



THE TORCH

(CRTP NEWSLETTER) JUNE '10

This is it. The last *Torch* of the 2009-2010 school year! It's not following its typical monthly format, and not just because I couldn't find enough bad things to say about the new *Sex and the City* movie. No, this one is different because of the calendar.

The closing of school for the summer always brings a great mix of sadness and insane joy. First and foremost, it's an opportunity to catch your breath after a long year of hard work. But it also allows you to look back at your accomplishments and failures this year, reflect, and look ahead to the new beginning and fresh start that characterizes the back-to-school season.

And let's face it: summer vacation flies. That's why we're already looking ahead to next year. As excited as we are about the great work civil rights teams have done around the state this past year, we're even more enthusiastic about the unlimited possibilities for the 2010-2011 school year.

In fact, we're so enthusiastic about next year that we're releasing this special June *Torch* bulletin. We don't want to wait until the fall to share our reflections, ideas for improvement, changes to the program, and other tidbits. Why not give this information to you right now?

Well... the most compelling reason not to share is that it's almost mid-June, and perhaps your attention is turning elsewhere. Understandable, of course, but please take the few moments to read through this bulletin. We wouldn't send it out if we didn't think it especially important.

So while we don't expect you to carry a copy of this bulletin to the beach, please take a few end-of-the-school-year or early summer moments to read through it. We've got a lot to share, and look forward to a wonderful 2010-2011 school year.

Enjoy your summer vacations! We'll be here all summer if you want us...

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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 high school, middle school and elementary school students and to reduce the incidence of bias-motivated harassment and violence in schools.

Janet T. Mills—Attorney General

Thomas A. Harnett—Director, Civil Rights Education & Enforcement Unit

Debi Lettre—Civil Rights Project Administrator

Brandon Baldwin—Schools/Curriculum Coordinator



Important Announcements

1. Short and Simple Survey

We have a short and simple online survey about The Torch and our Moodle site. It will take five minutes at the most. Please complete the survey, as the information will influence our decisions for next year!

www.esurveyspro.com/Survey.aspx?id=f80804ef-b45f-444f-9300-eb0f4574d7a0

2. Gardiner Area High School Gets Major Recognition!

Congratulations to the Gardiner Area High School Civil Rights Team. On May 15, three team members, Mary Hartley, Ross Boardman and Kasey Villeneuve, along with longtime faculty advisor Christina Benedict, accepted the Maine Education Association's (MEA) Human and Civil Rights Award on behalf of the entire team. The presentation was made in front of hundreds of members of the MEA at a conference in Portland. The award recognizes student organizations for their efforts in promoting human and civil rights in Maine. Steve Lerette, an English teacher in Gardiner, nominated the team stating "I would rarely take the time to nominate a person or a group of people, but this team and its leader are an outstanding example of compassion in action." Lerette added "[t]hey are all my heroes."

Congratulations Gardiner!

3. Mt. Ararat High School Civil Rights Team Member Honored by GLSEN!

Mt. Ararat civil rights team member and state conference panel presenter Dani Smith received major recognition from GLSEN for her outstanding leadership with the school's gay-straight alliance. GLSEN named Dani the "Student Advocate of the Year" earlier this spring.

This is a national award. Dani's outstanding commitment to improving her school's climate through the GSA and civil rights team *should* serve as a national model for student advocates everywhere. The recognition is well-deserved, and we wish Dani success in her future endeavors.

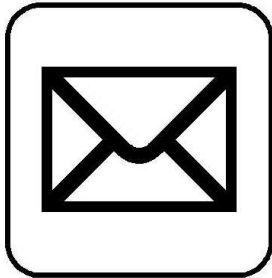
Read more about Dani here:

www.glsen.org/cgi-bin/iowa/all/news/record/2572.html

www.pressherald.com/news/Student-advocate-of-justice-for-all-honored-.html



Improved Recordkeeping



Issue One: Changes in Address

Please let us know if your e-mail address is going to change for next year. This seems to be happening more and more. Let us know now and we won't have to deal with figuring it out next year.



Issue Two: In or Out?

