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The Education Trust – West Releases Black Minds Matter

OAKLAND, CA (October 28, 2015) The Education Trust – West today released “Black Minds Matter: Supporting the Educational Success of Black Children in California,” which examines how the nearly 1 million Black youth in California are faring from preschool through college and reveals the distressing disparities that newly released state and national data show are persisting at all levels of their educational journey. The report also highlights the groundbreaking efforts underway to reverse these trends in California and close achievement and opportunity gaps for African American students.

California is home to the fifth largest Black population in the country. Though California’s Black students today are more likely to graduate from high school and college than a decade ago, they are still least likely to be placed in gifted and talented education programs, given a full sequence of college preparatory classes, graduate high school in four years, and complete a college degree. Black students in California are also most likely to be suspended and expelled, be taught by ineffective teachers and, as college students, take remedial, non-credit bearing coursework. These troubling findings are a result of the lack of access to opportunities and a history of inequitable policy decisions and institutional weaknesses rather than a lack of student ability or dedication.

“Although we’ve made some progress, Black students continue to face an education system that squanders their talent” said Ryan J. Smith, Executive Director of Ed Trust – West. “The deaths of unarmed youth by law enforcement across the country tell Black youth that their lives matter less than other lives. Similarly the decisions made within our education systems tell Black students that their minds and futures matter less as well.”

The report also highlights schools, districts, universities, and community-based organizations committing to closing achievement and opportunity gaps for Black students. These successful promising practices suggest that the persistence of opportunity and achievement gaps is due more to a statewide lack of urgency and commitment than a lack of knowledge and solutions. “All students deserve a strong education, we need to do more to learn from the schools, educators, and parents helping Black students excel.” said Sherry Griffith, Executive Director of the California State Parent Teacher Association.

The report calls on policymakers, education leaders, and all Californians to prioritize the equity-based changes that California’s Black students deserve and have been waiting far too long for. If we believe California is a land of opportunity, we must acknowledge that the current rate of progress we see is unacceptable. To accelerate this much-needed discussion and provide an action plan, a series of recommendations rounds out the report.

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