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## New \$1 million grant creates computer courses for Baton Rouge middle, high schoolers

### [The Advocate](#)

Middle and high school students in Baton Rouge public schools will soon have new computer science and computational courses, thanks to a \$1 million federal grant to LSU and the East Baton Rouge Parish school system.

The new courses will be rolled out over the next five years. The initiative will draw not just on computer science, but will bring in other disciplines, including physics and sociology.

The project is titled "BRBYTES: Baton Rouge: Bringing Youth Technology, Education and Success." The National Science Foundation awarded the grant on Sept. 12. The university and the school system announced it Thursday afternoon.

The School Board voted unanimously Thursday to formally accept the grant.

"It's just phenomenal, something that we need so desperately," said School Board member Evelyn Ware-Jackson.

Juana Moreno, associate professor in the LSU Department of Physics & Astronomy and the LSU Center for Computation & Technology, is the principal investigator of this project. She said the goal is to give all 41,000 students in the state's second largest school district the chance "to engage in high-quality computing courses."

"Our team has developed a five-year plan for introducing computing in all middle and high schools where every student takes at least one computing course in grades six through 12," Moreno said.

Moreno said she was part of a team that sought this grant unsuccessfully in 2018. Now that they received it, she said, they are in line to win an even bigger \$2 million grant.

A team will focus initially on developing new courses and expanding existing ones for seventh and 10th graders and then adding more grades over time.

Currently, 857 students are taking a computing course taught by eight full-time teachers. The grant envisions that growing to 2,729 students in such courses taught by 20 full-time teachers.

The initiative would build on existing high school programs at Lee and Tara high schools, as well as the Career Technical and Education Center.

The new seventh-grade course is called "Big Ideas in Computing" and is meant to show how those ideas are relevant to students, said Fernando Alegre, LSU Gordon A. Cain Center research associate and co-principal investigator.

Ben Necaise, an associate superintendent, said the goal is to make the East Baton Rouge Parish school system "a role model for computing education in Louisiana." He said he expects other school districts will join in the effort in the future.

The grant also funds efforts to expose principals, counselors and parents to the potential for students, especially minorities and those from disadvantaged backgrounds, to have careers in computing. In a similar vein, as part of the grant, LSU will work to increase the ranks of minority educators teaching computing courses and to spread the use of culturally responsive teaching practices to reach a variety of students.

"Our team is committed to promoting equity and to attracting more students from historically disadvantaged groups into computing fields," said Lori Martin, an LSU sociology and African & African-American studies professor.

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