



2020 annual report //

# Youth Reshaping

Democracy

**Mikva  
Challenge**

| [mikvachallenge.org](https://mikvachallenge.org)

# Challenge, opportunity and optimism

## The year in review and the roots of success

When the COVID-19 pandemic broke out in March of 2020, Mikva Challenge had to adapt rapidly to provide the urgent support youth and educators needed across the country.

Through the upheaval and challenges Mikva nonetheless saw exceptional growth. Mikva training and curricula programs expanded into more than twenty states. Mikva Challenge's Founding Chapters in Chicago and Washington, DC continued to serve as innovation hubs for Action Civics and youth voice, inspiring other counties, cities and states to partner with us. New sites include Cobb County (GA), Wilmington (DE), Rochester (NY), Louisville (KY), Riverside (CA), New Hampshire, Detroit and Macomb County (MI), Madison (WI) and Milwaukee (WI).

As many of you already know, Brian Brady will be retiring from Mikva this spring. Brian has spent the last 20 years working tirelessly as the CEO of Mikva Challenge, helping to spread the impact of civic engagement and youth development work across the country.

Brian's tenure has seen Mikva Challenge's reach grow from a handful of schools to an organization that now engages over 100,000 youth annually in Action Civics programs in over 3,000 schools across the country. Enabled by a dedicated and talented staff, courageous teachers, and

committed supporters, Brian's work has realized the vision of Ab and Zoe Mikva to engage young people in the political process. We are guided by principles central to our founders: the best way to learn democracy is to do democracy. As we say, "Democracy is a Verb!" He has had such a tremendous impact on Mikva, and all those whose lives it touches; for this we are eternally grateful.

## Youth voice will help form a more perfect union

In this new decade, Mikva is doubling down on our core values of amplifying youth voice, fighting for equity, and empowering our youth leaders. These goals will be at the forefront of all we do. Through strategic planning this year we will further define our values — centered in equity and justice — continually working to operationalize them in our work, both externally and internally.

We the People includes all of us; it is not partisan, it is American.

Young people are driving the racial reckoning movement throughout the country because they have the courage and energy to challenge systems and to dream a stronger, more inclusive America. Adult leaders and communities need to harness the immense power, creativity, idealism, and wisdom of young leaders to drive change and build more accountable systems of governance.

The opportunity for young people to engage in our democracy has never been more apparent, and their voices are needed. Now is the moment for us to focus on civic education and to build more equity in our communities. We have accomplished a lot, but there is still so much work to be done.

Thank you for joining us on this journey.



**Mark Rosenberg**

*Mikva Challenge Board Chair*

# The Mikva Challenge

Through our chapters and partner sites across the country, Mikva is committed to amplifying youth voice, fighting for equity, and empowering our youth leaders.

● Mikva Partner Site ★ Mikva Chapter

To date **300,000+** students have participated in Mikva Challenge programs in 17 cities/counties throughout the country.

**100,000** Students nationwide participate in Mikva programs each year.

**2,500** Teachers have received professional development and curricula in Action Civics to increase student engagement.

**97%** Of teachers report that using Mikva curricula increased their students civic knowledge.

## Learning democracy by doing democracy

Mikva Challenge was founded on the premise that youth voice and participation matter, and that our civic and political life will be stronger when youth participate and shape their own destinies. We envision a stronger, inclusive democracy that values youth voice.

## Building an educational movement

In 2020, Mikva continued to be on the forefront of the Action Civics movement. We provided powerful opportunities to 'learn democracy by doing democracy' with a focus on underserved and marginalized communities and youth of color, as well as support and curricula to educators from school districts across the country.



# A year of challenge and resilience

**“Youth voice being amplified during this pandemic is very important.” – Mikva National Youth Reponse Movement Council Member, New York**

When the pandemic broke out early in the year, Mikva had to pivot – quickly. We immediately went to work retooling lessons for remote learning, moving traditionally in-person showcases and Soapboxes online, and creating virtual spaces where youth leaders could continue to advocate for their issues and ideas.

Teachers and students faced incredible barriers in engagement and collaboration as our nation went on lockdown. Despite the hurdles, Mikva events were filled with energy, hope and passion.

