



Next Step to Success Weekly Update



A Message from our Executive Director



Families, we made it and what a summer it has been.

When we opened our doors in June, I asked every scholar to set a GRIT goal: something hard, something worth chasing, something that would require them to show up even on the days they didn't feel like it. I set one too. I told our students I would learn to swim and week after week, they held me accountable, asked about my progress, and reminded me that growth doesn't happen in comfort zones. That's what this summer was about. Not perfection. Persistence.

Our scholars showed up. They showed up for academics, for the arts, for athletics, and for each other. They tried new things and they finished what they

started. That is GRIT, and it's one of the Six Pillars we build everything on at Next Step to Success.

To our families: thank you. Your commitment to consistent attendance made this summer's success possible.

To our staff: your energy, patience, and love for these young people is the heartbeat of this organization.

And to our scholars: I am proud of you. You didn't just spend a summer with us, you grew.

As camp ends, our work doesn't. Our afterschool program begins Monday, August 31, and we are hoping to see every one of our scholars back and participating. If you have not already registered for the fall, please contact Mr. Muhamma at 757-995-2111 to secure your student's spot. Don't wait, your next step starts soon, and we'll be ready for you.

See you on August 31. Keep setting goals worth chasing.

With gratitude and GRIT,

James Harris

Executive Director, Next Step to Success

Our Summer in Review: A Season of Growth, Discovery, and Opportunity!



As another incredible summer comes to a close, we are filled with gratitude for the young people, families, staff, volunteers, and community partners who made Summer 2026 one to remember.

This summer wasn't just about keeping students busy—it was about opening doors to new experiences, building confidence, strengthening relationships, and helping every young person take another step toward a brighter future.

Throughout the summer, our youth explored career pathways through hands-on visits to aviation facilities and skilled trades partners, stepped onto college campuses to envision their futures, and learned firsthand from professionals across Hampton Roads. They discovered that their possibilities are limitless. Our students also embraced the outdoors through nature hikes, environmental exploration, boating adventures, and unforgettable visits to Circle A Home for

Horses, where they learned responsibility, compassion, and the healing power of connecting with animals.

Creativity flourished as youth designed miniature terrariums, tackled engineering and STEM challenges, experimented with new ideas, and developed problem-solving skills through engaging, hands-on activities. Every project encouraged curiosity, teamwork, and innovation.

Summer also brought plenty of opportunities for wellness and fun. Whether they were learning to swim, bowling with friends, competing at Topgolf, participating in martial arts, or enjoying team-building games, our youth stayed active while developing confidence, perseverance, and resilience.

Perhaps most importantly, this summer was filled with moments that can't be measured by a schedule or a program calendar. New friendships were formed. Young leaders emerged. Students encouraged one another, stepped outside of their comfort zones, and discovered strengths they didn't know they had. None of this would have been possible without the incredible generosity of our community partners, volunteers, donors, and supporters. Your investment in our mission gives young people opportunities they may never have imagined and creates experiences that will impact them long after summer ends.

As we transition into the new school year, we carry forward the memories, lessons, and momentum of an unforgettable summer. We are excited to continue empowering youth, building futures, and strengthening our community—one step at a time.

Thank you for making Summer 2026 one for the books. We can't wait to see what this school year brings!

NSTS Leadership Insights



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

A Message of Gratitude to Our Summer 2026 Families & Youth

As we close another incredible Summer Program, the entire Next Step To Success team extends our heartfelt gratitude to each of our youth and families for making the Summer of 2026 one to remember.

To our youth, thank you for showing up each day with energy, curiosity, and a willingness to learn, grow, and support one another. Your enthusiasm, resilience, and commitment made our program a vibrant community where meaningful relationships were built, new skills were developed, and lasting memories were created.

To our families, thank you for entrusting us with the opportunity to invest in your children each day. Your partnership, encouragement, and support are essential to our mission, and we are grateful for the confidence you place in Next Step To Success. Together, we continue to create opportunities that empower our youth to thrive both today and in the future.

While our summer program has come to an end, our journey together is just beginning. We are excited to begin enrollment for the 2026–2027 After-School Program and look forward to welcoming both returning and new youth into another year of growth, achievement, and opportunity.

Throughout the upcoming school year, we will continue strengthening the relationships we have built while creating new experiences centered on the first step of the Success Sequence: Earning a high school diploma or equivalent. Through intentional programming, mentorship, academic support, leadership development, career exploration, and family engagement, we remain committed to helping every young person build a strong foundation for lifelong success. Guided by our Program Pillars, we will continue fostering an environment where every youth feels safe, valued, challenged, and inspired to reach their fullest potential. Together, we will empower our young people to grow as leaders, strengthen their character, discover their purpose, and prepare for success in school, career, and life.

Community Resources for Back-to-School

As we prepare for the new school year, we also want to ensure our families are connected to valuable community resources.

For families in Norfolk, I encourage you to join me at the Fourth Annual Unity in the Community: Back 2 School Celebration, taking place Saturday, August 8, 2026, from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. at the Norfolk Scope (201 E. Brambleton Avenue, Norfolk, VA). This event offers free back-to-school supplies, community resources, and opportunities to help students start the school year prepared and confident.

