



Escape the Bus: Solving the Puzzle of 21st Century Learning

iSchool Initiative

Size: 30 employees

Industry: Education

Location: Atlanta, United States

Inventive Escape from the Traditional Classroom

We hear talk about the future of learning in the digital age, but for most of us it's hard to imagine what that looks like. The iSchool Initiative is role-modeling concepts like gamification and problem-based learning with teachers and students across the country.

"We believe it's important for teachers to get their hands dirty and actually experience the methodology to get a deeper understanding of how to apply it in the classroom," says Nikola Kolev, Vice President of Operations at iSchool Initiative.

The company has mobilized the popular escape room concept into a classroom on wheels called Escape the Bus.

Players have 30 minutes to find the clues hidden inside. They must work as a team to go through each station and solve problems to discover the secrets of lifelong learning. In the process of finding clues they learn how to apply new technology in the classroom, the importance of the

student voice, and the new project-based learning paradigm. A fun and challenging exercise, it develops important conversations among educators.

Innovative Technology Brings Inspiration to Life

The brainchild of digital learning visionary, Travis Allen, Escape the Bus brings to life his educational inspiration—using innovative technology to escape the drudgery of yesterday's rote learning. Powered by Cisco® technology, the interactive experience helps people discover learning can be fun.

"This started in 2009, when I was in high school. I had my phone taken away in class even though I was using it to take notes," says Allen, founder and CEO of the iSchool Initiative.

"I got really frustrated and decided to create a YouTube video about how mobile technology would transform the future of learning. Suddenly I was getting emails from all over the world saying 'I want to learn this way'! It went viral overnight."

Solutions

By combining Cisco Routing and Switching, Wireless, and Video, iSchool is:

- Showcasing digital learning to 60 schools and conferences in 12 months
- Giving 11,900 teachers a vision of how technology can improve student outcomes
- Helping 15,750 students improve their problem-solving skills

With Cisco technology, the iSchool Initiative is:



Showing teachers how IT can be applied to improve learning outcomes



Helping students develop valuable problem-solving skills



Demonstrating to school administrators the value of technology in the classroom

Encouraged to Ask Questions and Collaborate

Initially, iSchool Initiative used a bus to travel around spreading the message of mobile learning. “We were mobile learning evangelists,” Allen recalls. “A dozen of us lived and slept on the bus as we traveled from city to city, speaking at schools and conferences along the way.”

The group graduated to using the bus as a showcase for new education technology. The experience quickly became immersive. After three years of design iteration, two new Escape the Bus vehicles are being built to keep up with demand.

Students can’t get enough of the hands-on learning experience. “They’re given a problem and the answer to that task opens the door to another,” says Jim DiDonato, superintendent at Mount Holly Township School District. “It’s a physical learning experience where students are encouraged to ask questions and collaborate.”

At one point in the game, players must learn how to operate a 3D printer so they can create a key to open a lock that leads to a new clue. Participants also seek answers by connecting with people outside the bus using Cisco video conferencing technology. Every challenge calls on the Four C’s: Communication, Collaboration, Creativity, and Critical Thinking.

Practical and Affordable Technology

Although the technology on board Escape the Bus is cutting-edge, it’s designed to be simple to use and within reach of school budgets.

Most of the applications are delivered from the cloud. To intelligently manage all that traffic, the bus has a Cisco infrastructure including an Integrated Services Router (ISR) and Intelligent WAN blade. That combines high-speed communications, voice and video, wireless management, and secure access—all in one device.

The ISR links to a Cisco Unified Communications Manager server and a Cisco Wireless LAN Controller server, simplifying application management. Inside the bus there is full wireless connectivity using a combination of Cisco Meraki and Aironet™ access points. Operators use Cisco Meraki to manage devices and block or allow access to certain game play apps.

Reimagining IT in the Classroom

Escape the Bus attracted more than 35,000 visitors in the last year, including 15,750 students and 11,900 teachers.

The experience is leading many educators to rethink how they use technology in the classroom. At Manalapan-Englishtown Regional Schools in New Jersey, for example, Margaret Scuteri, Supervisor of Science and Technology, says it has reshaped how her district sees IT. “We use Escape the Bus for teachers, like a form of professional development, to show them the value of technology,” she explains.

“Escape the Bus helped me see that the way we’re using technology doesn’t suit our students,” adds sixth-grade teacher Karen Leder. “They’re capable of so much more than just regurgitating facts. The game aspect of the bus is fascinating and fun. It’s engaging and memorable.”

"We want teachers and students thinking 'how could we apply what we've learned back in the classroom?' Our Cisco technology is helping us demonstrate a solution."

Travis Allen
CEO
iSchool Initiative

Reaching Escape Velocity

The two new Escape the Bus vehicles the iSchool Initiative plans to launch will incorporate innovative technologies like Cisco Connected Mobile Experiences and the Cisco Spark™ collaboration suite.

They'll also offer different themes, including one that simulates a rocket ship to Mars. Escape the Bus is opening up new worlds of potential for educators.

For More Information

To learn more about the Cisco solutions featured in this case study, visit

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Products and Services

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- Cisco 4451-X Integrated Services Router
- Cisco Intelligent WAN

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- Cisco Wireless LAN Controller
- Cisco Aironet 3700 Series Access Points
- Cisco Meraki Access Points
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