funding through a scan of recent publications. This search yielded responses from states, institutions, and students as well as documents that detailed plans for future funding. In several cases, governors responded publicly to the letters, disputing the data and claiming the accusations were political in nature while also expressing support for land grant HBCUs. The institutions' faculty and students typically agreed with the administration's findings and advocated on campus and in Washington, D.C., for increased funding. In some instances, students met with lawyers to explore legal options for suing the system or institution. State legislatures began meeting to determine sources for increased funding but, because this scan was conducted directly following the states' receipt of the Biden administration letters in fall 2023, sufficient time had not yet passed for concrete steps to be taken. One exception was West Virginia, which introduced new legislation to “maximize the full federal matching requirement” for West Virginia State University (WVSU). However, House Speaker Roger Hanshaw said, “A retroactive reimbursement is unlikely.”⁷

Tennessee was the largest offender with a more than \$2.1 billion funding gap owed to **Tennessee State University (TSU)**, a land grant HBCU.

- **Political response.** State republicans claimed the administration's letter was purely political and that the governor, Bill Lee, has already taken steps to address the funding gap.⁸ In 2021, the state estimated that TSU had been underfunded by \$151 to \$544 million over 60 years. The governor then provided \$25 million in infrastructure funding in 2022.⁹ State Senator Bo Watson questioned the \$2.1 billion figure and shared “...we will continue to use our (state) analysis as our guide.”¹⁰ In March 2024, Governor Lee signed a bill that vacated the university's Board of Trustees, replacing the members with appointees, all

6 Alabama has two land grant HBCUs: Tuskegee, which is private, and Alabama A&M, which is the public land grant HBCU.

7 wsaz.com/2023/09/27/feds-claim-unequal-funding-wva-state-university/

8 wkrn.com/news/tennessee-politics/tn-lawmakers-react-to-tsu-underfunding-letter/

9 tennessean.com/story/news/education/2023/11/17/tennessee-state-university-federal-underfunding-joe-biden-letter/71595751007/

10 wpln.org/post/how-tennessee-officials-are-responding-to-tsus-call-to-make-up-for-2-1-billion-in-underfunding/

of whom are TSU alumni.¹¹ Meanwhile, more than 100 positions were cut and all nonessential vacant positions were frozen in an attempt to address a deficit of approximately \$50 million. Further, the state comptroller, Jason Mumpower, urged TSU to sell their Avon Williams campus (located in downtown Nashville) and property the university owns at John C. Tune Airport to make up the remainder of the shortfall. While lawmakers have contended that the budget shortfall is due to mismanagement,¹² university advocates point to the long-standing underfunding of the institution as the source of the financial difficulties and vehemently oppose the sale of any properties.¹³ In November, the state allocated approximately \$43 million to TSU, which enabled the institution to make payroll and pay other operating costs.¹⁴

- **Student response.** Student leaders met with high-profile civil rights attorney Benjamin Crump, who represented the families of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, to seek his advice for pursuing legal action should the state not comply. They also met with the Congressional Black Caucus and featured a “\$2 Billion: We’ve Been Cheated” campaign at homecoming.¹⁵ The TSU president laid out a five-year funding plan to focus on “...student success, program enhancements, and campus improvements.” Note, TSU faced financial and management challenges in 2022, including a housing shortage, and is currently conducting a search for a new president.¹⁶

North Carolina was just behind Tennessee, with more than \$2 billion in its funding gap to **North Carolina Agricultural & Technical State University (NC A&T)**.

- **Political response.** Governor Roy Cooper pledged to address the underfunding, noting that state legislators have already “begun providing significant allocations to address these issues.”¹⁷ State Representative Jon Hardister believes that the findings “missed the mark” and that the institutions are not fully comparable based on student characteristics, such as residency. Meanwhile, State Representative Zack Hawkins said it was time for the “state to ‘rectify the wrongs of the past.’”¹⁸
- **Institution response.** NC A&T Chancellor Harold Martin pointed out recent funding gains resulting from enrollment increases and a strategic priority to become a Carnegie Research 1 institution (R1: Doctoral Universities – Very high research activity), including recent state appropriations of \$10.7 million in recurring funds for agriculture research and extension and funding for the College of Engineering.¹⁹

11 insidehighered.com/news/institutions/minority-serving-institutions/2024/04/09/tsu-advocates-upset-board-overhaul

12 It is important to note that a forensic audit conducted in early 2024 found no fraud but did find a number of “procedural deficiencies” and “not sustainable spending.” (see insidehighered.com/news/institutions/minority-serving-institutions/2024/04/09/tsu-advocates-upset-board-overhaul)

13 tennesseelookout.com/2024/12/23/state-rep-balks-at-sale-of-tennessee-state-university-properties/

14 insidehighered.com/news/institutions/minority-serving-institutions/2024/04/09/tsu-advocates-upset-board-overhaul

15 bestcolleges.com/news/tennessee-hbcu-students-consult-attorney-ben-crump-on-2b-underfunding/

16 tennessean.com/story/news/education/2023/11/17/tennessee-state-university-federal-underfunding-joe-biden-letter/71595751007/

