



# THE TORCH

(CRTP NEWSLETTER) NOV./DEC. '10



Two things have dominated my life for the past few months. I am in the final stages of buying and selling a home (or, perhaps more accurately, selling one home and *then* buying another). And of course we just finished the very busy fall training schedule for students: five locations, eight training dates, over 2000 students reached... in the span of three weeks.

These two events are connected, and not just in a pathetic “Brandon is really busy” attempt at sympathy grabbing. (Although if you’re wondering where last month’s edition of *The Torch* has been, you now have your answer.)

While looking at potential properties in the greater Augusta metropolitan area, I would always think about the community’s schools, and my mind would inevitably scan the CRTP database to see if those schools have civil rights teams. And I don’t even have kids!

This thought process shows how work colors the way we think: I judge schools based on whether or not they have civil rights teams. I share these judgments, too. When in conversation, I have been known to scowl at the mere mention of schools that don’t have civil right teams. Seriously.

There’s a more important point here than the fact that the schools and curriculum coordinator the Maine Civil Rights Team is incredibly judgmental. I think so highly of our civil rights teams that I can’t possibly imagine why any school wouldn’t have one. Civil rights teams should be up and running in every single Maine school. It is a credit to the schools that have them.



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Schools aren't detached entities, though; they are comprised of people. The same is true of our civil rights teams, and the adults and students who are our civil rights teams are incredible individuals. We are reminded of this every year through the fall trainings. We get to spend time with the individuals and groups who are working to change our schools. It's inspiring.

Because of my background as a teacher, I'm often asked if I miss the classroom. My first answer is simplified and gloriously short: NO. Given time, however, I'll expand on it. The thing I miss most is seeing that your work matters. Teaching is very much an act of faith. You teach to the best of your ability and believe that it makes a real difference. Short-term evidence does little to confirm your faith, but over the course of a school year, you see change, growth, even learning.

Working with the Civil Rights Team Project doesn't allow for that long-term perspective. We don't work with the same kids all year. We're in Portland today and Presque Isle tomorrow. This work feels like even more of an act of faith than teaching.

Sometimes I forget that civil rights teams are more than just statistics kept in a database. I obsess over how many teams we have, where they are and where they aren't, and what information we have on these teams. A few minutes spent with the kids at our fall trainings changes that, though. It's easy to have faith in our work when you see the commitment and passion of individual students. Add the sheer number of students engaged in this important work all across the state, and your faith becomes fact: we are making a difference.

This month's *Torch* is packed. It should be, because it's two months of material. (It's like a double issue of your favorite magazine. And just like those special double issues, it's *not* twice as large as a regular issue! But it is bigger.)

In honor of the fall trainings and the inspiration we draw from so many kids engaged in this important work, we are putting the focus of this super-sized *Torch* right on the kids... even more so than usual. Here's what you'll find in the November/December edition of our newsletter:

**The Director's Cut:** Thom makes some surprisingly insightful connections between the NFL's efforts to reduce concussions and the problem of bullying and harassment in our schools. (Surprising because of the apparent incongruity of the subject matters and not commentary on Thom's intellect.)

**Team Spotlight:** Student voices abound! A tour de force featuring three events and students from Warsaw Middle School, Memorial Middle School, Cony High School, Gardiner Area High School, and Hall-Dale Middle School.



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**Activity Ideas:** Be in regular contact with someone; it might make you and your team more productive. We give five suggestions for who that special “someone” could be.

**Pop Culture Winners and Losers:** Two months of pop culture! Yeah!

**Using Moodle:** The website directly benefits from me having some time in the office. You can now access all our resources from the fall trainings, including the much-anticipated accumulation of ideas for how you and your teams can meet our series of five expectations.

**FA Issues:** We’re trying discussion forums again in 2010, and this time, based on our great success with the FA trainings, we’re *really* optimistic.

**Relevant Resources:** The Youth Voice Project and the revolutionary idea of “Just ask the kids.” Many of you have been asking about this information, which we feature in some of our presentations. Here it is.

