


12-2020

The Torch (December 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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The Torch is back! Our last newsletter was put out last February, pre-pandemic. While much has changed since then, we're still excited about what remains the same: the commitment and ongoing work of our civil rights teams.

From the Teams:

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

⇒ The second annual Day of Welcome! The 16 schools featured here show that it's always worth celebrating the idea that our schools are for everyone—even in the middle of a pandemic.



⇒ Honoring the life and legacy of Ruth Bader Ginsburg at Gardiner Area High School, Washburn District High School, and Yarmouth High School.

From the Office:

We start our 25th year with new energy, challenges, and opportunities. If our history tells us anything, it's that our civil rights teams are here for it, and that's certainly worthy of celebration.

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:

Day of Welcome

The pandemic posed all sorts of challenges in celebrating our second annual Day of Welcome on October 23. Social distancing and virtual learning are hardly ideal for statewide campaigns and schoolwide events.

And yet, many civil rights teams were able to take our action plan, adapt it to their circumstances, and make it work. They got creative in all the right places—with scheduling, tactics, and approach—while sticking to the event’s theme of using inclusive messaging to highlight the six civil rights categories and help promote welcoming school communities.

Here are some of the trends and highlights we saw from our resilient and resourceful civil rights teams with the 2020 Day of Welcome:



Working with the signs/banners/displays they created for their 2019 event • • • • •

- At **Caravel Middle School in Carmel** the CRT included a photo of the poster they made last year in a slideshow they shared in the school’s virtual morning meeting.
- At **Mountain Valley High School in Rumford** the welcoming banner from last year’s event is still visible over the school’s back door. For this year, then, the CRT created a new banner for the main entryway.
- At **Skowhegan Area High School** the CRT created a sizable wooden sign last year, so for this year they set it up on the floor in the lobby with an informational table. After the event the sign went up in its now-permanent home over the entryway doors.



From the Teams:

Creating and sharing videos ●●●●●

- At **Central Elementary School in South Berwick** the brand new CRT created a video on the importance of inclusion and belonging that the advisors shared with staff on a teacher workshop day.
- At **Connors Elementary School in Lewiston** the CRT worked with staff to film a PSA they used to generate excitement leading up to the big day ([video here](#), 1:32). They also encouraged staff to show their support by wearing their school t-shirts and posing with selfie signs the day of the event.



- At **Harrison Middle School in Yarmouth** the CRT compiled photos from their event to create a short highlight video. ([video here](#), 0:37)
- At **Cony Middle/High School in Augusta** the CRT shared a promotional video and virtual banner in their Google classroom homeroom time. ([video here](#), 1:05)



Rameses welcomes all to Cony

رامس يرحب بكم في كوني

Rameses les da la bienvenida a todos a Cony

Rameses accueille tout le monde à Cony

Rameses heißt alle an Cony willkommen

Rameses ad Coniem omnes salvere iubet



From the Teams:

Engaging students through advisory groups ● ● ● ● ●

- At **Falmouth High School** the CRT created a video featuring stories of students feeling welcome and unwelcome in their school community, crafted discussion questions to go with it, and shared it with adults for use in advisory groups.
- At **Greely High School in Cumberland** the CRT wrote discussion questions for use with a CRTP-recommended video on labels that they shared with advisory groups.



Falmouth High School

Rocking some custom-made event-themed gear ● ● ● ● ●

- At **Gorham Middle School** team members created face masks with individualized welcoming messages that they wore for their two-day event.
- At **Greely Middle School in Cumberland** the CRT sported their new dinosaur-themed “welcoming everyone will never go extinct” t-shirts (right, with welcome sign).
- At the previously-mentioned **Harrison Middle School** the CRT wore their new racially inclusive rainbow flag-themed face masks (below). The masks were made and donated by the school’s former librarian and another volunteer just in time for the Day of Welcome.



