



Next Step to Success Weekly Update



A Message from our Executive Director



This week we continued reinforcing one of the core principles of our culture: GRIT — the courage and perseverance to pursue meaningful goals despite challenges. And one of the best lessons we can teach our young people is that growth never stops. That lesson has to start with us.

My personal GRIT goal this year is to learn how to swim. It's a simple goal on paper, but it's pushed me out of my comfort zone and reminded me that progress comes from consistent effort, not perfection. This summer, I've had the privilege of taking swim lessons alongside many of our students — learning new skills, facing our fears, and cheering each other on. It's a great reminder that growth has no age limit.

I invite every staff member to choose their own GRIT goal and grow alongside our students this summer. If we expect our young people to set ambitious goals and push through challenges, we owe it to them to do the same. Our students are watching how we handle setbacks and stay committed when things get hard — and when we pursue our own goals openly, we show them that lifelong learning isn't just something we talk about.

Throughout the summer, staff will share updates on their progress and celebrate milestones together, the same way we encourage our students. We believe this builds a stronger culture of trust and authenticity across the organization.

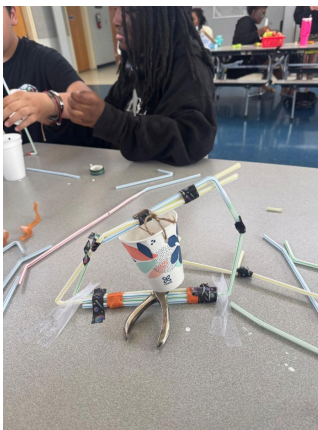
At Next Step to Success, GRIT isn't just a pillar — it's a way of life. Together, students and staff are proving that success is built one intentional step at a time.

A quick reminder: there will be no programming tomorrow, Friday, July 3rd. Wishing everyone a happy and safe 4th of July holiday!

Thank you for your continued support as we help every young person, and every adult, become the best version of themselves.

James Harris,
Executive Director

Engineering Big Ideas: A Thank You to Elizabeth River Crossings!



A Special Thank You to Elizabeth River Crossings!

This week, our youth put their engineering minds to the test — designing boats that float, building floating bridges, and even constructing strands of DNA out of candy! From testing buoyancy in the pool to engineering load-bearing structures with straws and tape, our students tackled real STEM challenges with creativity, teamwork, and a whole lot of trial and error (and a few laughs along the way).

None of this would be possible without the generous support of Elizabeth River Crossings (ERC). As the operator of the Downtown and Midtown Tunnels connecting Norfolk and Portsmouth, ERC's mission goes beyond physical infrastructure — the company is committed to connecting members of the community to important resources and helping local nonprofits make a lasting impact. That same spirit of connection is exactly what we saw in our students this week as they worked side-by-side, problem-solved together, and cheered each other on.

ERC has long championed STEM education across Hampton Roads, believing these programs give young people the ability to explore new interests while challenging them to think critically — values that came to life as our students engineered, tested, and redesigned their creations. Their continued generosity in support of students reflects a genuine investment in the next generation's growth, and we are proud to count ERC among our most valued community partners.

Thanks to sponsors like Elizabeth River Crossings, our students aren't just having fun this summer — they're building the confidence, curiosity, and problem-solving skills that will serve them for a lifetime. We are grateful for ERC's continued support of Next Step to Success and their belief in the potential of every young person in our program.

Thank you, ERC, for investing in our youth and in the future of our community!

Community Partner Highlight: Katie's Kickers!





This summer, our youth and coaches have been diving into one of the most important life skills anyone can learn — swimming — thanks to our partnership with Katie's Kickers, a Norfolk-based swim school dedicated to building water safety, confidence, and skill in the pool.

Katie brings over 25 years of experience in education, including 18 years teaching swim lessons and coaching club swim teams, along with certifications in Red Cross Water Safety Instruction, Swim America, Australian Swim School, Adaptive Swim, and Infant Safety Rescue. Her team's mission is centered on creating a learning environment that encourages water safety, increases confidence, and challenges students to be their best, and on helping swimmers build confidence and control in the water while replacing fear with understanding. That mission has shown up week after week in the pool with our students — nervous first strokes turning into big smiles, and hesitant kicks turning into real progress.

For many of our youth, learning to swim isn't just a fun summer activity — it has become their personal GRIT goal. Facing the water head-on, pushing past fear, and building a skill that could one day save their life is exactly the kind of courage and perseverance our GRIT pillar is all about. Watching our students cheer each other on, celebrate small wins, and grow more confident each week has been one of the proudest parts of our summer program.

We are so grateful to Katie and her incredible team of coaches for partnering with Next Step to Success and pouring their expertise, patience, and heart into our young people. Because of Katie's Kickers, our students aren't just learning to swim — they're learning that with practice, patience, and a little bit of GRIT, they can conquer anything.

Thank you, Katie's Kickers, for helping our youth build confidence both in and out of the water!

NSTS Leadership Insights

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

Attendance Matters: Help Us Finish the Summer Strong!

