

THE TORCH

CIVIL RIGHTS TEAM PROJECT NEWSLETTER

September 2008

Newsletter Editor: Brandon Baldwin

Welcome Back!



It is with great excitement that we welcome you back to school for the thirteenth year of the Maine Civil Rights Team Project. Most of you probably have some mixed feelings that accompany the end of your summer vacations, but we're relieved to get out of the office and into the schools.

On that note, we hope that you keep us in mind as you begin work with your civil rights teams. We are available for presentations, meetings, consultation, and ideas. We hope that you will consider us as a resource as you move forward.

One major development over the course of the summer is the creation of a CRTP website through Moodle. For those of you who are unfamiliar with Moodle, it is an online educational learning community. Translation: it's an easy to use website.

Our Moodle website will make your jobs as faculty advisors easier. Expect to see a greatly expanded resource guide online. There will also be loads of online content that you can access and use. There will be opportunities for you to share and contribute ideas and communicate with other faculty

advisors. We even have visions of posting our monthly newsletter online.

Sound intimidating? Don't worry. The CRTP is not going to strictly become an online community. The online presence will simply enhance what we already do.

We plan on unveiling our Moodle site at the fall faculty trainings. A significant part of these trainings will focus on getting you acclimated with this new and exciting resource. Overall, we think that this online presence will make your jobs easier and enhance your capabilities as faculty advisors, as well as create more of a statewide community of civil rights teams.

Report on GLSEN's *The Principal's Perspective*



GLSEN (the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network) recently published its follow-up report to 2005's *From Teasing to Torment: School Climate in America*. The 2005 report relied on survey data accumulated from students and teachers in public schools across America. This year's follow-up report, *The Principal's*

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Perspective: School Safety, Bullying and Harassment, relies on the more than 1500 school principals who responded to a similar survey.

The results and findings are instructive. Many indicators suggest that our nation's schools are failing our GLBTQ student populations. Most people who work in our public schools are probably already aware of this, but the survey data is telling. Consider:

- Half of principals report that bullying, name-calling, or harassment of students is a serious problem at their school, making it the most reported "serious" problem in the survey. This is especially true at the junior high/middle school level, where three-quarters of principals labeled it a serious problem.
- After physical appearance, the most common reasons why principals think students are bullied, called names, or harassed are because of how traditionally masculine or feminine students are perceived to be and sexual orientation (or perceived sexual orientation).
- Fewer than half of principals believe that a GLBTQ student would feel very safe at their school, lower than any other minority group.
- A substantial majority of principals have heard students make sexist remarks (91%), use the word "gay" in a pejorative manner (90%), and use hateful homophobic slurs (85%).

It is also worth noting that when compared with students and teachers, principals tend to under-report the seriousness of the problem. Students and teachers think that bullying, name-calling, and harassment are even more serious problems in their schools than the principals' data would suggest.

What are our schools doing to deal with these problems? The good news is that schools have been responsive. Almost all principals reported that their schools have some sort of anti-bullying/harassment policy. Most schools do some form of professional training on these issues as well. These are the areas where our schools seem to be failing our GLBTQ populations, though. While our GLBTQ students are likely targets of bullying, name-calling, and harassment, the policies and training rarely deal with these populations specifically. Most schools do not engage in efforts specifically designed to create safe environments for GLBTQ students. Perhaps most alarming is the fact that most schools' anti-bullying/harassment policies do not specifically mention sexual orientation.

Why should this matter? Doesn't an anti-bullying/harassment policy protect everyone? In theory, yes. In practice, not necessarily. The report clearly demonstrates that policies and programs that specifically address GLBTQ populations are more effective in reducing aggression towards *all* students, but specifically GLBTQ students. The conclusion is simple: if you want to help protect your GLBTQ population, you need to deal with the problem not in generic terms, but specifically as it relates to our GLBTQ population.

That got me thinking. How do *our* schools stack up? Are we doing an effective job of

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protecting our GLBTQ students? What do our policies say?

