

This is the last edition of *The Torch* for the 2013-2014 school year. Enjoy!

**On Our Radar:** Major events and happenings that are on our radar screen.

**From Edmodo:** Information about and from the CRTP group at Edmodo.

**From the Teams:** News and information about your civil rights teams and affiliated groups and what you're doing to address issues of bias in your schools.

**From the Office:** News from Brandon and Debi and what's happening with the CRTP.

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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 in our schools.*

**Janet Mills—Attorney General**

**Debi Lettre—Civil Rights Project Administrator**

**Brandon Baldwin—Schools/Curriculum Coordinator**



## On Our Radar:

Here's everything we've got our eyes on in the next three months...

I'm sure that the #1 event on *your* radar screen is Summer Vacation. It should be. Enjoy it!

But... we'd also like to highlight the events that will be immediately relevant for you when you return to school in August or September. Yes, we're already thinking about the 2014-2015 school year.



### Information Gathering

Our first communication will happen in mid-August. It will consist of some basic questions that will help us keep our records up to date. I realize that this is early. If you aren't anywhere close to getting back to school then, that's OK. I will give you plenty of opportunities to respond to these questions until we hear back from you!

For the first time ever, we are giving you a date by which we expect to hear back from you with your basic information for the 2014-2015 school year.

That date is... Friday, September 12. This might seem early, but all you have to do is respond to some basic questions.

So, please, mark your calendars now: Friday, September 12 is **CRTP Decision Day**.

### Advisor Trainings

We expect our full-fledged civil rights team advisors to make every effort to attend one of our four advisor trainings. The dates and locations are:

Sept. 16 (T): Presque Isle

Sept. 22 (M): Brewer

Sept. 23 (T): Augusta

Sept. 24 (W): Portland

### Student Trainings

Due to the adoption of Common Core standards, our schools will no longer have standardized testing in October. This means that we can start the Civil Rights Team Project student trainings a little bit earlier on the calendar!



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Our trainings will run from mid-October to mid-November. We will contact you *this year* with the specific assigned date for your team's training.

## **National Hispanic Heritage Month (September 15-October 15):**

I realize that this is really early in the school year... but a simple announcement and acknowledgement of National Hispanic Heritage Month highlights the simple fact that there are millions of Americans with national origins and ancestries in Central and South America. We can reduce help reduce bias simply by increasing the visibility of marginalized people.

## **Ally Week (October 13-17):**

Sponsored by GLSEN, recommended by the CRTP!

<http://glsen.org/allyweek>

[CRTP Recommendations](#)

## **Mix It Up at Lunch Day (October 28):**

Teaching Tolerance's annual event aiming to break down social barriers in our schools.

[www.tolerance.org/mix-it-up](http://www.tolerance.org/mix-it-up)

## **From Edmodo:**

I will be slowing things down with the CRTP Edmodo group during the summer months. My goal is to post something every week. Specifically, I will create new CRTP-approved project ideas and initiatives, as well as some other resources that will end up in the new CRTP Advisor Handbook.

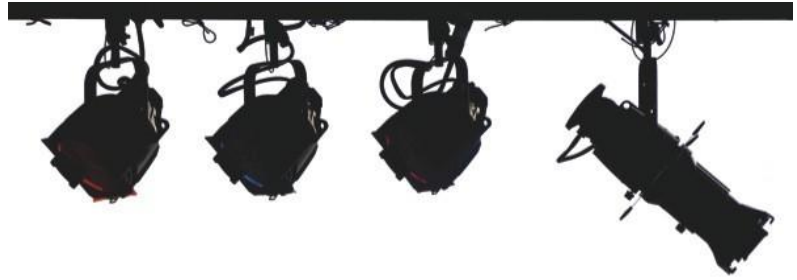


Summer is also a great time to comb through some of the old stuff that's posted to our Edmodo group. Scroll down to the bottom of the screen and click on "Load more content" and you can get lost in a sea of ideas...

(And the [CRTP Dropbox](#) is always available!)



## From the Teams:



### “A Lot Alike” Week

Some of our elementary and middle level civil rights teams celebrated and promoted “A Lot Alike” Weeks in March and April.

