



THE TORCH (CRTP NEWSLETTER) JAN. '15

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 January edition of *The Torch*:

From the Teams: The connecting thread in this newsletter is encouragement, as our teams encourage allies, conversation, and doing the right thing.

From the Office: Looking back at the student trainings and ahead to the Sea Dogs.

From the News: Extending civil rights protections to include transgender identity.

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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:



At **Bonny Eagle High**

School in Standish... the civil rights team used Ally Week to challenge other school organizations to join them in

voicing their support for a bias-free school climate. They created posters for each organization and invited their members to announce themselves as allies by signing the posters. The invitation was accompanied with a detailed explanation of what it meant to sign on and why it's worth doing. The team received signed posters from eight organizations: cross country, drama, GSTA, National Honors Society, outing club, robotics, student council, and volleyball. These posters were included on an Ally Week bulletin board. Next year, they plan on formalizing the process a bit more and anticipate an even stronger response.

Hey, Bonny Eagle High School civil rights team: nice job enlisting support! We shouldn't have to do this work alone, and calling on other school organizations for support is just smart. You have created a safe space for other students to join you, and sometimes, that's all someone needs. (And thanks to their advisor, Beth Hayden, for sharing.)

At **Gorham High School**... the civil rights team presented a short program during Advisory period to increase awareness of how everyday language specifically affects LGBT+ identifying individuals. They performed modified versions of dramatic pieces from the *Out and Allied* series, including:

- "To the Boy Who Yelled Faggot" on page 54 in Volume I
- "Coming Out: What not to Do" on page 112 in Volume II

A former GHS student, who identifies as trans and is currently transitioning, made a personal appeal for students to serve as friends and allies to their LGBT+ peers. The presentation was very well received.

Hey, Gorham High School civil rights team: What a well designed program! Generally "awareness" events and campaigns tell us something that we already know... but your specific focus on the impact of *everyday* language really challenged your audience to think. The dramatic pieces were smart selections, showing how bias can be intentionally hateful or casually hurtful. Including the voice of someone directly affected by anti-LGBT bias makes everything more meaningful. (And thanks to their advisor, Rachael Grady, for sharing.)



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At **Saco Middle School...** the civil rights team was happy to answer people's questions on "Ask Me About" Day. Team members wore signs inviting others to ask them about civil rights, bias, and protected classes. They averaged about 6-8 inquiries per student. Some of those inquiries came from teachers during class, giving the civil rights team a wider audience for their answers.

Hey, Saco Middle School civil rights team: what a simple and effective project! Your signs created visibility for your team and encouraged curiosity and conversation about what you do. Not only is this important for the beginning of the year, but it's created a model for how you can introduce other concepts and events later in the year. (And thanks to their advisor, Mark Murray, for sharing.)

At **South Portland High School...** the civil rights team is putting up some thought-provoking posters that challenge their peers to think about what they stand for. The team came up with messages directly related to the civil rights categories, printed them, and then took pictures of themselves holding the signs. (They also got a few teachers to do it!) Messages include:

- I believe that everyone can succeed, no matter their family history or background.
- I believe that men and women deserve equal treatment and rights.
- I believe that no one should be teased for their sexual orientation.
- I don't believe that people are defined by their abilities or disabilities.
- I don't think racial jokes are funny.
- I know we all deserve a great education, no matter where we come from.
- I'll be your friend no matter what language you speak.
- I'm offended by religious slurs or jokes.
- I want everyone to feel safe in school.
- I will speak up if I hear someone call you something hateful.

The #sphscivilrights hashtag is a preview of things to come, too, as the civil rights team launches a Twitter account. They plan on using it to respond to incidents of online bias.

