


12-2019

The Torch (December 2019)

C RTP

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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.



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

From the Teams:

In this edition, read about these civil rights team activities and project initiatives...

- ⇒ At Mt. Blue Middle School, Sumner Memorial High School, and Thornton Academy, civil rights teams helped change school policies and practices to make them more welcoming and inclusive for students of all identities.
- ⇒ Our first-ever statewide campaign was a great success! Civil rights teams all around Maine celebrated the Day of Welcome on October 25, and we've included 27 teams in our recap of the event.

From the Office:

In addition to enjoying what we saw and heard from civil rights teams about what they did for the Day of Welcome, we've been quite busy ourselves! We launched the 2019-2020 school year with a new Civil Rights Team Action Plan and record attendance at the advisor trainings. We've also welcomed fifteen new civil rights teams to the Project.

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

From the Teams:

The hard work some of our civil rights teams did last year on school policies has led to some positive changes for the 2019-2020 school year.



- At **Mt. Blue Middle School in Farmington**, the civil rights team worked with administration to make changes to the school's dress code. The team analyzed last year's version through the lens of the civil rights categories, identifying specific sections that could be more inclusive of students of all identities. Using a model policy, they crafted their own version of a dress code, submitted it to their administration, and met with them to discuss potential changes. The new version is in this year's student handbook and features more gender-neutral and inclusive language around clothing and body types, a religious exemption for the rule prohibiting hats and head coverings, and a ban on all clothing with hate speech and symbols.
- At **Sumner Memorial High School**, the civil rights team was brought in as consultants as RSU#24 considered a new policy to protect transgender and gender expansive students. After they were approached for their input, the team spent time researching the issues and how to effectively advocate for change. In the spring they presented to the policy committee, where they made a clear ask for the district to adopt a policy similar to the one Portland Public Schools has. They shared student testimonials and research/works cited highlighting the need for such a policy. The presentation was well received, their request was reviewed over the summer, and the district officially adopted the [Transgender and Gender Expansive Students policy](#) on September 3.
- At **Thornton Academy in Saco**, the civil rights team successfully lobbied their school to include language in the student handbook banning hate symbols from campus. The process started with [this letter](#) and a subsequent meeting with school administration. They explained exactly why symbols like the swastika and Confederate flag are considered hateful, showed clear precedent for other schools banning hate symbols, and connected their ask with the school's core value of compassion. Administration listened and included the expectation that students "refrain from the display of hate symbols and language on clothing and belongings" in this year's student handbook.

Hey, MBMS, SMHS, and TA civil rights teams... changing school policy isn't easy, but you helped make it happen. You did your homework, learned the process, and made a convincing case. The work you did last year will have an impact this year and beyond, as the policies now better protect students of all identities and support a more intentional approach to inclusion. You've shown that civil rights teams can create meaningful and lasting change, and this is exactly why "Consider Changes to School Policies and Practices" is one of our recommended project initiatives in the CRT Action Plan. (And thanks to all of their advisors—Kayla Girardin and Kat Zachary at MBMS, Michelle Wyler at SMHS, and Elizabeth Sampson and Geoffrey Slack at TA—for sharing.)



Day of Welcome

October 25, 2019 was a banner day in the Civil Rights Team Project, as civil rights teams all across Maine celebrated our first-ever statewide campaign with the Day of Welcome. Civil rights teams used the event to highlight the idea that our school communities are for *everyone*. They worked from our Day of Welcome action plan, utilized our official resources, and brought in plenty of their own inspiration and creativity to make the day a great success. We got the attention of Governor Janet Mills through [this official letter of support](#), received some [positive press coverage](#), and engaged thousands of students, school staff, and community members in our work.

From the Teams:

For the Day of Welcome, civil rights teams were specifically tasked with creating a sign, banner, or display in a prominent location in their school, with a “We welcome everyone” message including specific references to the six civil rights categories. The diversity of our school populations was mirrored in the many ways teams approached this challenge, so that we achieved both consistency of message *and* creativity in presentation.