The CRTP-sponsored event asks the important question “What do we have in common?” Civil rights teams did a full week of activities that promoted the idea that in spite of real differences that exist among people of different races, ancestries, religions, abilities, genders, and sexual orientations, we are actually all a lot alike. Brandon visited thirteen schools to support their civil rights teams and this event with a new “A Lot Alike” presentation.

Here are just some of the highlights from “A Lot Alike” Week (and please understand that this is just a *sampling* of what these teams did):

- At **Caribou High School...** the civil rights team promoted the week’s events by writing a letter to the editor of the local newspaper and purchasing a displaying an impressive banner encouraging their classmates to “Find the Common.” They also planned and facilitated activities focused on finding commonalities, always coupling these activities with the message that focusing on our differences often leads to bias and prejudice based on race, culture, religion, disabilities, gender, and sexual orientation. (And thanks to Caribou’s advisor, Alana Margeson, for sharing.)
- At **Cascade Brook Elementary School in Farmington...** the civil rights team showed the whole school the now-famous [“Take a Seat, Make a Friend”](#) video and led a discussion that focused on how the featured participants, in spite of real differences, were able to work towards finding commonalities. The team also led the school in ½ hour sessions of activities/games like “A Warm Wind Blows” with different-aged classes. On Friday, the team promoted A Lot Alike Shirt Day or Dress Alike Day. Many of the school’s adults got in on the act, helping to highlight how in spite of age differences, we can find things we have in common. (And thanks to Cascade Brook’s advisor, Martina Arnold for sharing.)
- At **Dayton Consolidated School...** the civil rights team created a bulletin board with open questions that students could answer on sticky notes. The questions focused on similarities, asking how students might have something in common with the school’s principal, a bear, or an astronaut. Civil rights team members took a lead role in reading themed books to each grade and leading



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discussions on what they read. As an incentive for participation in the week's events, the team purchased wrist bands stating "At DCS we are all a lot alike." Students got a wristband when they participated during the week. By the end of the week, every student had a wrist band... yet another way that they were all a lot alike! (And thanks to Dayton's advisor, Mark Murray, for sharing.)

- At **Katahdin High School in Stacyville...** the civil rights team made a jigsaw puzzle using heavy paper and taped the various pieces all around the school. As students found the pieces, they'd bring them to the advisor's room and tape them to the wall, trying to put the pieces all together. By the end of the day, all the pieces were put together. The final picture was one of the world with people of different genders and colors holding hands. (And thanks to Katahdin's advisor, Lisa Marie Oliver, for sharing.)
- At **Park Avenue Elementary School in Auburn...** the civil rights team interviewed "celebrity" staff members on the televised announcements every morning. Each guest had to answer two questions: (1) Tell about a friend who is really different from you, and (2) Was race or gender a factor in how you chose friends, and why? The team hosted a Morning Sing community meeting and led the school in singing "A Lot Alike" themed songs like ["Tom Chapin's 'Family Tree.'"](#) Students also colored mandalas, elaborate geometric patterns common to many spiritual traditions and cultures, showing how even with a common task, there is still plenty of room for individuality. (And thanks to Park Avenue's advisor, Irene Austin, for sharing.)
- At **Pemetic Elementary School in Southwest Harbor...** the middle level civil rights team led lessons featuring a similarities web that helped students visualize some of their common interests. Students listed three of their favorite activities, and a physical web made out of constructions paper and string showed the intersections. (This will make sense when you see the picture!) The team also led a Mix It Up lunch, and inspired by the "Take a Seat, Make a Friend" video, challenged each lunch table to create a new handshake to share with everyone. (And thanks to Pemetic's advisor, Sonja Philbrook, for sharing.)
- At **Presque Isle High School...** the civil rights team led homeroom groups in a rousing game of similarities charades. Groups of seven students, including one civil rights team member, had to find a commonality and act it out for another group. To wrap up the week, the team challenged students to find five differences and five similarities in a picture of a group of people. The differences were easy, but it took real effort to find the similarities. The activity highlighted the idea that we can appreciate differences without bias by also focusing on commonalities. (And thanks to Presque Isle's advisor, Trudy Gorneault, for sharing.)



