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Torch (April 2014)

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Civil Rights Team Project

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THE TORCH

(CRTP NEWSLETTER) APRIL '14



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.

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

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

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



From the Teams:

“Be Yourself” Week

Some of our elementary and middle level civil rights teams celebrated and promoted “Be Yourself” Week in February.

The CRTP-sponsored event features the slogan “Making school safe for individuality.” Civil rights teams did a full week of activities that promoted individuality and respecting others for who they are. Brandon visited nine schools to support their civil rights teams and this event with his “Be Yourself” presentation.

Here are just some of the highlights from “Be Yourself” Week (and please understand that this is just a *sampling* of what these teams did):

- At **Cony Middle School in Augusta...** the civil rights team sponsored White T-Shirt Wednesday, where students were asked to wear plain white t-shirts to school. This was to show how boring life would be if we were all the same, and served as the control for the next day’s experimental event: Favorite T-Shirt Thursday! On Thursday, students were encouraged to wear their favorite t-shirt, which meant an explosion of color, interests, and personality. (And thanks to Cony’s advisor, Joelle Drake for sharing.)
- At **Garret Schenck Elementary School in Anson...** the civil rights team was responsible for updating and promoting a “Be Yourself” bulletin board. The board featured a large “BE” in the middle, and the students added 45 different adjectives (three for every school day in February). Each day during lunch, they would read out three new words and add them to the bulletin board. The team recently presented to the school board about their successful “Be Yourself” Week event. (And thanks to GSES’s advisor, Brenda Mullin, for sharing.)
- At **Greely Middle School in Cumberland...** the civil rights teams sponsored a whole-school activity where students completed colored paper cutout “leaves” with the following fill-in-the-blank prompt: “My name is _____. What makes me unique is _____. I will respect others for their individuality!” The instructions were delivered through crt-original rap lyrics over the school’s televised announcements. Approximately 375 leaves (including one from me!) were collected and combined to form an impressive tree display. (And thanks to GMS’s advisor, Roberta Goodwin, for sharing.)



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- At **Katahdin Elementary School in Stacyville...** the civil rights team gave out blank nametags and challenged students and staff to make them special and unique. The activity highlighted how even when tasked with the same assignment, we can still show our individuality. This has been an ongoing theme at KES this year, including an art project where students were given popsicle sticks and instructions to decorate them using a grade-coordinated color. The civil rights team collected the popsicle sticks and glued them into a framed art piece that was unveiled just after my “Be Yourself” presentation on a Friday morning. (And thanks to KES’s advisor, Jaide Berry, for sharing.)
- At **Oak Hill Middle School in Sabattus...** the civil rights team created five days of activities for morning advisory period. The activities included: (1) students making acrostic poems out of their names, (2) a “symbolic self” activity where students drew symbols to represent something unique about themselves, and (3) a “Who am I?” trivia game where students wrote unknown facts about themselves on index cards and then tried to match the facts with their peers. (And thanks to Oak Hill’s advisor, Lucy Rioux, for sharing.)
- At **Poland Community School...** the civil rights team started off the week with the “Be Yourself” Treasure Chest. Each student, on their way into the building, was invited to take their own special and unique coin from the treasure chest, a participatory symbol for how each student has something to contribute to the school. Later in the week, the team performed and taught what may have been the Civil Rights Team Project’s first-ever official cheer. (And thanks to PCS’s advisor, Lexie Trigiani, for sharing.)
- At **Thomaston Grammar School...** the civil rights team embraced technology and recorded their skit about being yourself and respecting others for being themselves. They also create a “Being Yourself” slideshow featuring TGS students. The school’s music teacher added her voice by writing and recording a song to go with it. The team showed the slideshow to conclude the week’s events. (And thanks to TGS’s advisor, Hope Hersom, for sharing.)
- At **Tripp Middle School in Turner...** the civil rights team prepared students for the big event the week before by showing [Sara Bareilles’ “Brave” video](#) and discussing how students could be brave and make individuality feel safe at their school. During the week, students made “individual” quilt squares, designed around who they are, which were then put together and displayed in the hallways. The week culminated with a “Be Yourself” fashion show, celebrating some of the many ways students can express their individuality through clothes. It even included a red carpet. (And thanks to Tripp’s advisor, Kris Wing, for sharing.)
- At **Wells Junior High School...** the civil rights team used lunchtime video presentations to engage their peers in the week’s events. They showed videos of



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students accepting others for their diverse set of interests and used a narrative script to connect the videos with their “Be Yourself” theme. They also wrote a description of the week to send home to parents in the school’s weekly notes home. (And thanks to both of WJHS’s advisors, Bob Griffin and Kristie Soucy, for sharing.)

