

News

Oakland's Skyline High opens Computer Science and Technology Academy



Major League Baseball Hall of Famer and Oakland A's great Reggie Jackson, center, watches as Keren Webb, right, and Melody Long, left, both sophomores, play an interactive game on computers in the new computer lab classroom at Skyline High School in Oakland on Sept. 16. SAP and the Oakland Unified School District celebrated the opening of the new Computer Science and Technology Academy within Skyline High. Participating students will earn a tech-focused associate's degree from Berkeley City college at no cost to them. (Dan Honda/Bay Area News Group)

By **JEAN LEE**

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OAKLAND — The Oakland Unified School District has partnered with cloud software company SAP to open Skyline High School's Computer Science and Technology Academy.

The academy is a pathway for high school students to enter into the technology industry and is a product of a public-private partnership between OUSD and SAP, along with Berkeley City College and the nonprofit Career Ladders Project.

To celebrate Skyline's inaugural class of 100 students to the academy, a special ceremony was held inside the school's auditorium on Sept. 16 that included Skyline students and faculty, SAP employees, elected officials, educators and legendary Oakland A's player Reggie Jackson.

U.S. Rep. Barbara Lee, D-Oakland, wasn't able to attend the event but sent a video welcoming the incoming class of students. Venus Johnson, a California associate attorney general, and David Silver, Oakland's chief of education, were in attendance. Both spoke to the crowd, stressing the importance of education.

"Your education is your key ... the only thing that no one can take from you," Johnson told the students.

Most students knew about baseball Hall of Famer Reggie Jackson even though he played for the A's decades ago, from 1967-1975, and again in 1987. Some statistics he drove home were how African-American and Latino students have a much lower chance of graduating high school than white and Asian/Pacific Islander students and how there should be a bigger minority population in the tech industry.

"Please do your best, go through college, get a diploma," Jackson, an advocate of STEM programs, told the students.

The academy is a six-year early college high school program that allows students to take high school classes simultaneously while earning a tech-focused associate degree from Berkeley City College at no cost.

Students who participate are expected to complete a portion of their college careers before even graduating high school — some potentially completing full associate's degrees before then. The hope is that students will get a significant head start and advantage before applying for careers in the technology industry, which are increasingly competitive and in demand.

Students in the inaugural class, such as freshman Eleanor Wikstrom, are already thinking about what the program can bring for their futures.

"I haven't really been exposed to much of computer science yet, but from what I can tell it's going to open a lot of opportunities that weren't present before, so to take part of that and have it also be my first year and have this here for me is wonderful," Wikstrom said. "Every single job that I know of has some form of computer technology, so it's probably one of the most important things that you can learn."

SAP has launched several similar technology-driven high school programs across North America, such as BTECH in Queens, New York. Skyline is part of SAP pledge's to the White House Tech Inclusion Initiative and the White House Computer Science for All Initiative.

SAP is also among other tech companies that are helping fund technology education in the Bay Area. Software company Salesforce.com announced earlier this month that it will give a \$2.5 million donation to Oakland's public schools, so that it can go toward math and science courses.

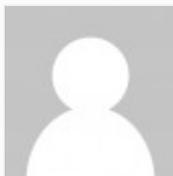
Katie Morgan, SAP director of corporate social responsibility for North America, said that Skyline's established collaboration with Berkeley City College and its location made it the right school for SAP to partner with.

"SAP chose to partner with Skyline because of the fantastic work that was already happening here with Berkeley City College," Morgan said. "They needed an industry partner that is invested in building the pipeline of talent, and Oakland is a really important community with Silicon Valley. The location made sense, that collaboration was already happening, so SAP was able to really help to lift it up and put some resources behind the dual enrollment fees and give industry expertise to the pathway."

Along with providing funding, SAP will also provide mentorship to students, according to Skyline computer science teacher Mark Frey, director of the school's Computer Science and Technology Academy.

"Instead of just being in a classroom, kids get to actually talk to people in the industry, mentors. SAP is creating a mentorship-like program for students. We eventually want to pair up each kid with a mentor. We haven't gotten all the way up to that point yet, where every kid has mentor, but that's the stepladder that we're climbing to get to," Frey said.

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Jean Lee

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