In the past, there has always been a cloud of uncertainty surrounding the number of schools participating in the Civil Rights Team Project. Much of this uncertainty has come from poor communication. We haven't always known if some schools continue to have active civil rights teams, or if they have faded out of the Project. Sometimes we lose contact with schools because we don't have updated contact information and their civil rights teams operate in a vacuum. Whatever happens, there is uncertainty, and we're never quite sure about some schools and civil rights teams.

We want to be sure. Next year, one of our goals is to have definitive information on every school in the state and whether they have a civil rights team or not. We plan on getting that information early.

We will operate under no assumptions. As of right now, we are officially "unsure" if your school has an active civil rights team for the 2010-2011 school year. (Or at least that's what I'm entering in the appropriate column in our database.) When you return



to school next fall, there will be an e-mail from us asking for some simple information. When we hear back from you, we'll change your school's status from "unsure" to "in" or "out". We will continue with this process until we are sure on the status of all the state's schools.

You can help us out by responding promptly to our e-mail request next fall.

What We Expect of Our Civil Rights Teams



We have always expected a lot from our civil rights teams, but next year we're going to be clearer about what exactly we expect. With better communication on our end, we hope that teams will better understand their function and focus on increasing their effectiveness.

For now, we have five basic roles/functions that serve as expectations. We will offer more explanation and guidance next fall, and help you and your teams meet these expectations. Ultimately, we think that these expectations will make the Civil Rights Team Project stronger.

Here, then, are the five things we expect from every civil rights team next year:

1. Create a Team Identity

This includes basic education at the beginning of the year. Students need to understand why they are on a civil rights team. They have to want to be there, and they need to believe in the core mission of the Civil Rights Team Project. After that, they can come together as a team.

2. Increase the Team's Profile

We think it's important that your school knows about the civil rights team. Everyone should know that the school has a civil rights team; as much as they know that there's a



basketball team. Not only should everyone know that the school has a team, but they should know what the civil rights team is for and about. Ideally, everyone knows who is on the team and what they do.

The civil rights team should primarily be active in the school, but it's important that the community knows something about the team, too. We do great work, and should advertise it more.

3. Identify School Issues

The civil rights team shouldn't be operating under any assumptions. You need to know what's going on in the school. Each school is unique, and so it will take some work to identify the civil rights and climate issues most relevant to your school.

4. Address School Issues

This is the most important thing that civil rights teams do. They need to be active in addressing the important issues in the school. This should not be abstract or indirect; there should be clear activities and projects that take dead aim at civil rights and climate issues relevant to the school.

The work should be ongoing. Nothing gets fixed through a single event. Whatever you do... it needs proper framing. People must understand why they're doing it.

5. Respond When Things Go Wrong

Teams should be ready to respond when something goes wrong in the school or community environment. Incidents deserve immediate attention. This might mean dropping whatever the team is working on to offer some sort of public and visible response.

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We will be doing a lot of work with these set of expectations next year. It will provide a frame of reference for the services we provide from our office, and we envision that it will serve as a guiding framework for the work you and your teams do in schools.

We can't wait to see how teams rise to these expectations next year.



Fall Trainings



An important word on our fall trainings: not only do we want you to be there, but we think it's really important that you attend. These fall trainings are not the same thing every year, and they are not just for new advisors and new team members.

We offer this introduction for the simple reason that we want all advisors and teams to attend our 2010-2011 school year trainings. Please make every effort to attend, because we will be going through our expectations and how you and your team can meet them. The expectations are listed in this bulletin, but in the fall we'll get practical and think about the expectations in action. This is our effort to offer you more structure and increase the effectiveness of our teams.

We were very careful in planning our fall training schedule. We have done our best to avoid traditional scheduling conflicts.

FA Trainings

The FA Trainings are going to outline our plans for the 2010-2011 school year. We will offer and review our new expectations for civil rights teams.

Please make every effort to attend. The FA trainings are especially important this year.

We have four sessions planned:

9/27 in Orono, Wells Common at UMaine, 8:00-2:00

9/29 in Augusta, Calumet Club, 8:00-2:00

10/1 in Portland, Keeley the Caterer's, 8:00-2:00

Teleconference training at a later date, 2:00-5:00, date and sites TBA



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This last session is designed for people who are unable to attend any of the other sessions. We prefer that you attend one of the other trainings, but understand that this might be your only option. The fall trainings are important enough that we do our best to make them available to everyone.

