IN STUDENTS’ OWN WORDS

RACISM AT SUBURBAN SCHOOLS:

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In interviews with more than a dozen students of color at various school districts across Monroe County, several topics came up repeatedly. Here are some of the most common concerns, in those students’ own words.

Slurs and the N-word

“Every day there’s a lot of racial comments made at school, directed basically at anyone who’s not a straight white person.” — Mark Simmons, Hilton High School

“One thing in this school is (white kids) saying the N-word and finding that socially acceptable when it’s not. ... They think that because it’s in a song, they can say it. ... I should feel comfortable going to school and I don’t always, because people say that word.” — Kennedy Jackson, Penfield High School

Fraught discussions about slavery

“You get around that topic in English and social studies, it’s a bumpy road.” — Yaa Korne, Penfield High School

“I’m not the whole black race. I was not a slave; my parents were not slaves. ... All I know about it is what you (teachers) tell me.” — Kennedy Jackson, Penfield High School

Consequence of a lack of black teachers

“I don’t have a teacher here I can talk to who relates to my experience as a person of color.” — Kennedy Jackson, Penfield High School

“There’s no (black teachers) here to check these (white) teachers when they let things happen.” — Will Barrett, Fairport High School

“I think it’s in (teachers’) heads that they want to be more racially (sensitive), but they go about it the wrong way.” — Mark Simmons, Hilton High School

“Every time I’m walking through the halls: ‘Oh, she doesn’t like me because I’m black.’ My brother always says that. ... In his mind it’s, ‘Every teacher I know is out to get me.’ If it was all black teachers, he wouldn’t feel that way.” — Bethany Beru, Rush-Henrietta Senior High School

Emotional strain of racial isolation

“I often feel like there’s 1,000 eyes on me while I’m taking a test. It creates a lot of stress and anxiety. ... They’re staring me down. Honestly, sometimes I feel invisible but at the same time everyone’s watching me to see if I fail.” — Will Barrett, Fairport High School

“You have to put on two different attitudes at home and at school. At home (in Rochester) people ask me, ‘Why do you talk white?’ I have to put on a different self.” — Yaa Korne, Penfield High School

Underestimated academically

“... I had to work very hard to be put in these classes and advocate for myself. I feel I have to work twice as hard to get half as much as some of my white peers.” — Will Barrett, Penfield High School

“There’s a certain level of ignorance that I am willing to tolerate because I expect it, just because of what I’ve gotten used to. And that’s a shame to get used to, but it’s something we’ve put up with and it’s something that we have considered to be part of the norm.” — Kidane Malik, Greece Arcadia High School
“In my AP classes there definitely weren’t a lot of us and we definitely weren’t encouraged. It was more, just, get through and don’t fail. ... Especially at the beginning, they’d be like, ‘Wow, great job, a B.’ And I made it clear my expectations were higher.” — Elijah Goldburg, Brighton High School “The few black students at my school, I feel they’re not in these (advanced) classes because of perceived biases. They just don’t get a

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