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## Troubleshooting teens

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PROSSER— Lisa Fiedler used to worry she would break a computer with the slightest tug or push while installing hardware. But now the Prosser High School senior knows better.

"It takes a lot more effort than you think to break something on a computer," the 17-year-old says as she watches friends fix computers at Housel Middle School in Prosser.

A member of the school district's Students With an Aptitude for Technology (or SWAT) program, Fiedler and a dozen other high school students help maintain and repair computers in exchange for course credit.

The computer course was created about seven years ago when secondary technology coordinator Dean Smith and district technology director Alan Walker began using students to help them with an increasing computer repair workload.

For school districts counting every penny, the student technicians help keep the cost of technology repairs to a minimum.

"(The students) have done so many things for the district. Basically, every time they work, they save the district money," says Walker.

To ensure the students received course credit, Smith and Allen worked out a curriculum and enrollment application process.

"Our SWAT class has been a real win-win situation for all parties involved. It gives students real-life work experience in the technology industry ... (and) it has been wonderful for the school district utilizing their technology skills to configure hardware, install software, perform maintenance, and do trouble shooting," says Rick Adams, Prosser High School vocational director.

High school students interested in joining SWAT must fill out an application, submit letters of recommendation and complete an interview.

Smith says the application process isn't designed to weed out the less tech-savvy, rather it's intended to ensure the students are dedicated to the work and trustworthy.

"We can teach the kids the (computer) skills. We just want kids that are reliable. Trust is a big thing," he explains.



SANDY SUMMERS/Yakima Herald-Republic  
**Ninth graders Marc Rollins, 15, left, and Susan Wilson, 14, take out the motherboard in a computer at Housel Middle School in Prosser Tuesday. Both students are in the program SWAT: Students With an Aptitude for Technology.**



SANDY SUMMERS/Yakima Herald-Republic  
**A student holds pieces of a computer that she has taken apart and plans to put back together.**

For those admitted to the program, the course begins in the summer with SWAT camp, where students are taught basic tasks such as how to clean computers and operate scanners for three days. When classes begin, students rotate working with the district technicians each class period and then have a Wednesday seminar before or after school.

During each semester, teens complete a project intended to help faculty bring their lesson plans into the 21st century— such as compiling projector slides into a PowerPoint presentation. Other teens offer their skills to community groups as one student did when he created a Web site for the Prosser Fire Department.

This year, Lisa has her SWAT class during first period. So instead of showing up at the high school each morning, she heads to Housel Middle School. Because Lisa was involved in the program during her junior year, she often works on her own.

She logs into a computer program and looks to see what types of "tickets" she has. Tickets are online complaint forms of a computer malfunction filled out by faculty or staff members. Next, Lisa begins working through the ticketed problems.

Until recently, Lisa also interned for two hours a day at Benton Rural Electric Association in Prosser, where she was paid to fix minor computer and networking problems.

Jeff Bastow, information technology manager with the electric association, says the intern program not only provides more advanced training for the teens but keeps his technicians focused on more complex problems.

Interns at the company must be 16 or older. At the beginning, the students are assigned to work with a technician at the electric association for a short time before being turned loose on their own.

Bastow looks for students with good customer service skills, since they often communicate with clients while solving problems or repairing equipment.

"I think teaching students technology skills is really important," he says. "It's actually really hard to find good technicians."

Some students in the program foster an interest in computers and go on to study computer science or engineering.

Prior to enrolling in SWAT, Lisa wanted to study medicine or politics. But now the teen is looking at applying to the University of Washington or Stanford University's computer science departments because of the universities' proximity to technology hubs.

Others teens in the program say they enjoy the class but don't plan to pursue careers in computers.

Kellen Moore, 16, enrolled in the technology course because he helped Smith in the upkeep of the middle school's computer equipment. In the past, Kellen has worked on the broadcast program at the middle school and assisted the high school football staff with editing and organizing game clips. Typically, he helps teachers out with video production problems or equipment.

"It's fun to do, but it's more of a hobby," he says.