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- At **Valley Rivers Middle School in Fort Kent...** the civil rights team introduced the concept for the week with a [video that they made](#). They also introduced each day with a statistical announcement highlighting ways that we are a lot alike. (Examples: 97% of teens play some sort of video games and 96% of teens agree that they like music and that it strongly influences their moods.) During lunch each day, the civil rights team led their peers in short activities designed to show students some of the things they might share in common. (Example: touch your nose if you have a sibling or cousin... and keep touching your nose if you've ever fought with a sibling or cousin.) (And thanks to Valley River's advisor, Kara Beal, for sharing.)

Hey, civil rights teams that celebrated and promoted "A Lot Alike" Week in 2014: I saw some great things happening in your schools when I visited! It's really important that we are able to see that in spite of real differences that exist amongst people based on their races, ancestries, religions, abilities and disabilities, gender, and sexual orientations, we all share things in common. You are helping to make this happen in our schools, and that's the key to overcoming bias and prejudice.

(And a major thank-you to all of the advisors for these teams; not just for getting me the information, but for encouraging your teams to do this and organizing all of the events.)

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At **Bruce M. Whittier Middle School in Poland...** the civil rights team planned a theme week of activities focusing on disabilities. The week actually began on a Saturday with a K-8 talent show, with all proceeds going to their Life Skills program to send athletes to the Special Olympics. In school, students and staff were encouraged to take one of several different color ribbons to represent their support for people with a specific disability. Throughout the week, the team offered daily announcements educating the school about these disabilities. The team also led roundtable lessons and discussions focusing on the word disability, how we tend to view it as a negative, and how people with disabilities aren't really all that different from people without disabilities. Later in the week, the team hosted Lisa Bird from the Special Olympics to introduce the "End the R-Word" campaign.

Hey, Whittier Middle School civil rights team: people with disabilities are often made invisible in our schools and society. By devoting a whole week to education about disabilities, you helped create visibility for people who have those disabilities. But even more important, it was *positive* visibility. Showing people with disabilities in a positive light helps to reduce bias... and that's what we're all about in the CRTP. (And thanks to Whittier's advisor, Bonnie Robbins, for sharing.)

At **The Middle School of the Kennebunks...** the civil rights team did some wonderful pop-up art installations in the school café. They divided into three groups



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and each group had the flexibility to come up with their own theme as long as they could make meaningful connections between the art and the CRTP mission of addressing bias. The students created large and eye-catching displays, utilizing collage, photography, sketching, and quotes. The team has also been DJ'ing their lunch periods with civil rights-friendly music.

Hey, Middle School of the Kennebunks civil rights team... sometimes civil rights teams struggle to get the school's attention. Problem solved! Creating large scale art projects and adding music to your lunch periods are the perfect way to get noticed... but you're also keeping your focus on civil rights. Let me know if you ever need a guest DJ. (And thanks to MSK's advisor, Ward Willis, for sharing.)

At **Noble Middle School in South Berwick**... the civil rights team spent their spring creating a promotional video. The 6-minute video features the team talking about who they are and what they do. They're showing it to all incoming students on step-up days and again next fall. It's part of their very intentional efforts to recruit new team members for the 2014-2015 school year. You can see the video [right here](#).

Hey, Noble Middle School civil rights team: this is the perfect project for spring. It's not always easy to think about what the team should be doing during this time of year. It makes lots of sense to think about the future, and your video does a great job selling and promoting your work. It's great for recruiting, but also for introducing the concept of the civil rights team to *all* incoming students. (And thanks to Noble's advisors, Sarah Buralow and Amy Malette, for sharing.)

At **Portland High School**... the civil rights team has been looking at the concept of microaggressions. Microaggressions are common, everyday occurrences of bias. (Think offhand comments, assumptions, jokes, etc.) The individual occurrences may not seem like a big deal, but they have a cumulative effect that helps create and reinforce a culture of bias. The team studied the concept, created a bulletin board showing some examples of microaggressions in their lives, and presented to staff on the concept, including explanation, examples, and effects.

