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Washtenaw Superintendents' Association Statement on Racial Equity, Police Brutality, and Justice in the United States

Washtenaw County, Mich. – After continued attacks on people of color across the United States and in Washtenaw County, the Washtenaw Superintendents' Association has issued a shared statement standing in solidarity with black and brown students and families and re-affirming their commitment to anti-racism. WSA represents the superintendents of the Washtenaw Intermediate School District and the nine public school districts in Washtenaw County: Ann Arbor Public Schools, Chelsea Schools, Dexter Community Schools, Lincoln Consolidated Schools, Manchester Community Schools, Milan Area Schools, Saline Area Schools, Whitmore Lake Public Schools and Ypsilanti Community Schools. Their statement reads:

“The public murder of George Floyd by a white police officer, the killing of Breonna Taylor by police officers while she slept in her home, and the lynching of Ahmaud Arbery by white supremacists in Georgia are stark reminders that the issue of race in America and abuse of power by white people continues unabated. Systemic racism was part and parcel of the founding of this country. For more than 400 years, people of African descent have been abused, oppressed and marginalized in a country where we proclaim “liberty and justice for all.”

Police violence and brutality is not a new phenomenon, and the racial disproportionality is evidence of just how deep and pervasive systemic racism is in every aspect of our society. We know that many dedicated officers would never commit such heinous acts and support those officers who work tirelessly to eliminate systemic racism. We also acknowledge that throughout our country, we have a problem. The recent incident in Washtenaw County with a white police officer punching a black woman repeatedly in the head is a reminder that this isn't something that just happens in other communities. This violence against people of color by those who are sworn to protect and serve is unacceptable. When a police officer can kneel on a helpless black man for more than 8 minutes while his life slipped away because he couldn't breathe and his colleagues in blue acquiesced to the public killing in broad daylight, we are all in danger. None of us are immune from abuse of power unless and until we demand accountability and insist on true liberty and justice for all.

Our children are angry, scared, and confused. They don't understand how in this country the people who are supposed to protect us can be allowed to arbitrarily take the life of someone because of the color of their skin. They are looking to us as leaders and adults to do something – not just say something, but to take action. When any one of our students has to fear for his or her safety because of the color of their skin, we know we are not living up to our ideals as a community and as a nation.

In February, we made a collective statement about our anti-racist commitment as public education leaders. That commitment is restated and reaffirmed here with an even greater sense of urgency.

As leaders of the public education system in Washtenaw County, we are committed to nurturing anti-racist educational learning environments where each and every child is respected and valued for who they are regardless of skin color, gender, sexual identity or orientation, ability or disability, or any other



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category. Our diversity is what makes us stronger, and we will not accept educational environments where students are subject to conditions where their identity makes them a target of abuse.

How we treat each other is a measure of our shared values and commitment to basic human dignity and worth. As superintendents in Washtenaw County, we commit to anti-racist leadership and fostering inclusive educational environments where each person, students and staff, feels a sense of belonging and is treated with dignity and respect.

Now more than ever there is an urgency to act. The superintendents of Washtenaw County stand with our black and brown students and families. We see you. We hear you. We know we have been part of the problem by perpetuating a system of inequity and injustice, and we pledge ourselves to dismantling and disrupting the unjust systems so that each person may live freely and without fear.”

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