Goals Accomplished

The Connecting Classrooms to Congress project aims to develop and test a social studies curriculum module that enables high school students to study a pressing issue—one that policymakers at the national level are grappling with—and then discuss that issue with their sitting member of Congress through an online deliberative town hall.

In the first year of the grant, our team from the University of California, Riverside, the Ohio State University, and Brown University accomplished a number of goals:

District and School Outreach

- Our team recruited a total of four teachers in two high schools: one school in the Riverside Unified School District (RUSD) and the other in the Brea Olinda Unified School District (BOUSD).
- Teachers participated in three professional development sessions in February 2022.
- Teachers implemented the curriculum in March and April 2022.

Curriculum Development

- We developed the 3-week curriculum module along with an issue guide on the topic of social media regulation with the support of an experienced curriculum writer.
- The curriculum has several components: lesson plans; student materials including an issue guide; Prytaneum, the platform on which the deliberative town hall takes place; and a final writing assessment.
- The lesson plans are organized into four parts:
  - Introducing the Project: Representation, Deliberation, and Democracy (days 1-4)
  - Exploring the Issue (days 5-8)
  - Deliberating the Issue (days 9-12)
  - Reflection and Writing (days 13-15).
Project Advisors

- We held meetings with the Advisory Committee and the Curriculum Working Group to seek advice on topics about which participants had particular expertise and to request feedback on curriculum drafts.

Recruitment of the Members of Congress

- Our team communicated with two members of Congress about participating in the pilot: Representatives Mark Takano (CA-49) and Young Kim (CA-39).
- Rep. Takano participated in a Deliberative Town Hall with students at an RUSD high school in April 2022.
- Unfortunately, Rep. Kim, who was scheduled for a town hall with students from a BOUSD high school, had to cancel the event.
- Finding dates that would work for the teachers and the members of Congress has proved to be more challenging than we anticipated. In the future, our team will work with teachers further in advance to ensure that they can schedule the Deliberative Town Hall event with their students during a Congressional District Work Period or a week without floor votes, as well as establishing back-up dates for the Deliberative Town Hall.

Platform Development

- The TeCD-Lab at UCR is developing Prytaneum, which is an online town hall platform that is designed to give participants more robust opportunities to engage with elected officials on substantive issues.
- We tested Prytaneum at the Deliberate Town Hall with Rep. Takano in April; we are using this experience to improve features and functionality.

Research

- We received research approvals from our higher education institutions as well as the two participating school districts.
- We developed and collected data in the spring of 2022 using the following research instruments:
  - A survey for teachers after completing the professional development
  - Pre- and post-implementation surveys for students.
- We also collected data through:
  - Classroom observations (27 class periods, 45-60 min each)
  - Teacher interviews (2 interviews, 60 min each)
○ Student focus groups (4 groups, 45-60 min) each
○ Samples of students’ writing assignments.

Products

● Website for teachers
  ○ https://www.classrooms2congress.org
  ○ The website provides a short overview of the project and houses the curriculum documents, a user guide to Prytaneum, information on our project team, as well as additional resources that teachers can consult.

● Videos
  ○ A video of several team members discussing the purpose and aims of the project
  ○ A video of the Deliberative Town Hall with Congressman Mark Takano

Year 2 Goals

In Year 2 we will expand the pilot to conduct a feasibility study in Illinois and Florida in addition to California, including 6-10 schools total. We will create two new issue guides and continue to refine the curriculum as well as the Prytaneum platform based on this year’s feedback from teachers and students. Another aim is to finetune the recruitment process for members of Congress as well as the professional development workshops for teachers. Finally, we plan to refine the research instruments based on lessons learned this year and begin to outline a plan for the feasibility of scaling.

For more information, please visit our website.