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Understandably, there is still a great deal of anger, frustration and disappointment surrounding the racist comments coming from the student section of our bleachers at the WA Girls Basketball game on January 28, 2022. We, the leadership of Westford Public Schools, are angry that it happened, just as our community is angry. We are frustrated that the previous work that we have been doing was not evident in the behavior exhibited in the student section. Many are frustrated and disappointed with us feeling like there has not been enough transparency or urgency in addressing the situation. There has been swift action and response to this hurtful, damaging incident, but the necessary healing takes a long time and must be purposefully planned and facilitated with great care and support or additional harm could be done.

We have strongly denounced this behavior publicly and will always denounce acts of racism in any form. Much of the communication and work that was done immediately was through the school administrations to respect and protect the needs of the victim. Some of these communications have included apologies, not yet from our students as we were informed that it was too soon for that process, but from our administrators on behalf of Westford Academy. In restorative justice, formal apology letters typically will happen later in the process, once the responsible individuals have had a chance to hear from the victim, thoroughly process the impact of their actions, and work to make amends. We will remain focused on how the victim might want her voice to be heard in the process.

Friday, February 11, 2022, we were able to visit the studios at WestfordCAT to record a special update with the members of our DEI Response Team. A link is provided below at the end of this message. This update focuses on sharing with the community some of the DEI work that has been done over the past, resources that exist for families and students, and the work that still needs to be done.

In the beginning of the segment, I mention that as a school system we are not at liberty to discuss specific student discipline. However, based on the investigations from both of the high school administrations, there have been consequences and there will continue to be ongoing consequences. As we continue to investigate based on new information shared in recent media reports, if adults were aware of the behavior and did not stop it then they will also be held accountable.

While there were initial disciplinary consequences for the individuals involved, as the restorative process moves forward, those individuals will be expected to continue to take steps to take accountability for their actions, and to work to repair the harm done to the Wayland player, the Wayland community, and the Westford community. More importantly, the restorative approach means that those most impacted by the hurtful actions will be those who have the greatest say in how they are addressed. The player and the members of the community should, and will, have the

strongest voice in how the responsible parties make amends, and the process won't be considered complete until they are satisfied. Dr. Michele Shannon has been working closely with the WA administration to help begin this process and facilitate open direct conversations that are paramount for greater understanding and healing to begin and for that we are extremely grateful for her support and service.

We will continue to reach out to Wayland to extend invitations to engage in restorative practices if they would find it helpful. Middlesex County District Attorney Marian Ryan offered her assistance and resources in helping to facilitate restorative conversations and we have started that process already, as well. Additionally, as mentioned in an earlier update, we are engaging with Pathways to Restorative Communities to help us plan and facilitate upcoming community wide events to provide space for open dialogue within the community. Their guidance along with the support we were already receiving from our professional development and consulting with Dr. Kalise Wornum, founder of KW Diversity, Inc., has been critical as we work to respond to this act of bias and discrimination that took place in our community.

WestfordCAT Special Supt Update: a Response to Bias and Discrimination 2-11-22

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