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Education Trust West

May 12, 2006

Statement by Russlynn Ali, Director of the Education Trust-West, on Today's Ruling on the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE)

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Today's ruling by Judge Robert Freedman in *Valenzuela v. O'Connell* represents a huge step backward for California's schools and students. We fully understand the intent behind this litigation. Students who are poor, Latino, African-American, or English Learners have not been given the same opportunities as their peers. High-poverty and high-minority schools have less money to educate their students; have the least experienced teachers; have the largest numbers of under-prepared teachers; and offer far less rigorous coursework. These patterns are pervasive, and indefensible.

Without the CAHSEE, though, we have even less leverage to disrupt these patterns and ensure that *all* students master the basic skills they will need to succeed in college and in the workforce. The CAHSEE has been a hugely powerful lever for changing decades-old patterns of inequality. The CAHSEE finally shines a bright light on those inequities and holds teachers, schools, districts and the state accountable for fixing them. If we lose the CAHSEE and the accountability attached to it, we fear that we also lose the attention, focus, and resources it brings to bear on the students and schools who most need help.

While this litigation continues through the appeals process, students and teachers must not let the turmoil detract them from the very important work they do every day in the classroom—teaching and learning the skills and knowledge that students will need to be college- and work-ready. State and district leaders must work harder to close the opportunity gaps that persist in California schools so that all schools have the resources they need to provide a high-quality education to all students. All of California's students, no matter who they are or what school they go to, should be able to meet the minimum standards embodied in the CAHSEE before graduating from high school. We must not retreat from the standards-based accountability system that ensures that they do.

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