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Bonita High School Honored with College Board AP Computer Science Female Diversity Award

SAN DIMAS/LA VERNE – Bonita High School was recognized for providing Advanced Placement (AP) computer science courses to a large range of students and increasing the percentage of female students in the course, earning the school the College Board AP Computer Science Female Diversity Award.

Bonita High is one of 834 schools nationwide honored in the category of AP Computer Science Principles (AP CSP) for reaching a high percentage of female student representation in the course during the 2022-23 school year. The College Board specifically recognized schools that have either reached 50 percent or higher female examinee representation in one or both AP computer science courses, or whose percentage of the female examinees met or exceeded that of the school's female population.

“I think that anytime we can break stereotypes in computer science or STEM fields it is an important win, and as technology becomes more and more integrated in all areas of our society, exposing students to the field at a young age gives them a deeper understanding of the possibilities,” AP computer science teacher John McGarvey said. “To solve a lot of the challenges our society is facing, we need to find solutions that include a broad spectrum of viewpoints, and women and people from historically marginalized communities must have opportunities to become computer science majors and scientists so that we can have those vital perspectives.”

Since AP computer science was introduced to Bonita High School in 2016, McGarvey has worked to recruit and target female students and students not traditionally included. In the 2021-22 school year, he reached out to the top freshmen math students to say they were excellent candidates for the AP CSP class. By the 2022-23 school year, the percentage of female students in the class jumped from mid-40 percent to 53 percent.

“There are a lot of benefits to students being introduced to computer science even if they don’t want to become a computer science major because they learn so many valuable skills and it gives students a vocabulary so they can communicate in technology terms,” McGarvey said.

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Students first take the AP CSP course, which serves as an introduction to the field of computer science and programming. Core lessons include networking, internet basics, and a review of ethical issues such as cyber security and the use of artificial intelligence (AI).

“We take a student at the beginning of the year who has never programmed in their life and by the second semester they can create and program a functioning app that solves a problem, processes input, and produces an output, or similar functions,” McGarvey said.

For the AP CSP exam, 30 percent of the student’s exam is based on their program app. Students submit a digital portfolio of their process of creating the app and on exam day, they complete a writing portion in which they are expected to communicate how they solved problems.

Next is the second-level course, AP Computer Science A, which involves more in-depth programming. The courses serve as optimum opportunities to create crossover skills, such as students solving computer science coursework using concepts they learn in math and geometry.

Both of Bonita Unified’s comprehensive high schools have been honored by the College Board for increasing the enrollment of female students in their AP CSP courses; San Dimas High School earned the award for the 2021-22 school year.

“Bonita Unified School District is committed to providing computer science and STEM courses to all interested students so that we can develop the highly qualified candidates our job force and communities need,” Superintendent Matt Wien said. “Congratulations to John McGarvey and the entire team at Bonita High School for preparing students to become future leaders in the tech and STEM fields.”

PHOTOS:

BUSD_BHS_CSP1: Bonita High School AP computer science teacher John McGarvey asks students in his AP Computer Science Principles class to walk him through their solution to analyzing and testing a coding problem.

BUSD_BHS_CSP2: Students in Bonita High School’s AP Computer Science Principles course expand their understanding of coding through writing and analyzing a solution to a coding lab. The introductory college-level computer science course concludes with an in-depth AP exam at the end of the year.

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