



**Lake finish**  
Edina finished in a four-way tie for the Lake Conference championship.  
Page 25

Thursday, March 24, 2022



(SUN CURRENT STAFF PHOTOS BY CAITLIN ANDERSON)

Junior Kayla Thomas helps lead the walkout from Edina High School to Lewis Park March 17.

At left: Sarah Hu speaks at the walkout March 17.

## Edina High School students participate in walkout

**Student speakers shared personal stories, called for acknowledgement**

By **CAITLIN ANDERSON**  
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Edina High School senior Louisa Darr was the first to speak at last week's student-led walkout. The protest was prompted by a racist video that surfaced earlier this month,

showing Edina High School students mocking Asian accents and giving a Nazi salute.

In her comments, Darr, an Asian American woman, pointed to a poem by Edwin Markham that reads: "He drew a circle that shut me out-/ Here-

tic, rebel, a thing to flout./ But love and I had the wit to win:/ We drew a circle and took him In!"

She expounded upon the poem by highlighting the use of shapes within Asian calligraphy and how they are given significant meaning. "For over 200 years of injustice, oppression and marginalization in this country, Asians and Asian Americans have together

with others been patiently drawing a circle large enough to take everyone in," she said.

Darr continued, "In our own diverse, Asian American way, we bring beauty as well as strength, faith and hope to the struggle. To prevent further racist attacks, ... I call upon the youth and leaders in my community to take action."

On March 17, over 150

students participated in a walkout from Edina High School just before the last period of the school day. The students walked a 1.6-mile route from the school to Lewis Park in Edina and were joined by Minneapolis activists Lavish Mack and Courtney Paris.

At the park, student speakers took the microphone, affirming feelings of discomfort that those

of color have often experienced in the district and community, sharing times when they themselves were racially targeted while also criticizing Edina Public Schools administration for its response and previous actions regarding racial equity.

"This administration

See **Walkout**, Page 8

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Volume 52, No. 14

### Index

Opinion-Page 4  
Business-Page 5  
Education-Page 6  
Public Safety-Page 7  
Classifieds-Pages 15-20  
Sports-Pages 25-28

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**PUBLIC NOTICES:** See pages 22-23

## Walkout

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

has to do better,” senior Willow Gilbertson, one of the event’s organizers, told the crowd. “Let’s keep signing petitions, educating others and attending peaceful protests.”

She added, “We need to do better, we need our voices heard, we need change.”

The video of Edina High School students surfaced March 7, prompting Principal Andy Beaton to send an email to district families that evening, saying that the post was “culturally insensitive and violates our Core Values.” A subsequent email, also signed by Superintendent Stacie Stanley, later that week went further by stating that they “understand the hurt this has caused in our community, especially among our Asian and Jewish members.”

At that time, the email also noted that the district could not divulge the consequences the students in the video faced, citing private data. But it did say district policies were followed.

Since then, the district has said it’s continued meeting with students and speaking with families about the incident. Prior to the Thursday walkout, Beaton and Stanley again sent an email, notifying parents that the protest was taking place and that any students who are supposed to be in class at that time would be recorded absent.

“Because our primary focus is and continues to be student learning, EPS is not condoning nor are we opposing the March 17 walkout,” the email said. “EPS respects students’ First Amendment right to peacefully assemble.”

In a statement sent to the Sun Current after the walkout, the district stated it would continue to listen and talk to students and families. It also said the district is developing a more specific “Racial Harm Protocol” to address the type of behavior that was made in the video – a common request by students after the incident.

“We hear the pain this



(SUN CURRENT STAFF PHOTOS BY CAITLIN ANDERSON)

Over 150 Edina students walked out before school dismissal March 17 to protest racism in the community.

has caused and are working to make change happen,” the March 17 district statement said.

### Students share past experiences dealing with racism

Despite changes within district policy to better respond to racist incidents when they happen, students at the walkout and in conversations to the Sun Current described a school environment that has not only brought on feelings of discomfort but direct acts of racism.

Junior Claire Chen said during her speech at the walkout that she recalled a time at school having bags of apple slices and open milk cartons thrown at her during lunch while a classmate yelled a racial slur. “The 28-second video was absolutely no surprise to any person of color. And it’s only a taste of what us POCs have dealt with all our lives,” she told the crowd.

“I have to accept that this is nothing new,” Darr also mentioned in her speech.

