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Recently, the news cycle took an interest in a specific conversation that has been taking place in our community for a little while although it seemed to be presented as new information. For some people, it may feel as though this conversation has actually been taking place for too long already. To those people, whether they seek change or not, I ask for continued patience; as Superintendent, I believe strongly that it should not be taken lightly and deserves significant investment of attention.

For anyone not aware of what I might be referring to, WA Principal Mr. Antonelli recently presented an update to the School Committee regarding the current WA mascot, the Grey Ghost. The news reported much more than the actual conversation at the School Committee meeting and I was informed that it ignited some rather hostile local online chatter. While we spend a lot of time trying to educate our students on the importance of their digital footprints, I dare say many of our adults might still need to consider the impact of their online commentary. Arguments via social media tend to do more damage to reputations than actually change the minds of the people with whom they are arguing.

This week, I engaged our WPS DEI Team in the conversation in order to solicit their perspective and feedback. Even within a group of individuals passionate about creating spaces where multiple perspectives and experiences can be shared and heard, there was not an immediate consensus. Where some see clarity in a specific decision, others see complexity. We are going to continue our conversation over the next month and I will be sharing a more definitive response as to what I believe we should be doing with the School Committee in November at the latest.

In the meantime, if you did not see the statement that School Committee Chair Chris Sanders and I shared with some of the news outlets seeking comments, I wanted to include it for you here:

Our community is engaged in an ongoing conversation about our high school mascot, which was adopted in 1959. The School Committee was briefed by the principal of our high school this past Monday about the various stories that have circulated describing the origin of the Grey Ghost mascot.

While there may be a lack of clarity around the true origin of the mascot, there is no ambiguity that Westford Public Schools must be a welcoming place for all students and families. And if our mascot is preventing students from feeling like this is their school district or their community, then we obviously have more work to do.

Self-reflection and a drive for self-improvement are hallmarks of both good educators and good students. In that spirit, the School Committee and the Superintendent are committed to listening to the full range of diverse voices in our community, and to ensuring that we are creating a culture of belonging for all students and families in Westford.

Sincerely,
Chris

Dr. Christopher Chew
Superintendent of Schools
Westford, MA

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