**Upcoming Events:** The end of the fall training season means a more open calendar.

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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 high school, middle school and elementary school students and to reduce the incidence of bias-motivated harassment and violence in schools.*

**Janet T. Mills—Attorney General**

**Thomas A. Harnett—Director, Civil Rights Education & Enforcement Unit**

**Debi Lettre—Civil Rights Project Administrator**

**Brandon Baldwin—Schools/Curriculum Coordinator**



## The Director's Cut

*A monthly column from our Director, Thom Harnett:*

### **From Concussions to Harassment Policies: What Schools Can Learn From the NFL**



The Civil Rights Team Project has long been a passion of mine as is its goal of making Maine schools places where every student feels safe, valued, welcome and respected. The word *safe* is first in that list because making schools *safe* is our number one priority. Long before I was involved in the CRTP, in fact long before the CRTP existed, I developed another passion, professional football. That's right; the same guy who talks incessantly about safety has been drawn for a lifetime to a game where oversized and incredibly fast grown men hurl themselves at one another in a very violent manner. For years both the sport and I ignored some of the most serious consequences caused by the violence of the game, notably brain injuries and concussions. However, today it is increasingly difficult to pick up a sports section in the newspaper and not see an article or an opinion piece on the ravages of head-to-head collisions in the sport. In some ways, it is similar to our reality that it is difficult to pick up a newspaper or watch a news show without reading or hearing about the ravages caused by bullying and harassment in our schools. Given those similarities, is there anything we can learn from the National Football League? I think there is.

For starters, it is fair to say that the NFL either ignored the number and severity of brain injuries caused by concussions or, at the very least, downplayed their significance. The league was quick to offer up excuses for why they did not address these issues... head on. (Sorry, I could not resist.)



Their reasons:

- *It is part of the game.*
- *The game has always been played this way.*
- *The athletes know the risks and most of them bounce right back up after a hit.*
- *Players need to protect themselves.*
- *Fill in the blank is a clean player; he would never deliberately hurt anyone.*

Sound familiar? Let's think of some of the excuses used when teachers, administrators and parents downplay the significance of bullying and harassment or explain why they do not respond to these behaviors when they witness them.

- *It is part of growing up.*
- *School has always been this way.*
- *Kids treat each other like that all the time and most of them don't seem bothered by it at all.*
- *Students need to become more resilient and learn to ignore these behaviors.*
- *Fill in the blank is a good kid who would never deliberately hurt anyone.*

A little frightening, isn't it?

One thing that we are all pretty good at is making excuses or finding reasons to justify our behavior even when we know in our heads and hearts that we are not doing the right thing. I do not believe for a second that anyone associated with the NFL thinks that concussions and brain injuries are a good thing. Nor do I believe that anyone associated with a school believes that bullying and harassment make their school a better place. However, much like the NFL did with concussions for decades, it is sometimes easier to do nothing rather than tackle (there I go again) a problem that is staring you right in the face. The NFL responded to the concussion crisis by doing a lot of things we do in government and education when we see a problem we think is too big or too pervasive to fix. They formed Blue Ribbon Commissions to study the issue and to report recommendations to solve it. When they did not like the first set of recommendations, they created more committees and called for more studies to be done. They brought in ex-players and medical professionals to weigh in on the crisis. But whenever anybody or any commission recommended a change in behavior, the response was *it can't be done. It will ruin the game.*

Then a funny thing happened. The general public began to see the concussion issue as serious. They worried about the health of their favorite players and thought about the young people, often their children, who play the game in school and college. The tide shifted. The problem became very real and the league knew they had to do something about it. They had no other choice. To the NFL's credit, they made significant changes to the protocol of handling players after they suffered a concussion. The days of *strap me up and put me back in, coach* have hopefully come to an end. Now medical



professionals, not coaches and general managers, decide when it is safe for a concussed player to return to the field. There is no denying that the rules on how to react to concussions changed in very significant ways.

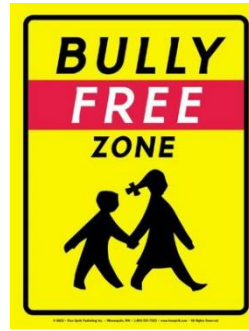
The point of this piece though is not what the NFL did in terms of behavior after a concussion occurs. The most significant thing that the league did was to look at the rules and policies already in effect to prevent concussions from occurring in the first place. After they engaged in that review, they in essence did nothing to their rules and policies. Instead they found that they already, and always, had rules in place that made intentional helmet-to-helmet hits, the leading cause of concussions, illegal and subject to penalties and fines. The most significant thing that the NFL did was to get serious about enforcing the policies that had always been there but were too often overlooked. In order to insure that all players, coaches and officials understood the policy on helmet to helmet hits, the NFL created and circulated a video that illustrated what was a legal hit and what types of hits violated the policy. Against an outcry from many, the league began to levy substantial monetary fines as a consequence for violation of its existing policies. Just turn on your television on any given Sunday and you will see that the sport has survived, quite nicely thank you, despite all of the doomsday predictions to the contrary.