Following are some examples of the many ways in which teams approached this challenge:



● ● ● ● ● **Captain Albert Stevens Elementary School (Belfast)** ● ● ● ● ●



● ● ● ● ● **Falmouth Elementary School** ● ● ● ● ●

From the Teams:



● ● ● ● ● Frank H. Harrison Middle School (Yarmouth)



● ● ● ● ● Holden Elementary School ● ● ● ● ●

From the Teams:



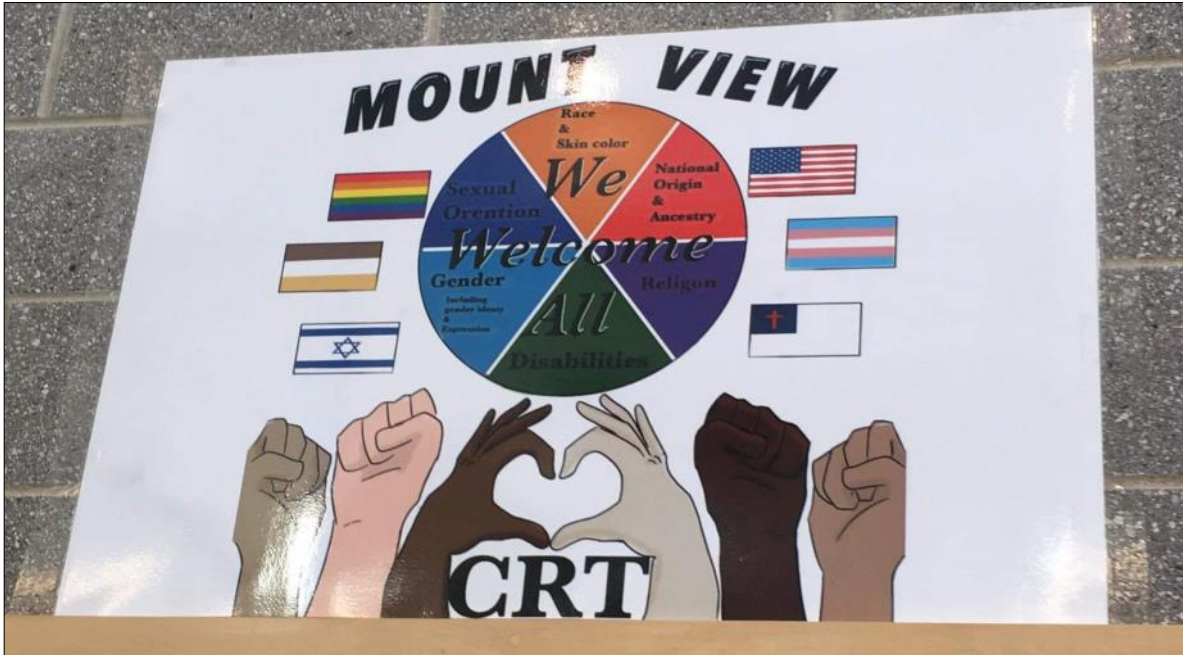
Mt. Blue Middle School (Farmington) ● ● ● ● ●



● ● ● ● ● **Maranacook Community Middle School (Readfield)** ● ● ● ● ●

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

From the Teams:



● ● ● ● ● Mount View High School (Thorndike) ● ● ● ● ●



● ● ● ● ● Noble Middle School (Berwick) ● ● ● ● ●

From the Teams:



Palermo Consolidated School



● ● ● ● ● **Poland Regional High School + Whittier Middle School** ● ● ● ● ●

From the Teams:

