



The Civil Rights Team Project

We get schools to think and talk about issues related to race and skin color, national origin and ancestry, religion, physical and mental disabilities, gender (including gender identity and expression), and sexual orientation.



Here's what you can read about in the October edition of *The Torch*:

From the Teams: Some of our civil rights teams got to work early this year! Read about their September accomplishments [here](#).

From the Office: After four advisor trainings across the state, we can't help but highlight the high level of commitment from the people who really make the Civil Rights Team Project work: our advisors.

From the News: We are highlighting six decades of news this time... and it all started with an activity from our advisor trainings last month.

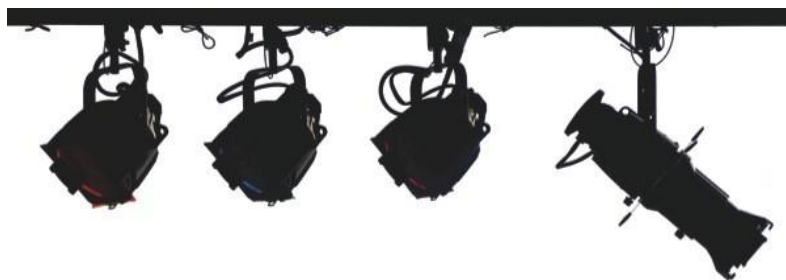
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This newsletter is written and distributed by the Civil Rights Team Project, a state-wide program under the auspices of the Maine Office of the Attorney General. The mission of the Civil Rights Team Project is to increase the safety of elementary, middle level, and high school students by reducing bias-motivated behaviors and harassment in our schools.

Brandon Baldwin—Program Manager, Newsletter Editor
Debi Lettre Goodheart—Civil Rights Project Administrator
Janet Mills—Attorney General



From the Teams:



Congratulations to the civil rights teams at **Leonard Middle School in Old Town** and **Waterville Junior High School** for being selected by

the Maine Youth Action Network (MYAN) to participate in their Superpower Partners program this year. They are two of eight groups to be selected this year, and they will receive training and support from MYAN throughout the school year to help them in their efforts to make youth-driven change in their schools and communities.

For more information on this program, check out MYAN's website. (And when they put out a call for applications for the 2016-2017 school year, we'll promote it!)

www.myan.org/programs/trainings

At **Falmouth Middle School**, the civil rights team has created a colorful mural on their bulletin board that successfully incorporates Suicide Prevention Month in their work. The team took their existing and informative bulletin board and added multicolor sticky notes, one for each FMS student, with the handwritten message that "You are loved." The notes frame the bulletin board's already-existing content, which includes:

- A flow chart asking students if they are on the civil rights team, encouraging them to participate (and including our unofficial mission statement)
- A plug for their Instagram account (@fmscivilrights)
- The wonderful "[This school welcomes YOU](#)" poster from Teaching Tolerance
- The "[Why Civil Rights Teams Exist](#)" framework from the CRTP Dropbox

Hey, FMS civil rights team... your bulletin board is alive! It's October and you've already gone ahead and changed it. People notice this kind of change (especially when it features so much color). More importantly, though, you've taken the issue of suicide prevention and used it to frame the work of your civil rights team. (And thanks to their advisor, Lauren Murphy, for sharing!)

At **Gorham High School**, the civil rights team is busy being allies. They promoted Ally Week with a great poster (check the next page to see it) that they presented to their peers during advisory period. They're also advocating for change in their school's harassment policies to include protections based on gender identity and expression. They've met with their superintendent and are in communication with the policy committee. Up next? Advocating for gender neutral bathrooms, an especially important safety measure for gender non-conforming and trans* students.



THE TORCH

(CRTP NEWSLETTER) OCT '15

Hey, GHS civil rights team... your poster demonstrates a really sophisticated understanding of what it means to be an ally. We could all learn from it. The poster is great, but even more exciting is the fact that you clearly believe in what it says, because you're putting it into practice. Advocating for a more inclusive harassment policy shows that being an ally isn't just a label that we wear; it's about *what we do*. (And thanks to their advisor, Rachael Grady, for sharing!)