So, what do we learn from this? Too often well-meaning schools, school personnel and school boards step into the same trap that initially snared the NFL. They face a growing public outcry about problems like bullying and harassment and think *we need new tools, we need a committee to look at these issues, we need to commission more studies, collect more data*. For the most part, they do not. What schools need to do initially is to take a look at existing policies. In most cases they will find that they already have policies in place to prevent and redress bullying and harassment. Of course, if they find their policies are lacking, they must amend them as needed and most importantly make sure they comply with current law. (See the February 2010 edition of *The Torch*, pages 4-5.) The real key however is to do what the NFL did: enforce the policies already in place. Let students and staff know in the clearest of terms what types of behaviors are unacceptable under school policies and what the consequences will be for engaging in those behaviors and violating those policies. Perhaps schools could take a cue from the NFL and demonstrate what violations of the policies look like by having members of the civil rights team prepare and/or act out scenarios. After that, let staff know that it is their responsibility to enforce those policies consistently by alerting administration whenever a staff member witnesses a violation.

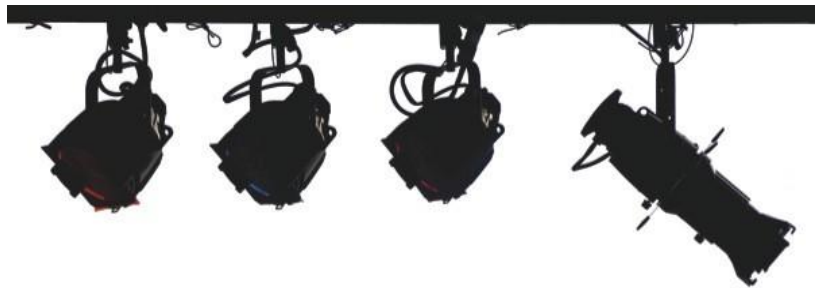
Sometimes the most efficient and effective solution is the simplest solution. We sometimes overcomplicate things when just taking a deep breath and assessing what tools we already have at our disposal is our best option. To be sure, like the NFL took steps to deal with the impacts of concussions on those who suffered them, schools can do more to deal with the real hurt and pain that victims of bullying and harassment suffer. There is much work to be done there. However, I do believe that if schools



dusted off the policies that they already have, educate people on those policies and enforce them when that is called for, they just might score a—oh, forget that.



## Team Spotlight:



“It’s good for them to hear from outside voices.” I hear this a lot, usually just before or after a school presentation. It’s acknowledging a truth: that our students tend to tune out adult voices over time. Bringing in new adult voices makes for a convincing case that the message is important.

But it’s also good for students to hear from inside voices. Yes, they tend to tune us out over time, but inside voices don’t have to be the same adult voices over and over. You’ve got fresh voices, just waiting to be heard, right in your school.

Hand the microphone over to the kids and good things will happen. They will offer an honest, real perspective on what’s going on in your school. They may lack the polish, but student voices get heard.

Three recent events on my calendar highlight the effectiveness of student voices.

### **1. Warsaw Middle School Students Offer a Stirring Introduction**

I recently spoke with students at Warsaw Middle School (Pittsfield) about language and the power of words. Before I began my presentation, though, civil rights team members



gave an excellent introduction, taking turns talking about the team and what they see as important issues in the school.

In the spirit of this piece, then, let's hear from them...

“The civil rights team is presenting today because words really do hurt. We want everyone to feel safe and secure here at school.”

-LOGAN, GRADE 7

“I believe Warsaw is a wonderful school already, but I think it could be better. Bullying is our weak point; we need to make not bullying our strong point.”

-DEVON, GRADE 5



“Bullying is something that cannot be ignored. I see it happening frequently... but the thing that bothers me is you don't see anybody stepping up to it and trying to stop it.”

