

Looking for Hope? Check out OBS!

In a Year Calling for Creativity and Hope, OBS Students Deliver

Speaking up about racial differences should not make a room go quiet or awkward.”

— *Indian Island student*



The 2020 - 2021 school year saw many learning formats, remote, hybrid, face-to-face — all requiring creativity, resilience, and incredible fortitude on the part of students, teachers, and communities. Those circumstances make the work of OBS students at three Maine middle schools — **Indian Island School, Leonard Middle School, and Orono Middle School** even more remarkable.

These students met remotely each week as individual school groups and had two remote “meet-ups” when they came together on Zoom as a whole group. In the late spring they were finally able to meet once outside in person.

I want to see a world full of empathetic people.

— *Orono student*

After researching Americans Who Tell the Truth activists, they examined and promoted action around climate change, racial equity, and LGBTIA+ rights in their schools and communities. They invited and met on Zoom with community leaders from each town to ask questions about school and community actions around these three topics (see sidebar). They then peppered the three towns with quotations from this meeting meant to spur thought and action within the communities (see quotes above).

These students are a model for how we can all work together for social justice and equity. Their energy and passion are reason for us all to have hope during challenging times.

I will make sure to start walking places, everywhere I can get to on foot. It will not only help my health and body, but it will help stop all the horrible pollution we are putting in to our earth.

— *Old Town student*



OBS Students' Questions for School and Community Leaders

- How are diverse voices included in decision and policy making?
- How do your school and community address publicly and individually targeted hate speech?
- How do you educate people about LGBTQIA+ identity, e.g. pronoun use, what letters stand for and mean, etc.?

Gorham High School (ME) and Energy Tech High School (NYC) Form a New Partnership!

During a year when many schools were struggling to continue regular programming, students at Gorham High School (ME) and Energy Tech High School (Queens, NY) took the challenge to create an Operation Breaking Stereotypes partnership.

OBS students at Gorham had spent the previous year exploring their own identities and sharing their voices for social justice within their own community. This fall they were ready to build a partnership with another school. Meanwhile, students at Energy Tech High School in Queens, NY, were looking to find a way to expand their learnings and vision beyond their pandemic imposed remote schooling.



And so the OBS magic happened.

Thinking critically about their own lives and identity and about the importance of cross-cultural understanding and appreciation, they used writing, reading, thinking, and discussing to accomplish a connection that addressed social equity and justice. They met three times on Google Meets sharing stereotypes they

had about each other (see sidebar), changes they want to see in their communities, and finally wrote and shared poems “giving voice to” particular issues and concerns. In spite of a pandemic, an enforced separation, a few nerves about meeting someone new, these students came together and identified concerns they have about the world right now — sexism, racism, xenophobia, ableism, homophobia, transphobia, the way power structures influence certain groups negatively.

They wrote and shared poems giving voice to these issues. The bond was strong, and the commitment to meet face to face is even stronger. As Maya Angelou said, “It’s very important to know the neighbor next door and the people down the street and the people in another race.”... And they will!

When I think of Maine, I think...

- of maple syrup and the countryside
- of white people in L.L. Bean clothing
- of farmers, of moose
- of little spread out towns with big white churches in the middle of town
- of people hiking and driving Subaru cars

When I think of New York City, I think...

- of busy streets, loud noises, and tons of people always out and about
- of people who prioritize their careers and aspire to make a big impact on the world
- of apartments instead of houses and only streets and sidewalks, no lawns
- of danger lurking through the streets
- of lots of diversity in people, food, and lifestyles

Ellsworth High School Looks Within

A group of students at Ellsworth High School met regularly this year to look at identity, equity, and school climate. They discussed the origin of stereotypes they hear and how those stereotypes influence behavior, how to respond to inappropriate language, examples of micro-aggressions, and, most importantly, how they can make their school climate more equitable, open, and anti-racist.

Today over 4500 students have connected to far away worlds, not across oceans, but across the chasms created by race, ethnicity, class and geography. The discoveries have been rich, the connections strong, and the possibilities for a more equitable and just world are extraordinary. Thank you to all who with your generous donations make this work possible in these very unusual times!

OBS accepts donations throughout the year at Operation Breaking Stereotypes, Box 633, Orono, ME 04473 or online at www.operationbreakingstereotypes.org