Educator Spotlight:
Teaching Coding in Middle Schools

FLORIDA

TEACHER: Sean Dennett
SCHOOL: Murray Middle School
GRADE(S): 6th-8th
NUMBER OF STUDENTS: 300
CERTIFICATION GOAL: Python Coding Apprentice

Each year, about 300 students take a semester-long class in Sean Dennett's computer lab at Murray Middle School in Stuart, Florida. When he started teaching coding four years ago, Dennett was pulling together a hodgepodge of resources from different places. Then he discovered EasyCode.

"EasyCode is one of the best programs to introduce students to programming and Python, because it's all-in-one and very easy to use," Dennett says.

Python is a text-based coding language that's widely used by companies around the globe. EasyCode introduces Python with drag-and-drop text blocks, gradually working toward full-fledged code writing. For Dennett's emerging bilingual students, a Spanish version of the lessons is available.

"EasyCode allows them to work at their own speed," Dennett adds. "Each lesson has slides that I go over with them, I demo any particular problems, and we talk about vocabulary. Then they get into it, and I walk around to help out."

By the end of their third semester of coding, most of Dennett's students are ready to take the Python Coding Apprentice exam. And for every student who passes the exam, the state of Florida gives the school a stipend which helps offset the cost of the curriculum.

> " I'm a believer in EasyCode. If you're starting a coding curriculum in middle school, EasyCode is where it's at."
>
> — *Sean Dennett, Murray Middle School*

EasyCode Pillars is an interactive, web-based curriculum that helps students learn coding principles using Python, the industry-leading programming language. In each lesson, students complete a project through a series of activities that include coding challenges, debugging practice and quizzes. The curriculum prepares students for Python Coding Apprentice and IT Specialist Certifications.

Learning.com
EXCEL IN A DIGITAL WORLD

TEACHER: Linda Weiner
SCHOOL: Cutler Bay Middle School
GRADE(S): 8th
NUMBER OF STUDENTS: 60
CERTIFICATION GOAL: Python Coding Apprentice

Linda Weiner had been using Learning.com's EasyTech digital literacy program for several years in the Computer Applications classes before she was introduced to EasyCode's beginning coding lessons.

"It was awesome!" she says. "And it was easy for the teachers to learn, which is important because a lot of us didn't major in computer science."

This is Weiner's third year using EasyCode in Intro to Coding courses for 8th graders at Cutler Bay Middle School in Cutler Bay, Florida. Her students complete an average of one lesson each day in class. They begin by watching an instructional video in EasyCode, and then practicing the coding skills themselves in the program.

"The students like it because it gives them a sense of empowerment or ownership because once they write a line of code and hit enter, they actually get to see the code implemented on the side of the screen right then," she says.

In the spring, students use the practice tests in EasyCode to prepare for the Python Apprentice Certificate – which 28 of Weiner's 32 students passed in 2023.

"Because my students are learning to code, their mindset and outlook has changed," she says. "They know they can do more with their future."

> ## Coding is where the high-paying jobs are."
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> *— Linda Weiner,*
> *Cutler Bay Middle School*

> ## The preparation for the industry certification is amazing."
>
> *— Alberto Sweeney,*
> *Bair Middle School*

TEACHER: Alberto Sweeney
SCHOOL: Bair Middle School
GRADE(S): 8th
NUMBER OF STUDENTS: 30
CERTIFICATION GOAL: IT Specialist

About five years ago, seeing the growing demand for computer science skills in the workplace, Alberto Sweeney introduced a coding course at Bair Middle School in Sunrise, Florida. He kept looking for the ideal coding curriculum to use in his 8th grade Advanced Technologies course, which offers high school credit.

"It's very hard to find a curriculum that teaches students to actually type in the real computer language," says Sweeney, who taught himself to code. "EasyCode is so thorough; it does not leave anything out."

EasyCode takes the students through lessons, quizzes and hands-on coding exercises to put their knowledge into practice. The latter being something that Sweeneys' students especially enjoy.

"EasyCode gives them an opportunity to be creative, taking what they've learned to develop their own projects with their own guidelines," he says.

Some of Sweeney's students elect to take the Python Coding Specialist exam, an industry certification that community colleges sometimes require students to pass, giving his students an edge on the competition for college.

"The preparation for the test is amazing," he says. "As the lessons go on, they get harder and harder, and students may have to do it again and again and again, until they get it."

That persistence pays off. More than half of his students who took the industry certification last year passed – helping ensure their future college and career success.