In 2020, after participating in Mikva programming –

**45,000+ students nationwide took to their Soapboxes**, delivering impassioned speeches and offering potential solutions to critical issues

**1200+ Elections in Action curricula** was provided to teachers

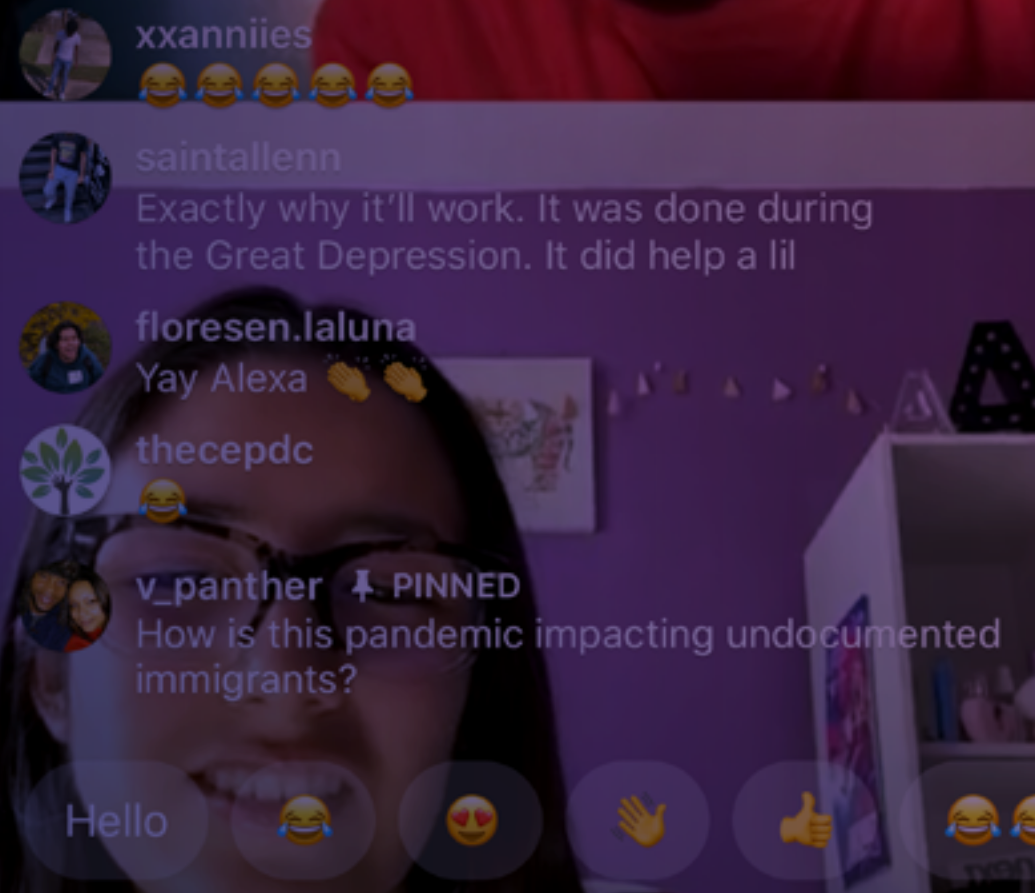


In 2020, after participating in Mikva programming –

97% of students said they are **more likely to actively listen to their peers**, even when they may not hold the same views

83% of our civic partners said they are more likely to **include youth as part of policy changes and community improvement**

95% of our teachers said that they are more likely to have **positive relationships with their students**



