

Two-Year Report

CIVIC SPIRIT

Restoring Faith in Democracy

by Daniel Olsen

February 2020

Introduction

This report documents the achievements of Civic Spirit in its first 18 months. Civic Spirit is grounded in the belief that every student should come of age **informed, inspired, and invested in the civic life of their community and the political life of our democracy.**

The organization seeks to achieve this goal by working **within and between faith-based schools and communities.**

Civic Spirit launched with a cohort of **13 faith-based schools in the New York City area**—six Catholic (Bishop Loughlin, De La Salle, La Salle, St. Jean Baptiste, St. Joseph’s, and St. Peter’s) and seven Jewish (The Frisch School, The Heschel School, Luria Academy, Ramaz, SAR High School, Yeshiva University High School for Boys, and Yeshiva University High School for Girls). In the second year, Shalhevet High School in Los Angeles joined as a 14th school.

Over the course of its first year, **over 300 students** regularly participated in a Civic Spirit class or club, with **over 1000** joining in for school-wide events associated with Civic Spirit.

The report is divided into two parts:

- » **Part 1:** Explains the programming directly offered by Civic Spirit and evaluative reactions.
- » **Part 2:** How Civic Spirit was implemented in the schools.

Civic Spirit offered [**two well-received Summer Institutes in 2018 and 2019**](#). Educators from the schools joined together for a week of close reading of primary sources with university professors, pedagogical strategies for teaching civics, learning from one another’s faith traditions, planning for a school-based Civic Spirit initiative in the coming year, and developing relationships with one another. Educators gave positive feedback regarding both institutes. A majority agreed or strongly disagreed that sessions on pedagogy and primary source texts were engaging and useful for their schools. Indeed, most reported using texts shared at the Summer Institute in Civic Spirit programming in their schools.

The other signature program in 2018-2019 was **Civic Spirit Day**, which brought together **150 students from ten Civic Spirit schools** for a day of collaboration and learning around public service, with the theme “Our Democracy Needs You.” Students gained insight into the **responsibilities of citizenship and worked constructively with others of different backgrounds to solve a civic challenge.**

In its first year and a half, Civic Spirit offered two additional professional development sessions for educators, a day-long civil discourse training by [**Essential Partners**](#), and Day of

Learning related to the U.S. Census in anticipation of Civic Spirit Day 2020 which will focus on the historic, civic, and religious considerations of counting people. In total, Civic Spirit has offered **80 hours of formal cohort-based professional development and training events** for participating educators, as well as 2-4 hours a week over the last 18 months of individualized pedagogical coaching with teachers for a total of almost **800 hours of civic education training.**

Another opportunity offered to students is a **Civic Delegates program**, designed to expand the work of students at Civic Spirit Day. The first cohort presented proposals for a city-wide service program to NYC Service, an Office of the Mayor, while the second cohort was competitively accepted into a year-long “fellowship”, in which they are learning about the U.S. Census and challenged to serve as Civic Ambassadors, carrying out a project in their school and holding a leadership role at 2020 Civic Spirit Day.

Importantly, a major accomplishment of Civic Spirit is the development of **15 Shared Aims**. These aims fall under three pillars: Civic Belonging, Democratic Fluency, and Civic Skills, which honor the heart, head, and hands of civic education. These aims were co-created with Civic Spirit educators at the 2019 Summer Institute. Educators can use the shared aims to identify goals for civic education in their classes and clubs and to align themselves with the overarching vision of Civic Spirit. The organization hopes that future Civic Spirit schools will use at least a few of these aims as the basis for designing their courses and clubs.

The second part of this report documents how Civic Spirit was implemented in the initial cohort of schools. Of the thirteen schools that participated in the first cohort of Civic Spirit, **eleven have implemented ongoing Civic Spirit programming in the form of a regularly meeting class or club**. All schools that offered Civic Spirit classes (9 of 11) incorporated primary sources presented at the Institute. A twelfth incorporated principles learned at Civic Spirit events into a number of service-learning programs across the grades.

Civic Spirit was not designed as a one-size fits all model. The organization understood that it was working with a variety of schools with different structures and curricular demands. They wanted to create a flexible model that could become part of the culture of each school and therefore live beyond the shelf-life of a scripted, pre-packaged curriculum for a course. The schools offered Civic Spirit in the following ways: (1) Stand-alone elective courses (2) Integration with pre-existing required courses (3) School-wide events, (4) Extracurricular activity (5) Debates and civil discourse, and (6) Engagement with parents, grandparents, and alumni in a Civic Spirit-inspired course.

