



THE TORCH

(CRTP NEWSLETTER) MARCH '13



The Civil Rights Team Project newsletter is changing...

(again)

It's now going to be more of a traditional newsletter. It will include more news about your civil rights teams and what you're doing. It will also include information from our office and what's going on here. The newsletter will focus more on what's happening within the Civil Rights Team Project.

And that's it. The pop culture fodder, recommended resources, and upcoming events are gone... from *The Torch*. That content still exists; it's just in a new location. All that good stuff has migrated online onto our new Edmodo site. It's a much more natural fit for that type of content, and part of our ongoing efforts to create more of a connected Civil Rights Team Project community.

If you're not on the site yet... get there! (Instructions included in a separate e-mail.)

Here are the sections you can now expect in our restructured newsletter:

Team Spotlight: News and information about your civil rights teams and affiliated groups and what you're doing to address bias and bias behaviors in your schools.

From the Office: Have you ever wondered just what I do all day? This section focuses on news and what's happening in the Civil Rights Team Project.

Edmodo: Here we'll highlight some of the great things about our Edmodo site and how you can get more out of it.

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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.

Janet Mills—Attorney General

Debi Lettre—Civil Rights Project Administrator

Brandon Baldwin—Schools/Curriculum Coordinator



Team Spotlight:

No Name-Calling Week

GLSEN's No-Name Calling Week has always been a popular event for our civil rights teams. This year was no different, as civil rights teams all across the state challenged their schools to address bias-based name-calling.

I had the privilege of visiting eight schools and in support of their civil rights teams' efforts to celebrate and promote No Name-Calling Week. Here is some of what they did for the week of January 21-25:

Thomaston Grammar School had a full slate of events planned for the week, but the civil rights team still found time to perform skits for the fourth graders from their neighboring elementary school. They didn't just focus on the younger kids, though, as they also visited middle level classrooms for educational sessions on the Maine Civil Rights Act and the RSU #13 harassment policy. The whole school showed their support for the week's events with their participation in a door decorating contest. The results were impressive.

At **Oak Hill Middle School** in Sabattus the civil rights team made sure their classmates knew that No Name-Calling Week was coming. The Friday before the week's events started, they were outside the school building decked out in their team t-shirts and greeting their classmates with a morning reminder that No Name-Calling Week was coming. They also selected activities from GLSEN for use during advisor sessions during the week and helped facilitate sessions.

The **Bucksport Middle School** civil rights team created a scavenger hunt quiz for their school. The quiz included questions related to the week's themes of name-calling and bias. Answers to the questions were on small posters placed around the school. The kids had a few days to find the answers and submit their completed quizzes to be eligible for prizes. Overall, the scavenger hunt quiz was a hit!

The high school team at **Piscataquis Community Secondary School** in Guilford created a promotional video that they showed on the Friday before No Name-Calling Week. (Coming soon to the Edmodo site!) They also created and led advisor group activities, including one where students harnessed the positive power of words by writing compliments about their classmates, which the civil rights team collected, sorted, and distributed.



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The students at the **Sweetser School** in Saco got to showcase their design skills. They created t-shirts featuring name labels and promoting the idea that we should get to decide what name(s) we get called. One of the team members designed a sticker for students and staff to wear in support of the week's events. Another team member designed a slide presentation highlighting the protected civil rights categories. Overall, a successful week, and *by design*.

Wells High School's civil rights team did their fair share of designing (and printing), too. They created posters featuring the GLSEN No Name-Calling Week slogan of "No sticks, no stones, no dissing, no name-calling" and distributed them to every classroom. They also created table tents for the cafeteria featuring poetry and questions challenging students to think about their own experiences with name-calling. (Unfortunately, these tents suffered an early demise in what we might call an "overzealous cleaning mishap.")

The civil rights team at **Greely Middle School** created a six-page newsletter specifically for No Name-Calling Week. It included student editorials, a word search, information about the week's events, and details on their No Name-Calling Week poster contest. Most importantly, it included this bit of encouragement: "During No Name-Calling Week, join the civil rights team in stopping the use of inappropriate and rude name-calling, especially the words *gay* and *retarded*." Students were challenged to sign colored paper pledges to stop using those words, and the team created a colorful rainbow display with all the completed pledges.

The **Buckfield Sr. High School** civil rights team chose No Name-Calling Week to introduce their first-ever "Make a Difference Day." Each student got a ticket. They could write down something they did to make a difference and exchange the ticket for a bracelet featuring the Buckfield buck. The collected tickets were featured in a mosaic on the cafeteria's bulletin board.

