**New Research from Education Trust**–**West Calls on California to Prioritize Financial Aid Access and Awareness**

**OAKLAND, CA (November 14, 2019)** – Today, The Education Trust–West released *“Hidden Figures: A Framework to Increase Access to Financial Aid,”* to rally California’s communities, schools, and policymakers to come together and publicize the importance of financial aid and what it can mean for students.

In the past two years, nearly half a million high school seniors did not complete a financial aid application. And each year, $550 million dollars in state and federal financial aid gets left on the table in California that could be flowing to our students and institutions.

*“Hidden Figures”* is a part of Ed Trust–West’s All in for Financial Aid campaign, a call for a statewide commitment to increase financial aid awareness for students of color and those coming from low-income households to boost college access, enrollment, and persistence. This includes supporting the passage of Assembly Bill 1617 (Reyes) – a statewide policy solution to ensure every student applies for financial aid.

“Every student deserves the opportunity to go to college regardless of their financial situation,” explains Assemblymember Eloise Reyes, co-sponsor of AB1617. “That is why we need a statewide solution to ensure every student applies for financial aid before they graduate from high school. Students cannot wait.”

While policymakers and other education advocates work to move this statewide policy forward, Ed Trust–West encourages schools and districts to adopt and scale practices that can help ensure more students can complete their financial aid application before they graduate high school.

“The pursuit of higher education should be affordable – financial aid is key in making California students’ college dreams a reality,” said Dr. Elisha Smith Arrillaga, Executive Director of Ed Trust–West. “However, we know current rates of financial aid application completion are startling low, especially in schools that serve more students of color and low-income students. As we work towards a statewide solution, we must also amplify the successful practices already happening up and down the state to increase financial aid application completion rates and build promising futures. We all - counselors, teachers, policymakers, and parents - have a role to play.”

Educators, from superintendents to counselors, and teachers in many schools and districts across the state are already engaging in a variety of practices to help improve financial aid awareness and completion. “Hidden Figures” highlights five “components of success” – insights from diverse, cutting-edge districts and schools about best practices and strategies that are helping to close equity gaps.

The five components identified are:

* Prioritizing Completion through Policy
* Collecting and Monitoring Appropriate Data
* Establishing and Maintaining Strong Partnerships
* Building Relationships & Trust
* Programming with Students at the Center

“Schools and districts are pivotal to ensuring a student's opportunity to attend college,” said Michael McCormick, Superintendent at Val Verde Unified School District. “That is why we must provide the resources to our educators and practitioners that make college affordable for our students. We need a systemic approach to equitably increase financial aid application completion rates and that starts with strong leadership.”

By implementing the tangible strategies and practices outlined in “Hidden Figures”, the goal to make certain that students complete a financial aid form can be achieved.

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[The Education Trust–West](http://www.edtrustwest.org/)works for the high academic achievement of all students at all levels, pre-K through college. We expose opportunity and achievement gaps that separate students of color and low-income students from other youth, and we identify and advocate for the strategies that will forever close those gaps.