



Next Step to Success Weekly Update



A Message from our Executive Director



Dear NSTS Families,

We're in the heart of our summer program, and it has been a joy to watch our students grow in the classroom, in their friendships, and in their confidence. This week, I want to talk about something simple that makes all the difference: **showing up.**

Every day a student is with us, they're building on the day before. Our summer programming is designed intentionally, academic enrichment, electives with our community partners, and activities rooted in our Six Pillars of Development. When

a student misses a day, they don't just miss an activity; they miss a link in a chain we're building together toward Growth Mindset, Confidence, Agency, and GRIT.

The research is clear: consistent summer attendance helps prevent learning loss and sets students up for a stronger start in the fall. But we see something even more powerful up close, students who attend regularly form deeper relationships with staff and peers, take on leadership roles, and carry real momentum into the school year.

Here's how you can help:

- Treat program days like school days — same routine, same expectation.
- If your student must miss a day, let us know in advance so we can help them catch up.
- Talk with your student about what they're working on. Interest at home fuels effort here.

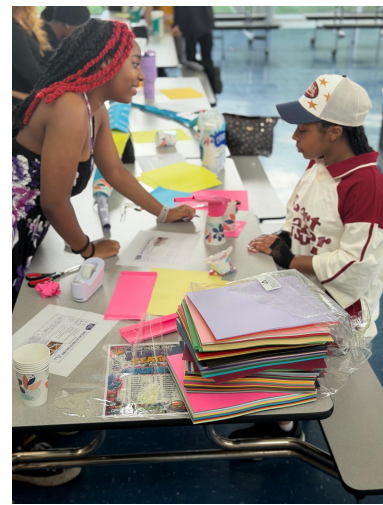
Thank you for trusting us with your students this summer. Every day they walk through our doors is a day we get to invest in their next step to success.

With gratitude,

James Harris
Executive Director

ERC-Sponsored STEM Week: Bridges, Roller Coasters, and Big Ideas!





Thanks to the generous sponsorship of Elizabeth River Crossings, our Next Step to Success youth spent the week diving into hands-on STEM challenges that put engineering, creativity, and teamwork to the test!

In the Popsicle Stick Bridge Challenge, campers worked in teams to design and construct bridges using nothing but popsicle sticks and glue — then put their creations to the ultimate test to see how much weight each bridge could hold before giving way. It was equal parts science and suspense as youth problem-solved, reinforced their designs, and cheered each other on.

Not to be outdone, teams also took on the Paper Roller Coaster Challenge, engineering the most extreme rides they could imagine using paper, card stock, and tape. Loops, drops, and twists were all on the table as youth tested the limits of their designs — and staff couldn't resist jumping in to build right alongside them!

These activities gave our youth a chance to explore real engineering concepts — load distribution, structural design, and motion — all while building confidence, creativity, and a love of hands-on learning.

A huge thank you to Elizabeth River Crossings for making STEM programming like this possible for our youth!

Community Partner Highlight: Circle A Home for Horses



This summer, our Next Step to Success youth once again had the opportunity to visit Circle A Home for Horses, a nonprofit farm right here in Virginia Beach dedicated to healing — both for horses and for kids. NSTS has partnered with Circle A for several years now, and our youth spend the entire summer building up to it, working toward the opportunity to ride by the end of the program.

Founded in 2014 by Alicia Mahar, Circle A Home for Horses has helped hundreds of rescued Thoroughbreds while touching the lives of thousands of at-risk children through equine therapy. As natural prey animals, horses are extremely sensitive and always present in the moment — intuitive enough to read human emotions, body language, and facial expressions. Their calm, quiet nature helps facilitate healing for people working through difficult experiences.

For our youth, that journey starts with the basics — learning to approach a horse calmly, grooming, and earning trust one small moment at a time. Many had never been this close to a horse before, and watching that nervousness turn into confidence over the course of the summer is something our staff look forward to every year. By the time they're ready to ride, our campers have learned patience, gentleness, and what it means to build trust with another living being — lessons that carry far beyond the farm.

We're so grateful to Circle A Home for Horses for years of opening their farm to our youth and guiding them on this journey of trust, patience, and connection.