At **Woolwich Central School**, the civil rights team is starting the year off by using Facebook to get people thinking and talking about civil rights issues. They posted a video on gender stereotypes and posted the following message:

The WCS Civil Rights Team would like everyone in our community to watch this video that challenges gender stereotypes. We should all feel free to express ourselves the way WE want to, not how others expect us to. Like and Share if you agree.

(And you can check out the WCS civil rights team Facebook page [right here](#).)

Hey, WCS civil rights team... there is so much quality civil rights content out there. This is a smart way to share it. Sometimes we think that we need to create everything ourselves, but creating space and opportunities for thought and discussion are just as important as creating content. You've created the space. Keep posting the content and you'll be creating opportunities. (And thanks to their advisor, Kyle Beeton, for sharing!)

At **Valley Rivers Middle School and Fort Kent High School**, the civil rights team has become the official welcoming committee for students new to their combined school. New students are assigned a peer mentor from the civil rights team who answers their questions, shows them around, and helps them figure out life in their new school. The entire orientation process lasts two weeks. Advisor Kara Beal explains that this is particularly important in their school, as new students are usually not Acadian and often not Franco-American, thus marking them as different from the majority of their peers.

Hey, Valley Rivers and Fort Kent High School civil rights team... three of my favorite words I use in the Civil Rights Team Project are *safe*, *welcoming*, and *respectful*. That's what we want in our schools, and I'm sure it's what every new student in any schools is thinking about. "Am I going to belong here?" You are making sure that students of all identities, no matter who they are, receive a positive answer to their question. It's great that the first person every new student at your school meets is a member of the civil rights team. (And thanks to their advisor, Kara Beal, for sharing!)



THE TORCH (CRTP NEWSLETTER) OCT '15

The Falmouth Middle Schools civil rights team bulletin board...



The GHS civil rights team's poster on being a good ally and a member of the Valley Rivers and Fort Kent High School civil rights team and welcoming committee works to create a school that is safe, welcoming, and respectful...

TIPS ON BEING AN **ALLY**

1. Being an ally is about listening
Listening to a diversity of marginalized voices can help you understand the core of any given issue.
2. Allies don't take breaks
Although we all make mistakes, allies try their best to always stick up for what they believe in.
3. Allies educate themselves constantly
We need to educate ourselves about the issues facing those with whom we want to be allied and about the history of said oppression.
4. You can't be an ally in isolation
Any person who wants to act in solidarity needs to recognize that allyship cannot exist in isolation.
5. When criticized or called out, allies listen, apologize, act accountably, and act differently going forward
When you screw up and damage the trust of those you have allied yourself with, listening is important, but it's not enough.

BROUGHT TO YOU BY THE CIVIL RIGHTS TEAM





From the Advisors:

This month we're featuring Bonnie Robbins, a school counselor at Whittier Middle School in Poland. Bonnie has been advising the civil rights team there for 8 years, and also worked with the team as an intern for another year.



(And it's worth noting that Bonnie has shepherded many interns towards the Civil Rights Team Project in her time as advisor, including another this year!)

1. What do you like about being a civil rights team advisor?

I love working with the students to look at the issues in our school and have student voices and ideas to find ways to best educate and be proactive in helping our school community.

2. What is your favorite moment or memory associated with the CRTP?

My favorite memory being part of my civil rights team is the first year we participated in the R-word campaign with our elementary/middle school life skills class. We brought in a speaker from the Special Olympics to talk to our student body and then held a school-wide Spread the Word to End the Word pledge. We educated our students about different disabilities and how we all are different in our own way, which makes us unique. We followed up with a K-8 Talent Show with all proceeds from the evening going to our RSU16 Special Olympics Team. It was a special week in our school, and we have continued the tradition for the past 4 years.

3. What do you see as the biggest civil rights issue in your school?

I think every year what we find to be the biggest civil rights issue is the use of language. Kids throw around the "R-word" and/or "gay" way too often. Our goal has been to educate our school on why it's not ok to use those words in a joking or mean manner.

4. What do you like about your civil rights team this year?

The dedication, passion, and commitment of my students!