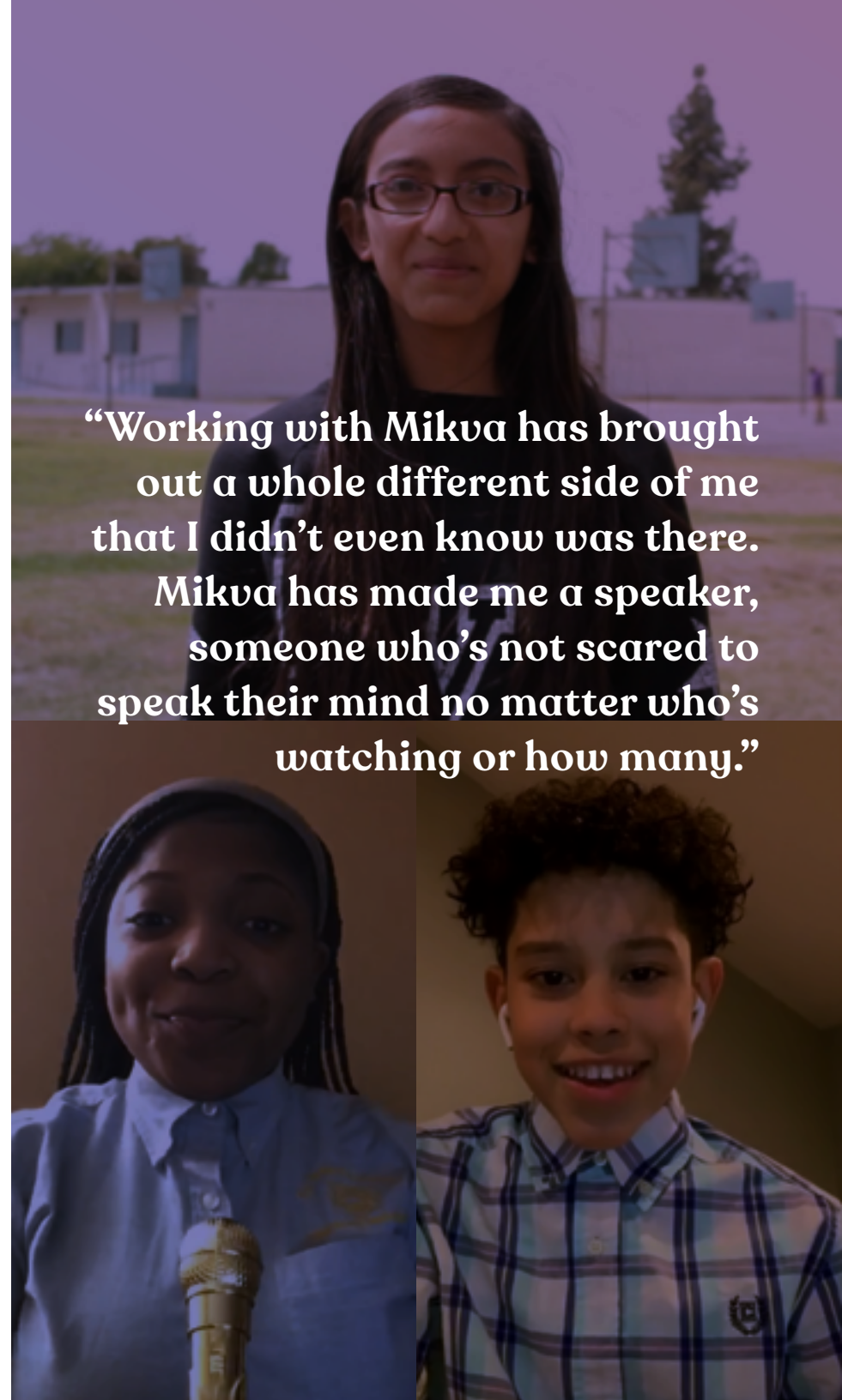
# COVID-19 policy response

**“We are the people most at stake.”  
– Mikva NYRM Council Member,  
Washington, DC**

Mikva convened young people across the country into national and local COVID-19 response teams that brought youth voices and experiences to the policymaking table. As the nation grappled with the dual crises of a pandemic and a racial reckoning, our National Youth Response Movement (NYRM) crafted policy recommendations for building more just, equitable and student focused schools. The youth leaders powerfully presented these recommendations to members of Congress and leading experts in education and philanthropy.



Meet the National Youth Response Movement team



**“Working with Mikva has brought out a whole different side of me that I didn’t even know was there. Mikva has made me a speaker, someone who’s not scared to speak their mind no matter who’s watching or how many.”**

# Elections in Action

**“There are a lot of kids like me who are fighting for our present and our future.” – Mikva Youth Issues Summit attendee, California**

This election season was like no other and it showed us just how strong our democracy can be when youth are at the table. Mikva Challenge engaged thousands of youth nationwide in the democratic process in 2020. Despite being too young to vote, youth turned out to speak up, advocate for candidates, and mobilize their communities.

## During the 2020 election year –

Mikva enrolled 2,205 youth as **student judges** for the spring primaries

Provided educators nationwide with **professional development** that brought elections to life for their students by centering the study of elections around students' personal experiences

Connected 1,200 teachers with **Elections in Action curricula**

**Engaged over 1,240 students** through youth voting squads, national youth election forums, youth councils, and the Great Electoral Race

Hosted five **national virtual events** with over 700 youth which gave students the opportunity to get informed, and equipped to make an impact in the historic election

**“I learned that I can make a difference. That we matter. That my age doesn't affect my mental capacity to take on big issues.”**


**– Mikva Youth Issues Summit attendee, Madison, WI**




Watch Raena, a Mikva middle school student, talk about youth participation in the 2020 election

**“Too often young people, people of color, people with less means, people from neighborhoods where there aren’t a ton of resources, they don’t always realize their power. They’re not always looked to for answers.” – Mikva Youth, Washington, DC, Iowa trip 2020**