Hey, Portland High School civil rights team: I am a longtime admirer of the [Microaggressions website](#). It makes lots of sense to take that concept and apply it to your lives and your school. This is important work. Talking about microaggressions helps people see that bias isn't always malicious or targeted, and that it's far more common than most realize. (And thanks to Portland's advisor, Claire Schroeder, for sharing.)



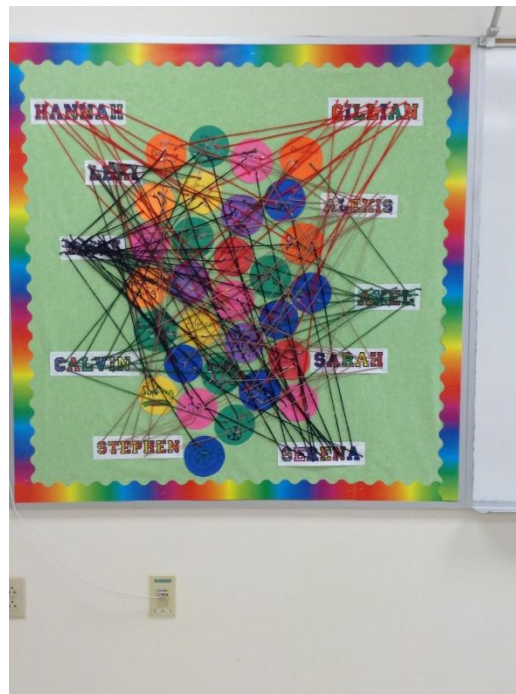


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**The very professional-looking banner at Caribou High School...**



**Students at Cascade Brook find commonalities with one of their student teachers, and the activity interests bulletin board at Pemetic Elementary...**

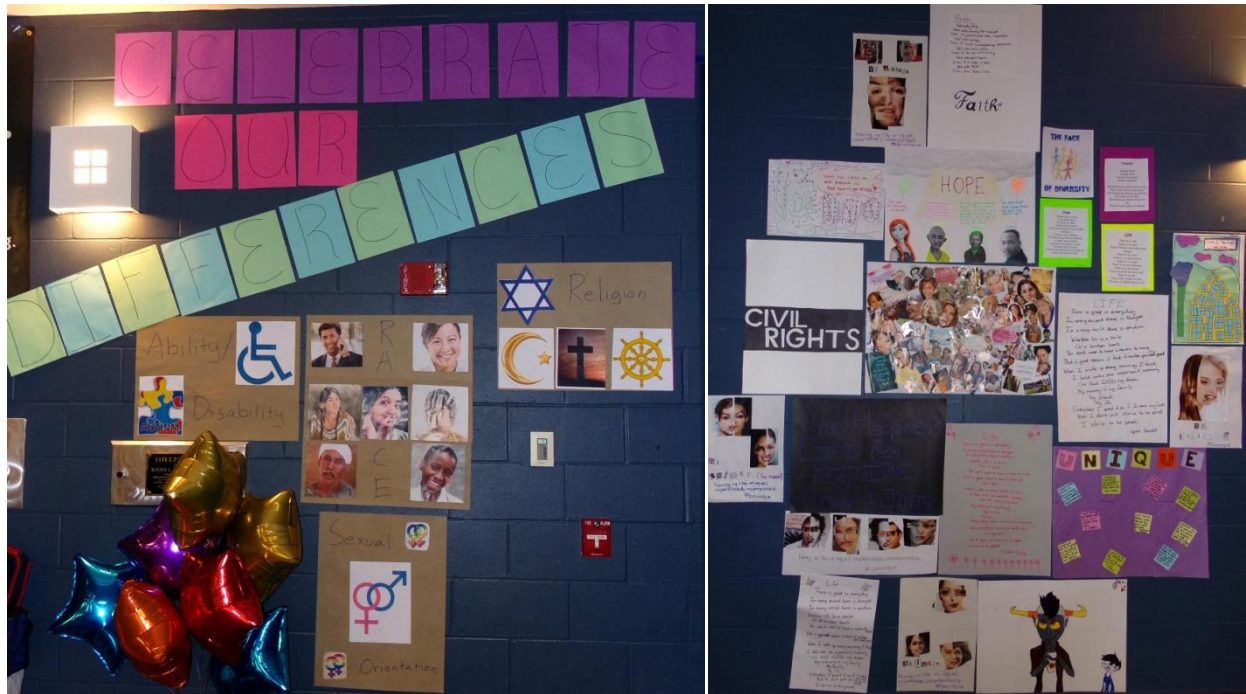






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**Some of the artwork from the Middle School of the Kennebunks' art installation project...**





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## Completed mandalas brighten up the hallways at Park Avenue Elementary School...



