The Torch (October 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.

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

From the Teams:

It may be early in the 2018-2019 school year, but student civil rights teams are already engaging their school communities in thinking and talking about civil rights issues.

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

⇒ A recruitment video at Lebanon Elementary School!
⇒ A carry-over project from last year’s Civil Rights Day at Shapleigh School!
⇒ Unity and Diversity Day at Gorham High School!
⇒ An athletics campaign promoting respect at Greely High School!
⇒ A civil rights card catalogue in the Mt. Blue High School library!

From the Office:

We’ve got plenty of new teams joining the Civil Rights Team Project for the start of the 2018-2019 school year, and we just completed a busy training schedule for our adult advisors.

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 Gorham High School, the civil rights team held their annual Unity and Diversity Day event on September 19. The half-day offered all GHS students the opportunity to engage with issues outside of the school’s scripted curriculum, including a keynote presentation with Shay Stewart-Bouley, and two workshop choices from a menu of 24 options. Workshop presenters included outside organizations, adult experts from within the school community, and civil rights team members. The day concluded with a debrief session and evaluations in advisory groups. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with 84.5% of students giving the day high marks.

At Greely High School in Cumberland, the civil rights team partnered with the new Athletic Advisory Board to unveil the school’s new “Rangers Lead the Way with Respect for All” campaign. The campaign is in direct response to incidents involving hateful language at sporting events last year. The team collaborated with administration last year in thinking through how the school community could address these issues in an ongoing and proactive manner. That led to the campaign, which includes the slogan, banners designed by a Greely student, a launch-off rally for the whole school, and a statement of respect to be read at all Greely sporting events.

At Lebanon Elementary School, the civil rights team is off to a great start, as advisor Julie Smith received a record number of applications to be on the team. She directly credits the recruitment video her team created late last year with this year’s surge in interest. The video was shared with teachers to show to their classes. It was intended as a

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recruitment tool, but had the added benefit of helping teachers know more about the team and what they do. (And it clearly accomplished both of these objectives with one excited adult, who wrote to Julie asking if she could be on the team.)

Hey, last year’s Lebanon civil rights team... you really set up this year’s team for success! The video you created talks about what you do, uses the words, and means a lot coming directly from you. You know more about what it means to be on the civil rights team than anyone else. Thanks for sharing that knowledge and helping the team grow. (And thanks to their advisor, Julie Smith, for sharing.)

At Mt. Blue High School in Farmington, the civil rights team is set to launch the civil rights card catalogue in the school’s library. They spent much of last year researching and selecting books that represented each of the civil rights categories. The card catalogue will become a civil rights-themed display, helping students take advantage of their school’s diverse book collection and offering visual and textual support to students of marginalized identities. The team intends to make this an ongoing project, continuing to add more titles to their lists throughout the year.

From the Teams:

Hey, Mt. Blue High School civil rights team... this is a great idea and an excellent example of using the resources that you already have in your school community. You’ve already figured out that your school library has lots of great resources for learning about civil rights issues. By highlighting some of these options you are promoting the idea of reading diverse books and making them easily accessible. Keep reading and sharing! (And thanks to their advisors, Melissa Audy and Meadow Sheldon, for sharing.)

At the Shapleigh School in Kittery, the school year started with some visual reminders of the great work the middle level civil rights team did last year. The civil rights team planned and organized an entire Civil Rights Day last year with a specific focus on culture: what it is, how it is often the basis of bias and prejudice, and how individuals can stand for acceptance and inclusion for all cultural identities. The day concluded with a discussion on the cultural significance of flags and an activity where students created “intention flags” to represent how they can make their school community more safe, welcoming, and respectful for students of all identities. Those flags were out and on full display for the start of this school year.

Hey, Shapleigh middle level civil rights team... your Civil Rights Day sounds like it was great. That may have been so last year, but by having students create something at the end, you extended it into this year. And you didn’t just have students create something... you had them create something with real meaning attached to it. You showed that flags are culturally important and symbolic, and the intentions those student-created flags represent are a great way to get this school year started. (And thanks to their advisors, Eva Diharce, Kelly Martin, and Kristin O’Neill, for sharing.)

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New Teams!

As we settle into the 2018-2019 school year, we’re signing up a number of new schools to participate in the CRTP. We’ve recently added:

- Ames Elementary School in Searsmont
- Buxton Center Elementary School
- Caravel Middle School in Carmel
- East Belfast School
- East End Community School in Portland
- Fiddlehead School of Arts and Science in Gray
- Frank I. Brown Elementary School in South Portland
- Gray-New Gloucester Middle School in Gray
- Great Falls Elementary School in Gorham
- Horace Mitchell Primary School in Kittery
- Islesboro Central School
- James Otis Kaler Elementary School in South Portland
- Lincoln Academy in Newcastle
- Marshwood Great Works Elementary School in South Berwick
- Marshwood Middle School in Eliot
- Marshwood High School in South Berwick
- Minot Consolidated School
- TWK Dirigo Middle School in Dixfield
- Van Buren Secondary School
- Vassalboro Community School

Welcome! We’re starting the year with 184 teams in 180 schools!

Advisor Trainings

The Civil Rights Team Project recently concluded a busy training schedule for our adult advisors, with six training sessions (including two orientation sessions for new advisors) in Augusta, Brewer, Presque Isle, and South Portland. In total, 190 advisors attended, including 47 new advisors at the orientation sessions.

