



Kokomo Schools

Education Foundation Newsletter



March 2018



Go Baby Go Project!

In the past 18 months, Maple Crest Technology and STEM teacher Sid Culp has presented two Bon Air students, who have special mobility needs, with battery-powered, ride-on cars that were adapted specifically for them. Mr. Culp worked with several of his students, as well as businesses in the community, to complete these specialized cars as part of a nationwide Go Baby Go service learning project.

The Kokomo Public Schools Education Foundation recently provided a grant to assist Mr. Culp in adapting more vehicles.

"This project is pretty extraordinary for all involved," Dr. Teni Helmberger, Director of Special Education for Kokomo School Corporation, noted. "Mr. Culp and his Maple Crest students learned how to fit children and assess their needs, before adapting cars based on those needs."

The Go Baby Go project was developed in 2006 by University of Delaware Professor Cole Galloway. According to the university's website, Professor Galloway started with custom robot-driven devices and later began modifying off-the-shelf toy race cars to provide mobility to children with special needs.

The Life Skills teachers and therapists at Bon Air Elementary Technology Academy learned about the Go Baby Go project and wanted to bring it to Kokomo. The teachers and therapists understood the benefits these adapted vehicles could provide for their students.

A Life Skills teacher at Bon Air Elementary noted in the initial project proposal that the vehicles are used as a form of assistive technology, and can improve hand-eye coordination, spatial awareness skills, and visual perception skills. The teacher added that the ride-on vehicles also can assist in cause-effect learning, along with upper extremity and lower extremity control.

The ride-on vehicles do not replace other movement opportunities, rather they encourage the child's exploratory drive. The vehicle, then, becomes a learning environment that challenges a child, while still maintaining a high level of motivation and fun through mobility and play.

The Life Skills staff believed Maple Crest STEM Middle School was a natural partner for this project since its students learn through engineering and technology. Immediately, Mr. Culp was excited about the idea.

For the first two vehicles, the Technology and STEM teacher taught himself how to rewire the battery-powered cars, so the vehicles can be operated by a large button on the steering wheel instead of with pedals on the floorboard.

Help has come from throughout the Kokomo region during this project, according to Mr. Culp, as Kokomo School Corporation physical therapists, occupational therapists, speech therapists, and the assistive technology team has provided interdisciplinary support.

Area business IDRA North America provided financial support for the first vehicles. Since then, Chrysler has joined the efforts – providing funding, as well as volunteer engineers to provide technical support to help adapt the vehicles.

Mr. Culp said the technical support will be especially important as he and his Maple Crest student rebuild the next three vehicles since these adaptations will be more complex.

One ride-on vehicle will be adapted so it can be operated with a joystick, similar to the joystick on the student's wheelchair. A second vehicle will be outfitted with an intermittent button that can be operated by a person's head movement. The intermittent button will allow the vehicle to move for only 3 or 4 seconds before the button must be pushed again.

Mr. Culp also will be adapting a battery-powered, ride-on ATV for a student who is working to develop leg strength. This vehicle will be fitted with a button that will stop the vehicle when the student sits down, and move the vehicle when the student stands up. Mr. Culp noted that because the vehicle will move only when the student is in a standing position, he and the Chrysler engineers also must build a safety apparatus that will support, and secure, the student while the vehicle is in motion.

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