Hey, civil rights teams that celebrated and promoted “Be Yourself” Week in 2014: I saw some great things happening in your schools when I visited! Our schools are much better places when students feel comfortable being themselves *and* they can respect others for being themselves. You are helping to make that happen.

(And a major thank-you to all of the advisors for these teams; not just for getting me the information, but for encouraging your teams to do this and organizing all of the events.)

* * * * *

At **Dirigo High School in Dixfield...** the civil rights team used their monthly presentation time during their Student of the Month assembly to talk openly and honestly about racism in their school. A brave crt member who is African-American spoke about his experiences in school, saying “Every student here has most likely been made fun of for something; too tall, too skinny, or called chubby. But that stopped in high school for the most part. But I get it every day at work, at school, online, everywhere.” He went on to talk specifically about the racial insults he hears at school and challenge his peers to do better. He was met with a standing ovation.

Hey Dirigo High School civil rights team: It’s great that you are talking to your whole school on a monthly basis. It’s even better that you’re willing to talk about the tough issues. We don’t talk about race and racism enough. To the brave team member who shared his experiences with the school: you put a human face on the damage that comes from racial bias, and that’s the key to changing behaviors. (And thanks to their advisor, Melissa Audy, for sharing.)

At **Maranacook Middle School in Readfield...** the civil rights team organized a whole-school assembly after there were multiple incidents of bias-based graffiti in the school’s bathrooms. The team highlighted how the specific words that were written on the walls reflected bias related to gender and sexual orientation. They connected the incidents to the Maine Civil Rights Act, which protects people from bias-based property damage. They read statements from students expressing how they felt about these acts of vandalism and made a clear case that it needs to STOP.

Hey, Maranacook Middle School civil rights team: This is the exactly how we need to respond to incidents like this: *directly*. (And it’s why our fifth expectation of civil rights teams is to “respond to public incidents of bias.”) You were clear in identifying the problem. You gave voice to individuals who were affected. But most importantly, you



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showed your school that it's OK, and important, for *students* to speak out against incidents of bias. (And thanks to their advisor, Gwen Robertson Mohlar, for sharing.)

At **Riverton Elementary School in Portland**... the civil rights team is only three months old, but they've already accomplished an all-school assembly. They highlighted the idea that all Riverton students share things in common, but that they are also different in many ways: race, religious beliefs, culture, language, family structure. Each of the team's eight subcommittees showcased their work and talked about their future plans. The assembly culminated with the civil rights team, all 60+ members, singing the Youngbloods' "Get Together." (Flower power!) The school superintendent attended and apparently was quite impressed.

Hey, Riverton Elementary School civil rights team: way to put yourselves out there! In just three months you've already put your stamp on your school, and you're finding all kinds of creative ways to do it. And you've demonstrated that the best ambassadors for the Civil Rights Team Project are the students on the civil rights teams. (And thanks to Riverton's advisors, Amanda Atkinson-Lewis and Teddy Valencia, for sharing.)

At **Waterville Junior High School**... the civil rights team celebrated and promoted Anti-Bias Week. Each day was devoted to one of the protected civil rights categories. On Tuesday, for instance, as part of the "Where is your family from?" activity, students and staff were invited to place pins on a world map highlighting their ancestry. On Friday, the team showcased posters featuring school staff defying gender stereotypes. Examples included "Guys Can Be Nurturing Too" and "Girls Can Be Tough and Strong Too."

Hey, Waterville Junior High School civil rights team: nice work putting together a real variety of events. You showed your classmates that bias exists in many different forms, including some that aren't so obvious. It's important that we all learn to recognize bias in a school setting, and Anti-Bias Week will help make that happen. (And thanks to their advisor, Ashley Pullen, for sharing.)



The tree display celebrating individuality at Greely Middle School...