At the trainings for our experienced advisors, we looked at:

- some of the clever ways teams used the focus signs we shared last year
- the concept of inclusive welcoming and how we can make students of all identities feel welcome in our school communities
- how civil rights teams can respond to public incidents of bias and hate
- how to “create” more time by being more efficient with the time we have

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These activities and conversations were meaningful and highly participatory, but we think we saved the very best part of these trainings for last. Advisors who stayed until the end were treated to a copy of the picture book *Her Right Foot*, courtesy of our friends at the Maine Humanities Council.

We then enjoyed a shared reading along with the audiobook version (voiced by Dion Graham) and group discussions on topics as wide-ranging as American identity, immigration, monuments, and what we do and don’t learn with history.

It was a thoroughly engaging experience, and one we think will inspire advisors to share the book with their civil rights teams and school communities, but also consider how we can use picture books and other texts in our work.

(Check out the book trailer for *Her Right Foot* right here. Spoiler alert, though!)

At the new advisor orientations, we gave our newest participants in the Project all the foundational and practical knowledge they’ll need to work with civil rights teams. Our afternoon panels of experienced advisors emphasized a recurring theme throughout the training: that being a civil rights team advisor is an active role. It’s a lot of work, but as one of our panelists put it, “it may be the single most important thing you will do in education.”

We couldn’t agree more. We look forward to working with such an active and engaged group of advisors this year!

**A special thank you to our panels of experienced advisors:**

Cynthia Martell, Captain Albert Stevens Elementary School; Marie Jones, Warsaw Middle School; and Elizabeth Holub, Narraguagus Jr./Sr. High School (Brewer orientation); Jennifer Whitehead, Narragansett Elementary School; Amy Malette, Noble Middle School; and Heather Peterson, Greely High School (South Portland orientation).
From the Office: Quotes from Advisor Training Evaluations

* I always like these trainings! Good ideas, enjoyable and humorous and sincere presentations. Thank you!

* It was just right. So much information packed into one day, and I didn't get bored!

* Awesome as always! Y'all run like a well-turned machine!

* As always, these trainings make the most of our time together....they are organized, well-paced, and relevant.

* AWESOME! Respectful of us as professionals, the presentation was witty, visually appealing, and informative.

* As always, it (this training) was useful, relevant, and extremely helpful to keep me and my team on the path to a great year. I got lots of ideas, shared experiences with other advisors, and refreshed my spirit.

* I LOVED Her Right Foot. As a high school English teacher, getting a book I can use with my team (and will be using with my Identify and Society Class!) was awesome!

* I ALWAYS like to see what other teams are doing and connecting with other advisors.

* I found value in everything. I left the training with a list of ideas and with the tools to help guide our team through projects. The best would have to be the Impact/Effort matrix though.

* Loved the deep dive into the book. We’re often so busy we don’t take the time to think deeply and keep pushing our thinking.

* The modeling of activities we can use with our kids is great. I loved the first activity with the pictures, and the quote activity. Any opportunity to connect with fellow CRT advisors is welcome.

* Just being there and hearing ideas gets me chatting and brainstorming with my co-advisor and the HS advisor. We have big plans for this year!

* I will use every part of the training with my team. I found the discussion of the pictures very compelling. I so appreciate getting the book- what a wonderful surprise!

* This training, as well as other trainings in the past, really help in two critical way: (1) helping to refocus my attention (which in turn, will help to refocus the CRTs attention at my school) and to (2) energize me. Even a simple reframing or reminder about welcome banners/materials is super helpful. It may go without saying that the gift of Her Right Foot is beautiful and relevant. I’m excited to read it to my high schoolers. Thank you!

* I always love seeing what others do so thanks for collecting so many pics and examples from the year. It really is inspiring.

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* The day is beneficial for me because I get energized and buoyed by sharing ideas with people doing the same hard, important work we are trying to do.

* I am really excited for the work my team will be able to do with *Her Right Foot*. I enjoyed talking about this book with other advisors at my age-level.

* *Her Right Foot* gave me a whole chain of excellent ideas about how to use children's stories to teach—even with "big kids". I was having a major educational epiphany. The whole thing was great though.

* I felt like this training was highly effective for my needs and well worth my time away from school.

* Keep doing what your doing. Each training is fresh and new and leaves me energized to do this hard but essential work!

* Always an enjoyable and powerful time.

* It's always a highlight of my year. You always keep it fresh and relevant. Can't ever think of any good constructive feedback. (That's a good thing!)

* The trainings get better and better every year. It is great to walk away with project ideas and tools. You do half the work for us!

* More white chocolate macadamia nut cookies :)

* I seem to say this every year... Last year was fantastic...there's no way to do better, and yet you continue to do so. I really liked the shared reading and discussion activity, especially being in age level groups. (This was a great way to meet other advisors.) Special thanks to the Maine Humanities Council for the book.

* Each year the experience keeps getting better. I absolutely loved the read aloud of *Her Right Foot*. It is not often that a teacher can enjoy the experience of having another adult read to them! Thank you!

* Know that these trainings are so appreciated and so energizing! I look forward to it every year. Thank you!!

* Great work! The advisor trainings are refreshing and motivating. A wonderful way to start the school year off!

* Just keep on doing like you do- the advisor trainings are always inspiring. They help me to be a better CRT advisor and also, I think, help me reflect on my teaching in general. I want to inspire my CRT team, but I would also like to make my classroom more inclusive and more accessible, and be sure that all of my classroom students feel safe and welcome every day- and there are so many subtle yet effective ways to do that. Thank you for being you! I know a lot of Maine's students will benefit from these trainings.