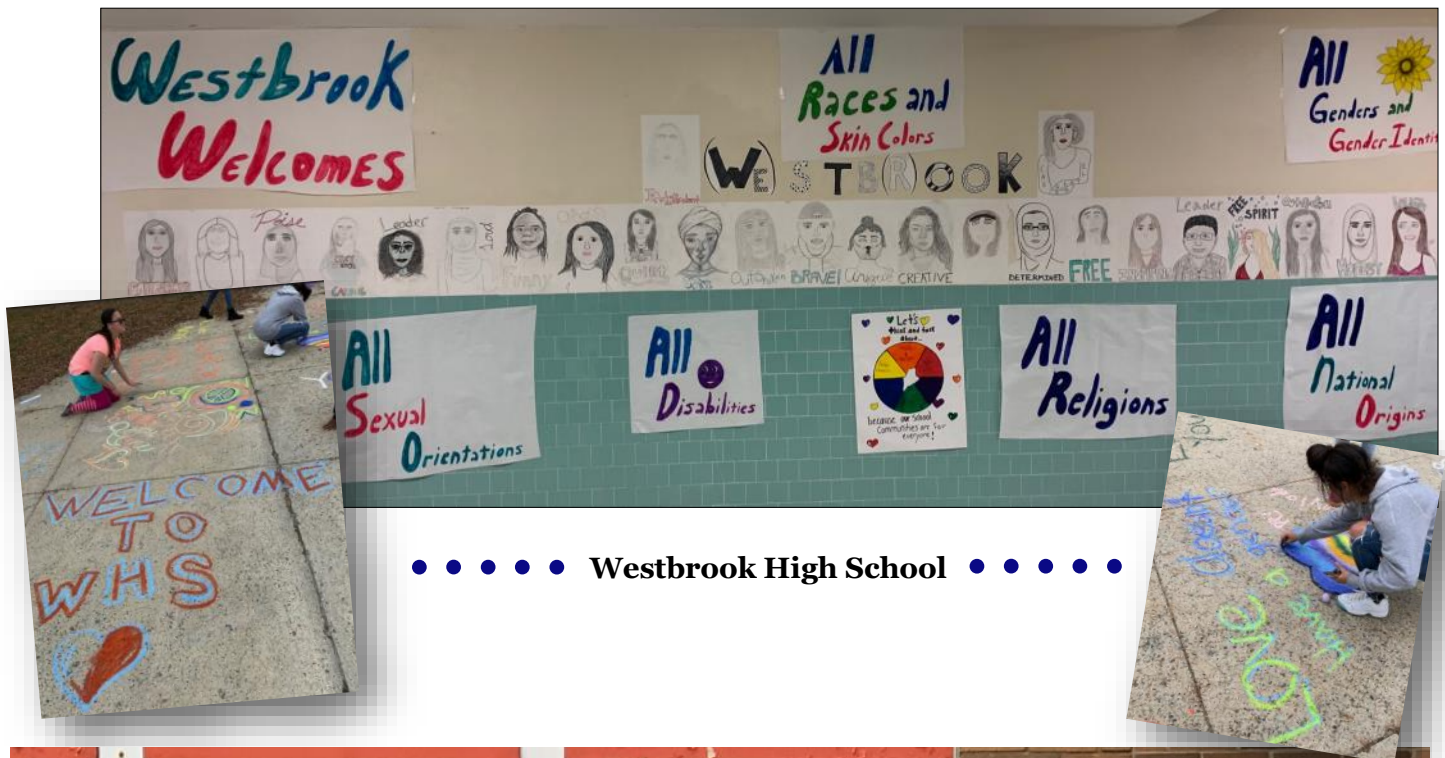


• • • • • Skowhegan Area High School • • • • •



TW Kelly Dirigo Middle School (Dixfield) • • • • •

From the Teams:



• • • • • Westbrook High School • • • • •



Winslow Junior High School



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From the Teams:

In addition to creating a sign, banner, or display and promoting it as part of the Day of Welcome, civil rights teams were challenged with the option of doing more to engage their school communities with this event. Here's a sampling of what some teams did to make this event even bigger and better (use numbers to refer to images on page 12):