-EMMA, GRADE 7

“The civil rights team is here at school to make it a safe and friendly environment for all of us... As you listen to this presentation, think about other people's feelings and decide if your word choice is appropriate or not before you speak.”

-LEXI, GRADE 7

These quotes are selected excerpts of what the Warsaw civil rights team shared that day. They spoke directly about the words they hear in school, offered personal stories about their experiences, and challenged their audience to focus and think about their school and their own behaviors.

Students listened. How often had they really heard from their peers on these issues? It may very well have been the first time that some of the students in that audience had ever heard from their peers about the routine use of bias-based language in their school.

It was simple, powerful, and effective... and a great introduction for my presentation.

Credit is due to the team's advisors, Donna Chale and Brian Cole, who issued a challenge to their team and organized their voices.





## 2. Students Conclude “Character Unites Day” at Memorial Middle School

I recently conducted a workshop at Memorial Middle School (South Portland) on bystander behavior. This workshop was part of a civil rights-themed day that also included the Holocaust Human Rights Center, a screening of Teaching Tolerance’s new film, *Bullied*, and other teacher-led activities. It was up to members of the school’s civil rights team to tie it all together with a conclusion.



Three students, Kris, Lily, and T-Moe, addressed the student body. They asked students to raise their hands on three separate occasions, if they had ever:

- Witnessed or been a part of incidents at school where others were treated inappropriately.
- Been the target of inappropriate behavior at school.
- Witnessed or been a part of incidents at school where others were treated inappropriately and did nothing to stop or prevent it.

Of course any students who were honest with themselves had their hands raised for all three prompts, and, in fact, a majority of Memorial Middle School’s students had their hands raised. The three student presenters asked everyone to repeat the school’s motto, and in unison, the student body thundered, “Everyone deserves to be treated with kindness and respect.”

The three students then challenged their peers to take three simple actions to help make Memorial a better place for all students:

- Everyone deserves to be treated with kindness and respect.
- When we witness acts that are unkind or disrespectful, we will respond with “We don’t do/say that here.”
- We will reach out to “targets” and offer assistance and support and isolate/report bullies to adults.

They then asked students who were willing to make a true commitment to these actions to stand united in silence. To demonstrate their commitment, they then walked back to their classrooms in silence.



This was optional. Students did not have to stand. But again, this may have been the first time students had seen their peers take a stand against bullying and harassment behaviors. The sheer number of students who did so, in silence, was a powerful statement.

George Conant, the school's assistant principal and co-advisor to the civil rights team, later told me that this conclusion was "all the kids." He and Brenda Laliberte deserve credit for giving the civil rights team such a prominent role in the school's "Character Unites Day." And of course Kris, Lily, and T-Moe deserve even more credit for doing such a wonderful job.

### 3. Holding Court at the Holocaust Human Rights Center

The Holocaust Human Rights Center contacted us, looking to include civil rights team participation in their Series 360 program on the history of human rights and hate right here in the state of Maine. Student representatives from the Cony High School, Gardiner Area High School, and Hall-Dale Middle School civil rights teams shared their opinions and experiences as part of a roundtable discussion, "Hate Speech in Vacationland?" On a Wednesday evening in November, these students spoke for 90 minutes about what they see in our schools.



It was sobering. Hate speech exists in our schools and society. More troubling is the fact that so many students feel like schools aren't doing enough to stop it. But it was also encouraging to see students from three area schools actively engaged in the issues and trying to bring about positive change. The audience recognized this, ending the night with a standing ovation for these student heroes.

We did very little to make this happen. Daniel Pearl, responsible for organizing a series of roundtable discussions as part of the Series 360 events, contacted us. The civil rights team advisors, Cony's April Fenton-Hulett, Gardiner's Christina Benedict, and Hall-Dale's Nona Thompson, organized and prepped their kids with a series of three questions:

- Is hate language a problem in your school? What do you see/hear?
- What is its impact on individual students and the overall school climate?



