Fall 12-1-2018

The Torch (December 2018)

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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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THE CIVIL RIGHTS TEAM PROJECT NEWSLETTER
DEC. 2018

Here’s what you can read about in the December edition of The Torch:

From the Teams:

In this edition, read about these civil rights team activities and project initiatives...

⇒ Civil rights-specific welcoming signs at Caravel Middle School!
⇒ A civil rights blog at Great Falls Elementary School!
⇒ Community support for the civil rights team-sponsored Unity Day at Greely Middle School!
⇒ A display challenging cultural appropriation in Halloween costumes at Oceanside High School!
⇒ A show of support for Maine’s Jewish community after the hate-fueled tragedy at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh.

From the Office:

We’ve been busy with a series of successful middle level and high school student trainings, and we’re excited to report out on some of the many highlights!

We help schools think and talk about issues related to race and skin color, national origin and ancestry, religion, disabilities, gender (including gender identity and expression), and sexual orientation.
At Caravel Middle School in Carmel, the newly created civil rights team has announced their presence with an inclusively welcoming sign in their school lobby. The sign specifically welcomes people of all races and skin colors, national origins, religions, abilities, genders and gender identities, and sexual orientations. The team also created smaller signs that hang outside individual rooms throughout the school. All signs are branded as being from the civil rights team with a pawprint logo, and the team took time at an all-school assembly to point out their first project.

Hey, Caravel civil rights team... your civil rights team is off to a great start! Your signs are engaging and meaningful, and they effectively announce what you’ll be doing moving forward. You’ve already established a presence in your school, and you have a visual conversation starter for identifying issues and framing your future projects. We look forward to seeing what else you do this year! (And thanks to their advisors, Angela Smart-Davis and Britney Taggett, for sharing.)

At Great Falls Elementary School in Gorham, the civil rights team is documenting their work and sharing their thoughts and feelings about civil right issues through their team blog. The blog is shared directly with staff and online through the school’s Facebook page. In just two months of existence, they already have four posts and a total of 479 page views, with plans to keep updating the content throughout the school year!

Hey, Great Falls civil rights team... your blog really captures the experience of having a civil rights team. It shows what you do, but also what it means to you. Now you can share that experience with others, and even use the blog to help you with your work of engaging your school community. Keep sharing! (And thanks to their advisors, Ellen Berry, Brianna Carroll, Cecely Conrad, and Stacey Sawyer, for sharing.)

At Greely Middle School in Cumberland, the elementary level civil rights team got the whole community to get behind Unity Day and the idea that students of all identities are welcome in the MSAD #51 school community. The civil rights team promoted the idea at a Cumberland Town Meeting and enlisted local faith leaders, police officers, firefighters, town council and school board representatives to show their support by wearing orange and greeting students on their way into school on October 24. (One of the churches even lit their steeple orange!) The team created pumpkin-themed displays and posters with messages of inclusive welcoming and presented the day’s theme at an all-school assembly. After October 24, the team created signs for teachers to
hang on their doorknobs, offering visual reminders of the Unity Day event, but also their vision of a school community that welcomes people of all races and skin colors, national origins and ancestries, religions, abilities and disabilities, genders, and sexual orientations.

At Oceanside High School in Rockland, the civil rights team took on the issue of cultural appropriation through a display on Halloween costumes. Inspired by the “We’re a Culture, Not a Costume” campaign, the team posed three important questions in determining if a costume choice is cultural appropriation, and three examples of potentially problematic costumes: Indian, hula dancer, and Rastafarian. They explained why each of the three costumes was potentially problematic. After receiving both positive and negative feedback on the display, the team continued to talk about the issue, summarizing and seeking to understand the different responses while moving forward to their next initiative.

Hey, GMS elementary civil rights team... your version of Unity Day is a day that’s truly worth celebrating. By getting adult leaders from your community to show their support for this event, you showed everyone that all are welcome there... and you were the leaders in making it happen! Keep leading through your example, because us adults can learn a lot from you. (And thanks to their advisors, Katie Campbell and Ali Waterhouse, for sharing.)

Hey, Oceanside civil rights team... put me down in the “positive feedback” camp. You are doing the difficult work of challenging people to think through some things that might make them uncomfortable. You are asking people to question things they’ve never really questioned before... possibly including their own beliefs and behaviors. Of course some will say that people are too easily offended, but what’s wrong with showing consideration and respect for people’s identities? You’re doing good work. (And thanks to their advisor, Hannah Faesy, for sharing.)