NSTS Leadership Insights

A Note from Muhanma Garcia, Director of Director of Strategic Growth, Partnerships, and Youth Engagement

As we enter the final weeks of our 2026 Summer Program, we want to thank our families for partnering with us to create an unforgettable summer for our youth. From leadership development and academic enrichment to field trips, workforce readiness, and hands-on learning experiences, every day brings new opportunities for growth.

This week, our average daily attendance was 72.2%, a slight decrease from 77.1% the previous week. While summer vacations, illness, and other commitments have impacted attendance, every day a young person is present is another day they benefit from the full Next Step to Success experience. Our goal remains to reach an average daily attendance of 80% through Friday, August 7. We need your partnership to finish the summer strong by helping your youth attend at least four out of five program days each week whenever possible. Regular attendance allows youth to:

- Build meaningful relationships with peers, mentors, and staff
- Participate in engaging academic, leadership, and enrichment activities
- Enjoy exciting field trips and special events
- Strengthen life skills, confidence, and resilience
- Experience the consistency needed to maximize their personal growth and success

Attendance matters, and every young person makes our program stronger. Thank you for making attendance a priority and helping us provide the highest-quality experience for every youth we serve.

2026–2027 After-School Program Enrollment Opens August 10!

We're excited to announce that enrollment for the 2026–2027 Next Step to Success After-School Program officially opens Monday, August 10, 2026!

This year, all families — including returning families — must complete a new application through our updated enrollment system. The new platform is designed to create a faster, more user-friendly registration experience while improving communication and ensuring accurate information throughout the school year.

Important Reminders:

- Enrollment opens: Monday, August 10, 2026
- Every family must submit a new application, including returning participants
- Enrollment is limited and will be processed on a first-come, first-served basis
- Additional instructions, required documents, and key deadlines will be shared in the coming weeks
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We encourage families to complete enrollment as soon as it becomes available to secure their youth's place in our After-School Program.

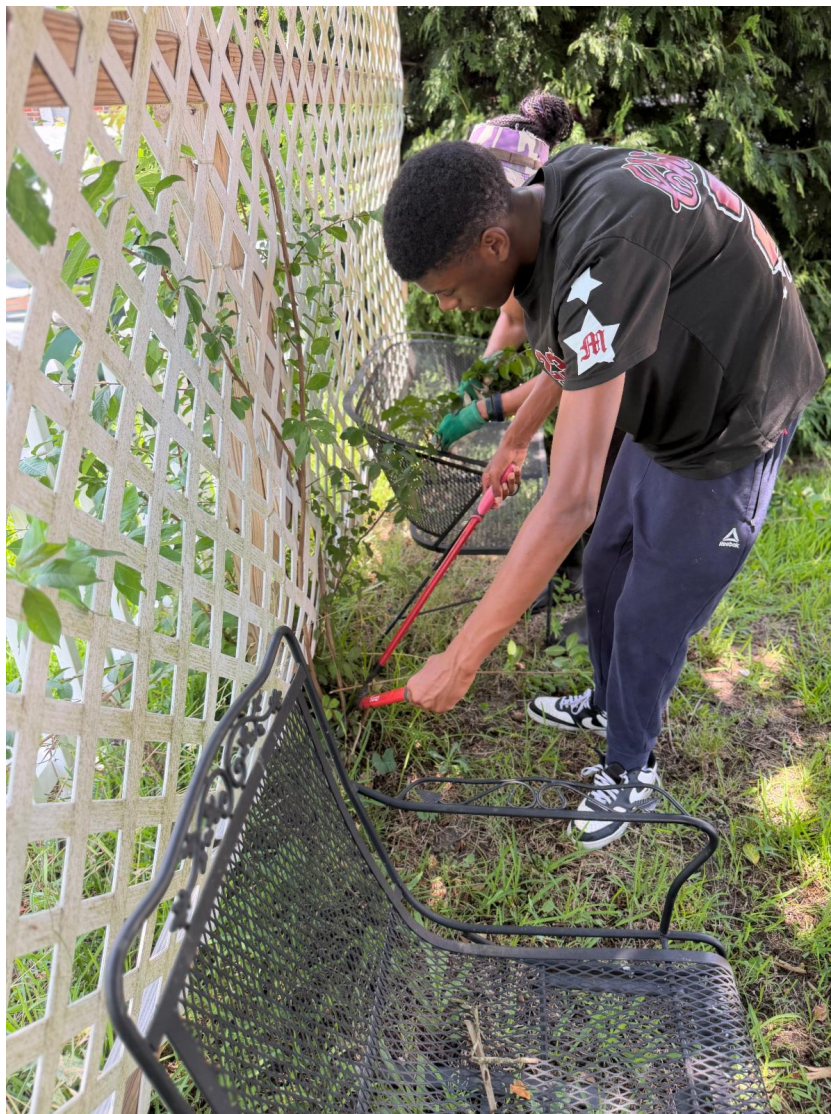
We look forward to welcoming both returning and new families for another incredible year of academic support, leadership development, mentorship, workforce readiness, and opportunities that empower every young person to thrive.