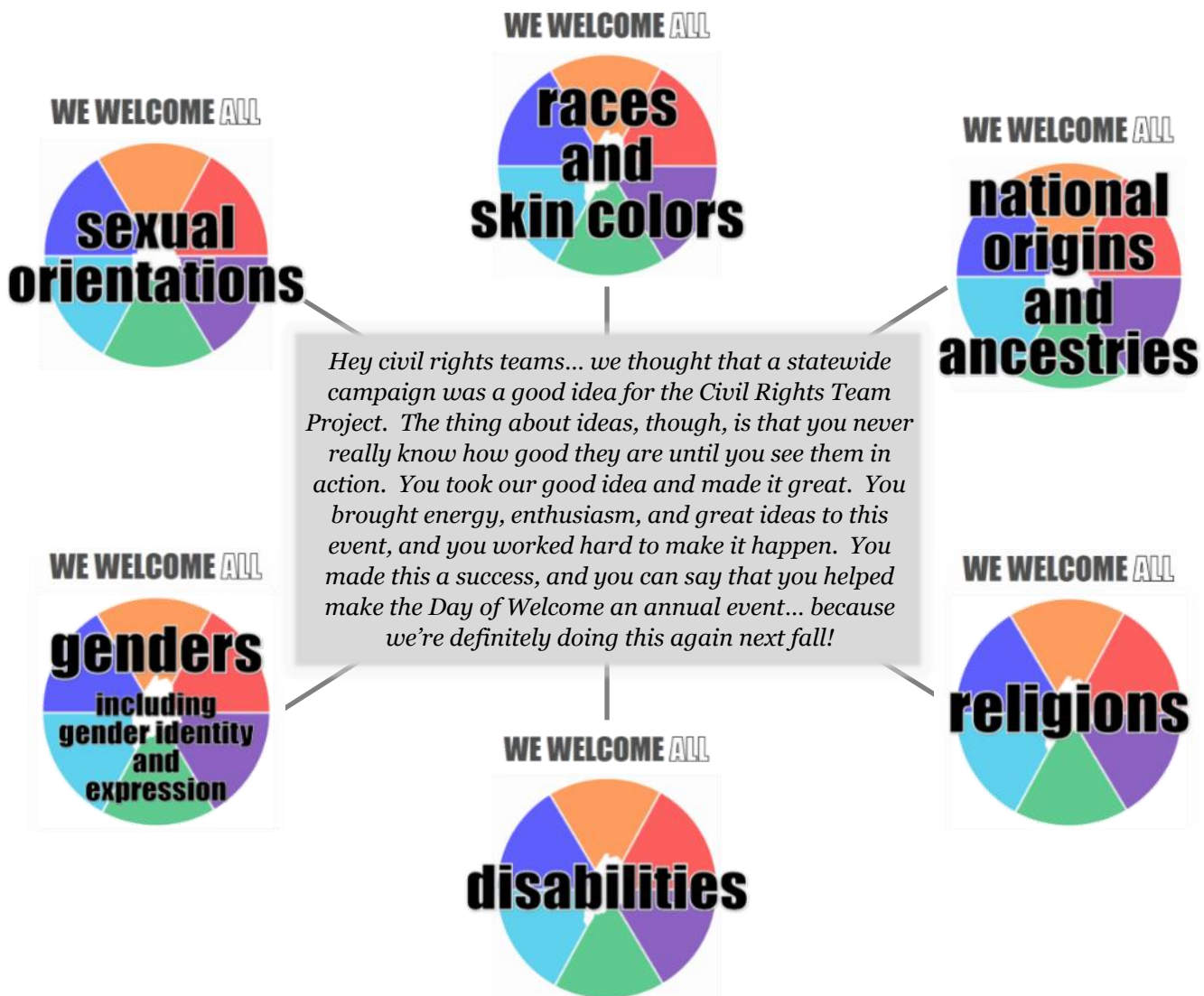


- At **Bruce Whittier Middle School in Poland**, the civil rights team recognized and celebrated the diversity in their school community with an identity exploration activity. In advisory groups, the team shared a slideshow explaining the Day of Welcome and identities connected to the six civil rights categories. Students wrote down pieces and parts of their identities on colorful papers, which the team collected and presented as a large collage labeled *WE ARE...* **(1)**
- At **Fairview Elementary School in Auburn**, the civil rights team borrowed one of the CRTP head cut-out focus signs, collected photos of students with it at their school Harvestfest, and created a collage as the centerpiece of their welcoming display. The crowd sourcing effort helped highlight their message, as students engaged with the display as they tried to find themselves in the collage. **(2)**
- At **Falmouth High School**, the civil rights team designed an activity for teachers to share in advisory groups. The activity prompted students to think about how welcoming their school community is for students of all identities. It culminated with a “welcome challenge,” asking students what they could do to make their school more inclusively welcoming. Responses were collected and shared through a slideshow.
- At **Falmouth Middle School**, the civil rights team recorded a short video to explain exactly what it means to welcome people of all identities, going through each of the six civil rights categories. The video was shared in advisory groups, generating good discussion and understanding for the event.
- At **Greely High School in Cumberland**, the civil rights team hosted a guest speaker, Mufalo Chitam of the Maine Immigrant Rights Coalition. She gave a powerful and moving speech about the experiences of immigrant Mainers and some of the things that have made them feel or not feel welcome here in Maine. The assembly was followed by welcome-themed discussions in advisory groups. **(3)**
