



Photo courtesy of Jason Adams

HOP ON BOARD THE CAREER DEVELOPMENT BUS

By Sadie Heath

EASTERN OKLAHOMA COUNTY (EOC) TECHNOLOGY CENTER STANDS FIRM IN THE BELIEF THAT A SOLID

education is not measured by the name of the university attended or the number of years taken to finish college, but rather it is measured by quality instruction that gives students the ability to perfect soft skills, experience on-the-job training and become familiar with college-level courses.

With this mindset in place, EOC Tech developed a tool to readily educate elementary-age students, as well as adults,

about their interests and skills, possible career opportunities and how to prepare for their future.

The Dream Becomes a Reality

Three years ago, Jennifer Burch, EOC Tech academic center/data coordinator, saw a grant opportunity through the Oklahoma Department of Career and Education's weekly memo to directors.

"I made a copy of the grant parameters and took it to my superintendent to see if he was interested in pursuing this grant," Burch said. "He returned to my office with-

in 20 minutes with an idea for a career development bus."

The grant was approved, a 2003 school bus was acquired and the transformation from a passenger bus into a mobile classroom began.

Early Education: The Importance of Career Exploration

EOC Tech Superintendent Terry Underwood unofficially named the iguana as the school's mascot in 2012. Since then, it has taken on a life of its own, finding

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its way onto print material, promotional giveaways, faculty and staff apparel, and even debuting as the title for the EOC Tech leadership group known as the Iguana Council. Because of the iguana’s importance among the students, it seemed fitting for EOC Tech to stay true to its lime green roots and name the career development project the “Iguana Bus.”

The Iguana Bus is designed to make trips to local elementary schools and community events. On board the bus, students can participate in group activities, emphasizing certain career paths available at EOC Tech.

“The whole idea for the Iguana Bus is to give students a chance to see what the future holds for them,” said Community Relations Coordinator Jason Adams. “The earlier students can figure out what they want to do with their life, the better.”

Whether students continue their education after high school or enter the workforce, EOC Tech instructors, faculty and staff members recognize that preparation is key. “If one accepts the concept that children make decisions about themselves and the world at a very young age, it follows that development of the skills required for effective life career planning must begin early,” purport Carolyn Magnuson and Marion Starr (2000) in their article *How Early Is Too Early to Begin Life Career Planning? The Importance of the Elementary School Years*.

Showcased throughout the bus are posters with job descriptions, employment outlooks, average annual salaries and the recommended career path to obtain certain occupations:

As children mature into young adults, they will be ready to actively pursue age-appropriate occupational decision-making. ... If we provide opportunities for children to develop

the sub-skills required for effective life career planning, we empower them to become all they are capable of becoming throughout their lives and in all aspects of their lives (Magnuson & Starr, 2000).

The concept of introducing students to career training at an earlier age is not necessarily new to EOC Tech. The school’s Explore program introduces high school sophomores to career opportunities and allows them to shadow older students in



The Iguana Bus gives elementary students opportunities for quality interactive learning.



Photo courtesy of Jason Adams

The bus is a marketing tool that allows members of the community to see the value of on-the-job skill-specific training.

different programs and participate in career assessments such as OK Career Guide.

"I've taken some of my Explore students on the bus, and from a high school perspective, they wish they had something like this when they were in elementary school," said EOC Tech Explore program coordinator Milissa Ellefson. "They see the connection between the bus and the Explore program, and they are also amazed by the transformation of the bus. When you walk on to a school bus, you expect to see seats—not tables, a workspace or a mobile high-tech classroom—which is what it really is."

What is new, however, is the ability to bring information, learning activities and long-term career plans out into the community to reach potential EOC Tech students, parents, job-seeking community members and fellow educators.

"We also plan on bringing the Iguana Bus into the community to host career workshops," Adams said. "During the workshop, adults seeking employment or to attend college will have their own laptop station set up so they can have the ability to receive assistance with applications and resumes. They will also have the chance to complete the OK Career Guide career assessment."

Students Put Practice Into Action

In addition to providing quality interactive learning opportunities to elementary students and adults, those currently studying at EOC Tech also reap the benefits. In order to save money and fulfill the promise to provide students with a valuable training opportunity, the tech center's high school and adult students did all the work of transforming the bus,

with the exception of the paint and body work.

"Students in Service Careers completely gutted the bus to make room for the tables that those in the Welding program made," Adams said. "Electrical students wired the bus, and Graphic Arts students wrapped the bus in vinyl and created the graphics on the outside."

By taking on the bus project, students not only put their learning into play to create a marketing tool to be used by EOC Tech year after year, but members of the community are also able to see the value of on-the-job skill-specific training.

"I think the whole transformation makes high school students proud," Ellefson said. "Their work on the bus is a great representative of the level of work they're doing here at the tech center."

