

# Forney ISD - The OC: Career, College and Community

## SUMMARY

Forney ISD is honored to submit the launch of the Keith Bell Opportunity Central (The OC) and its subsequent year of deep community integration for the TSPRA Platinum Award. This year-long, multifaceted project established The OC as a national model for integrated education and community engagement. The core mission was to address the district's unprecedented growth—adding 1,600 to 2,000 students annually—not merely by building more space, but by creating an innovative, centralized hub that merges academic rigor with practical career skills for the entire community. The OC, a 350,000 square foot facility, was envisioned to serve learners from age 3 to 103, operating seven days a week, and purposefully emphasizes "career first" by fully integrating college, career, and community resources. The launch and subsequent campaign successfully positioned The OC as the tangible symbol of "The Forney Experience"—a collaboration-centered educational model.

## RESEARCH

As one of the fastest-growing school districts in the nation, Forney ISD's long-term objective is to advance student learning, ensure efficiency, and prepare every student to graduate future-ready for a path of their choosing. Research confirmed strong community financial support for innovative infrastructure, evidenced by the passage of two massive bond referendums—\$623 million in 2019 (72% approval) and \$1.29 billion in 2023 (66% approval). This financial commitment provided the foundation for The OC.

Research on student needs focused on preparing students for careers through hands-on, real-world work experience, aligning with the Career and Technical Education (CTE) program and the development of a Future Ready curriculum. The core issue defined by this research was not simply providing space for growth, but actively integrating academic rigor with practical career skills and maximizing resource use for the entire community. This led to the vision for The OC—a three-story, 350,000 square foot center intended to serve learners from ages 3 to 103, and was constructed for \$100 million less than a traditional high school. The facility's mission was guided by a Community Facilities Committee composed of over 55 stakeholders who provided direct insight.

## PLANNING

The year-long strategy centered on transforming The OC from a construction project into a tangible symbol of collaboration and community-centered education. The project's primary objective was to seamlessly launch The OC during the 2023-2024 school year as a premier national model for integrated Career, College, and Community engagement.

### **Key Goals & Objectives:**

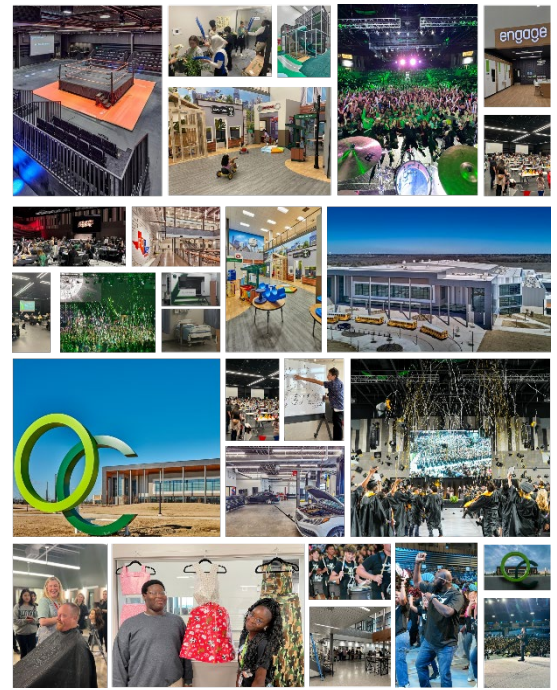
1. Successfully open The OC (fully opened February 2024).
2. Establish robust and innovative school-community partnerships that provide real-world learning opportunities for students.
3. Utilize The OC as a central hub to foster community engagement and effective communication, achieving an approval rating of at least 90% of stakeholders.