Junior and walkout organizer Richanta Pollard recalled being asked for her student ID to head back into the school after eating lunch outside despite her white peers not being



Richanta Pollard speaks to a crowd of students about her experiences at Edina High School.

stopped.

“Like I have to prove that I’m part of the school no matter what,” Pollard, who is Asian, Black and white, told the Sun Current.

Junior Kayla Thomas described classmates asking insensitive questions or touching her hair. After bringing up a couple of situations to administration, Thomas, who is Black, recalled being told she had

the option to move classes.

“I was just pushed to the side, which was very disheartening,” she told the Sun Current. “It’s a pretty heavy atmosphere when it comes to, especially Black people.”

Of the more than 8,400 students enrolled in the district, about 67.6% of them are white, 9% are Asian and 10.3% are Black, according to the 2022 Minnesota

Report Card. Compared to statewide average, Edina has a greater percentage of white students and Asian students, and lower percentage of Black students.

The video has “permanently changed how I think of my white peers. It is now uncomfortable for me to walk through the cafeteria. It is uncomfortable for me to walk through the halls,” Sophomore Sarah Hu said

during her speech at the walkout.

Gilbertson told the Sun Current that when she had reported racist incidents to the district, such as through its online reporting form, she did not see action taken.

Several students at the walkout also criticized a

See **Walkout**, Page 14

# Walkout

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

short suspension period for the students involved in the video, but the Sun Current could not confirm this with the district.

Salmo Mohamed, who also organized the event, said she worries that without larger consequences for those who commit racist acts, they will continue. "I just want a safe environment for everyone. I just don't want this to happen again," she said.

## Students call for more action

Mohamed said after seeing the video, she wanted to organize a walkout. She and others reached out to Edina Truth, an organization that looks to amplify marginalized voices in the community, which helped promote the event on its platforms. They also connected with the Minneapolis activists, who

showed up at the walkout alongside Minnesota Justice Coalition president Johnathon McClellan.

"If you see something, say something," McClellan addressed teachers and administrators.

McClellan added, "Hold your schools accountable, be accountable. ... Don't shrink in your responsibility, do the right thing."

Activist Mack told the crowd that they are allowed to be angry. "Never dilute your message for these white ears. That's not your job," he said. "Keep this up, keep up the fight."

Students at the walkout said they wanted to see acknowledgment, both from the district and wider community, for the harm the video caused and trauma that people of color have to face regularly.

"For white people listening, ... it is up to you to listen to the voices hurting," Gilbertson said.

Darr echoed this thought, noting her dis-

may at the initial district response. "It is the lack of meaningful action taken by school leaders initially to acknowledge the suffering and harm caused by the video but also to recognize the need for leadership towards restoring our sense of school community in all its diversity, that's where my greatest disappointment lies," Darr said.

Beaton, who has been criticized for his use of the term "culturally insensitive" to initially describe the video, has since publicly acknowledged that the behavior was "racist and is totally unacceptable," according to the school's student-run newspaper, Zephyrus.

Following a lengthy discussion during a special March 14 meeting, the Edina School Board approved a statement to be sent to families and staff. The statement highlighted three points on which it encouraged greater thought: the community's role in creating a positive learn-

ing environment beyond school walls, the importance of using dialogue to facilitate learning and the board's intent to take action to update policy.

Hu told the Sun Current last week that while she was glad the district acknowledged the video, actions still needed to be taken, such as continuing to meet with student groups and updating the student code of conduct to be more strict and specific toward racist acts.

According to the district's March 17 statement, it intends to do so.

The in-development "Racial Harm Protocol" document will "help us respond more comprehensively and consistently. More conversations are planned for the future as we are committed to making our school community whole, welcoming and accepting of all," the statement said.

Hu said she is encouraged to hear the district is planning to change its

policies to be more specific so that future incidents "can be handled much better."

But, as she noted in her speech at the walkout, she doesn't plan to "stay silent." The video was "a direct attack against Asian American and Jewish people," she said.

Chen's grandparents endured racism when they first came to the United States from China, Chen said. They "would be so heartbroken to know that

two generations and 52 years after stepping their first foot in America for the first time, their grandchildren are going through the exact same thing."

She urged people to educate themselves. "We can say all are welcome and it's one thing to just stick a sign in your yard," she said. "But what are you really doing behind closed doors with your friends?"

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Students chant while holding up signs at the walkout at Lewis Park March 17.

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