



The Princeton Club of Rochester

Kiara Johnson **Junior, School of the Arts**

When Kiara started her activism for race relations two years ago, she looked at her own heritage and focused on Pan African studies. At School of the Arts and in her community, she took a hard look at how to help her fellow students strengthen the bonds of solidarity:

“I had to reflect on my own relationship with school, and I started to think, why should we continue to force them to be in an environment when their culture and history is not taught properly and not displayed properly?”

Since then, Kiara’s leadership roles have taken her from school to the state capitol. She has presented to more than 400 RCSD principals, central office staff, and other administrators about the need to do anti-racism work in school by inserting Pan African studies into the curriculum. She organized a Pan African rally and school board “Speak Out”, and traveled to Albany for Education Lobby Day to advocate for students of African heritage learning not only about their common history, but their common destiny. Kiara explains that it is a team effort:

“This work has been driven by our elders and we understand that this won't be successful without multiple generations working together. Students need to also speak up for themselves.”

Shalinda Bollar, Kiara’s Teen Empowerment mentor [and coincidentally last year’s Princeton Prize recipient], says Kiara has used the Teen Empowerment platform as a springboard to show true leadership on race issues:

“She was the only student on the Black Student Leadership advocacy group. She’s participated in protests and sit ins, is the spokesperson for the Mayor’s Youth Advisory Council, and attended school board meetings. As a youth organizer at TE, she has been one of the biggest advocates for Pan African Studies.”

Kiara is now seeing real change at SOTA and across the Rochester area, but says one of the biggest rewards is the bond her activism on race issues has created:

“My community has changed in many ways from our youth being encouraged to follow their dreams, to wanting to better themselves to better our community. It has brought us closer and we've had fewer fights and more positive energy.”

We are so proud of your work, Kiara. Congratulations!