

CS4NorCal Newsletter Spotlight Article

December 2024: DAVID ZAVALA

Headline:

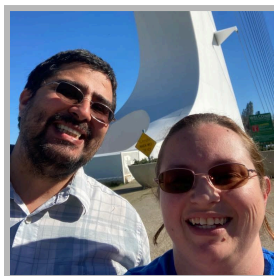
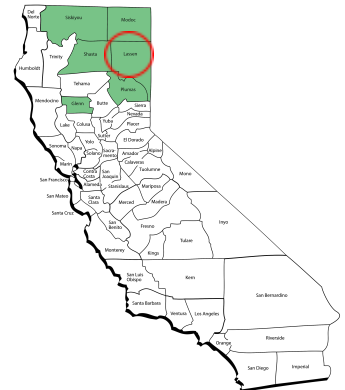
Computer Science is a Family Affair in Susanville with David Zavala

Article:

David Zavala grew up all along the coast of California... moving from Santa Cruz to Irvine and Long Beach, before moving back up north and settling far from the Pacific in Susanville, CA with his family. David is the computer guru for the Susanville Elementary School District; although his official title is Technology Specialist and Computer Lab Technician at Diamond View Middle School.

In the small, rural school district in Susanville (*located in Lassen County*), David has been helping students learn Computer Science for more than eight years. SEDS has three schools providing educational opportunities to about 1,000 students* (*roughly 300 per school*):

- McKinley Elementary, TK - grade 2,
- Meadow View Elementary, grades 3 - 5,
- and Diamond View Middle School, grades 6 - 8.



Bringing more Computer Science offerings to the students of Susanville is a family affair... as David's wife Christina Zavala ALSO teaches computers, robotics and technology (in grades 3 - 5) at Meadow View Elementary. David and Christina have raised their three children in Susanville: they have a sophomore son in high school, an 8th-grade son and a 6th-grade daughter -- both of whom attended the Diamond View Middle School.

At Diamond View, David meets with 6th graders twice a week for a 30-minute and 40-minute session to teach general computer skills -- operating systems, typing proficiency and using the Microsoft software (*Word, Excel, PowerPoint, etc.*) However, as his students progress into the 7th and 8th grades and when possible in 6th grade, David tries to add in a little bit more robust, varied content including block coding, basic programming, and navigating new developments in AI.



“I’m always looking for new opportunities to bring current applications and real-life topics to my students as they navigate how to use computers effectively,” David said.

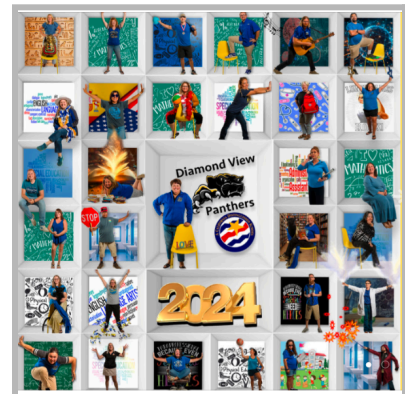
“Computers are used more and advance further each year... so I want to teach my students the skills they will need to be successful with technology -- not just as a job skill, but also a life skill.”

Since the pandemic in 2020, and the need to teach students remotely on Zoom, David has seen an uptick in the number of students who come into middle school a bit more savvy with computers. The computer exposure students (*and their parents*) had thrust upon them during Covid, specifically with remote learning, definitely sped up the technology learning curve.

Following Covid, David’s administrator, Dede Heimbigner, pitched the idea of working with CS4NorCal to bring more technology programs and classes to their rural school district. With the trainings and support offered, as well as the remote-learning opportunities, David (and Christina) have been able to connect with other Computer Science teachers throughout the state: sharing lesson plans, discussing accessibility challenges and finding grant opportunities to continue to grow their tech offerings.

Despite the challenges with resources, David really enjoys the benefits of being at a small, rural school. *“In my middle school, I’m able to get to know each student -- not only by name, but by their strengths, weaknesses, interests and talents,”* David said. *“I recently had students from the first 6th-grade class I taught come back to visit me as graduating seniors. And most of those thanked me for the positive influence I had on their lives. It’s great when my CS classes ignite a passion for technology -- that may lead to a possible career for them before or after college.”*

One thing is for sure, David Zavala is making a difference in the lives of his students each and every day. From Chromebooks to coding, David is preparing the next generation of learners for a brighter future in a technology-rich environment... from the Sierra Nevadas in Lassen County to the city streets of Sacramento and beyond.



CS4NorCal, a professional learning and research project serving over 100 schools (in Glenn, Lassen, Modoc, Plumas, Shasta and Siskiyou counties), promotes equitable access to computer science education for small and rural schools in Northern California. The project, started in June 2021, brings resources and builds capacity and partnerships to create opportunities to establish CS pathways in similar districts throughout the state. It is sponsored by the Small School Districts’ Association.