

Deering alum starts mentoring program for architecture, construction, engineering students

By [Randy Billings](#)

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PORTLAND — Tyler Johnson grew up on Capisic Street in a family of construction workers and wanted to carry on the tradition. Only he wanted to work more with his mind than his muscles.

It wasn't until he got to college that Johnson finally decided he wanted to be an architect. But he realized he didn't know exactly what an architect did. Had he known sooner, he said, his path to achieving his goal may have been smoother.

"I think a lot of kids do the same thing," Johnson said. "When they go to college, they assume (architecture is) one thing and then realize it isn't really what it is. Architecture school has a high attrition rate and I think that has something to do with it."

That's why the 25-year-old was compelled to start an [ACE mentoring program](#) at his alma mater, Deering High School.

The program partners students interested in architecture, construction and engineering with local mentors who are professionals in their fields. That way, for example, students inclined to become engineers can figure out whether they want to be mechanical, electrical or civil engineers.

"Just having a mentoring program helps kids figure out what they want to do," said Johnson, a 2002 DHS graduate now working as an intern architect at [WBRC Architects & Engineers](#) in Portland. "If I was in school with this program, I think it would have helped me out."

At the end of the year, up to four students could be selected to receive scholarships.

Johnson said there are about eight students participating in the program, a 16-year-old national program now in its first year at Deering. He said he hopes next year to be able to expand the program to Portland High School.

In addition to working closely with mentors to determine their career path, Johnson said students also gain valuable experience by working on specific projects, visiting construction sites and building model bridges.

This year, students, who meet for two hours after school every other week, are working on a proposal for a community center for the pines area behind Deering High School.

Although the community center will not be built, students will present their plans to several businesses and universities at the end of the year.

"(We're) trying to get these kids exposed to public speaking and promoting what they've done," he said. "They can use these projects as an example for a portfolio."

Meanwhile, Johnson said the scholarships will be awarded based on the students' work throughout the year and their end-of-year presentations.

There are two other ACE mentoring programs in Maine, at Bangor High School and Hampden Academy. The program offers a total of \$2,000 in scholarships – \$1,000, \$500 and two of \$250 – at each school.

The goal is to raise \$6,000 for scholarships to be distributed equally at all three schools.

"We have to raise money so we have scholarship money and expand our mentor base," Johnson said. "This year, because we have three teams, the money's kind of tight because of the economy."

Anyone interested in learning more about the Deering program – or to make a financial contribution to the scholarship fund – may contact Johnson at Tyler.Johnson@wbrcae.com.

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