### **Strategies and Activities:**

- **Strategic Partnerships:** Securing partnerships with businesses and higher education institutions who would physically operate within the OC structure. Partners included Dallas College, Texas Tech University (offering undergraduate, graduate, and continuing education programs), Indiana Wesleyan University (for degree programs), commercial entities like Swim and Sport, Pin High, Cheeky Chique Boutique, Royal T, KLC2, and Forney Taqueria, student-run businesses like Blooms, the Beauty Bar, and OC Pit Stop, and district-purchased franchises such as Code Ninjas and Novus Escape Room.
- **Experiential Learning Integration:** Launched student-run businesses within The OC, such as Code Ninjas (where FUSD students aged 15-18 serve as "senseis") and The Agency (a PR and marketing firm where students work directly with real clients like Hotworx and Star Transit). CTE students rotate through these partner sites for hands-on practicum experience.
- **Media and Visibility:** The Communications Department planned a comprehensive public relations campaign, including videos, press releases, media pushes, and social media promotion, with specific emphasis on storytelling for the Grand Opening.
- **Community Programming:** Scheduled the facility for a wide range of events including Parent & Family Engagement (PFE) sessions, community classes, youth programming (OC Junior parties), and large external events.

## IMPLEMENTATION

The project came to fruition with the grand opening and dedication of the Keith Bell Opportunity Central on Friday, February 2, 2024. Implementation centered on three core pillars: physical activation, strategic partnership integration, and high-impact communications.



### **Key Implementation Highlights:**

- **Physical Activation & Grand Opening:** The facility opened and hosted its dedication ceremony with high-impact media and district student performances to directly engage the community.
- **National Media Success:** The OC garnered national attention when it was featured on the **TODAY Show** (Sept 25) as part of their "Class Acts" segment, highlighting its unique blend of academic learning and hands-on job training.
- **Student Engagement Metrics:** By late 2024, Code Ninjas had 68 students enrolled, with the majority of employees being FISD high school students. The broader Engage Department employed 68 students to assist with community classes and leagues, resulting in over \$125,000 in extra pay disbursed. Students in The Agency gained critical real-world experience interacting with clients and managing expectations.
- **Community Utilization:** In the first year, The OC hosted over 200 internal meetings, 120 internal events, and more than 50 large-scale external events. OC Junior, the early childhood space, hosted 50 birthday parties, and parent/family engagement sessions were successfully offered weekly. Over 1,000 students took college classes through Dallas College at The OC.
- **Professional Outreach:** The model was showcased through four "Site Visit" events, welcoming 184 **representatives** from school districts and organizations across the nation eager to learn about The OC model.
- **Ongoing Partnership Development:** A multi-year partnership was announced with **Texas Health Resources** and the Forney Education Foundation, focusing on community health and engagement with the key activation event as "December to Remember" and the Back to School Resource Fair, both at the OC.

## EVALUATION

Evaluation confirms that the launch of The OC successfully met its objectives, cementing its status as a vital hub for students and the community and earning prestigious industry recognition.

### **Program Effectiveness Metrics:**

- **TSPRA Crystal Award:** The "The OC Grand Opening & Dedication" campaign achieved TSPRA's highest honor, winning the **Crystal Award for Special Event**. Other accolades included a Best of Category & Gold Star Award for the "One Team. One Family. One Goal" Marketing Campaign.
- **Stakeholder Participation:** The implementation successfully drew massive participation, including the 1,000+ students taking college classes and the thousands attending campus-hosted events, directly supporting the district's goal of expanded opportunities and partnerships.
- **Reputation Management:** The OC quickly became a positive national talking point, drawing visitors globally and nationally, which significantly enhanced the district's reputation for innovative education.

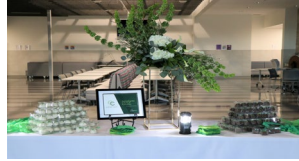
### **Lessons Learned:**

1. **Innovation as Communication:** The OC itself, being a "first of its kind" facility, acted as the most powerful public relations tool, attracting media and peer visits without extensive promotion. This validated the strategy of focusing on experiential excellence.
2. **Cultivating a Culture of "Yes":** Sustaining a monumental project like The OC requires a flexible administration that can quickly reorganize and adapt, fostering an ecosystem where educators, students, and administrators embrace rapid change (known internally as the "Culture of YES").
3. **The Value of Student Ambassadors:** Empowering students to staff, market, and operate The OC's businesses (like Code Ninjas and The Agency) turned students into the district's most enthusiastic and credible advocates, amplifying the school's mission organically. The primary takeaway is that genuine, experiential community integration creates irresistible advocacy and transforms citizens into genuine enthusiasts.

