



## The Civil Rights Team Project

We get schools to think and talk about issues related to race and skin color, national origin and ancestry, religion, physical and mental disabilities, gender, and sexual orientation (including gender identity and expression.)



Here's what you can read about in the November edition of *The Torch*:

**From the Teams:** As the school year gets going, or civil rights teams get active!

**From the Office:** Lots and lots of trainings!

**From the News:** An introduction to the Creating Safe Maine Schools Coalition and a useful resource guide.

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*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 elementary, middle level, and high school students by reducing bias-motivated behaviors and harassment in our schools.*

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## From the Teams:



In Saco, the **Biddeford Middle School** civil rights team participated in the second annual United Against Bullying Walk at Thornton Academy.

The team members sported event t-shirts and were joined by the school's tiger mascot. One of their students was even featured in an interview on Channel 8 News.

Hey, Biddeford Middle School civil rights team... good job adding a civil rights presence at an anti-bullying event. It's important that anti-bullying efforts include conversations about race and skin color, national origin and ancestry, religion, disabilities, gender, and sexual orientation (including gender identity and expression). They usually don't... but the presence of a civil rights team can change that! (And thanks to their advisor, Coleen Whitehurst-Hatt, for sharing.)

At **Bonny Eagle Middle School** in Buxton... the civil rights team hosted their first-ever Ally Week. The team created a video explaining what an ally is and how to be one. They continued their messaging by taking statements from the video and creating signs around the school. The team challenged students and staff to take a pledge and be an ally. Allies traced their hand print and signed their name onto a prominent display. Anyone who took the pledge was encouraged to wear blue on a designated day.

Hey, Bonny Eagle Middle School civil rights team... nice work enlisting allies in our ongoing efforts to create safe, welcoming, and respectful schools. We can't do it alone! By educating your classmates about what it means to be an ally and giving them safe opportunities to identify themselves as such, you are empowering them. Even better, you're communicating to students who might be suffering that they are not alone. (And thanks to the team's advisors, Kristin House and Dominique Hilton, for sharing.)

At **Greely Middle School** in Cumberland... the civil rights team sponsored a musical performance by Yann Falquet and Pascal Gemme of Genticorum, a traditional Québécois musical trio from Montreal. The team created a meaningful framework for the event by introducing the performance. They spoke about the purpose of the civil rights team, Maine's history of discrimination against Franco-Americans, and the shame of someone feeling the need to hide their heritage from the world. They ended positively by emphasizing that the point of the presentation was to experience the joy of embracing the culture of our ancestry.

Hey, Greely Middle School civil rights team... this was the perfect way to introduce a Québécois musical performance. You took something with potential civil rights connections and *made it* into a civil rights event. Maine has an ugly history of bias



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towards Franco-Americans and their culture. It's too bad, because diversity in culture enriches our state. Your excellent framing helped your classmates understand that we all suffer when bias and discrimination discourage people from being themselves. (And thanks to their advisors, Kate Olsen-Pietrowski and Bobbi Goodwin, for sharing.)

At **Noble Middle School** in Berwick... the civil rights team did a great scavenger hunt activity using already existing messages around the school. The team took photos of any posters or displays around the school that had *anything* to do with civil rights. This included content that was directly connected and indirectly connected, created by students and professionally made, in the hallways and in individual classrooms. The team challenged students to locate each item (26 in all). In community circles, they then discussed where they were located and how they connected with the mission and goals of the civil rights team. In the process of creating the activity, the civil rights team realized that there are many spaces in their school that lack any sort of civil rights messaging. For a future activity, they aim to change this. (Possibly using [this!](#))

Hey, Noble Middle School civil rights team... this is just a great activity! At the advisor trainings we talked about how we can "use what's already there." What a clever and creative way to do that! You engaged students in a fun activity that encouraged them to interact with their environment and think about the mission and goals of the civil rights teams. This should help everyone in your school understand what you do. The fact that you're already thinking about how you can add civil rights messaging to what's already there is a logical and productive next step. (And thanks to their advisors, Sarah Burcalow, Amy Mallett, and Jade Pedrick, for sharing.)

