



Annual Report 2014-15

is a verb

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Democracy is ...

How would you finish that sentence? Is democracy simply casting a ballot? We at Mikva Challenge say NO! We challenge you to share our belief that democracy is so much more. We work with middle- and high school-aged youth to not only expose them to voting and the electoral process, but also to develop them into full-bodied citizens through our innovative youth-centered curriculum and programming.



Democracy is Empowerment. Teenagers, particularly teens of color, are called lazy, apathetic, violent. I dare you to challenge this notion. When young people are given safe spaces of respect and agency, the possibilities are endless. We have been privileged to see such possibilities in action here through our Peace and Leadership Councils, our Citywide Youth Councils, and our Action Civics curricula.

Democracy is Holistic. Mikva's programming builds the entire citizen: we aim to impact every level of youth leadership and development. Our programs teach persistence, grit, resiliency, collaboration, and communication—skills that are critical to succeeding in a 21st century workforce. Mikva youth report higher confidence and self-esteem, higher feelings of connectedness to their schools and communities, and the feeling that they have the power to change their environment.

Democracy is Love. We love our youth. Mikva Challenge is working tirelessly to invest in and empower our next generation of leaders, to teach them those leadership skills not generally taught to urban youth. We know that once youth are given a voice, they are capable of anything. This is why Mikva is expanding beyond Chicago, into Aurora, downstate Illinois, and our new offices in Los Angeles and Washington, DC.

Democracy is a Verb. If you love our youth, if you love Chicago and this country, I urge you to support Mikva Challenge. With your generous support we can impact more youth here in Chicago and beyond. Doesn't every youth deserve to be exposed to the transformational work of Mikva Challenge and to become a fully realized leader? If you agree, spread the news, volunteer, meet our youth and amazing staff, and help us to grow.

See you at the voting booth,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Michelle Morales".

Michelle Morales, *Chicago Executive Director*

Across Chicagoland in 2014-2015, Mikva Programs Served:

7,636

Student participants

145

Teacher participants
who use Mikva curricula

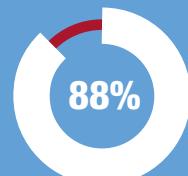
115

Schools in all corners of
the Chicagoland area and
its surrounding suburbs

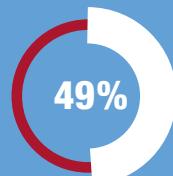
65,000

Alumni nationwide

Program alumni who are
registered voters

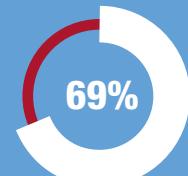


MIKVA ALUMNI

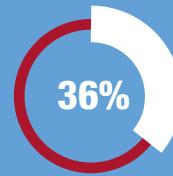


18-29 YR OLDS
NATIONWIDE

Mikva alumni who continue to
volunteer in their communities



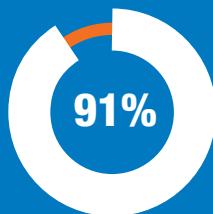
MIKVA ALUMNI



18-29 YR OLDS
NATIONWIDE



Campaign program participants who intend to vote in the future

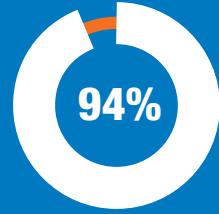


MIKVA YOUTH

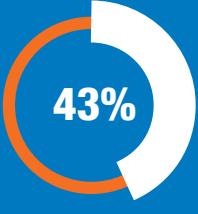


BEFORE MIKVA

Peace and Leadership Council participants who believe young people have the power to influence decision-makers



MIKVA YOUTH

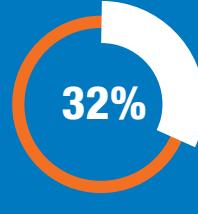


BEFORE MIKVA

Students who can confidently present a speech in front of a group of people



MIKVA YOUTH



BEFORE MIKVA

3,311

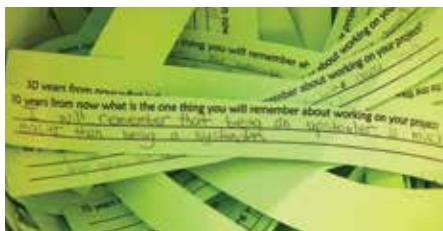
Students engaged in campaign work, voter registration, and election judging

121

Classrooms of students each took action on a local school or community problem

18

School-based and citywide youth councils advised adult leaders on youth issues



A photograph of a young man with short dark hair and a light beard, wearing a dark suit jacket, white shirt, and light blue tie. He is standing on a sidewalk in front of a brick building with large windows. A green utility pole is in the foreground to his right. The background shows a city street with trees and other buildings.