## OC Ground Breaking Invite

## Ground Breaking Ceremony

The ground breaking ceremony was a “box reveal” through projection mapping of all the things that will be offered at The OC. A large screen was built by theater students to provide the perfect backdrop for the story-telling animations. Held at the adjacent Jackson-Rhodes Campus, students provided the decoration, bands from North Forney and Forney High School performed. Esteemed guests were welcomed from all over the state.



## OC Topping Out

FISD worked with Gallagher construction to produce an event for all the contractors working on the facility in addition to our school board and members of our community. A 30 ft banner was designed to hang from the rafters for this event. In addition, custom wind-screens were installed announcing key highlights of the future OC.

## Grand Opening Invite

**THE KEITH BELL OPPORTUNITY CENTRAL COMING AUGUST 2023**

**TOPPING OUT CEREMONY**  
THURSDAY, DECEMBER 8, 2022  
TIME: 10:30 AM  
Opportunity Central (OC) Construction Site

**in the spirit**  
In the heart of Forney, where dreams take flight,  
A celebration beckons, a spectacle sight.  
At The Opportunity Central, doors swing wide,  
Inviting us all to step inside.  
Put on your green, in shades bright or deep,  
A hue of hope, a promise to keep.  
Emerald, lime, or a soft sage tone,  
Wear it with pride, let your spirit be shown.  
United, we'll gather 'neath banners, vivid and grand,  
Where both jackboots and Falcons know the future's at hand.  
Students, teachers, and leaders side by side,  
Embracing our journey, far and wide.  
In every corner, excitement hums,  
A rhythm of progress, an energy that drums.  
Innovations and ideas, set to take flight,  
We will celebrate BIG on this night.  
Workshops and talks, horizons and keen,  
Skills to be learned, sights to be seen.  
From technology's edge to the artisan's craft,  
Each space, a story, each display, a shaft.  
So, come in your green, from forest to farm,  
For in these shades, there's much to learn,  
Together we'll cheer, for this bright new start,  
A journey of minds, a union of heart.  
At The Opportunity Central, dreams unfold,  
In shades of green, bold and unrolled.  
In this grand opening, under Texas' sky,  
We wear our hopes, our spirits high.

# Social Media Posts leading up to Grand Opening Event

**The OC**  
January 15, 2024 · 🌐

It's official! The OC Grand Opening is scheduled on Groundhog Day 02.02.24! Join the FUN and let's celebrate this momentous occasion. Get your show and concert tickets [www.theoc.net](http://www.theoc.net). Don't forget to wear your best disco attire and "Let's Groove!" #groundhogday #letsgroove #OpportunityCentral #TheOC



👍👍👍 You, Kristin Lenae Zastoupil, Robyn Pearce and 17 others 2 shares

**Forney ISD**  
January 20, 2022 · 🌐

We were so excited to reveal what's inside the box at the official Keith Bell Opportunity Central, The OC, groundbreaking this week! Check out the new flyover video to see what's ahead a the OC. #forneyfamily #opportunitycentral #TheOC #texastech #DallasCollege



**The OC**  
January 20, 2022 · 🌐

#forneyfamily #opportunitycentral #TheOC #texastech #DallasCollege Career, College and Community Opportunities await at Forney ISD's Opportunity Central - The OC opening 2023

👍👍 Heather Hembree, Becky DeLong Dobbs and 44 others 10 shares

**The OC**  
January 10, 2024 · 🌐

Let's dance the night away in celebration of the OC Grand Opening! Get your tickets for the show and concert featuring FISD student performing groups and Emerald City Band! Get your tickets NOW, \$5 each. [www.theoc.net](http://www.theoc.net)



