



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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There's always a seemingly contradictory mix of exhaustion and excitement that comes with the end of the school year. In this pandemic year, the exhaustion is extreme—but even it can't stifle the enthusiasm we feel from so many civil rights teams in sharing their work.

### **From the Teams:**

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In this edition, we're featuring 10 civil rights teams who engaged their school communities through the following CRTP project initiatives...

- ⇒ Consider Changes to Policies and Practices
- ⇒ Engage Staff
- ⇒ Respond to a Public Incident of Bias
- ⇒ Visibility Campaign
- ⇒ Welcome Everyone

### **From the Office:**

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We've got updates on two great projects we've been working on: our own official song, and a series of animated, age-specific recruitment videos. Both projects will be completed and ready for next fall, giving us added reasons to be excited about the 2021-2022 school year.

*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.*

## *From the Teams:*

### Consider Changes to Policies and Practices

In **Falmouth**, the **middle school and high school** civil rights teams helped convince the school board to retire their Yachtsmen name and mascot, arguing that it's unnecessarily exclusive—and unpopular. The process started when the district's Intercultural Awareness and Inclusion Committee asked them to take up the issue. The teams partnered in sharing a mascot-focused advisory group activity with their peers, conducting a survey, and finally presenting their findings to the board. They reported that a significant majority of students do not feel a sense of belonging or pride in connection with their mascot and proposed that the board vote to stop using it. Later in the spring, that's exactly what the board did, unanimously voting to retire the Yachtsmen. (You can check out press coverage of both [the process](#) and [the decision!](#))

*Hey FMS and FHS civil rights teams... nicely done! You did a great job in leading your school community through a potentially difficult discussion. Regardless of the original intent, the Yachtsmen name and mascot at least connotes (and possibly promotes) race-based, gender-based, and socioeconomic-based exclusion. You helped your school community confront that uncomfortable truth, and ultimately decide This is not who we want to be. Take pride in the role you played in bringing about this change.*

### Engage Staff

At **Skowhegan Area High School**, the civil rights team created and shared a video with staff on personal pronouns. The 9-minute video is a slideshow with voiceover from team members and advisors, highlighting how important it is to show respect for someone's gender identity by using their chosen pronouns. The team was careful to include relevant background information on the difference between gender identity and sexual orientation, what personal pronouns are, and how *they* can be used in the singular. They concluded with two suggested action steps: (1) start asking your students for their personal pronouns, and (2) include your own in your email signatures and virtual screen names. Response has been positive, with the team invited to present in other MSAD #54 schools and make their video a part of the district's orientation for new teachers.

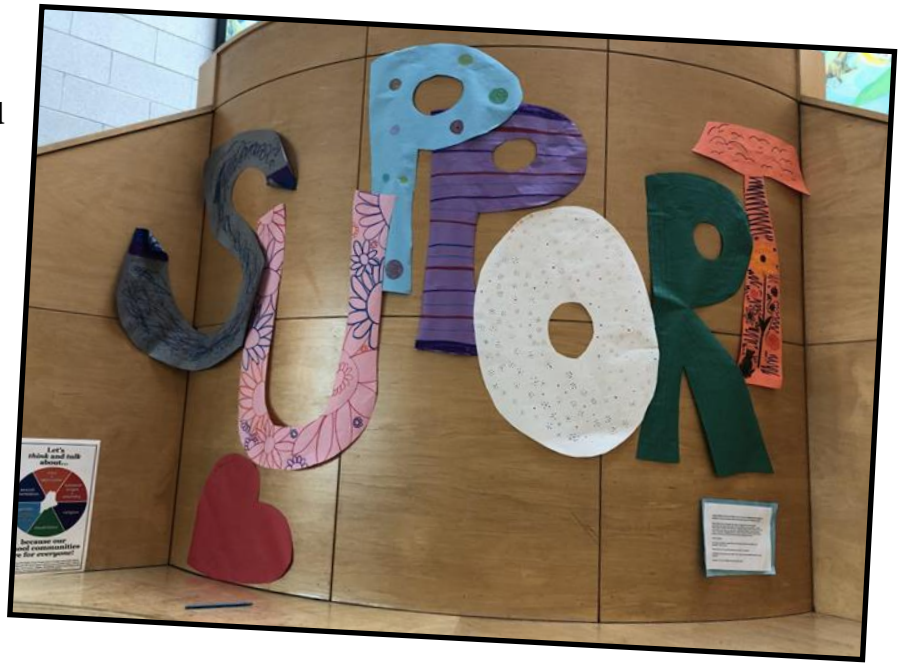


*Hey SAHS civil rights team... the work you're doing with staff could go a long way toward creating more inclusive classrooms. Your educational efforts respectfully meet people where they're at. Best of all, you've gone beyond just building awareness, offering educators some specific, reasonable, and immediate actions they can take. Hooray for sharing pronouns—and your excellent presentation!*

### Respond to a Public Incident of Bias

Civil rights teams took an active role in responding to the March shooting in Atlanta that left six Asian women dead, as well as the pandemic-fueled uptick in anti-Asian hate and violence.