**“FOR THE FIRST TIME I SAW A LIFE OF POSSIBILITIES
AHEAD OF ME, WHICH FUELED MY DESIRE TO CHANGE.”**

BERTO AGUAYO

GROWING UP, I DIDN'T HAVE A SAFETY NET. There was no one in my neighborhood I could look up to. No one went to college, no one had a degree, and when you don't have anyone around you who's done that, you don't even know that sort of thing is a possibility.

I was raised in the Back of the Yards on Chicago's South Side. My mother worked hard to raise me and my siblings in a single-parent household, but despite her best efforts, I did what so many in my neighborhood do: I joined a gang. My grades started failing as I found the street a more welcoming place than the classroom.

Things changed when my high school principal tossed me an application to Mikva Challenge while I was serving a suspension in her office. Miraculously, Mikva accepted me in spite of my 1.5 GPA and my record number of suspensions. I landed an internship with Alderman Michele Smith through Mikva Challenge's Summer Fellows program.

THAT INTERNSHIP EXPERIENCE TRANSFORMED MY LIFE. I RAISED MY GPA FROM A 1.5 TO A 3.0 AND LEFT THE GANG.

Upon graduation, I was selected to participate in Mikva's Mayoral Youth Commission where we worked to design policy recommendations to present to the Mayor and other city officials.

Today, I'm a senior at Dominican University majoring in Political Science and Economics while minoring in Pre-Law and Business Administration. I am spending my fall semester in Washington, DC at the office of Senator Dick Durbin through the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute Congressional Internship Program.

Through my experiences at Mikva and Dominican, I've learned and changed a lot. I think often about others who are in the same place that I was a few years ago. We're from tough neighborhoods. We're the ones who are being affected by the policies being put into place without including our voice. I want to be the one who uses my talents to help turn around the sense of powerlessness that many disadvantaged youth experience. I want to be that voice that Mikva has helped create.



EVERY FALL, MIKVA CHALLENGE FACILITATES PROJECT SOAPBOX—a public speaking competition that helps teens develop valuable communication skills that are critical to a young person’s ability to ‘get on a soapbox’ and become an advocate for pressing community issues.

In 2014, 2,750 high school students from 28 schools across Chicago participated, presenting compelling speeches that addressed the prompt, “If you were mayor of Chicago, what is the first issue you would address and why?” First place winner Joanna Bahena, Phoenix Military Academy, answered that question with a powerful speech on the importance of providing support for victims of rape.

“BY PARTICIPATING IN SOAPBOX, I LEARNED THAT MY THOUGHTS AND VOICE REALLY DO MATTER. I LEARNED THAT MY ISSUE IS ONE THAT AFFECTS MANY. I SHOULDN’T BE AFRAID TO SPEAK—BECAUSE I CAN MAKE CHANGE.”

SENIOR at Alcott College Prep

Before they ever take the stage, students work with their teachers on a curriculum specifically designed by Mikva to develop research and persuasive writing skills in preparation for writing and delivering their speeches. Working together, the teens and educators discuss what makes for great public speaking, how to structure a speech and how to receive and incorporate feedback on their skills.

After careful practice and preparation, teens present their speeches to peers and adult allies in the civic, political and business communities. The winners of the competition appeared on WBEZ to talk about their experience with Project Soapbox. Congratulations to all who participated!

IMPACTS:

In classroom competitions, **83%** of participants felt their voice was heard by their peers.

87% of teachers strongly believe that they saw improvement in their students’ public speaking skills.

96% of students at our Citywide Tournament said they would seek opportunities to speak out on issues they care about.

HIGHLIGHTS:

Extensive media coverage >



“I BELIEVE THE HIGHLIGHT OF PROJECT SOAPBOX WAS THE PRIDE EXHIBITED BY THE STUDENTS WHO FACED THEIR FEARS AND SPOKE IN FRONT OF THEIR CLASSMATES AND THE JUDGES. IT WAS AN EXCELLENT PERSONAL CHALLENGE.”

