



This is our first task — caring for our children. It's our first job. If we don't get that right, we don't get anything right. That's how, as a society, we will be judged.

And by that measure, can we truly say, as a nation, that we are meeting our obligations? Can we honestly say that we're doing enough to keep our children — all of them — safe from harm? Can we claim, as a nation, that we're all together there, letting them know that they are loved, and teaching them to love in return? Can we say that we're truly doing enough to give all the children of this country the chance they deserve to live out their lives in happiness and with purpose?

-President Barack Obama in Newtown, Connecticut

There is hurt, anger, blame, and sorrow. Sandy Hook Elementary School is on all of our minds. And while the context is unimaginable and not everything needs to be about us, I keep returning to our President's words and thinking of all of you and the great work we do with the Civil Rights Team Project.

Thank you.



- The Civil Rights Team Project would like to welcome back Janet Mills as Maine's Attorney General. As you may remember, Janet served as our Attorney General from 2009-2011. We look forward to her leadership and support for our work.
- *The Torch* could be undergoing some significant changes in the near future. Some of the content that you've grown to love will be finding a home elsewhere, making the newsletter more of a traditional newsletter. Change will be gradual.
- I will be making a major (and exciting) announcement on January 11. Feel free to get a preview of what this might be by flipping to the last page of this newsletter.

Here's what you can expect in this edition of *The Torch*...

**Team Spotlight:** Our first-ever Anti-Bias Week was a great success!

**Activity Ideas:** People are already making resolutions. Take advantage!

**Talking to Myself:** Bold predictions for the new year.

**Pop Culture Winners and Losers:** Walmart, Atlanta Braves, Quentin Tarantino.

**Relevant Resources:** The CRTP gets serious about being online.

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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 and in schools.*



## Team Spotlight:

### Anti-Bias Week

The first Civil Rights Team  
Project-sponsored event week  
for the 2012-2013 school year  
was Anti-Bias Week, December 10-14.



Here is what some schools did to promote education around issues of bias.

#### @ Houlton High School:

Civil rights team, advised by Chalene Beals

- The team created bookmarks featuring definitions of bullying and bias, thus highlighting the differences. The bookmarks were given to English teachers for distribution during classes.
- The team distributed gumballs (sugar free!) featuring the civil rights team's logo. The gumballs came in all kinds of flavors and colors, and of course this was a way to initiate conversations about people's exterior appearances, differences, and the ways we judge others. The message drew explicit connections with the protected civil rights categories.
- The team created Mismatched Shoe Day, promoting un-biased thinking. The mismatched shoes represented the differences in the student population, but also how everyone can "walk" towards the same goal: making sure that every student feels safe and welcome in school.
- The team created an anti-bias pledge banner for students to sign. The pledge read "I pledge to: stand up and speak out against biased behavior, lead by example by recognizing the inner worth of everyone regardless of race, religion, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, physical or mental disability, or other personal characteristics, show kindness and respect to everyone because all students should feel safe and welcome in our school."
- The team coordinated activities with the student council, including rewarding precious Winter Carnival points for participation in the week's events.
- The team designed and purchased 121 super-visible t-shirts for civil rights team members, student council members, and every adult in the school.
- The first-ever Anti-Bias Week was such a success that the school plans on having a civil rights team-sponsored event in the second week of December every year!



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## @ Mahoney Middle School, South Portland:

Civil rights team, advised by George Conant, Pat Peluso, and Susan Thornfeldt

The civil rights team compacted a week's worth of events into one Anti-Bias Day. They created and helped facilitate small group activities throughout the day, including:

- An introductory session focused on the goal of the day: to begin a schoolwide discussion about bias and bias-based behaviors and their impact on the school community.
- Discussions of the school's core values and how the day's events related to their school slogan, "Everyone Deserves To Be Treated With Kindness and Respect."
- Brainstorming of observed bias-based behaviors related to the protected categories under the Maine Civil Rights Act (the sticky note activity from the fall trainings) and sharing/discussion in community circles.
- Viewing a film clip from *Remember the Titans* to begin discussions about stereotypes, labels, cliques/groups and their overall effect on school climate.
- Discussions of the potential roles of targets, perpetrators, bystanders, and allies and how they relate to the short story, "The New Girl."