## The bulletin board on microaggressions at Portland High School...







## From the Office:

### New Teams!

The Civil Rights Team Project would like to officially welcome back the civil rights team at Strong Elementary School.

We also have some exciting new leads for next year, and are confident that the 2014-2015 school year will see many new schools participating in the program.



### The Civil Rights Team Project and the Sea Dogs

"Sometimes you win, sometimes you lose, sometimes it rains."

*-Bull Durham*

And then sometimes... you get it all! On a cold, gray, and potentially unpleasant evening, the Civil Rights Team Project visited Hadlock Field for the May 9<sup>th</sup> game between the Sea Dogs and the New Hampshire Fisher Cats. The Sea Dogs won the game, 5-2. We lost out on some of the pregame ceremony due to time constraints. And it rained; not enough to cancel the game, but enough to make everything wet.

So we won, we lost, *and* it rained. Our spirits were bolstered by the collective goodwill and spirit that define the Civil Rights Team Project. For our third annual event with the Sea Dogs, we had students from 39 schools in attendance, with 559 students signed up for tickets. (Actual attendance was something lower than that, and I 100% blame the weather.)

Many of you voiced your disappointment that I didn't speak to the students before the game like I did last year. Blame the weather, as the plan was to have me speak again this year, but the rain forced the grounds crew to keep the tarp on the field for as long as possible. This meant cutting down the pregame ceremony time so that the game could start on time.

It's too bad, because I was ready to speak! (I'm not one to shy away from a microphone and a crowd.) Since it's a shame to waste a perfectly good speech, here's what I *planned* on saying to our Civil Rights Team Project participants:

It's great to be here tonight to celebrate sports and civil rights. I happen to think that sports and civil rights go great together. And if you've been paying attention to your current events, you'll probably agree.



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Last week, public opinion and the NBA came down hard on LA Clippers owner Donald Sterling after he voiced his horrifically racist opinions. NBA Commissioner Adam Silver banned Sterling from all league activities for life, and he was applauded for this decisive action.

Meanwhile, this weekend, Missouri graduate Michael Sam hopes to get drafted to play football in the NFL. With a little luck, he'll hear his name called either tonight or tomorrow, and he'll begin life as the NFL's first out, gay player.

These two events show us that the world of sports is becoming more and more respectful and inclusive. We are less likely to accept the kinds of hateful and divisive comments made by Donald Sterling, and more likely to accept someone like Michael Sam and people's differences.

It's impossible to imagine either of these events happening 50 years ago, and even unlikely to imagine them just 10 years ago.

So why now? It's tempting to think that these things happen because of the passing of time. But time doesn't tell the whole story... the world of sports is becoming more respectful and inclusive because of the commitment and dedication of individuals and organizations who are willing to *work* to make that change happen. We know that change doesn't happen overnight, but it's important to also remember that it doesn't happen by accident, either.

That's true in the world of sports, and it's also true in our schools. Just like with sports, our schools are becoming more respectful and inclusive places. Our schools are becoming more and more likely to reject bias and prejudice and accept people and their differences. Time does not tell the whole story; this change is brought about because of individuals and organizations who are willing to make that change happen. Our schools are becoming more respectful and inclusive places because of organizations like the Civil Rights Team Project, and because of individuals like you.

Your willingness to reject bias and work towards creating a safe school climate that accepts students of different races, ancestries, religions, abilities and disabilities, genders, and sexual orientations is *making a difference*. Thank you for what you do, and may we all continue with this important work, so that the world of sports and our schools keep moving forward and become places where all individuals are offered equal opportunities to accomplish their very best. Thank you!



