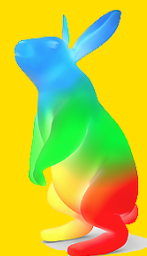


AUSTIN MONITOR IN THE CLASSROOM

AN INTERIM REPORT, FEBRUARY 2016



Google fiber



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In fall 2015, Google Fiber agreed to support a pilot version of the Capital of Texas Media Foundation's Monitor in the Classroom project. This effort is conceived as a way to inspire young future voters to participate in civic activity. In so doing, it is also an attempt to help local educators make existing subject material more relevant to students via Austin Monitor reporting. Initial plans were to have Monitor publisher Mike Kanin produce lesson plans and a basic set of metrics with which to measure the impact of the program. Initial interest, however, moved us forward quickly, and without much in the way of either. Still, as you will see, the program demonstrated significant potential as a core set of teachers adopted Monitor in the Classroom tools. Their efforts, those of the Monitor, and the first collaborative explorations produced supplemented learning experiences, opportunities that wouldn't have been available to students without Monitor involvement, including a class trip to present a traffic solution to an Austin City Council Member (pictured), an award-winning civics fair prize, and broader understanding of U.S. history through local reporting. All that happened in just four months. Additional plans call for the production of a "This American Life"-style radio program that will examine the perceptions of Lanier High School students against the backdrop of a fight at a school basketball game, further classroom material supplementation, and our first try at teaching math via current events. Beyond that, CoTMF hopes to expand Monitor in the Classroom into a full-scale effort available across the AISD system. To support this effort, we'll look to a class at Travis High, where state testing should demonstrate the efficacy of the program.

Impact Summary

Fall Semester, 2015

Students Served.....	113
Participating Schools.....	2
Participating Classrooms.....	3
Monitor Classroom Visits...	10
Electeds reached.....	11



Progress at Lanier

The Monitor's Mike Kanin met with Lanier teacher Taylor Hawkins and Lanier Principal Ryan Hopkins. Hawkins and Hopkins listed off a set of teachers they felt would be most interested in the program. Eventually, two—AP U.S. Government teacher Guillermo Tabasco and AP U.S. History teacher Laurie Beaman—agreed to get started with the program immediately.



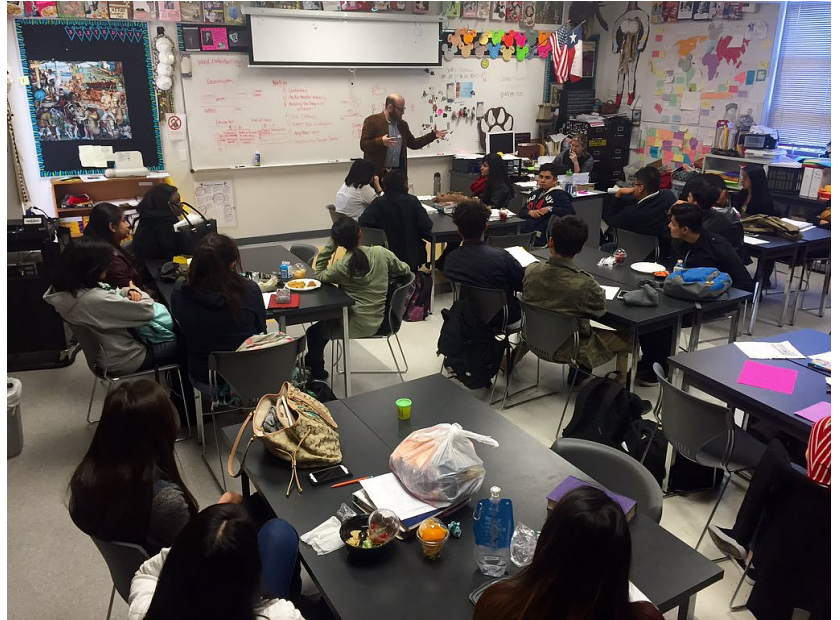
AN "OUT OF THEIR WORLD" EXPERIENCE

Government Class to City Hall Guillermo Tabasco's fall 2015 AP U.S. Government class was the first to participate in the Austin Monitor in the Classroom program. Beginning in October 2015, Tabasco's class used the Monitor for regular current events reading assignments. This was supplemented with two in-class visits from Kanin. The first, for a lesson on the role of media in a democracy, and the second for a lesson on special interests and how they interact with government. (Each of these presentations is attached in the appendix.) In addition to these uses, Tabasco employed the Monitor to supplement an already-scheduled lesson in ordinance writing. Tabasco's students elected to pursue their concerns over traffic safety around Lanier High, and in neighborhoods surrounding the school, and wrote a resolution calling for improvements. The Monitor added a practical element to this exercise, arranging for a class visit with Austin City Council Member Greg Casar . In preparation for the visit, students prepared a powerpoint presentation. The meeting took place in Casar's office on November 18, 2015. Armed with facts about the situation—and a great sense of timing, informed by Monitor coverage of a coming vote on the dispensation of transportation dollars—the students convinced Casar that the improvements should be considered for a portion of the dollars reserved for his district by Council vote. In late January, Casar invited Tabasco's class to deliver their presentation to the rest of Council (pictured, above). This they did, and their proposal was included as part of a set of transportation-related expenditures pitched by the Council Member.