## @ Mill Pond School, Hodgdon:

CRTP-affiliated anti-bullying team, advised by Rhonda Foster

- The anti-bullying team renamed Anti-Bias Week "Shine the Light on Bias" Week, highlighting the hurtful/harmful impact of bias and why it's so important that we recognize and expose it.
- The team created a bulletin board with a definition of the word *bias*.
- Another mismatched sock day! The day promoted the important idea of accepting people's differences.
- In social studies classes students discussed incidents of bias here in Maine and make bookmarks highlighting the positive and unique nature of their own personalities.

## @ Whittier Middle School, Poland:

Civil rights team, advised by Bonnie Robbins and Maria Russell

- The civil rights team created colorful, laminated locker tags featuring ten different civil rights quotes. Before everyone arrived for school on Monday morning, they put a locker tag on every locker in the school. (That's *hundreds* of tags, for the record.) The end result was a significant brightening of the hallways and plenty of student curiosity.



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- Following my “Understanding Bias” presentation, the team created four follow-up discussion questions for use the next day during homeroom-based community circles (a staple of restorative school practices). Individual civil rights team members also sat in on each homeroom and helped teachers facilitate the circles.
- The team had a daily presence during morning breakfast, when the whole school is gathered together. They made announcements about recognizing and addressing bias behaviors.

## **@ Windham Middle School:**

Civil rights team, advised by Eliza Adams

- Students watched the story of *The Sneetches* in homeroom, followed by discussions about recognizing bias.
- The civil rights team enlisted the help of student leaders from five other student organizations to serve as table leaders for a Mix It Up at Lunch event. The seventy-five table leaders were trained and ready to lead small groups in discussions about bias featuring four student scenarios. (And for Windham Middle School, Mix It Up lunches are a very big deal. They are well-practiced and have even been honored by Teaching Tolerance as a Mix It Up Model School.)
- All students had the opportunity to write a comment on a small paper in response to my “Understanding Bias” presentation. The civil rights team has collected these comments and will use them to create a collage on a bulletin board.

## **Other CRTP Activity**

### **@ Greely Middle School, Cumberland:**

Civil rights team, advised by Roberta Goodwin and Kate Olsen-Pietrowsky

Greely Middle School was recently spray-painted with a slew of offensive graffiti, including some bias-based messages that included swastikas and “I hate Jesus.”

The civil rights team wrote a statement rejecting the graffiti, with a specific focus on the bias element. They took to the airwaves and used the school’s video announcements to make themselves heard. (See the picture on the next page.)

But then they went a step further...

The team challenged their school to join them in rejecting the bias-based graffiti by wearing their school colors and a sticker reading “I REJECT BIAS!” the next day at school. They gave their classmates the opportunity to join them in rejecting the act.





*And they got press, spreading the message to a wider community...*

[www.wcsh6.com/news/article/224123/314/Students-take-a-stand-against-bias](http://www.wcsh6.com/news/article/224123/314/Students-take-a-stand-against-bias)

The civil rights teams at Greely High School and North Yarmouth Memorial School also addressed the incident. It may not have been their school that was specifically targeted, but it was their district and their community.

The high school's team addressed the issue with a prepared statement at a school-wide assembly. Students at North Yarmouth Elementary School joined the middle school in wearing their school colors and "I REJECT BIAS!" stickers.

To all the students on the MSAD #51 civil rights teams: your voices are important, and you were heard. Good job.

### **@ Carrabec High School, North Anson:**

Civil rights team, advised by Katie Hall and Lisa Savage

Soon after the student trainings this fall, the team delivered a training on issues of bias and discrimination to their school's tenth grade advisory groups and their advisors as part of the half-day Responsible Decision Making Conference. They used information and slides from student trainings to better educate their peers on the unique nature of bias and bias behaviors. It went so well that they've been asked to repeat the program with the school's ninth graders this month.



## Activity Idea: Civil Rights Team Resolutions

It's that time of year when a significant swath of our society optimistically commits to self-improvement!