JUANITA DOUGLAS Teacher at Lincoln Park High School

2,750 → 98 → 120 → 10 → 1

Youth at 28 schools

Classroom
competitions

Advanced to
Citywide Tournament

Youth in
final round

Winner



A photograph showing a group of diverse young people from different ethnic backgrounds. They are looking at a large white poster or banner. The poster features the text "#DiverseChic" in green, a colorful abstract graphic, and the word "THE" in red. One person in the foreground is wearing a blue and yellow striped shirt.

"I ALWAYS THOUGHT THAT EVERYONE WAS AGAINST ME, BUT AT MIKVA I LEARNED THAT THERE ARE MANY PERSPECTIVES TO A SITUATION AND THAT I'M NOT ALONE IN MY TROUBLES."

MEHAK HAFEEZ



BEING PART OF MIKVA CHALLENGE GAVE ME A CHANCE to stand up for myself and develop communications and leadership skills I didn't even think I possessed. Mikva Challenge provides what I think are rare and amazing opportunities for youth in Chicago, especially youth like me who are undocumented and come from a low-income family.

My law teacher noticed that I was having difficulty in school and was being bullied because of my accent and my background, so she recommended I join Mikva Challenge. As soon as I started here I knew it was a game changer for me.

I started off by campaigning for an alderman and it was an amazing experience! Later, I worked as a Summer Fellow and then as part of Mikva's Mayoral Youth Commission. A big milestone for me was being part of the Chicago Youth Congress and the Employment Summit, both of which reached thousands of youth and addressed issues of employment and safety for young people.

YOU KNOW HOW A ROCKET NEEDS A SPARK AND FUEL TO SHOOT UPWARD? MIKVA WAS THAT SPARK FOR ME.

Now I'm a student at Harold Washington College and am working part-time at the Chicago Architecture Foundation. My dream is to become a clinical psychologist and help people in low-income communities who have issues of depression and anxiety — something I'm very familiar with in my own household.

I always thought that everyone was against me, but at Mikva I learned that there are many perspectives to a situation and that I'm not alone in my troubles. Mikva taught me that my voice matters, that being a woman from another culture doesn't have to define me. It's my thoughts, my work, and my approach to life that makes me who I am.



IN MY SECOND YEAR OF TEACHING AT BROOKS COLLEGE PREP, a coworker signed up for a program facilitated by Mikva Challenge and I decided to sign up, too. I had no idea what to expect from my students, but by the end of the year they had had an amazing experience. By talking to media, their alderman, and other influencers, students got their message across to the administration how important it was to finish the school building the way that it had originally been conceptualized.

The Democracy in Action program was definitely the most transformative for me. Understanding key issues, identifying access points to influencers, advocating for policy changes—all of those things are completely new for most students. Democracy in Action allows students to express themselves, take on leadership roles, and learn when to step back and let others lead. They grow in a multitude of ways.