- At **Greely Middle School in Cumberland**, the elementary and middle level civil rights teams worked together in engaging their school community with the event. The elementary team expanded the Day of Welcome outside of school. They created and delivered an inclusively welcoming banner for the Cumberland fire station. They also brought community members into the school, with guest readers sharing books from the [I'm Your Neighbor welcoming library](#) in classrooms, and community greeters from local churches, police and fire departments, town government, and RSU #51 at the front door to welcome students to school on Oct. 25. The middle level team sponsored a schoolwide poster contest during language classes, giving every student time and opportunity to participate. The prompt to create a poster with a positive message of inclusion and a focus on the civil rights categories generated great work. The team hung all the posters around the school, but specifically recognized the three winners by highlighting their work in the lobby and rewarding them with a donut party for their entire language class. **(4 + 5)**
- At **Lebanon Elementary School**, the civil rights team created table tents with welcoming-themed questions for lunchtime discussion. Students eagerly participated in conversations about what they can do to make sure everyone truly feels welcome in their school community. **(6)**
- At **Mill Stream Elementary School in Norridgewock**, the civil rights team created and distributed doorknob hangers for classrooms. The hangers include an inclusively welcoming message with the CRTP wheel and the school's mascot, Milton the Giraffe. **(7)**
- At **Sanford High School**, the civil rights team shared a poem template with students to engage them in