The civil rights team poses with the popsicle stick artwork at Katahdin Elementary School...





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One of the advisory group quilts on display at Turner Middle School...



The civil rights team at Wells Jr. High School getting some well-deserved recognition at the end of my presentation...





The Riverton civil rights team encourages their school to “get together...”



The “Where is your family from?” bulletin board, part of the Anti-Bias Week event at Waterville Junior High School...





From the Office:

No New Teams... for Now

We have no new civil rights teams to brag about for February and March. This is entirely normal for this time of year... but we'd love to have some new schools join the Civil Rights Team Project between now and the end of this school year. You and your civil rights teams can help make this happen! If there are schools in your district or school unit that don't have teams, let's work together to change that. We can arrange it so that your team presents to school administrators and advocates for having teams in those schools. Kids can be very convincing, and we should leverage this so the great work you're doing in your school is replicated in other schools.



Another Great Night Scheduled with the Portland Sea Dogs!

The details have been finalized and we're having our third annual CRTP/Sea Dogs event on Friday, May 9. 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 Hampshire Fisher Cats. (Dogs vs. Cats!)

In our first year, we had approximately 650 students from 45 schools attend this wonderful event. Last year, that number increased to approximately 850 students from 53 schools. And so I ask... *what can we do this year?* Let's fill Hadlock Field with students who are working to reduce bias in our schools, and let's get them the recognition they deserve! We all deserve a day at the park...

Civil Rights Team Project Regional Show-Off Sessions

For the first time in four years, we have the go-ahead to do official CRTP-sponsored end-of-year events! Rather than do the traditional statewide conference in Augusta, we've decided to try something new... our first-ever Civil Rights Team Project Regional Show-Off Sessions!

The regional show-off sessions will be evening events where area civil rights teams gather to celebrate our accomplishments and show off what we do. We're starting small this year, with one session in Bangor on May 5 and one in Presque Isle on May 22. (We specifically chose these locations because it's either hard or impossible for the area teams to take advantage of the Sea Dogs event.)

Attending teams will be responsible for creating exhibits highlighting three specific team initiatives from the 2013-2014 school year. Rather than show off everything the team



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has done, the exhibits will highlight examples of how the team has addressed our series of expectations. These exhibits, taken in total, will offer an overall picture of

If these events are received positively, we'll look to expand around the state next year. We very much like the idea of regional teams sharing their accomplishments with each other and the community. The Civil Rights Team Project is a unique program, and one that deserves recognition. In other words... we think it's important that we show off a little bit.

New CRTP Presentations Promoting the Idea that We're All A Lot Alike

Most of my time in the office this winter was devoted to creating two age-level presentations to support our civil rights teams promoting "A Lot Alike" Week in our schools. Here's the official write-up of these presentations:

The human mind is quick to identify differences in people. There's nothing necessarily wrong with this, but focusing too much on people's differences opens doors to bias and prejudice.

People of all races, ancestries, religions, disabilities, genders, and sexual orientations share much in common; probably more than we realize. It's easy to focus on people's differences, but for the sake of our schools and our world, it's important that we discover our commonalities and learn to embrace the idea that *we're really all a lot alike*.

Response to the "A Lot Alike" presentations has been enormously positive. I am very, very happy with the presentations and the events that they support. "A Lot Alike" Week will definitely be an available project option for your civil rights teams next year.



On Our Radar:

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

Autism and Asperger's Awareness Month (April)

For more information, check out:

- www.autism-society.org
- www.autismspeaks.org



Holocaust Remembrance Day (April 28)

For more information, go to: www.ushmm.org/remember/days-of-remembrance

Asian Pacific American Heritage Month (May)

For more information, go to: <http://asianpacificheritage.gov>

Loving Day (June 12)

Celebrate the rights of interracial couples. For more information: www.lovingday.org

Juneteenth (June 19)

Celebrate the end of slavery in America. For more information: www.juneteenth.com

From Edmodo:

I Can't Tell You What the Most Viewed Content Is

With the first four editions of The Torch for the 2013-2014 school year, I shared with you the top three most viewed posts on the CRTP Edmodo site.

No more. Without warning, Edmodo has removed the feature where I can see how many views each post has. I now have no way of knowing what you're looking at.

So... please, get on Edmodo and *look at the stuff*.

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

