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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Wellesley Public Schools District Statement on Affinity Spaces**

**May 20, 2021 (Wellesley, MA)** - Like many school districts in the Commonwealth, the Wellesley Public Schools (WPS) District for many years has hosted and participated in numerous affinity-type activities. In light of events in this year and last, in which Asian and Asian-Americans continue to be the subject of racial violence around the country, our district hosted a healing space for members of the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community, and wider BIPOC (Black and Indigenous people of color) community, to come together to support one another in a time of grief and loss. This healing space was in addition to broader conversations already happening in classrooms and in our community.

In an effort to further define this district invitation to an individual class of students in a developmentally appropriate manner, one of our teachers noted that this particular space was not designed for students who identify as white. The teacher's intent, however imperfectly stated, was to help early secondary students better understand the intended audience for this affinity space, not prohibit anyone else from attending. No students or staff were turned away from participating in the healing space. In fact, participants on that day represented a range of racial groups, including white participants.

As conversations around race and equity have increased both in urgency and intensity, our students, parents, and staff have sought greater opportunities to lean into these issues through dialogue to elicit and provide feedback, seek improvement in our district, and build empathy and understanding. These conversations are often deeply personal and emotional, particularly as we have heard first-hand experiences from alumni and current students who have shared ways that they have often felt unwelcomed or have been subjected to both overt and subtle racial microaggressions in our district.

In each of these examples there have been opportunities for all members of the community to come together to both share and learn. Additionally, at times we have also hosted specific affinity spaces for members of our school community from historically marginalized groups to come together for mutual support and sharing,

which we know is more difficult to replicate in a more general setting. Our use of affinity spaces is not meant to drive conversations about race and equity into separate spaces, increasing social divisions. Rather, these spaces are one element of many aimed at strengthening our inclusive practices so that all members of our community feel valued, heard, and a deep sense of belonging. To be successful, affinity spaces must exist within a broader environment of racial discourse. In short, it's not an "either/or" but rather a "both/and" strategy.

***About the Wellesley Public Schools District***

*The Wellesley Public Schools (WPS) District is located in the MetroWest region of Greater Boston. WPS aspires to be a world-class school system that develops the heads, hearts, and hands of its students and inspires them to be the critical thinkers, problem-solvers, artists and innovators who make contributions to their communities, our nation, and the world. WPS is guided by the following core values: Academic Excellence, Commitment to Community, Respect for Human Differences and Cooperative & Caring Relationships.*

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