Adams and Ellefson also communi-

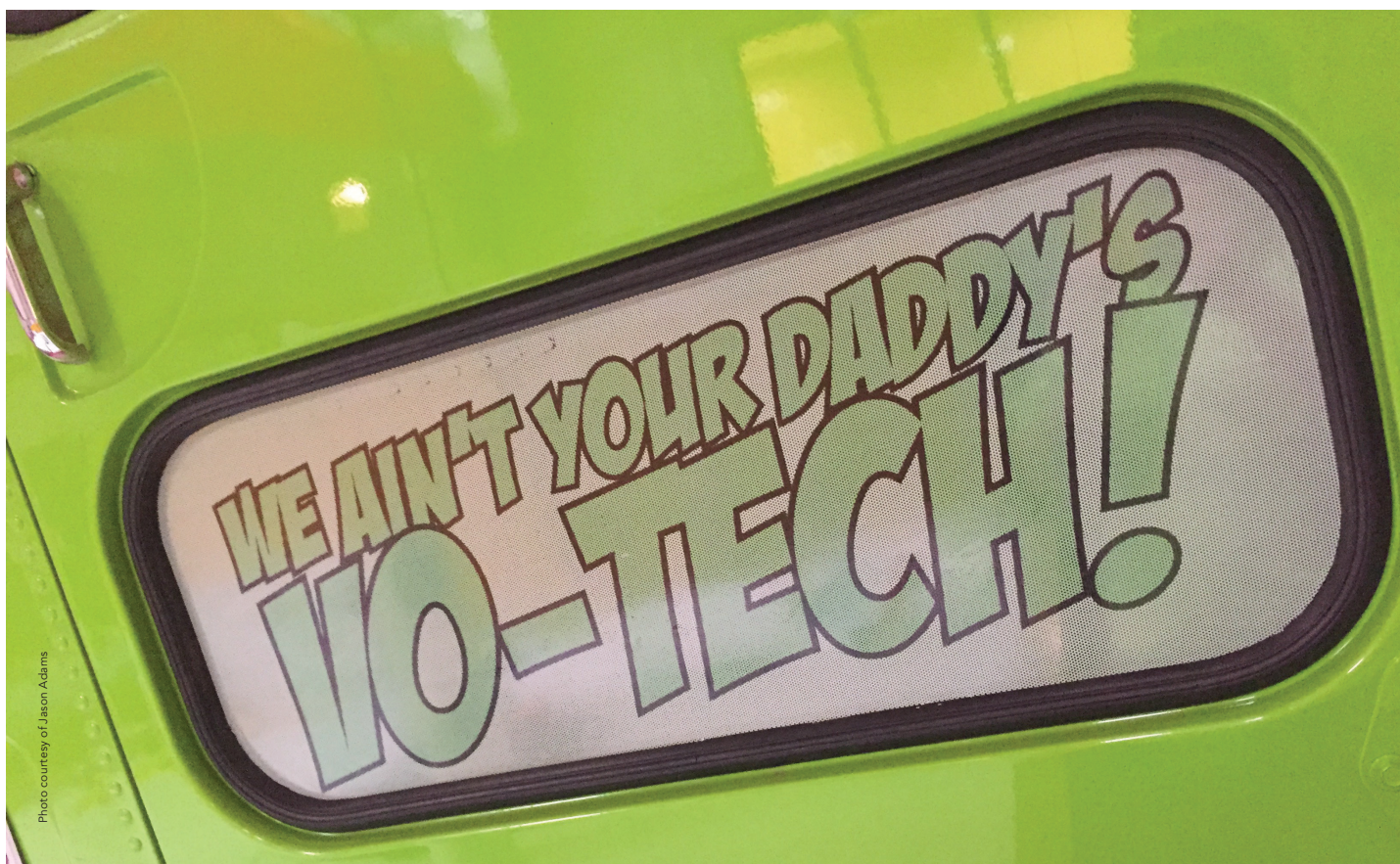


Photo courtesy of Jason Adams

Graphic arts students at EOC Tech created the graphics on the outside of the bus.

cated with local elementary students throughout the outfitting of the bus, giving them the chance to voice what types of activities they wanted to see. The learning activities are designed to be a group effort, emphasizing the “product of a process.”

“Through the bus, we’re able to demonstrate multiple components of any industry,” Ellefson said. “There are multiple facets to any particular career, and students are able to understand that more readily by doing more group-centered work. They can also see in real time how their work directly impacts others in their group.”

A Mobile Classroom

The Iguana Bus makes multiple trips back to the classroom—introducing different activities each time—allowing operators of the bus to customize the activity to what students are currently studying in class.

“Teachers who have attended different community events and experienced the bus love the idea of a mobile classroom

that can provide enhanced activities and pair with their own curriculum,” Ellefson said. “It also provides time for teaching opportunities that they don’t always have time for during their class.”

So far the Iguana Bus has made its debut at several community events and conferences, and it has also made trips to local elementary schools. Parents, educators, and current and future students who are looking to take classes can now conveniently experience what EOC Tech has to offer, as well as receive insight into career opportunities and qualifications.

“The bus is a great way to get kids and adults involved so that we are able to have a conversation with them and [their] parents,” Ellefson said. “Parents and other adults are amazed when they see the bus, what we offer and at how much ‘vo-tech’ has evolved over the last several years.”

Fulfilling the Promise

By being approved for the grant, deciding to do most of the work “in house” and al-

lowing current students the opportunity to put their skills into practice, EOC Tech continues to fulfill its promise of quality instruction and on-the-job training. In the process, the school has gained the ability to intentionally and more readily serve the next generation and future workforce of Oklahoma. **Tech**

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