December 2022 Newsletter

“Sharing Our Commitments”

Executive Director Message

Messaging plays a significant role in creating culture. When an organization’s mission is communicated effectively, these words can shape how we interact with one another and influence how we use space as we organize classrooms, business meetings, and communal gatherings.

At a moment when so much divides our society, schools have a unique opportunity to underscore common purpose and shared responsibilities for those they serve. Beyond what is taught in the classroom, what adorns a school’s walls and halls regularly reminds students, faculty, and community members of shared values and aspirations.

One of the highlights of my first six months with Civic Spirit has been visiting faith based schools and seeing them in action. Our Civic Spirit school visits are not just a chance to meet devoted educational leaders and striving students and witness civic education in action, but also to see how schools communicate their values.

On recent school visits, I have been deeply impressed by the messaging I have seen. At the Luria Academy in Brooklyn, a series of signs placed around the campus called “The Four Commitments” caught my eye. Complementing its mission statement, Luria’s values focus on kindness/respect, strength/accountability, curiosity/growth, and contribution/partnership. Moreover, the De La Salle Academy in
Manhattan has its “Core Values” that revolve around Care, Support, and Respect; and each and every visitor to the school can see how these values inform the culture from what’s displayed to how time and space are organized in their building. Both schools integrated aspects of their Jewish and Catholic traditions respectively into their messaging and produced statements that are as much rooted in the timeless traditions as connected to best practices of contemporary education.

In today’s world we are bombarded with messaging. Online ads, posters on public transportation, and corporate logos stitched onto professional sports uniforms attempt to grab our attention and direct it elsewhere.

What makes these values driven posters and displays so powerful is that they invite students to be present, engage with one another, take ownership of their responsibilities, and work together. A shared statement of purpose lets us know what we can expect from each other, what values unite us, and what success can look like. Equally important, creating a communal conversation amongst stakeholders around shared values that culminates in these types of statements of shared purpose is a process that brings the community together in dialogue and visioning.

Representative John Lewis once said, “What I try to tell young people is that if you come together with a mission, and it’s grounded with love and a sense of community, you can make the impossible possible.”

As we reflect today on National Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day, I know that civic education is not a quick fix. It happens one day, one message, one lesson, and one experience at a time. And yet day after day, intentional educational leaders use public social contracts to uplift and elevate our social contacts, enabling the next generation to reach new heights for a better tomorrow for all of us.

Looking Forward,
Rabbi Charles Savenor
Join us on January 5th to prepare for MLK Day
Join Civic Spirit’s We the Educators series on Thursday, January 5th from 7:00-8:30pm ET for an evening of learning and inspiration in preparation for MLK Day. Rabbi Saul Berman and Rev. Julie Johnson Staples, J.D. will illuminate key passages from Dr. King’s “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” and “I Have a Dream” speech that explore the relationship between faith and civic engagement, and share their personal experiences with the Civil Rights movement. We’ll discuss Dr. King’s legacy for us, and ways to bring these texts and ideas into our classrooms and communities. Learn more about the presenters here.

Register Here

Last chance to apply for the Student Delegates program!
The **Student Delegates program** is a unique opportunity for student leaders to train as civic ambassadors. A cohort of selected students from across the diverse Civic Spirit network will have a chance to develop leadership skills, collaborate with others of different faiths and backgrounds, and create digital media to encourage healthy online discourse and combat misinformation. The focus question for this year’s program is, “What does it mean to be a citizen in the digital age?” Students in grades 9-12 can apply for the program which will begin in January, 2023. Please share the Delegates program [flyer](#) with students in your school. Applications close on December 12th.

Students Apply Here

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**Professional Development**
Nina Taub, our Director of Education, ran an Election Day professional development workshop for teachers at Joseph Kushner Hebrew Academy and Rae Kushner Yeshiva High School. At the workshop, teachers began by sharing why teaching with texts is important in their classroom. We discussed how texts can help create empathy for another’s experience and aid students in the important civic skills of perspective taking. Teachers then worked in pairs to study ten texts on the topic of racial equality. Each text modeled a different method of using documents in the classroom. Some texts explored the audience of a text and how that influenced the message, others compared how ideas changed over time, and others contrasted texts from the same time period. After reading the texts, teachers discussed key ideas about equality through the Socratic Seminar discussion technique.

For more information about our professional development workshops, please contact Nina at nina@civicspirit.org.
Cohort member Cary Riker is working on expanding the use of dialogue in the English Department curriculum at Torah Academy of Bergen County. As Department Chair, Cary has added a dialogue component to each ninth grade book study. She hopes to have students practice and hone their dialogue skills throughout the year.

Cohort member Beverley Madar accompanied students to a National Honors Society conference on mental health. Ms. Madar’s students will be producing PSA videos for fellow Bishop Loughlin students on the topics of mental health and social media use.

Cohort member Mollie Beek is developing key questions and methods for studying texts with her seventh grade history class in Luria Academy of Brooklyn. Her goal is to hone their abilities to read text in preparation for a capstone project on Civil Rights expansions in US history.
School Visits

Civic Spirit welcomes any opportunity to visit schools participating in our programs and check out the great work educators are doing in the classrooms with civic education! Executive Director, Rabbi Charlie, has recently had the pleasure of meeting with students, educators, and staff from two Civic Spirit schools- De La Salle Academy and Luria Academy of Brooklyn.

View photos from his visits below, and if you would like to recommend a faith-based school to participate in our programs, please contact charlie@civicspirit.org.

Giving Tuesday Update
A huge win for Civic Spirit- thank you to our wonderful community for helping us reach and surpass our goal of $5,000! It brings us great confidence and joy to know we have the support of so many friends in our network who believe in our mission and work of uplifting educators and students in the field of civic education. Our work is not siloed and we would not be able to make the impact we need in the classroom if it weren't for our generous donors. A special shout out goes to Harriet Shapiro for rallying her Bristol-Myers alumni to our Giving Tuesday cause!

If you did not have a chance to participate in Giving Tuesday, we are still accepting gifts below. If you would like to explore other ways to support Civic Spirit, please contact charlie@civicspirit.org.

Donate Today

“Hear ye, hear ye!” Announcements

Honorary Doctorate Recipient, Executive Director Rabbi Charles Savenor - Congratulations to our Executive Director for receiving an honorary Doctor of Divinity from The Jewish Theological Seminary for his achievements over many years of distinguished service in the community!

Prizmah Conference, January 8-10, 2023, Denver, CO - Join our team from Civic Spirit this winter at the 2023 Prizmah Conference. We have been selected to present our session,
“Why Civic Education is What Our Students Need Today,” to educators and lay leaders from Prizmah’s network of more than 300 North American Jewish day schools and yeshivas gathered in Denver, CO. For more information on how to attend, please click here.

National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA) 2023 Convention, April 11-13, 2023, Virtual and Dallas, TX - Civic Spirit has been accepted to present a virtual session for the NCEA 2023 Convention on-demand library, available this Spring. To register for the convention and check out our session, "Why Civic Education is What Our Students Need Today," and other available offerings for Catholic and religious educators, please click here.

National Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day, December 7th - As we honor this national day of remembrance of the 2,403 service members and civilians who were lost on December 7, 1941, we invite you to read A Pearl Harbor Day Memorial Prayer from the Veterans of Foreign Wars here.

Trivia Time! - Submit your answers to the following trivia questions for your chance to win a free Civic Spirit tote bag!

In what year was the Constitution amended to lower the voting age to 18? What civic responsibility inspired the Twenty-Sixth Amendment to lower the voting age?

Email carla@civicspirit.org with your answers.
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