From the Teams:

Additional photo submissions from various teams! ●●●●●



Ames Elementary School (Searsmont)



Gardiner Regional Middle School



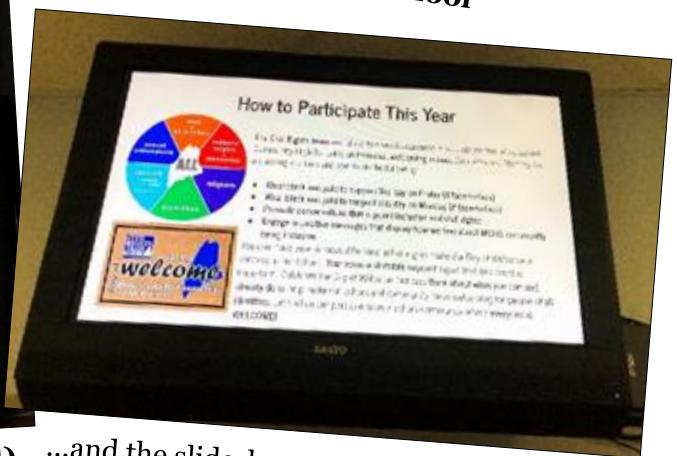
Sumner Memorial High School



Houlton Middle/High School



Maranacook Community High School (Readfield)



...and the slideshow on their school's kiosk

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:

To ALL the civil rights teams who participated in our Day of Welcome... it couldn't have been easy, but you did it. You made sure this became an annual event, because even though we're in the middle of a pandemic, it's always important to promote the idea that our school communities are for everyone. (It could even be more important now!) There is so much to mourn this school year, but the commitment and flexibility you demonstrated in making the Day of Welcome happen this year are a big bright spot. You kept our statewide campaign alive and made it a meaningful event in your school communities. We'll be back with the third annual Day of Welcome next year, and it will be bigger and better than ever!



Honoring RBG

Following her death in September, some civil rights teams took action to honor Ruth Bader Ginsburg and her civil rights legacy:

- At **Gardiner Area High School** the CRT created a tribute video featuring team members, GAHS staff, and community members talking about what RBG meant to them ([video here](#), 6:23).
- At **Washburn District High School** the CRT incorporated Ginsburg's image and quotes into some of their Day of Welcome messaging.
- At **Yarmouth High School** the CRT shared an announcement in their school and observed a 1-minute moment of silence in advisory groups ([announcement here](#)).



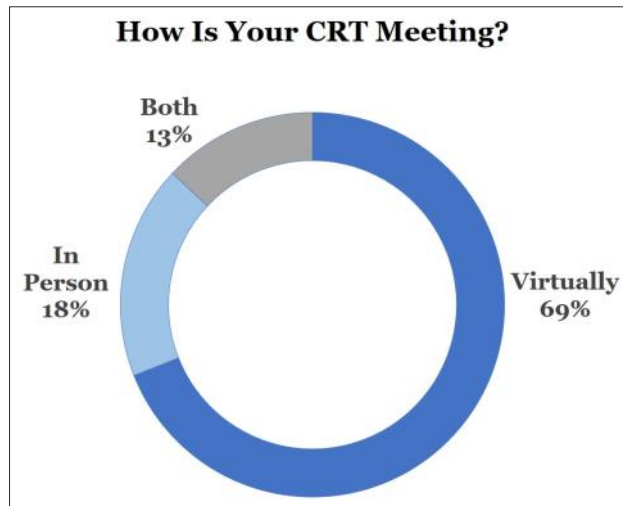
Washburn District High School

Hey, GAHS, WDHS, and YHS civil rights teams... in these tough times, we need to take inspiration wherever we can get it. While the news of RBG's passing was especially tough to take during this pandemic, her lifetime of work advocating for gender equality and justice for all remind us of just how important this work is. You are keeping her spirit and flame alive!

From the Office:

Adjusting to the New Normal

(from fall advisor check-in surveys)



New Teams

For the 2020-2021 school year, we've added civil rights teams in:



This brings our total number of participating schools to 160!

- ◆ Biddeford Intermediate School
- ◆ Brooksville Elementary School
- ◆ Central High School in Corinth
- ◆ Central School in South Berwick
- ◆ Deer-Isle Stonington Elementary School
- ◆ Dora L. Small Elementary School in South Portland
- ◆ Durham Community School
- ◆ Eastport Elementary School
- ◆ Freeport Middle School
- ◆ Hall-Dale High School in Farmingdale
- ◆ James F. Doughty School in Bangor
- ◆ Jordan-Small Middle School in Raymond
- ◆ Kennebunkport Consolidated School
- ◆ Kermit Nickerson Elementary School in Swanville
- ◆ Kingfield Elementary School
- ◆ Maine Arts Academy in Sidney
- ◆ Molly Ockett Middle School in Fryeburg
- ◆ Pond Cove Elementary School in Cape Elizabeth
- ◆ Sea Road School in Kennebunk
- ◆ Searsport District High School
- ◆ Searsport District Middle School
- ◆ Searsport Elementary School
- ◆ Sedgwick Elementary School
- ◆ Shead High School in Eastport
- ◆ Thornton Academy Middle School in Saco
- ◆ Vivian E. Hussey Primary School in Berwick
- ◆ Washington Academy in East Machias
- ◆ Western Foothills Regional Program in Rumford

