



It's Your Democracy!

By Alecia Bryner, Education Programs Coordinator for the Morven Park Center for Civic Impact

November 2018 was a civics-heavy month with Election Day, Veterans Day, and the 100-year anniversary commemoration of the end of World War I.

Throughout the month, there was heightened interest in civic concepts, a push for people to vote, and a sense of community for those who have dedicated their lives to the service of our country. But what happens after the month of November?

Morven Park's Center for Civic Impact strives to ensure that democracy is at the forefront of everyone's mind and that civic engagement is second nature to Loudoun youth. Morven Park plays an important role in connecting local students with the community and encouraging their involvement in democracy. So far in the 2018-2019 school year, the Park's Education Team has taught over 2,200 Loudoun County students and are on track to reach at least 7,000 students by June. We want students to be engaged in their communities 12 months out of the year, not just on election days and national holidays.

Despite a busy schedule of teaching, planning, and prepping materials, the Park's educators always make time to attend the annual National Conference on Citizenship in Washington D.C., and this year did not disappoint! The theme of the conference – "It's Your Democracy!" – reflected on the current state of democracy and civic engagement levels across the nation.

This theme was emphasized by a number of enthusiastic presenters, especially during the session on youth engagement in which students from around the country described how they are tackling issues facing their communities. The next generation has the potential to be more civically committed than previous generations, but must use their voices to become the change that they want to see. The students at the conference not only proved that they know it, but they are acting on it!

One of the key ideas highlighted by the empowered teens at the conference was that the public agenda often includes issues that directly impact the student population, but because younger teens can't vote, politicians and community leaders do not visit their schools, leaving teens to feel overlooked as constituents. Teens want to be heard and they want to be taken seriously because they are dealing with challenging issues every day.

Morven Park's Center for Civic Impact endeavors to teach all students that their voices are needed to make democracy work and influence change, and to see themselves reflected in democracy. At the start of our programs, we often hear students say that civics is not interesting or they feel the government doesn't listen to them – and we say, "Then make it!" Our hope is to continue to empower the next generation of Loudoun County citizens to understand and engage in the democratic process rather than follow a path of civic disengagement.

As a nonprofit organization, Morven Park relies on contributions from civic-minded citizens and dedicated donors to bring authentic, real-world problem solving to Loudoun County schools. Please help us empower youth by making a donation today at www.MorvenPark.org/Donate.