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The CRTP Responds to Tragedy in Pittsburgh

Following the horrific hate crime that left 14 dead at the Tree of Life Synagogue, the Civil Rights Team Project sent out some recommendations for how civil rights teams could respond. We think it’s important to respond to public incidents of hate, as it shows support for affected individuals and communities, and empowers youth to discover their voice.

We have since seen and heard ample evidence of teams responding to this tragedy, countering this act of anti-Semitism with messages of support for Maine’s Jewish community. Here’s a small sampling of what some of our civil rights teams did...

- The Conners Emerson civil rights team sent a letter of support to their local Jewish community group and had it printed as a letter to the editor in the Mount Desert Islander.

- The Gorham High School civil rights team partnered with the school’s Holocaust class to create a short video, which they shared directly with the Tree of Life Synagogue, local synagogues, and the Jewish Community Association of Southern Maine, and in their school community through student e-mail, the principal’s weekly newsletter, and the Gorham Schools’ Facebook page.

- The Windham Middle School civil rights team shared an open letter with their school community and had it printed in the Maine Jewish Museum’s fall newsletter (page 21).

- There are also civil rights teams engaging in the ongoing work of making sure our school communities recognize and respect religious diversity... like the Yarmouth High School team and their work with school policy.

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**New Teams!**

As we move ahead with the 2018-2019 school year, we’re continuing to sign up new schools to participate in the CRTP.

We’ve recently added:

- Kingfield Elementary School
- Manchester School in Windham
- Penobscot Community School
- Presumpscot Elementary School in Portland
- Winthrop Middle School

**Welcome!**

**Middle Level and High School Trainings**

In four whirlwind weeks this fall, we conducted eleven regional trainings for our middle level and high school civil rights teams in Augusta, Brewer, Farmington, Presque Isle, and South Portland. A total of 98 schools and 885 students attended.

The theme for the 2018 trainings was *identity*. We first introduced the concept, looking at identity as pieces and parts of who we are. Our understanding of identity was intentional in including race and skin color, national origin and ancestry, religion, disabilities, gender (including gender identity and expression), and sexual orientation… even though many of us are reluctant to think of these things as important in understanding who we are.

In the second part of the trainings, we looked at the potential positive power of labels. Most students arrived with a well-developed understanding of how labels can be used negatively, especially when used as identity-based insults. We instead shifted the focus towards how labels can be empowering. They can help us make sense of who we are and offer us vocabulary to engage in important conversations about our identities and experiences.

In the third and final part of the trainings, we had some of these important conversations, looking at specific ways that identity influences experience. Since we couldn’t highlight everyone’s identities and experiences, we instead focused on a few with the idea that they were representative of the overall concept. At our middle level trainings we looked at how disabilities often frame individual experiences. At the high school trainings, we looked at two high profile civil rights issues: the #MeToo movement and police profiling of people of color.

Throughout these trainings, we asked students to consider how their civil rights teams can use the concept of identity in our efforts to create school communities where everyone feels safe, welcome, and respected for who they are. We were consistently impressed with what we saw and heard from the students, and look forward to seeing what these trainings inspire from our civil rights teams this year.

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From the Office:

Note: We planned on featuring the elementary level trainings in this newsletter, but had to postpone our first three training sessions because of the weather. You can read about the elementary trainings in the next edition of The Torch.
Identity Influence

At our middle level trainings students were asked, from the six civil rights categories, ‘Which piece/part of your identity do you think has had the most influence over your life and experiences?’ The results:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identity</th>
<th>TOTAL %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>race and skin color</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>national origin and ancestry</td>
<td>12.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>religion</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>disabilities</td>
<td>12.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gender</td>
<td>29.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sexual orientation</td>
<td>17.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

American Identity Gallery

At our high school trainings, students were asked to take in six images, all featuring the American flag. We simply asked them which of the six images they found most compelling.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Image Description</th>
<th>Identity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American flag</td>
<td>race</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(in skin tone colors)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizenship naturalization ceremony</td>
<td>national origin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Christian, Jewish, and Muslim soldier graves)</td>
<td>religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability rights rally with an American flag featuring a wheelchair user</td>
<td>disabilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suffragette holding a refashioned broomstick/flag pole</td>
<td>gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fenway Park flying the pride flag</td>
<td>sexual orientation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

33% 9% 15% 11% 15% 17%

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