

Seven largest US districts to teach computer science (Update)

December 8 2014, by Josh Lederman



President Barack Obama speaks at a reception honoring the Kennedy Center Honorees in the East Room of the White House in Washington, Sunday, Dec. 7, 2014. (AP Photo/Manuel Balce Ceneta)

The seven largest school districts in the U.S. are joining more than 50 others to start offering introductory computer science to all their students, the White House said Monday.

The school districts encompassing New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Miami, Las Vegas, Houston and Fort Lauderdale, Florida, are committing to offer the course in high school or middle school. While some large districts already have computer electives at limited campuses, all are now pledging to make computer science a standard offering district-wide.

The College Board, which runs the Advanced Placement program, is also introducing a new course called AP Computer Science Principles that will launch in the fall of 2016.

"While no one is born a computer scientist, becoming a computer scientist isn't as scary as it sounds," President Barack Obama said in a video message to be released Monday by the White House. "With hard work and a little math and science, anyone can do it."

In an effort to highlight the importance of high-tech education, Obama and Vice President Joe Biden also met with about 20 middle school students from Newark, N.J., for an "hour of code" computing event.

One girl showed the president how to make shapes using JavaScript, with a design program using characters from the movie "Frozen." "This is the future right here," Obama said.

The president said students, especially girls and minorities, need to learn sooner "not just how to use a smartphone but to create the apps for a smartphone."

Although Obama has long wanted to make the U.S. more competitive with other countries in computing, science and math education, his efforts have been limited by Congress, which has ignored most of Obama's proposals on education. Seeking to sidestep lawmakers, Obama has sought to use his convening power to get communities and

companies to pitch in, with generally modest results.

There's already one Advanced Placement course in basic computer science, but the White House says the new course will be multidisciplinary and focus on real-world applications. AP offers college-level courses to high school students, who can get college credit for the courses. A key aim of the new course is to encourage women and minorities to start training for careers in computers.

To meet the teaching demand, charitable groups are pledging \$20 million to train more teachers in computer science by the start of the 2015 school year. Google, Microsoft and philanthropists Bill Gates and Mark Zuckerberg are among those contributing.

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Citation: Seven largest US districts to teach computer science (Update) (2014, December 8) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2014-12-largest-districts-science.html>

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