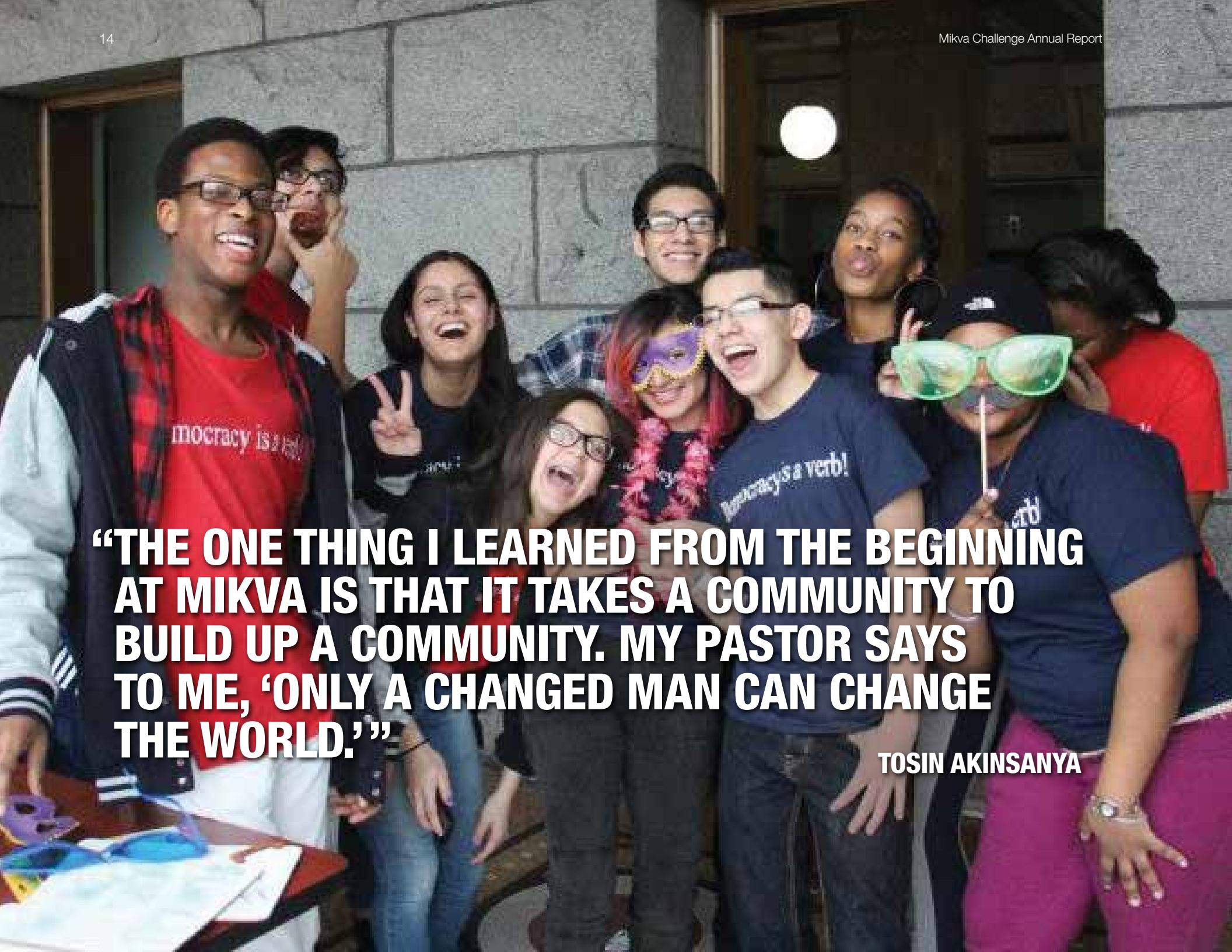
For me the real brilliance of Mikva, the real strength, is the people who work there. They are passionate about this mission and they work tirelessly to provide the support that teachers need, the access to information, and ideas that they might not have at hand. Mikva is far more than a curriculum or a binder. It's the human capital that comes with those tools.

I can honestly say that Mikva Challenge has completely transformed my pedagogical paradigm. The job I have now as a Civics Instructional Specialist for CPS is due to Mikva. I support 54 civics teachers at 32 schools and encourage them to utilize Mikva's programs, resources, and expertise. Teachers don't have to be intimidated if they don't have deep experience in civics. I'm there to support them. Mikva is there to support them. And with support like that, every educator can empower their students to be powerful forces for change.



“I EMERGED FROM THAT YEAR ENERGIZED AND TRANSFORMED ABOUT OUR STUDENTS’ CAPACITY TO BE CHANGEMAKERS BY USING THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS. I THOUGHT DIFFERENTLY ABOUT MY APPROACH TO NEARLY EVERYTHING IN THE CLASSROOM.”

LIZ ROBBINS



“THE ONE THING I LEARNED FROM THE BEGINNING AT MIKVA IS THAT IT TAKES A COMMUNITY TO BUILD UP A COMMUNITY. MY PASTOR SAYS TO ME, ‘ONLY A CHANGED MAN CAN CHANGE THE WORLD.’”

TOSIN AKINSANYA



"MIKVA SUCKS!" Those were my words after my first Mikva Peace and Leadership Council meeting. I just wasn't feeling it. Our instructor said to me "Tosin, you're gonna love it!"

Now I strongly say: **I LOVE MIKVA!**

Four years ago, my family moved from Nigeria to the United States with the dream that my siblings and I would have the opportunity to be successful and get excellent educations. We sold all of our belongings to buy plane tickets and sacrificed nearly everything to come to a country whose culture, language, and lifestyle we knew nothing of.

