

# This Bus Is Plugged In

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## Wi-Fi lets Arkansas kids study on their commute



For the children of Grapevine, Ark., a rural town 60 miles outside Little Rock, the long, bumpy commute to school on bus No. 46 is anything but ordinary. That's because they are solving math and science problems with teachers and university professors live via the Internet. It's what Vanderbilt University medicine, biochemistry, and pathology Prof. Billy Hudson describes as a virtual schoolhouse on wheels.

"It's really cool," says sixth grader Shelby Rhodes, who like the other bus riders is a gifted student. "I've got my own teacher, and I take a test every time I finish a lesson." The Wi-Fi technology that allows the kids on the bus to connect to the Internet is similar to the kind used by recreational vehicles. The bus looks no different from the others in the school district fleet, except for a cellular router and rooftop antenna that are secured to the vehicle. The online courses in pre-algebra, algebra 1, and Advanced Placement biology are offered through a private company, Aventa Learning. Hudson, his family, the university, and private donors are footing the estimated \$50,000 in costs the first year. A Grapevine native, Hudson came up with the idea to turn a bus into a classroom two years ago after seeing the bored faces of children who made the 90-minute commute to the nearest school. His wife, Julie, a Vanderbilt associate professor of clinical anesthesiology and pediatrics, is now monitoring the students' academic progress. By making the school day in essence longer and offering advanced courses online, the Hudsons hope these rural students arrive at college better prepared.

More souped-up school buses with high-speed Internet access may be on the way. The Hudsons are applying for two federal grants to expand the program to Tennessee and add other amenities to the buses such as individual lighting, power outlets, and projection screens.



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