👍👍👍 Kate Dunfee, Meg Baggs Wagner and 15 others 16 shares

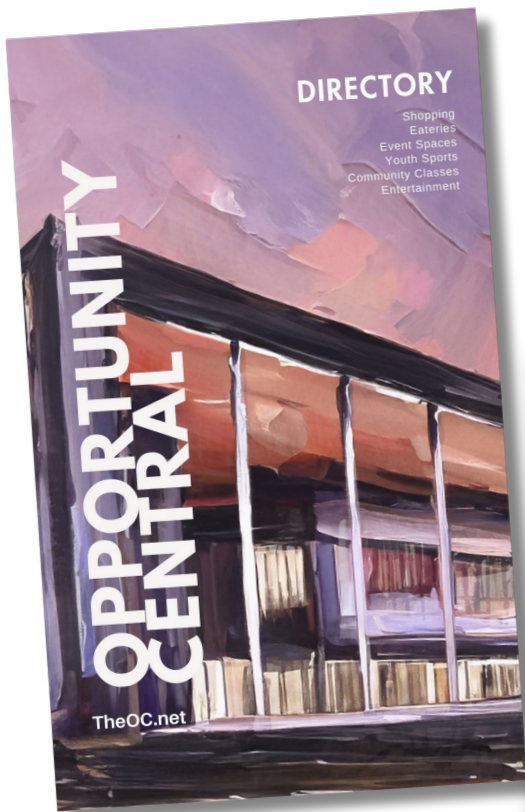
**The OC**  
January 20, 2024 · 🌐

What's better than a BOGO? A BOGO times 2! This weekend only, buy 2 OC Grand Opening concert tickets and get 2 FREE. The ticketed show begins at 7 p.m. and will feature performances by FISD student groups and a concert by Emerald City Band. Visit [www.theoc.net](http://www.theoc.net) and use promo code GROOVEx2. #groundhogday #letsgroove #OpportunityCentral #TheOC



📩 Send message

👍👍 You, Robyn Pearce and 11 others 4 comments 19 shares



## Directory of businesses available at The OC



**Assembly Required**, a hands-on makerspace, is located on the second floor of The OC. This space is used by students during the school day and can be rented for community classes on evenings and weekends. This space is powered by the Forney Education Foundation.

BLOOMS

**Blooms** at Forney ISD is a student-operated business featuring floral arrangements for all occasions. Order in person or through the app. Hours: Monday - Saturday 10 a.m. - 6 p.m. Closed Sunday.



CODE NINJAS

**Code Ninjas** is coming soon. It is an edutainment experience for students ages 6 to 14. Specialized classes and coding camps are designed to teach students about computer coding through a variety of engaging and entertaining lessons.

engage

The **Engage** office will market programs and opportunities for the public to engage in a variety of program offerings. Programs, classes and youth leagues are designed to promote fun, enrichment, socialization, physical activity and more.



THE GALLERY

**Forney Taqueria** features authentic Mexican food made from scratch. Fresh corn and flour tortillas, salsas, breakfast tacos, enchiladas, flautas and more! Forney Taqueria also offers catering services. Hours: Monday - Saturday 7 a.m. - 9 p.m.



**The Gallery**, under the direction of the FISD Fine Arts Department, features curated student and staff works of art. Guests of The OC are encouraged to browse, admire and seek inspiration from the artists' displays.



**The Green Room Studio** is a multipurpose space located on the first floor with access to natural light. This space can be utilized as a photography studio or a special event venue. The Green Room can accommodate 20-30 guests for receptions or meetings.



e-sport lab

**Mary Sue's by Eddie Deen** features a variety of favorite foods and down-home cookin' available at The OC. Mary Sue's is available for a quick bite, a family meal, or catering for your next big event. Hours: Monday - Saturday 11 a.m. - 6 p.m.

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The **ESPORT lab** is designed to provide a space for the FISD ESPORT teams to practice and play. Located on the second floor, this space can be rented for groups or parties on select evenings and weekends.

