Yavneh Academy

COHORT 5

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Participating in the Civic Spirit Cohort was one of the most hands-on, practical professional development experiences we have participated in. Engaging in our actual curriculum and content enabled us to prepare actual lessons and projects that we could immediately integrate into our classrooms.

Our Civic Spirit inspired project, “The 2024 Yavneh Bill of Rights Fair,” called on students to emulate constitutional law scholars, researching Supreme Court case precedents, crafting arguments, and collating data. Students collaborated in groups of three or four to create three-panel boards featuring multiple elements, including individual and group “legal briefs", curated multimedia, infographics, and a cartoon strip. To create the cartoon strip, students used Book Creator or Canva to storyboard their “clients” scenarios. Students used primary sources alongside Supreme Court precedents to parse original intent juxtaposed against the ongoing judicial interpretation of these amendments to our Constitution. By grounding their arguments in legal precedent, students sharpened their understanding of constitutional principles but also developed critical thinking skills essential for informed civic engagement. The project’s goals included student-centered learning and curated opportunities for differentiation and self-directed learning.

Throughout the academic year, we integrated civic engagement into the planning and structure of our lessons. We prioritized the pillar of Democratic Fluency as a springboard for meaningful civic engagement. Our curriculum emphasized the intentional placement of primary texts within the larger framework of Democratic Principles, ideals, and practices. With Democratic Fluency as the driver, we sought to develop a comprehensive view of America's political heritage and its heresies; and the concomitant need for a vigorous and engaged electorate. We also prioritized immersive learning platforms to allow students to engage in meaningful debate and critical analysis to center political discourse as a cornerstone of democratic resilience. As an example, students performed as Publius and Brutus to gain a proactive understanding of the tensions around creating democratic systems that could authentically capture and express the “will of (all of) the people.”

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The most meaningful aspect of the Civic Spirit experience was the personalized coaching and mentorship programming with Audi Hecht. Having a mentor who so genuinely cared about our growth and development was an invaluable gift. Audi guided us through the intricacies of civic engagement in terms of pedagogy and project-based learning, with a thematic and goal- oriented coaching. With an unwavering dedication to our growth as educators, she integrated theoretical insights with practical applications and also shared best practices for enhancing student engagement. Audi's depth of experience and her “choose your adventure” approach to project-based learning invigorated our pedagogy and inspired our creativity and sense of joy. Amidst the chaos of deadlines and the occasional existential crisis, having someone there to offer guidance and encouragement was like having a teacher superhero in our corner. Thank you, Audi Hecht!!