I decided to go online and look at some of our schools' anti-bullying/harassment policies. I randomly selected twenty Maine high schools from all across the state and studied the parent/student handbooks for each of these twenty schools, focusing particular attention on the harassment and bullying policies when applicable.

The results were eye-opening. Half of the 20 schools have specific policies protecting GLBTQ students from bullying, name-calling, and harassment. **Half do not.** The reasons are varied:

- Seven schools list all of the Maine Human and Civil Rights Act protected categories *except* sexual orientation in their harassment policies.
- Two schools do not define harassment in their policy, simply stating that it is "unacceptable" or that the school has a "zero-tolerance policy" towards it.
- One school's harassment policy is limited to sexual harassment only.

This is alarming. Our most vulnerable and tormented student population is invisible in half of our school's harassment policies. Even a good policy is no guarantee of good practice, either. Teachers and students need to be aware of the policy.

At this point, hopefully you're itching to get a look at your school's harassment policy. It's worth a look. I suggest asking yourself the following questions as you review it:

1. Is this policy specific as to what constitutes harassment?
2. Is this policy inclusive of GLBTQ students?
3. Is this policy understood? Are teachers and students aware of it? What about parents/guardians?
4. Is this policy implemented and used effectively?

If the answer to any of the above questions is "NO" you may have found your first great project for your civil rights team this year. If the policy itself is flawed, get it fixed. This isn't always easy, but it's important, and it gets your team active in the school. If the policy itself is good, but its practice is flawed, your team can help change that. Just as we work with the Maine Civil Rights Act, we can work with our schools' harassment policies. By educating teachers, parents, and students about the rules we already have in place and why they exist, we can make our schools better places. Ultimately, the goal of school harassment policies shouldn't be simply punitive, but preventative.

A summary of the GLSEN's findings in *The Principal's Perspective* can be found at:

www.glsen.org/cgi-bin/iowa/all/news/record/2294.html

The full 116 page report can also be downloaded there, although it's a whopping 932k. Buyer beware!

An article about *From Teasing to Torment*, the 2005 GLSEN report on the state of our schools, is available at:

www.glsen.org/cgi-bin/iowa/all/library/record/1859.html

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Greater Good Magazine Focuses on Issues of Prejudice and Racism

Greater Good is a self-described “voice of compassion, hope, and inspiration.” The quarterly magazine focuses on very human issues, but with an emphasis on scientific research into the roots of human relationships. *Greater Good*’s goal is “to highlight the strides we’re making (and obstacles we’re encountering) toward becoming a more benevolent society.”

This summer’s issue focused on prejudice and racism. The magazine’s objective of combining scientific research with human issues makes for

compelling reading. Of particular note are the articles “Look Twice” and “Rubbing Off.”

In “Look Twice,” Susan T. Fiske looks at the research and reports that prejudice may actually be an inherent human characteristic. Before you spiral into a deep depression and think our work hopeless, consider her conclusion: we are highly capable of learning to overcome our prejudices.

“Rubbing Off” examines the folly of teaching colorblindness to our children. Rather than encouraging youth to ignore race and pretend that it doesn’t exist, Allison Briscoe-Smith argues that we must teach anti-racism, which requires that we accept and acknowledge racial differences.

These two articles and the other content in *Greater Good*’s summer issue serve as an important reminder as to the power of the Civil Rights Team Project. The work we do is critical in reducing prejudice and furthering understanding and respect for all people.

These two thought-provoking articles, amongst others, are available for download at:

<http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/greatergood>

Another great resource in teaching anti-racism is the Anti-Racist Parent, a self-described “blog for parents who are committed to raising children with an anti-racist outlook.” Check it out at:

www.antiracistparent.com

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Save the Dates!