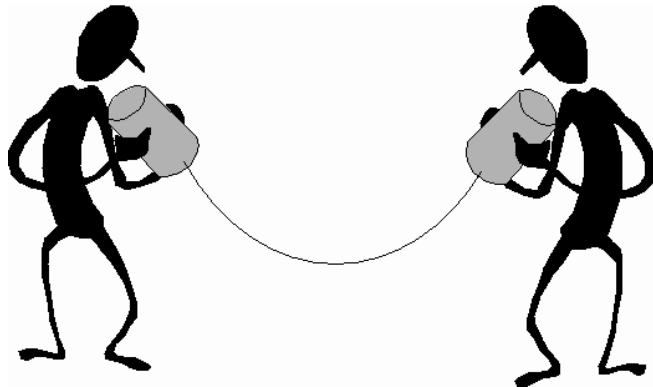
- What can civil rights teams do to address this issue?

Thom and I attended and served as moderators. At first, students were hesitant to speak, but over time, they needed us less and less. This was the students' show.

(A special thank-you to the Holocaust Human Rights Center and Daniel Pearl for inviting student civil rights teams to participate. We highly, highly recommend that civil rights teams and schools establish relationships with this wonderful organization. They have terrific people and facilities, and we look forward to deepening our ties with them in the future.)

Three separate events where student voices had an impact. Sometimes as adults we are hesitant to hand things over to the students. We question their readiness. But if we offer them some structure, specifics, and clear and manageable tasks, their voices get heard. What they lack in polish and professional presentation skills they make up for in candor and directness. Let your students surprise you and others; let them be heard.

## Activity Idea: The Simple Act of Reporting Out



The simple act of having to tell someone else what you've been doing can spur you into action. It creates *accountability*, and not necessarily to your audience, but yourself. Each and every report out serves as a checkpoint where you have to think about what you've accomplished in a given amount of time. The value isn't so much in the actual communication itself, but the motivation and self-reflection that it encourages.

Civil rights teams often operate in their own space, with minimal reporting, communication, and accountability requirements. It's no surprise that oftentimes, faculty advisors struggle to remember what the team has accomplished. It may be because the team has a short list of actual accomplishments, or perhaps some things simply fade into memory. Either way, creating a regular system of communication may help you and your team accomplish more. Just knowing that you'll have to report out on your accomplishments every week, month, or quarter can help you keep your focus.

A great project idea, then, for you and your team is to create a regular system of communication between you and someone else. First off, though, we have two simple rules for communication:



1. Make it **scheduled and regular**. Have dates or deadlines. Commit to it and do it. When we don't schedule things in our lives, whatever our intentions, we don't do them.

2. Make sure the **students are reporting**. This shouldn't be your job. It can be shared work, but the kids need to take ownership for the team and its accomplishments.

And just who should you and your team communicate with? No matter who it is, it will have benefits, but here are some specific suggestions we have:

### 1. Another civil rights team

Be in constant contact with another civil rights team! They know something about the work and what it's like trying to change school climate. You can learn from each other, feed off each other, and support each other.

We are even taking steps to formalize this process for interested schools. We have a list of nearly 40 schools so far. Contact Brandon if you'd like to be paired up with another school and we'll create communication lines that should benefit both schools.

### 2. Administration and/or teachers

The school needs to know about the civil rights team and what you're doing. This is the perfect way to make that happen. Request an audience with administration every month and offer a short summary of what the team is working on and what you've accomplished. Write up a brief report and leave it in teacher mailboxes or send it through e-mail. Or come up with your own method of communication.

The work we do with our civil rights teams is made much easier and more effective when we have administrative and staff support. We can garner that support by simply letting them know what we're doing. You may even discover that the communication starts going both ways, as you get suggestions and input.

### 3. Students

We want civil rights teams to be an active presence in the school community. Students should know that the civil rights team exists, what they represent, and what they're doing. A simple way to make sure this happens? Tell them!

Many schools have built-in time during morning announcements, homeroom, advisor groups, regularly scheduled assemblies, and other schedule features. Use it to your advantage. Or maybe it isn't a schedule feature at all: bulletin boards or school newspapers can effectively communicate what the team is doing. You don't always need to have something big going on, and it doesn't need to be a finished product; just remind students that the team exists and that you're working on something.



#### 4. Superintendent and school board

How much do they really know about your civil rights team? Probably not as much as you would like. Get out there and let them know what your team is doing. They are probably itching to share some positive news about what's going on in the schools. They also have the power to set and change policies, and they're certainly great allies to have on your side.

Keep in mind that school boards already meet on a regular basis, and they rarely hear directly from students. This sounds like a perfect presentation opportunity. But you could also update your superintendent and school board through letters or e-mail communication. Anything that gets you on their radar screen is a good thing.

