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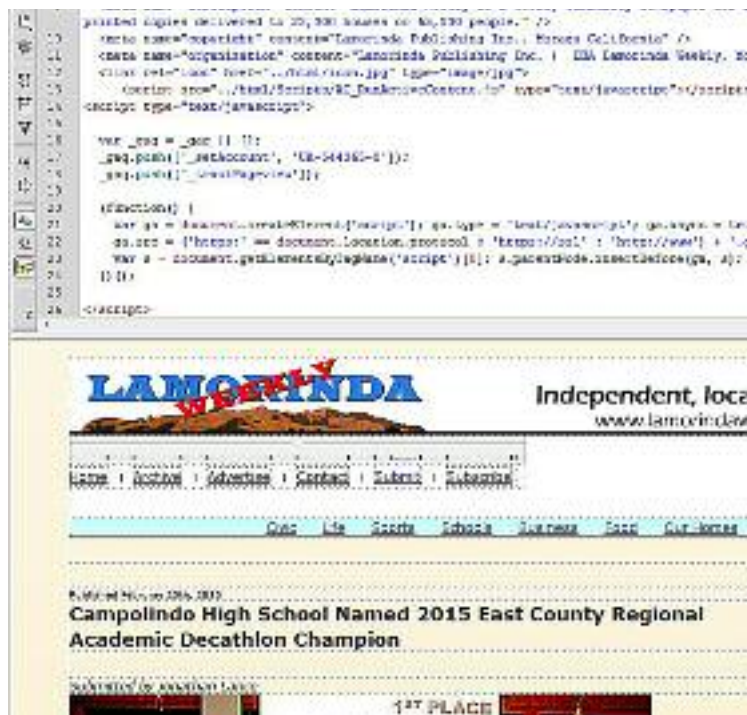
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Local Schools Teach Programming Skills One Hour at a Time

By Zoe Portnoff



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Learning how to write computer code sounds like a daunting task, even to most adults. But at local schools such as Burton Valley Elementary School and Campolindo High School, students are being offered an opportunity to learn computer science using the new Hour of Code program.

Hour of Code is a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing the opportunity for every student in every school to learn computer science. Launched two years ago this program has enjoyed tremendous international success, with courses available in over 30 languages. Some of the program's goals include improving diversity in the field of computer science, introducing computer science to a greater number of schools and setting up policies to support this field.

Carol Paymer is the instructor of the AP Computer Science class at Campolindo High School. She organized the Hour of Code event, hoping to show students that computer programming is far from impossible.

"My goal in implementing the program was to demystify programming," Paymer explains. "I don't necessarily want to turn everyone into a programmer, but I want everyone to know that they could be one if they wanted to. I want everyone to have a chance to find out if it is something they might love to do."

The program's website, Code.org, states, "We believe computer science and computer programming should be part of the core curriculum in education, alongside other science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) courses, such as biology, physics, chemistry and algebra." According to the website, tens of millions of students have tried Hour of Code. And more than 60 school districts in the United States have added computer science classes using Code.org's curriculum, including the seven largest districts in the nation.

At Burton Valley Elementary School's computer lab, along with various computer games that focus on improving the students' typing skills

and logical reasoning, young students learn the basic steps of coding. Hour of Code presents new concepts using programs featuring familiar characters from popular games and media, such as Elsa and Anna from Disney's animated film "Frozen."

Other programs on Code.org allow the user to create stories or even downloadable games that can be played on smartphones. The website also features links to more advanced tutorials that teach JavaScript and tutorial apps for phones and tablets. Using drag-and-drop programming, these game-like tutorials help students to learn various elements of coding such as repeat loops, conditionals, and basic algorithms. The program presents concepts in a simple, fun way that anyone can understand, regardless of age or previous experience.

Valerie Rockwell, a sophomore currently enrolled in Campolindo's Intro to Computer Science class, believes this program will lead to an increase in popularity for the subject.

"I thought it was a great way to learn the thought process used when coding. It helps build the basic skills needed in more complex programming. By introducing it in a fun and simple way, people who enjoy it will become more curious about programming and challenge themselves to learn more in a computer science or programming class," Paymer said. "Many students had a really good time participating in the Hour of Code, and some, who had never before considered programming, found out that they are good at it and want to learn more about it. I am hoping that those students will continue studying programming next year in one of our computer science classes. But even students who do not choose to continue have learned a little about how programming works, and that's really important right now in our society."

As the program's website declares, "Anyone can learn."

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'25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee' Comes to Miramonte

Submitted by Heather Cousins



Miramonte High School cast rehearse for "The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee," which opens with a special show tomorrow at 4 p.m. Photo provided

The Miramonte Drama and Music Departments present this year's musical, "The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee." This zany, hilarious production is never the same show twice due to actor improvisation and volunteer spellers from the audience. It also has some poignant moments showing the pressures young children often face to compete

and succeed. The all-star ensemble cast of quirky characters features Lauren Bond, Jesse Epstein, Martiza Grillo, Henry Hodder, Max Hunt, Tosca Maltzman, Eleanor Roeder, Sam Shain, Andy Tobin as well as a live band that plays on stage. So don't miss this fun opportunity to see Miramonte's talented performers and to test your spelling. Show times are

Thursday, March 12 at 4 p.m. (\$5 special), Friday, March 13 at 7 p.m., Saturday, March 14 at 7 p.m., and Sunday, March 15 at 2 p.m. Tickets are available on the web store at <https://miramonte.revtrak.net/tek9.aspx?pg=products&grp=141> and at the door. General admission: \$8 students/\$10 adults.

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