

stronger TOGETHER

students lead walkout on Nov. 30 to combat racism

Students walked out of South on Nov. 30 in response to a racist attack on a black student at Shawnee Mission East. According to The Kansas City Star and video released by various media outlets, a black female student was in a verbal argument with a white student, after another white student had called another black student a slave. After that exchange ended, a white male student suddenly walked over to the black student, yelling the N-word, pushing and punching the student repeatedly, before the other student began punching back. East students walked out on Monday to show support for the student who was attacked and protest their administration's response to the situation.

The walkout at South was primarily organized by senior **Ace Cofield**. Cofield met with principal **Todd Dain** to propose the walkout. "Dr. Dain and I have had previous conversations about racial tensions and racial issues within our school," Cofield said. "I've always been open to talking to administration about those things."

As a Black student, showing support was especially meaningful to Cofield. He emphasized the importance of

standing up for others, even if there is pushback.

"I don't ever want to be the person that doesn't speak up because I'm scared," he said. "Silence is enabling racism. Silence is not okay. The time is always right to do what's right."

With the administration's support, the walkout was scheduled for the end of seminar on Nov. 30. A group of about 20 students gathered during late start that morning to make posters for the demonstration. At 11 a.m., the administration announced the walkout over the intercom. Students gathered in the hall of fame hallway and walked toward the football stadium and around the track. Hundreds of students participated, many holding posters they had made. Some signs read "Justice for Brey," the student who was attacked, while others read "Stop Racism" and "Can't Hide the Truth" in block letters.

Senior **Taran White** and junior **Ava Harris** helped Cofield organize the poster-making meeting.

"I DM'd him and I was like, 'Hey, if you need help with anything you let me know,'" Harris said. "I went to the Dollar Tree the night before and got supplies, and we just wrote our feelings on the

boards and then held them at the walkout."

"We are all out here supporting Brey," junior **Aniyia Miller** said as she walked alongside a group of friends. "We are trying to ensure there is justice for what happened. This means a lot to me as a black woman, because it hurts that my people are being called the N-word and being beat up."

While the attack occurred at Shawnee Mission East, students expressed the need for change at South and district-wide.

"Hopefully, the administrators will actually start to listen to the students, instead of ignoring them and sweeping it under the rug and being afraid of confrontation," junior **Aianna Johnson** said. Johnson explained that it would not be surprising if a similar incident happened and that incidents of racism are common at South.

After students circled the track for a few minutes, they gathered near the West stands of the stadium to listen to Cofield speak. Those with signs held them up in front of the stands, facing the crowd of students who had walked out.

"Change is in order. Change has to come," Cofield said. "What we do at South is we stay positive,

stay encouraging, root each other on. It does not matter if the person sitting next to you is a different color than you, a different religion than you: stand up for them, have their backs, because we're all Raiders—all of us."

Cofield also encouraged students to voice their opinions at the SMSD Board of Education meeting on Monday, Dec. 4.

Students then returned to the building to attend their fourth-hour classes. That evening, students from across the district voiced their concerns during a protest at the Center for Academic Achievement (CAA), which was organized by the Black Student Solidarity Network. On Friday, Superintendent **Michelle Hubbard** released a statement addressing the incident and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion efforts in the district.

"Our students have been vocal this week in reminding us that we are not done," Hubbard said. "They have spoken loudly, and we are listening, both at Shawnee Mission East and across the district. What I saw on that video is NOT who we are, and we must do better. And we will."

story by eirc vacek,
greta waller



Holding up her sign, junior **Aniyia Miller** attends the walkout in support of the SM East student. Miller and hundreds of other students attended the walkout on Nov. 30. photo by georgia mccabe



Embracing one another, senior **Emily Willhite** and junior **Ava Harris** had strong emotions following the walkout for SM East student Brey on Nov. 30. "I was very scared about how people were going to react, but I was happy because thought it went really well and I didn't expect so many people to come," Harris said. photo by georgia mccabe



Head held high, junior **Ava Seay** walks the track with hundreds of students during the walkout. Seay joined the walkout as a form of peaceful protest. photo by georgia mccabe



big
THINGS

"[The walkout] was organized by one of my good friends and [I participated in it because it] was for a reason I believed in."

Phillip Birech,
11

"I thought [the walkout] was a great idea and seeing everybody going outside and supporting what happened at East. I think it was a good thing to show that it's not a joke."

Annie
Summers, 12



Standing with pride, senior **K Watson** and sophomore **Alandra Branham** hold their signs high while participating in the walkout on Nov. 30. Watson and Branham joined the peaceful protest to stand up for what they believe in. photo by georgia mccabe

Arm in arm, senior **Taran White** and junior **Ava Harris** stood holding their sign before the crowd while senior **Ace Cofield** gave a speech from the top of the bleachers on November 30. "So many people came to make the signs; we didn't expect there to be that many, but the word got out fast," Harris said. photo by georgia mccabe