Schools also faced a number of **barriers** in implementing the programmatic potential of Civic Spirit. The Civic Spirit team sought to help educators overcome many of these challenges, despite limited capacity and resources and a need to develop organizational growth.

Methodology

Civic Spirit has engaged an embedded “Developmental Evaluator” since its inception. Developmental evaluation is a mode of evaluation particularly well-suited to new projects like Civic Spirit. This mode of evaluation recognizes that multiple outcomes are possible, creating room for remaining flexible and open to experimentation. It iteratively builds an evaluation model alongside the innovators by providing feedback and findings throughout a program’s development. A unique element of developmental evaluation is that the evaluator joins the organizational team, sharing its values and participating in its activities.

The evaluator engaged in both traditional and non-traditional forms of research which included: traditional data-gathering activities such as program observation, interviews with Civic Spirit educators, and in-depth questionnaires distributed at the end of each Civic Spirit program, as well as at the end of the first school year. The evaluator produced two detailed evaluations of the inaugural [Summer Institute in 2018](#) and [Civic Spirit Day in 2019](#). The evaluator also joined the Civic Spirit team for strategic conversations about its offerings.

One notable contribution of the evaluator to Civic Spirit’s development was identifying “Civic Belonging” as a desired outcome of the program, based on observations and feedback of the conversations of the first Summer Institute. This concept has since become one of the three pillars of the organization’s methodology and subsequent Shared Aims. The evaluator continues to participate in the Civic Spirit team’s strategy meetings and is currently developing a set of measurement tools to be put in place to support the existing and new cohort of schools in the coming academic year to help track student movement. Each school will be asked to identify 2-3 Shared Aims that they will prioritize. The evaluator will also contribute to future conversations about the long-term desired civic outcomes for students, with a particular emphasis on post-high school and college life and assessing the movement of “Civic Spirit alumni” toward achievement of the shared aims.

Part 1: Programs Offered by Civic Spirit

Over the course of its first year and a half, Civic Spirit has offered the following program offerings: two 4-5 day Summer Institutes for educators, a day-long program for students called Civic Spirit Day, two additional professional development sessions for educators, two cohorts of students serving as Civic Delegates, and the development of 15 shared aims based on emergent findings from the first academic year of Civic Spirit. The organization aspires that these aims can be used as a guiding structure for civics education for all faith-based schools.

→ Summer Institute for Educators

In Summer of 2018 Civic Spirit, together with the [Jack Miller Center](#), ran a 5-day Summer Institute for educators that took place in New York City and was attended by both teachers and schools administrators representatives from all thirteen of Civic Spirit's first-year partner schools. Talented faculty taught sessions on primary source texts about democracy and American government, expert pedagogues shared techniques for how to make the material of civics come alive for students in classrooms, and educators worked together to plan for the coming year.

Those elements were all planned well ahead of the Institute by Civic Spirit and Jack Miller Center staff. But the story of the Institute as it actually took place contained much more. Educators connected with one another about their shared interest in civics, their faith backgrounds, and their commitment to their students' learning. But even further, the week had an emotional arc. Conversations about the nature of American history and identity could at times grow heated, but by the end of the week, participating educators felt a renewed sense of commitment to doing the complex work of civics education. These conversations also revealed a new goal for civics education: to promote a feeling of civic belonging in students.

The Summer Institute combined a number of promising educational approaches for participating educators. The educators re-studied American founding documents and key primary sources with expert faculty who created opportunities to access and connect with these critical texts in new ways. The educators also experienced civics through the arts: short stories, music, and textiles. They participated in sessions emphasizing the importance of socio-emotional learning (SEL) in the context of American history and civics. Civic Spirit staff facilitated transformative growth for the educators by beginning each morning with reflective and personal opening questions, regularly checking in with and nurturing the needs of the institute participants, and making sure the faculty taught in a way that recognized the varied intellectual and educational talents of the participants.

The Summer Institute was well-received by participating educators. They particularly enjoyed the opportunity to learn primary source texts and to build relationships with others committed to civic education. The first Institute received an average rating of 4.76/5. The sense of connectedness among these educators continues even now, more than a year after the first Institute, with educators continuing to participate in professional development and planning joint programs for their schools. [See the full evaluation of the 2018 Summer Institute for greater detail.](#)

The Summer Institute has become an essential component of Civic Spirit's work. The intellectual and relational work of the educators provides motivation and a community of practice to realize civic education at their schools. A majority of schools incorporated texts they learned at the Summer Institute--from the founding documents to Greek writing on democracy to classic American short stories--into their classroom teaching and school programs.

