The Future is in Good Hands with JFK PACE Students
by Alexa Mark and Kayla Toy, JFK PACE Class of 2017

Every spring, thousands of high school seniors are learning what their future has in store. As their hands shake, they meticulously tear open an envelope from their dream college. For some, it is a letter of disappointment, and the students must accept that their dream college will most likely not be in their futures. For others, it is a letter filled with relief and euphoria, that yes, their future really can include the college of their dreams. Fortunately, many students of the Program in America and California Explorations (PACE) experience the latter. PACE at John F. Kennedy High School is an advanced four-year public high school accelerated program located here in the Greenhaven/Pocket area.

PACE teachers work incredibly hard to guide students through high school, college, and beyond. At PACE, there are numerous advanced classes that challenge students and prepare them for the intensity of college. PACE offers classes ranging from Molecular Biology to AP World History to AP English Language and Composition. Our teachers are incredibly knowledgeable and go the extra mile to ensure that students engage in and understand the content. “PACE has led me to develop the analytical skills and study habits that make me feel prepared to face the rigor of college,” remarked senior Haley Adel, captain of both the Kennedy Track and Cross Country teams as well as two-time state track and field meet attendee.

However, teachers are not the only staff members of PACE. Ms. Yee, the office coordinator, puts together the countless field trips and organizes the numerous applications, field trip forms, and summer programs. She and Mr. Todd Whalen, the PACE Director, completely organize PACE and ensure that everything is precise and pristine. Ms. Yee’s salary is funded entirely through PACE fundraising, like the Big Day of Giving and the PACE Crab feed. Without her, PACE would not be as remarkable as it is today.

A wonderful aspect of PACE are the incoming freshman, sophomore, and junior summer classes that are all uniquely crafted to prepare students for the upcoming school year. Prior to freshman year, students attend summer classes at Sacramento State to meet their fellow PACERs as well as their teachers, and to become familiar with life on a college campus. During their freshman year, PACE students participate in volunteer-led book clubs, which introduce a myriad of literature. The devoted book club leaders engage with the students to help them analyze the book’s literary devices and themes. Book club is a preview for English classes such as AP Literature. Freshman Frances Fang chimed, “I am very pleased that I chose to join the PACE program. My favorite part about PACE are the novels we read in book club. Book club has allowed me to read beyond the text and see the deeper meaning in stories as well as teaching me efficient reading and analyzing skills that will widely help me with college reading skills as well as the SATs.”

Another unique feature of PACE is a community service requirement. PACE students are required to complete a minimum of 30 hours of volunteering. PACE students often volunteer at animal shelters, nursing homes, non-profit organizations, and fundraising events. Volunteering broadens the perspective of the students, and allows them to meet new people, network for their future, and most importantly give back to their community.

One of the most remarkable activities that PACE offers students are field trips. The field trips help students to become multi-faceted and cultured young adults through visiting a multitude of museums like the de Young and the Computer History Museum in addition to college campuses such as UC Berkeley, Stanford, Southern Oregon University, University of
Santa Clara, and more. As many of us inch closer and closer to college, these field trips become very valuable and beneficial. Daniel Mistir, JFK’s Male Athletics Commissioner said, “I believe that PACE does an excellent job in allowing kids to see a variety of colleges in California with the plethora of field trips to California universities that they offer. I think this entity that they offer will be helpful in our future decision for college.” In addition, students are also given opportunities to go beyond their comfort zones by experiencing camping trips and attending plays locally and at the Ashland Shakespeare Festival. Junior Diana Vaca Oropeza added, “PACE provides great guidance for college readiness! We have the opportunity to explore college campuses through educational field trips. Donating to PACE would allow these and other activities to continue to help students.”

Students in PACE are part of an ambitious, devoted community from all areas of the Sacramento region, where their peers are determined to learn and succeed. According to Class of 2017 Treasurer Ashley Chin, “PACE is like a family; we help each other learn by challenging each other academically, but we are all friends in the end and want all of us to succeed.” Class President of 2017 Nile Brown said, “PACE puts me on the right track for college by with rigorous courses. Throughout the program, courses I wouldn’t have normally taken have guided me towards college readiness while staying close to my peers. I am exposed to many different environments through the field trips and cultural events which allowed me to grow my understanding of the college environment.” Sophomore Chris Wong and reviver of JFK’s The Clarion school newspaper agreed, “PACE has really helped me to push myself and take on challenges while also helping me make some of the best friends I’ll ever have. I don’t know what I’d do without it.”

PACE students flourish because of the amazing aspects of the program, which tend to be pricier than regular funding for public schools. These enriching activities are only available to students because of donations from PACE families and other members of the community. On May 3, 2016 everyone will have the opportunity to contribute to such an extraordinary program via Sacramento’s Big Day of Giving. The Big Day of Giving is 24 hours of online giving, sponsored by Sacramento Region Community Foundation and other local foundations and businesses. On May 3rd, please go to www.bigdayofgiving.org and search for JFK PACE Parent Committee to make your donation. You will be supporting the education and enrichment of PACE students like us. Thank you for your support!