- At **Cape Elizabeth Middle School** the civil rights team wrote this excellent [letter to the editor](#).
- At **Falmouth High School**, the civil rights team sent out a letter to their entire school community. The letter voiced support to the Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) community and denounced the recent surge in racist violence and rhetoric.
- At **Greely Middle School in Cumberland**, the civil rights team put together a lobby display to send a message of caring and support to Asian American families and communities while condemning the attack and anti-Asian racism.
- Students from several civil rights teams attended the #StopAsianHate rally in Portland and the Holocaust and Human Rights Center of Maine's virtual panel discussion on the Asian American youth experience in Maine.



*To all our civil rights teams who responded to this ugly incident of hate... this is one of the many reasons why we have civil rights teams.*

*Maine's own Attorney General, Aaron M. Frey, recently [responded to an anti-Asian act of hate here in our state](#), asserting "We will not tolerate such attacks in Maine." That is such an important message, whether it comes directly from our office through the state's top law enforcement official, or from the students on our civil rights teams.*

### Visibility Campaign

With the pandemic shattering any sense of normalcy in our schools this year, civil rights teams had to work extra hard to make themselves seen and heard.

- At **Maranacook Community Middle School in Readfield**, the civil rights team created a clearing-house for curated civil rights content with [a website](#). They promoted the site regularly using the school's newsletters and morning announcements. The team will continue to update resources, and have even created a platform for other students to share their recommendations for review.
- At **Sanford High School**, the civil rights team shared slides on the school's closed-circuit televisions. They displayed messages for calendar events like Black History Month and Autism Acceptance Month, as well as model language that individuals can use to interrupt bias. All slides featured their logo, which is also on their team t-shirts.
- At **SeDoMoCha Middle School in Dover-Foxcroft**, the civil rights team was active all year on the school's Facebook account, posting information on civil rights-related calendar dates. Whether it be Diwali, or Fred Korematsu Day, or International Women's Day, the CRT has something to say! Their efforts have been noticed, too, as their posts consistently get likes and comments. Advisor Jeannine Reece reports "It is really special when community members say, 'Hey, I celebrated that today at work!' or 'Our family really appreciates this post.'"



*To all our civil rights teams who were able to maintain some version of a Visibility Campaign... you found a way! Life in schools was topsy-turvy this year, so your consistent presence is something worth celebrating. You let your school communities know that no matter what, you can always count on the civil rights team being there.*

### Welcome Everyone

Some of our newest teams are off to a great start, announcing their presence by creating welcoming displays for their school entryways! (This project initiative is specifically designed for new teams as their alternative version of the Day of Welcome.)

- At **Biddeford Middle School**, the civil rights team created a meaningful welcoming message by taking the colors and language from the CRTP focus sign and adding them as stripes to their school's tiger mascot. It's currently displayed as a digital image on school televisions, but they plan on printing a physical banner for the school lobby next fall.
- At **Searsport Elementary School**, the civil rights team designed and built an eight panel display to welcome people of all identities to their school. The three foot acrylic panels were just installed in the library windows overlooking the school foyer. (WABI was there to cover [the grand unveiling!](#))



*Hey BMS and SES civil rights teams... we are so excited to welcome you to the Civil Rights Team Project! You're already making things happen. You've created a focal point and conversation piece for your work moving forward, and shared an important message with your school community. We can't wait to see what you do with the Day of Welcome next year—you clearly know how to welcome everyone.*

## From the Office:

We think that civil rights teams are worth singing about—and that just got a lot easier, because now we have our very own song! We collaborated with local pop punk band Random Ideas to create a song celebrating civil rights teams and the work we do in our school communities.

We've had the pleasure of working with the band before, as they performed at (*and rocked*) our 2017 and 2019 statewide conference events. Megan, Lexi, and Kinsey Johnson are all former CRT members themselves, and with their energetic sound and socially conscious lyrics, we knew that they could write and record us something that felt celebratory and meaningful. "Song for Civil Rights Teams" is the triumphant result.