Civil rights teams should embrace this opportunity; *we're all about optimism and improvement.*



Here are some ideas for how your team can ride the wave of resolutions for 2013:

1. Have civil rights team members make individual resolutions. These can be civil rights/bias-related or specific to the functioning of your civil rights team.
2. Have the civil rights team make *team* resolutions. What do you want to accomplish with the rest of your school year?
3. Have the civil rights team suggest resolutions for individuals in your school looking to improve their school culture/climate. Is anyone in your school sitting around and waiting for these suggestions? Probably not... but this could be a fun and public way to remind people in your school that you exist.
4. Have the civil rights team create school resolutions for the new year and invite individuals to sign on.

Of course we all have experience making and breaking resolutions. Here are four simple tips to make these resolutions meaningful:

1. Put them in writing. This requires thought. The simple act of writing something down also makes it more of a commitment. It also creates a record.
2. Make them manageable. Small steps! Unrealistic resolutions and goals discourage meaningful change.
3. Make them measurable. This is Goal Setting 101. You have to be able to measure and assess whether or not resolutions are successful.



4. Revisit them. One-and-done resolutions don't get done. Resolve suggests a certain level of commitment. Real change requires it. Make sure you offer opportunities to revisit resolutions.

Resolved: you and your team should do something with New Year's resolutions. It's timely, thoughtful, and fun. Get to it, before everyone accepts the status quo again!



## Talking to Myself: Predictions for 2013

The end of the calendar year is pure gold for anyone who has to write columns. You can always do a "year in review" column. Some sort of list featuring the very best and/or very worst of (*fill in the blank*) is always popular.

But I'm opting for the forward-looking approach of offering predictions for 2013. Here we go, then, with my civil rights-related predictions for the new year.

**Prediction #1:** This year's Oscars will be a civil rights disaster that has Brandon absolutely steamed.

Why I'm Right: Seth Macfarlane is hosting, and this guy has made a career out of crossing the line. *Family Guy* routinely mines off-limits material for cheap laughs. The year in movies will offer Macfarlane plenty of off-limits civil rights material, too. We've got three major contenders that are (sort of) about race: *Beasts of the Southern Wild*, *Django Unchained*, and *Lincoln*. *Zero Dark Thirty* is about the hunt for bin Laden and features scenes of waterboarding. *Life of Pi* has an Indian main character. Thank goodness hobbits aren't real. The inevitable French jokes surrounding *Les Misérables* might be the tamest thing we hear all night. Yikes.

Why I Might Be Wrong: The Oscars go out of their way not to offend people and Mr. Macfarlane will be very, very careful in his biggest moment.

**Prediction #2:** A male athlete in one of the four major American sports (baseball, basketball, football, hockey) will come out as gay.

Why I'm Right: It's time. This has already happened in every major sphere of public life. The world seems ready for it. Even the leagues seem ready for it. The NBA has done great work with GLSEN. MLB teams did public service announcements for the "It Gets Better" project. The NHL's work with the "You Can Play" campaign is really, *really* good. The current climate is as good as it has ever been for an openly gay athlete.





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**Why I Might Be Wrong:** The current climate may be as good as it's ever been, but there's a reason why this hasn't happened yet. Players fear how they'll be treated by their teammates, their opponents, their fans, and the media. It's a big burden to bear and a whole lot of attention.

**Prediction #3:** The words *gay* and *retarded* as insults are on their way out.

**Why I'm Right:** I think that education and awareness are an important part of this. I don't think ignorance is much of an excuse anymore. People now know that these words are potentially offensive and insulting. The previously voiceless now have voice. At some point these words just won't be part of the lexicon. They're mostly spoken by youth, and youth culture changes. Remember words like *groovy* or *rad*? It's time for *gay* and *retarded* to become obsolete, and I hope it's because our youth reject the inherent bias in these words.

**Why I Might Be Wrong:** The more we highlight the harmful and hurtful nature of these words, the more incentives we provide for some people to use them. It's an unfortunate but true reality. Besides... change is slow.

**Prediction #4:** Current events will continue to focus people's attention on issues of school safety and school climate.

**Why I'm Right:** Look at recent history. Sandy Hook. LD 1237. *Bully*. Tyler Clemente. "It Gets Better." Phoebe Prince. *Glee*. There will always be news and pop culture that get people talking about this stuff.

**Why I Might Be Wrong:** Unfortunately, so much of that talk is water cooler talk without any real focus. If the conversation is limited to "That's a shame," and is then followed by a laundry list of complaints, you can't really say that people are *focused* on much of anything. *Focus* implies substantive conversations and even action. Are we ready for that? (Well, *we* are... but is everyone else?)