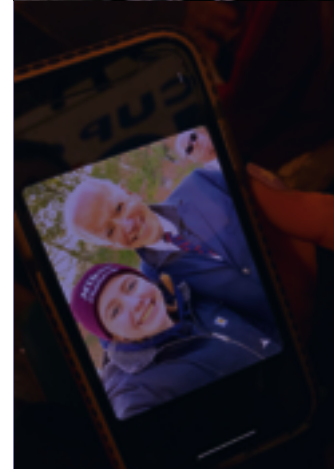
Students inspired a nation when they found their voices during the Iowa caucus. Mikva took over 220 students from across the country to get their first real experience with the democratic process. The youth campaigned for presidential candidates, held their own youth caucus around issues most important to them, and attended candidate forums with local Iowa lawmakers, as well as the Democratic candidates themselves.

 CNN's coverage: the issues young people say they care about in the 2020 election

 The Iowa trip gathered national media attention, explore the news coverage



**Sam Clarke**  
17 years old



**cnn** These are the issues young people say they care about in the 2020 election

These students from Washington, DC, traveled to Iowa — the first state to vote in the 2020 Democratic presidential primary — as part of a trip hosted by a group called the “Mikva Challenge.” The non-partisan program focuses on outreach to under-resourced communities and schools across the country. Many of the students say being politically active is personal for them, listing gun violence, climate change, education, and health care as issues they face every day.

2h



85,545 views



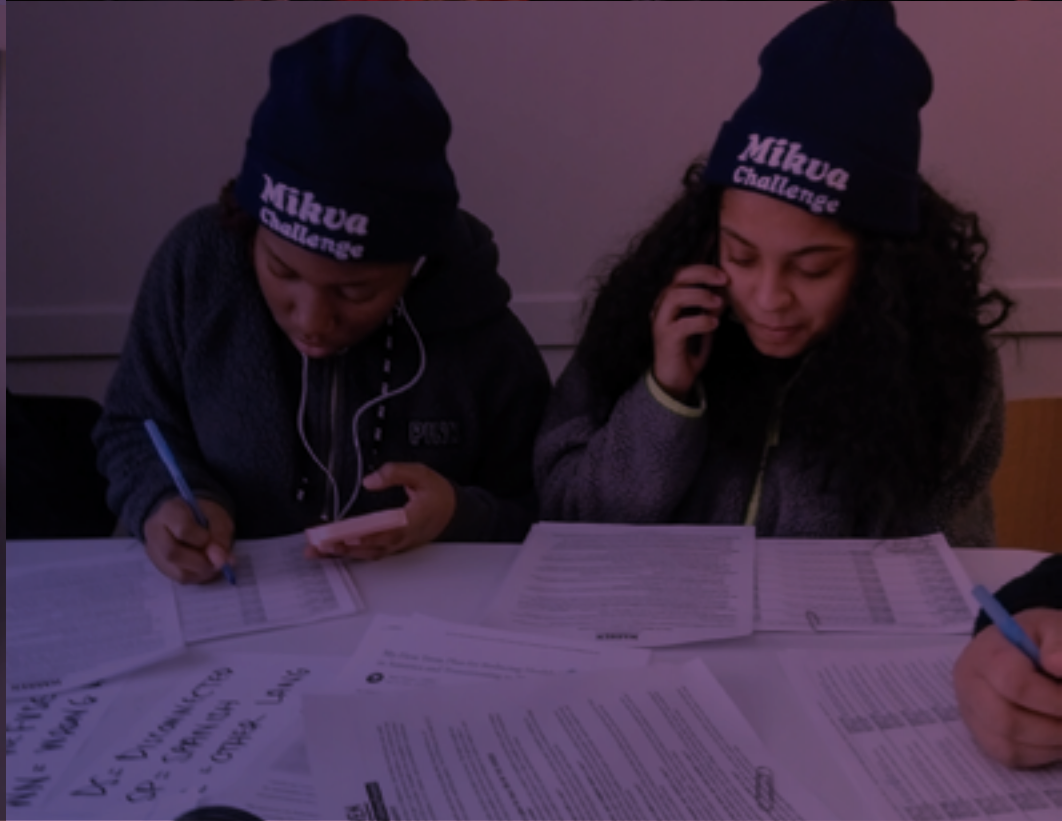


## Due to their participation in Mikva electoral events –

99% of Mikva youth believe that **young people like them need to take a stand** on political issues

82% said they are more likely to be **actively involved in community issues** than before

97% said they are **more likely to campaign** for a candidate or issue now



CHAPTER HIGHLIGHT

# Mikva Challenge IL

**“It has literally changed my life. Mikva Challenge shows kids that they don’t have to wait until they have a seat at the table to make change; that just because they’re young doesn’t mean that what they have to say doesn’t matter.” – Mikva Juvenile Justice Council Member, Chicago, Illinois**

Mikva Challenge IL provides in-school services to 185 middle and high school teachers in Chicago, Aurora and the Northwest suburbs, impacting over 10,200 youth annually. Mikva Challenge IL also reaches over 225 youth with advocacy and leadership-focused afterschool programming.