We dedicate the song to all of our civil rights teams, past and present, but especially those who persevered through this difficult school year. You all are worth writing songs about, so turn it up and sing along! (And we look forward to sharing a studio-quality version of the song next fall to help with future promotional efforts.)

**Watch Random Ideas perform our [Song for Civil Rights Teams here!](#) (2:34)**



### What was it like writing this? What were you going for with the song?

*Writing the song was really fun and it was a great challenge. Getting started is always one of the hardest parts and finding that place to push you towards the best direction for the song as a whole, once we found that place it just took off from there. With this song one of the biggest goals was for it to have a sense of togetherness and community. To be open, catchy, memorable, unifying, so this is everyone's song. When you hear the song it feels like being a part of something unifying and positive, like to be on a civil rights team. That's definitely what we were going for; what I always had in mind when thinking about the song.*

-Kinsey

### What was it like recording?

*Recording was pretty quick, but really fun! It only took about 2 hours to record. And we started by getting our drum and bass tracks, and then we did two guitar tracks to make it sound fuller. Then, we ended with*



### Song for Civil Rights Teams Random Ideas

#### Verse 1:

I'll hold the door for you  
Cause you belong here too  
There's no one quite like you  
There's no one quite like me

#### Chorus:

Civil rights teams change the system  
We do it loud  
We break the silence  
We are a crowd  
Civil rights teams change the system  
We do it loud  
We break the silence  
We are proud

#### Verse 2:

It can start in our schools  
Your voice is a tool  
For justice and equality  
In this diverse community

#### Repeat Chorus

## ***From the Office:***

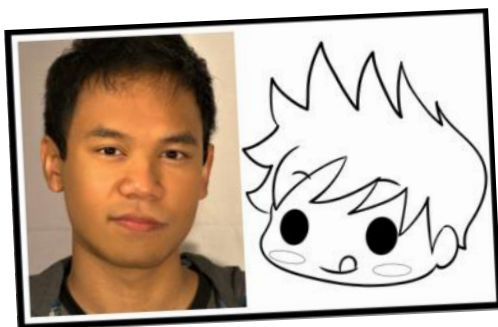
*getting rid of our scratch vocals and recorded two new vocal tracks, and then our harmony in the background! In the case of recording at Husson University we did it with Audio Engineer Josh Small and some of his students! And after a couple of days it was mastered, and finished.*

-Lexi

### **What message would you like to share with civil rights teams?**

*A message I'd like civil rights teams to know is that it can be as simple as holding the door for someone to make a difference. Always use your voice whether that's through music, visual art, or simply speaking up for someone. We all hold power that can create positive impact on someone's day or even the world.*

-Meagan



***And, stay tuned for the fall release of our first-ever CRTP recruitment videos!***

We've been working with a professional animator, Chad Moeun, to create a series of age-specific recruitment films for next fall. The films are intended to help civil rights teams grow their numbers, but we'll also use them to recruit new schools to the CRTP.

We've wanted to work with Chad for a long time. He is another former CRT member who first came to our attention when his past advisor, Jeff Bailey of Mountain Valley High School, shared a video he had created for his school's Diversity Day event in 2014. Chad's story of alienation and isolation in rural Maine, and how it fueled him to help start his school's civil rights team, impressed us deeply. In fact, we shared it at the 2015 advisor trainings, but now we're especially excited to work directly with Chad in creating something from the ground up.

One highlight from these recruitment videos will be the inclusion of current CRT student voices. This spring we asked students to share: *Why are you on the civil rights team?* We set up an online survey and received more than 120 submissions. It was truly inspiring reading through their responses. All of them were worthy, but we ultimately selected six students for inclusion in the videos. We are getting audio recordings and photos of them to Chad so that he can animate them explaining why they are on their civil rights teams. We can't wait to see this project come together for the fall!

***Until then, you can watch [Chad's 2014 MVHS Diversity Day video here](#).***

These exciting new resources amplify the feelings of hope and optimism we have right now in the CRTP. The same resiliency and ingenuity that we saw so much of this year will be back in full force next fall, and with better circumstances.

We're ready. The advisor trainings and the Day of Welcome are scheduled, and the visibility of the CRTP and the work of civil rights teams only continues to grow. As we close out the 25<sup>th</sup> year in the Civil Rights Team Project, we can't wait to launch the next 25 years.