

## Brighton student's video on race relations prompts concerns

### Video

Parents storm meeting calling for answers

### Mary Chao

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Keniyah Vickers and her family moved to Brighton a little over two years ago. The 14-year-old, who is currently enrolled in summer school at Brighton High School to improve her grades, has found herself at the center of an incident that became the hot topic of Wednesday night's town meeting.

Vickers and a group of African-American friends were watching a video of comedian Kevin Hart, who used the Nword in his skit, when a white student reported it to school administration. Vickers, who is entering 10th grade, was admonished.

Deciding that she'd been treated unfairly, Vickers took her grievance public with a lengthy July 12 YouTube video describing the incident in addition to alleging racial bias at the school.

"I live in a white neighborhood. They already think I don't live here; they already assume that every kid who goes there is Urban/Suburban. Meanwhile I live seven minutes away," Vickers says on the video at one point.

Vickers then says there is a lack of equality and equity in Brighton.

That video prompted parents to attend the Brighton Town Board meeting Wednesday night to address their concerns about race relations.

With a standing-room-only crowd of about 50 people, town residents and activists took turns during the public forum to address what they allege is racial inequity in Brighton schools.

Brighton resident Sarah Teres, who has three children in Brighton schools, called on the Town Board to ask the school administration to address several issues that she felt were offensive. She took issue with Colonial Day events in the schools, their implication of colonialism as well as children being able to dress up as Native Americans. She also took issue with the Brighton school mascot Baron, with Teres interpreting "Baron" as implying a white person who owns people, she told the board.

Brighton resident Sean Dobbin, who is biracial Asian, graduated from Brighton High School and now has children of his own, urged the board to look outside their bubbles. When he was attending school in the town, he said he "thought race relations were fine, but came to realize that students of color were having very different experiences."

Brighton Town Supervisor Bill Moeh-

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**Brighton High School student Keniyah Vickers addresses Brighton Town Board on Wednesday.** MARY CHAO/ROCHESTER DEMOCRAT AND CHRONICLE

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### **Video**

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le addressed the crowd, noting that the town is creating a diversity and inclusion committee. Brighton resident Sean Singh asked the board to speed up the process.

### **District statement**

In a statement, district communications coordinator Dan Goldman addressed the incident.

“All students and their families should feel respected, valued, included and embraced in the school community. We strive to provide equity and be culturally responsive in all of our work. In fact, this work has resulted in high achievement among all groups of students,” the statement said. “We’ve been made aware of this video, but had not been contacted by a student or their family about an issue occurring or in need of problem-solving until yesterday. We’re looking forward to meeting with them next week to discuss their concerns. It should be noted that the summer school principal reviewed behavioral expectations with all classes as a normal procedure and was not addressing a specific incident or issue.”

Over the past several years, the district has engaged in a variety of efforts to support equity for all students and to better address issues related to diversity, the statement said.

Data from the U.S. Education Department Office of Civil Rights shows major disproportionality in suspensions for black students at Brighton High School. In 2015-16 they made up 8 percent of the student body but had 32 percent of in-school suspensions and 40 percent of out-of-school suspensions. Black students, both male and female, were suspended about eight times as often as white students.

In 2017, 40 percent of black fourth-graders in the district were counted as proficient in math on state exams compared with 73 percent of white children.

Vickers attended the meeting with her mother, Wynette Vickers, who said she is proud of her daughter for speaking up.

After the meeting, Keniyah Vickers lauded the Brighton school system, but also said its excellence may be used as an excuse.

“The education is really good, but the powerful use education as an excuse to deny human rights,” Keniyah Vickers said.

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