



## Next Step to Success Weekly Update

### A Message from our Executive Director



**James Harris**

As we celebrate Valentine's Day this week, we're reminded that love is more than a feeling—it's action, commitment, and showing up for one another. At Next Step to Success, we see that love reflected every day in the encouragement our students receive from coaches, families, and community partners who believe in their potential.

This month, we continue to emphasize the importance of GRIT goals, teaching our students' perseverance, responsibility, and resilience. GRIT helps students push through challenges, stay focused on long-term goals, and build the confidence needed for lifelong success. Parents, we encourage you to ask your child, *"What is your GRIT goal?"* and celebrate their progress at home. When support surrounds them from every direction, growth accelerates.

We also invite our families and supporters to participate in our Brick Fundraiser. Purchasing a commemorative brick is a meaningful way to show your love and commitment to our students while leaving a lasting legacy at NSTS. Visit our website to secure your brick and help us continue creating opportunities for Norfolk's youth.

Thank you for sharing the love and believing in what's possible.

James Harris, Executive Director



## Introducing Our Student of the Week

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## Julianna

Julianna brings a quiet strength and steady presence to the NSTS community. She carries herself with kindness and determination, showing up each day ready to grow, connect, and challenge herself. With a thoughtful spirit and a strong sense of purpose, she continues to take meaningful steps toward building the future she envisions for herself.

1. What is your name and grade? **10<sup>th</sup> Norview High School**
2. How long have you been a part of Next Step to Success? **2 Years**
3. What do you like most about coming to NSTS? **Meeting new friends**
4. What is one goal you're working on right now? **Getting a job**
5. Who inspires you the most, and why? **God – I feel blessed**
6. What is your favorite subject in school? **Language Arts**
7. What activities or hobbies do you enjoy outside of school? **Exercise**
8. What's your favorite book, movie, or song right now? **Book: A long way down**

9. What does success mean to you? **Doing what you have always wanted to do**
10. If you could give advice to another student, what would it be? **Stay on top of your work.**
11. What do you see yourself doing in the future (career, dreams, or big goals)? **Becoming a Nurse**
12. Share a fun fact about yourself most people don't know! **I can do a handstand**
13. Is there someone at NSTS (staff or peer) who has made a big difference for you? **Coach Jontel and Coach Brittany**
14. If you could describe yourself in three words, what would they be? **Kind, Funny and Quiet**
15. What makes you proud of yourself this week? **That I am living my best life.**

As she continues her journey, Julianna represents the heart of what NSTS stands for — resilience, growth, and forward momentum. She is learning, stretching, and embracing new opportunities with confidence. We are proud of the young woman she is becoming and look forward to watching her continue to rise and reach her goals.

## NSTS Leadership Insights



### Education Update Carly Gelles

Dear Families,

At Next Step to Success, we continue to see that meaningful growth happens when students fully engage in the opportunities available to them. The youth who show up ready to participate, push themselves academically, and take ownership of their progress are the ones making the strongest gains. Our role is to provide structure, support, and access to enriching experiences, but it's their consistent effort — reinforced by your encouragement at home — that turns those opportunities into real results. When families partner with us to emphasize both strong academic habits and active participation in all areas of the program, the impact is powerful. In line with that commitment to academic growth, we've expanded our Academic Power Hour to now include daily SAT prep with our new tutor from Old Dominion University, Isaiah. This addition gives students dedicated time and targeted instruction to build skills, strengthen test-taking strategies, and grow their confidence as they prepare for future opportunities. We are excited about the momentum we're seeing and grateful for your continued partnership in supporting our youth.

Best,  
Carly Gelles  
Director of Education



## Programming Update Kaelyn Hundley

This week at Next Step to Success, our youth enjoyed a variety of Valentine's Day-themed activities, including cookie decorating, delivering valentines to local daycares, writing self-gratitude letters, and letters to their future selves.

We also loved spending time with our partners at the Hermitage Museum and Brighter Horizons. We have some exciting opportunities ahead as we welcome new partners, and we're looking forward to our upcoming career fair. If you or someone you know is interested in hosting a table to share about your career, please contact our Youth Coordinator, Jontel Evans, at [jevans@nextsteptosuccess.org](mailto:jevans@nextsteptosuccess.org).



## Operations Update Muhanma Ernesto Garcia

### **Amended Electronic Submission Requirement:**

To strengthen youth engagement, minimize distractions, and maintain a focused learning environment, Next Step to Success will implement an amended electronic submission process beginning Tuesday, February 16th.

#### **Effective February 16th:**

- All youth are required to place their phones and personal belongings in designated lockers upon arrival to programming.
- If a youth is observed with their phone during programming, the phone will be removed, and a parent/guardian will be requested to pick up devices.

