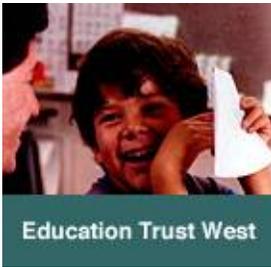


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Don't Waive Away Good Policy: Algebra Is A Must For California High School Graduates

Education Trust—West Director Russlynn Ali today released a statement urging districts and the state to stay the course on the requirement of Algebra-for-all.

(OAKLAND) – “In 2000, California took the laudable and necessary step of requiring that all of our public school students take Algebra to graduate beginning with the class of 2004.

“But now that the time has arrived, districts are seeking waivers because their students haven’t met the requirement. We’ve heard that some confusion – about which classes qualify and about whether the delay of the high school exit exam delayed this requirement, too – caused districts to seek such waivers.

“Regardless of the reason, one thing is clear: waiver requests mean students haven’t mastered the integral skills Algebra teaches. And it is the students themselves who suffer in the end.

“There’s a very simple reason California demanded algebra for all: it’s a necessity for virtually every single young person, no matter what career path they might choose. Indeed, research now tells us that young people need even higher-level courses to succeed; geometry is the benchmark for success in blue collar jobs, and Algebra II for success in college and the white collar workforce.

“Historically, our Algebra enrollment and completion rates have shown that we disproportionately leave behind our Latino, African American and low-income students. Instead of just letting these students out in the world without basic skills, districts should be encouraged to add additional summer-school classes in Algebra and work with their local community colleges to make sure these students aren’t denied their right to learn the skills they’ll need to be effective citizens, even if waivers are granted.

“As to the waivers themselves, the State Board should grant the requests contingent upon the district releasing demographic data about which students they seek waivers for. We must track – and shine a bright spotlight on – which students lose out on these basic skills.

“We’ve had four years to get this right. We understand the impulse to give these young people credit for the years of work hard they’ve put in. But the State Board should strictly

scrutinize waiver requests in future years and severely limit their approval. Districts and schools must step up to provide students the skills and supports they need to succeed, and waivers allow them not to.”

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