#### 5. Parents and community

We want teams to be active in the school, but people outside the school should know about the team. We want to celebrate and advertise the great work our teams do. You can do that by regularly offering reports about the civil rights teams.

Have a regular column or feature in the school, district/union, or community newspaper. Attach mailings to report cards. Find another way to offer regular communication. Whatever it is, it's good for people outside of the school to know about the civil rights teams and the great work you're doing.

#### 6. Us!

We're always happy to hear about whatever you and your team are doing, and we're happy to offer feedback.

\* \* \* \* \*

This is not a comprehensive list; just a few suggestions for potential audiences and methods of communication. Regular communication can help focus you and your team, as the act of reporting encourages you to have something to report. The reporting also encourages reflection. And finally, there are added benefits dependent on who you're communicating with. With many of the groups we've chosen to highlight, you'll be addressing our second expectation of our civil rights teams: create a visible presence.

Go for it! It might feel like a major commitment, but changing school climate is a big job. With any big job, it helps to share your progress with someone. So get on out there and talk about what you and your civil rights team are doing.



## Pop Culture Watch: October and November 2010

The Pop Culture Watch is where we offer our opinions on what's going on in popular culture from a civil rights perspective!



### Ha, Ha, Ha: What Did I Just Laugh At?

Bud Light has made a name for itself through advertising. Their 30-second television spots have such a unique stamp that you can often identify them before the product is even mentioned.

Their most recent advertisement starts like so many of their others: a group of men showing just what lengths they'll go to for their Bud Light. (Does anyone in these ads know that you can buy it at the store?)

A group of guys on a bridge, one is hooked up to a bungee cord, he's balking at the jump. We look down and see a boat on the river below. Guy sees a ton of Bud Light in the boat, and our jumper suddenly gains the courage to take the plunge.

He jumps. The camera stays on his buddies up on the bridge. He arrives back in the picture (from the bungee's reverb) with two Bud Lights. Then two more. Then some appetizers. Then a bikini top. Product shot of the beer with some voiceover. Last joke: he takes the bikini top back, saying "She wants it back."

You aren't supposed to think about Bud Light ads too much. They have a light tone, and you're supposed to laugh... but just what happened in the end of this ad? He takes some beer, some food, and a woman's bikini top. We then find out that she wants it back.

Is it just me, or does this sound like sexual assault? It certainly looks and sounds like he removed a woman's bikini top without her permission.

And don't forget that this is a beer ad; I wouldn't be playing around with anything that creates any sort of connection between alcohol and sexual assault.

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=YuOJ4eBqxFU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YuOJ4eBqxFU)



## A Simple Love Song

Isn't it reassuring to know that *Sesame Street* is still on? Even better, this classic television show is now benefitting from the new world of social media.

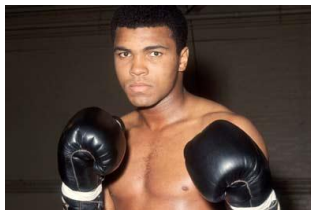
A recent example is a segment from the show called "I Love My Hair," which went viral a few weeks ago and gained a massive audience. It's just two minutes long, with a young African-American female muppet singing a love song about her hair.

To truly understand the impact of this short video, read some of the comments. You will see some wishing that it had been around years ago, and many more celebrating that they can share it with their kids.

And of course this just shows how infrequently African-American girls get positive messages about their beauty. How great that something like this gets spread far and wide... between this and the "It Gets Better" viral campaign, we must remember that the internet is so much more than just a place for cyberbullying. It can be a great positive.

Watch the *Sesame Street* viral video, "I Love My Hair," at:

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=enpFde5rgmw&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=enpFde5rgmw&feature=related)



## Best Website Name, Ever!

NPR's firing of Juan Williams for his comments about Muslim terrorists is not pop culture fodder. But the almost instantaneous creation of the website "Pictures of Muslims Wearing Things" sure is. The site was created in direct response to Williams' quote, "[W]hen I get on the plane, I got to tell you, if I see people who are in Muslim garb and I think, you know, they are identifying themselves first and foremost as Muslims, I get worried."



