

Federal Policy Digest

January 29, 2026

Texas and Florida Move to Restrict on H-1B Hiring at Public Universities (1.29.26)

On January 29, 2026, the State University System of Florida's Board of Governors [advanced](#) a policy proposal that would bar public universities in the state from hiring new international employees on H-1B visas through January 5, 2027. The proposal would allow institutions to renew H-1B visas for current employees. Public comment will remain [open](#) for two weeks before the full board votes on the measure. The proposal [follows](#) an October directive from Florida Governor Ron DeSantis instructing universities to end what he described as "H-1B abuse." Separately, on January 27, 2026, Texas Governor Greg Abbott ordered a freeze on all new H-1B hires at Texas public universities through June 2027. Under the order, Abbott has [directed](#) institutions to submit a report by March 27, 2026, to the state's workforce commission, detailing H-1B visa applications and renewals, as well as documenting efforts to recruit Texas-based candidates for university positions. Together, public universities in Texas and Florida had more than 1,000 H-1B applications approved in FY 2025, including both new petitions and renewals.

Implications/next steps: These state-level actions come amid federal scrutiny of the H-1B program under the Trump administration. Critics warn that restrictions on H-1B hiring could undermine the academic competitiveness, research capacity, and global standing of Florida and Texas universities. While some higher education experts argue that Florida and Texas operate within distinct political and higher education policy environments, others [caution](#) that these actions could encourage similar restrictions in other Republican-led states.

Education Department Announces Negotiated Rulemaking on Accreditation Reform (1.26.26)

The Education Department (ED) [announced](#) plans to establish the Accreditation, Innovation, and Modernization (AIM) negotiated rulemaking committee to pursue reforms to the higher education accreditation system. The effort is intended to reduce regulatory barriers for new accreditors and to curb accreditors' DEI standards. The announcement follows Trump's April executive order, [Reforming Accreditation to Strengthen Higher Education](#), as well as the ED's revocation of Biden-era guidance that made it more difficult for institutions to change accreditors. The administration had also already lifted a moratorium on reviewing applications from new accrediting agencies. According to the ED announcement, the AIM Committee will focus on four primary areas.

- *Deregulation:* Reducing barriers to entry for new accreditors and eliminating duplicative, high-cost accreditation requirements.
- *Student Outcomes:* Shifting accreditation toward measurable, data-driven student outcomes rather than DEI-related criteria.
- *Merit:* Ensuring accreditation standards comply with federal civil rights law and prohibiting practices the administration characterizes as "discrimination on the basis of immutable characteristics" (e.g., certain race-based policies)
- *Transparency:* Preventing misleading accreditation labels, strengthening separation from trade groups, and reforming transfer-of-credit rules to lower costs and student debt.

More information from the ED about negotiated rulemaking in higher education is posted [here](#), though details have yet to be released about the AIM Committee.

Implications/next steps: Accreditation is a prerequisite for institutional eligibility for federal student aid, making accreditation policy a powerful federal lever. Trump has previously referred to accreditation reform as his “secret weapon” for reshaping higher education, and the administration has already sought to use accreditation as leverage against individual institutions. The formation of this committee [represents](#) the administration’s broadest effort to date to revise accreditation policy. That said, the committee’s authority is [constrained](#). Certain elements of accreditor recognition—such as statutory eligibility [requirements](#) set in the Higher Education Act, including minimum operating history requirements for new accreditors—cannot be changed through negotiated rulemaking and would require congressional action. Experts have also cautioned that efforts to use accreditation to advance broader policy goals, such as shaping campus intellectual diversity, could raise legal concerns. While a greater emphasis on student outcomes has drawn bipartisan support, it remains a complex issue to address given contradictions in federal law about the role of accreditors in student achievement standards. As far as next steps for the committee, nominations for negotiators must be submitted by February 26, 2026. Aspiring accreditors will be included on the committee, according to the Federal Register [notice](#). The committee is scheduled for two weeklong rulemaking sessions in April and May 2026.

Trump Administration Freezes Certain Immigrant Visa Applications; Student Visas Exempt (1.21.26)

On January 21, 2026, the State Department began pausing the issuance of immigrant visas from 75 countries, citing public charge-related concerns. The pause applies only to immigrant visas and does not affect nonimmigrant visas, including student visas. *Inside Higher Ed* has published a list of the 75 affected countries [here](#). Of these, 23 are also subject to the administration’s existing [travel ban](#). According to [NAFSA](#), individuals from these countries will have to “independently assess their eligibility for a nonimmigrant visa under the travel ban.” Collectively, these 75 countries sent more than 200K students to U.S. institutions during the 2024-25 academic year.

Implications/next steps: The Trump administration has not announced an end date for the immigrant visa pause. Applicants may continue to [submit](#) immigrant visa applications and attend consular interviews, but they will not be issued visas while the pause remains in effect. Because the State Department’s guidance is based on the notion that individuals from these 75 countries are more likely to become a public charge, immigrants and nonimmigrants should [consider](#) carrying proof of their finances to all visa interviews.