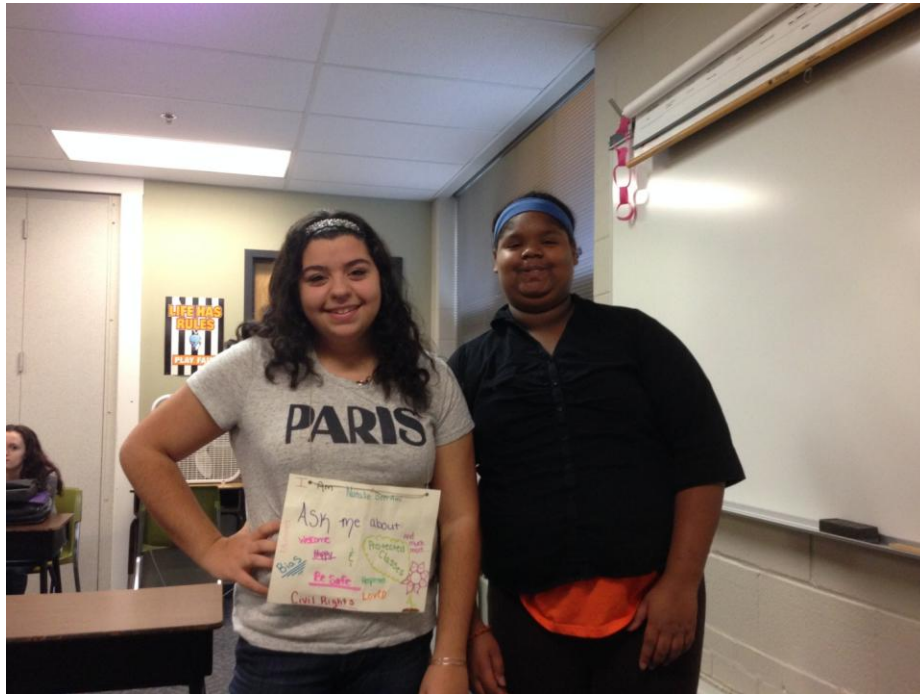
Hey, South Portland High School... these posters are smart! They are completely on topic, and the opinions you're expressing really need to be seen and heard. The Twitter account is a great way to respond to online bias, too. It allows the user some level of anonymity and authority, making it easier to do something. Keep up the creative thinking. (And thanks to their advisor, Sarah Keezing Gay, for sharing.)



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Students at Saco Middle School show off one of the signs they wore for “Ask Me About” Day...



The Gorham High School team performs a piece from *Out and Allied*...

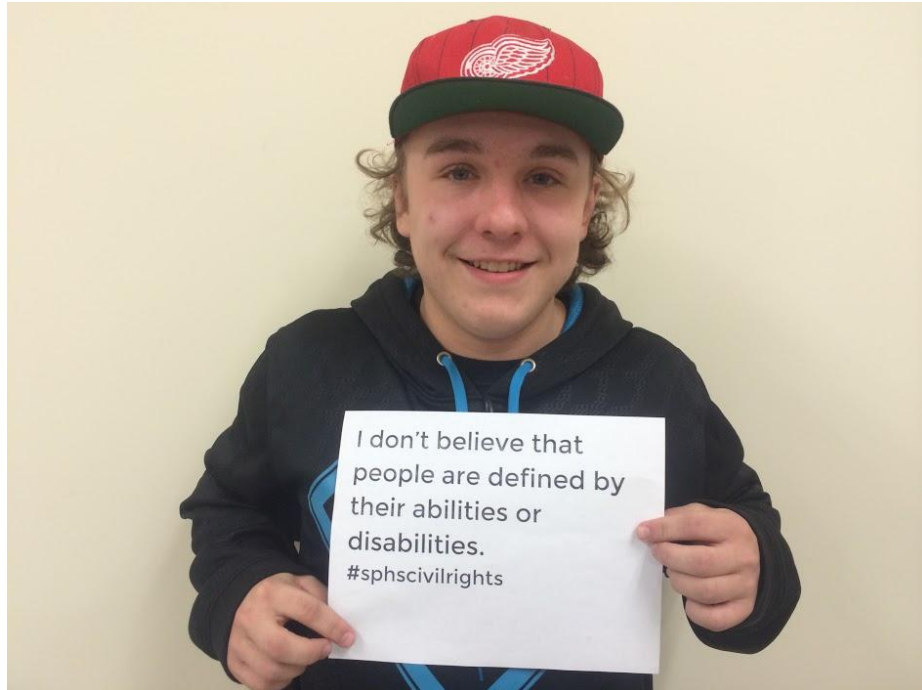




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Some of the posters from the South Portland High School civil rights team...





From the Office:

New Teams!

We only have one new team to report in this edition of *The Torch*, but we're pretty excited to have a civil rights team at Foxcroft Academy in Dover-Foxcroft.



