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Torch (February 2014)

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Civil Rights Team Project

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**“ EDUCATION IS
THE MOST POWERFUL WEAPON
WE CAN USE TO CHANGE
THE WORLD.”**

- NELSON MANDELA
1918-2013



On Our Radar: Major events and happenings that are on our radar screen.

From the Teams: News and information about your civil rights teams and affiliated groups and what you’re doing to address issues of bias in your schools.

The Civil Rights Team Project in the News: Media coverage for the CRTP.

From the Office: News from Brandon and Debi and what’s happening with the CRTP.

From Edmodo: Information about and from the CRTP group at Edmodo.

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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.

Janet Mills—Attorney General
Debi Lettre—Civil Rights Project Administrator
Brandon Baldwin—Schools/Curriculum Coordinator



On Our Radar:

Here's everything we've got our eyes on in the next three months...

African American History Month (February):

Information available at: www.africanamericanhistorymonth.gov

Women's History Month (March)

- Information available at: www.womenshistorymonth.gov

End the R-Word Day (March 5)

- Information available at: <http://r-word.org> (although they haven't updated it yet)

A Lot Alike Week (March 10-14 for middle level and high schools)

- Information available [right here!](#)

International Day for the Elimination of Racism (March 21)

- Sponsored by the United Nations

A Lot Alike Week (March 24-28 for elementary schools)

- Information available [right here!](#)

Autism and Asperger's Awareness Month (April)

Holocaust Remembrance Day (April 28)





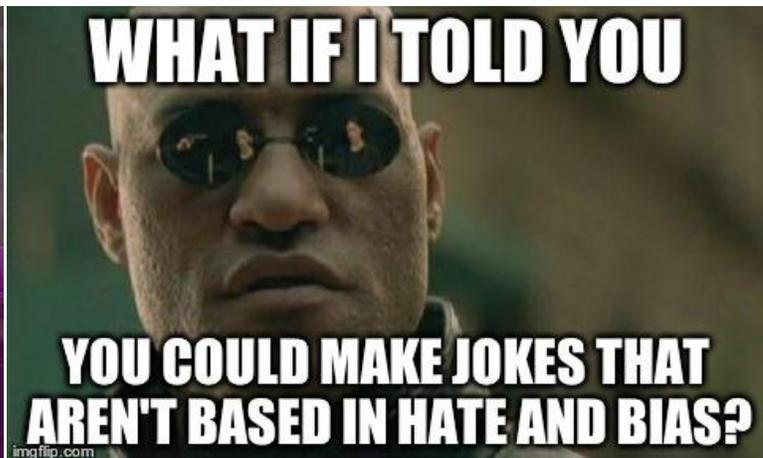
From the Teams:



At Bangor High School... the civil rights team sponsored No Name-Calling Week. Some highlights included:

- Prominently hanging the team's anti-bias pledge for all to see
- Creating anti-bias memes that were on the school's tv's (see below)
- Screening the Teaching Tolerance film *Bullied* and specifically talking about how bias based on sexual orientation led to the bullying
- A scavenger hunt activity where students could earn a candy bar reward for getting 20 different signatures from people who fit certain criteria (someone who speaks a language other than English fluently, someone who participates in band or chorus, someone who is two years older or younger than you, etc.)

Hey, Bangor High School civil rights team: a few of you did *a lot* of work to make this event happen. You showed that bias-based name-calling is a serious subject (with the pledge), but that we can still have a sense of humor about it (the memes). You were direct in talking about civil rights when you needed to be (with the film) and not so direct when it would have been inappropriate (the choice of scavenger hunt categories). This is why weeklong events are great: you can embrace complexity! Nice job. (And thanks to their advisor, Stephanie Hendrix, for sharing.)



At Edgecomb Eddy School... the civil rights team gets presentation time at the school's monthly variety show. They've done skits and a modified version of some of the similarities/differences activities from the fall trainings. Since this monthly time wasn't enough, though, they also presented to their school during lunch time and honored the life and work of Martin Luther King on his birthday.



THE TORCH (CRTP NEWSLETTER) FEB '14

Hey, Edgcomb Eddy civil rights team... it's really impressive that you have something to share with your school every single month, *and* that you're willing to get up there and do it. We all know that variety shows are that much better when you include civil rights! (And thanks to their advisor, Madeline Olney, for sharing.)



At Lake Region Middle School in Naples... the civil rights team sponsored a successful Mix It Up Day. They used the well-liked "[Take a Seat, Make a Friend](#)" video from the fall trainings to introduce the event and provided "question dice" for lunch tables. The dice were created out of old manila folders and featured questions on their sides (see above). Students would roll the dice and answer the questions. In what has to be considered a strong sign of success, once students had exhausted the questions on their die, they began swapping with other tables. Score!

