



## **The Princeton Club of Rochester**

**Janelle Esler  
Junior, Brockport High School**

The “Black Lives Matter” movement has proliferated news and filled streets with activists across America. For Janelle, the words pinned to her backpack brought a host of racial issues, actions and awareness to the campus of Brockport High school and the surrounding community. Janelle’s courageous pursuit of justice and activism has had true impact on race relations at her high school and beyond, contributing to racial harmony and respect in the Brockport Central School District and at the nearby SUNY campus.

Janelle took the simple task of affixing a “Black Lives Matter” cloth banner to her backpack. She wanted to highlight what she says was a lack of sensitivity around diversity at her school.

*“The banner I created was in response to the racial tension at my school that had been building up for years. It had long been ignored or unnoticed by teachers and the administration. The amount of frustration, distrust, intolerance and flat out racism between students and even some teachers contributed to this ignorant cycle that affected the education and lives of many.”*

Janelle used the banner as a way to have conversations--with all students--about racial issues and the movement. When school officials told Janelle that her banner violated school code and ordered her to remove it, she researched the issue, and along with family members, courageously sat down with her administrators to defend her right to keep it. After much discussion, the school reversed its decision. Brockport Principal Brian Weller says it was the right thing to do, and now he keeps a similar banner affixed to his office door.

*“It has prompted questions and conversation from other students who want to know why it is there, and has allowed for some productive discussion with students who hadn’t understood the issues that ‘Black Lives Matter’ represents.”*

Janelle says that several students have since asked for banners for themselves, and she has distributed nearly 60 of the handmade banners to classmates.

In addition to her leadership in the Diversity Club, Janelle was instrumental in helping organize Brockport’s regional ROC2Change event that brought hundreds of student representatives from more than 20 local school districts together to talk about race issues. Principal Weller believes that Janelle’s work will have long lasting impact.

*“The conversations and learning continue at our school and will do so even after she graduates and moves on to another stage. The ripple effects of her resolve to do what is right will continue to expand beyond Brockport High School.”*

Janelle, your resolve is admirable. Congratulations!