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# Microsoft software engineer visits Wenatchee Valley Technical Skills Center

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Education, Business



## Photo provided

Microsoft software engineer Haishi Bai teaches an Advanced Placement computer programming course Friday at the Wenatchee Valley Technical Skills Center. Bai has been a volunteer with the Technology Education and Literacy in Schools program for a year.

**WENATCHEE** — Wenatchee High School junior Cruz Villegas isn't sure exactly what career path he wants to take, but he knows it'll involve computers.

The 17-year-old is taking an Advanced Placement computer programming course at the Wenatchee Valley Technical Skills Center. He said it'll open doors for him because many technology-related jobs require programming knowledge.

Microsoft software engineer Haishi Bai has been teaching Villegas and his classmates remotely, using video screens to chat with them twice a week. On Friday, Bai visited the class to share more of his 32 years' programming experience.

"What I believe is that programming is not about learning the syntax, but about learning the skills to solve problems," Bai said in an interview. "This is what we keep reiterating for the students: how to approach a complex problem, divide it into little parts, figure out the solution to each part and then combine them into a bigger solution. I think that's very beneficial to them. Programming language changes all the time, but how you approach a problem sticks with you."

He has worked for Microsoft for six years and been a volunteer with the Technology Education and Literacy in Schools program for a year. TEALS pairs computer-science professionals with teachers to bring their expertise to classrooms.

Bai said he wants the students to become comfortable with thinking logically.

“But for the bigger part, I just want them to be interested in computer science and want to do more,” he said.

On Friday, Bai spoke with the students about his native China, offered lessons on math and technology, and showed them programs he’d written.

From the visit, Villegas said he learned that “programming isn’t as hard as most people think, it’s just you just have to be a problem-solver.”

The course also includes students from WestSide and Eastmont high schools.

Instructor Kim Anderson said this is the only TEALS course in Central Washington that has in-person mentors, including one who works for Amazon and local professionals. He said the class not only meets high school requirements but also gets students on track for careers related to computer science; they can earn up to 15 credits at Wenatchee Valley College.

Anderson said the mentors can offer real-life experience.

“It’s actually practical,” he said. “Like, ‘Here’s what the program looks like. Here’s something I built. This is what it takes to get into the industry.’ And all of them have had a path to get to where they’re at, so (the students) can actually connect with them and walk through, ‘OK, these are the important things I need to learn and this isn’t that important.’”

Wenatchee High School freshman Michael Curtindale, 15, said he’s learned how to write JavaScript and wants to develop applications.

“Writing code is the basis for everything, from desktops to phones to even calculators,” he said. “I feel like we’re learning what we need to know for our future. The teachers we have are working with us a lot. They’re super kind ... and really awesome at helping us do our best. Haishi’s visit here really taught me how to apply myself more to programming. I want to work harder at this.”

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