## In 2020, Mikva Challenge IL focused on –

**Virtual Classrooms** Mikva Challenge classrooms across Chicago stayed active, virtually. Mikva students participated in Project Soapbox and submitted videos to address the issues they care most about; including Disability Inclusion, Teen Mental Health, and Community Needs During COVID-19.

**Chicago Citywide Policies** Mikva Challenge's Citywide Youth Councils (CYCs) infused youth voice into policy-making conversations and decision-making across Chicago. In 2020, Mikva Challenge employed more than 110 youth across five different Councils, who made policy recommendations in 17 Decision Maker meetings, resulting in 19 policy wins. Mikva youth also hosted the first-ever State of Chicago Youth Town Hall to showcase their top priorities in the areas of health, juvenile justice, education, youth-police relations, and public housing.

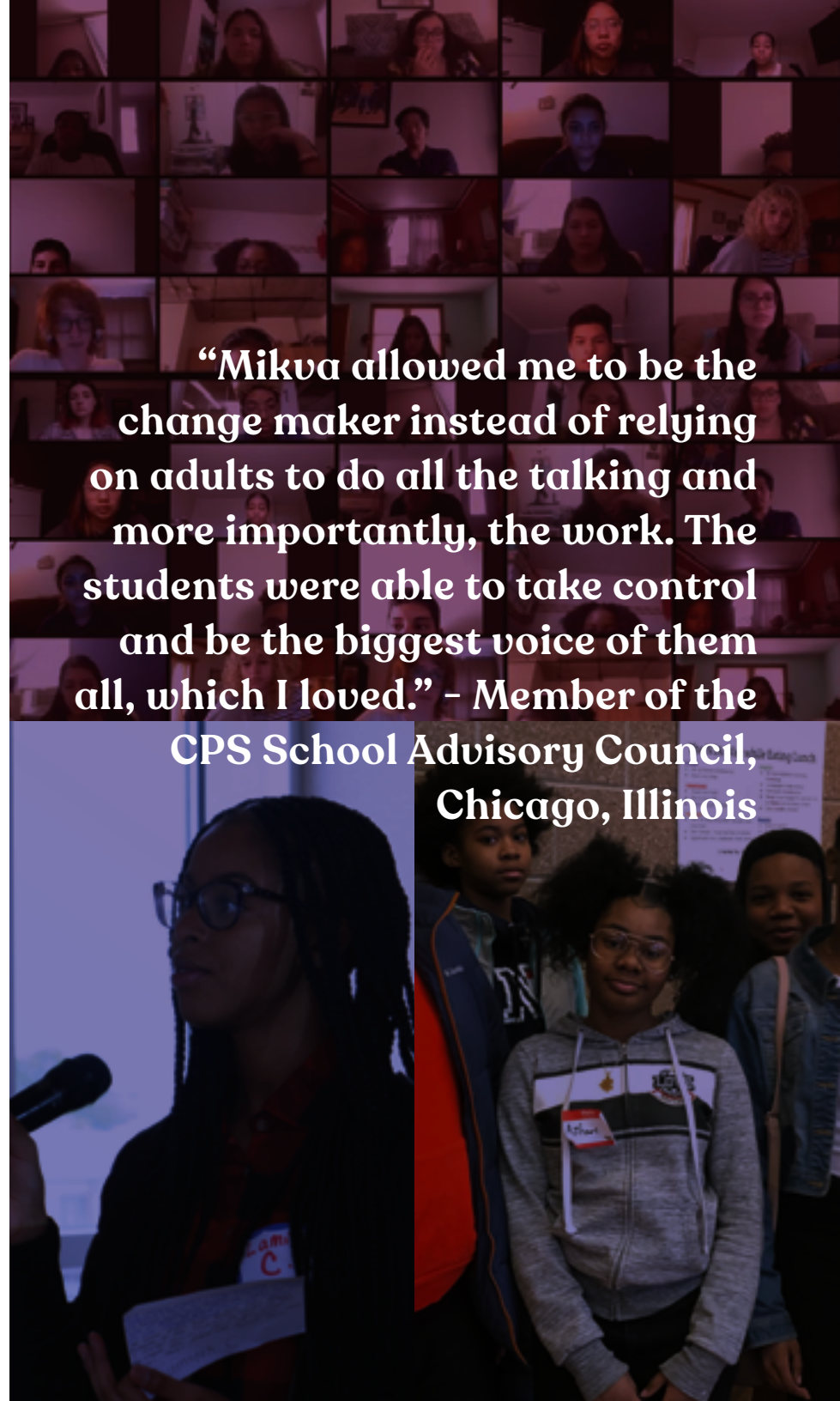
**Neighborhood Leadership Initiative** Mikva Challenge's middle- and high-school program, based in the neighborhoods of North Lawndale, Gage Park, and New City, explored hyper-local issues, provided intensive mentoring, and connected students to local leaders. In 2020, Neighborhood Councils hosted two Town Hall events to discuss the causes and consequences of violence in their communities and to present their youth-led solutions.

