



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 April edition of *The Torch*:

From the Teams:

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

- ⇒ A “We Believe” bulletin board honoring religious diversity at Gray-New Gloucester Middle School!
- ⇒ A letter-writing recruitment campaign from the Leroy H. Smith School!
- ⇒ A powerful “Step Forward” activity and follow-up discussion at the Middle School of the Kennebunks!
- ⇒ A screening and facilitated discussion of *Dawnland* at Skowhegan Area High School!
- ⇒ A schoolwide retelling of the picture book *Her Right Foot*, complete with props, at Solon Elementary School!

From the Office:

Get to know Aaron Frey, the 58th Attorney General for the state of Maine, as he introduces himself here in a letter 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:

At **Gray-New Gloucester Middle School**, the civil rights team created a “We Believe” display to honor their school’s religious diversity. They researched seven religions: Buddhism, Catholicism, Islam, Jehovah’s Witness, Hinduism, Judaism, and Protestantism, gathering basic information on beliefs and practices, symbols, and important holidays. They neatly presented the information underneath a bold, hand-painted banner proclaiming “We Believe,” giving each of the seven religions equal treatment as part of their school community. They announced the completion of their project through school announcements and asked that anyone whose religion wasn’t included to contact the team so that they could add it.



Hey, GNGMS civil rights team... we believe in your project! It highlights and celebrates the religious diversity we have in our communities. This contradicts many people’s assumptions about rural Maine. By giving each of the seven religions equal treatment, you show that all religious identities should be treated with respect. (And thanks to their advisor, Theresa Allocca, for sharing.)

At **Leroy H. Smith School in Winterport**, the civil rights team [wrote a letter](#) to share with other schools encouraging them to join the Civil Rights Team Project. The idea came through a team conversation about how important it is for their school to have a civil rights team. Students asked how many other schools have teams and decided that 185 isn’t enough because it’s not 100% of Maine schools. They wanted to do something to change that number, so they planned and wrote a letter about their team and the Civil Rights Team Project. The letter outlines the reasons why schools should have civil rights teams and includes student signatures and contact info for their advisors and the CRTP office. They are sending the letter to elementary schools in Eastern Maine not currently participating in the Project, and plan to share



From the Teams:

their initiative in their school community by writing about it in the school newsletter.

Hey, Leroy Smith civil rights team... we agree with you that every school should have a civil rights team. Thank you for taking action to recruit new schools into the Project. It shows that you really value the work you're doing in your own school community. Your passion and commitment to expanding it to other schools could be contagious. We often reach out to schools without civil rights teams, but something tells us that it will mean a lot more coming from you. (And thanks to their advisors, Kim Raymond and Hannah Boss, for sharing.)

At the **Middle School of the Kennebunks**, the civil rights team led their school in a powerful “Step Forward” activity. The team wanted to highlight the prevalence of bias-based language and other behaviors in their school community, in order to make the issue visible so that they could better address it. The school’s 600+ students and staff gathered in the gym, standing on the sidelines of the basketball court and sitting in rows on the bleachers. The team introduced themselves and the activity and then led the group through a series of prompts from center court, asking students to step forward or stand if they’d witnessed specific bias-based language and behaviors. The prompts were specific and organized under the six civil rights categories. For each of the prompts, a majority of students stepped forward and stood. Their respectful silence throughout the activity amplified the sound of their collective movement and shared experience. After the team concluded the activity, students went back to their advisory groups for some follow-up discussion.

Hey, MSK civil rights team... you've helped your school community take an important step forward in confronting bias-based behaviors. It's always important to name these behaviors for what they are, and your clear prompts did that. After such a visual and visceral activity, it's impossible for anyone to deny that these issues are right there in your school community. What a meaningful activity! (And thanks to their advisor, Rachel McGlashan, for sharing.)