17 greensboro.com/news/local/education/nc-at-hbcu-money-funding-biden-roy-cooper-agriculture-education-north-carolina-greensboro-raleigh-nc-state/article_b84592ac-5c99-11ee-b5dd-e3900b1b2c13.html

18 newsobserver.com/news/local/education/article280928558.html

19 greensboro.com/news/local/education/nc-at-aggies-2-billion-north-carolina-jon-hardister-harold-martin-nc-state/article_9245d142-5e0c-11ee-bb17-f7544fbb008c.html

- **Faculty response.** NC A&T faculty said it is not surprising that the institution has been underfunded.²⁰
- **Student response.** The attorneys of NC A&T students and alumni called on Governor Cooper to begin reviewing the way the state spends money on HBCUs and commit additional funding to closing the gaps identified in the Biden administration’s letter, arguing that “the continuation of these disparities is not only morally reprehensible but also legally untenable.”²¹ The attorneys stated that Governor Cooper’s failure to respond to their letter within 10 days would result in further litigation.

Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University (FAMU) saw a nearly \$2 billion shortfall.

- **Political response.** Governor Ron DeSantis and the State University System denied underfunding FAMU, claiming under his leadership, “FAMU’s operational funding has increased by 37.6%.”²² Recently, DeSantis proposed a \$10 million facility increase for the state’s HBCUs.²³
- **Student response.** In January 2024, a judge dismissed a July 2023 lawsuit brought by six students who argued racial discrimination in the state’s funding of its land grant institutions, stating that “the formula isn’t traceable to *de jure* segregation (separation mandated by law and enforced by the government) and isn’t the result of intentional discrimination.”²⁴

Other states had similar reactions. Governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders of **Arkansas** claimed that the Biden administration’s letter was politically charged and that the state continues to support **University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff (UAPB)**; however, a student shared the importance of UAPB to his family and community and said, “I saw buildings go unrepaired and unusable after natural disasters.”²⁵ An alumnus concurred, adding the underfunding represents the “value that’s placed on my education at an HBCU and as a Black student in the state versus my white peers.”²⁶ A faculty member added that UAPB “had to apply for grants and waivers for federal funding in cases where the state has refused to match federal funds” and stated, “At this point, we’re not even trying to get ahead. We’re doing a lot of work with so little.”²⁷

In October 2023, alumni from **Fort Valley State University (FVSU)** in **Georgia**—with Albany State and Savannah State, two other HBCUs in the state that are not land grant universities—sued the state system due to unequal funding, which has led to a “lack of resources, infrastructure and opportunities for students at HBCUs, and that the funding disparities ‘prevent students from marginalized communities in accessing quality education, which is a fundamental right enshrined in the Constitution.’”^{28, 29} State representatives put additional pressure on the governor,

20 greensboro.com/news/local/education/nc-at-aggies-2-billion-north-carolina-jon-hardister-harold-martin-nc-state/article_9245d142-5e0c-11ee-bb17-f7544fbb008c.html

21 newsobserver.com/news/local/education/article280928558.html

22 tallahassee.com/story/news/local/2023/10/04/desantis-florida-chancellor-tells-feds-famu-isnt-underfunded/71059064007/

23 flvoiceneews.com/desantis-increases-hbcu-funding-by-10-million-in-upcoming-budget-for-facility-hardening/

24 highereddive.com/news/judge-dismisses-discrimination-lawsuit-famu-florida/705933/

25 arktimes.com/arkansas-blog/2023/09/25/cut-the-check-a-third-generation-uapb-grad-says-arkansas-needs-to-pay-whats-owed

26 kark.com/news/education/university-of-arkansas-at-pine-bluff-chancellor-reacts-to-biden-administration-letter-claiming-state-underfunding-of-school/

27 ualpublicradio.org/local-regional-news/2023-09-22/uapb-professor-responds-to-claims-of-state-underfunding

28 cnhnews.com/cnhi/article_4c14c034-6384-11ee-aa2c-73b88322ce88.html

29 highereddive.com/news/georgia-system-sued-over-alleged-underfunding-of-3-public-hbcus/697986/#:~:text=The%20lawsuit%2C%20filed%20by%20three,programs%20at%20traditionally%20White%20institutions

calling public attention to the funding disparities.³⁰ The case was dismissed in July 2024 after an Atlanta federal judge indicated that “no action had been taken” since the complaint was filed in October 2023.³¹

A **Kentucky** lawmaker claimed, in response to the letter, that **Kentucky State University (KSU)** is *overfunded*, when taking into consideration full-time equivalent students (FTE). Students at KSU had a much different reaction, with the Student Government Association president saying the administration’s letter was “long overdue.”³² KSU is recovering from 2021 reports of “...misconduct, financial mismanagement and sexual harassment by former leaders.” A new governing board and leadership in 2022 “...pleaded for more help from legislators in addressing ‘atrocious’ conditions in KSU facilities.” The state made a \$23 million loan to KSU in 2022 to help with “financial turmoil” and “...an additional \$15 million tied to KSU meeting certain benchmarks.”³³

