

# At Google's Community Computing and Coding Classes, Priority Placed on Personal Growth

By Scott Stiffler on May 14, 2019 · No Comment



L to R, foreground: Naia Crump, Khemasia Pierce and Shawn West do college readiness at Code Next. | Photo by Winnie McCroy

**BY WINNIE McCROY** | As Google grows and expands in Chelsea and Hudson Square, they are finding innovative ways to engage these communities via computer coding and literacy programs. Currently, Google is providing two such opportunities: Code Next, an initiative to foster the next generation of Black and Latinx tech leaders; and Grow with Google, a nationwide initiative to help people and businesses increase their computer literacy.

“I’ve been in a lot of spaces where I hadn’t seen Black or Latino employees in software engineering or tech. So this really became a passion project of mine,” Code Next Program Lead Peta-Gay Clarke said. As Deputy Director of IT at Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, Clarke held workshops for young girls of color, and launched the local chapter of Black Girls Code.

“Fast forward a few years and folks were reaching out to me,

saying Google was looking for their own opportunity to cultivate Black and Latino computer science. I jumped all over it,” Clarke recalled.

After a listening tour to understand where the “pain points” of diminished access were, Clarke helped build out innovation spaces that create opportunities for young people of color to graduate and major in computer science or a technical field.

The latest physical manifestation of this is the shiny new Code Next lab on the ground floor of 111 Eighth Ave., which opened in early March after relocating from a smaller space within the building. Google has similar labs in Oakland and Harlem. When teens visit Code Next, they can access Macs and Chromebooks, 3D printers, and laser cutters. As Clarke put it, “We will get anything that allows students to build, design, and be creative.”



The newly-opened Code Next lab, on the ground floor of 111 Eighth Ave. | Photo by Winnie McCroy

## Code Next lab

On a recent visit, the Code Next lab was hosting three afterschool programs. Richard Achée taught Python MC, as part of Google's longtime encouragement for employees to devote 20 percent of their time to side projects.

“These kids are writing code to create music tracks,” Achée said. “We’re using EarSketch by Georgia Tech, and within the first session they are writing code to remix beats by Young Guru, the producer behind Jay-Z.”

“We also have a robotics program with all the technology you will need. We try to find engineers and innovators from New York, and they’re all Black and Latino,” Clarke added. Code Next has

earmarked space for a virtual reality program.

Downstairs, Google 20 percenter Julian Frost, who was working with students on the laser cutting of clock faces, noted, "Next week, we will start with circuits, arduinos, and the difference between analog and digital. Then we'll work with smaller robotics." Robotics kits cost thousands, so Frost teaches students about different tools they can use to create small robotics.

And in a third classroom, Anjie Diaz from, The Door, counseled on college readiness. Said Diaz, "The Door is based in SoHo and we don't just do college prep. We provide a million services, from a health clinic to arts and recreation, a dance team that performs at museums, a whole floor dedicated to career advisement and internship programs, counseling, and even an on-site charter school."

Students said Diaz helped them translate their experience at Google into highlights for their college applications, and score coveted internships and scholarships.

"Google introduced me to computer science and tech fields in general," student Shawn West said. "I don't think I would have been interested in computer science unless I had this opportunity. And it's actually something I'm going to pursue in college and as a career. I'm still trying to find my space—computer science, or computer engineering. I'm interested in tech, and part of the work I'm doing now is to decide where I want to go with it."

Sitting next to West, Khemasia Pierce touted the support Code Next provided, saying, "The vibe of Google is like a community. The coaches help you with everything... and they give us mentors, too. I still talk to mine about school and my dreams. She put insight into my life. Once, I told my mentor I was interested in being a lawyer, and she actually brought me to her friend's law firm. Not to mention, saying you come from Google is great clout."

As she laughed with her friend, Naia Crump, Pierce admitted, "The people who come here, we're pretty much a family. Even if we don't talk to each other outside Google, when we get here, the whole dynamic changes."

Looking at her friends, Crump said they represented the full spectrum of what Google could inspire: West's engineering, Pierce's coding, and her love of computer design.

"I pull from a different side of the brain, for art, and that really got to flourish here," Crump said. "When I came to Google in eighth grade, I was scared that I wasn't going to fit in with all those geniuses, that they were going to be so good at math and I'm awful at math."

But the coaches convinced her each person had different strengths to bring to the table—some in coding, others in graphic design or CSS (Cascading Style Sheet).

"So that's what I focused on, and I'd like to say I'm pretty good at what I've chosen to do," Crump said. "They support and help me work on my portfolio, to go to art school and college. I want to be a UX [User Experience] designer, and they've shown me programs and scholarships I can sign up for free. I've gone to so many Black Girls Code events, even a new one during the summer. Google is a really good place to help you figure out what you want to do. You get direction when you come here, and are not just drifting aimlessly in the angst of teenager-dom."

And these students get to do all of this work in a brand-new, state-of-the-art location, with supplies provided to them in a way that's accessible and exciting.

"We wanted to make this a space that was fun and thought-provoking," Clarke said. "Students come here and feel they're doing rigorous work, but it doesn't feel like school. We made a space they would enjoy coming to... so they can participate and be engaged. That's really what we strive for."



Google Communications Manager Peter Schottenfels showed of the new Grow With

Google storefront. | Photo by Winnie McCroy

## Grow with Google

Right around the corner, in the former Banana Republic storefront, is Grow with Google, an initiative to provide computer literacy. Although the physical workspace and classrooms are only open until about Labor Day, Grow With Google actually started in October 2017 as a nationwide tour through Oklahoma City, Louisville, Reno, Indianapolis, and elsewhere.

“Somewhere along the way, we realized we should try an extended tour stop, so this is the manifestation of that,” said Google Communications Manager Peter Schottenfels. “We’re open here for five more months.”

The program is geared toward those who want to learn computer literacy, with a special focus on free resources small businesses can use to increase their online presence. One of these is Small Thanks, a social app hybrid where people can review their favorite locations, and businesses can turn results into a poster, window decal, or tabletop sign.

“You can even come here and have your signs printed,” Mr. Schottenfels said.

Grow With Google classes are available to all, catering to different age and interest groups. Popular classes include Ready, Set, Code — For Kids!, Design Thinking for Entrepreneurs, Design an Effective Resume, Make Better Business Decisions With Analytics, Make Your Website Work for You, Intro to Coding for Students, and Fundamentals of Online Marketing. There’s even a Digital Skills for Everyday Tasks, for those just gaining computer literacy.

“Anyone in the country can drop in and learn how to build a website, or online safety basics for moms with kids,” Schottenfels said. “We’ve had these resources online for a while, and we just wanted to build a physical space for it. We’re lucky to have this retail space available to us for this period of time. We want to bring in the neighborhood, because it’s geared toward people who live here, small businesses, and those looking for jobs.”

To help inspire people, Google provides success stories from across the country in their Grow with Google newsletter. They provide one-on-one coaching sessions with Googlers who teach people how to improve their business website, or any number of



other skills. They're all free, and all you need to do to join is register.

*For class descriptions or to register, visit [g.co/GrowNYC](https://g.co/GrowNYC).*



From left: Carley Graham Garcia (Google), Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer; Torrence Boone (Google), U.S. Representative Jerrold Nadler, Ken Jockers (Hudson Guild), and Katy Gaul-Stigge (Goodwill NYNJ). | Photo courtesy of Google



Grow with Google provides free workshops, such as this recent resume-building session. | Photo courtesy of Google

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