At Mikva Challenge, I was privileged to participate in electoral campaigns and civic projects, including a phenomenal approach called participatory budgeting or 'PB' for short. PB allows residents to decide how to spend the ward's \$1.3M discretionary "menu money."

Working with youth from the 49th Ward, we came up with a project titled #TakeASeat. Our proposal was to establish bus stop benches at the 22 Clark Street bus stops in order for pregnant women, seniors, and disabled citizens to have a seat while waiting for the bus.

DURING THAT TIME I GREW TREMENDOUSLY, AND I OWE IT TO ALL THE STAFF AT THE 49TH WARD OFFICE AND AT MIKVA.

We presented our project at ward meetings and set a goal for 100 youth votes. To our surprise, we exceeded our goal by gaining 752 votes, and over 100 from youth. The success of that project drove me to participate in the Mikva Summer Fellows internship and work at my Alderman Joe Moore's office for six weeks.

From working with PB to my internship, my actions always counted, whether big or small. Mikva has embedded into my heart the spirit of change: from being shy, to publicly speaking.

Today I'm a student at Wilbur Wright College majoring in mechanical engineering. I'll continue to be civically engaged and keep that spirit alive as I go forward.



New Civics Practitioners Conference

MIKVA CHALLENGE BELIEVES that 21st century educators need to take a fresh approach to civics education. That's why we developed an approach we call action civics, a model that encourages students to bring their voices and perspectives to bear on issues facing their communities.

In this spirit, we convened 192 educators, youth workers, and youth civic education leaders in June 2015 for our New Civics Practitioners Conference, co-hosted by the National Action Civics Collaborative. Over the course of two days, attendees participated in innovative trainings and workshops designed with two goals in mind: making space for educators to share best practices and building grassroots energy for a teacher-led New Civics movement.

“WE WANT TO BUILD A MOVEMENT AROUND NEW CIVICS. WE WANT TO HELP TEACHERS REIGNITE THEIR PASSION.”

AMANDA BERGER Middle-school social studies teacher

From action civics to youth media production, from digital civic learning to controversial issues debates, we recognize that the tools and strategies for teaching civics are changing. We believe that providing in-depth training and comprehensive exposure to a range of New Civics instruction is one of the best ways for educators to build their capacity to lead relevant and empowering civic engagement practices with youth. We've even developed our own curriculum—*Issues to Action*—through which students select an issue in their school or community, conduct action research to inform their thinking, analyze the power relationships involved in implementing change, develop change strategies, and take action.