We appreciate the partnership and support of our families as we continue to promote a safe, structured, and productive environment for all youth.

### **After School Program Enrollment Update:**

NSTS Enrollment is growing day by day! Please share our program information with families, friends, and other members of the community interested in having youth enjoy a unique youth development experience at a top-performing organization.

For more information, apply here  
⇒ [Application Link](#)

## Summer Program Enrollment Announcement

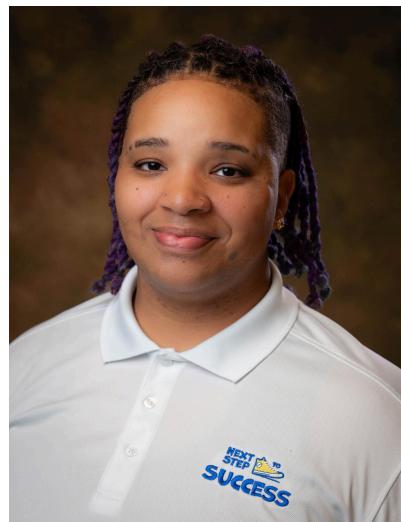
Save your seat! Early Summer Program enrollment begins Tuesday, February 16, 2026, for currently enrolled youth in our afterschool program.

- Early Enrollment Period: Tuesday, February 16, 2026 - Friday, February 20, 2026 (Currently Enrolled Youth Only)
- To submit your early enrollment, log on to TraxSolution ([Log-in Link](#)) and update your programming selection to Summer Program 2026. If you have any additional questions, please contact Muhanma Garcia via email at [mgarcia@nextsteptosuccess.org](mailto:mgarcia@nextsteptosuccess.org).

We encourage families to enroll early to secure their child's spot in our exciting summer experience. Additional details and registration information will be shared soon.



## Culinary Corner



## From the Coordinator of Culinary Arts, Chef B

Hey Next Step Family & Team 💙💛,

Get those taste buds readyyyyy—because next week's menu is bringing the **flavor, comfort, and crowd favorites** our youth love! 🧑‍🍳🔥

Here's what's cooking at Next Step next week:

🇺🇸 **Monday – President's Day**

✨ **No programming today! Enjoy the holiday and some well-earned rest.**

🌮 **Tuesday – Chicken Walking Tacos**

Crispy, seasoned chicken loaded into crunchy chips with all the fixings.

Messy. Fun. DELICIOUS. 😋

🍗 **Wednesday – Wings & Wedges**

Golden wings + crispy potato wedges = midweek happiness.

No notes. Just vibes. 🔥

🥗 **Thursday – Grilled Chicken Salad & Garlic Bread**

Fresh grilled chicken over crisp greens, garlic bread on the side, and your choice of dressing.

Healthy and hearty? Say less. 💪✨

🥞 **Friday – Biscuits & Gravy**

Warm, fluffy biscuits smothered in savory gravy—the ultimate comfort meal to wrap up the week right.

Friday earned this one. ❤️

As always, thank you for trusting us to fuel our youth with meals made with care, love, and intention. We can't wait to see everyone next week—come hungry! 🙌



**With gratitude,**

Brittany "Chef B" Brown 🍷

Director of Culinary Arts

# Bricks That Build Futures



For generations, the St. Vincent de Paul House has stood as a place of compassion, service, and hope in our community. Originally established as a resource for families and individuals in need, the building has long been rooted in the belief that everyone deserves dignity, support, and the opportunity to move forward. Today, that same spirit lives on through Next Step to Success, as the space continues to serve as a foundation for growth, learning, and second chances.

Through the NSTS Brick Fundraiser, we invite our community to become a permanent part of this legacy. Each engraved brick represents a name, a family, a business, or a message of encouragement—laid literally into the path of progress at the St. Vincent de Paul House. Funds raised through this campaign directly support NSTS programming, helping us provide enrichment, mentorship, and life-changing opportunities for youth and families in Norfolk.

The images below offer a preview of the engraved bricks and the location where they will be permanently installed. Bricks will be laid along the walkway at the St. Vincent de Paul House, creating a visible and lasting tribute to the individuals, families, and supporters who believe in the mission of Next Step to Success. Each brick becomes a meaningful part of the path forward, symbolizing community support and shared commitment to building brighter futures.

Your brick is more than a donation—it's a lasting symbol of belief in our mission and the people we serve. Join us in honoring the past while building the future. Purchase a brick today and leave your mark on a place where the next step toward success begins.



# BUY A BRICK



CEMENT YOUR LEGACY &  
INSPIRE THE NEXT GENERATION!



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