



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:

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

- ⇒ A direct response to a symbol of hate found at Falmouth High School.
- ⇒ A presentation to staff at Frank H. Harrison Middle School!
- ⇒ A “refresh” and schoolwide sharing of MLK’s “I Have a Dream” speech at Lincoln Academy!
- ⇒ A book-based lunch and learn (with food) at Phippsburg Elementary School!
- ⇒ A message of inclusive welcoming to all families at Veazie Community School!

### From the Office:

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The 2018-2019 student trainings are over! See what we did in our five elementary school sessions.

*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:***

At **Falmouth High School**, when the civil rights team learned of a swastika that had been carved into a table in their school, they decided to respond. The team crafted a strong statement to be shared in English classes that week, but because of a scheduling glitch it ultimately went out to all staff and students through school email and through the weekly principal's notes.

***“Although this should be clear, we absolutely do not tolerate this act or any other form of hatred that makes members of our community feel unsafe.”***

The statement included a brief history of the symbol and why its presence was of concern, especially following the recent shooting at the Tree of Life Synagogue. The team clearly rejected the act and reached out to anyone who wanted to engage further.

*Hey, Falmouth High School civil rights team... this is the sort of direct response your school community needed to hear. We can't excuse or ignore a hateful symbol like the swastika; it carries too much meaning and impact. Your words struck the right tone, but your most powerful statement came through your willingness to take action. You showed up, and that's how we support people of all identities. (And thanks to their advisors, Erin Finn and Ashley Pullen, for sharing.)*



At **Frank H. Harrison Middle School in Yarmouth**, the civil rights team delivered a powerful presentation to school staff. The team wanted to share some of their experiences in school and ask staff to be allies in creating a school community that welcomes individuals of all identities. They started the process by having individual team members write about what they'd like to say and share with staff regarding civil rights issues in their school community. The advisors selected 35 lines from the writing, offering a representative sampling of their thoughts and feelings, and students wrote them on placards. For the presentation, they silently stood in line and held up the cards, one at a time and in order, for adults to read. The impact was immediate, sparking real conversation that led to administration and the School Improvement Team developing programming and devoting time at the next staff meeting to look at how adults respond to incidents involving bias-based language.

*Hey, Harrison civil rights team... what a powerful presentation! Without speaking a word, you were heard loud and clear: we need adults to engage in this work. It's not an easy thing to ask for without sounding accusatory or judgmental, but you did it. Connecting the work of the civil rights team with adult efforts to create safe and welcoming classrooms benefits everyone. (And thanks to their advisors, Laura Mike and Charlotte Agell, for sharing.)*

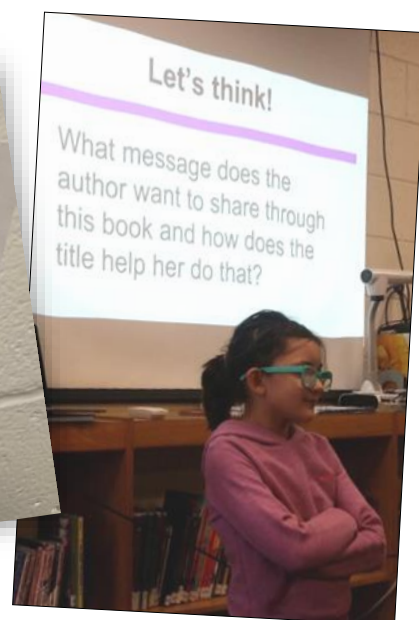
At **Lincoln Academy in Newcastle**, the civil rights team took Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech and made it their own. The team read carefully selected parts of his speech at an all-school assembly the Friday before the Martin Luther King holiday. His words sounded new and fresh, augmented by the racial diversity of the voices sharing them. The team concluded their presentation by sharing the quote "I have a dream" in Spanish, Mandarin, German, Russian, and American Sign Language, and then watching as their classmates in the audience asserted "I have a dream," too, starting with planned participants but then expanding to include spontaneous additions.

## From the Teams:

Hey, Lincoln Academy civil rights team... it's not easy to make King's "I Have a Dream" speech feel fresh, but that's exactly what you did. You were smart to share pieces of his speech that resonated with you. Your presentation bridged a divide between 1963 and 2019, showing that King's legacy lives on in all of us, and that while the details may have changed, his work continues. (And thanks to their advisors, Lyn Bass, Ida Chapman, and José Cordero, for sharing.)



At **Phippsburg Elementary School**, the civil rights team organized and hosted a “lunch and learn” session for their classmates on the book *Everybody Bakes Bread*. The team researched the cultural diversity featured in the book and prepared a presentation of what they learned. At the event, the school librarian read the book, the school counselor facilitated a discussion around the main themes, and the team shared their presentation. *Oh, and did we mention that there was bread?* Of course there was bread! The team baked and bought breads featured in the book and shared samples, framing diversity as a positive and encouraging students to recognize both similarities and differences between cultures.





## From the Teams:



*Hey, Phippsburg civil rights team... what a wonderful learning opportunity you shared with your classmates. You collaborated with adults in your school and used two things that everyone loves, read-alouds and food, to really get people thinking about how diversity enriches our culture and communities. Keep enriching your school community with your engaging ideas (and save us some leftovers)! (And thanks to their advisors, Amanda Hoag and Anne Schlitt, for sharing.)*

At **Veazie Community School**, the civil rights team welcomes all families to their school community with their VCS Welcoming Board. In the beginning of the school year, the team sent home a flyer to all households sending children to their school, introducing themselves and asking for a family picture. Those pictures are featured on a bulletin board under the heading “ALL FAMILIES ARE WELCOME AT VCS” with an inclusively welcoming statement borrowing language from a [Teaching Tolerance poster](#). The team keeps updating the board by adding pictures when new students enter the district, and advisor Lexie Dineen reports that “visitors and families stop and look at it all the time!”



*Hey, Veazie civil rights team... we love inclusively welcoming messages in the Civil Rights Team Project. You have put an interesting and intelligent spin on your message by focusing on families. The pictures make it clear that when you're welcoming everyone and celebrating diversity, you aren't talking about abstract concepts... you are talking about the people in your school community. Everyone can truly feel included in your welcoming message. (And thanks to their advisors, Lexie Dineen and Nicole Spinney, for sharing.)*

## *From the Office:*

### Elementary School Trainings

After multiple postponements and sadly, one cancellation on account of inclement weather, the Civil Rights Team Project completed our elementary trainings for the 2018-2019 school year in December. We conducted trainings in Auburn, Brewer, Farmington, and South Portland, with a total of 520 students from 38 schools attending.

The trainings explored the concept of identity through a civil rights lens, looking at race and skin color, national origin and ancestry, religion, disabilities, gender (including gender identity and expression), and sexual orientation as pieces and parts of who we are. Through a series of activities and discussions, we built our understanding of the civil rights categories and our own identities, ending with ideas for how our civil rights teams can celebrate individuals of all identities in their school communities.

