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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Statement by Education Trust—West Director, Russlynn Ali Proposition 54 “Racial Privacy Initiative”: Not “Color Blind,” Just Plain Blind

“On October 7 California voters have an opportunity to VOTE NO on a seductively labeled but potentially devastating initiative that will crush our ability to ensure that all children have a high quality education and that will flush tens of millions of state tax dollars down the drain.”

“Deceptively known as the ‘Racial Privacy Initiative,’ Proposition 54 is really just an Information Ban.”

“What does this mean for education in California?”

“The Information Ban’s backers claim this will make California a ‘color blind’ state.”

“They’re half right. It will make California blind. Period.”

“Sure, we’re on our way to becoming a blended society where race and ethnicity are increasingly irrelevant. But we aren’t there yet. And we’re never going to get there if we lose our right to uncover the very real sources of inequity that permeate our schools – indeed our society – today.”



“The Information Ban will deprive educators, policymakers and advocates of the most powerful spotlight they now have to see and measure how well we’re educating all of California’s children: honest data.”

“Many Californians think, for example, that our low performance relative to other states is mostly attributable to the large numbers of poor children and children of color in our schools. If this initiative passes, they’ll keep thinking that.”

“But an honest look at our data shows that belief isn’t true. For example, White students from low-income homes in California are performing at the bottom in 4th grade reading relative to their peers in every other state in the nation. (It turns out that White, Black and Latino students from upper-income homes aren’t doing so very well either.) If we can’t examine what’s happening in California schools for every subgroup, we relinquish our ability to know with any real accuracy which groups of students aren’t mastering the skills they need—and why. We’d relinquish

the ability to see if white low-income students are tracked into low-rigor, mind numbing classes or provided adequate instructional materials.”



“If this initiative passes, we will no longer be able to see inequities that need our attention. We won’t, for example, be able to see that, while more than half of our Asian American high-school graduates (58%) were eligible for admission to the U.C. or C.S.U. systems, only 40% of our white graduates, 25% of our African American graduates, and 22% of our Latino graduates met that goal. Why? Because too many of these students didn’t get programmed into the prerequisite ‘A-G’ course sequence.”

“It’s a myth that the Information Ban’s cleverly crafted exceptions will mitigate its destructive impact. Yes, the Information Ban has an exception if we would lose federal funding by failing to collect data by race. But the No Child Left Behind Act, the primary federal education act that requires us to show whether our efforts to close achievement gaps are working, is too narrow. NCLB requires only that we track achievement by subgroup in general mathematics and English, and even that is required only in grades 3-8 and once again in high school. (The other mechanism, the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) Survey, is limited to data on enrollment and provision of some school services.) Thus our data – and hence our accountability system – would be incomplete.”



“With this Information Ban we undermine the state’s courageous and *right* efforts to craft an accountability system with meat. We lose the chance to measure student performance in every important discipline and to provide meaningful checks and balances. We miss out on whether our students rank differently in history, social science, biology or any high level science course, algebra or any high level math course, benchmark assessments, class enrollment or resource allocation because the NCLB does not require us to measure those things.”

“And what of the waste? The tens of millions spent on our Academic Performance Index (API), and California School Information Services (CSIS), which has been in development for more than 6 years. The more than \$60 million in state taxes we’ve already invested in that project alone gets flushed down the tubes.”

“California has always valued diversity. It is embedded in our accountability system and taught in our classrooms. Yet our schools are still failing many of the students who need the most help. Latino, and African American and low-income white students are but a few. The Information Ban blinds us to their struggle.”



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