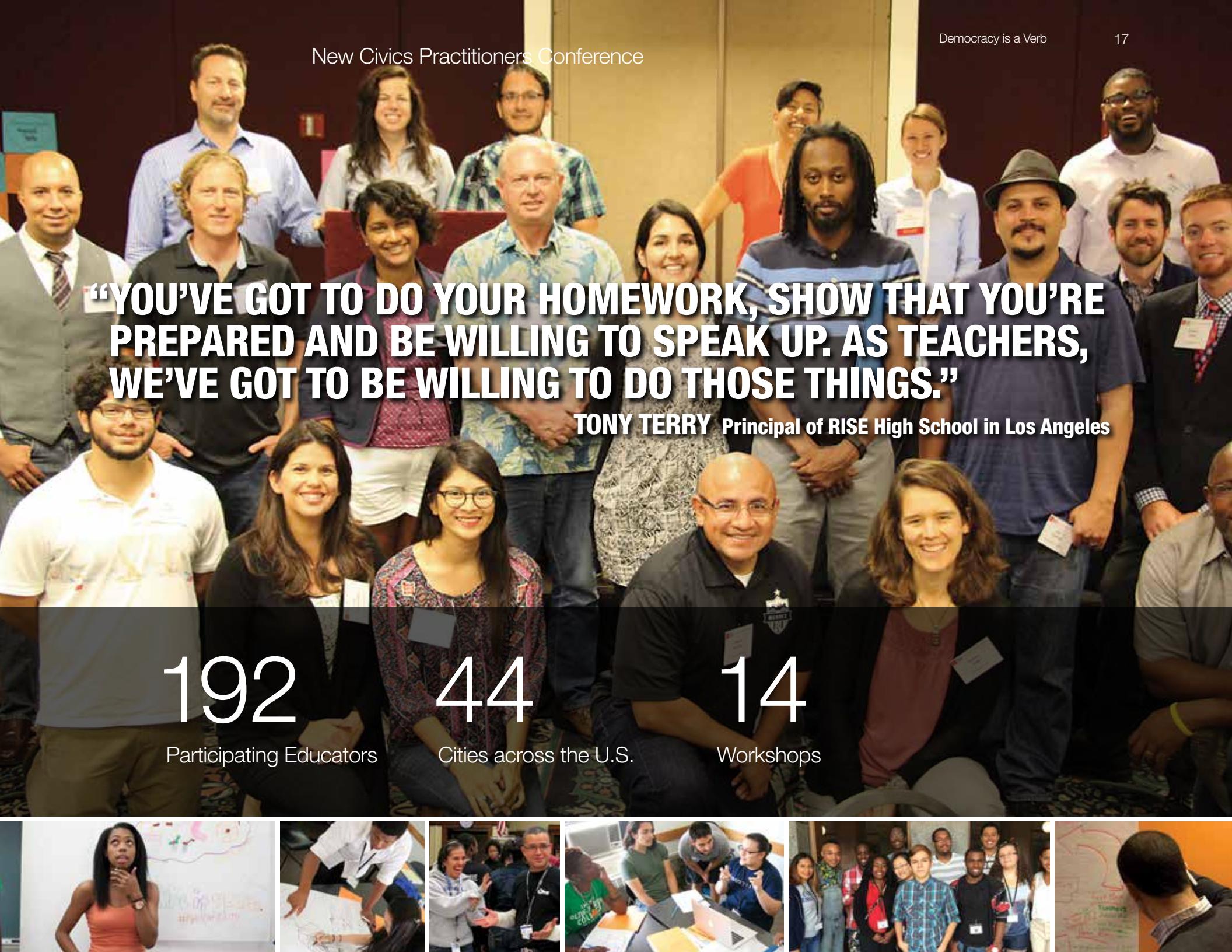
Our goal of the conference was to inspire teachers to return to their schools ready to approach civics instruction in a fresh way and with the tools to do it. Ultimately we believe that teachers will be the champions who blaze the path for New Civics to become the norm in civic education within their school districts, statewide, and, eventually, nationwide.

SPONSORS:



PARTNERS:

- Center for Inspired Teaching
- Chicago Freedom School
- Constitutional Rights Foundation Chicago
- Earth Force
- Facing History and Ourselves
- Generation Citizen
- Generation Nation
- iCivics
- The Participatory Budget Project
- ProCon.org
- Smart Chicago
- Engagement Lab
- The News Literacy Project
- University Community Collaborative
- Youth On Board Student Advisory Council



"YOU'VE GOT TO DO YOUR HOMEWORK, SHOW THAT YOU'RE PREPARED AND BE WILLING TO SPEAK UP. AS TEACHERS, WE'VE GOT TO BE WILLING TO DO THOSE THINGS."

TONY TERRY Principal of RISE High School in Los Angeles

192

Participating Educators

44

Cities across the U.S.

14

Workshops



Peace and Leadership Councils

Mikva Challenge's Peace and Leadership Councils (PLCs) operate in eight high schools and five middle schools in Chicago communities that experience high rates of youth violence. PLCs are designed to build students' self-confidence and collaboration skills, and foster youth-adult partnerships to address school problems.

The PLCs provide youth with the expertise needed to successfully implement their ideas for improving their school climate. Students cover a diverse range of topics throughout the year, from lunchroom food to cell phone and uniform policies. Other important issues include teacher and student relationships, bullying, and community violence.

"I'VE GROWN AS A LEADER BECAUSE I'VE GAINED MORE CONFIDENCE. I SAY THINGS MORE CLEARLY, AND I KNOW WHO HAS POWER."

8TH GRADER at McAuliffe Elementary School

These councils also provide social and emotional learning opportunities to help young people become better collaborators and communicators with their peers, as well as foster a stronger feeling of connectedness to each other and to their schools.

HIGHLIGHTS:

- The Fenger High School PLC took part in "The Simple Good," a photography project that connected youth from Moshi, Tanzania and Chicago, Illinois for a photo exhibit at Northwestern Law School.
- PLC students from five middle schools took a field trip to Springfield where they met with their representatives and successfully advocated for reinstating afterschool program funding.