It is noteworthy that 100% of Civic Spirit schools, plus the addition of Shalhevet High School in Los Angeles, returned for the 2019 Summer Institute, which ran intensively for four days. Similar to the 2018 institute, the feedback from teachers was positive, with most identifying text learning and fellowship with other educators as a highlight. Overall, the Institute received a rating of 4.93/5 from participants.

"The text based sessions were a true dream. It felt like an oasis of scholarship that holistically fueled the mind and soul. The aura created in this learning community--of respect for diversity, of an appreciation for each participant's contributions, of the rich dialogue and the welcoming of continuous contributions from all members were beyond exemplary. Each session was replete with depth, rigor, challenge, and they welcomed dissent and difficult conversations. They were authentic, serious, yet we share[d] great laughs. I loved each and every session."

"We explored how our populations may come from different religions and represent diverse socio-economic backgrounds, yet at the same time, common themes about belonging, the feeling of being 'dual citizens', and the role of faith in regard to civic engagement emerged. I know many of my students lack the opportunity to speak with people outside of our 'bubble' and see this as an authentic means to have real conversations about our civic life and faith traditions."

→ Civic Spirit Day

On May 1st, 2019 Civic Spirit held its first ever Civic Spirit Day at the JCC of Manhattan. It was the culmination of a year’s worth of civic activity at the schools.

Civic Spirit Day was an opportunity for students and teachers from all of the schools to gather together for a day of learning and collaboration across difference through the theme of “citizenship as service”. Over 140 students from 10 different schools (6 Catholic and 4 Jewish; 8 high schools and 2 middle schools) came together to solve a civic problem together. In 2019, that was designing a New York City summer service project for teens.

The feedback from students was overwhelmingly positive, with a huge majority strongly agreeing or agreeing that they enjoyed Civic Spirit Day. There were no statistically significant differences across categories of race, gender, or religious affiliation of school for any of the scale-type questions.

Civic Spirit Day has also become an annual offering of Civic Spirit. The theme of Spring 2020’s day will be on the importance of counting and will offer opportunities for learning and collaboration across the Civic Spirit network, inspired by the U.S. Census, given the national census event in 2020. Civic Spirit staff are working in consultation with the same educational consultant, Dr. Marc Kramer, who successfully orchestrated the first Civic Spirit Day.

All but a small handful of students reported that they enjoyed attending Civic Spirit Day, with particular positive attention given to collaborating with students of different backgrounds and gaining a deeper appreciation of citizenship:

“[Working with students of different backgrounds] was really awesome. Sometimes it can feel like religion can put up a wall between us but we’re all just a bunch of teenagers going through the same experiences in different ways. Religion was just another fact about us like having brown hair or blue eyes but everyone had such wonderful personalities.”

“Being at Civic Spirit Day gave me the definition of being a citizen, a real acting citizen. Civic Spirit Day metaphorically took me to the front of the gate and said, ‘Now it’s your turn. Don’t let us down,’ and now I’m better prepared for it.”

Feedback from teachers was also overwhelmingly positive, with many feeling particularly proud of watching their students interact with and work productively with others of different backgrounds. They spoke about the experience in the following ways:

“[Collaborating with students from different backgrounds] It was natural and our students shared this as their favorite part of Civic Spirit Day. It was a true expression of what NY is and what our students’ experience should be more filled with.”

“[Collaborating with students from different backgrounds] was by far the most meaningful part of the day. Our students are cloistered, and watching them find common ground with their fellow Civic Spirit participants was incredibly gratifying.”

“[Civic Spirit Day] aligned beautifully with the ideas discussed throughout the year such as civic duty, the scholarly exploration of civics and its historical origin, and the idea of an action civics project.”

See the [accompanying evaluative report on Civic Spirit Day](#) for more information about the experience of this day.

→ Additional Professional Development

In November 2018, Civic Spirit offered a professional development session for educators in collaboration with [Essential Partners](#), an organization committed to fostering constructive dialogue where conflicts are driven by differences of identities, beliefs, and values. This day-long training was and continues to be extremely well-received by teachers, with many of them citing repeatedly how they use their newfound skills in managing difficult conversations in the classroom, from current political events to language in the Constitution, and during more informal conversations outside the classroom. Furthermore, many of the Civic Spirit teachers who attended the Essential Partners training have been intentional about using debate as part of curriculum and lunchtime student programming. At De La Salle Academy in Manhattan, for example, the Civic Spirit teachers have encouraged five different classes, including Spanish language and science, to incorporate civil discourse and debate as pedagogical tools for deeper learning and facilitate conversations across different political, cultural and religious backgrounds.