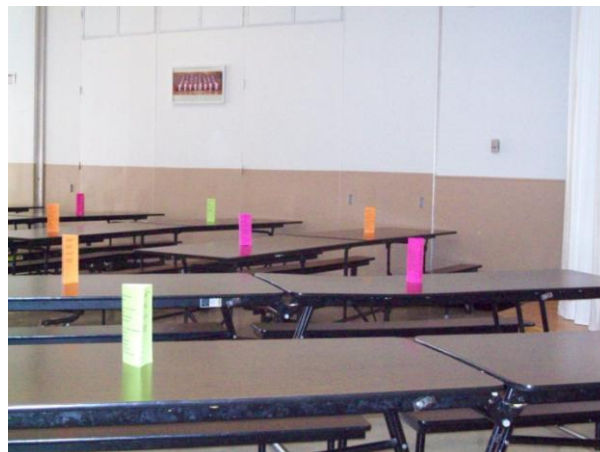
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See some picture highlights from No Name-Calling Week on the next page!



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Clockwise from upper right: an entry in the door decorating contest at Thomaston Grammar School, t-shirts from the Sweetser school, table tents set up in the cafeteria at Wells High School, the collected pledges at Greely Middle School, and the “Make a Difference” ticket mosaic at Buckfield Sr. High School.





Other Activities and Initiatives

On January 9 the civil rights team at South Portland's **Memorial Middle School** led their classmates in a half-day training on "Understanding Bias." Team members conducted five different workshops focused on understanding bias and what it looks like in a school setting. The workshop sessions included some highlights from our fall trainings and original material created by the civil rights team. There were videos, music, scenarios, and relay activities, all keeping the focus on bias. The day provided an opportunity for the civil rights team to increase their profile and help their school understand and address issues of bias.

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The civil rights team at **Whittier Middle School** in Poland has been busy creating and leading small group activities 1-2 times each month for their school's scheduled homeroom/advisor group sessions. A recent session featured team-created scenarios. Some of them featured bias related to the protected civil rights categories, but some did not. The scenarios included discussion questions like:

- How do you think _____ feels about this? (Empathy-building.)
- Do you see things like this happening in our school? (Make connections.)
- What could you do about this? (Mental role-playing and empowerment.)
- Is this bullying or bias behavior? (Understand the difference!)

The parentheticals are my addition; I include them to highlight what each question accomplishes. These four questions make scenarios into great discussion starters and teaching tools.

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The civil rights team at **Greely High School** responded to a public incident of bias that put their school in the news. Members of the girls' basketball team got in some trouble for posting a picture of themselves giving the "heil Hitler" salute on Facebook. That by itself didn't necessarily warrant a civil rights team response, as we discourage teams from getting too involved in administrative and disciplinary issues, but when the incident grabbed media attention, things quickly changed. It then became a public incident that affected a wider community, and everyone was talking about it.

The team held emergency meetings and included members of the basketball team in crafting the following statement:

We, the students and staff of Greely High School, would like to express to our community our regret about recent events. We feel these events do not accurately represent our feelings towards people of different religions,



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racess, colors, national origins, ancestries, sexual orientations, genders or different abilities--nor do they reflect our attitudes about the Holocaust. We recognize that this could be especially painful for the Jewish members of our community.

We deeply regret these incidents and the students involved realize their actions were hurtful. We acknowledge that we are by no means perfect, but we would like the public to know that Greely is a place that strives for tolerance and respects diversity. Our individualities are the backbone of our strength as a community. We are very concerned by hurtful language and images and we are constantly striving to make Greely a safe and welcoming place for all members of the community.

This event has created an opportunity for our school community to learn from mistakes and come together as we look toward the future. We pledge to continue working towards creating an environment of tolerance and acceptance for all. We will work to increase sensitivity in our community. We will recognize the power of language and images and will make personal efforts to use our words with greater sensitivity.

The team read the statement at a whole-school assembly. They have also distributed it to advisor groups, where students have the opportunity to sign on and show their support.



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From the Office:

New Additions to the Civil Rights Team Project

We have two new middle level civil rights teams up and running at Hichborn Middle School in Holbrook and Palermo Consolidated School. Welcome aboard!



Launching the Edmodo page

We officially launched our new online community in January with the new Edmodo site. Right now, it's the place for civil rights news, resources, and events. In due time, we have plans to open it up and create opportunities for communication and collaboration.