From the Office:

Reflections on Our 25th Year

The start of this school year marked the 25th year of the Civil Rights Team Project. It's an impressive milestone, and one worth celebrating... but things haven't exactly gone as planned. We were excited to honor our history and look ahead to the next 25 years.

And then the pandemic happened. Everything went on pause, including our celebration plans. The pause lengthened and became our new way of life. We moved from the first stage of grief to a maelstrom of all five stages at once: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, *and* acceptance. The 25th year suddenly felt far less important as our time and energy went towards figuring out *the right now*.

For the Civil Rights Team Project, that meant figuring out how we could continue with the work of supporting our schools and civil rights teams. We put together a new plan for the 2020-2021 school year focused on the needs of the present: modified expectations, virtual programming, and increased prioritization of relationships. All three areas of focus came together in what we consider our most important service, the annual advisor trainings.

We were nervous about these trainings: what attendance would look like and how the experience would translate to a virtual format. Overall, though, they were a great success! Consider:

- We had 247 advisors attend, including 78 new advisors at our orientations.
- While most of our experienced advisors would prefer meeting in person, over 99% agreed that the virtual format worked for them. (Not bad for our first try!)
- Most of the sessions took place after school hours, meaning our advisors gave up some of their precious and precarious work-life balance to be with us. That's commitment.
- There was geographic diversity at each training session. There's something beautifully symbolic about the statewide nature of our work when you have advisors from Aroostook and York Counties in the same space together.

It's impossible to quantify, but there was a general sense of optimism—even a sense of relief in being able to feel it—amongst our attendees this year. We promoted a theme of what we called an *informed optimism*, where we could simultaneously acknowledge the horror of everything around us while still feeling that something good remains possible. (You can read some of what advisors said they were feeling optimistic about on the final page!)

We know that not everything is going to go according to plan this year. There will be setbacks and struggles, but we think that makes it even more important for us to celebrate what's working. In the face of unprecedented challenges, we see civil rights teams demonstrating passion, commitment, and creativity. We are figuring out how to navigate the present together. It's what we've been doing for a quarter century now, and it's what will sustain us moving forward. We certainly didn't plan it this way, but it just might be the perfect way to celebrate our 25th year.



**What are you feeling optimistic about?
(CRT advisor answers taken from the chat in our virtual trainings)**

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How motivated the young people are to get out there, protest, resist, create change, fight for what they believe in! So many protests this year have been led by teens!

How many people are invested in CR issues in our district.

My students are happy to be back in school, even if it's not the normal that they're used to.

Kids are asking when our team will begin meeting! They want to get started!

We have a student who told us it has always been his dream to be part of the CRT!

I am eager to keep working with our amazing CRT -- they have been meeting virtually ever since school closed in March, and they inspire me so much!

Kids seem to like our virtual CRT meetings - I think we are sort of getting to the kids' level with technology!

People pulling together and sharing goals and solutions!

I'm optimistic about our team! We have our first virtual CRT meeting next week! :)

We've learned so much about education this year.

I'm really excited about what we can use from what we've learned.

I am feeling optimistic about all the creative ways people have found to connect.

Students showing up to the virtual meetings when they could be doing just about anything else.

Seeing all of these advisors who also plan to run CRTs this year, despite all the obstacles!

Remote CRT is going to be ok! We will get creative.

I've seen great resilience in my students and I'm feeling optimistic about their futures and their positive impact on our world.

My students being open to learning and the CRT members being eager to begin meetings, however they may look.

*I'm optimistic about great work and advocacy with students.
I've had some great conversations with kids already and they are motivated.*

Freshman who participated in CRT in middle school are already asking when the high school team will meet.

Grateful and optimistic about patience the school community has had with us.

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