**COVID-19 Response** Chicago Youth Response Team (CYRT) provided youth a platform to discuss their concerns, stories, and ideas surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic. Mikva Challenge youth advocated for the issues that the COVID-19 pandemic exposed, including education equity and the digital divide, access to healthcare, socioeconomic inequality, mental health support, and a need for social-emotional tools as students return to school.

**Youth Resources** Mikva Challenge provided tablets and computers to ensure students could e-learn and virtually participate. Mikva staff also provided 1:1 support and resources.



Watch the State of Chicago Youth Town Hall



**“Mikva allowed me to be the change maker instead of relying on adults to do all the talking and more importantly, the work. The students were able to take control and be the biggest voice of them all, which I loved.” – Member of the CPS School Advisory Council, Chicago, Illinois**



## CHAPTER HIGHLIGHT

# Mikva Challenge DC

**“Mikva Challenge celebrates the different backgrounds youth come from and teaches them how to use their experiences to be involved in civic leadership. Since becoming involved with Mikva, I have decided that I would want a career in advocacy.” – Mikva alumnus, Washington, DC**

Mikva Challenge DC makes citywide impact in Washington, DC, reaching over 1,200 local students at more than 30 schools. Through teacher partnerships, Mikva Challenge DC integrates Action Civics into students' classroom experiences. Students engaged in real-life democratic experiences outside of the classroom through our Elections in Action and Summer Fellowship programs.

## In 2020, Mikva Challenge DC focused on –

**Elections in Action** Thirty high school students from across the city spent the year activating their peers and communities in the 2020 presidential election. Fellows traveled to Iowa in January for campaigning before the Iowa caucus and to South Carolina in February for the Get Out the Vote work. In March and April, when we pivoted to virtual programming, students started hosting Instagram Live round tables to address public policy issues affecting youth today.

**Action Civics Showcase** Youth and educators participated in the Mikva Challenge National Action Civics Showcase. Students shared ideas and solutions on critical issues affecting their lives.

