

## Coding Club: Preparing for their future

By Nick Moffitt Digital Content Editor | Posted: Tuesday, January 19, 2016 7:30 am

CLINTON — To the outside it may just look like kids playing with toys, and essentially that's what they're doing.

But when popping into the after-school session of the Whittier Coding Club you see kids having a lot of fun while learning the fundamentals of computer science.

Led by Sarah Shepherd, a librarian and media specialist teacher at Whittier and Eagle Heights elementary schools in Clinton, 15 students have started their journey into computer science.

"We started with code.org and they learned what coding was and the block system to code," she said.

Code.org is a non-profit group that advocates for computer science education in grades kindergarten through 12. Since the website started, thousands of students have been taught the fundamentals of computer science or explored other computer science education through the program.

Now having programmed with a block coding system, the 15 fifth-graders in this session of the club will work with Sphero robots and program them to accomplish a set task.

For Brooklyn Peters, who participates in the club, it was the fun that drew him in, but he's enjoying the learning as well.

"It's fun I like and we get to code some special stuff," he said. "We get to code robots here."

Peters, and his group of three that also includes Andrew Butt and Merick McDowell, spent the 30-minute after-class session learning to input commands on a tablet to make their Sphero Robot go off a ramp and land on the other side.

For the three it was a lot of trial and error filled with "I told you!", "Why is it doing this?", "Ohhhhh," and "Let me try!" By the end of the session the group had a grasp on how to command the robot, and Shepherd said in following sessions they would continue and teach their robots to achieve a task.



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Nick Moffitt/Clinton Herald  
Brooklyn Peters, Andrew Butt and Merick McDowell work on their program for the Sphero robots they are working with. All three participate in the after-school Whittier Coding Club.

The idea of computer science education may bring up thoughts of a boring time clacking away on a keyboard, but the kids in Shepherd's coding club had smiles across the board.

Shepherd said programs like the coding club could be expanding in the Clinton School District as soon as next year and for good reason.

"We need to make our kids creators of technology, not just consumers of it," she said.

Shepherd said right now they hopefully are training their students for jobs that don't even exist, so getting them technology-ready by teaching computer science is a must going forward.

Code.org also works toward not only education promotion efforts, but equality in the computer science profession. According to Shepherd, the group of 30 students interested in the program is about a 50-50 split of boys and girls.

This session included 15 fifth-graders and a new session will start in February with 15 more, according to Shepherd.

Digital Content Editor Nick Moffitt can be reached at [nickmoffitt@clintonherald.com](mailto:nickmoffitt@clintonherald.com).