5. What makes you optimistic about our work in the future?

There is so much great work being done around our state that I'm in hopes it will stick with kids across Maine and they will continue to advocate for civil rights issues as they



THE TORCH (CRTP NEWSLETTER) OCT '15

progress through school and enter the real world. Brandon is always engaging and energizing and has a clear vision of the CRTP and where it is headed.

6. What advice or wisdom could you offer to other civil rights team advisors?

Listen to the students, let them lead the meetings and put their creative juices to work. Often some of the best ideas come from kids (of all ages)! It's OK to do several small projects throughout the year or even just a couple of big projects. It's really about educating your school about civil rights and making your team presence known as helping people! And most of all...have fun with your team of kids! Listen to them. Lots of team building to start off the year can help build trusting relationships.

Also, access Brandon if you need help! He's always willing to listen to ideas and give suggestions!





From the Office:

New Teams!

This is an exciting time of year for the Civil Rights Team Project as new schools register for the 2015-2016 school year. The following schools have registered and plan on having civil rights teams this year: Cherryfield Elementary School, Mast Landing School in Freeport, Messalonskee High School in Oakland, Mt. Blue Middle School in Farmington, Mt. Jefferson Junior High School in Lee, Narraguagus High School in Harrison, Noble High School in North Berwick, and Windham Primary School.



We've also added CRTP affiliate groups at Hall-Dale High School in Farmingdale, Madison Elementary School, Oxford Hills Comprehensive High School in South Paris, and Wiscasset Elementary School.

Welcome, everyone! We look forward to working with you this year.

Advisor Trainings

We've completed our series of advisor trainings around the state, with dates in Augusta, Brewer, Portland, and Presque Isle. We had 184 adults attend this year, up from 172 last year. We know that it's not easy for advisors to take time away from school, especially so early in the school year. But they do, and that reflects the level of commitment we see in the Civil Rights Team Project.

It's wonderful that we have 184 adults who make time to attend these trainings. It becomes even more wonderful when you look at the details.

- Adults from all five RSU #16 schools (Elm Street School, Minot Consolidated School, Poland Community School, Poland Regional High School, Whittier Middle School) were represented!
- Hillari Morgan from the Holbrook School in Holden attended in her 35th week of pregnancy.
- Bridget Wright from Foxcroft Academy finished the training and then made her way south for a NEASC conference on school accreditation in Boston.
- Bruce Brann came for the fifth straight year as a co-advisor and administrator from Harrison Middle School in Yarmouth. Now that's administrative support!
- Emily Rideout and Emma Irish from Lee Academy, who couldn't attend the training in Brewer because of a scheduling conflict, got up early and drove more than two hours north to the training in Presque Isle.