In Fort Kent, the **Valley Rivers Middle School** and **Fort Kent High School** civil rights teams participated in the annual Scarecrow Festival parade. They created a float and a series of anti-bias posters. The seven civil rights team participants marched and handed out goodies, including information on the schools' civil rights teams, diversity-themed bookmarks, and bags of multicolored M&M's with a sticker reading "Variety is good in candy and people." Turnout was great, to the point that the team ultimately ran out of materials. For their efforts, the teams were recognized with the first place prize in the "Best Nonprofit" entry category!

Hey, Valley Rivers and Fort Kent High School civil rights teams... congratulations! You have done a great job getting out into your community and spreading the word on what you do. It's important that people see who we are and what we do! The fact that you were officially recognized for your efforts is just wonderful... and entirely deserved. (And thanks to their advisors, Kara Beal and Marion Bouchard, for sharing.)



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**Many students at Bonny Eagle Middle School took the pledge to be allies...**



**The civil rights team at Greely Middle School is front and center as students enter the auditorium for a musical treat...**





**The winning float from Valley Rivers Middle and Fort Kent High School...**



**A tidbit from the Indian Island School's bulletin board for Disability Awareness Week...**







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## From the Office:

### New Teams!

It has been a busy few months registering new schools for participation in the Civil Rights Team Project.

We have new affiliate groups at Benton Elementary School, Blue Hill Consolidated School, and Waterville High School.

We have new civil rights teams at Cape Elizabeth Middle School, Lee Academy, Leroy H. Smith School in Winterport, Massabesic High School in Waterboro, Mount Desert Island High School, Rockland District Middle School, Spruce Mountain High School in Jay, and Westbrook High School.

We currently have about 160 schools participating in the Civil Rights Team Project.

### Advisor Trainings

It seems like such a long time ago... but we had about 175 participants at our three advisor training sessions in Augusta, Brewer, and Portland. We asked you what you thought of the training, and you told us!

When asked to rate the overall quality:

- 0% rated it "poor."
- 3% rated it "adequate."
- 12.5% rated it "good."
- 33.5% rated it "very good."
- 51% rated it "excellent."

We will continue to sift through your feedback, and it will inform the decisions we make about future trainings. We can promise you two things next year:

- It will not be the same as this year. (It never is.)
- We will strive to provide a quality training that meets the needs of our advisors.

See you next year! (And hopefully before then.)

### Student Trainings

We're too busy doing the student trainings right now to share any info about them... but we'll create a folder soon on Dropbox and review the content right here in January.





## From the News:

### Look for Creating Safe Maine Schools... Soon

For the last two years I have been actively involved in a statewide coalition of professionals who do “safe schools” work here in Maine. We call ourselves the Creating Safe Maine Schools Coalition.



We recently completed our first project: a resource guide highlighting the quality Maine-based programs and resources that our schools and communities can access to help create a safe school environment. The guide is much more than just an indexed list of who's who in school climate work in Maine, though. It includes the philosophical underpinnings of our work, with sections on the core principles and practices of safe schools and the criteria for organizations' inclusion in the guide.

This philosophy will be important in determining our next steps. Our plan is to use this guide as a starting point for increased collaboration and communication between the many organizations and individuals doing “safe schools” work here in Maine. The coalition is already collaborating; ideally, we will start important conversations outside of the coalition so that our schools and communities better understand what goes into creating a safe school environment.

I am proud of the resource guide we created and excited about the possibilities it presents moving forward. The coalition agrees that the guide is only a starting point, and we now have an opportunity to do more. Conversations about safe schools (and civil rights) need to capture the public's consciousness, and the Creating Safe Maine Schools Coalition might be the way to make that happen.

You can get a head start on these conversations and access the resource guide at:

<http://creatingsafemaineschools.weebly.com/the-guide.html>