We have about 100 registered users right now; we want that number to increase to include all of our advisors.

Appearance on *Maine Watch* with Jennifer Rooks

In January I accepted an invitation to appear on MPBN's *Maine Watch* with Jennifer Rooks. The topic? Bullying... I know, I know. I go out of my way to keep this word out of our work because we need to keep our focus on bias. Conversations about bullying usually are not conversations about bias.

But I accepted anyway, because if you get a chance to go on *Maine Watch* and promote the Civil Rights Team Project, you do it. I wanted to make it very clear, though, that I wasn't there as some anti-bullying expert. I wanted to highlight the overlap between issues of bullying and bias, so...

I carefully constructed the following introduction:

I run the Civil Rights Team Project in the Attorney General's Office. The Civil Rights Team Project is a school-based program that includes and engages students through what we call civil rights teams. We currently have civil rights teams in over 130 Maine schools. The purpose of these civil rights teams is to increase safety in our schools by addressing issues of bias, especially bias related to race, national origin and ancestry, religion, disability, gender, and sexual orientation. Bullying, when it's related to bias based on these protected civil rights categories, is one of the issues we address.



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I practiced this and memorized it so that when I got the opportunity to introduce myself, I could explain our relationship with bullying. So I'm ready. I'm prepared.

And then I get my first question... and it's a direct question about what schools can do to address cyberbullying that occurs off campus.

Oh, well. I ended up playing the anti-bullying expert after all. It's not what I intended to do, but I have no regrets.

You can see the drama unfold right here: [Maine Watch, January 17, 2013](#)

Midseason Check-Ins

All civil rights team advisors were expected to complete midseason check-ins in January. I've read through and responded to about 100 so far. I'm very impressed with the general level of thought and effort that went into completing these. The check-ins offer me insight into the current state of the Civil Rights Team Project, and I'm pleased with where we are and where we're going.

I think that our re-focus on bias has been a great success so far. We are working very hard to get our teams, students, and schools to think about issues specifically related to race, national origin and ancestry, religion, disabilities, gender, and sexual orientation. It's not always easy, but it's what we need to do. We are putting the civil rights focus back into our civil rights teams and the Civil Rights Team Project.

It is encouraging to see this happening, especially after spending so much time on it with our communications and trainings. Our advisors and teams respond well to our project initiatives.

Based on what I've read in the midseason check-ins, I see a need for two major initiatives for the 2013-2014 school year:

1. All of our teams, but especially the elementary school teams, could use some help in getting the kids to understand our focus on bias and what it looks like in a school setting. For next year, then, I'll be creating a series of ready-to-use lessons and scenarios that you can use with your teams. We will use repetition to help our students identify and understand bias while shifting them away from a focus on bullying. We need to up the education, and the tools need to come from our office.
2. A common complaint from advisors is that our students aren't always engaged and committed to the work. Attendance, productivity, follow-through... these are problems that are hampering our ability to get things done. We've successfully focused on the *what* this year; next year we're going to focus more on the *how*. How can we get more done? Expect plenty of focus on this question next year.



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These initiatives are a direct result of what advisors reported in their midseason check-ins. Thank you to everyone who took the time and effort to complete one; I hope that the opportunities for self-reflection, my responses and feedback, and the ensuing informed decisions about the future direction of the CRTP make it worth your while.

(And this seems like a good time to mention that all civil rights team advisors are responsible for completing an end-of-year report for May 31.)



Our Edmodo group page for CRTP advisors is up and running, and I'm putting fresh content on there every weekday. I have big plans and ambitions for this, but we're starting with small steps...

All you have to do is go there and just check out the content.

Things you may have missed if you haven't been visiting the Edmodo page:

- A video produced by the Waterville Junior High School civil rights team about "How to Be an Ally."
- A link to a spectacular animated short film on the lasting effects and damage that come from name-calling.
- Civil rights-related commentary and criticism of Seth MacFarlane's Oscar hosting performance.
- Weekly quotes celebrating Black History Month.
- Information on the free Real Deal Film Fest at the Portland Public Library.
- The best and worst ads from the Super Bowl (from a civil rights perspective).
- A link to a great article about the Buckfield Sr. High School's civil rights team and their efforts to promote No Name-Calling Week.
- And so much more!

Increase your education. Be aware. Get inspired.

Don't get left behind! This is just the beginning...