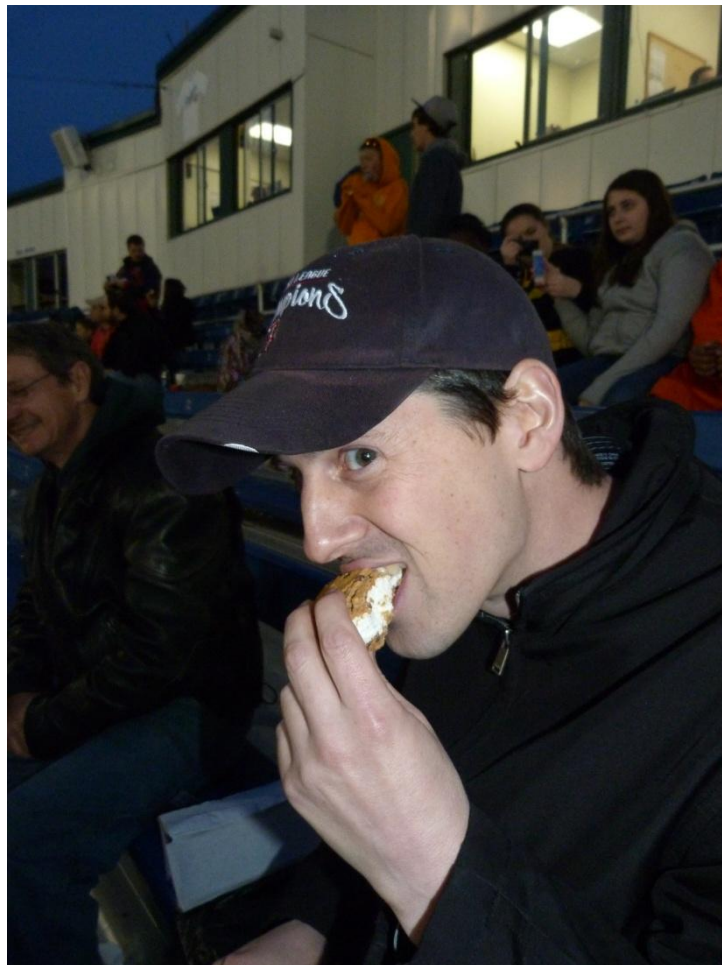
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(And in my head, this is followed by massive amounts of applause and me getting carried off the field on the shoulders of starry-eyed elementary school students. Or something like that.)

That's what I *wanted* to say. When I thought about what I'd say, my intent was pretty simple: make them feel important. That's really what this Sea Dogs event is all about.

I know that earlier I highlighted the idea that our night at Hadlock Field involved winning, losing, and rain, but on the whole, you'd have to chalk up our third annual CRTP and Sea Dogs event as another win. See you next year.



**(Yup. I pretty much love my job.)**





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This school year, we lost two civil rights legends. Nelson Mandela died at age 95 on December 5, 2013. Maya Angelou died at age 86 on May 28, 2014.

Both were prolific quote makers. I'd like to share two of their quotes here:

"No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its *opposite*." -*Nelson Mandela*

"When you know better, you do better." -*Maya Angelou*

Both Mandela and Angelou experienced significant personal hardship and tragedy; still, they rose. They would not be silenced, but even more incredible is how they never succumbed to bitterness. Mandela and Angelou were the ultimate optimists. They were not naïve; they knew, all too well, of our great and seemingly endless capacity for injustice and inhumanity. *And yet they still chose to believe that we could do better and create meaningful and lasting social change, through education.*

You, too, have that belief. You are very much aware of the bias that permeates our schools and society. You refuse the seductive denial of insisting that "We don't have those issues here." You fight off all the excuses that discourage anyone from ever trying to change anything. The work is hard and the rewards are not always tangible, but still, you won't succumb to bitterness.

No, rather than turn away from these important issues, you embrace them. You know that we have to talk about race, and ancestry, and religion, and disabilities, and gender, and sexual orientation. We have to, even when it makes us uncomfortable... *because it makes us uncomfortable.*

We have to, we do, and we will... and it's all because of you. Remember Nelson Mandela and Maya Angelou, and know that your work is part of their legacy, and the students coming through the Civil Rights Team Project are part of yours. Thank you.