**Prediction #5:** The Civil Rights Team Project and our civil rights teams will have their greatest calendar year yet.

**Why I'm Right:** We always do good work, but I feel like we are more *focused* this year. I keep hearing from many of you that this feels like the first time your students are really "getting it." We want all-in on the anti-bias part of our mission last fall, and it feels like it's paying off.

**Why I Might Be Wrong:** There is absolutely no way I can be wrong about this. Yes, times are tough. Government curtailment orders and slashed school funding will have their effects, but as long as we have committed advisors and our most valuable resource, the kids, we can do a lot. We can and we will, and I *won't* be wrong. (About this one.)



## Pop Culture Watch: December 2012

The Pop Culture Watch is where we offer our opinions on what's going on in popular culture from a civil rights perspective!



### Walmart Does Something Good for Civil Rights?

I never thought that I'd be writing anything positive about Walmart in the pages of *The Torch*, but here we are. Walmart's legal history has consistently put them on the wrong side of civil rights issues, but one of their recent advertisements for smart phone service had me cheering.

The ad features Walmart employee Sonia. She appears to be of South Asian ancestry. That's nice, but it's not enough to warrant attention in *The Torch*. The reason why this ad gets its own write-up is because Sonia seems to have a physical disability. She uses crutches.

I saw this ad several times before I noticed Sonia's crutches. That's great; her disability is just there. How often do we see people with disabilities on tv where their disability isn't the focus?

I really, really hope that "Sonia" has a disability in real life, and that they cast her for this role because she was the best person for the part.

[www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=bN-Rft22jFo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=bN-Rft22jFo)



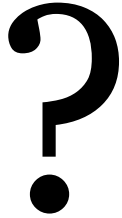
### The Atlanta Braves Strike Out

All Major League Baseball teams get newly designed batting practice hats for the 2012-2013 season. Many teams are going retro and embracing colors and imagery from their



pasts.

Unfortunately, for the Atlanta Braves this means bringing back their old mascot, Chief Noc-a-Homa. I believe this makes the Braves the only sports team in the last 25 years to embrace MORE Native American imagery.



## What to Make of *Django Unchained*?

I haven't seen it yet. But I will, and I'm pretty sure that even then, I won't know if Quentin Tarantino's new film is a positive or a negative moment in civil rights-related pop culture.

The positive is that the title character and hero in *Django Unchained* is an escaped slave who gets his revenge. The topic and setting, main character, and plot are all welcomingly different from what we typically see out of Hollywood. Perhaps the film can even be seen as a revenge fantasy on the institution of slavery.

Then again, maybe I'm giving Tarantino too much credit. He is known for mining pop culture trash for his films (there's a reason why his first was called *Pulp Fiction*). With this film and *Inglourious Basterds*, he's now turning to history. Perhaps slavery is just a convenient canvas for another of his shocking tales of revenge and violence. He could be undermining the seriousness of the subject of slavery.

We'll see. I'm afraid that I won't like it... but I'm even more afraid that I *will* like it.

You can watch one of the many trailers here:

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=eUdM9vrCbow](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eUdM9vrCbow)



## Relevant Resources: Our Online Presence



Have you ever looked at our official website? I hope not, because for too long the information has been hopelessly outdated.

But no more! The Civil Rights Team Project's web info has been updated to better reflect the current state of what we do. You can check it out at:

[www.maine.gov/ag/civil\\_rights](http://www.maine.gov/ag/civil_rights)

Unless you are recruiting new schools for the Civil Rights Team Project, the information on the website probably doesn't help you too much in your role as advisor. The website is a way to spread basic information about the CRTP; you're beyond that.

You want something more. You want resources, events, activities, inspiration, ideas, engagement. You want something specifically designed for you as an advisor. You want something... more.

It's coming. On January 11, I will be making a significant announcement .

In the meantime, it might be worth your time to check out Edmodo. And just what is Edmodo? It is best (and often) described as Facebook for educators. It is intuitive and easy to learn.

It is the future.

It is worth your time to spend a few minutes looking it over at:

[www.edmodo.com](http://www.edmodo.com)