Virginia’s Secretary of Education Aimee Rogstad Guidera disputed the federal data and said the state paid **Virginia State University (VSU)** more than Virginia Tech over the last 15 years, according to state data.³⁴ (As noted above, according to IPEDS data, the state provided more funding to VSU than Virginia Tech from 2015 to 2020.) However, Dr. Mortimer Neufville, president and CEO of the 1890 Universities Foundation, said state data “only goes back to 1994,” arguing the state does not recognize the “full historic extent” of VSU underfunding.³⁵ U.S. Representative Jennifer McClellan (D-VA) emphasized the “institutionalized racism and systemic underinvestment” facing HBCUs and argued that “instead of being defensive and attempting to deflect, Governor Youngkin should look at our nation’s history, recognize these long-standing inequities, and work to right these historical wrongs to ensure more equitable opportunities for every student in Virginia.”³⁶

UPDATES SINCE OUR LAST REPORT

In 2021, we reported on the funding inequities in **Missouri** for its land grant institutions and the inability of **Lincoln University (LU)**, a land grant HBCU, to secure state matching funds, unlike its non-HBCU land grant counterpart. The university continues to struggle with funding challenges, and in response to its three-decade \$361 million shortfall, “...a bipartisan group of lawmakers requested a state study of the disparity so damage to Lincoln’s programming and infrastructure can be repaired.”³⁷ Sadly, LU received attention in the news recently for more somber reasons relating to its management, when its vice president of student affairs died by suicide in 2023 after being fired from what has been described as a hostile environment.

We also reported on **Maryland** settling a 10-year lawsuit for underfunding its four HBCUs, including the land grant **University of Maryland Eastern Shore (UMES)** through a \$577 million payout over

30 diverseeducation.com/leadership-policy/article/15635906/georgia-democrats-call-on-gov-brian-kemp-to-address-hbcu-funding-gaps

31 ajc.com/education/lawsuit-that-alleged-georgia-underfunded-its-public-hbcus-quietly-dropped/7GZZZTLDFGFCMDG4PYQSMYKG4NA/

32 lex18.com/news/u-s-education-sec-law-violated-by-underfunding-kentucky-state-university-other-hbcus

33 wkyufm.org/education/2023-09-21/feds-call-on-state-to-address-172m-underfunding-of-kentucky-state-university

34 insidehighered.com/news/quick-takes/2023/10/10/virginia-disputes-federal-claim-it-underfunded-hbcu

35 virginiamercury.com/2023/10/25/va-governor-rejects-claim-of-underfunding-virginia-state-university/

36 Ibid.

37 kcur.org/news/2024-01-14/lincoln-university-a-missouri-hbcu-faces-reckoning-after-suicide-of-senior-leader

10 years (the HBCUs in the state were underfunded for 40 years despite intervention efforts by the U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights to achieve equity).³⁸ After receiving the Biden administration’s letter, Governor Wes Moore included \$5 million for UMES in the budget proposal for next fiscal year “...to begin to repay the lost funding.”³⁹ The Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland added equitable funding for UMES to its legislative priorities and “...wants to ensure the state’s lone land grant Historically Black University...is fully funded every year going forward.”

A LOOK AHEAD

As part of its letter to the underfunded land grant HBCUs, the Biden administration offered workshops to help institutions understand the IPEDS data used to identify funding gaps. Given the confusion indicated in the state responses to the letter, these workshops—or, at least, meetings between the U.S. Departments of Education and Agriculture, state leaders, and institutional representatives—were undoubtedly beneficial to better understanding funding regulations, shortfalls, and opportunities for closing gaps.

To ensure that land grant HBCUs ultimately get the funding to which they are entitled by law, it will be necessary to engage in continued monitoring and legislative advocacy,⁴⁰ much like that which occurred under the Biden administration. Apparently, most states are unwilling to fulfill their federal funding matching requirements and fund land grant HBCUs on par with land grant non-HBCUs without pressure. Under the current administration, it is unlikely that any efforts to promote equity will occur. Therefore, NEA recommends unifying state efforts to change the funding inequities resulting from federal legislation. Advocacy is essential to help fulfill the mission of land grant HBCUs to serve marginalized communities. States will ultimately benefit from these investments by not only improving the lives of their citizens but also bolstering their economies.

As former Secretary of Education Cardona stated, “I am continually inspired by all that HBCUs have achieved despite having to punch above their weight. Our HBCUs graduate a huge share of our nation’s Black educators, doctors, engineers, judges, and lawyer.... We need state leaders to step up and live up to their legally required obligations to our historically Black land-grant institutions.”

NOTE

NEA Research would like to thank ASA Research for preparing this brief.

38 afro.com/timeline-maryland-hbcu-equality-lawsuit/

39 wypr.org/wypr-news/2024-01-22/after-decades-of-historic-under-funding-marylands-black-lawmakers-want-to-protect-land-grant-hbcu

40 tcf.org/content/report/nourishing-the-nation-while-starving-the-underfunding-of-black-land-grant-colleges-and-universities/