In addition to this formally structured professional development opportunity, Civic Spirit staff frequently visited schools and offered one-on-one support to educators as they implemented Civic Spirit coursework and programming. For its second year, Civic Spirit hired a former educator and school administrator to join the team and specifically work alongside Civic Spirit teachers in converting their ideas into lessons, units, and other civic learning opportunities.

In November 2019, Civic Spirit offered an additional day-long PD session inspired by the U.S. Census 2020, in anticipation of this year's Civic Spirit Day theme: "Who is Counted, Who Counts, and Who Decides?". All teachers **strongly agreed** that they gained new ideas for teaching content related to counting and the census in their schools. An additional highlight of this day was an interfaith study of biblical texts about census gathering, from the book of Numbers and the book of Luke, with one teacher reporting, "I most enjoyed learning religious texts with a partner. I have been talking about the experience since that [day] and sharing about how meaningful it was for me."

In total, Civic Spirit has offered its partner educators **80 hours** of formal professional development through the Summer Institute and focused day-long learning sessions, not including additional hours of school visits and one-on-one pedagogical support with educators

→ Civic Delegates Program

After Civic Spirit Day, Civic Spirit developed an opportunity for interested students to present a proposal for service projects to the NYC mayor's office. **Seven students** participated in this presentation from **five different Civic Spirit schools**.

The presentation was based on 5 weeks of substantive research, brainstorming, team building, collaboration, and careful preparation by the students during the summer. They rehearsed several times digitally and in person the morning of the event before the meeting. After the presentation, the NYC Service government staff stated several times that they learned insights from the students' presentation that they would be putting into action right away. The NYC Service staff said they were eager to continue partnering with Civic Spirit on service-oriented work. The group ended its visit with a tour of NYC City Hall. The students loved being inside a monumental building from the early 1800s and asked engaging questions from the historian who led the tour.

Those who participated in the Student Delegates Program offered positive feedback on the experience. Participating in the program allowed a participant to "[see] the practical use and workings behind civics and service and made me believe that I and those my age can make a change and do something." Another had a change in attitude toward their ability to contribute to society: "Public service gives me an outlet to work for a solution instead of just finding problems and hoping someone else fixes them."

Students also appreciated the additional opportunity to collaborate with others from different schools and religious backgrounds. One wrote, "It was really great interacting with other students...People offered their unique perspectives on the problems we faced based on their backgrounds and upbringings. Each person had something useful and different to offer I had a lot to learn."

This academic year, Civic Spirit is running a second Civic Delegates cohort ahead of Civic Spirit Day. It hopes to offer students robust content related to the census theme of the Day, to empower students to take the lead on a civic project in their schools, and possibly to prepare them to play a larger role at Civic Spirit Day.

→ Development of Shared Aims

In the weeks leading up to the Summer Institute, Civic Spirit hired Knead Partners to facilitate the process of developing shared aims for Civic Spirit schools: a list of desired and acquired student competencies as a result of civics education. Through multiple interviews with Civic Spirit staff, Civic Spirit educators, and experts in the field, the Knead Partners team generated an initial list of 24 shared aims under three pillars: Civic Belonging, Democratic Fluency, and Civic Skills. These three pillars cover three domains of learning – Feeling, Knowing, and Doing – as Civic Spirit believes that civic education is best when it engages students’ hearts, heads, and hands.

With these 24 aims in hand, at the second annual Summer Institute, Knead Partners led educators through two afternoon sessions to identify which of the shared aims felt most salient for their schools and future Civic Spirit schools. As a result of this process, some shared aims were removed, and others were combined. A few of the educators wondered why there wasn’t a fourth pillar to directly address religion and the connection between civics, education, and the faith-based nature of the Civic Spirit schools.

This feedback was taken into consideration by Knead Partners and Civic Spirit staff as they worked on finalizing the list of shared aims during Fall 2019. Collectively, they decided to include one aim related to faith under each of the three Civic Spirit Pillars. The Civic Spirit team rewrote the list of 15 Shared Aims to ensure that efforts to achieve each aim could be measured using standard educational tools (tests, reflective writing, student participation, etc.). Future Civic Spirit schools will be asked to identify a few (2-4) aims to prioritize each year in guiding the Civic Spirit programming they launch. Civic Spirit staff will assist educators in tracking student movement toward achieving these aims.

