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NAME Statement on U.S. College Admissions Cheating

In just days, about [3 million young people](#) surrounded by family and friends will graduate from high school, and about 66 percent of those graduates, or slightly more than 2 million of them, will know by now the college or university they hope to attend in the fall. All they want is a fair shot at continuing their education in the school that will give them the best chance to get a good job or get an advanced degree so they can enjoy a fruitful future.

[The National Association for Multicultural Education](#), (NAME) knows, however, that the recent college bribery scandal reveals new layers of how celebrity, money, power and white privilege have made admission to elite colleges and universities anything but fair. [Federal prosecutors](#) on March 12, charged 33 parents, including Hollywood celebrities and wealthy businesspeople, with paying bribes — some amounting to millions of dollars — to get their children into prestigious U.S. colleges and universities. Also charged were at least nine athletic coaches, accused of accepting millions of dollars to help admit unqualified students in a number of colleges. In all, 50 people face charges in what has been called the “largest admissions scam ever prosecuted by the Department of Justice.” [Cheating](#) occurred on ACT and SAT college entrance exams, “learning disability waivers” were sought where none was merited, sports was used as portal into college for some students who had no athletic involvement. Accepting the gravity of their actions by April 8, 13 of the parents, including actress [Felicity Huffman](#), and one coach have agreed to plead guilty to charges in the scandal. Huffman, said in a statement: “I am in full acceptance of my guilt, and with deep regret and shame over what I have done, I accept full responsibility for my actions and will accept the consequences that stem from those actions. I am ashamed of the pain I have caused my daughter, my family, my friends, my colleagues and the educational community. I want to apologize to them and, especially, I want to apologize to the students who work hard every day to get into college, and to their parents who make tremendous sacrifices to support their children and do so honestly. My daughter knew absolutely nothing about my actions, and in my misguided and profoundly wrong way, I have betrayed her. This transgression toward her and the public I will carry for the rest of my life. My desire to help my daughter is no excuse to break the law or engage in dishonesty.” [Lori Loughlin](#), the other actress indicted, plead not guilty and was additionally charged with money laundering. She has been quoted as saying that she did nothing any parent with means would not do.

As a social justice and equity organization, NAME knows the scandal adds a new layer to what most people already know: Those with power and money have a leg up on getting their kids into the best colleges and universities compared with those who don't. Legacy admissions have commonly enabled graduates of elite schools to ensure that their children also can attend those universities. Let's not overlook that sizable donations additionally have paved the way for the admission of donors' children. Other above board but “privileged” means include costly tutoring, essay counseling and admissions coaching. These things are still more accessible to those with a financial advantage, but they will not land the participants in jail. Wealthy families who do these kinds of things almost always are white, making college admission an ongoing, troubling example of white privilege. Coupled with the cheating scandal, they edge out lower-income, first-in-their-families, and often students of color from being considered by top-tier or better colleges. These are young people whose hard work, audacity to defy the odds and sheer grit for good grades would otherwise have merited them seats at prestigious schools. They are forced to settle for less or sometimes not make the cut for college at all.

NAME knows this is a tragedy, knows the United States can't afford such threats to this nation's long-believed promise of social mobility, and a good education is the surest way up. The country must do everything possible to eliminate what H. Richard Milner IV calls “opportunity gaps” in his book, *Start Where You Are, But Don't Stay There: Understanding Diversity, Opportunity Gaps, and Teaching in Today's Classrooms*. Milner writes:

Opportunity is at the core of success and failure in *society* as well as in *schools*. I believe a focus on an achievement gap places too much blame and emphasis on students themselves as individuals and not enough attention on why gaps and disparities are commonplace in schools across the country. Opportunity, on the other hand, forces us to think about how systems, processes, and institutions are overtly and covertly designed to maintain the status quo and sustain depressingly complicated disparities in education.

Better schools often translate into opportunities for either good paying jobs or scholarships and grants for young people to seek advanced degrees as well as admission to other big name schools. Being boxed out by wealth, power and white privilege shortchanges not only hardworking students but the country as well because the best and the brightest with the greatest potential have simply been outclassed by a system that continually favors the elite — whether within the law or through illegal means.