

Take Our Children to Work Day: Bringing Security, Technology, and Art to ED Families

*O*n Thursday, April 28, ED staff joined millions of working Americans to celebrate the 23rd year of what ED calls the “Take Our Children to Work Day” (TOCTW) program. More than 200 children and other relatives of ED employees, as well as preschoolers sponsored by the National Capital YMCA, participated in events throughout the day in the LBJ building and at several other ED sites. An Office of Communications and Outreach (OCO) team, led by Tony Fowler, Cynthia Cabell, and Juliette Rizzo, planned and executed the event with imagination and support from Ed Metz of the Institute of Education Sciences (IES). At right, several participants check out the equipment in ED’s Training and Development Center.



The day’s first and always popular activity was getting an “official ID” made in LBJ’s first-floor security office. After that, the group gathered in Barnard Auditorium for a welcoming session with Matt Lehrich, the designated assistant secretary for communications and outreach, and a discussion of potential careers at ED, presented by emcee Christine Jackson of the Office of the Deputy Secretary.

Next, the youngest visitors were whisked off to a Let’s Read! Let’s Move! session in ED’s National Library of Education. The Let’s Read! Let’s Move! initiative helps address summer learning loss and childhood obesity by engaging youth in reading and physical activity. The youngest TOCTW participants were energized by stories they heard from ED readers, including Secretary King, and then had fun doing movement activities led by ED volunteers and staffers from the National Capital YMCA. Below, Secretary King is pictured reading to the children in the National Library of Education.



At the same time, the seven-to-ten-year-old students split up into groups for a three-stop tour around ED. The stops included a security tour of the LBJ building, a visit to the interactive Office of Educational Technology (OET), and time at the IES-sponsored Games and Tech Expo.

Highlights of the security tour included a visit to the control center and a look at the many security cameras in the LBJ basement. Children also experimented

with the security scanning equipment. At left, Christopher Strambler, director of physical security and law enforcement, discusses security in the control center with young visitors.

The Games and Tech Expo introduced students to products developed under the Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) grant program. The very popular Expo featured 18 technology-based learning games and interventions that build skills in science, math, reading, history, and social development. Two of the technologies were developed for students with disabilities, and all were appropriate for students across elementary and secondary grade levels.

Many of the items demonstrated are already being used in thousands of schools around the country. The Expo gave ED team members and the children the opportunity to ask questions of the six developers who were in attendance, while trying the technologies. The showcased games included:

- Happy Atoms: a chemistry game with a futuristic ball and stick molecular modeling kit;
- Empires: a math game where students solve problems in a simulated environment of ancient Mesopotamia;
- Brainology: an intervention for students to understand that intelligence and abilities are qualities we can develop;
- eTouchSciences: a handheld device that enables visually impaired and blind students to explore scientific concepts, such as the atom, through tactile feedback;
- Inq-ITS: a virtual life science lab for inquiry-based learning; and
- My ASL QuizMaker: a program which helps teachers generate web-based assessments for students who are deaf, hard-of-hearing or use American Sign Language.



Participants also were exposed to state-of-the-art workplace technology and a modern workplace setting in OET, where a three-dimensional printer (pictured above at right) was demonstrated, students donned virtual reality headsets (pictured at left), and the visitors were able to express themselves on the office's huge white board. They also enjoyed seeing the modern office atmosphere, and observing the different ways of working in a cube!

And, finally, while all that was going on, the oldest students enjoyed a tour of ED's impressive student art exhibits.



Participants play with games and educational technology at ED's SBIR fair during TOCTW.

The formal activities ended around noon, at which point participants spent time with their parents or other relatives at their work stations. This was a change from recent years, and was designed to give participants a true taste of what a work day at ED is like. Participants got to work one-on-one in ED's offices, doing what they could to help administer grants, review policies, and otherwise pitch in with elements of ED's critical work for the nation's students, parents, teachers, and administrators.



The TOCTW team is looking forward to hosting children again at next year's event!

--Tony Fowler, OCO, and Edward Metz, IES