Debi has booked all the dates for faculty and student fall trainings. Here they are:

Faculty Trainings

October 3rd, Wells Common, Orono
October 6th, Keeley's, Portland
October 9th, Calumet Club, Augusta

Student/Team Trainings

October 24th, UMF, Farmington
October 28th & 29th, Brewer Armory
November 4th, 5th & 6th, Keeley's, Portland
November 20th, Keddy's, Presque Isle
December 8th & 9th, Augusta Civic Center

You should have already received registration materials for both sessions. Book your spots now! We look forward to getting out for all the fall training sessions.



Current Events

Here is a new and exciting feature for the CRTP: current events. There are always plenty of civil rights-related stories in the news, but who actually has time to sort through all of them and share them with their teams? Well, if you've always wanted to do more with what's current in the news, we've got you covered! Starting this month, we'll provide some ready-to-use current events that you can share with your team. Each current event has questions that should get your civil rights team members thinking about some important issues. The current events will frequently have hand-outs for students and notes for the faculty advisor.

There was no shortage of civil rights-related news this summer. With a lot to pick from, we chose the following:

- the controversial selection of Beijing to host the Summer Olympics (elementary level or higher)
- the summer smash hit "I Kissed a Girl" and what it means from a gay/lesbian perspective (middle and high school level)
- the *New Yorker's* Obama cover controversy (high school level)

All three current events follow. We hope you enjoy them and find them useful!

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Current Event: End of Year Party



At the end of every school year there's a big celebration party for everyone in your class. It's a way to celebrate the fact that your class got through the school year together. Everyone is invited, and everyone goes. There's tons of great food and activities. It's something the whole class looks forward to every year.

Part of what makes this party so interesting is that a different student hosts it each year. There's a group of students called the Summer Party Planning Committee (SPPC) who decides where the party will be held. The committee has chosen wonderful hosts every year... but this year things could be different. The SPPC chose Steve Libby for 2009.

Steve Libby is probably the meanest kid in your class. He's big and powerful: not someone you want to mess with, and so people are mostly nice to him. When they're not, Steve is cruel. He makes fun of other students, picks on some constantly and calls them names, excludes others from activities, and sometimes gets in fights over nothing. No one is ever willing to say or do anything about it, because they're all afraid of Steve.

Now Steve is hosting the end of the year celebration party. Steve has promised everyone that it will be a great, but yesterday he shoved someone into a locker when they asked him if he'd be nice for a day.

This party is always something people look forward to all year. You've talked to all of your friends, and they plan on going.

You really want to go the party, but you don't like the fact that Steve is hosting it. You don't agree with the things Steve does at school, and you think that the planning committee should have chosen someone else.

Should you go? Why or why not?

Focus students on how complex and touchy the issue really is. There is no simple solution.

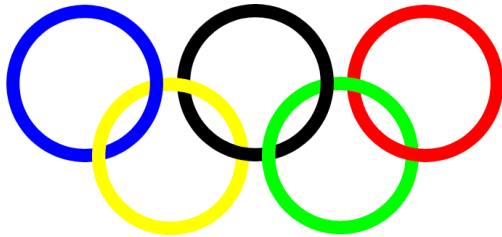
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The Beijing Olympics



The problem we just thought about with the end of the year summer party is a lot like what happened this summer with the Olympic Games in Beijing, China. The Summer Olympics happen every four years, and they're a very big deal. Athletes from all around the world train their whole lives for the Olympics.

Not everyone was happy with the fact that the 2008 Olympics would be in China. China is a lot like Steve: a bit of a bully. The Chinese people are not free to speak out against their government. When they do, they risk being thrown in jail. China has also forced its ideas on Tibet. Tibet used to be a separate country, but now China controls it. China has also been friendly with the government in Sudan, which has killed thousands and thousands of its own people. Finally, China is probably the worst polluter in the world, and it keeps getting worse. When China was chosen to host the Olympics, some people wanted a boycott. A boycott is when you refuse to participate in something. Countries have boycotted the Olympics before, including the United States.

Should the United States have boycotted the Beijing Olympics? Why or why not?