Together, let's finish the summer strong and prepare for another successful school year at Next Step to Success!



A Note from Carly Gelles, Director of Education

From engineering bridges and roller coasters to spotting dolphins off Rudee Inlet, building trust with horses at Circle A, and getting their hands dirty restoring our Outdoor Learning Lab, our NSTS coaches have been right there with our youth every step of the way — leading, encouraging, and turning each activity into something fun, educational, and exciting. Whether it's cheering on a team of engineers, walking a nervous camper up to a horse for the first time, or digging alongside campers in the garden, our coaches show up fully, every time. Their hands-on energy is what makes these experiences stick, and it's a big part of why our campers keep showing up ready for whatever's next!



A Note from Kaelyn Hundley, Director of Programming

This week, our Next Step to Success campers headed out on the water for a dolphin watching cruise through Rudee Inlet with Rudee Tours. Youth got to experience the Virginia Beach coastline from a completely new vantage point — spotting dolphins, taking in the inlet's rock jetties and skyline views, and enjoying time together on deck in the sun.

Beyond the fun, the outing gave our campers a chance to build social connection, practice being part of a group in a new environment, and experience something many hadn't done before. It's exactly the kind of enrichment experience that rounds out our summer programming and gives youth memories — and confidence — that go beyond the classroom.



Good Food. Good Mood. Chef B's Got You Covered!



CONFIDENCE CAFE



GOOD FOOD.
GOOD VIBES.
FULL PLATES. 

#HOW YOU EATING?

= MENU =

JULY 13TH - 17TH

	BREAKFAST	LUNCH
MONDAY CALZONE KICKOFF! 	 CONTINENTAL BREAKFAST	 CALZONES
TUESDAY TACO ROLL-UP! 	 BISCUITS & GRAVY	 FLAUTAS (ROLLED TACOS)
WEDNESDAY WING WEDNESDAY! 	 CONTINENTAL BREAKFAST	 WINGS & WEDGES
THURSDAY PHILLY DAY! 	 SAUSAGE BISCUITS & FRUIT	 PHILLIES & CHIPS
FRIDAY ALFREDO FINALE! 	 CONTINENTAL BREAKFAST	 CHICKEN ALFREDO


CHEF B APPROVED

LET'S EAT & LEVEL UP!

#HOWYOU EATING #CHEFB #NSTS 

WE DON'T PLAY ABOUT LUNCH OVER HERE! 

From DePaul's Legacy to the Next Generation's Future

WERE YOU BORN AT DEPAUL HOSPITAL?

Your story started here. Now, help write the next chapter.

Then



Our Future



From a Legacy of *care...* To where *futures* are built.

 **HONOR THE PAST.
INVEST IN THE FUTURE.**

Purchase a commemorative brick
and be part of transforming the historic
DePaul Hospital site into the future home
of Next Step to Success.

 Leave a Lasting Legacy

 Honor a Loved One or Family

 Support Norfolk's Youth



SCAN TO
**BUY YOUR
BRICK**
Today!



**NEXT
STEP**  **TO
SUCCESS**



St. Vincent de Paul House
Future Home of Next Step to Success

Were You Born at the Historic DePaul Hospital?

For generations, DePaul Hospital was more than a building. It was where families began, where first breaths were taken, and where lifelong stories started.

If you or someone you love has a connection to DePaul, this is your opportunity to honor that legacy in a meaningful and lasting way. Next Step to Success is proud to carry that history forward as we transform this historic space into a place where young people can grow, learn, and build their futures. By purchasing a commemorative brick, you become a permanent part of this next chapter — celebrating the past while investing in the future of Norfolk's youth.

Each brick tells a story. Each name becomes part of the foundation.

Honor your DePaul story. Invest in their future. Purchase your commemorative brick today.

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