Student Team Trainings:

We promise that there will be more opportunities for students to talk and work with students from other schools. We will do our best to make the workshop sessions more activity-oriented... although we think we did a good job of this last year.

Also, it really needs to be highlighted and understood that the fall trainings are not entertainment. The purpose of these trainings is to get students inspired and ready to go back and work towards improving their school communities. We seek to educate, inform, and inspire, not entertain.

This year's planned workshops include:

Working with School Harassment Policies: Teams will bring copies of their school harassment policies, typically an underutilized resource in improving school climate. We'll dissect the policies, look at their relationships with Maine law, and think about activities and ideas teams can use to help make these policies relevant.

Standing Up Is Hard to Do: Every year we hear students say that they're going to stand up to bullying harassment when they get back to school. It's not that easy, though. We will study the psychology of why it's so hard to stand up, and what we can do to make it easier.

The Importance of Response: Civil rights teams are engaged in preventative education, but there are times when they must respond to events in their schools or communities. We will look at why these responses are important and what makes for an effective response. If something calls for a response, your civil rights team will be ready.

We also plan on making the early morning and post-lunch activities more meaningful.

We do not yet have firm dates and locations scheduled yet, but we are aiming to hold all our student trainings in a four-week period from October 25 to November 19. As soon as we have the exact dates and locations, we will make that information available through e-mail and a posting on the Moodle site.



The Director's Cut

A monthly column from our Director, Thom Harnett:



As Another Year Draws to a Close

Spring brings us many things. The days are longer and warmer. The lawns need mowing, and more mowing. From my office window, I see a lot more school children piling out of bus after bus, day after day to visit Maine's Capitol Building and other historic sites. Spring also brings us the end of the school year and for me that means many things as well. It provides me a time to reflect on the past school year including the many accomplishments of student members and civil rights teams all around Maine.

I think of the students and faculty I met and worked with along with Brandon, Debi, Amy Homans and Barb Maurais at our many fall trainings and at the electric statewide conference on May 3. I find myself signing hundreds of certificates of appreciation for students and faculty who are being recognized for their efforts on civil rights teams by their schools. And as Brandon pointed out earlier in this issue of *The Torch*, I also think of the failures, the young people who were mistreated and the targets of bias motivated comments and behaviors who were made to feel unwelcome or unsafe in their schools. I think of the parents who I spoke to when they called asking, pleading for some help or advice to make things better. Some we were able to help, others we were not.

I think of this as the year when it was difficult to pick up a newspaper and not find an article about bullying, harassment, and misuse of the internet and social networking sites. We all will remember reading about Phoebe Prince, whose young life was cut short in part by the behaviors of her classmates in South Hadley, Massachusetts, and then reading about some of those students being arrested and criminally charged in connection with her death. Yet despite those awful incidents and those terribly sad memories, I also look back at this year with great pride and joy. I am able to do that because of the thousands of Maine students on civil rights teams in schools throughout Maine who are working to make sure stories like these, like the ones we read and hear about, are never told in their schools.



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You make sure that those stories never unfold. By taking a stand against hate as a civil rights team or speaking up as an individual member of a team when a classmate is being harassed or made to feel *less than*, you shatter the status quo. You show people that school does not have to be a place where students walk the halls in fear worrying about what they are going to hear, see or experience. You bring about change, and for that you should be so proud. The truth is that more stories are written about things that go wrong than things that go right, and that is a shame.

Please know that even if the stories of your compassion, empathy, courage and support go unreported in the press, they do not go unnoticed. They are noticed and appreciated by the students that you support. They are noticed by other students, bystanders, who might see what you do and commit to doing the same thing for somebody else. They are noticed by the adults in the school. They are also noticed by the students who choose to torment others. Your actions, no matter how simple, show them that the days of people ignoring hurtful behavior are coming to an end. Just like the school year is coming to an end, so is the silence that allows those hurtful behaviors to pollute our schools. You are creating a new awareness and newer and more welcoming schools, and it certainly does not go unnoticed here.

Thank you for all you do and have a wonderful summer.