The most updated list of shared aims can be found on the following page:

SHARED AIMS

[Last updated October 2019]

CIVIC BELONGING

Emotional connection to community and country is the first step toward civic faith and responsibility.

DEMOCRATIC FLUENCY

Knowledge of America's intellectual and political traditions prepares students for a self-governing society.

CIVIC SKILLS

Competency in civil discourse, media literacy, and problem-solving teaches collaboration and engagement.

"Civic Spirit Schools graduate students who..."

<p>1. DEFINE WHAT IT MEANS TO BELONG ...know intellectually and affectively how various individuals and groups in America have or have not experienced belonging, and can speak about the importance of belonging for building a society together.</p>	<p>1. UNDERSTAND DEMOCRACY ...have a basic knowledge of how our governmental systems work -- from local to federal -- and are able to apply that knowledge to address current public issues.</p>	<p>1. DISCERN INFORMATION ...are educated consumers of the news, understand media bias and journalistic ethics, and can confidently access and evaluate information to make informed civic decisions.</p>
<p>2. ANCHOR THE SELF IN SOCIETY ...apply definitions of belonging to their own lives, including their role as citizens or committed residents of the United States, and contemplate how belonging might obligate them to act in society as a result.</p>	<p>2. COMPREHEND TEXTS & CORE IDEAS ...are familiar with the virtues and limitations of foundational texts that have animated thinking about American democracy, and how these texts and ideas have been challenged over time.</p>	<p>2. ENGAGE IN DISCOURSE ...are able to form and express thoughtful opinions on controversial topics while also respectfully engaging with others whose opinions may differ.</p>
<p>3. CONSIDER BARRIERS TO BELONGING ...recognize that even with professed values of equality, there have been and remain barriers to belonging in the United States, and feel responsible for expanding belonging for themselves and others.</p>	<p>3. CONSIDER THE ROLE OF RELIGION ...understand the ways religion and American democracy have intersected, and explore the ways their and other faith traditions contribute to the public square.</p>	<p>3. COLLABORATE ACROSS DIFFERENCE ...have experience spending time with people who have different cultural and faith backgrounds and experiences than their own, and are able to empathize and work together toward a common goal.</p>
<p>4. TRANSLATE BELONGING INTO ACTION ...are fueled by a sense of belonging and obligation to participate in civic society as informed, inspired, and invested members.</p>	<p>4. INCORPORATE GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES ...are curious about other countries' intellectual and political traditions, and are able to apply global knowledge to better understand American democracy and international affairs.</p>	<p>4. EXERCISE RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES ...are aware of their constitutional rights and are committed to carrying out basic civic activities, such as informed voting.</p>
<p>5. LOOK TO THEIR FAITH ...have reflected individually and within their faith community on how religious tradition may inform, complicate, and/or motivate their sense of civic participation.</p>	<p>5. COMMIT TO ONGOING LEARNING ...see the pursuit of democratic knowledge as a lifelong venture and maintain intellectual humility when navigating new information.</p>	<p>5. SERVE AS CIVIC AMBASSADORS ...have identified and built their personal leadership skills, learning how to be a public servant to their communities and neighborhoods, and inspiring their peers to participate in the public square.</p>

Part 2: What Happened in Civic Spirit Schools

Of the thirteen schools that participated in the first cohort of Civic Spirit, eleven have implemented ongoing Civic Spirit programming in the form of a sustained class or club. A twelfth school incorporated principles learned at Civic Spirit events into occasional service-learning programs across the grades.

Nine of the eleven schools with sustained Civic Spirit programming incorporated primary sources presented at the Institute. Instead of a classroom course, two schools organized Civic Spirit as an in-school club. In preparation for Civic Spirit Day, one club had students study texts from Aristotle, Theodore Roosevelt, and contemporary scholar of citizenship Danielle Allen.

Schools offered Civic Spirit in a number of different ways: as stand-alone elective courses, as part of pre-existing required courses, as part of school-wide events, as an extracurricular activity, through debates and civil discourse, and in the case of SAR High School, by engaging parents and grandparents with their own class inspired by Civic Spirit. Below is a detailed description of each approach.

