Civic Spirit's team works every day towards reaching more schools and extending our impact. As we begin 2023, we are excited to share two developments in our scaling effort.

Since our beginning five years ago, one of our premier offerings has been Educators Cohort, a selective 10-month fellowship for teachers committed to advancing their knowledge and skills as civic educators and bringing new approaches to their school. This summer we will offer two cohorts, the first launching with a Summer Institute in Chicago in July and the second at the beginning of August in New York. Two cohorts mean more teachers will be trained and supported in providing quality civic education, and equally important, more students will be prepared with the skills to be informed participants in our democracy.

The second area of growth involves experiential education. Last week, Civic Spirit welcomed Hillary Gardenswartz as our first full-time Director of Student Experiences. A seasoned educator and programmer in both summer camps and day schools, Hillary will run our Student Delegates program and re-launch Civic Spirit Day, an experience that features democratic design challenges and fosters collaboration. The latter was put on hiatus during Covid. We seek to re-establish Civic Spirit Day in-person in the Metropolitan New York area this spring and expand it nationally in 2024.
experiential – or extracurricular - aspects of school life, a whole new frontier exists in this realm associated with camps, youth movements, and community service organizations. As soon as the news about this new full-time position was announced, our team began meeting with camping and youth professionals. The ideas generated about empowering students to become civic ambassadors are inspiring and represent the next frontier for enhancing civic skills and belonging.

The expansion of the Educators Cohort and experiential education offerings are possible not only due to rising interest and demand around the country, but also because we have received generous backing of our mission. We appreciate your support and encourage you to deepen your partnership with Civic Spirit.

Recognizing the challenges and embracing the opportunities of our time, Civic Spirit embraces the words of poet T. S. Elliot: “Every moment is a fresh beginning.” We believe that 2023 is just the start of impacts that we will feel for many years to come.

Looking Forward,
Rabbi Charlie Savenor

If you would like to support our efforts, consider making a gift.

Donate Today

The Educators Cohort is Expanding
The Educators Cohort is a 10-month fellowship for teachers and administrators committed to developing their capacity in non-partisan civic education and bringing new approaches to their schools and communities to enhance civic knowledge, skills, and responsibility. We are thrilled to announce that we will be expanding to two fellowship cohorts in 2023-24. This means two Summer Institutes, one in Chicago in July and another in NYC in August.

Applications are due by March 24, 2023.

Questions? Contact Yael Steiner at yael@civicspirit.org.

Welcome our new Director of Student Experiences! Hillary Gardenswartz
Hillary Gardenswartz is ecstatic to be joining Civic Spirit as the Director of Student Experiences! She is passionate about making civics education relevant and meaningful in the lives of teens. Having worked in a variety of educational settings, Hillary brings her experience from the field to work with both students and educators to create and implement new programs. Before joining Civic Spirit, Hillary was a Senior Project Manager at The Jewish Education Project, where she worked with top professionals, helping to reshape the teen landscape. Hillary was privileged to support and collaborate with educators who worked in all types of settings, including day schools, camps, congregations, and youth groups. Hillary spent twelve years teaching high school Rabbinics and Judaic Studies, and eight years as the Rabbinics department chair at Schechter Westchester (now The Leffell School). She loves helping students become critical readers of text and making text-to-world and text-to-self connections. In addition, Hillary has over 10 years of experience working at Camp Ramah in Ojai.

Hillary is thrilled to be working with students in this year's Student Delegates program! This program, which brings students from different schools together to think collaboratively around a pressing civic issue, will focus on the following question this year: "What does it mean to be a citizen in the digital age?" We still have a few spots open for this year's cohort, so if you want to nominate a student for this program, please email Hillary by Friday, Jan. 27 at hillary@civicspirit.org
In addition to the Student Delegates program, Hillary is looking forward to the return of an in-person Civic Spirit Day this Spring! Civic Spirit Day is a gathering of students from Civic Spirit schools to connect and work collaboratively in designing solutions to civic issues, and this year we're expanding the opportunity for middle school students to gather on their own day! Stay tuned for more details in upcoming newsletters and emails.

