

Racist graffiti called hate crime

WILL CLEVELAND

@WILLCLEVELAND13

Police are conducting a criminal investigation at Brighton High School after the statement, “the n----- should die,” was found etched onto the stairway leading into the school’s front entrance Tuesday morning. Brighton schools Superintendent Kevin C. McGowan said the graffiti was discovered by a student at 9:52 a.m.

Brighton Police Chief Mark Henderson said the act of vandalism and criminal mischief is being investigated as a hate crime. After photographing the racially charged graffiti, Brighton school staff removed it and notified police. “At no time did we or the Brighton Police Department feel that a student or students as a group were unsafe or in danger,” McGowan said.

Police say cameras are being reviewed and students are being interviewed at this time. There is a surveillance camera directly above where the alleged message was etched. McGowan, Henderson and Brighton High School principal Thomas Hall reached out to the high school’s Black Student Union and met with 20 students “to discuss the incident and get feedback from them as well.” McGowan said the district is using this opportunity to start a dialogue, choosing to use it as a teaching moment. He was especially heartened after meeting with the school’s Black Student Union, but added that, “They are exceptionally upset. ... We have a culture, that we think, embraces all people and we’re very proud of it. It’s a violation, and it’s not who we are. “We desperately need help from adults in our community and in society at large, in terms of addressing these particular issues,” McGowan added. “I think as a society we really need to think deeply about how we can step up our efforts to support all children, and to break down barriers that seem to be growing.” Henderson wouldn’t comment on how large the message was, but admitted, “It was clearly discernible and it was clearly identifiable. He also wouldn’t comment on what means were used to etch the message into the concrete. The message was found after schools had opened for the day, but Henderson and McGowan weren’t sure when it was etched into the concrete.

“The phrase ‘die’ was in the etching, so we looked at that in terms of a threat,” Henderson said. “And we performed a formal threat assessment and concluded that it was not a threat directed at an individual.” A letter was sent Tuesday afternoon from McGowan to notify parents of what he called a “disturbing and saddening ... hateful act” at the school.

WCLEVELAND@ [Gannett.com](mailto:WCLEVELAND@Gannett.com)



WILL CLEVELAND@WILLCLEVELAND13/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

This is the spot where police say a racially motivated threat was etched into the concrete at Brighton High School.

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