

The Eagle

## Bus ads rev up CSISD's coffers

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By CASSIE SMITH

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College Station school buses may look a little different this year.

Advertisements are being placed on the fleet to bring in extra revenue for the school district's general fund.

The district estimates the ads will generate about \$44,000 for the 2011-12 school year -- about the cost of a teacher's position, according to Superintendent Eddie Coulson. The district will receive 60 percent of the revenue while the remaining goes toward Steep Creek Media.

Trustees approved a contract with Steep Creek, a Houston company that specializes in mobile advertisements, to sell, design and install the bus ads.

Each bus has the potential to generate \$700, with two signs selling for \$175 each and one at \$350. The school district approves each ad before it's printed and placed on a bus.

State regulations allow for two small ads near the rear of the bus above the windows on each side, and a larger ad above the rear wheels on the driver's side.

Cynthia Calvert, Steep Creek Media owner, said there are ads on 25 of the district's 36 route buses, with more coming.

Steep Creek Media -- which also represents Houston, Cypress Fairbanks and two dozen other districts -- will also sell advertising space on the district's website, athletic stadiums and facilities and other opportunities that become available.

"If a local business has a creative idea, we are open to presenting it," she said.

Lisa Troy, a clinical associate professor of marketing at Texas A&M University Mays Business School, said concerns may be raised in the community over the types of ads to be placed on the buses.

For instance, she noted, some might question the appropriateness of ads for fast food and unhealthy snacks, given the high rate of obesity among young people.

"There will be some people in the community who don't like it and others who will understand the money is going toward the school and it will help," she said of the ads.

Calvert said ads for some products won't be considered, including those involving alcohol, tobacco, religion or politics.

Steep Creek Media began placing ads on the Humble district's buses in 2008.

"Every dollar generated by advertising revenue provides the district with another resource for employing teachers," Humble Superintendent Guy Sconzo said.

Sconzo said the district received more than \$100,000 in 2010-2011 from the partnership.

"Strong public schools and a healthy business climate go hand in hand," he said. "Our advertisers say they are excited about the opportunity to be making a positive difference."

Steep Creek Media is nearing \$1 million in gross revenue for Humble school district to date, Calvert said.

"These ads provide instant recognition to viewers who see the advertiser as a supporter, or hero, to their district," Calvert said. "It provides a great branding opportunity and puts ads where no ads have gone before -- up and down the residential streets."

Joe Brown, spokesman for the College Station Medical Center, said it is completing designs for ads on buses. Brown said the ads will publicize The Med's call center.

The program allows advertisers to pick the buses and routes for placement. The Med chose buses that would drive through new and growing neighborhoods to target recent residents, Brown said.

"You can really get specific about who you want to see your message," he said.

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