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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Black Parents Advocacy Group Launches New Website

Advocates for Equity in South Orange & Maplewood Schools

(Maplewood, NJ) – The South Orange-Maplewood **Black Parents Workshop** (“The Workshop”) has launched a new website – www.blackparentsworkshop.org – as part of its continuing efforts to advocate for equity in the suburban New Jersey school district. The organization was launched in 2014 as an effort to address a two-decade failure of the South Orange Maplewood School District to address a racial achievement gap. The Black Parents Workshop supported the civil rights complaint brought against the school district by the ACLU and the UCLA Civil Rights Project that targeted discriminatory practices in student discipline and academic tracking. The Workshop has also challenged the school district on the lack of diversity in its teacher ranks and its failure to adopt a culturally competent curriculum.

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Workshop convener Walter Fields said, “Recent developments in the district have moved us to begin planning a long-term campaign to reform public education in our community. The website is the first in several steps we are taking to expand our efforts. We are also expanding our outreach nationally to collaborate in other suburban school districts where Black children are being similarly treated. In addition, we are developing a pro-bono legal team in anticipation of litigation we might be forced to pursue in light of the South Orange-Maplewood district’s failure to appropriate resources to close the achievement gap, despite its promises.”

The South Orange-Maplewood School District was subject to an investigation by the U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights (OCR) under the Obama administration. OCR found the district to be in violation of the civil rights of Black students in its disciplinary practices and denial of access to advanced level courses. Subsequently, the ACLU and the UCLA Civil Rights Project filed a complaint with OCR based upon the federal investigation. The school district has entered into a Resolution Agreement with the Office of Civil Rights and its efforts to address OCR’s findings are being monitored.

Fields added “We have witnessed the legal and moral failure of a school district in serving Black children and the time has come to hold the district fully accountable. We seek the appropriation of sufficient resources, monetary and personnel, the reconstruction of the district’s curriculum and the termination of personnel who exhibit bias toward Black children or in the exercise of their duties. On the last point, we are fully prepared to exercise provisions in state education law that allow us to challenge teacher tenure. We have lived through two decades of excuses by this district, hiding behind the façade of ‘diversity,’ while operating a de facto segregated public school system.”

In recent weeks, the South Orange-Maplewood School District has come under fire for the assignment to 5th grade students of a lesson on Colonial America that included the drawing of slave auction posters. That assignment influenced some children to create a slave auction video in which a Black classmate was portrayed as a slave and ‘whipped.’ There have been multiple

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episodes in the district over the last two decades in which Black students have complained about their mistreatment and expressed frustration over the district's response. The Black Parents Workshop will be proactive in assisting student organizing efforts and will play an active role in representing their concerns, and seeking reparative remedies for any harm experienced by maltreatment in the South Orange-Maplewood School District.

For information contact Walter Fields at the number or e-mail address listed above.

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