



## Inclusive Westwood comment on One Westwood publicity April 2022



Inclusive Westwood has received many questions and notes of concern from community members regarding the recent advertisement and publicity by the group One Westwood. While the content was disturbing, it is the work of a small minority in our town. We know there is deep support for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts across our community because:

- More than 1,000 Westwood residents signed this [public statement](#);
- The Westwood Select Board and Human Rights Task Force [issued a joint statement in support of DEI](#);
- The Westwood Public Schools has committed to an equity audit, established a Director of Equity, Integration & Community Partnerships role, [addressed the erroneous claims](#) in the advertisement, and stated their commitment to DEI work; and
- Westwood students and recent graduates [shared their response to the advertisement](#), with the majority of perspectives in favor of diversity.

In an effort to foster a supportive, safe, equitable, and inclusive town for all children, their families, and all Westwood residents, it's important to address the most jarring, inaccurate, and harmful statements posited in the advertisement. Several of them are incorrect and seek to stoke fear, division, and confusion. Some are blatantly intolerant of certain populations, whereas others are more subtle in their bias. We know some residents of Westwood are earnestly trying to understand the issues, and we hope to correct falsehoods and provide clarity.

*Advertisement Statement 1: We call for an end to classroom discussions and curriculum supporting transgender ideology at all grade levels and an end to discussions of human sexuality at the elementary school level. (This and subsequent statements were pulled from the One Westwood 3/31 Hometown Weekly ad, One Westwood website, and/or One Westwood 3/23 opinion piece in the Westwood Minute.)*

**Inclusive Westwood's perspective:** Our schools' primary job is to welcome, support, and educate every child, and children can't learn if they don't feel safe, seen, and validated. The statement above is harmful to some of the most vulnerable members of our community. While there has been a significant increase in social acceptance and the legal rights of LGBTQ+ people over the last several decades, research shows that they still face discrimination and higher incidences of violence, especially among youth. This environment has life or death consequences. [Data from the Trevor Project](#) shows that LGBTQ+ youth are at increased risk of suicide, physical threats, harm, and mental health issues. Conversely, suicide risk drops by half for transgender and non-binary youth when their pronouns are respected by all or most people in their lives. Acknowledgement and affirmation matter.

Elementary school is a place where students learn how to be kind, respectful, and compassionate. Students share information on their families and learn about the rich diversity in our community when they get to share these stories with their classmates and friends. LGBTQ+ inclusivity in elementary school is rooted in the values of respect, family, and acceptance. Students

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with LGBTQ+ parents and loved ones deserve to know that their families are welcomed and valued in our schools, just like all children and families. Transgender children should be able to be themselves and have their experiences validated as well.

Finally, Massachusetts law includes civil rights protections that [prohibit discrimination](#) on the basis of gender identity and sexual orientation (among other dimensions of identity), and the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education provides [clear guidance](#) on how schools are to provide a safe and supportive environment without discrimination. The guidance includes using pronouns consistent with the student's gender identity and chosen name. The advertisement's suggestion of how our schools should treat our LGBTQ+ children is not just cruel, it's also against the law.

*Advertisement Statement 2: We call for an end to the “race-obsessed” agenda being taught to our students at all grade levels.*

**Inclusive Westwood's perspective:** The advertisement falsely implies that communities must choose EITHER an academically rigorous education OR one that includes race-related topics. The reality is that an excellent education – one that actually prepares our students to thrive post-graduation – is one that helps them to understand and address the role of race in our history and current society. It teaches them to work effectively with people who are different from them as well as to appreciate the vibrancy and assets of other cultures. When diverse communities and cultures are represented in the curriculum, students of all backgrounds are validated. By presenting students with viewpoints and experiences far different from their own, it gives them the opportunity to think critically about their own beliefs and examine the world in fresh ways. Learning from the mistakes of our past, understanding their impact on our present, and demanding we move forward with equity for all Americans is not a “race-obsessed” agenda. It's evolution. It's decency. It prepares our students to succeed.

When our students graduate, they'll join a global and diverse workforce. Interacting with people of all different backgrounds and mindsets will be challenging if they haven't had prior exposure to diversity, especially at a younger age. Many Fortune 500 companies make “diversity, equity, and inclusion disclosure and performance a critical metric for successful businesses” via this [initiative](#). We must send Westwood graduates off to college and careers prepared to live and work in a diverse world; otherwise, we are limiting their ability to succeed.

Investing in training that gives our teachers the tools and language they need prepares them to lead these lessons and conversations productively and thoughtfully. The group behind the advertisement may decry the use of professional development dollars for these purposes. We see it as essential.

The advertisement also asserts that talking about diversity in classrooms is akin to political indoctrination. Let's clarify the definition of indoctrination: “the process of teaching a person or group to accept a set of beliefs uncritically.” Teaching our children about multiple perspectives and discussing both the successes and failures of our country is the opposite of indoctrination. Doing so teaches our children to think critically about our history and form their own opinions.

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They say that race shouldn't matter, and even quote Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., out of context (and offensively), to support their assertion. We can look to his own daughter, Dr. Bernice A. King, to clarify this: "People using 'will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character' to criticize discussion of racism are not students of the comprehensive MLK. My father's dream included eradicating racism, not ignoring it." The reality is that race does matter, and racism will continue to exist until enough of us choose to work toward a better and more just society. By standing together and demanding our kids deserve the truth of our history, we ensure they can understand where we've been and work to create a better future.

Advertisement Statement 3: *We value equality over equity. Equity isn't even a distant relative of equality. One idea has led to prosperity and freedom unparalleled in world history, and the other to the gulags.*

**Inclusive Westwood's perspective:** Equity differs from equality: equality is the idea of providing the same thing to everyone, whereas equity is providing what people need to succeed, recognizing that it may differ across people or communities. There are numerous [powerful illustrations of this concept](#) that seek to bring the difference to life. It is not clear which definition of equity was used in the advertisement, as they do not define it beyond evoking 'gulags.'

We already embrace equity with positive results in Westwood. Our schools offer tailored and supplemental services to ensure that every child has what they need to succeed, with improved mental, physical, academic, and social outcomes. The town provides accommodations to make buildings more accessible, specialized programs for senior citizens, allowances for absentee ballots for voting access, and more. And the benefits often apply more broadly. For example, even though ramps into buildings or on street corners tend to be designed with wheelchairs in mind, they also end up benefiting parents with strollers and people making deliveries.

A continued and deepening equity focus supports all our children and residents with what they need to thrive, even – and especially – when those needs are different than those of the majority.

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Interacting with people who are different from ourselves can make us better communicators, more effective leaders, and more informed people. When we're exposed to different cultures, customs, norms, values, and communication styles, we learn to navigate in a nuanced way, to listen, and to connect. We show more respect, patience, and sensitivity. Classrooms that explore all aspects of diversity develop our children into leaders who are respectful, patient, and kind.

Many in our town are grateful for the growing diversity of Westwood and are already committed and engaged in making our town stronger and more inclusive. We look forward to doing this work together with you.

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