

## **Fathers & Families of San Joaquin ("FFSJ") Statement on *Ella T. v. State of California* Settlement**

Good afternoon. Fathers & Families of San Joaquin is a community based organization in Stockton, California that works to promote healthy communities, including the positive development of youth and families through organizing, advocacy, and direct services. Our mission is to promote the cultural, spiritual, economic, and social renewal of the most vulnerable families in Stockton and the greater San Joaquin Valley.

Literacy is imperative to the health and dignity of the youth and families we serve. Yet we know, in Stockton, our students have some of the lowest literacy rates anywhere in California – in fact, anywhere in the country. We joined this lawsuit back in 2017 because the State has a moral and legal obligation to do more for our kids, especially for our Black and Latino kids in Stockton.

Today, more than two years after this case was filed, we are excited to be part of this historic settlement. We hope and expect that the holistic, community-centered approaches to literacy education promoted by the settlement will benefit our kids in Stockton and lift up the important work that FFSJ and our partners in the Central Valley have done for many years.

Our work over the past two decades has taught us a lot about what trauma-impacted youth need to succeed – in both school and life beyond. We know these young people need schools that are equipped to deliver a pedagogy of love and healing, not criminalization and exclusion. The settlement we submitted today defines a clear tie between literacy education outcomes and the key conditions that must be present at a school in order to ensure safe and successful learning opportunities. It explicitly puts forward restorative justice programs and trauma-informed practices as potential uses of the Block Grant funds, validating what our communities know works best for our students.

The settlement also includes a specific commitment from State Officials to visit and meet with the Stockton Unified School District and its community stakeholders. Our school system has the potential to be a critical point of intervention in the lives of many young people, and we look forward to this opportunity to engage with State officials during their visit to Stockton and to show them firsthand the realities of generational harm and trauma faced by Stockton students.

Our youth are resilient and tenacious learners, but without the proper supports from their schools, we see far too many young people fall through the cracks and into the juvenile and adult justice systems. The schools serving our most vulnerable children need more support, and we hope this settlement will be a step in the right direction that helps the State of California begin to correct past harms experienced by students around the state. We hope the commitments to the Stockton community will stop Stockton schools from being ignored and falling through the cracks in our State's education system.

The next generation of leaders cannot right the historical injustices and oppression faced by our community if they cannot read and write. We need our babies to be educated and have the ability to immerse themselves in books, read and know their own histories, and express themselves freely with words – be it through poems, music, or prose. When we create a system of schools

that love our kids, we know we will deliver on the promise, and constitutional right, of access to literacy for every child. We hope this settlement will help lay the groundwork for lasting changes in our District and across the State to better serve and educate our leaders of tomorrow.