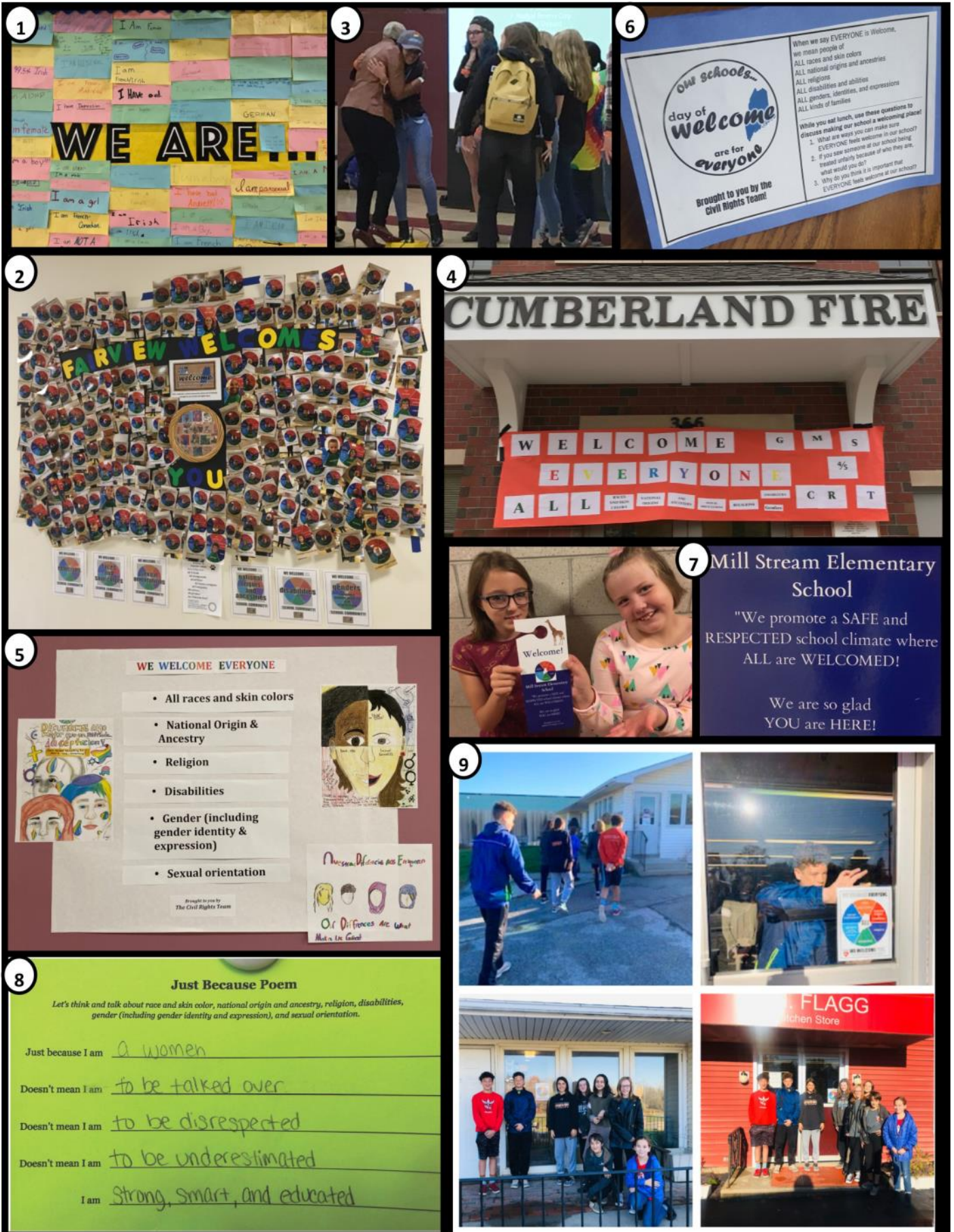
From the Teams:

thinking about stereotypes and assumptions connected to their identities. They collected completed poems and shared them through bulletin board displays and in slideshows on school tv's. **(8)**

- At the **Shapleigh School in Kittery**, the civil rights team was featured as a special interruption during the schoolwide newscast. They came in to deliver the breaking news that Governor Janet Mills was in full support of the Day of Welcome and read her letter over the air.
- At the **Veazie Community School**, the civil rights team stepped outside of their school to recruit local businesses to post a customized version of the CRTP-designed community welcoming sign. Want to see one? Get to American Concrete, Raegamuffins, R.M. Flagg Restaurant Equipment, Stucco Lodge, or Tradewinds in Veazie! (And thank you to these area businesses for being so welcoming!) **(9)**
- At **Washburn District High School**, the civil rights team held a civil rights version of a pep rally to create and show school support for the statewide initiative. The team encouraged everyone to wear their school colors to support the idea that their school community is for everyone, shared the letter from Governor Mills and information about the day at a schoolwide assembly, and had students show their support with a group photo and signature banner. All this was made more meaningful because of [the mural the team created last year](#), which served as the event's centerpiece.



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



1

3

6

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8

9

Mill Stream Elementary School
 "We promote a SAFE and RESPECTED school climate where ALL are WELCOMED!"
 We are so glad YOU are HERE!

Just Because Poem
Let's think and talk about race and skin color, national origin and ancestry, religion, disabilities, gender (including gender identity and expression), and sexual orientation.