→ As a Stand-Alone Course

St. Jean Baptiste High School for Girls offered a year-long elective course for 25 students. It was co-taught by a teacher from the History department and one from the Religion department. These departments have a history of collegiality at the school, and the collegiality between these two teachers was enhanced by their joint participation in the Civic Spirit Summer Institute.

The Summer Institute proved to be influential for these teachers in selecting texts to include on the syllabus. Plato, Aristotle, Locke, and the texts of “America’s Bible” (the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution), as teacher Daniel Linehan described these documents, were all included in the first two units of the class: “Foundations of Study” and “Origin Stories”. Ralph Ellison’s short story *In a Strange Country* served as a foundation for the third unit called “Keeping the Dream Alive”. The teachers also used material from [Facing History and Ourselves](#), also introduced at the 2018 Summer Institute, to spark conversations about contemporary issues of identity and civil rights.

The St. Jean class, like both the student and parent classes at SAR, incorporated religious texts as well secular. In the Origin Stories unit, students studied some of the biblical texts that underlie core Catholic teachings of human dignity, participation, and solidarity. For one assignment in the course, students were asked to write their own prayers for the country, with

many choosing to focus on immigration as a theme. Many of the students in the class come from an immigrant background, and students relished the opportunity to discuss challenges they face living in multiple worlds. Mr. Linehan shared that, through this class, he learned that his students do have a love for the country, but that they do not love the marginalization they and their families experience as a result of their race, nationality, or socio-economic status.

The final unit, called “How to Be a Citizen,” was meant to focus on a civic action project. This aspect of the curriculum, for St. Jean’s, and for many of the other Civic Spirit schools, remains a work in progress. At St. Jean’s, there is a tension between wanting to do something on the local level on the Upper East Side, while recognizing that no students live in the immediate neighborhood and come from all five boroughs of the city.

Civic Spirit has responded to this difficulty by offering a Civic Delegates program for select students. Last year, that group presented proposals for service projects to the NYC Mayor’s office and this year, the delegates are learning about the 2020 census and thinking about ways to gather data about their own school communities.

Six other schools offered Civic Spirit electives: Central, De La Salle, Frisch, Luria Academy, SAR, and St. Joseph. They all incorporated some balance of studying primary source texts, many of which were taken from the Summer Institute, and discussion of contemporary issues. Like St. Jean’s, a few also included religious texts.

→ As part of a pre-existing course

In other schools, material inspired by the Civic Spirit Summer Institute entered pre-existing courses for students, including some required courses. At St. Peter’s High School in Staten Island, the lead Civic Spirit educator shared texts taught at the Institute with teachers in the Social Studies and English departments.

For example, the 12th grade AP English teacher included Melville’s “Bartleby” as a part of the curriculum, teaching it as both a literary, historical, and moral document. In addition to leading discussion on plot and character, the teacher also shared old photographs and maps of New York City and led the boys in a conversation about contemporary homelessness. Plato’s “Crito” was incorporated into the 9th grade global history class. In 10th grade English classes, students worked collaboratively on an essay prompt asking if Americans should be required to vote. They needed to research the issue, write a short essay in support of and in opposition to the question, and then participate in a class-wide discussion.

Four other schools--St. Joseph, De La Salle, Frisch, and YU Boys--incorporated at least some material picked up through Civic Spirit into pre-existing courses in religion, social studies, or history.

→ As part of school-wide events like assemblies

Yeshiva University High School for Girls (also known as Central) also offered an elective course called Civic Spirit for seniors. After grounding students in history and political philosophy texts (De Tocqueville, The Soul of the 1st Amendment), students worked on an artistic presentation of original poetry and music to be performed in front of the entire school around Thanksgiving time. The performance was well-received and the lead teacher described hearing from ninth grade students who had watched the performance and how excited they were to participate in a Civic Spirit course down the road.

The lead Civic Spirit educator coordinated many other school-wide events for Civic Spirit including a town hall with local elected officials, a voter registration drive for students, and assemblies themed around US holidays. In Fall 2019, the school hosted a series of “Talia Talks” (a version of Ted Talks) before Thanksgiving, in which students and staff shared personal stories related to gratitude and immigration to the United States.

The Heschel School offered in-service programs throughout the year relating to community service and getting to know about the local area. A highlight was a joint program on homelessness with fourth graders and high school students.

St. Joseph’s (through the creation of a PSA), Frisch (through its public debates), LaSalle (through honoring Civic Spirit at their annual gala and proudly displaying a banner identifying them as a Civic Spirit school), and SAR (through its observances of federal holidays) also did school-wide programming related to Civic Spirit.