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Prepare for Presidents' Day:
Join us on February 7th

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Washington's letter to the Jews of Newport, RI creates a precedent of equality unknown to Jews during centuries of exile. However, many questions exist about this 1790 document, including who actually wrote the letter and whether our first president meant what he wrote. During this session we will offer strategies for developing engaging civic education around documents. We will also consider how to do this within our school communities in ways which encourage respect, foster curiosity, and promote positive interactions.

Register Here
Civic Spirit modeled our educational approach to dialogue around foundational texts at the Prizmah Center for Jewish Day Schools 2023 Conference. Rabbi Charlie Savenor and Nina Taub led a session titled, “How Can We Bridge Divides in Our Schools and Society?” At the session, participants had a chance to study Frederick Douglass’ speech, “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?” and to discuss how the speech personally resonated with them. We then discussed the importance of using primary sources in the classroom to highlight historical perspectives and to help students develop historical empathy.

View photos of our team at the Prizmah Center for Jewish Day Schools 2023 Conference here.

Nina Taub also ran a session at Ma’ayanot High School for students from the school’s Civic Spirit club. Students are researching how they can make change on a local level on issues that matter to them. Nina visited with Ma’ayanot students and helped them brainstorm methods of action they can take on their selected issues. Students discussed whether they would want to focus on informing their peers, speaking to government officials, performing community service, developing entrepreneurial solutions, or some combination of those methods. The Ma’ayanot Civic Spirit club meets twice a month and we are looking forward to seeing how they make change in their community.

Cohort 4 Updates
David Lakin of The Weber School is challenging students with an open ended civics projects. Students in his AP US Government class are making videos that will explain key concepts to their classmates in engaging videos.

Colleen Coveney of Milwaukee Jewish Day School is exploring the civil rights movement with her students by asking them to write movie reviews. They are watching movies with a critical eye to assess the historical accuracy of the movie and how it portrays the civil rights movement.

Linda Litland and Ari Levine of JKHA had students learn about the either-or fallacy in history and today. They compared British and colonial accounts of the Boston Massacre to show how people develop different perspectives on an event. They furthered the discussion by learning about how the either-or fallacy affects us today by looking at cartoons that depict Covid vaccinations and the environment today.

Luria Academy and Ezra Academy recently held school elections that modeled aspects of our electoral process. Teachers, Mollie Beek, Ryan Willm, and Madeleine Cahn, used student government elections to have conversations about the degree to which representative democracies should respond to constituent needs.
School Visits

Civic Spirit is on the road again! Our Executive Director, Rabbi Charlie Savenor, is committed to meeting with educators and students with a need for civic education in their classrooms and has recently traveled to Boston, MA to visit faith-based schools in the area. View photos from his visits to The Rashi School, Gann Academy, Maimonides School, and Schechter Boston below!

If you would like to recommend a faith-based school to participate in our programs or schedule a site visit from our team, please contact charlie@civicspirit.org.
“Hear ye, hear ye!” Announcements

Prizmah Podcast Live: Teaching Towards an Ethical Democracy - Hear from Dr. Dan Glass, Head of School of The Brandeis School in San Francisco, on how Jewish schools ensure that their students become stewards of democracy, and check out the shout out to Civic Spirit in the Prizmah Podcast here!

How America’s most Jewish city is also its most Catholic, Protestant and Muslim - Read about the Museum of the City of New York's newest exhibition, City of Faith: Religion, Activism and Urban Space, and learn how different religious groups have come together to do good work in secular and faith-based spaces. Article can be found here.

We Need to Start Teaching Kids That Civics Is More Than Just Activism - Check out the latest article from TIME that highlights the need for a comprehensive civic education that encompasses more than political activism. Read the article here.

Civic Spirit's Newest Video! - Did you miss the premiere of our newest video? Have no fear, you can view the video here! Hear from our Executive Director and stakeholders on the impact of our work on our educators and students and why Civic Spirit is a trusted partner in the classrooms.

Congratulations to Rabbi Amanda Brodie, a member in our Educators Cohort, on officially becoming a US citizen! We are continuously proud of all the work you do at Ezra Academy in honoring and bettering our democratic life and congratulate you on this wonderful achievement.
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