

CASE STUDY

Bringing Opportunity to Bridgeport

Introduction

Left by the wayside after deindustrialization of the North East during the 1970s and 1980s, Bridgeport, Connecticut is not a place that is often associated with words like ‘Opportunity’, or ‘Technology.’ One teacher, Eve Sarra, at Bridgeport Central HS, is trying to change that.

Eve, who before two years ago had never taught a programming class, teaches both Introduction to Computer Science and AP Computer Science in Java at Central—a one woman computer science program. Having single handedly taken that program from 0 students to a current enrollment of 100+, her story can help us gain some insight into what makes a successful computer science program.

“ It’s exciting when you tell students that they have a talent for Computer Science and then give them a push towards pursuing CS as a career.

- Eve Sarra

Eve knew from a very young age that she wanted to be a teacher—“I think I had a thing for chalkboards” she says. Her first teaching degree was in elementary education, with a math concentration. She taught math at the elementary and middle school levels for years, before “graduating” into high school.

At that time, there was a teacher at Central that was responsible for teaching a few Computer Science classes. All of a sudden, a new magnet school was built, and along with the teacher, Central’s computer science program was gone. Luckily for the students at Bridgeport Central HS, that teacher wasn’t quite finished with them. He knew that Eve had an interest in technology and was capable, with the right support, of bringing computer science back to Central.

Central was looking to put more electives on their schedule, so Eve dove in head first. She collected what free resources she could, so that she could piece together a curriculum for the students. After a few months trying out different curriculum, she connected with us, and decided to teach her introduction to Computer Science course using CodeHS, supported by CodeHS Professional Development course and suite of teacher resources.



Year one was a success—so much so that Eve decided she could handle the challenge of offering AP Computer Science to students. She’s staying about a month ahead of them, teaching as she learns herself. It’s challenging, but it allows her students to see that they are not alone. She feels like she is in a unique position as an instructor to show students that she is having the same struggles that they are.

What’s next for Central?

Eve would like to keep developing her skills as a computer scientist and instructor so that she can expose every student at Central to CS. “Exposure is huge—these students are coming from a background where they feel like they can’t succeed at anything.” Eve is doing her best to counteract that feeling, not just by bringing them opportunity, but by telling them directly about how far CS can take them. She recounts that one of the best parts of this whole project has been speaking to students and their parents, about the type of college and job opportunities, that will be available to them, if they continue their study of Computer Science. “It’s exciting when you tell students that they have a talent for Computer Science and then give them a push towards pursuing CS as a career.” she tells us.

On that count, we agree, and look forward to inspiring Bridgeport students for many years to come!