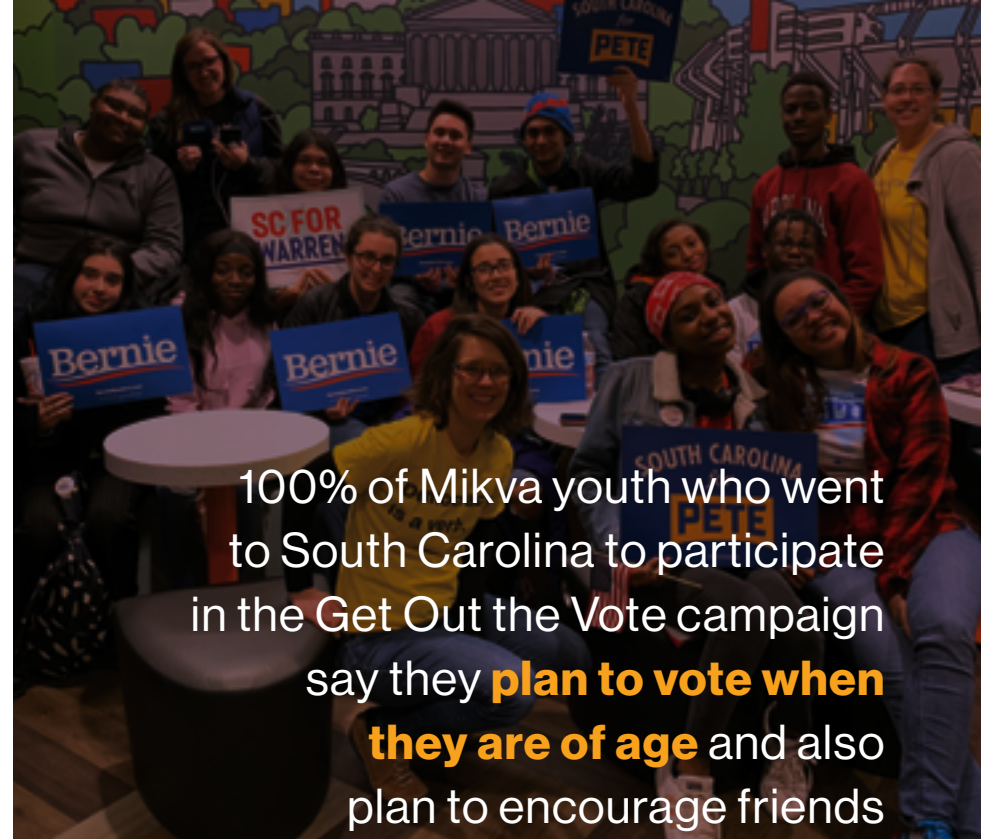
**Summer Fellows** The Summer Fellows program brought youth voice to city leaders, district agencies, and local advocacy organizations. Participants worked as virtual interns on projects focused on improving virtual education, increasing access to health services and combating hate crimes. Summer Fellows organized and led a virtual Youth Roundtable with five DC City Council members centered on increasing public safety for young people in DC.

**Youth Census Ambassadors** Youth Census Ambassadors mobilized residents in Wards with lower response rates to complete the 2020 Census. In total, the Ambassadors held 15,568 conversations with community members about the importance of the Census.

**Project Soapbox** In the fall, DC students joined Mikva students nationwide to deliver impassioned two-minute speeches about an issue important to them and ideas for solutions.



Watch the Mikva DC Youth in Quarantine Table Talk



100% of Mikva youth who went to South Carolina to participate in the Get Out the Vote campaign say they **plan to vote when they are of age** and also plan to encourage friends and family to vote





## CHAPTER HIGHLIGHT

# Mikva Challenge CA

**“There are a lot of kids like me who are fighting for our present and future and it was beautiful to share the same feelings, build on them and move toward taking action.” - Youth Issues Summit attendee, California**

Mikva Challenge CA provided opportunities for young people in Southern California to engage in Action Civics to increase youth voice in local decision-making processes. In 2020, Mikva CA provided curricula and programming to every school in Anaheim, in addition to 100+ schools throughout the state. Last year, Mikva Challenge CA reached 4,000 youth.

## In 2020, Mikva Challenge CA focused on –

**Project Soapbox** Thousands of young people in Los Angeles County and Orange County participated in the Mikva Challenge CA Project Soapbox this past year. The experience had a transformational impact on the students who participated. **“Soapbox was amazing. It was inspirational to listen to the personal experiences of my peers and how they could utilize their struggles and empower others.”**

**California Rapid Response Team** Young leaders spoke out on issues in their life related to the pandemic. The team also identified how community leaders can better support youth. **“Mikva Challenge has given me an opportunity to use my voice civically. We talk about these things in school, and how to use your voice occasionally. But with Mikva Challenge, it lets me get involved. I now have actually done something and know how to get something like this started.”**

In the coming year, Mikva Challenge CA is expanding its programming to Riverside, CA, providing its youth activism curricula and training to teachers across the state through a contract with the CA Department of Education.



Watch Kenny's Soapbox speech on anxiety. Kenny, a Soapbox Nation finalist from Anaheim, California, served on the California Rapid Response Team in this past fall.



100% of the California Rapid Response Team say they are significantly more likely to be **actively involved in community issues**



In 2020, after participating in Mikva programming –

100% of youth said they feel like they can **make a difference in their communities**

100% of teachers said they are impressed by how their **students took ownership of their learning**

98% of youth want to **try harder in school**





# Financials

Mikva Challenge is proud to report a strong financial position at the end of FY20. We ended FY20 with a surplus, due to strong foundation partnerships and a number of new investments to support our programmatic expansion to deliver the Mikva Action Civics model in more communities and schools across the county. Our generous corporate, foundation and individual donors provided critical general operating support for our mission-focused programs for youth, teachers, and schools.

