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Students walk out for racial justice

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Minneapolis, already an infamous site of police shootings like the deaths of Daunte Wright, Philando Castile and George Floyd, has been under the microscope again, facing criticism about rampant racism in its police force here from far and wide. Some of the most vocal are right here at Columbia Heights High School (CHHS); in fact, teenagers from all over the state have been galvanized to protest and participate in walkouts for years on end now, and the winter of 2022 has been no different.

The recent Minneapolis death of Amir Locke, a 22-year-old Black man originally from Maplewood, caused widespread outrage. The Minneapolis Police Department (MPD) had received a no-knock warrant, which allows police to search a property without prior notification to residents, like a knock or doorbell ring, from the St. Paul Police Department in connection with a homicide investigation.

Before arriving on the premises, MPD had previously listed Locke as a suspect. By the time they got the no-knock warrant, Locke was not the subject of the warrant, but was the cousin of Mehki Speed, who was sought by St. Paul police for alleged involvement in the January death of Otis Elder. Locke lived in the same Minneapolis building as Speed.

Locke was woken up when the police arrived at the apartment and announced that they were coming in. He did have a gun in his hand, which he grabbed upon being startled awake, but it was registered. He was shot within seconds of the police's arrival. Among other factors, this sequence of events sparked conversations around the nation about no-knock warrants, with people citing the unexpected (and presumably loud) visit from the police as the reason he reached for his gun.

Exacerbating matters was Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey, who oversees the MPD, ran his campaign in 2020 with an emphasis on changing the city's no-knock warrant



policy, often referring to the proposed change as a "ban". Frey later said he meant as in requiring officers to announce their presence and their business there before entering a home, not necessarily discontinuing no-knock warrants altogether.

"The risk of harm to both innocent bystanders as well as to law enforcement is not worth the debatable benefit of a no-knock warrant," Sandra Feist, the state representative for District 41B, said. "We need to effectively end reliance on no-knock warrants and 'dynamic entry' to protect against unnecessary loss of life."

No matter where one might stand on the semantics of city and police policies, the loss of an innocent life at the hands of police has again inspired activists across the metro, state and country to make their voices heard. School walkouts have become increasingly prevalent as racism in Minnesota has become exposed. There have even been numerous walkouts here at Columbia Heights Public Schools (CHPS) over the past decade in response to incidents related to everything from school board member controversy in 2016 to the shooting death of Daunte Wright in 2021, who attended Columbia Academy (CA) — the sole middle school of CHPS. Just last week, there was even a walkout led by CA students attempting to protest sexual

harrasment.

In response to the police shooting of Amir Locke, the student members of St. Paul's Central High School Black Student Union, collaborated with popular Instagram account MN Teen Activist to plan and follow through with arguably the most ambitious high school walkout event in recent memory. Joined by 3,000 students from all over the state and local city activists of all ages, there was a walk from Central to the Governor's Mansion.

Students and organizers spoke about the importance of youth involvement in government, encouraging youth to reach out to their state representatives. There was also music playing to get attendees to loosen up, as well as chants that captured the passion and enthusiasm for change among the crowd. Phrases like "Frey lied, Amir died" and "ain't no power like the power of the people" boomed down St. Paul's Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard, calling neighbors out of their houses and elementary students out of their classrooms in support.

"It was really moving watching everyone march for Amir Locke and all of the other kids who fell victim to police brutality," Jeehan Mohamoud (12), a student who went to the walkout, said. "The most eye opening part was seeing all the different schools and students marching and chanting together for one cause. It was really inspiring."

When it comes to fighting for social justice, students of all backgrounds from all corners of the state are looking for progress, and if demands are not met, the adults in power are now accountable for keeping kids' minds off of their education. With more and more acts of resistance and rebellion like walkouts almost guaranteed to continue, it is important to remember that walkouts are not protesting education, but about gaining education through a different source: by hearing about lived experiences that at the end of the day, unite us all.



All photos by Kwot Anwey

Over 3,000 students marched from all over the state from Central High School to the Governors Mansion. Top-right: a teen activist addresses the crowd about system racism.

CHPS updates course catalog

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Crack back open that course catalog because new classes are coming to Columbia Academy (CA) and Columbia Heights High School (CHHS) for the 2022-2023 school year.

Intro to Education is one of the newest additions to the Family & Consumer Sciences department at CHHS, and is already being taught by Ms. Julia Henderson this semester. This is a dual enrollment course through Century College, so students can earn high school and college credit simultaneously. The goal of the course is to educate students who want to pursue teaching/mentoring as a potential future career.

"Our goal is to support students who have a desire to become teachers in their own community where they can be leaders inside and outside of the classroom," Henderson said.

A new class is also being added to the Performing Arts department at CHHS. Mr. Nicholas Hollerman will be teaching a World Music course starting this fall. It will help students meet fine arts requirements and will be a single-semester class.

"There is going to be an opportunity to play some instruments, and hopefully, we'll be able to bring in some guest artists," Hollerman said.

Project Lead the Way: Engineering is a new addition in the Engineering & Technology Education department at CHHS. The class is currently run by Mr. Matt Townsend, and like Intro to Education, it's already in its first semester this spring. Budding engineers learn mechanical skills, how to draft and draw, 3-D print, design work, code, and learn how to operate microcontrollers and programming.

"Right now, we are working on research and coming up

with solutions for engineering challenges, such as how to reduce poverty [and] sustainable living," Townsend said.

Two new courses will also be added to the CHHS Social Studies department this fall. One will be College Workshop 12, which will only be available to seniors in the first semester. The course is designed to help students learn how to fill out the FAFSA and figure out what colleges to apply to. They will be taught by both Ms. Erin Edwardson-Stern and Mr. Mike Prellwitz.

The class will be formatted to serve students both individually and as a group, so that college applicants can get personalized help and also work with peers to troubleshoot the many issues that come with preparing for life after high school.

"Students who are interested in pursuing the four-year and two-year college process are welcome to register," Prellwitz said.

This year's juniors that have already registered for the course are looking forward to having dedicated time during the school day to focus on how to plan their college journey.

"I'm unprepared, and I really just need help preparing for everything that is involved with college, like the FAFSA, just getting scholarships maybe, all that sort of thing," Jesus Gonzalez (11) said.

The second social studies class being added is for 11th graders. This re-branded course will be called College Prep 11 and will be made available spring semester. The class will cover everything from SAT test preparation to resume writing so that juniors are equipped for College Workshop 12 the next academic year. There are even preliminary plans for college campus visit field trips.

"In many ways, the course will be very similar to College Exams, but given all the changes that have



Illustration by Alex Druley

New classes offered next year include Journalism at CA, two new college prep classes and World Music at CHHS.

occurred to the college process in the past couple of years, it will also undergo a few changes—in particular to the way SAT test prep is delivered and emphasized."

CA is also making a course change by adding an Introduction to Journalism class. Students who take this course will learn the different aspects of journalism and how to utilize their student voice in preparation for their high school journalism career. Young readers could very well see their byline on the pages of The Heights Herald within a year or two!

"We are looking at the possibility of publishing a quarterly newspaper online," CA Principal Duane Berkas said. "We are hopeful that our middle school course can be a feeder to the CHHS newspaper. This will be an elective course and no teacher has been named yet."

With these additions of new courses comes excitement and fun to the course catalogs at CHHS and Columbia Academy, encouraging student growth, critical thinking and, of course, lifelong learning.