As we continue an exciting summer filled with learning, enrichment, field trips, and memorable experiences, consistent attendance is what turns those experiences into real growth for our youth. Showing up regularly is how relationships deepen,

skills build, and confidence grows — it's the thread that connects one great day to the next.

That's why we need your partnership to help every youth make the most of the program. Our goal is to maintain an average attendance rate of 80% through the end of the Summer Program. To help us achieve this, we ask that youth attend at least 4 out of 5 program days each week on a consistent basis between now and our final day on Friday, August 7, 2026.

Regular attendance allows youth to:

- Build meaningful relationships with peers and mentors.
- Stay engaged in hands-on learning and enrichment activities.
- Participate in special events and field experiences.
- Maintain consistency in their personal growth and development.

Every day offers new opportunities to learn, lead, and succeed. Thank you for partnering with us by making attendance a priority and helping us finish the summer on a strong note. Together, we can ensure every youth has the opportunity to experience all that Next Step To Success has to offer.

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

We are excited to announce that enrollment for the 2026–2027 Next Step To Success After-School Program officially opens on Monday, August 10, 2026! This year, all families — including those with returning youth — will complete a new enrollment process through our updated enrollment system, designed to make registration more streamlined and user-friendly while helping us keep accurate records and better serve our youth and families all year long.

Whether your youth is returning to Next Step To Success or enrolling for the first time, every family must complete the new enrollment process before participation in the 2026–2027 After-School Program. Additional information, including enrollment instructions, required forms, and important deadlines, will be shared as we approach the August 10 opening date. We encourage families to complete the process as early as possible, as enrollment is limited and available on a first-come, first-served basis.

We look forward to welcoming both our returning and new families for another year of learning, growth, and success!



A Note from Carly Gelles, Director of Education

Our Summer Session is in full swing, and our students have been making the most of every opportunity to learn, grow, and have fun!

Over the past few weeks, coaches have taken students out into our community to explore local resources and hands-on experiences. Students learned about environmental conservation and got an up-close look at the incredible corpse flower at the Norfolk Botanical Garden — a rare and unforgettable sight for many of them. At the Chrysler Museum, students explored art and history, discovering new perspectives and sparking curiosity about the world around them.

Back on-site, students have been just as busy. They've been building water safety and confidence through swimming lessons, expressing their creativity through art projects alongside their coaches, and getting hands-on with STEM through fun experiments like slime making. Add in a rotating lineup of enrichment activities, and our students have had no shortage of ways to explore new interests and try new things.

Every activity, whether in the community or in the classroom, is intentionally designed to strengthen teamwork, build character, develop confidence, and foster meaningful relationships. Our goal is simple: help students grow academically and personally, all while creating lasting summer memories they'll carry with them long after the season ends.



A Note from Kaelyn Hundley, Director of Programming

This week, our youth enjoyed an exciting visit to the Norfolk Botanical Garden, where they explored the vegetable gardens and learned about native plants, got to sample fresh blueberries and grapes straight from the vine, and wandered through the beautiful butterfly garden, taking in the colors and life around them. It was a hands-on afternoon of discovery, curiosity, and a little bit of wonder for our students.

We are so grateful to our summer community partners for making experiences like this possible. Because of your support, our youth have the opportunity to explore new places, discover new interests, and build meaningful connections with the world around them — experiences many of them wouldn't otherwise have access to.

Thank you for helping us create a summer filled with learning, growth, and unforgettable memories!





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



CONFIDENCE CAFE

MENU

JULY 6TH - 10TH



GOOD FOOD
GOOD MOOD!

CONFIDENCE
FUELS
EVERYTHING

<div style="text-align: center;">  <h2 style="font-size: 2.5em; margin: 0;">MONDAY</h2>  </div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ CONTINENTAL BREAKFAST ★ SPHAGETTI ★ SALAD ★ POPSICLES 	<div style="text-align: center;"> <h2 style="font-size: 2.5em; margin: 0;">TUESDAY</h2> </div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ BREAKFAST PANCAKE STICKS ★ TACOS WITH SPANISH RICE ★ CHURRO BUNDT CAKE 
<div style="text-align: center;">  <h2 style="font-size: 2.5em; margin: 0;">WEDNESDAY</h2> </div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ CONTINENTAL BREAKFAST ★ WING WEDNESDAY! ★ WEDGES ★ BROWNIES 	<div style="text-align: center;"> <h2 style="font-size: 2.5em; margin: 0;">THURSDAY</h2>  </div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ BREAKFAST BACON, EGGS, AND BISCUITS ★ FRIED RICE ★ SWEET AND SOUR CHICKEN ★ SPRING ROLLS 
<div style="text-align: center;">  <h2 style="font-size: 3em; margin: 0;">FRIDAY</h2> </div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ GRILLED DOGS ★ WEDGES ★ PUDDING CUPS  <div style="text-align: right;"> <p style="font-size: 1.5em; margin: 0;">EAT PLAY SMILE!</p> </div>	

CONFIDENCE. COMMUNITY. GREAT FOOD. EVERY DAY. ♥

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.

[Buy a Brick](#)

Next Step to Success | [Website](#)





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