

Grant aids SUHS computer program

by SCOTT NEWTON

Don't be surprised if one of these days computer literacy is a required course at Sandy Union High School.

Presently the school does not have the money to provide the resources that such a requirement would make necessary.

But, the Math Curriculum Development Committee at SUHS has already recommended that a semester of computer literacy be required. "It's something that's coming," said Roger Ford, who is teaching four courses dealing with the use of computers this fall.

"I really enjoy those classes," said Gary Curtis, who's taught computer classes for six years. "The kids are there because they want to be. They'll learn in spite of you."

Mike Stevenson, head of the computer department at Mt. Hood Community College, said computer literacy is already a graduation requirement for some programs at MHCC.

He said an "absolute minimum" of 50 percent of all jobs by 1990 will involve the use of computers in some

way. That estimate, he said, is "very, very conservative."

SUHS used to have three teletypes set up, which were comprised of keyboards and printers. The "brains" of the computers were housed by the North Clackamas School District. The students hooked up with the "brains" through a telephone connection.

The disadvantages of this system included the cost of renting the telephone lines and teletypes, and the disruption of classes when the "brains" were tied up or broken down.

The district owns a Radio Shack TRS-80 Model 1 computer. It was purchased several years ago and, according to Ford, only basic maintenance has been required.

"Considering the use it has had, it's held up great," Ford said.

Teaching a computer class with four stations could be compared to teaching typing to 20 students with only four typewriters. There is some downtime.

An \$8,000 federal grant has helped solve the problem. Curtis said they plan to buy five Radio Shack color computers, with individual disk

drives and color monitors, and one printer, with the grant money. The equipment has been ordered and should be available for use by the computer classes this fall. Curtis is hoping they can renew the grant for a year or two.

He pointed out several times that the money is from a federal grant, and is not coming out of the district's budget.

Students are first taught to write in a computer language called "BASIC," which stands for beginners all-purpose instructors code.

Getting students involved is a step in the right direction, although it's not as hard to get them involved as it is the adults.

Said Curtis, who has a home computer that hooks up to the family's color television. "If I have any questions I go get my son." Paul, 9, will sometimes get exasperated with his father, but reportedly tries to be patient. "That's hard to take, sometimes," Curtis joked.

Students who have been exposed to computers at home do go into classes sometimes "knowing computers better than the teachers," agreed Ford,

whose son Aaron enjoys using the family's computer.

Adults are less enthusiastic. "The students don't mind making mistakes and learning," Ford said. "Adults don't like to feel they're starting all over again."

Ford and Curtis agree that they have an advantage over some other teachers in that most students are motivated going in. They'll experiment and pursue outside reading on their own.

Having motivated students "makes it enjoyable to teach," Ford said.

Experimentation is an important part of learning, according to Curtis. He "only" allows game playing once a week, and that is if it has been a productive week. Some students have devised "fairly sophisticated" video games, Curtis reports.

Devising a game requires skills not unlike those Curtis and Ford hope to instill. Curtis said their goal is to get the students to develop proficiency in one language, while providing them with a general knowledge of other languages.

The reasoning being that after one learns a computer language, it's

easier to learn a second or a third. Students have, in fact, developed their own programs. One practical program set up by students helps the school district keep inventory.

Options abound in the computer education field. One popular choice is the Apple brand. Ford and Curtis, on the other hand, "lean" toward Radio Shack models.

Apple is the "Cadillac" of computers, according to Curtis. Radio Shack is preferred because of cost, past history of service and repair and available software support. A Radio Shack outlet is located in Sandy.

Computer literacy is one thing. Using the computer in math, science or other areas would provide a resource heretofore untapped.

Teachers have been slow to pick up on this, Ford said. It goes back to the idea that adults are less enthusiastic about having to learn a new system.

Ford and Curtis feel an obligation to pass on what they know about computers to their fellow teachers.

The affect of computers on education is expected to be discernible.

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