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And just what is Muslim garb? Probably everyone knows what Williams was trying to say, but the new site decided to have some fun at his expense and educate people about the diversity in the Muslim world. The site is exactly what it says it is: pictures of Muslims wearing different things. Their site summary says it all:

Former NPR analyst Juan Williams, among other ignorant people, has an irrational fear of Muslims, and thinks you can identify them based on what they look like. Here I will post pictures of Muslims wearing all sorts of things in an attempt to refute that there is such a thing as “Muslim garb” or a Muslim look.

So simple, and so effective. Between this and the *Sesame Street* video, I’m seriously crushing on the positive power of the internet right now.

Check out the site:

<http://muslimswearingthings.tumblr.com>



## **Asian Man Gets Major Spokesman Role! (Too Bad It’s This One.)**

Adidas basketball just unveiled their new ad campaign for the 2010-2011 season. It features the conspicuously rich and conspicuously ridiculous Asian character Slim Chin, marveling over the basketball prowess of Dwight Howard and Derek Rose.

Now go and watch the ads. Something shouldn’t sit right with you. Doesn’t it feel like Adidas is relying on people to laugh at the fact that this *Asian* guy is acting so... silly?

Let me help you with that answer: yes.

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=P9EiHz3XzpM&feature=channel](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P9EiHz3XzpM&feature=channel)

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=bJLmiU9y8\\_g&feature=channel](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bJLmiU9y8_g&feature=channel)





## Disney Tries to Get It Right on the 50<sup>th</sup> Try

*Tangled*, a re-imagined version of the Rapunzel fairy tale, is Disney's fiftieth animated feature film. The first previews suggested an extremely self-aware production, flaunting gender expectations so prevalent in fairy tales and Disney films alike. Encouraging.

But this is Disney. Their history is hardly encouraging.

We haven't seen the film yet, but we're hopeful. Last year's *The Frog Princess* is surprisingly good, featuring an African-American heroine whose life's ambition is owning her own restaurant. (Does she have to get married to achieve this ambition? Well, it is a Disney princess movie. Baby steps!)

We predict that there will be positives and negatives with *Tangled*. Strong female lead, independent, doesn't need a man to rescue her... but of course she'll end up married to her prince in the end. Hope I didn't spoil anything.

**Using  [moodle](http://www.civilrightsteams.org): [www.civilrightsteams.org](http://www.civilrightsteams.org)**

The Maine Civil Rights Team Project



I hate to start so many sentences the same way, but...

*Now that the fall trainings are over*, I have much more time to devote to our site. I will be making active efforts to get all of our resources online, nicely organized so that anyone can easily access everything we have to offer.

And it starts with the fall trainings. Many of you have asked us for slides, information, articles, film clips, and other pieces of the workshops from the fall trainings. It's all available online.



Anything and everything that we used, we're making available. Feel free to use it in any way you see fit.

Go online and you will find:

- The Powerpoint, activity sheet, and information on our expectations from the FA trainings (coming soon: a summary version of the FA trainings for those who were unable to attend)
- The Powerpoint and film clips from Brandon's "Standing Up" workshop
- The Powerpoint, harassment policy quiz, and an informational/reference guide to harassment policies and state law from Thom's "Your New Best Friend" workshop
- The Powerpoint, instructor notes, scenarios, and planning sheet from Amy's "Ready to Respond" workshop

We also have materials and resources from our 2008 and 2009 trainings.

Feel free to contact me with questions about anything from the fall trainings, too. If you and your team were not in attendance, some of the materials won't make total sense, but we're confident that they still hold value. And if you were there, you know that there's some great stuff available online.

Check it out at in the "What's Going On" section of the site, or just go to:

<http://civilrightsteams.org/mod/book/view.php?id=244>

It's also worth noting that we have officially compiled all of your ideas about how to meet our series of five expectations. Many of you asked for this information at the fall trainings. It's now available online at:

<http://civilrightsteams.org/mod/book/view.php?id=245>

## **FA Issues: Giving Students Voice**

One of the most encouraging parts of our FA trainings this year was the level of participation we saw in our discussion forums that we set up. We showed you exactly how to do it, and you went ahead and did it. It wasn't hard.

Now for the next step. We want to see it happen again, without us there to guide you through the process. (Although one phone call to Brandon and he will gladly guide you through the process. Gladly.)



Let's go. Last year, we had a discussion forum set up called "FA Issues." We would introduce a topic through the newsletter and encourage an exchange of ideas online. The exchange never really happened.

