Joseph Ditton

Opposition Letter (Response to Classical Argument)

Samantha Latham

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The Most Important Classes are the Ones we already have.

Dear Mr. Ditton,

I recently read your essay on the need for computer science in Utah classrooms. It makes me happy to see that other people are taking a serious interest in our student’s education. I have a child in high school and am always concerned about the quality and direction of their schooling. Admitting that I am not an expert in the field of computer science myself, I still have to wonder if requiring computer science classes is the best thing for our students. I hope to express my opinion without completely ignoring the facts presented in your research, but propose that we explore alternative solutions the problems that you present, solutions that may be less demanding for students.

First let me say that I whole heartedly agree that there is a need for computer scientists. The information you discussed about the large gap between the amounts of college graduates versus the amount of job openings was outstanding, and informing our students of the options that are available to them is very important. I also agree that during their high school years is when students should be exposed to computer science if they are interested. My son, for example, is determined to go to school studying music because of the choir class he has had this year. This magnifies the importance of the point you made about how high school is where career decisions are made.

That being said, I don’t think that requiring high school students to take computer science classes is the best way to go. I appreciate the attempts you made to address some of the concerns that some might have about making computer science classes a requirement, but there are some things that I feel like were overlooked. There was never any discussion about the alternatives to doing high school courses. There are many alternative forms of learning during that age that don’t involve increasing a student’s work load. For example there could be a computer science club. A club would provide that same environment that would be found in class, but without the added homework and study. It would provide students who are interested a way to get exposure and for those who aren’t interested they would be able to move on. I recognize that you addressed the issue of the added work in your research, claiming that “The benefits would out-weigh the cost,” but I have seen what happens to students when they are overloaded with school. Working with a qualified teacher to run the club would be a great way to teach students about computer science without the damage that can be caused by the extra work load. You yourself even recognized the difficulty of the subject.

Also, students can often teach themselves better than teachers. There are many websites and online programs that teach coding for free. For example, CodeAcademy.com is a free website where anyone can log on, create an account and immediately begin learning to code in 1 of about 10 programming languages offered. Code.org and codeschool.com are other examples of similar websites. All are free of charges. If students were aware of the resources that are already available to them then hiring teachers and getting new equipment seems less necessary. Taking guitar lessons seems to be a thing of the past because they can learn so much online without ever having to leave their house. I recognize that putting in a room with other people that are doing the same thing is important but if they have already learned a lot on their own, then making the transition to college should not be that difficult.

Again, I am not disputing the fact that computer science is important, or that getting experience in high school would be valuable, but I am proposing that there are other ways that the students would be able to get the experience with little to no overhead cost for schools and parents and without overloading our students.

Sincerely, Avery Conser Nedparent.