



Next Step to Success Weekly Update

A Message from our Executive Director



James Harris

We are off to a great start in 2026 at Next Step to Success! This week, we're excited to welcome our Old Dominion University tutors, whose dedication and academic support are already making a positive impact on our students. Their presence strengthens our Homework Hub and reinforces our commitment to providing high-quality tutoring and mentorship to help students succeed.

We are also preparing for a major milestone, the "NSTS Site Ribbon Cutting" on January 28 @ 4:00 PM. We invite families, partners, and community members to join us for this special occasion. Come tour our new site, meet our incredible team of coaches, and see firsthand the amazing facility that supports our students' growth and success.

The event will be held at our new home, the former "Christ the King School", located at 3401 Tidewater Drive, Norfolk, VA 23509.

Please RSVP via the link: [NSTS Ribbon Cutting Ceremony RSVP](#)

We look forward to celebrating this exciting new chapter with you and sharing all that is possible when a community comes together to support its youth.

James Harris, Executive Director



Introducing our Student of the Week



Chase

Chase is a 9th-grade student at Granby High School who has been part of Next Step to Success for the past year. Creative, kind, and helpful, he enjoys the activities at NSTS (and the food!) and is currently working on building new friendships. Chase is inspired by his friends, takes school seriously, and believes success means accomplishing your dreams no matter what. With interests in art and design, he hopes to pursue a future as a graphic designer or artist—and he's proud of continuing to live his best life this week.

1. What is your name and grade? **Chase, 9th -Granby High School**
2. How long have you been a part of Next Step to Success? **1 year**
3. What do you like most about coming to NSTS? **Activities and the Food!**
4. What is one goal you're working on right now? **Making Friends**
5. Who inspires you the most, and why? **My friends – They are great company**
6. What is your favorite subject in school? **Math**
7. What activities or hobbies do you enjoy outside of school? **Art and game play**
8. What's your favorite book, movie, or song right now? **Dragon Ball Z**
9. What does success mean to you? **Accomplishing your dreams – No matter what**
10. If you could give advice to another student, what would it be? **No matter how boring it is... Take school seriously**
11. What do you see yourself doing in the future (career, dreams, or big goals)? **I want to be a graphic designer or artist**
12. Share a fun fact about yourself most people don't know! **I make finger puppets**
13. Is there someone at NSTS (staff or peer) who has made a big difference for you? **Coach Allicen**
14. If you could describe yourself in three words, what would they be? **Helpful, Kind and Creative**
15. What makes you proud of yourself this week? **I'm living my best life...**

Chase's creativity, kindness, and positive outlook make him a great example of what Next Step to Success is all about. We're proud of the growth he continues to show and excited to see how his creativity and confidence develop as he works toward his goals.

NSTS Leadership Insights



As we head into the week, we want to remind families about the upcoming TCC Food Manager Trainee program we will be offering in the upcoming months. Through this program, students will have the opportunity to earn a variety of industry-recognized certifications in the field of culinary arts, helping them build practical skills and credentials that support both college and career pathways. We are excited about the opportunities this program will provide and will be sharing additional details soon.

Report cards will be released next week, and we kindly ask that families provide us with a copy once they are available. This allows our team to continue supporting each student's educational goals and progress. The new semester

officially started yesterday, which means a fresh start for many of our high schoolers as they begin new classes, while others may use this report card as a reminder to finish the second half of the year strong.

This week, ODU also visited our program to speak with students about CLEP testing. CLEP exams can replace up to five SOL tests and allow students to earn up to 34 college credits at absolutely no cost—an exciting opportunity as students plan for their postsecondary goals.

Finally, families of juniors and seniors should note that we will have a financial aid expert meeting with students on Wednesday. During this time, students will begin scheduling one-on-one appointments to receive individualized support completing financial aid forms for this year's college applications.

As always, please reach out to me at cgelles@nextstptosuccess.org with any concerns you may have to ensure we are meeting your child's academic needs.



Programming Update

This week at Next Step to Success was filled with exciting experiences and growth. Our basketball group visited Norfolk State University to watch a game with Coach Whitley and had a fantastic time. Middle schoolers worked on an affirmation project, learning the importance of positive self-talk and confidence, while karate continued with youth showing steady improvement each week.

Summer is right around the corner, and we're getting ready for another great season at Next Step to Success! Registration for Summer Camp will be opening soon, and we're excited to share more details in the coming weeks. As always, camp will include transportation, breakfast, lunch, and snacks, making it easy for families to participate. Our summer program also features field trips and fun, engaging activities designed to



Operations Update

We'd like to share a few important reminders to help keep our program running smoothly and ensure the best experience for our youth.

Attendance Reminders

Youth are expected to attend the program a minimum of three (3) days per week. Regular attendance helps youth stay engaged, build consistency, and get the most out of our programming. Thank you for supporting this commitment.

