LURIA ACADEMY OF BROOKLYN

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Team Lead, 9-11

When I began the school year I had the goal of developing an Upper School student government. The year before I had engaged with my students in a conversation about how a student government might look and as a class of 27 kids we came up with the roles, responsibilities and procedures for how a student government might look. Then we had class elections: students submitted their speeches for various positions (president, vice president, treasurer and secretary) and the speeches were read aloud by by faculty members so that the vote would be based on the ideas in the speech rather than the individual behind the speech. Students that were not elected to the government were then allowed to participate in a different way: they selected a committee that they were interested in and worked with other students on various projects (garden committee worked on a school garden, the event planning committee held a chess tournament, the technology committee created a website for social/emotional learning).

My school is very supportive of such endeavors as we are a very student led organization. Within our mission is this clause: “we seek to foster a strong sense of Jewish pride and communal responsibility (ahavat yisrael) along with a profound sense of kinship with all people and a commitment to social justice (ahavat olam). Additionally we seek to instill in our students a deeply held respect for the environment and a committed sensitivity to the needs of our planet (tikun olam).” Our director of teaching and learning prioritizes education that is cross curricular and engages students in civic action. She brought to my team a plan this year to develop a time that centered around problem based learning. In this space, students engage with a problem that they recognize, research background information about, experiment with solutions for and eventually present to others what they have learned. Although it was still in its beta stage this year, the students were very engaged in this process.

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This focus on problem based learning soon became how students engaged in civic endeavors. They learned about various environmental problems found in the school and around the neighborhoods of Brooklyn. They examined various water based problems such as drought, contaminated water and plastics in the ocean. Although there was no central student government, students met in committees to tackle these challenging, real world problems.

Although this was a major way in which we engaged in civic education this year it was not the only way. During our social studies unit on the indigenous people of New York City we visited the National Museum of the American Indian and we had Perry Ground, an educator and storyteller from the Turtle Clan of the Onondaga Nation visit our school. We collaborated with the organization Repair the World to build sanitary packages in honor of the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

From the connections and through the professional development I was exposed to the amazing ideas of educators of all different grade levels from across the country as well as the expertise of civic academics that have been doing this work for a very long time. By participating in Civic Spirit, I gained resources that I could use in my classroom and perspectives that could shift my own education and pedagogy.

Perry Ground, an educator and storyteller from the Turtle Clan of the Onondaga Nation, visits Luria Academy