PARTICIPATING MIDDLE SCHOOLS:

Marquette (Chicago Lawn)
McAuliffe (Logan Square)
Orozco (Pilsen)
Perspectives (Auburn Gresham)
Reavis (Bronzeville)

PARTICIPATING HIGH SCHOOLS:

Bowen (South Chicago)
Clemente (West Town)
Fenger (Roseland)
Harper (West Englewood)
Hope (Englewood)
Sullivan (Rogers Park)
Tilden (Canaryville)
Wells (West Town)



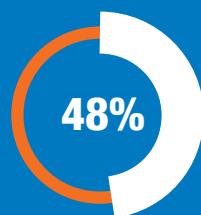
“THE WORK THAT MY GROUP AND I HAVE DONE HAS HELPED MY SCHOOL. WE PROVED THAT STUDENT VOICES ARE NOT TO BE TAKEN SO LIGHTLY. OUR OPINIONS MATTER AND WE DO HAVE GOOD IDEAS FOR IMPROVEMENTS.”

PEACE AND LEADERSHIP COUNCIL PARTICIPANT Tilden High School

Participants who intend to take leadership roles on an issue/campaign

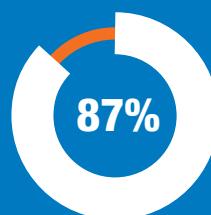


Mikva Youth



Before Mikva

Participants who believe young people have the power to improve their school or community



Mikva Youth

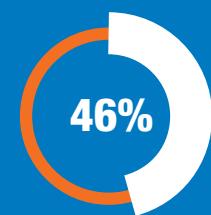


Before Mikva

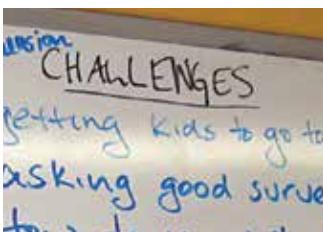
Participants who intend to stay involved in community issues



Mikva Youth



Before Mikva



RECEIVES THE PRESIDENTIAL MEDAL OF FREEDOM

On November 24th, 2014, **PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA HONORED** our co-founder, Judge and Congressman Abner J. Mikva, with the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian honor.

Abner Mikva started his political career in 1948, when he tried to volunteer for the Stevenson/Douglas campaign and was rudely dismissed by a Chicago ward committeeman with the words, "We don't want nobody nobody sent." Beating the odds, Abner continued to push his way into the tightly knit political grid and was elected in 1956 to the first of five consecutive terms in the Illinois General Assembly. Over the course of his career, he held positions in all three branches of the U.S government, a distinction that few can boast.

"OF ALL THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN MY PROFESSIONAL LIFE, WHAT I AM MOST PROUD OF IS HELPING FOUNDED THE MIKVA CHALLENGE."

ABNER MIKVA

The idea that all of us "nobodies" should have a voice in the political process is an important one for Ab, one that he and his wife, our co-founder Zoe Mikva, consider the cornerstone of a thriving democracy.

We're so proud of and inspired by Judge Mikva and continue to promote his and Zoe's vision for involving young people in politics through our work here at Mikva Challenge.



Electoral Engagement

MIKVA CHALLENGE BEGAN AS MANY MOVEMENTS DO, with a dedicated, all-volunteer staff that ambitiously set out to make a transformative change in their city. They ran electoral engagement projects in just four schools, but the impact was immediate. Energized by that first year, Mikva has expanded dramatically in the last 18 years, but we've never lost sight of our founding principles.

Electoral engagement efforts that get young people—politicos and novices alike—into the excitement of campaign work and demystify what it takes to run for office are at the center of who we are. These are the most basic of hands-on democracy experiences, but ones that are often unavailable to many youth.

"IT'S BEEN BECAUSE OF THE FOUNDATION THAT MIKVA CHALLENGE PROVIDED FOR ME THAT I KNOW GOVERNMENT CAN GET BETTER AND IT WILL WORK BETTER. LEADERSHIP IS A LIFESTYLE, AND I THINK YOU SEE THAT THE MIKVA CHALLENGE STUDENTS ARE THE LEADERS IN THE ROOM."

RONNIE MOSLEY Mikva Alumnus & Assistant to the Alderman, Michelle Harris (Ward 8)

We use these efforts to help young people identify the candidates whose platforms resonate with them and become critical consumers of election news coverage. Mikva students are exposed to a variety of viewpoints across the political spectrum as they are empowered to meet candidates, engage with voters, and develop a strong sense of agency in the political process.

