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The Torch (February 2020)

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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 February edition of *The Torch*:

From the Teams:

In this edition, read about how civil rights teams have been engaging their school communities with project initiatives from the new CRT Action Plan!

Enjoy a snapshot of the different approaches teams took when completing the following CRTP project options:

- ⇒ Consider Changes to Policies and Practices
- ⇒ Honor Martin Luther King's Legacy
- ⇒ Recognize and Celebrate Your School's Diversity
- ⇒ Respond to a Public Incident of Bias

From the Office:

With in-service trainings, a new advisor orientation, and multiple efforts to create new content for use by civil rights teams, there's always a lot happening at the office!

(Don't miss our statewide conference save-the-date on the final page!)

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:

Civil rights teams have been engaging their school communities through project initiatives from the new CRT Action Plan.

CRTP PROJECT INITIATIVE:

Consider Changes to Policies and Practices

At **MDI High School in Bar Harbor**, the civil rights team teamed up with the Gay-Straight-Diversity Alliance to advocate for gender neutral restroom options in their school. The team consulted with administration and surveyed the student body to see where public opinion was on the issue. They then used the survey results in selecting content and messaging for a school-wide presentation. They adopted the slogan “*Normal*” is what we make it and showed that while gender neutral restrooms are especially important in enhancing the privacy and safety of trans and gender expansive students, they are accessible and available to everyone. They shared buttons with their slogan for anyone who wanted to show support and conducted a follow-up survey to inform their next steps. They are currently in the process of identifying specific restrooms that would be private and safe gender neutral options.



At **Portland High School**, the civil rights team shared some recommendations on how their school can be inclusive of people with disabilities. They started the process by identifying issues through team brainstorming on a Google doc. They then consulted with teachers and students from the Special Education department and the Maine School for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. The team then looked at these issues, researched and identified potential action steps, and shared their findings with school administration. The process created productive conversation and has already led to action, as the principal has asked building facilities for better signage to clearly identify accessible entrances and instructions for accessing elevators.

Hey, MDI and Portland HS civil rights teams...for our school communities to be truly welcoming, they need to be fully accessible. Too often entrances, bathrooms, and other facilities are exclusionary, but you are helping to change that. You have listened to others to inform your advocacy, which has helped you be heard. Keep asking questions, listening, and speaking up!

CRTP PROJECT INITIATIVE:

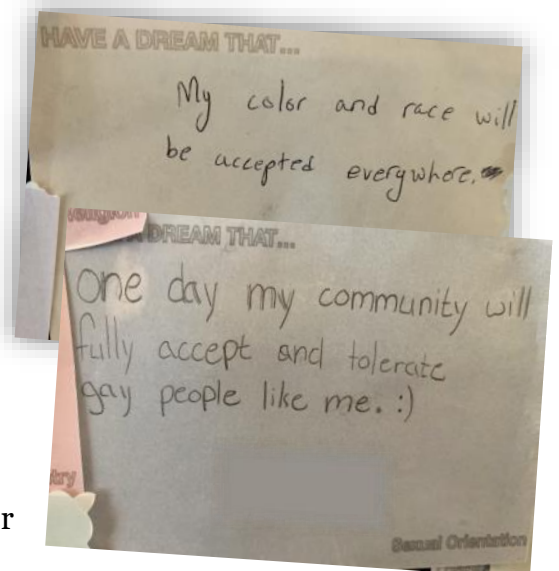
Honor Martin Luther King's Legacy

At **China Middle School**, the civil rights teams created an activity for adults to share in their advisory groups. The activity had three parts: (1) a historical video to help students understand King's role in fighting segregation during the Civil Rights Movement, (2) a quote vote, where students read and talked about some of King's quotes before voting on which one spoke to them the most, and (3) a gallery walk and discussion focused on photographs of King. The team did a practice version themselves before sharing it with advisory groups. Response was overwhelmingly positive, with adults asking for a similar activity next year.



At **Lebanon Elementary School**, the civil rights team sponsored an entire MLK-themed day. They kicked it off with a presentation that included an informational video and team members sharing why they think it's important to study King today. Following this introduction, students rotated through four activities. Three of the activities were brainstormed by the team and then created and led by adults. The fourth activity came courtesy of the **Noble Middle School** civil rights team.

At **Narraguagus Jr./Sr. High School in Harrington**, the civil rights team asked their school community for their civil rights-related dreams, which were added to a visual display of King's silhouette. Dreams had to be connected to at least one of the six civil rights categories, which were represented by different sticky note colors. Team members completed their own sticky notes to get things started. The activity was paired with a bake sale that netted the team over \$300!



Hey, China, Lebanon, and Narraguagus civil rights teams... Martin Luther King's words and work still have the power to inspire today. You connected him to the present and encouraged reflection on why he is someone worth celebrating. In honoring his legacy, you are honoring our ability to create positive change by fighting for justice everywhere.

CRTP PROJECT INITIATIVE:

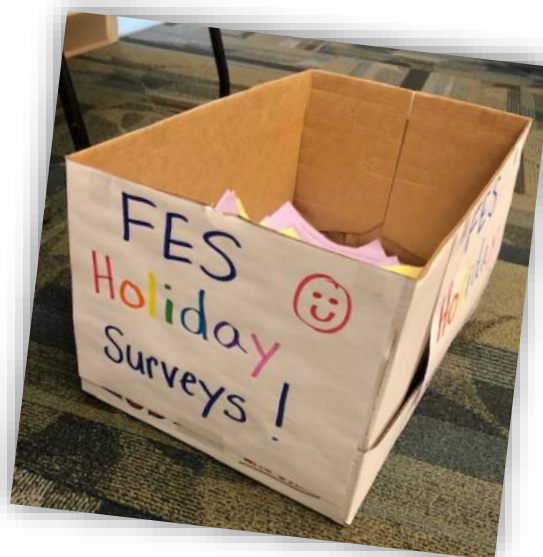
Recognize and Celebrate Your School's Diversity



At **Congin Elementary School in Westbrook**, the civil rights team called attention to the many national origins of their school population by saying *hello* in 17 different languages. Team members shared the greeting in the language of their national origin over Monday morning announcements. They then created a visual display of all the greetings under the heading “Hello from around the world.”

