



## **The Princeton Club of Rochester**

### **Kaori-Mei Stephens Senior, The Harley School**

The challenge of improving race relations starts with awareness, follows with education, and ends with acceptance, understanding and racial equality. For many, the latter -- opening and changing minds and hearts -- can be the most challenging of all. Kaori-Mei is demonstrating in her work at Harley, and in the community, a unique ability to break down barriers with her activism, conversations and creativity.

Kaori-Mei founded the Union for Students of Color at Harley, a group whose mission is to act as a safe platform for students of color. It is here where the students can voice concerns and share ideas they have on how to better improve race relations at Harley. She also sits on numerous school and community panel discussions about racial justice, representation and activism and the importance of, as she says, ***“maintaining strong identities in order to be emphatic in the face of racism.”***

Kaori-Mei has also had a tremendous impact on race relations through art. Within the walls of Harley, she created personal pieces and murals that represent historically significant people of color that not only beautifully represent ethnic minorities but also educate her classmates outside their traditional experiences. Beyond Harley, Kaori-Mei is painting murals for civic organizations in Rochester to illustrate and promote diversity in the community.

***“I have created visual art that prompts discussions about social justice and race.”***

Larry Frye, Kaori-Mei’s advisor and Head of the Upper School at Harley, says Kaori-Mei has a unique ability to break down barriers. After a student at Harley reposted a homophobic and racist image to social media, Kaori-Mei and two classmates were asked to meet with the student. Here Frye witnessed Kaori-Mei’s powerful passion for restorative justice:

***“Kaori-Mei sat across the table from this young man, eyes up and on his, peaceably but firm, and we had what I think was a transformational moment. I could only have asked this of the most exceptional students I have, the ones with the maturity and emotional intelligence to both bring home the point and to do so in a way that the young man could hear. I hope Kaori-Mei is proud of this moment; I think it was one in a million. I don't think another student at Harley, in my 14 years, has done so much for the purpose of improving race relations as Kaori-Mei Stephens.”***

Kaori-Mei, your creativity and activism are inspiring. Please keep up this empowering work, and go on helping to heal our world.