$150K GRANT KICKS OFF SANDY CREEK COMPUTER SCIENCE PROGRAM

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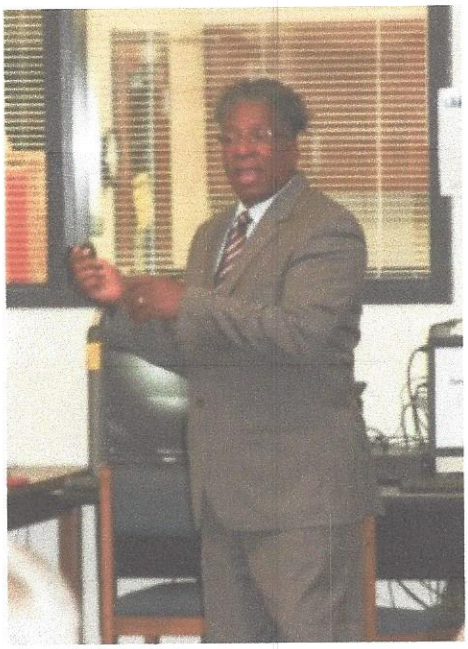
by Russell Cooks



(http://fayette-news.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/IMG_1605.jpg)

Dr. Joseph Saulter, CEO of Entertainment Arts Research, discusses "Gaming, Innovation, and Education." (Staff Photo by Christopher Dunn)

Video games as part of the school day. No, it's not just a student's dream. It's a reality coming to Sandy Creek High School that will help build a brighter future. Sandy Creek recently hosted a kickoff event celebrating a $150,000 grant awarded by the Governor's Office of Student Achievement.

Sandy Creek will provide professional learning that supports the integration of authentic coding/programming experiences into academic instruction and that increases the exposure of non-traditional STEM students to STEM subjects. Professional learning will be provided to computer science teachers to apply visual programming, scripting, and programming using professional game engines, and to computer science, CTAE, and mathematics teachers to collaboratively develop school-wide, authentic, game programming projects that integrate math and computer science, and to design and develop integrated instructional materials, artifacts, and assessments.

The grant will allow Sandy Creek to prepare the teachers for the future who in turn with prepare our students. There will a total of 10 participating teachers and five lead teachers that will be trained and exposed to integrated mathematics and computer science/coding.

Dr. Gary Liu offered a breakdown of the project:

• Sandy Creek is the only individual school that received this grant. The other three recipients are all large institutions and a school district.

• Sandy Creek receives $150,000 to foster professional development under the hard work of Dr. Gary Liu, Lisa Collins, and Dr. Margo Wimbish.

• Sandy Creek will utilize the opportunity to expose more math and science students to computer science through gaming and simulations.

• It will set the table to expand the program county-wide and motivate all math and science students to learn and apply computer science in their everyday lives.

"Our students compete at high levels in athletics, academics, and the performing arts. However, our goal is for continuous improvement in every category," said Sandy Creek Principal Robert Hunter. "We want to thoroughly prepare our students for post-secondary education, but also afford them the opportunity to excel in the extracurricular activities that they are truly passionate about."

The media center was filled for the event with dignitaries from the gaming industry, teachers, administration, and members of the Fayette County School Board of Education.

Dr. Joseph Barrow, Fayette County School Superintendent, said, "We are excited for the grant. Our system is a leading system in the state, and we see computer science as a critical part of our future. As educators, if we don't get into the game, we will be left behind. I am so proud that Sandy Creek was selected as the only individual school to be awarded the grant."

The keynote speaker for the kickoff was Dr. Joseph Saulter, CEO of Entertainment Arts Research, Inc. His topic was "Gaming, Innovation, and Education."

Dr. Saulter quickly got everyone's attention when he said, "This is not about a $150,000 grant. The key here is that the gaming industry is a $93.8 billion industry, and the mobile gaming industry is a $34.8 billion industry, and the mobile gaming is expected be $47 billion in 2017. The salary ranges are an average of $83,000 for developers and an average of $101,000 for management."

Saulter went on to say, "The virtual future is just the tip of the iceberg. Everyday is so exciting for me. I never know who I can inspire to go into the gaming industry and transform their lives.

"The jobs that we are doing today will be done by robots. So, we need to prepare our children for the jobs of the future. Everybody is playing the games, but I want people to build the games. When you build the game, you actually become a better player and you get paid."

Dr Liu added, "This is an opportunity to expand this program. We want to expand throughout Fayette County and the entire state of Georgia."

Saulter said, "Where Sandy Creek is going is a model for Georgia. Not only Georgia, it is a model for the world. The new era of education must be based on technology."

Hunter added, "It is a great opportunity for Sandy Creek. This is ideal for our students to be on the leading edge of technology. Moreover, our students are playing games on their smart phones. Now, they will be able to learn and create future job opportunities for themselves. It is an exciting time at Sandy Creek High School."

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