

# A High School Administrator's Guide to Hackathons

<http://mlh.io/high-school-administrator-hackathon-guide>

Hackathons have grown to become a global student movement. By fast-tracking the software and hardware development process, hackathons provide students with valuable technical skills they will need in their future careers. Students learn by doing and finish with a final project that the potential to turn into a real business. Collaborating in a high-stakes environment, students learn how to work effectively on a team. Students meet like-minded peers from around the world and also have a chance to interact with professional engineers and recruiters. Their new motivation and creativity remains after the hackathon, as hacker culture grows and a more diverse array of students travel to other collegiate hackathons to make new friends and win prizes.

## What is a “hackathon”?

Not to be confused with illegal and unauthorized programming, hacking in this context means quickly and intelligently creating a real application that others can use. Teams of two to six students work together over a weekend to develop a product, learning about new technologies and making friends on the way. Without an instructor lecturing them, attendees self-teach and learn how to independently research new technologies and fix problems. Expert mentors from professional development backgrounds work through the night to help students with their projects. Winners are chosen, prizes are dealt, and the top teams give a live demo of their project on stage at the conclusion.

## How popular are hackathons?

From the very first student-run hackathon in 2009, the number of hackathons has exploded to over 150 throughout the world in 2015. Ranging from 50 person gatherings to 1,500 person 36-hour coding marathons, schools like the MIT, Stanford, the Bergen Count Academies, Thomas Jefferson, and the Downtown STEM Academy have run their own hackathon.

## Who runs these hackathons?

Students are not alone in their hackathon planning endeavors. Backed by corporate sponsors like Dell, Major League Hacking will help high school organizers by answering questions they may have, providing valuable advice, and connecting organizers to companies and vendors that they may need to work with. Major League Hacking is the official student hackathon league. We organize the official hackathon seasons in North America and Europe and support the 50,000 student hackers who compete annually in student hackathons. Organizers also work closely with school administrators and faculty members to ensure the success of their hackathon.

*"Since running our hackathon, interest in Computer Science has grown tremendously here at our school. We offered new coding classes over the summer and have added new Computer Science courses to meet the additional demand from our students. I believe hackathons are a great way to promote student interest in Computer Science."*

—Mr. Russell Davis (Principal of the Bergen County Academies)

## Why are hackathons important?

Countless students get to spend a weekend having fun, meeting new people, and preparing themselves for technical careers. Hackathons provide a real-world experience for students, as they compete in teams to create a product. Students have a chance to gain time management skills, along with technical expertise and new connections.

Through name, student culture, and corporate partnerships, hackathons are one of the best ways to improve the computer science program at any school. Hackathons are one of the most effective tools for practical computer science education, and all schools that host a hackathon can supercharge their computer science program and the culture of their students. Increasing from the handful of signups for HackRU in 2013, over 60 students signed up in the fall of 2014 following Bergen County Academies' first hackathon. Hackathons attract a lot of media attention. Computer science faculty also get a chance to meet, interact with, and develop relationships with professionals at the cutting-edge of technology.

Hackathons can put a school's computer science department on the map, along with making a visible impact in students' lives from around the world. There is a shortage of computer scientists in the workforce, and hackathons have the potential to both diversify the workforce and help inspire more students to learn to code.

Have other questions?  
Contact MLH at [hi@mlh.io](mailto:hi@mlh.io)



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