HAUTE SALON



LEX  
IMMERSIVE

**Haute Salon** offers a full range of services to include men's, women's and children's hair care including cut, color and style. Manicures and pedicures are offered at The OC. Hours: Tuesday - Friday 10 a.m. - 6 p.m. and Saturday 10 a.m. - 4 p.m. Closed Sunday.

LATHAM  
BAKERY

The **Lex Lab Immersive** (Learning Experience) is a collaboration with Indiana State Wesleyan University and Huckabee creating a virtual immersive environment to support student learning, educator development, and community entertainment.



THE MIX

**Latham Bakery** has all your favorites including soups, sandwiches, baked goods and custom cakes.

powered by Huckabee

**Martin's Automotive** specializes in car diagnostic and repair services. To schedule an appointment for service, call 972-564-1990. Hours: Monday - Friday 7:30 a.m. - 5:30 p.m.



ESCAPE ROOM

**The MIX powered by Huckabee** is a collaborative community space furnished for small group meetings as well as independent work.



**Novus Escape Room**, a franchise owned by Forney ISD, features game spaces for students, groups and families. This edutainment space is sure to captivate audiences with original story lines and various levels of difficulty.



**OC Junior** is the mini-version version of The OC featuring interactive career exhibits just for kids. The space also includes a two-story play structure that can be rented for groups and parties.



**Pine & Ivy** features home decor and custom light fixtures. Hours: Monday - Saturday 10 a.m. - 6 p.m. Closed Sunday.



ROYALT  
DESIGNS

**Printer TX** specializes in all formats and sizes of print and graphic design services. They are known as "creative doers" can be utilized as a "one-stop" shop for all printing, design and marketing needs. Hours: Monday-Friday 9 a.m. - 5 p.m.



**The Rancher's Wife Boutique** features women's and junior's apparel, shoes, accessories and gift items. Hours: Monday - Saturday 10 a.m. - 6 p.m. Closed Sunday.



**RoyalT Designs** specializes in direct to garment printing and design services. Hours: Tuesday - Friday 10 a.m. - 6 p.m. and Saturday by appointment. Closed Sunday and Monday.

**Stay Golden Gifts + Artisan Market** features personalized gifts and locally sourced vendor products. This gift and market boutique works with Forney students to offer selected student-made products for sale. Hours: Tuesday - Saturday 10 a.m. - 6 p.m. Closed Sunday & Monday.



**Southern Social Eatery** will feature southern comfort food and catering services. Coming soon!



**White Rhino Coffee Company** features craft coffee and made-from-scratch eats. Hours: Monday - Friday 7 a.m. - 5 p.m. Saturday 7 a.m. - 3 p.m. Closed Sunday.

College & University offices are available for registration and class offerings - **Dallas College, Texas Tech University, Indiana State Wesleyan University (IWU)**

## Media Engagement



Please use this interactive PDF to click on the links below:

### Website

[www.theoc.net](http://www.theoc.net)

### Media Kit

[OC Media Kit](#) (with photos and information)

### Internally Produced Videos

(in chronological order)

[The OC Revealed](#)

[We Can Do That at the OC](#)

[The OC Final Flyover](#)

[Welcome to the OC](#) (from grand opening)

[Career, College, Community](#) (from grand opening) [OC Grand Opening Recap](#)

### Outside Media Features:

- 9/25/24 - [The Today Show](#)
- September/October 2024 - [Construction Executive](#)
- 9/27/24 - [KTVT 11, DFW](#)
- August 2024 - [Dallas Express](#) Podcast
- 5/16/2024 - [This Week in Start-ups](#) Podcast
- 5/20/2024 - Mission Matters Business Podcast, Adam Torres [Apple Podcast Spotify](#)
- Spring 2024 - [Sloan Feature \(Vendor\)](#)
- Spring 2024 - [Vivi Feature \(Vendor\)](#)
- 3/15/2024 - [NBC 5, DFW, Carter in the Classroom](#)
- 3/08/2024 - Article for [People's Connection](#)
- 2/2/2024 - [Gallagher & Huckabee Grand Opening Video](#)
- 10/10/2023 - [WFAA 8, DFW, Jason Whitely](#)