

Torrey Hills students work with architects, AI to envision a new outdoor learning space



Torrey Hills students with their AI-generated renderings of campus improvements. (Nancy Ingersoll)



By **DEL MAR TIMES**

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Torrey Hills School fifth graders recently took part in a design thinking challenge with national design firm LPA Architects, reimagining one of the school's existing outdoor learning spaces. For the project, students used artificial intelligence (AI) as a creative tool to redesign an area on campus that is scheduled for improvements next year.

According to a district news release, the series of three workshops with LPA invited students to think like designers, architects, and problem-solvers as they explored how an outdoor space could better support the district goals of wellness, creativity, collaboration and belonging.

In their designs, students envisioned water features such as aquariums and ponds, snack cafés and healthy vending machines, decorative painted rocks and bright wall graphics, opportunities for play like a ball pit and giant slides, and even a living flower wall. Many students described how their ideas would help create a welcoming and peaceful environment for learning and connection, according to the district news release.

"This project is a wonderful example of what happens when students are invited into meaningful, real-world learning," said DMUSD Superintendent Marisa Janicek in the news release. "Our students were not simply imagining a space. They were observing, questioning, collaborating, refining ideas, and communicating their thinking in ways that could influence an actual campus design. Experiences like this show students that their voices matter and that their ideas can help shape the world around them."

After two dreaming and designing sessions, LPA architects used the students' sketches and written descriptions to help AI generate renderings of their designs. According to the district, the project demonstrated how artificial intelligence can be used as a tool to support brainstorming, visualization, storytelling, and communication —rather than just replacing student thinking.

Design thinking plays a big role in Del Mar's instructional program, stressing student inquiry, creativity and innovation. In observing the students at work, Torrey Hills Principal Jacob Ruth said that he was proud to see students using the "T.A.G. Thinking Routine": telling classmates something they liked, asking thoughtful questions and giving suggestions to consider.

"This experience gave our students an authentic opportunity to make their thinking visible in service of something real," said Ruth in the news release. "They were able to see how observation, perspective-taking and careful communication can strengthen a design."

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