If you are traveling outside of Norfolk or live in the Western Tidewater area, be sure to visit The Up Center's Back to School Skate Party on Wednesday, August 12, 2026, from 6:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. at The Golden Luxe Arena in Suffolk. This family-friendly event provides an opportunity for youth to celebrate the start of the school year while connecting with community partners and resources in a fun and engaging environment.

Thank you for being an important part of the Next Step To Success family. We are honored to walk alongside you and look forward to another impactful year of learning, leadership, and achievement.

Here's an outstanding 2026–2027 After-School Program, we can't wait to see you soon!



A Note from Carly Gelles, Director of Education

Every summer program has a schedule. What makes one work is who's standing in the room when the students arrive.

This summer, our coaches and staff were in that room every single day. They were in the pool at swim lessons, holding a board steady for a first-time breaker at martial arts, walking the trail at the back of a field trip group to make sure nobody fell behind. They were in the kitchen at seven in the morning, so meals were ready, and behind the wheel of a van before that, because a program that promises free transportation only keeps that promise if someone gets up early to drive.

They were also the ones asking the question that mattered most: what do you think? When students designed tunnel flood barriers, our coaches didn't hand them the answer. They let the prototypes fail, then asked what the students would change. When the food hall opened and a stall priced its lemonade too low, nobody stepped in to fix the math. They let a teenager discover it and figure out why.

That takes a particular kind of patience. It is much faster to do it yourself. Here's the number that tells the story best. Our summer attendance ran about 76 percent — and when students missed the morning van, they called us. Teenagers, in the summer, phoning a program to ask how to get there. That doesn't happen because the activities are fun, though they were. It happens because a young person knows that when they walk in, someone will be glad to see them.

We watched students who arrived in June barely willing to speak up stand in front of a corporate CEO in August and explain a design they built with their own hands. That transformation has a cause, and the cause has names. Coach Nisha, Coach Nicole, Coach Mike, Coach Jacob, Coach Diana, Coach Terrie, Coach Corey, and Coach Brittany — thank you.

To every coach, instructor, driver, and staff member who gave this summer: you didn't just supervise activities. You raised what these young people

believe they're capable of. That is the entire work, and you did it in ninety-degree heat, on long days, without much fanfare.

The students noticed. We noticed too.



A Note from Kaelyn Hundley, Director of Programming

The last week of summer went out the way we like them to: loud, a little messy, and completely worth it.

Students took on an egg drop challenge, engineering protection for a fragile passenger out of whatever materials we put in front of them. Then we took every design up to the lower roof and dropped them. Five eggs survived.

That's a hard number, and it's exactly why the challenge works. There's no partial credit on an egg drop — either your design held or you're looking at the pavement wondering what you'd do differently. The students who cracked one learned as much as the five who didn't.

We also took the whole crew to see the new Spider-Man movie, because a summer that's all engineering challenges and no popcorn isn't much of a summer. And we closed it out with our second annual Field Day — a full day of games, competition, and the kind of noise you could hear from the parking lot. It's become one of the highlights of our year, and it sent everyone into the school year the right way.

To every partner who showed up for our students this summer — thank you. You gave our young people experiences they would never have had otherwise, and you made a program that runs on free tuition, free rides, and free meals possible. We could not do this without you.

Construction Begins This Fall: St. Vincent DePaul House Breaks Ground



We have exciting news to share, and it made headlines this week! The Virginian-Pilot recently reported that construction on our new campus, St. Vincent DePaul House, is set to begin this fall at the former DePaul hospital site in Norfolk.

This milestone comes on the heels of a major vote of confidence from our city. Norfolk City Council voted unanimously to approve a \$25 million revenue bond to help fund the project, issued through the Norfolk Economic Development Authority and financed through TowneBank. Importantly, this bond comes at no cost or liability to the city itself.

NSTS Board Chair Chuck McPhillips shared with the Pilot that this project reflects a generational investment in the future of our city and our youth, and that our organization is putting everything we have into making it a reality.

The numbers behind this project are just as remarkable as the mission driving it. The total cost of the redevelopment now stands at more than \$50 million, funded through a combination of the James Barry Robinson Trust, generous private donors, and now the city-backed bond. Construction is expected to take approximately 16 to 18 months, with hopes of moving our programming into the new space by the middle of the 2027-28 academic year.

When complete, St. Vincent DePaul House will include two classroom buildings, an arts and media center, a gymnasium, an auditorium, a cafeteria, administrative offices, and outdoor athletic facilities, all built on 10 acres of the former hospital property. NSTS currently serves approximately 120 students, and we're hopeful this new campus will allow us to grow that number to 300 or more.

This is more than a construction project. It's a permanent, purpose-built home for Norfolk's young people, made possible by the belief and generosity of this entire community. We are so grateful to everyone who has helped bring this vision to life, and we can't wait to break ground this fall.

Want to be part of our future? There's still time to purchase a brick or make a donation to help cement our future in Norfolk's youth. Every gift, big or small, helps us build something that will serve our community for generations to come.

Stay tuned for more updates as construction begins!

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

JANE FORREST
BORN AT DEPAUL
MAY 15, 1992

SCAN TO

**BUY YOUR
BRICK**
Today!



**NEXT
STEP**



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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