→ As an extracurricular activity

Bishop Loughlin Memorial High School offered a Civic Spirit after-school club. Highlights of the club’s activities included preparing for and putting on school-wide debates, as well as putting on a workshop for girls to discuss women’s issues in the school. The debate topic for the 2018-19 school year was on using the n-word and the 2019-20 debate will be about police brutality. Petrus Fortune, the teacher supervising the club, estimates that 80-100 students participated in some ways in the club’s activities. There are plans to build up the club for the future, including publishing a newsletter with the results of the two debates.

A reported challenge with the club model is that attendance can be spotty. Unlike a formally scheduled class, students can bounce back and forth between many different after-school activities. By the end of the year, Bishop Loughlin had a solid group of regular participants with plans for continuing to grow the club. Loughlin also offers a course on the history of the Holocaust and its participation in Civic Spirit enriched that course, as documented in this recent [JTA piece](#).

At LaSalle, a group of students who participated in a Civic Spirit club served as Civic Spirit scholars, charged with researching a civic issue and presenting their findings and recommendations to classes all around the school. A consultation with Civic Spirit staff led La Salle to further refine its goals for this club in the 2019-20 school year, based on the three pillars of the Shared Aims. Students will synthesize information about current political structures, articulate and disseminate their opinions, and develop opportunities for civic advocacy in their families, school, and communities.

At The Heschel School, content from Civic Spirit training was integrated into their “Hesed and Tzedek” (Service and Justice) program. Rabbi Anne Ebersman, who attended both Civic Spirit Summer Institutes and the two professional development trainings that Civic Spirit offered to educators, works at Heschel as the Director of Hesed and Tzedek. Using content, pedagogical tools, and government contacts provided during the teachers’ Day of Learning on the US Census, Rabbi Ebersman worked with academic advisors at her schools to create a Day of Learning on the census for the junior class. Similar to the educators workshop, at this event students explored questions and data from census forms of previous decades and identified societal and economic trends revealed through this close reading. In addition, students learned about the US Census 2020 from the census bureau official that Civic Spirit partnered with for the educators workshop. At the learning event, students had the opportunity to interact with the “Who We Are” census exhibit at the Museum of the City of New York. To conclude the program, the Civic Spirit team was consulted and asked to create an action-oriented activity to culminate the day of learning and give the students a concrete civic task to complete.

→ Debates and Civil Discourse

A number of schools incorporated debate and civil discourse into their Civic Spirit programming. As part of its club, Bishop Loughlin High School had students conduct a debate. At De La Salle Academy, a middle school, five different courses are incorporating material from the Essential Partners Civil Discourse training. The Frisch School in New Jersey offered an elective course on the first amendment, during which students publicly debated one another in the school’s central atrium.

Yeshiva University High School for Boys (MTA) implemented Civic Spirit through its Honors College across 9th-12th grade. As a final interactive event, the teachers had students debate the topic: “Who should represent the people in government: elites or common folk?” These debates had a formal structure with a three-minute opening and a rebuttal, after a gathering with the team.

Some of the teachers managing the debate had not attended the Summer Institute. They were English teachers enthusiastic about the material and opportunity to incorporate civic learning; one of them came to the second Summer Institute in 2019. The English teachers, as well as a

history teacher who had attended the 2018 Summer Institute, all encouraged students to base their arguments on primary source texts, some of which were taught at the Summer Institute. At one point in the debate, when the boys were arguing, their teacher asked them to turn to Aristotle for evidence. The teachers reported to Civic Spirit staff that the material from the Summer Institute gave them much to work with in preparation for these debates.

→ By engaging parents

SAR offered a parent and community class taught by a member of the Jewish Studies faculty. This class focused on the obligations citizens have toward their societies. It was grounded mostly in traditional Jewish texts. These texts spoke to the responsibilities diasporic Jews should have to their surrounding societies. One text argued that Jews should engage in order to promote Jewish survival, while another argued that Jews should engage in order to better society more generally. He also included texts that argue that the best version of a person is the version in the context of a larger community.

He also had participants track the development of prayers for the welfare of the government over time and used some secular sources, including the preamble of the UN Declaration of Human Rights and the beginning of the Declaration of Independence. He shared a State Department document from the 1970s that described citizenship as “a thing of the spirit, not of the flesh” which prompted a discussion about the sources of the obligations of citizenship.

