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Lawyers' Committee and Silicon Valley Community Foundation
Withdraw Civil Rights Complaint against Mountain View Los Altos Union High School District
*District applauded for adopting new guidelines aimed to ensure equal access
to advanced math classes for all qualified students.*

(San Francisco, CA) – Under pressure from state lawmakers and in response to [a complaint](#) filed by the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights of the San Francisco Bay Area and Silicon Valley Community Foundation in August, the Mountain View Los Altos Union High School District ("MVLA") passed a new policy at their October 12 meeting aimed to rectify the disparities that resulted from former math placement practices. The district will set up transparent guidelines for how freshmen are placed in math classes based on a new written math placement policy that relies on objective factors, and omits subjective measures that often reflected an unconscious bias against students of color and low income.

The two non-profit organizations were urging the government to investigate discrimination against ninth grade students of color in this district who have been enrolled in lower level mathematics classes than their white peers despite performing well on standardized tests and meeting or exceeding other objective standards.

"We are pleased that the MVLA is poised to implement a comprehensive policy that treats all students fairly. We applaud the district's new superintendent for the important first step of developing a written policy. While we will continue to monitor implementation and the impact on students, we expect to withdraw our complaint in the light of the district's actions," said Kimberly Thomas Rapp, Lawyers' Committee Executive Director. "In our pursuit of education equity, if we identify other schools across California that discourage successful students of color from pursuing math classes that will put them on a STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) trajectory, they will be similarly challenged."

Most universities (including California State and University of California) require at least three years of math for college eligibility and prefer students who have taken Calculus or AP Statistics. Such high level math classes are generally only available to students who begin high school taking Geometry. Without this proficiency, a student may be unprepared to compete for the highly compensated, highly sought after fields of science, technology, engineering and math (STEM). These negative impacts in higher education have far-reaching effects on the students' future earning power and other measures of success.

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“We are pleased that under Superintendent Jeff Harding’s leadership the district policies will no longer hold back minority and low-income students from math classes they are qualified to take. No student should be denied the opportunity to advance after successfully passing a class and performing well on standardized tests,” said Emmett D. Carson, CEO and President of Silicon Valley Community Foundation.

In 2013, the Lawyers’ Committee, in partnership with Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher LLP, and with support from Silicon Valley Community Foundation, issued a report “[Held Back: Addressing Misplacement of 9th Grade Students in Bay Area Math Classes](#)” addressing the misplacement of ninth grade students in Bay Area high school mathematics classes. The report concluded that when objective data is used as the basis of placement decisions, minority students who have performed at Proficient or Advanced levels on their standardized tests should be placed in the proper 9th grade math class. The study identified subjective assessments in placement decisions, such as teacher recommendations, as a likely cause of racial disparities.

With this knowledge, Silicon Valley Community Foundation led the charge to address math misplacement through legislation by sponsoring Senate Bill 359, the California Placement Act of 2015, which was signed into law by Governor Jerry Brown last week on October 5. This legislation ensures all California school districts adopt fair and transparent math placement policies that take multiple objective measures into consideration.

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The **Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights of the San Francisco Bay Area** is a non-profit law firm that advances, protects and promotes the rights of communities of color, immigrants and refugees through direct services, impact litigation and policy advocacy. Lawyers' Committee work in the field of education focuses on securing equal access to a quality education for low income students and students of color.

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