Transportation Pick-Up Reminder

To keep transportation routes running on time:

- Coaches will wait no more than five (5) minutes at each school pick-up location.
- If a youth is not ready within that time, the coach will move on to the next scheduled stop.

Please help your child be prepared and ready at the designated pick-up time.

Staying Connected

help students stay active, connect with friends, and beat the summer heat. We can't wait to spend the summer learning, growing, and making memories together.

Additionally, some of our youth completed their stools with Andie Paints, learning the full furniture restoration process and taking pride in their finished projects. Thank you for your continued support.

If you know your child will be sick or unable to attend programming on a given day, please let us know as soon as possible. To help us keep our daily information up to date, families can:

- Call the main office at 757-995-2111, or
- Email mgarcia@nextsteptosuccess.org

Open communication helps us plan appropriately and continue providing safe, reliable, and high-quality programming for all students.

Save the Dates

- Monday, January 19, 2026 - MLK Day (NSTS Closed)
- Wednesday, January 28, 2026, 4:00 p.m. NSTS Ribbon Cutting Ceremony

Thank you for your continued partnership and support!



Success Coach Spotlight!



Inspired to join Next Step to Success by her sister, who knew she'd be a great fit, this team member brings organization, empathy, and an athletic spirit to everything she does. Shaped by the guidance of her softball coach, who showed her the power of sports as a healthy outlet, she is passionate about helping young people understand that their past does not define them. Creating a safe, supportive space where youth feel seen and valued is at the heart of her work at NSTS.

1. What inspired you to join Next Step to Success? **My sister... She believed I would be a great fit.**
2. If you could describe yourself in three words, what would they be? **Organized, Athletic and Empathetic.**
3. What's one lesson you hope every student you work with carries with them? **There past does not define them.**
4. Who was a mentor or role model in your own life, and how did they shape you? **My softball coach... Coach Olivio.. He allowed me to use sports as an outlet from reality.**
5. What's your favorite way to spend a Saturday when you're not working? **With my dogs.. Wrigley and Luna and my husband, I guess...**
6. If you could have dinner with any historical figure or celebrity, who would it be and why? **Amelia Earhart. Would love to learn her story.**
7. What's a fun fact about you that most people don't know? **I'm left-handed**
8. If you had to pick a theme song for your life, what would it be? **Fight Song by Rachel Platten**
9. What's the best piece of advice you've ever received? **Networking is very important and the ability to socialize with others.**
10. Finish this sentence "Working at Next Step to Success means..." **Creating a safe place for youth.**
11. What's your all-time favorite TV show or movie? **Grey's Anatomy.**
12. If you had a superpower for a day, what would it be? **Teleportation.**

Whether she's spending time with her dogs Wrigley and Luna, listening to country music, or rewatching Grey's Anatomy, she brings authenticity and warmth to the NSTS community. Guided by the belief that relationships and connection matter, she encourages students to build confidence, lean into opportunities, and imagine what's possible for their futures. We're grateful to have her as part of the Next Step to Success team.

Culinary Corner



From the Coordinator of Culinary Arts

Hey Team & Families, 🙌,

The kitchen is HOT, the vibes are RIGHT, and the menu is doing what it always does... showing out 😊🙌

Here's what we're serving up this week:

- 🌮 Tuesday: Beef Walking Tacos with all the fixings (yes... ALL of them)
- 🍗 Wednesday: Wings & Wedges — because it's Wednesday and we don't break traditions around here
- 🍝 Thursday: Creamy Chicken Alfredo (comfort food at its finest)
- 🍔 Friday: Burgers & Fries, made your way — no judgment, extra sauce encouraged 😊

Now for the real highlight of the week ✨

Please help me give a HUGE welcome to Eliza and Jailincy, who have officially joined me and Kylah in the kitchen as part of the Culinary Program 🧑🍳🧑🍳

These ladies jumped right in, rolled up their sleeves, and said, "We got this, Chef!" They've helped take on the load, kept things moving, and are doing an AMAZING job. I couldn't be prouder if I tried.

Ladies — keep shining, keep learning, and keep being great. We are SUPER proud of you, and I'm excited to see all the greatness the rest of the year holds ✨

As always, thank you to our families and my team for the love, support, and hungry bellies 😊

Let's have an awesome week!

With flavor & pride,

Brittany "Chef B" Brown

Upcoming Events & Community Updates



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Your brick isn't just engraved—it becomes part of a story. A story of hope, community, and the belief that every young person deserves a strong foundation. Whether you're honoring someone special, celebrating your family name, or spotlighting your business, your personalized brick will live permanently on the new St. Vincent de Paul House campus. Every brick supports the growth of Next Step to Success youth programs, turning your contribution into real opportunities for Norfolk's young people. It's a simple way to leave a legacy—and an unforgettable impact.

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