Mikva's Elections in Action Curriculum is now being used by 700 teachers in 47 states, motivating thousands of students to speak out and get involved. This work takes on special significance in election years, when youth serve as election judges in polling places, campaign for candidates competing in elections, and intern in the offices of elected officials.

Our model of actions civics provides youth with authentic and transformative democratic experiences that we believe are the first steps toward a lifetime of civic commitment. And we continue to be in awe of what our young people can accomplish when they know that their voice is valued in decision making. Through their words and their actions, Mikva youth continually reinforce our shared core belief: democracy is a verb.

3,311

Student Participants in
Elections Programming

99%

of Student Election Judges intend
to vote in the future once they are of
voting age or did vote if already of age



Special thanks to our generous supporters

Gifts received between July 1, 2014 and June 30, 2015

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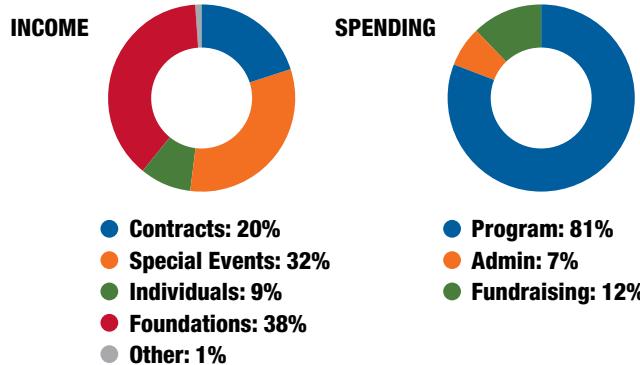
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Mikva Challenge is proud to report a strong financial position at the end of our FY15. We were able to make strategic infrastructure investments while devoting 81% of our expenditures—up from 77% in the prior FY—directly to mission-focused programs for youth, teachers, and schools. We ended FY15 with a budget surplus, due to growth in our special events and securing more foundation partners for our work. Contract and fee-for-service support allowed us to expand our intensive summer programming to engage more young people than ever in meaningful, paid jobs. Our generous corporate and individual donors provided critical general operating support for our youth voice programming.

We completed the pilot year of our first replication initiative, Action Civics LA, at the close of FY15 and launched a planned second replication site in Washington, DC. We are excited about the potential to grow Mikva Challenge's impact in Chicago and to share our model with cities around the country.

Thank you for your support of Mikva Challenge.

STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES

Years ended June 30	2015	2014				
	UNRESTRICTED	TEMPORARILY RESTRICTED	TOTAL	UNRESTRICTED	TEMPORARILY RESTRICTED	TOTAL
Revenue and Support						
Foundation and corporate grants	200,200	959,312	1,159,512	170,000	858,646	1,028,646
Individual contributions	215,072	50,000	265,072	98,936		98,936
Special events:						
Gross proceeds	1,004,013	30,000	1,034,013	924,029		924,029
Expenses	(64,079)		(64,079)	(101,035)		(101,035)
Contract services revenue	603,740		603,740	490,456		490,456
Interest and dividends	28,495		28,495	28,833		28,833
Net realized and unrealized gain on investments	(4,035)		(4,035)	19,783		19,783
Other income	4,850		4,850	5,175		5,175
Net assets released from restrictions:						
Satisfaction of restrictions	1,131,504	(1,131,504)		802,299	(802,299)	
Total revenue and support	3,119,760	(92,192)	3,027,568	2,438,476	56,347	2,494,823
Expenses:						
Program services	2,311,670		2,311,670	1,767,386		1,767,386
Management and general	208,403		208,403	167,577		167,577
Fundraising	336,234		336,234	367,193		367,193
Total expenses	2,856,307		2,856,307	2,302,156		2,302,156
Change in net assets	263,453	(92,192)	171,261	136,320	56,347	192,667
Net assets, beginning of year	1,555,442	423,431	1,978,873	1,419,122	367,084	1,786,206
Net assets, end of year	\$ 1,818,895	\$ 331,239	\$ 2,150,134	\$ 1,555,442	\$ 423,431	\$ 1,978,873

These statements are an excerpt from the Mikva Challenge's annual audited financial statements. For a complete copy of those statements, please contact Mikva Challenge.



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