Depending on how the discussion goes, you could further investigate the complaints against China hosting the Olympics. Another good point of discussion would be what the Olympics are supposed to represent, and how that factors into the argument.

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“I Kissed a Girl,” by Katy Perry

In late June, the song “I Kissed a Girl” by Katy Perry vaulted to the top of charts. It was #1 on the Billboard Top 100, TRL, iTunes downloads, and anything else that tracks music popularity. It was the song of the summer.

Here are the song’s lyrics:

This was never the way I planned
Not my intention
I got so brave, drink in hand
Lost my discretion
It's not what, I'm used to
Just wanna try you on
I'm curious for you
Caught my attention

Chorus:

I kissed a girl and I liked it
The taste of her cherry chap stick
I kissed a girl just to try it
I hope my boyfriend don't mind it
It felt so wrong
It felt so right
Don't mean I'm in love tonight
I kissed a girl and I liked it
I liked it

No, I don't even know your name
It doesn't matter,
You're my experimental game
Just human nature,
It's not what,
Good girls do
Not how they should behave
My head gets so confused
Hard to obey

(Chorus)

Us girls we are so magical
Soft skin, red lips, so kissable
Hard to resist so touchable
Too good to deny it
Ain't no big deal, it's innocent

(Chorus)

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Faculty Advisor Notes for Discussion of “I Kissed a Girl”

Questions to Consider:

Is it a big deal that a song about a girl kissing another girl was so popular this summer?

Is this a sign of gay and lesbian acceptance in this country?

Important Lyrics:

“I kissed a girl and I liked it”

“**just** to try it”

“hope my boyfriend don’t mind it”

“my **experimental** game”

“ain’t no big deal, it’s **innocent**”

Perry says the song is “about the magical beauty of a woman.”

Slant’s Sal Cinquemani says that her “self-satisfied, in-your-face posturing rings phony.” Also, the song “isn’t problematic because it promotes homosexuality, but because its appropriation of the gay lifestyle exists for the sole purpose of garnering attention.”

Rolling Stone’s Nicole Frehsee says that “she sounds like the type who makes out with her BFF just to get a dude’s attention.”

Watching the song’s music video, readily available on YouTube, might make sense.

Worth looking at some of her other work... her first single was called “UR So Gay.” The song mocks her ex-boyfriend, who she thinks is non-masculine. It’s meant to be insulting. In fairness to her, however, she says that a lot of her friends are gay, and the lyrics aren’t homophobic.

Other Advanced Questions to Consider:

Do you think this song would have been popular 25 years ago?

Why do you think Katy Perry chose to write and sing this song?

What do you think gay and lesbian people might think of this song?

Does this song trivialize lesbian relationships?

Would this song be as popular if it was about kissing a guy? (And what if a guy sang it?)

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The New Yorker's Obama Cover Controversy



What are some of the things that you notice from this magazine cover?

Do you know what these things are making reference to?

What do you think this cover is trying to say? What's the point?

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The New Yorker intended for this cover to be satire. It was meant to poke fun at the ridiculous fears some Americans have about the Obamas, as indicated by the title, "The Politics of Fear." The cover became an immediate controversy for *The New Yorker*, though. Many argued that it was tasteless, and that it was just reinforcing misinformation and stereotypes. The following has been taken from a Huffington Post interview with *The New Yorker's* editor, David Remnick.

This cover has quickly become very controversial. The Obama campaign has called it "tasteless and offensive." Why did you run it?

Obviously I wouldn't have run a cover just to get attention — I ran the cover because I thought it had something to say. What I think it does is hold up a mirror to the prejudice and dark imaginings about Barack Obama's — both Obamas' — past, and their politics. I can't speak for anyone else's interpretations, all I can say is that it combines a number of images that have been propagated, not by everyone on the right but by some, about Obama's supposed "lack of patriotism" or his being "soft on terrorism" or the idiotic notion that somehow Michelle Obama is the second coming of the Weathermen or most violent Black Panthers. That somehow all this is going to come to the Oval Office.

