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## Local

Feds scrutinize racial equality in colleges

Mike Silvestri, The Examiner

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### BALTIMORE -

Federal education officials are visiting [Maryland's](#) colleges and universities this week to determine if after more than 50 years the state has removed from schools the lasting effects of segregation.

Maryland was one of seven states to enter into an agreement in 2000 with the [U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights](#), vowing to eliminate by 2005 all remaining effects of segregated schools.

The Education Department has not ruled on Maryland's progress, and federal officials Monday toured the [University of Maryland, Baltimore County](#) to see buildings on campus.

While the federal officials study equality, state officials remain divided over whether it has been reached, officials said.

"The thing of concern in resolving this issue is there are nine different issues where Maryland has to demonstrate it has met the Office of Civil Rights' expectations, and you're never going to get total consensus within the state that we've met them all," said Kevin O'Keefe, chairman of the [Maryland Higher Education Commission](#).

O'Keefe said he believes that the state has met all requirements.

But others say that historically black and historically white schools are duplicating courses, and that the academics and buildings at historically black schools are not "comparable and competitive" with those at white schools.

The clearest indication of the chasm is in the [Coalition for Equity and Excellence](#) in Maryland Higher Education's 2005 federal lawsuit against the Maryland Higher Education Commission.

It alleges that the state violated federal civil rights law by allowing [Towson University](#) to partner with the [University of Baltimore](#) to offer master's degrees in business administration, when [Morgan State University](#), a historically black school, already had a similar program.

The state gave \$456 million for construction at historically black schools from 2002 to 2009 while giving \$1.1 billion for all other public colleges and universities.

Operational funding at historically black schools also grew by 7.4 percent annually in that time, while other schools had an average increase of 3.4 percent.

"The fact that we're still discussing this 50 years later, I think, is a remarkable observation about the incredibly negative and damaging effects that segregation had on this state and its people," O'Keefe said.

The [U.S. Education Department](#) confirmed the visits were related to the desegregation agreement but declined further comment, spokesman [Jim Bradshaw](#) said.

msilvestri@baltimoreexaminer.com

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