

High School Students are Working to Solve San Diego's Housing Crisis

The ACE Mentor Program connects thousands of students to industry leaders and prepares them for college and careers in architecture, construction, and design.

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SAN DIEGO (January 9, 2024)----Every other Wednesday for one and half hours after school, 30 students at Patrick Henry High School stick around to study architecture, construction and engineering with either John Muller or Monica Wright, two well-regarded and local architectural designers from [AVRP Studios](#).

“The mentorship program helps students like me get hands-on experiences through communication, planning, and actually building a project together,” said Kimberly Lodge, a junior at Patrick Henry interested in pursuing a degree in civil engineering. “My peers and I have learned lifelong lessons and gained so much knowledge. The after-school sessions and field trips to construction sites have been life changing because I can see myself doing this one day.”



The Patrick Henry students and their volunteer instructors are part of a larger network, the ACE Mentor Program. Founded nationally 30 years ago and 20 years ago in San Diego, the ACE program gives high school students an inside look at the career opportunities available to them in the building and design industries. ACE stands for architecture, construction, and engineering.

“We stay engaged after high school too, helping these students pursue their degrees and enter the local workforce,” said Muller, who leads the Patrick Henry sessions. “It’s really a fantastic opportunity for the students, but it’s more than that. We (mentors/instructors) get a chance to give back, colleges and universities get engaged students who want to learn, and the community benefits too as these students enter the workforce.”

What really makes this year’s program stand out is the subject matter. The students enrolled in the 2023/24 [San Diego ACE Mentor Program](#) are working to solve our region’s housing crisis. Yes, that’s right: high school freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors are applying their skills, creativity and imagination to try and tackle our region’s most pressing need: housing.

For their project, the Patrick Henry team identified an [old quarry off Mission Gorge Road](#) where it is developing a new community with three different types of housing units – apartments, townhomes and single-family homes – designed to appeal to a wide range of San Diegans.

Building industry leaders are impressed with the students and the ACE program, but seeing this year’s teams zero in on San Diego’s housing crisis is what’s really special, they said.

“It’s inspiring what these kids are doing,” said Lori Pfeiler, CEO of the [San Diego County Building Industry Association](#). “The program deserves praise for reaching into high schools and helping develop our future

workforce, but to see these students zero in on helping us solve our housing crisis – that’s just next level. It’s awesome! It connects all of us in the community and that’s really what we need, all of us pulling together, to solve our housing crisis.”

This year in San Diego County, the [San Diego ACE Mentor Program](#) is serving 291 students at 12 high schools from Oceanside to Imperial Beach and Lakeside to the coast. At the heart of the all-volunteer program are the mentors, the professionals in their fields who lead the after-school sessions. Across the county, 172 mentors are leading the way for aspiring architects, engineers, and construction workers.

“Each year our Education Committee issues an RFP to each team, and they are purposefully vague and open to interpretation to spark innovation and great ideas,” said Anthony Damon, Board Chair of ACE San Diego and Design Manager at [DPR Construction](#).

The subject of this year’s RFP: New Facilities or Rehabilitation of Existing Buildings under a common theme of “Housing: the Keystone to a Brighter Future.”

Damon added: “The 12 high school teams interpret this theme in various ways with their mentors helping them develop a project. In May, we host a showcase where the students stand in front of parents, teachers, mentors, and fellow students to present their projects. Last year, we had over 400 people attend the showcase at San Diego State’s Montezuma Hall.”



Scholarships are a big part of the ACE program. Last year, the San Diego chapter issued 74 scholarships worth more than \$175,000 to students majoring in the ACE disciplines and trades. The money is donated by hundreds of local firms. An Alumni Program also connects students to scholarships and to internships.

“Another great aspect is the exposure to construction trades – electrician, plumber, carpenter, etc. – that ACE provides these students,” said Andy Lawrence, a local ACE team leader and superintendent at [Dynalectric San Diego](#). “These kids are getting early exposure to multiple career paths, including jobs very much in demand across our region.”

[Click here](#) to view and download additional photos.

ABOUT: [The ACE Mentor Program of America](#) was founded in 1994. It is a no-cost after-school program that prioritizes workforce development for high school students by connecting them with experts from the design and construction industry. ACE Mentor addresses pressing workforce needs, offers a range of exciting opportunities for students, and plays a crucial role in bridging the skills gap, with continuous mentor opportunities from high school through to full-time employment.

Nationally, ACE Mentor annually excites 9,000 students from 1,000 high schools about careers in architecture, engineering, construction, and the skilled trades. Seventy-four chapters operate in 36 states. Almost 70% of ACE students study industry-related fields in college or enter a skilled trades training program. ACE minority and female students enter college engineering and architecture programs at significantly higher rates than their national peers. A group of local architects, engineers, and general contractors founded the [San Diego ACE Mentor Program](#) in 2003.