The idea that we would publish a cover saying these things literally, I think, is just not in the vocabulary of what we do and who we are... We've run many many satirical political covers. Ask the Bush administration how many.

Many Obama supporters have started to voice their anger over the cartoon, which they say does not so much lampoon the smear as perpetuate it.

Normally I'd want the work to speak for itself — normally I'd not want to explain jokes, or short stories, or a piece of non-fiction that we publish — people always read things the way they're going to read them. In this case, since I see that it's stirred the pot somewhat, and some people have misinterpreted it very quickly, I'm talking to you. The image tries to be as clear as possible the title tries to make sure of that. (*Ed. The title does not appear on the cover, but is listed in the Table of Contents, in the magazine and online.*)

I respect people's reactions — I'm just trying to as calmly and as clearly as possible talk about what this image means and what it was intended to mean and what I think most people will see — when they think it through — that it means. The fact is, it's *not* a satire about Obama - it's a satire about the distortions and misconceptions and prejudices *about* Obama.

What do you think? Did this cover cross the line?

In general, this raises important questions about humor. Are there some things you just can't make jokes about?

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Faculty Advisor Notes for *New Yorker* Controversy

Emphasize that discussing this issue shouldn't be about your political leanings. It's not about who you're going to vote for. It's about how Obama has been portrayed and the sticky subject of satire and whether some jokes are off limits.

There's a good chance that some students won't get some of the references on the cover.

Consider this an opportunity for them to learn something. A quick online search should catch them up pretty quickly. Suggest searching for:

- Obama Muslim
- Obama Hussein
- Obama flag
- Obama garb
- Obama militant

As students discover some of the misinformation and controversies surrounding the Obamas, make sure they understand that not everything they see online is truth.

Of course the *New Yorker* cover references the following fears:

- Michelle Obama being too militant
- The fist bump greeting
- The American flag controversy
- The Pledge of Allegiance controversy
- Wearing the traditional garb in Kenya
- His middle name of Hussein
- His supposed Muslim faith

For the final question on humor, it could be a big one. Comedy frequently tackles controversial issues like race. Some argue that it's one of the few arenas where Americans are able to have honest conversations about such controversial topics. Others argue that by making light of such topics, we are desensitizing ourselves to their very serious nature. And of course there's always the issue of satire. By pointing out stereotypes are we mocking their ridiculousness or helping to reinforce them?

This is a highly relevant topic, as many high school students watch and love Dave Chapelle, Carlos Mencia, and *South Park*, amongst others.

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Gardiner High School Keeps It Local and Takes It Global

Editor's note: Last spring I had the pleasure of joining Gardiner's civil rights teams for an afternoon of celebration. In hearing about the civil rights teams' numerous accomplishments over the course of the year, I couldn't help but be impressed by the scope of the high school's projects and accomplishments. They were effectively addressing national and international issues through local, community action.

I asked GAHS civil rights team member Brandon C. Caron if he'd be willing to make a contribution to our newsletter highlighting his team's accomplishments. He eagerly accepted. The following is his contribution, which effectively demonstrates how a civil rights team can stay connected with broader civil rights issues outside of the school environment.

The Gardiner Area High School Civil Rights Team had high hopes coming into our 2007-2008 campaign. We had so much success the prior year that it was hard not to be excited about the new year. We started off by electing new Advisory Panel members: Patrick Burnham-Senior, Elisabeth Hartley-Senior, Shaunyce Johnson-Senior, Ethan Pierce-Junior, and Brandon C. Caron-Sophomore.

We began our year with a tribute to all who were lost on September 11, 2001. This was fitting for our team to do as these terrorist attacks were motivated by hate for political and religious views. We placed flags all around the front of our school and filled our "tiger's den" with flags as well. During

morning announcements, some of us read various quotes referencing the terrorist attacks, and held a moment of silence at 8:46 AM.

