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For Immediate Release

Coding Classes Offered To Hartford Students This Summer

Hartford, CT, August 2, 2016 — This summer, 24 high school students from Hartford are using MIT App Inventor to learn programming for mobile applications.

The classes are held for five weeks at the Hartford Public Library through a partnership with the Center for Latino Progress and Capital Workforce Partners, and brought to the library by state Sen. John Fonfara of Hartford.

"I chair the finance committee," says Fonfara. "Connecticut is woefully behind in providing qualified technology workers. We have to become a player in innovation and to do that we have to make a major commitment to get people on track for these high paying jobs."

Teaching coding to high school student is a start, Fonfara says.

Two 14-year-old girls agree with him.



Jordann Dowell, left, and Makala Reid, are two 14-year-old Hartford students taking a coding class this summer at Hartford Public High School.

Makala Reid, who lives in Hartford and attends Glastonbury High School, says she was encouraged by her mother and sister to take advantage of the program. She's studying hard, "so when I get into the real world I won't have to face anything I don't know, and I can earn my own money."

Her partner in the coding class is Jordann Dowell, a Hartford resident who goes to Bloomfield High School.

They are making an app called Paint Producer, where the user can take a picture and draw on it, changing its size, shapes and colors.

"We took apps that we made together in class and applied what we learned to make this one," Jordann says.

At the last week of class each student will explain how to produce an app to another student who has not been in the class. This peer instruction is a tenant of YOUmedia, a resource at the Library which serves ages 13 to 19. Tricia George, YOUmedia and Teen Services Director, is overseeing the coding program. She and the library are talking to funders to make the coding class a regular feature at the Library. They are hoping to build a 20-week course during the school year and continue the partnership with the Center for Latino Progress and work with Resilient Coders out of Boston, who run boot camps for traditionally underserved communities and teach coding as a career path.

"We're working to close the opportunity gap in Hartford, and computer science education and careers offer a lot of opportunity," George says.

"Connecting teens to technology and providing a place for them to learn skills that will help them in school and in life is a critical part of our role as a learning institution," says Bridget Quinn-Carey, CEO of Hartford Public Library. "We hope to offer more opportunities for Hartford students to find their passion and connect with the community to explore their interests." The classes, which meet four times a week for three hours each, are run by several experienced teachers, with at least two in each class. Michael Wilkosz, a technology and engineering teacher at Hall High School in West Hartford, has taught MIT App Inventor for the past two years and was part of a pilot program at Trinity College.

"The program is really more about logic than math," Wilkosz explains. "You have to think about conditional statements: If, Then, Else, and order of operations."

He presents the students with a written schedule each day with time assigned to each task.

"At first we tell them what to do. Two weeks in we're expecting them to build their first independent project, looking at the five projects we already did and making a new thing. It's time for a leap in logic. This is a harder thing to do. A lot of them are getting it, some are frustrated easily and some are trying really hard but need more help."

Wilkosz says his students learn more from failure than success.

"If they can figure out what went wrong, where it went wrong, and where to go from here, then that's progress," he says. "In app development, you've got a customer who needs an app

to do X, Y and Z. How can you get it to do that? How do you build it for them, maintain it for them and run it for them?

Fonfara credits Bank of America for their support of the program and Bridget Quinn-Carey for providing a place to teach the workshops and recruit the teachers and fine-tune the curriculum.

“We cannot deny Hartford kids the opportunity to be exposed to this kind of education,” Fonfara says. “We have to do something about it.”