At **Skowhegan Area High School**, the civil rights team hosted a community screening of [Dawnland](#), a powerful documentary about cultural genocide, truth and reconciliation, and the survival of indigenous

peoples and cultures in Maine and the US. Through their advocacy during the school’s recent mascot debate, the team recognized a need for their community to come together and engage in conversations about bias, identity, and inclusion. CRT members agreed that *Dawnland* would be a powerful tool in starting conversations about race and ancestry, so they secured rights to show the film and got to work promoting their event. They had approximately 75 people in attendance, and close to 50 of them stayed to participate in a more than hour-long circle conversation that resulted in powerful insights and reflection! Appreciation was shared with the team for creating such a meaningful opportunity for the community. The team was also able to



From the Teams:

raise \$450 through donations, a 50/50 raffle, and a rather impressive bake sale! They will be consulting with the Penobscot Nation Youth to determine where to donate a portion of the funds.



Hey, SAHS civil rights team... Dawnland is a great film, and you created a great platform to share it with your community. The film can stand on its own, of course, but you helped individuals further engage through your discussion circles. That shared community experience, one of honoring and understanding the experiences of Maine's Wabanaki people, is especially important in what is a community currently divided on the issue. Keep leading the way. (And thanks to their advisors, Donna Irish, Laurie MacFarland, and Iver Lofving for sharing.)

At **Solon Elementary School**, the civil rights team shared the picture book [*Her Right Foot*](#) at a schoolwide assembly. The book shares the history of the Statue of Liberty and how she symbolizes the American ideal of welcoming immigrants. Students entered the gym to the sounds of Neil Diamond's "Coming to America" before settling in for a read-aloud. The team created "live illustrations" to make the text more engaging, performing the book's pictures with props they created, including an atlas, beret and mustache combo, top hat, and the entire Statue of Liberty costume! The presentation introduced an ongoing conversation about national origin and ancestry, including their current initiative of studying their school community's family histories of coming to America.



Hey Solon civil rights team... we love Her Right Foot. We didn't think it possible to improve on that book, but your props and performance have taken it to the next level. The book makes a compelling argument for welcoming people from around the world, and exploring the diversity of the American people is how we live up to that ideal. Your ongoing work around national origin and ancestry is like the Statue of Liberty's torch, burning brightly for all to see. (And thanks to their advisors, Michelle Stevens and Elaine Jillson, for sharing.)

From the Office:

In our 23 years of existence, the Civil Rights Team Project has enjoyed consistent support from the Attorney General. The fifth Attorney General to administer the Project, Aaron Frey, just took office in January, but he's already learning about our work and finding ways to support us.



April 8, 2019

Dear Maine Civil Rights Team Advisors:

Thank you for participating in this important role. As you probably know, the Civil Rights Team Project was founded in 1996 to assist with the Office of the Attorney General's efforts to enforce the Maine Civil Rights Act. Since then it has grown to include more than 150 schools, spanning all sixteen counties. Advisors like you are critical in our efforts to grow the program and strengthen its connections in Maine communities.

The Maine Civil Rights Act is the foundation of our shared vision of making Maine a welcoming state, and the Civil Rights Team Project has grown as we've understood how integral school communities are to make that vision a reality. Educating people from a young age about bias is vital to reducing it amongst adults.

Since I took office in January, I have learned more about the work you do, and I am excited to partner with such a passionate and caring group of educators and youth. In fact, I attended a new advisor orientation on February 14. I was energized by the enthusiasm of the volunteers participating in the training and I left full of optimism for the great work that would develop from that event.

I hope you will view the Office of the Attorney General as a resource for your work. I am committed to conducting business in this office in a way that is consistent with Maine's Constitution, and our values as a welcoming state more broadly. I look forward to promoting your work, helping to tell your story, and to celebrating your accomplishments at the statewide conference on May 17.

We all have a role to play in promoting civil rights and reducing bias. It is critical to not only educate people, but to bring communities together so that we can learn and grow. I am proud that the Civil Rights Team Project is part of the Office of the Attorney General and am excited to continue to work with you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Aaron M. Frey". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Aaron M. Frey
Attorney General