Hey, Lake Region civil rights team: you took an event that many, many schools have done and included your own unique twist. You made it fun and proved that there are always ways to make things fresh, new, and exciting. (And thanks to their advisors, Megan Grimshaw and Claire Schroeder, for sharing.)

At Park Avenue Elementary School in Auburn... the civil rights team made sure their classmates understood why they weren't in school on January 20, the Martin Luther King holiday. Team members chose favorite MLK quotes (and a few select others), read them over the announcements, and explained exactly how those quotes relate to their school. Their quotes and explanations were also paired up with their photos on an ever-changing civil rights bulletin board.

Hey, Park Avenue civil rights team: nice work taking the words of Martin Luther King and connecting them with things that are happening today in 2014 in your school. (And thanks to their advisors, Irene Austin and Sue Potter, for sharing.)

In the next newsletter... we'll have highlights of "Be Yourself" Week!



From the Office:

New Teams!

We have new participating schools with full-fledged civil rights teams at Riverton Elementary School in Portland and Loranger Middle School in Old Orchard Beach.



Midseason Check-Ins

A big thank-you to all our advisors who completed their midseason check-ins. These check-ins are important, as they give our office a good idea of how things are going, both for individual advisors and teams *and* the Civil Rights Team Project in general.

(And here's an early reminder that end-of-year reports are due on June 2! You can get the form [right here](#).)

In offering feedback to our advisors on our fourth expectation of addressing school issues, I've stumbled on some language that might prove useful in better understanding the role of the civil rights team. We address *issues* more than *incidents*. We see bias as more than individual behaviors... it's a culture that exists in our schools and society. We change that culture by engaging our school in dialogue about the issues.

Expect to see more of this language at the advisor trainings next fall!

New Presentations

I created a new workshop called "We Have Those Issues Here: Civil Rights in Maine Schools" and unveiled it at the Maine School Counselors Association conference in December. The entire workshop was a response to the classic line I often hear, "we don't have those issues here." Expect to see elements of this workshop at next year's advisor trainings, as it makes for a compelling argument for why we need to talk even more about race, skin color, national origin, ancestry, religion, disabilities, gender, and sexual orientation in *all our schools*.

I also created a new introductory assembly for elementary schools. If you happen to know of any elementary schools that you think should join the Civil Rights Team Project... I'm ready.

And finally, I've edited and improved my "The Power of Words" presentation. This presentation is specifically for use during No Name-Calling Week events. It includes a section that specifically looks at how we respond to getting called out on our use of



THE TORCH

(CRTP NEWSLETTER) FEB '14

bias-biased language. It's confrontational and challenging... perfect for anyone with excuse after excuse about why it's OK for them to use bias-based language.

End of Year

We are actively looking at possible alternatives to the annual spring conference. We asked about several possibilities using an online survey tool, and...

- You thought that a weekend event was a bad idea.
- You were intrigued by the potential for regional weekday evening events.

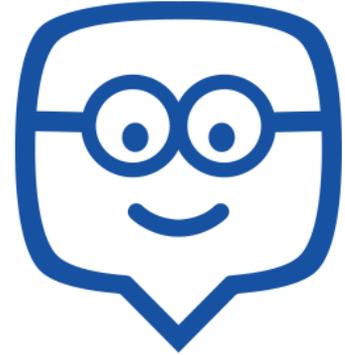
So what does this mean? We certainly won't be doing anything on a Saturday... that's for sure! We continue to investigate other possibilities...



From Edmodo:

Most Viewed Content:

1. US Postal Service “Auld Lang Returns” ad (51 views), [see it here](#)
2. Salon’s blog post on “8 Things You Probably Didn’t Know about Martin Luther King, Jr. (22 views), [see it here](#)
3. (tie) “Because Who Is Perfect?” video (21 views), [see it here](#)
3. (tie) Clip from Disney Channel’s *Good Luck Charlie* (21 views), see it here



My Take: I’d like to point out that our most viewed content from the last two months is about race, national origin and ancestry, disabilities, and sexual orientation. Good for us for distributing our clicks around the different civil rights categories!

In Case You Missed It:

Here I’m highlighting great content from the last two months that I wish had gotten more clicks:

- From NPR’s Code Switch blog, “2013 Signoffs: Short Stories about a Few Remarkable Lives” (only 8 and 10 views), see them [here](#) and [here](#)
- From Teaching Tolerance’s blog, a great piece about the successful inclusion of Amish students in Ohio public schools (only 8 views), [see it here](#)
- Race Forward’s new study (and video) on how we talk about race and racism (only 8 views for the study and 4 views for the video), [see it here](#)

(You can access the CRTP Edmodo group by logging in at www.edmodo.com .)