At **Falmouth Elementary School**, the civil rights team recognized the religious diversity in their school community by asking students what holidays they celebrate. The team created a survey with questions about 14 religious and cultural holidays. It was shared with students and sent home. The team tabulated the results and included them in a schoolwide presentation on the many holidays that are celebrated by their student population.

At **Spruce Mountain High School in Jay**, the civil rights team created a Diversi-Tree display to visually represent the diversity in their school community. The team wrote questions and shared a survey asking students how they identify their race and skin color, national origin and ancestry, religion, disabilities, gender (including



From the Teams:

gender identity and expression), and sexual orientation. They then wrote the different answers on leaves color-coded by civil rights category. The display gives equal weight to all the represented identities.

Hey, Congin, FES, and SMHS civil rights teams... your three school communities are very different, but diversity is something we all have in common! It's important to show that our school communities include people of many identities. In naming those identities, you are creating a framework and sharing the vocabulary that's necessary to appreciate diversity as something more than an abstract idea. It's who we are... in this community, and in all our communities.



CRTP PROJECT INITIATIVE:

Respond to a Public Incident of Bias

At **Bowdoinham Community School**, the civil rights team wrote and shared an open letter condemning the December attack on a Jersey City kosher market. The shooting is being treated as a hate crime and is part of a disturbing and escalating trend of anti-Semitic incidents of violence. In their letter, the team stated that to target anyone for their religious beliefs is wrong, and that “We hope that by coming together as a community we will be stronger than hate.” They shared the letter, as well as some background information about the incident, in school over the announcements before sending copies to Jersey City’s mayor and the Jewish Community Center of Bayonne, NJ.

Hey, BCS civil rights team... your letter was excellent. It was direct and forceful, and it's the exact message that needed to be shared after such a horrific incident of hate. It's important for the Jewish community to know that they are not alone, but it's just as important for your school community to know that they can stand with others in their time of need.

From the Office:

The Civil Rights Team Project has kept plenty busy this winter with trainings, planning, content creation, and collaborations. Here's all the CRTP news from Augusta!

- Winter weather didn't stop a small group of new and prospective advisors from attending our orientation session on February 10 in Augusta. We reviewed a framework for understanding our work in schools and the winter start version of the CRT Action Plan. We ended the day with a panel of experienced civil rights team advisors: Maggie Luce from Washburn Elementary in Auburn, Kayla Girardin from Mt. Blue Middle School in Farmington, and Peter Scott from Greely High School in Cumberland. (Thanks to our panelists for sharing their wisdom with our newest advisors!)
- After recent sessions at Falmouth Middle School and in Belfast for RSU #71 elementary schools, we've now conducted ten in-service trainings this school year, working directly with approximately 750 educators. The training remains free of charge and available to any school with an active civil rights team (or a plan to get one started). We'll start scheduling for next year as soon as the 2020-2021 school calendars are released. Reach out if your school may be interested in hosting a staff training!
- The specifics of our May statewide conference event for middle level and high school teams are starting to take form. Our featured guest will be OUT Maine for a workshop called "Growing Up Queer in Maine: From Rights to Reality." We are in the process of identifying and inviting civil rights teams to present as part of our CRT Spotlight workshops. We're also working with the Maine Humanities Council in putting together a series of activities to actively engage attendees and promote interaction throughout the day. (See our save-the-date flyer on the final page!)
- We've collaborated with the Maine Humanities Council to create discussion guides for five of the picture books we've given our elementary civil rights teams, with plans for completing three more before the end of this school year. We've also identified several titles we're excited to share next year!
- Our recommended videos are getting reorganized for easier access. We're busy creating civil rights category-specific video guides on Google Drive that will include short descriptions, video length, and age level appropriateness. Updates will be shared via the Communiqué.
- The 2020-2021 school year will mark the 25th anniversary of the Civil Rights Team Project, and we're carefully considering how to best mark this momentous occasion. Advisors shared their ideas through exit slips at the fall trainings, and we've noted some clear thematic trends: *celebration*, *honoring the history*, and *telling our story*. We look forward to putting forth a plan that embraces all three of those themes in our 25th year!



CIVIL RIGHTS TEAM PROJECT

2020 STATEWIDE CONFERENCE @ Augusta Civic Center

Registration opens 4/14 ... keep an eye out FMI!

Join us for an *epic* end-of-year celebration!

May 19

with special guest



presenting
**Growing up Queer in Maine:
Rights to Reality**

also featuring...

Middle and high school civil rights teams presenting on a variety of successful project initiatives from the 2019-2020 school year, including:

- Efforts to help launch our first-ever statewide campaign, the Day of Welcome!



the details... for help with sub and transportation requests!

- 8:30 am** Registration opens through 9:30 am
- 9:30 am** Program begins in the Main Auditorium
- 1:35 pm** Final workshop ends (but enjoy activities until your bus has to leave!)

There is no limit to the # of students you can bring, so long as they are all active civil rights team members (grades 6-12) and you have adequate adult supervision.