**Thank you for your support of  
Mikva Challenge.**

## Statement of Financial Position

|   | June 30, 2020    | June 30, 2019    |
|---|------------------|------------------|
| <b>Assets</b>                                 |                  |                  |
| Cash  | 711,821          | 529,696          |
| Investments                                   | 1,478,221        | 1,351,464        |
| Grants and contributions receivable           | 1,800,962        | 751,152          |
| Other receivables                             | 166,114          | 189,924          |
| Prepaid expenses and deposits                 | 122,443          | 167,219          |
| Property and equipment, net                   | 49,545           | 68,437           |
| Total assets                                  | 4,329,106        | 3,057,892        |
| <b>Liabilities and Net Assets</b>             |                  |                  |
| <b>Liabilities</b>                            |                  |                  |
| Loan payable                                  | 430,272          | -                |
| Accounts payable and accrued expenses         | 91,329           | 207,610          |
| Deferred rent                                 | 57,076           | 61,484           |
| Deferred Revenue                              | -                | 18,429           |
| Total liabilities                             | 578,677          | 287,523          |
| <b>Net assets, without donor restrictions</b> |                  |                  |
| Board-designated endowment funds              | 1,680,858        | 1,556,902        |
| Undesignated                                  | 268,169          | 151,880          |
| Total without donor restrictions              | 1,949,027        | 1,708,782        |
| With donor restrictions                       | 1,801,402        | 1,061,587        |
| Total net assets                              | 3,750,429        | 2,770,369        |
| <b>Total liabilities and net assets</b>       | <b>4,329,106</b> | <b>3,057,892</b> |

## Statement of Financial Position

|                                       | Year ended June 30, 2020   |                         |           | Year ended June 30, 2019   |                         |           |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|-----------|----------------------------|-------------------------|-----------|
|                                       | Without donor restrictions | With donor restrictions | Total     | Without donor restrictions | With donor restrictions | Total     |
| <b>Revenue</b>                        |                            |                         |           |                            |                         |           |
| Foundation and corporate grants       | 282,153                    | 2,163,500               | 2,445,600 | 244,152                    | 1,143,172               | 1,387,324 |
| Individual contributions              | 517,368                    | 474,414                 | 991,782   | 318,753                    | 73,152                  | 391,905   |
| <b>Special events</b>                 |                            |                         |           |                            |                         |           |
| Gross proceeds                        | 652,556                    | -                       | 652,556   | 1,100,655                  | -                       | 1,100,655 |
| Less cost of direct benefit to donors | -                          | -                       | -         | (174,123)                  | -                       | (174,123) |
| Contract services revenue             | 1,120,892                  | -                       | 1,120,892 | 1,005,069                  | -                       | 1,005,069 |
| Net investment income                 | 126,852                    | -                       | 126,852   | 112,804                    | -                       | 112,804   |
| Other income                          | 27,995                     | -                       | 27,995    | 11,188                     | -                       | 11,188    |
| Net assets released from restriction  | 1,898,099                  | (1,898,099)             | -         | 1,578,195                  | (1,578,195)             | -         |
| Total revenue                         | 4,625,915                  | 739,815                 | 5,365,730 | 4,196,693                  | (361,871)               | 3,834,822 |
| <b>Expenses</b>                       |                            |                         |           |                            |                         |           |
| Program services                      | 3,290,117                  | -                       | 3,290,117 | 3,493,906                  | -                       | 3,493,906 |
| Management and general                | 485,091                    | -                       | 485,091   | 429,136                    | -                       | 429,136   |
| Fundraising                           | 610,462                    | -                       | 610,462   | 702,391                    | -                       | 702,391   |
| Total expenses                        | 4,385,670                  | -                       | 4,385,670 | 4,625,433                  | -                       | 4,625,433 |
| Change in net assets                  | 240,245                    | 739,815                 | 980,060   | (428,740)                  | (361,871)               | (790,611) |
| <b>Net assets</b>                     |                            |                         |           |                            |                         |           |
| Beginning of year                     | 1,708,782                  | 1,061,587               | 2,770,369 | 2,137,522                  | 1,423,458               | 3,560,980 |
| End of year                           | 1,949,027                  | 1,801,402               | 3,750,429 | 1,708,782                  | 1,061,587               | 2,770,369 |

# Mikva Challenge

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# Mikva Challenge

## Donors

**“I feel like as a person you’re supposed to leave things better than you found them and giving to Mikva Challenge is my way of doing that” – Mikva donor**

A special thank you to all our supporters. Gifts received between July 1, 2019 and June 30, 2020.

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In honor of the students in Ms Alison Rice and Ms Raquel Smith's class who inspire me with their passion and wisdom!  
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