Just because I am a women
 Doesn't mean I am to be talked over
 Doesn't mean I am to be disrespected
 Doesn't mean I am to be underestimated
 I am Strong, smart, and educated



From the Office:

For the 2019-2020 school year, we've added civil rights teams in:

- Auburn Middle School
- Brunswick High School
- Congin Elementary School in Westbrook
- Connors Emerson School in Bar Harbor
(new 5/6 team in addition to existing middle level team)
- George Stevens Academy in Blue Hill
- Hampden Academy
- Penquis Valley Middle/High School in Milo
- Reeds Brook Middle School in Hampden
- Scarborough Middle School
- South Portland High School
- St. George Municipal School Unit in Tenants Harbor
- Village Elementary School in Gorham
- Weatherbee School in Hampden
- Whitefield Elementary School
- York High School



This brings our total number of participating schools to **175!**

Advisor Trainings

The CRTP recently concluded a busy training schedule for our adult advisors, with sessions in Augusta, Brewer, Falmouth, Farmington, Portland, Presque Isle, and Saco. For this year, and moving forward, we re-emphasized the importance of attending the advisor trainings, as the face-to-face communication helps us build our network and offers direct engagement with content and resources that just can't be replicated otherwise. We saw a marked increase in attendance this year, up 15% from 2018, as a total of 248 advisors attended, including 70 new advisors at our new advisor orientation sessions.



At both versions of these trainings, for experienced and new advisors, we celebrated the active advisor role and connected it with the launch of our new CRT Action Plan. The action plan offers a clear path forward with ample opportunity for flexibility and creativity. It marks a major change for how we do things in the Civil Rights Team Project. Initial response has been overwhelmingly positive.

At the trainings for experienced advisors we took a deeper dive into some civil rights-related content, as we believe that this work is an ongoing process for all of us to engage with on a personal level. We got practical with Francesca Ramsey's YouTube video [Getting Called Out: How to Apologize](#), but also looked at the bigger picture of why apologies are so important, but often difficult, when they're related to civil rights issues.

Our trainings concluded with a simple thank you and a little CRTP swag: newly-designed focus signs and CRT pins! Both are the direct result of civil rights team advisor input:

- Greely Middle School's elementary advisors Katie Campbell and Ali Waterhouse suggested adding language to the focus sign's invitation to think and talk about civil rights issues to offer more framework around those conversations. We liked that idea and added on "Because our school communities are for *everyone*."
- Hermon High School's Lillian Barry challenged us to create something to honor civil rights team participa-

From the Office:

tion in high school graduation ceremonies. Lillian envisioned it, Stacie designed it, and this year we have CRT pins for our graduating seniors. (We figured that since all our advisors have already graduated from high school, they deserve pins, too.)



Thanks to Katie, Ali, and Lillian, and everyone who attended the advisor trainings and orientations this year, for embracing their active advisor role. We will continue to listen and respond to advisor feedback, and look forward to seeing what we do with the new CRT Action Plan in the 2019-2020 school year.



Here are a few responses we received to the question “How are you feeling about the new Advisor Expectations and CRT Action Plan?” on the Advisor Training Exit Slips:

- I like having a balance of structure and freedom and flexibility.
- While it looks like a lot to do, I am excited because it's well organized and user friendly. I think this will motivate us all to do more!
- Previous years, I left feeling inspired but my plans and dreams fell flat due to letting kids try and plan things. This year, with a few definites, I feel more confident that the students will be engaged and successful with these initiatives...
- This is a manageable way to do the work, and it cuts out a lot of the “Well, what should we do?” time.
- Great—initially the expectations felt overwhelming but now after review they feel doable. Thank you for setting us up with more structure, resources, activity ideas—very helpful with our busy days as educators.
- SUPPORTED.
STRUCTURED.
ORGANIZED.
EMPOWERED.
LISTENED TO...

A special thank you to the advisors who served on our panels and shared their knowledge and wisdom with our newest advisors at the orientation sessions:

Kim Raymond from Leroy H. Smith School, Angela Smart-Davis from Caravel Middle School, and Michelle Wyler from Sumner Memorial High School (Brewer orientation)

Ali Waterhouse from Greely Middle School, Matthew Shardlow from Windham Middle School, and Ashley Pullen from Falmouth High School (Portland orientation)

