



The students celebrate their two-week boot camp. Photo by Kristy Walker

## Students and Illumina employees come together for a STEM boot camp

*San Diego youth visit company headquarters for a two-week paid summer experience*

SAMANTHA GOLDBAUM, AGE 16, runs a STEM club at her charter high school in Chula Vista, California, 7.5 miles from the US-Mexico border. The club, and her school, are both very small, and she finds it difficult to share her interest in science with others in her community. “I really want to show what it’s like to be professional, but also that your dreams don’t stop at your ethnicity,” she says. Her school’s student body is mostly Hispanic, “and it’s very hard for us to see Hispanic women and men in STEM.”

Enter the Junior Achievement (JA) Fellows program,<sup>1</sup> which offers a financial literacy class at her school, takes students on field trips, and requires that they complete an internship. Through JA, Samantha learned about Illumina’s High School STEM Scholar Program, an immersive, two-week paid summer experience that just wrapped up. Illumina partnered with JA as well as the local nonprofit San Diego Squared<sup>2</sup> (SD<sup>2</sup>) to welcome 29 participants to Illumina’s San Diego headquarters.

“Today, I met Holly, a senior lab supervisor,” Samantha says. “She talked about how she wants to help young women in STEM, and that’s what I want to do with my

future—have an impact on the community, not just overall.” The rising senior plans to stay connected with Holly in the future.



Students had the opportunity to hear from lab managers and technicians.

All students had a chance to network with employees, acquire lab skills, and explore careers in STEM and business. The program was designed to strengthen

1. [jasandiego.org/high-school-experiences](http://jasandiego.org/high-school-experiences)  
2. [sd2.org](http://sd2.org)

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students' professional skills and to give Illumina employees an opportunity to invest in their community.

"More than 70 employees volunteered for our second annual program, alongside a dedicated talent acquisition team," says Vanessa Light, senior manager of Corporate Social Responsibility. "At Illumina, we are committed to providing access to genomics through STEM education. These students are driven to succeed, and we want them to be aware of the limitless opportunities they can pursue in STEM. We tapped into our San Diego workforce to ensure they heard firsthand employee experience, and hearing why employees come and stay at Illumina reminds us how important the culture and mission are."

Isela Ordoñez, 17, is a rising senior from Escondido, California, and a biology enthusiast who's considering applying to a handful of colleges, including California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo. Like Samantha, she was also moved by an employee who spoke at the Illumina Solutions Center: "I met an engineer named Bree. She works in the lab where they show customers how to use the instruments. And *she* went to Cal Poly San Luis Obispo. And I'm a runner and she's a runner. We had similar interests, so it was really cool to see someone like me in the space."

SD<sup>2</sup> focuses on increasing diversity in STEM careers through mentorship and support. The nonprofit has been working with Illumina since its inception in 2020 to expose students to the industry, develop talent, and "create a diverse STEM pipeline."

Another SD<sup>2</sup> student in attendance was Ashenafew Daniel, 17, a graduate of San Diego High School. Ashenafew was impressed during a tour of Illumina's new Executive Briefing Center. He also found the employees inspiring. As an incoming freshman at the University of California, San Diego, he will major in computer engineering, but he's also interested in being an analyst, a business executive, or a tech startup entrepreneur one day. "One thing I learned during my time here was that a lot of people who are working in specific departments right now studied something completely different in college," he says. "And it showed me that I don't have to limit myself. I can just explore and be open to anything."



*Illumina CEO Jacob Thaysen spent time with the students.*

The STEM boot camp also brought out Larissa Garcia, 17, from Chula Vista. She's on her way to Yale University in the fall, where she hopes to major in molecular, cellular, and developmental biology and study the history of science. During the boot camp, students were asked to come up with and deliver an "elevator pitch" for themselves to an Illumina employee. Larissa says she was very nervous, but glad for the experience: "Before doing Junior Achievement, I was a really shy and reserved person. But this boot camp and Junior Achievement in general have helped me come out of my shell, be more confident, and present myself with more grace."

In addition to coaching the students on pitching, Illumina's talent acquisition team shared their advice on successful networking and leveraging individual strengths. Elsewhere in the packed schedule, the students learned lab safety, enrolled in an introduction to automation, attended career panels, toured Illumina's campus, and took part in a charitable opportunity—decorating capes for the "hero" patients at Rady Children's Hospital-San Diego. The program culminated in a heartwarming celebration with the students, Illumina volunteers, and the SD<sup>2</sup> and Junior Achievement teams. ♦

*To learn more about Illumina's Corporate Social Responsibility programs, go to [illumina.com/company/about-us/corporate-social-responsibility.html](https://illumina.com/company/about-us/corporate-social-responsibility.html)*

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