Student Trainings

We concluded our student training schedule on November 18 in Presque Isle. All told, we held 13 sessions and reached 1490 participants from 113 schools. Unfortunately, inclement weather prevented some teams from attending this year. We try to avoid this problem by scheduling all sessions before the November Thanksgiving break, but... we live in Maine, and there just aren't many weather-proof months on the school calendar.

The number of students and schools who participated in the trainings was slightly down from last year. We blame the inclement weather and tight school budgets. (The number of schools actually participating in the Civil Rights Team Project is holding steady at around 160.)

In recent years we have done combined trainings for middle level and high school students. This year we did separate middle level and high school sessions in Augusta, Brewer, and Portland. Based on what we saw in these trainings... *we really like this change*. In fact, we received enough positive feedback about this change that we'll look to do it whenever and wherever we can.

We had a great time with the student trainings this year, and are already looking forward to October 2015. (Is it too early to say that?)

Another Great Night Scheduled with the Portland Sea Dogs!

Our fourth annual CRTP/Sea Dogs event will be on Friday, May 8. Participating students and advisors will be honored with a pre-game on-field ceremony and complimentary tickets, courtesy of Electricity Maine, to see the Portland Sea Dogs take on the New Britain Rock Cats.

This event is a wonderful way to recognize our teams for the great work they do. This year, we plan on having an increased civil rights presence for this event. Expect more!

We'll be getting you more information about the event later this month. Look for it.



From the News:

Protecting Transgender Identity in Law

December was a pretty good month for transgender equality here in the United States.

On December 1 the US Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights issued a memo on single-sex education. The memo specifically states that transgender students are protected from sex discrimination under Title IX:



How do the Title IX requirements on single-sex classes apply to transgender students?

Answer: All students, including transgender students and students who do not conform to sex stereotypes, are protected from sex-based discrimination under Title IX. Under Title IX, a recipient generally must treat transgender students consistent with their gender identity in all aspects of the planning, implementation, enrollment, operation, and evaluation of single-sex classes.

Then, on December 18, Attorney General Eric Holder made this announcement in an official press release:

I have determined that the best reading of Title VII's prohibition of sex discrimination is that it encompasses discrimination based on gender identity, including transgender status.

So what does this mean? It means that in one month, the US Department of Education and the Department of Justice officially recognized the rights of transgender individuals under federal civil rights law.

What's especially interesting is the way that they are doing this. The DOE and DOJ are including gender identity in their definitions of sex, thus extending protections through prohibitions on sex discrimination. The legal protections are important, but I'm just as interested in the legitimacy this offers to the concept of gender identity. By recognizing transgender individuals' rights under federal laws prohibiting sex discrimination, the federal government is essentially saying that when transgender individuals identify as a certain gender, *that is their sex*.

Compare that to Maine. Here in Maine, state laws recognize transgender individuals' rights to live free of discrimination through the Maine Human Rights Act. But we do it



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differently than the federal government, including those protections under the definition of sexual orientation:

"Sexual orientation" means a person's actual or perceived heterosexuality, bisexuality, homosexuality or gender identity or expression.

It's great that Maine state law offers these protections, but gender identity and expression are not *really* part of someone's sexual orientation. Sexual orientation is about the gender(s) you are (or are not) attracted to. Your gender, and how you identify it and express it, is something different.

The laws here in Maine and now the federal government are accomplishing the same thing using different strategies.¹ What's interesting is how gender identity and expression are always part of some other protected category, shoehorned into the laws under definitions of sex or sexual orientation. As our understanding of gender variance continues to evolve, perhaps we'll rewrite our laws to explicitly include gender identity and expression as their own protected categories.

For further reading:

You can read the Department of Education memo, "Questions and Answers on Title IX and Single-Sex Elementary and Secondary Classes and Extracurricular Activities" [right here](#). (I *promise*... it's more interesting that the title would have you believe.)

You can read the Department of Justice press release [right here](#).

And further viewing:

In October there was a panel discussion at USM called "Schools in Trans*ition: Supporting Trans and Gender Diverse Students in K-12 Education." You can watch it [right here](#). (It's 77 minutes long, but there's some good stuff.)

¹ It's worth noting that the federal civil rights laws referenced here do not include specific protections based on sexual orientation.