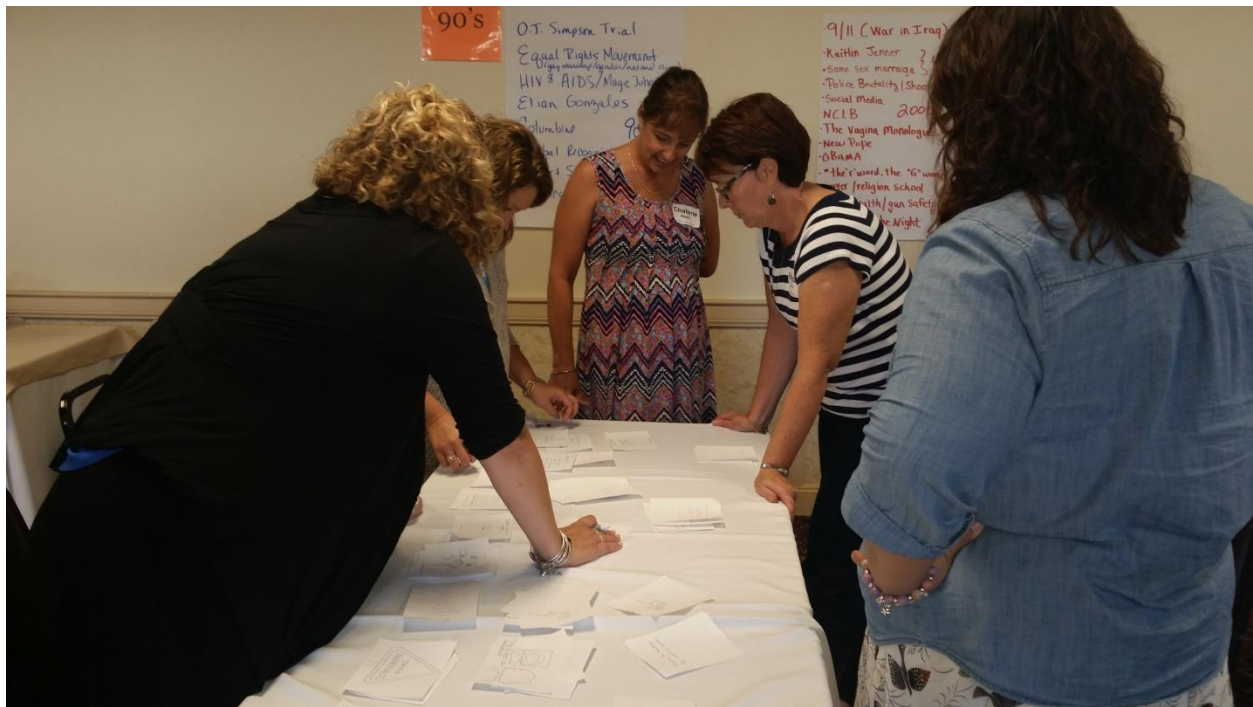


THE TORCH (CRTP NEWSLETTER) OCT '15

- Three educators from Sexual Assault Response Services of Southern Maine (SARSSM) attended. To Maye Emlein, Katie Church, and Cole Leighton: we very much appreciate your commitment to connecting with us and learning about what the Civil Rights Team Project and our civil rights teams do.
- Kellie Sanborn, the advisor for the new civil rights team at Messalonskee High School, who had this to say on her school's registration form in response to the question about how she had heard of the Civil Rights Team Project: "I was on a civil rights team through the CRTP in high school." That is pretty much the greatest thing ever. Just think, the students on your current teams could be joining us at the advisor trainings in a few years!

These are some of the committed adults who attended our trainings. We wanted to highlight their stories because we think they're representative of what really makes the Civil Rights Team Project so successful. Thank you to all our advisors!

Advisors in Presque Isle work together to create a systems model on what it takes to be an effective and successful civil rights team.





Advisors in Portland talk about the important civil rights events from their lifetimes...



Student Trainings

The Civil Rights Team Project is getting ready for an aggressive schedule of student trainings. We have thirteen training dates in five locations. Our final training is on November 13 and we'll have plenty to share in the December edition of *The Torch*.



From the News:

Civil Rights Issues through the Decades

At each of our advisor trainings this year, we started with a question:

- During which decade did you start to develop a real interest in this work?



Advisors could define “this work” however they wanted to as long as it had *something* to do with why they were attending a Civil Rights Team Project training. The question was really asking how we ended up where we are.

We then moved on to our next question:

- From a social/cultural/historical perspective, what was happening during this decade related to race and skin color, national origin and ancestry, religion, disabilities, gender (including gender identity and expression), and sexual orientation?

We answered that question individually and then got into groups based on the decade we chose and compiled our answers on chart paper. We then went around the room in chronological order and shared what we had.

It was wonderful activity, and it feels like something worth writing about here, because everything we wrote about on the charts was “in the news.” That said, then, here are some observations I have about our “Decades Activity” from the advisor trainings.

“**This IS American history.**”

Someone made this observation at one of the trainings. Our charts didn’t include every important event in American history from the past 50+ years, but it was pretty close. So what exactly does this mean?

It could tell us something about America itself. I’ll defer to the historians (and especially Howard Zinn) on that one. Clearly, though, a focus on civil rights issues is going to highlight much of what’s been important in American history. You can also take important ideas and events in American history and view them from a civil rights perspective. American history and civil rights history go great together.



THE TORCH

(CRTP NEWSLETTER) OCT '15

Pick a decade... *any* decade.

There were certain issues that kept popping up as important in different decades. They included women fighting for full equality, issues of police violence affecting people and communities of color, and immigration issues. This makes sense, as these issues are unresolved. As long as they remain unresolved, they will continue to be issues in the decades ahead.