In October we did a hat day for breast cancer awareness. Students paid a dollar and wore their hat all day [with a ribbon showing]. We donated the funds we raised to the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation. This relates to civil rights because people of all races and ethnicities can be affected by it, but did you know that African-American women have higher incidents and mortality rates than Caucasian woman? We also did ribbon sales for our own funds, our Plumpynut project, and one in memory of our fallen peer: Alex Glynn.

Our headline project this year was our Plumpynut project. Plumpynut is a vitamin enriched powdered milk and peanut butter paste created by Doctors without Borders. It is a new tool to help combat world hunger amongst children. It only costs a dollar to make a serving [enough for one day], and the mothers walk to their village centers and get enough for the week. To raise monetary donations, we did a hat day and three bake sales raising over 300 dollars! To help promote our project, Melissa Freeman [mother of a team member] donated 150 amazing color brochures with pictures and informational nuggets which were distributed by team members at the bake sales and basketball games.

A staple of the Civil Rights Team is our food trips. We take these trips to restaurants that serve authentic cuisines as a way of "broadening our horizons" and to connect us to other cultures. We started with our annual trip to the Great Impasta. It is an Italian restaurant in downtown Brunswick that is

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very authentic and has some of the best cannoli. Secondly, we went for a lunch rendezvous to Buenito's Mexican Restaurant in Waterville and of course our annual trip to Fuji, a Japanese restaurant in the Old Port. It serves traditional food and you sit bare footed in standard tables you would find in Japan.

The day before spring break, a select few from the CRT and a handful of other students chose to partake in the National Day of Silence. It is a day set to honor those harassed in many ways because of their sexual orientation. This year's observation was in honor of fifteen-year-old Lawrence King. He was killed in his school and it is said that the act was done because of his sexual orientation and gender expression. In our post meeting we decided that the event was successful in that kids who partook didn't really feel any negative attention; in fact, some of the kids who didn't do it this year said they will sign up next year. It was approved by the team, to think about doing again next year.

Thanks to Mrs. DeSoto, our team along with other two teams in the district, went to the *Spirit of Uganda* concert at Merrill auditorium in Portland. About twenty children ages 8-22 from Uganda performed dances and songs from their native land, while wearing their customary dress. It was an amazing sight that brought us all to our feet! They looked so natural that sometimes it seemed we were in an Eastern African village. This conjured up the inspiration for our project that will raise monetary sums for a charity that specifically deals with the issues in Uganda, and we chose the Invisible Children.

Next on our agenda was the March 23rd District celebration and the May 30th concert for the Invisible Children. In lieu of the Maine Civil Rights Team Project's Spring Conference, we decided to host all three MSAD #11 Civil Rights Teams at Johnson Hall in Gardiner to celebrate the efforts of our younger counterparts to uphold the Maine Civil Rights Act. Maine Attorney General Steven Rowe, Assistant AG Thomas Harnett, Civil Rights Team Project Coordinator Brandon Baldwin, and cultural singer and lecturer Shamou all attended our get together. On May 30th in our gym we hosted four local bands in a concert, raising money for the Invisible Children group. These folks are brought together to help raise awareness about the despicable state of children in the African country of Uganda. It was a fun night for those attended and we were able to raise around \$200.

That is what the GAHS Civil Rights Team accomplished last year. We balanced the focus points of our work from supporting local charities in the fight against cancer or to remember the hate driven attacks of 9/11 to Uganda Children Soldiers and world hunger.

Remember that Tolerance, Acceptance, and Awareness of Civil Rights can easily be spread by:



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PCMS Civil Rights Team Challenges School and Community to Sign the Birmingham Pledge

The beginning of the school year is a tough time to get things done. Teachers and students alike generally ease into things, taking it slowly. There's an inevitable adjustment period that accompanies those first weeks of school.