For his part, Tabasco noted that the experience offered his students an opportunity to engage in government in a way that would not otherwise be available. He called the experience, "out of their world."

"FANTASTIC CONTENT"

History Class made relevant A.P. U.S. History teacher Laurie Beaman elected to use the Monitor in the classroom program to supplement existing lessons plans. She asked Kanin to produce a list of articles that would touch on six successive already planned-for themes (see the appendix for details). She assigned these articles as reading material for her students. Beaman said that the synthesis between existing lessons and Monitor content was "fantastic," and added that her students asked questions she couldn't answer about Austin and the articles they were reading. This has produced a slight change for the second semester of they year. All 85 of Beaman's students were able to participate in this portion of the program. The design here prompted deeper thinking about critical local issues, and future efforts should produce valuable discussion opportunities for Lanier students.



Looking ahead. The spring semester will bring twice as many students to Tabasco's classroom. Though this may make things more difficult, logistically, he still plans to pursue the same line of programming. Beaman anticipates fewer students this semester, and a slightly different approach. This spring, the Monitor will support the production of a "This American Life"-style radio feature. In so doing, she hopes that the students can employ critical thinking skills to analyze the perceptions of Lanier students in their community. This project will involve a smaller subset of students, and will be mostly extra-curricular. Kanin will guide production of the show, set for a May 18 broadcast.

Meanwhile, Beaman plans to use Kanin to help guide a look at various City of Austin issues alongside already-scheduled reading about U.S. History (Kanin, addressing Beaman's students, pictured above). Here again, she hopes that students will see parallels between history and their everyday experience, an approach that may make it all more relevant. Thus far, Kanin has been used to compare and contrast the Gilded Age with a growing economic disparity in the City of Austin. Future plans include economic policy and immigration.

Tabasco and Beaman will be joined in the Spring by Hawkins. Hawkins plans to use Monitor coverage of the City of Austin's sound ordinance and the measurement of sound to demonstrate practical applications for certain algebraic math equations. Hawkins' programming will be complimented with classroom visits from Kanin, partisans on all sides of the debate, and field trips to measure sound at various downtown sources. Hawkins also plans to use this as an excuse to get his students to City Hall.

Progress at Austin Achieve

"THANK YOU FOR ALL OF YOUR SUPPORT"

Austin Monitor in the Classroom started at Austin Achieve with teacher Ellie Ezzell. Ellie saw an opportunity to use Monitor content to help her Civics Club prepare an entry for the Annette Strauss Institute's Speak Up! Speak Out! civics fair.

Getting 'em while they are young Ezzell's club is part of a mandatory extra-curricular program provided by Austin Achieve. She and the sixth graders who participated in the Civics Club met twice a week for much of the fall semester. Kanin joined them for multiple sessions. This included a presentation that introduced students to the branches of government as they are organized in the City of Austin (see appendix). However, Ezzell found Kanin most useful as a resource to a group of students working on a project for the fair about civic engagement. There, Kanin used his expertise to guide research and the development of the project from early on. Though the students did not place, they did win an award. Ezzell puts it in context: "They (all students with Austin Achieve) were the youngest group there, competing against 8th and 9th graders," she told Kanin in an email. "There were about 400 competitors presenting 75 projects. They gave out 7 awards, a 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place, and then four honorable mentions in four categories. "The (civic engagement group) won an honorable mention for creativity!!!," she continued. "Thank you for all of your support! They were so pumped to win, and they did an incredible job." Despite ultimate success, it is worth noting that the Austin Achieve wing of the project ran into issues with accessing the publication. Ezzell attributed this to age, and the fact that not all students had access to email—a necessity for Monitor log-in. We aim to address these problems in the second semester.

Looking ahead Ezzell is targeting an advocacy project for next semester. She also plans to try the program with eighth-graders, a move she thinks may alleviate access issues. Meanwhile, Ezzell has brought in a seventh grade teacher who'd like to use Monitor in the Classroom to supplement her Texas History lessons. Both teachers are, to-date, still preparing specifics.

WHAT'S NEXT?

CoTMF's work to establish Monitor in the Classroom programs in targeted areas this fall was supplemented by continuing outreach to test interested in expanding the program. To that end, Matthew Meldrum, AISD's High School Language Arts Curriculum Specialist, arranged for Kanin to attend two cross-district departmental meetings. From journalism teachers looking for help establishing a school newspaper, to English teachers looking for supplemental writing material, interest there was significant. Indeed, as we've already noted, there is interest from other teachers at Lanier and Austin Achieve in expanding the program on those two campuses. Meldrum and Kanin have also discussed building a potential curriculum around feature writing. Though the Monitor does not currently feature such writing, Kanin has experience in the field, and would offer his expertise here. CoTMF has also established contact with government and history administrators at AISD. They will receive copies of this report ahead of an effort to engage these departments along similar lines. At a higher level, AISD District 6 rep Paul Saldaña has indicated interested in the program.

We've seen exciting results in a limited pilot project that has fostered civic engagement in small group of Austin's students, and strong exposure for the Monitor and our mission to foster transparency and engagement in local government. We're grateful to Google Fiber for the support necessary to take these first steps. We're now ready to have a conversation about scaling the program to reach students across the city, and identifying the resources that will make this possible.



APPENDIX

Kanin presentations