But we don't quit. No, no, no. So here we go, relaunching the discussion forum in 2010:

We ask a simple question, you think about it, go online, and post! How simple!

Our question(s) this month is consistent with the rest of this edition of *The Torch*:

- What have been your experiences in giving students on the civil rights team voice?

You can highlight past practice, positives and negatives, and other ideas you have for the future. Just contribute something to the discussion, and check in to see what others have written. We want to start an exchange of ideas!

To weigh in, simply click on the link below and hit "Reply" in the lower righthand corner to give your response:

<http://civilrightsteams.org/mod/forum/discuss.php?d=60>

Or, if you want to go and find the discussion forum on your own, get to our site, find the "Community Forum" section in the middle, and the big red letters for "FA Issues." Click on the "FA Issues Discussion Forum" and you'll see a list of topics. This one is on top.

## Relevant Resources: Good Research

The world of education seems to have developed a full-blown crush on research. The words "research-based" have entered the lexicon of education buzzwords.

But I'm no lover of research. Whenever I'm asked about research that supports our work, I bristle. Research? We don't need no stinkin' research! How do we *know* that this stuff works? Because it does... that's how!





# THE TORCH (CRTP NEWSLETTER) NOV./DEC. '10

Some things just can't be measured. And many of the things that can be measured by research we already know.

But then there's that small amount of research that defies conventional wisdom and tells us something completely new, or even better, contradicts what we think we already know. That research is invaluable.

The new studies from the Youth Voice Project are an invaluable resource for anyone in education. The Project comes from erstwhile friend of the Civil Rights Team Project Stan Davis and Charisse Nixon. Their research consists of more than 14,000 student surveys from all around the country. Their philosophy is simple:

This study is the first known large-scale research project that solicits students' perceptions about strategy effectiveness to reduce peer mistreatment in our schools. We believe that students' voices are an invaluable resource to increase our understanding of effective prevention and intervention efforts.

The goal of this project is to compile a body of knowledge describing the most helpful interventions in order to help adults and youth reduce bullying and harassment in their own schools. It is our hope to use this information to guide educators, parents, and youth in applying effective interventions to reduce bullying and subsequently, optimize students' development.

It's such an incredibly simple philosophy, as indicated in their tagline, "Just ask the kids," that apparently no one has done it before. This should come as no great surprise, as student voices are often neglected in educational efforts to change school culture and climate.

And so you may approach this study with some level of interest. Paw around the data for a few minutes and you'll be shocked. Much of what the kids tell us runs *directly contrary to what we've been teaching them*. Yikes.

Of particular note are the sections where students who had experienced bullying or harassment report on the effectiveness of:

1. Strategies they employed themselves to deal with the situation.
2. Actions taken by educators
3. Actions taken by peers

I will be so bold as to say that the results will surprise you. Here are just three interesting tidbits:

1. "Pretending that it didn't bother me" was the *least* effective strategy for students to self-employ.



2. “Listened to me” is the single most helpful action taken by educators, ahead of any actions taken against the perpetrators.
3. There are *nine* different actions peers can take that are deemed more helpful than confronting the perpetrators.

This is just a teaser, like one of those promotional mini-magazines that arrive in your mail for free, trying to entice you into a subscription. But the Youth Voice Project data is completely free! We think highly enough of the information that we’ve found there that we’ve already included significant chunks of it in our in-service trainings.

Check it out. It is both interesting and hugely important. Every time I’ve presented any of the findings, audiences inevitably want to stop and study it. Go and see it for yourself!

[www.youthvoiceproject.com](http://www.youthvoiceproject.com)

(All the information mentioned here is included in the first report.)

## Upcoming Events:

### Dec. 13: Film Screening of *Bullied*

Portland, Portland Public Library,  
Rines Auditorium, 6:00-8:00 pm, free  
and open to the public

Sponsored by GLSEN Southern Maine.

Come and see Teaching Tolerance’s great new film *Bullied* (featured in our October edition of *The Torch*). The film will be followed by a panel and public discussion about anti-gay bullying and harassment in our schools. Area Gay-Straight Alliances (and possibly civil rights teams) will also share some of what they’re doing in schools. Come see a great film and support some of our allies!



(And if you know of any upcoming events that are somehow related to civil rights and the work we do, please keep us informed. We want a full calendar in the next *Torch*!)