The same could be said for civil rights teams. The beginning of the school year is a time for recruitment, ice breakers, and setting the stage for the rest of the year. Just don't tell that to Piscataquis Community Middle School. Before most civil rights teams across the state had even met, the eight members of the PCMS civil rights team were introducing a major initiative through school-wide assemblies.



PCMS civil rights team members add their names to the school's Birmingham Pledge wall.

On August 29th, just the fifth day of school for PCMS students, the civil rights team launched an impressive campaign to improve the climate in their school. Through two assemblies featuring guest speaker Thom Harnett, the team challenged students and teachers alike to sign the Birmingham Pledge and afterwards add their names to a wall of signatures that will serve as a visual reminder of their commitment to improve the school climate.

The Birmingham Pledge comes out of the rich civil rights history of Birmingham, Alabama. The pledge was born in 1997 as that community's effort to honor its own legacy and "to share with the world our community's commitment to eliminate prejudice in the lives of all people." More than 100,000 people from around the world have signed the pledge and made a personal commitment to eliminate prejudice from their lives.

Last spring the PCMS civil rights team decided to bring the Birmingham Pledge to Guilford. Faculty advisor Fred Andrews reports that this year's team inherited the project enthusiastically. They met during the summer to plan the organization of the day's events. They prepared copies of the pledge and a wall area for signatures. They solicited signatures from prominent adults, including the district superintendent, school board members, their school principal, teachers and coaches, and community advisor Angie Alphonso. On the 29th they took the stage and introduced their guest speaker, gave the history of the pledge, read it, and issued a challenge to PCMS students to sign it.

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Channel 5 news covers the event.



PCMS civil rights team photo!

The challenge was well received. A very well-behaved group of students left the assemblies with copies of the pledge, which they must read and discuss with their parents or guardians before they sign. Returned pledges require two witness signatures, emphasizing the seriousness of the commitment. There will be an upcoming wall signing ceremony for all who return pledges.

The PCMS civil rights received some well-deserved recognition for their efforts. The

Channel 5 news team was on hand to film the day's events. PCMS Principal Virginia Rebar praised their efforts. Perhaps the greatest compliment came from FA Fred Andrews, who said that he "spent most of the morning sitting and observing." The Civil Rights Team Project would like to officially recognize Jessica Bell, Will Cartwright, Cheyenne Clukey, Brooke Morrill, Rachael Nelson, Emily Northup, Abi Riitano, and Logan Sargent for their hard work and commitment to making their school a better place. Keep up the good work!

(A copy of the PCMS Pledge is on the next page, as well as a web link for more information. Check it out!)

This newsletter is written and distributed by the Civil Rights Team Project, a state-wide program under the auspices of the Maine Office of the Attorney General. The mission of the Civil Rights Team Project is to increase the safety of high school, middle school and elementary school students and to reduce the incidence of bias-motivated harassment and violence in schools.

Ideas, submissions, questions, or comments should be directed towards Brandon Baldwin at 626-8548 or brandon.baldwin@maine.gov

G. Steven Rowe—Attorney General
Thomas A. Harnett—Director, Civil Rights
Education & Enforcement Unit
Debi Lettre—Civil Rights Project Administrator
Brandon Baldwin—Schools/Curriculum
Coordinator

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The following is a modified version of the Birmingham Pledge, as used by the PCMS civil rights team. Their modifications make the pledge more inclusive than its original focus on race.

The Birmingham Pledge

Sign It - Live It

- **I believe** that every person has worth as an individual.
- **I believe** that every person is entitled to dignity and respect.
- **I believe** that all acts of hurtful language and behavior are harmful; if it is my act, then it is harmful to me as well.
- **Starting** right now I will work daily to eliminate hurtful language and behavior from my actions.
- **I will** encourage others to do the same.
- **I will** treat all people with dignity and respect; and will work daily to honor this pledge, knowing that my school, community, and the world will be a better place because of my effort.

For more information on the Birmingham Pledge, go to:

www.birminghampledge.org