

Construction charter school in East

Enrollment dwindled at union-backed ACE Academy, and the Carpenters needed the space.

The Architectural, Construction and Engineering (ACE) Academy, a public charter school located at the Pacific Northwest Carpenter's Institute (PNCI) in East Multnomah County, will close at the end of the school year. PNCI ended its lease with the academy because it needs the space to train more of its own carpenter apprentices following a sharp increase in construction projects.

The ACE board of directors and administrators searched for a new location, but nothing could be found within the time frame required to transition into the 2016-17 school year. An option to partner with Mount Hood Community College (MHCC) and rent space there was taken all the way to the conceptual design phase. However the retrofitting costs (\$250,000), permitting requirements, and construction schedule limitations became insurmountable obstacles, said ACE Academy Director Mark Clifford.

On top of that, enrollment at the academy had been dwindling, as had support from some of the participating school dis-

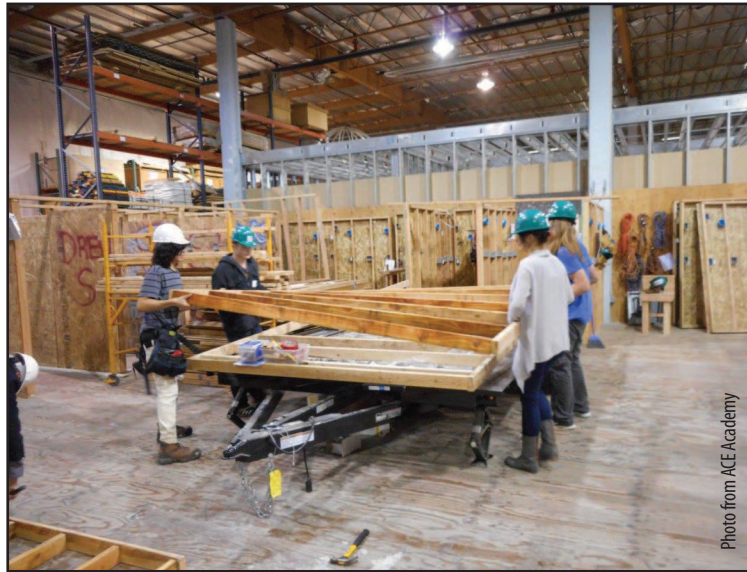


Photo from ACE Academy

tricts. The Parkrose School Board had recently voted to end its participation, and support from the Reynolds School Board reportedly was also wavering.

So, on Feb. 9, ACE's board of directors voted unanimously to end the charter.

ACE Academy was launched in September 2008 by the Oregon Building Congress, in partnership with Reynolds, Centennial, Parkrose and Gresham-Barlow school districts, and five apprenticeship training programs — the Carpenters, NECA-IBEW Electrical Training Center, the HVAC & Metals Institute of Sheet Metal Workers Local 16, the Northwest Laborers-Employ-

ers Training Trust, and the open-shop Northwest College of Construction.

Reynolds School District was the sponsor of the charter. Charter schools are independently run, but publicly funded.

ACE's board, comprised of building industry representatives, a union official, a parent representative, and superintendents from the four participating school districts, formulated policies, curriculum and budgets. Among the directors are Dan Drinkward, operations manager of Hoffman Construction; Jeff Wheeler, a project manager at Portland General Electric; Tom Goodhue, executive director of

the Oregon Building Congress; and John Steffens, executive director of Pacific Northwest Carpenter's Institute.

The two-year program offered graduation credits in math, science and English, as well as opportunities to intern and job shadow. All juniors took construction courses to learn the basics. As seniors they could specialize in architecture, engineering or one of the trades. Students spent half a day at the academy, and half a day at their home school.

There were nine employees at the Academy — Clifford, an administrative assistant, and seven employees filling 5.8 FTEs.

When it opened in 2008 there was room for 250 juniors, with optimism that it could double once juniors and seniors could attend. It never reached that mark. Peak enrollment was 142 students, Clifford said. This school year only 114 students were enrolled.

In a letter sent to industry partners last month, the board of directors said over 500 students graduated from ACE Academy since its inception.

Clifford told the Labor Press

that a little more than a dozen students went on to apply at one of the affiliated apprenticeship training programs. Last year, six students (out of 23 taking construction) entered into the carpenters training program, and another student applied for the electricians program. Clifford expects to put at least six more students into the carpenters program at the end of this school year.

"We know they all benefitted greatly from their ACE experience. The hands-on learning experience, small class sizes, excellent facilities, and programs focused on ensuring their success, fostered a unique opportunity for every student that attended ACE," the board of directors said in a statement.

Board members say they want to be involved in a regional conversation focusing on a long-term location of a Career Technical Education Academy at MHCC. They say the ACE Academy served as a model of such a program, and that successes and challenges it experienced over the last eight years would be helpful in the development of a new academy.

... Bonamici: Still undecided

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U.S. trade positions so that they would benefit rank and file workers, not just the 1%ers. Their ideas were rejected.

"The final TPP will not create jobs, protect the environment or ensure safe imports," the AFL-CIO said in a statement. "Rather, it appears modeled after the North American Free Trade Agreement, a free trade agreement that boosts global corporate profits while leaving working families behind."

At the Feb. 22 NOLC meeting, Bonamici acknowledged that NAFTA "was a disaster." She said labor and environmental protections were side agreements in that trade pact, and that she is looking to see if the TPP fixes some of that language. She said she wouldn't support the TPP if it doesn't contain strong labor and environmental protections and enforceable language.

"I don't want to see more jobs go overseas," she said. "I want to see more Oregon products exported overseas."

The AFL-CIO says commitments to improve labor rights

and environmental practices in the TPP are vague, and the proposed enforcement scheme relies wholly on the discretion of the next Administration.

"The TPP contains strict, clear and stronger protections for foreign investors and pharmaceutical monopolies," the labor federation said in a statement. "It is clear that, as currently drafted, the TPP would increase corporate profits and skew benefits to economic elites, while leaving workers to bear the brunt of the TPP's shortcomings, including lost jobs, lower wages and continued repression of worker rights."

It is uncertain when the agreement may come up for a vote. Republican leaders in the Senate say they may wait until after the presidential election. Bonamici predicts "it will be a long while" before a vote is held.

(Editor's Note: To date, U.S. Rep. Peter DeFazio and U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley are the only members of Oregon's congressional delegation to publicly oppose the TPP.)



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