**Re: Affinity Groups**

To [school district]

**FAIR stands firmly opposed to schools' establishing or funding official identity-based affinity groups that restrict membership to those with a particular group identity**. FAIR does not, however, oppose the formation of such groups by private individuals or organizations who wish to create such affinity groups or clubs outside of school.

School-sponsored racial or other identity-based affinity groups are highly problematic for several reasons. These groups exclude students or teachers based on their identity, which violates their civil rights to be treated fairly and equally without regard to their immutable traits. It is not appropriate to force people to choose a group identity, and no one has the moral right to decide for others the importance or unimportance of various elements of their identities.

School-sponsored affinity groups can also reinforce stereotypes based on socially constructed concepts of "race," which can lead to mistrust, division and racism within our schools by creating an “us” vs. “them” mentality. Also, although identity-based affinity groups may aim to create a sense of belonging, students and teachers within those groups may experience social pressure to conform with the behavior and decisions made by their leaders. This pressure interferes with each individual’s ability to form and express their own unique identity and to form relationships with those they may have more in common with outside of their designated identity-based affinity group.

If [the school] decides to move forward with creating identity-based affinity groups, we advise that any such groups be voluntary and not compulsory; no student or teacher should be forced to join a group based on how others perceive them or their identity. We also advise that any such groups be open and inclusive to anyone who wants to join, even if they may not be perceived as belonging to a particular identity group; no student or teacher should be restricted from joining an identity-based affinity group because of how others perceive them. If school-sponsored affinity groups exclude based on such traits, they will run afoul of civil rights laws and foster divisions and mistrust. Identity-based affinity groups must welcome any and all who want to join, without judgment or question about their identity formation or belonging. This openness will help promote understanding, tolerance, fairness, and a sense of shared belonging within our schools.

It’s my hope that we can build a strong culture of belonging in [our school] through inclusive community events. Some ideas could be multicultural food events, cultural arts events, community service days, pep rallies, carnival days, talent shows, and the like, for the whole community.

Thank you for providing us the opportunity to clarify FAIR's position on this topic. If you would like to discuss further, we're happy to schedule a phone call.