



WESTWOOD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Honoring Tradition, Inspiring Excellence, Shaping the Future

April 6, 2022

Dear WPS Families:

We are writing to offer clarification and context for a few of the claims made in an ad that ran in last week's *Hometown Weekly* newspaper. Our intent here is not to explain the District's decision-making--we have and will continue to provide that information through our public presentations to the School Committee around District goals and priorities. In this letter, we simply want to make sure that District families have accurate and complete information with respect to curriculum. We believe that without clarification and context, the statements in the ad may be confusing and/or lead to mistrust and misunderstanding.

The ad claims that a first grade classroom read-aloud involved "a book on the topic of gender dysphoria (or transgenderism)." The book in question is [Neither](#) by Arlie Anderson. For an accurate sense of the book, you can watch a [video](#) of it being read aloud on YouTube. This book was read to encourage conversations about acceptance and belonging among our very youngest students. While the story is appropriate for any month, it was read in June, which is celebrated by many members of LGBTQ+ community and their friends and loved ones as Pride Month.

The ad also cites a 7th grade science lesson centered on a *Scientific American* blog post. The lesson, a collaborative effort between reading specialists and science teachers, encouraged students to think about the impact of under-representation of women and people of color in science. Students read a handout that contained an excerpt of the post, along with some additional data, and answered some questions in preparation for a classroom discussion. The ad quoted, in bold typeface, a line from the full blog post ("Break contracts with local police, and pledge not to call the police for nonviolent offenses"); however, it is important to note that this line DID NOT appear in the excerpt given to students and was not part of the class discussion.

Finally, the ad references a memo that Assistant Superintendent Borchers wrote in April, 2021 in which she provided an update about curricular work related to efforts to honor the diversity of our community, pursue equity, and promote integration. This memo was the basis for a public presentation at the School Committee meeting in April 2021 and was posted on our District website at that time to provide the community with information about those efforts. The [memo](#), [presentation slides](#), and [video](#) of the meeting all remain posted on our District website for the public to view.

The leaders in the Westwood Public Schools value the partnership between educators and our students' families, and we work to be transparent about what is happening in our classrooms. Our curriculum in the WPS is aligned to the [state learning standards](#) that are required for all public schools in Massachusetts. The goals outlined in the [WPS Strategy for District Improvement](#) are discussed publicly at School Committee meetings and are posted on the home page of our District website.

As always, we encourage parents to reach out to their school principals if they have any questions about what their children are learning in school or to the Assistant Superintendent with broader questions about curriculum and instruction in the Westwood Public Schools. We always welcome conversation and hope that you will feel comfortable reaching out if you hear something concerning or confusing.

This letter will be posted on our District website (www.westwood.k12.ma.us). Please feel free to share it with other Westwood community members who may not have children in the school.

Sincerely,

Emily J. Parks
Superintendent

Joshua Baumer
Deerfield Principal

Allison Borchers
Assistant Superintendent

Kristen Evans
Sheehan Principal

Abigail Hanscom
Director of Student Services

Debra Gallagher
Downey Principal

Lemma Jn-baptiste
Director of Business and Finance

Matthew Kuklantz
Hanlon Principal

Steve Ouellette
Director of Technology, Learning, and Innovation

Donna Tobin
Martha Jones Principal

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Thomas Millett
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Aishleen Flanagan
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