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JOHN H. ASHLEY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

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At its June 13, 2020 meeting, the WASB Board of Directors approved the following statement.

WASB Statement to Members on Equity and Racial Justice

Public education, as the cornerstone of our democracy, must add its voice to the collective call for a more fair and just society and take a leadership role in finding solutions. But first, we must recognize our own shortcomings.

Wisconsin has a strong public education system, but for years we have known that our black, Latino, Native American and Southeast Asian students lag behind our white students by nearly every measure – test scores, access to advanced coursework, participation in extracurricular activities and graduation rates – while being overidentified in discipline and special education rates. It's past time to step forward and ask ourselves hard questions on why the disparities persist.

Limited resources pose significant challenges in addressing these issues and major factors outside our control contribute to inequality, but school board members have an obligation to evaluate their policies, practices and budget decisions to promote equity and racial justice for all children.

In June 2018, the WASB Board of Directors approved the following equity statement:

We affirm in our actions that each student can, will and shall learn. We recognize that based on factors including, but not limited to, disability, race, gender, ethnicity and socio-economic status, not all students receive equitable educational opportunities. Educational equity is the intentional allocation of resources, instruction and opportunities to meet the specific identified needs of students and staff in the local school community.

That was the beginning. As an association, we used this statement as a springboard to provide professional development around the issues of equity and highlight thought-provoking stories and information in our publications. As your association, we pledge to do more. So, we created a task force of WASB directors to work specifically on these issues. We are committed to prioritizing discussions about racism and inequity in order to empower you to lead these conversations in your communities.

We know many in your districts are hurting and this work will not be easy. But we call on all school boards to determine how their policies and practices have a disproportionate impact on students of color.

Ask yourselves:

- Does our board have an equity statement? Are there ways to make a commitment to equity clearer to those we serve?
- How are we ensuring that we assess every decision with an eye towards its impact on all students?
- How does our understanding of the district's demographics impact our decision making?
- What process do we have in place to regularly review our policies to ensure there are no barriers to an equitable education for all students?
- How does our curriculum development process ensure culturally relevant learning experiences for our students?
- What process do we have in place to prioritize diversity and cultural competency in hiring?
- How have we directly addressed the implicit bias among all of us to ensure that it does not impact our expectations for students, our governance and leadership work, the quality of our teaching or how we manage our classrooms?
- How are we ensuring that our students of color are participating in advanced coursework, the arts and extracurricular programs at the same level as our white students? How are we eliminating barriers that stand in their way?
- What are we doing to remove restrictions on access to advanced coursework?
- How are we ensuring that our dress codes are sensitive to cultural differences?
- How are we addressing disproportionality in student discipline?
- What steps are we taking to ensure that our students interact with a full cross-section of our society and are prepared to respectfully interact with everyone they meet?
- How are we ensuring that the wide variety of voices in our communities are fully represented and heard?
- What are we doing to ensure that student voice is encouraged and used in our decision making?
- How are we challenging the status quo to ensure equity for all students?

As an association, we don't have all the answers, but we want to do better and we want to help you listen, learn and lead in your communities. The WASB stands ready to assist you in facilitating local conversations and evaluating your policies and procedures to ensure they lead to fairness and justice for all. In the near future, we will share more details about how we intend to respond to these issues and how we can be of support to you as you do the most important work in educating all of Wisconsin's public school children.

For more information or to provide your feedback, contact WASB Executive Director John Ashley.