Though this educator shared that he is most at home in the *Beit Midrash* (Jewish study hall), he described a longstanding interest in politics, a quality shared among many Civic Spirit educators. Had he not become a rabbi, he might have pursued politics as a career. He argued passionately for a role for religion in the public square, feeling a responsibility for improving his surrounding community because of his religious commitments. He aims to do this from a place of humility, not hubris, calling on Moses’s encounter with God as a model. The idea of teaching from a place of humility is shared by many of the Civic Spirit educators, mentioned explicitly at Summer Institutes by teachers at De La Salle and St. Jean Baptiste. At least in these schools, this quality is a shared attribute of faith-based civic education.

He imagines navigating potentially contentious conversations in community by being honest about the ways God’s touch motivates participants while simultaneously asking participants to recognize that others may be experiencing God’s touch differently. No one, not even Moses, has access to God’s face, to a singular Truth. In secular terms, that might be called *intellectual humility*, which has become a part of one of Civic Spirit’s Democratic Fluency shared aims: Commit to Ongoing Learning. How appropriate that part of Civic Spirit’s launch included a class designed for parents, grandparents, and other community stakeholders that placed such a focus on cultivating intellectual humility.

→ Middle Schools

Two middle schools participated in the first cohort of Civic Spirit: Luria Academy in Brooklyn and De La Salle Academy in Manhattan. They each offered Civic Spirit courses and brought students to Civic Spirit Day. At De La Salle, the Civic Spirit course focused on identifying issues on the local, state, national, and global levels. It included a candid Q&A with police from the local precinct. A project that emerged from the class was research on enhancing safety in the 42nd street subway tunnel. Luria Academy's Civic Spirit course partially replaced a previously offered Jewish history course. The first half of the year remained focused on Jewish history, while the second half focused on US History and government, incorporating some of the primary sources shared at the Summer Institute. Both middle schools also incorporated techniques taught at the Essential Partners civil discourse training. At De La Salle, dialogue as a pedagogical tool is now a part of five different classes across the school.

Both schools attended Civic Spirit Day, but their students struggled with activities primarily designed with a high school audience in mind. The students and teachers still reported having positive experiences. Moving forward, Civic Spirit is considering ways to offer Middle Schools a more age-appropriate alternative to Civic Spirit Day in 2020.

→ Barriers for Implementing Civic Spirit

With all the successes of Civic Spirit's first year, educators still reported a number of barriers to fully realizing Civic Spirit's potential in their schools. Many noted that time was a limited resource, particularly in schools that teach a dual curriculum (religious and secular studies). Even though Civic Spirit invites school administrators to participate in Summer Institutes, a small number of schools identified a lack of administrative support as an additional barrier. Similarly, a few educators commented on the difficulty of getting students and staff to take seriously something that felt like an add-on class, that was not a central part of the curriculum.

Launching a civic action project within Civic Spirit also proved challenging for a number of schools. Many did not have the time to provide the scaffolding necessary for students to complete a meaningful civic project. For some schools, components of the civil discourse training were challenging to implement because of a heavily partisan student body and a curriculum that did not offer much room for thoughtful reflection. Finally, one educator identified the engaging students who were religious minorities within their schools (e.g. Muslim and atheist) required an additional layer to curriculum design.

Civic Spirit as an organization faces some constraints of its own that prevent it from fully helping these schools overcome some of these barriers. While staff can offer some one-on-one support for teachers, provide an intensive day-long civic action project through Civic Spirit Day as well as a longer term project for a smaller group of students through the Civic Delegate

program, and bring educators together for peer support, they are limited given their current capacity of only 1 full-time staff member. As Civic Spirit recruits and works with a full second cohort of Civic Spirit schools, it will be even harder to help current schools overcome some of these barriers without more staffing.

Still, Civic Spirit has managed to motivate and inspire a group of educators to re-energize civics education in their schools, already reaching hundreds of students in just eighteen months. Distinct from the rapidly growing field of civic education, Civic Spirit has developed a promising model using a cohort-based, multi-pronged approach based on emotion-centered pedagogy, deep study of primary source texts, and collaborative civic problem-solving across its diverse network of schools. Further, with the insights of the educators, Civic Spirit has created a set of “shared aims” that focus on students’ competency through civics education, rather than on particular curriculum. Possibly of most importance, through Civic Spirit, educators have entered into relationships with one another across faith traditions with a commitment toward building the next generation of service-minded citizens.