That can be really, really frustrating, because it suggests that we aren't making any progress on the issues that matter. But...

The LGBTQ+ movement has made incredible progress.

LGBTQ+ issues weren't even talked about in the 1960's. The Stonewall riots of 1969 started the modern gay rights movement, but most Americans didn't even know that it happened. I don't think that anyone could have predicted the great progress we've made towards recognizing the full humanity of LGBTQ+ Americans. It may not have been fast (or far) enough, but it's still impressive, and it should give us all hope that we can accomplish great things in the next 10, 25, or 50 years.

Pop culture matters!

Our charts featured a lot of literature, film, television shows, music, sports, and other forms of entertainment. Old-style history might pooh-pooh pop culture, focusing more on "big" and "important" events... mostly politics and war.

But how could any civil rights history ignore these (and other) pop culture nuggets our charts? Sidney Poitier winning an Oscar, *All in the Family*, *Roots*, the rise of hip hop, Madonna and female sexual empowerment, Magic Johnson retiring from basketball with HIV, *Life Goes On*, Ellen DeGeneres coming out on national television, RuPaul, *Milk*, *Glee*, Lady Gaga, Caitlyn Jenner...

Popular culture can both mirror our society and push it in new directions. Seeing so many references to popular culture on our charts is an important reminder that this stuff is worth studying.

Omissions! (Or, where were _____ ?)

Whenever someone puts together a big list, you can *always* expect people to respond with great outrage over perceived slights and omissions. So, then, I'll be playing the part of every outraged online commenter, calling attention to all the important events that weren't specifically mentioned on any of our charts at any of the trainings.

Where were...



THE TORCH

(CRTP NEWSLETTER) OCT '15

- *To Kill a Mockingbird*? (Both the book *and* the movie!)
- Cassius Clay embracing the Nation of Islam and becoming Muhammad Ali?
- The attempts to pass the Equal Rights Amendment of the 1970s?
- The American Indian Movement and the occupation of Alcatraz, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and Wounded Knee?
- The kidnapping of Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympics?
- Billie Jean King vs. Bobby Riggs in the Battle of the Sexes?
- *The Cosby Show*? (I know... yuck.)
- Oprah? I mean... Oprah!
- The Americans with Disabilities Act?
- *Brokeback Mountain*?
- The rise of the #blacklivesmatter movement?
- All the other things that I'm forgetting?

I'm *entirely sure* that I left out some important stuff, too, because there's just so much of it, and no one can remember everything.

We, too, are history.

The formation of the Civil Rights Team Project was mentioned on a few charts. Yeah! It all started in 1996 as a pilot program in just twelve schools. Now we are in over 150 schools. That's amazing.

It's worth noting that next year we will be celebrating our twentieth anniversary, and we have plans to highlight our own history. Start thinking about artifacts you might be able to contribute to an exhibit honoring our history. Anything that shows what our civil rights teams have done in the past could be a part of this exhibit. (And *especially* if it reflects our current focus and philosophy.)

Current events are important.

Today's current events are tomorrow's history. There were many comments stating that it's important for our students to learn some of the history we highlighted on the charts. That's a pretty compelling argument for discussing current events with our civil rights teams. We don't want to become the current events club, and we want to keep our focus in our schools and communities, but what's happening in the "outside" world has an influence over what's happening locally. (It's why we have a section in the Civil Rights Team Project newsletter called "In the News!") It's all connected, and we can use what's happening in the world to build our students' knowledge base so that they'll better understand what's happening around them in their schools and local communities.



THE TORCH

(CRTP NEWSLETTER) OCT '15

The age diversity of the CRTP is a beautiful thing.

One form of diversity we don't talk about all that much is age diversity. It was on full display during this activity, as we had advisors of different generations sharing some of the civil rights-related events from their formative years. It felt *important*. I have such high levels of respect for the people who were doing this work in the 60s, 70s, and 80s, and are still doing it today. I can't help but think that it's inspiring for the people who wrote on the 2000s and 2010+ charts. It might feel daunting to think that there's a lifetime of work ahead of us, but it's important that we keep moving things forward, and that we keep inspiring new generations of advocates to keep the work going. The torch must be passed.