

ANNUAL REPORT

Fiscal Year 2025



NEXT STEP LEARNING CENTER



Transforming Lives through Education

With pride, dedication, and resilience,
our community at Next Step is ...

Honoring Our Past. Securing Our Future.

“Regardless of what happens outside that Red Door – whether political, personal, or emotional – inside, there is respect, compassion, and positive student-tutor relationships. To me, that is love of humanity and community. At Next Step Learning Center, we are a community.”

- Peggy Presley, Director of Programs
Celebrating 25 years at NSLC!

IN THIS ANNUAL REPORT:

- High School & GED Program Report
- College & Career Program Report
- A Student's Journey
- Founders' Fund Kickoff
- Honoring Community Members
- Strategic Plan
- Financials
- Partners & Founders
- Planned Giving
- A Student's Journey



Sister Cynthia Canning, Jael Myrick, and Sister Rosemary Delaney



Dear Friends,

Next Step Learning Center – the house built by Sisters Cynthia Canning, Rosemary Delaney and Margaret Kennedy – continues to open up new opportunities for those forgotten by traditional institutions of education.

On July 15th, I was entrusted with the tremendous honor and responsibility of leading this amazing organization. As we work to build on the legacy of the Sisters and ensure this program continues for another 30 years, it is important to me that we recognize the values that have brought this organization success and establish new practices that will sustain us for the decades to come.

The values that define us are simple: **Everyone deserves the opportunity to complete their education.** Just because someone could not succeed in the traditional school model does not mean they should be destined to accept a less fulfilling life. Everyone's path to success is different and that should be celebrated.

At Next Step, our incredible staff and volunteers live out these values by ensuring that every student who comes in has the support to succeed, as long as they are willing to do the work. In addition, thanks to our staff and volunteers, none of these students have to take this educational journey alone. Our students know this and often end up building close connections with the tutors and developing real trust with those they interact with from our staff.

So the task ahead, from my perspective, is clear. Ensure this organization has a broad base of community and financial support to continue this model for another 30 years. We honor our donors, board members, staff, volunteers and amazing community partners who have taken us this far. There is so much more work to be done, so many more lives to be changed, and so much more hope to provide.

With gratitude,

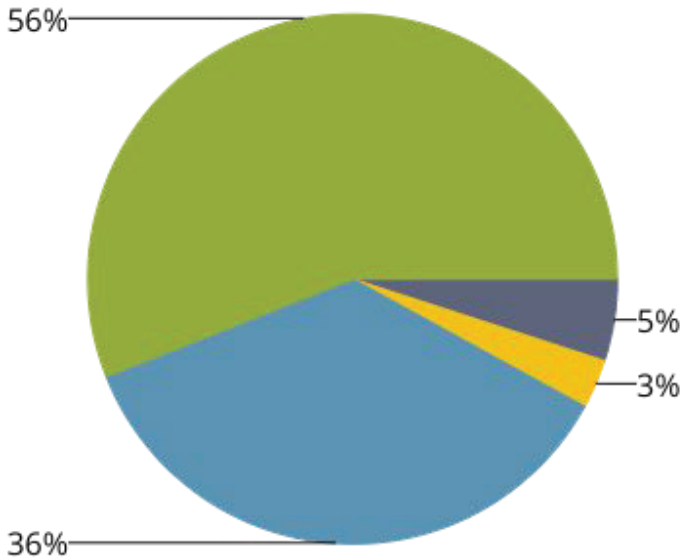
Jael Myrick
Executive Director

**committed to 30 MORE years of
transforming lives through education!**

High School & GED Program Report

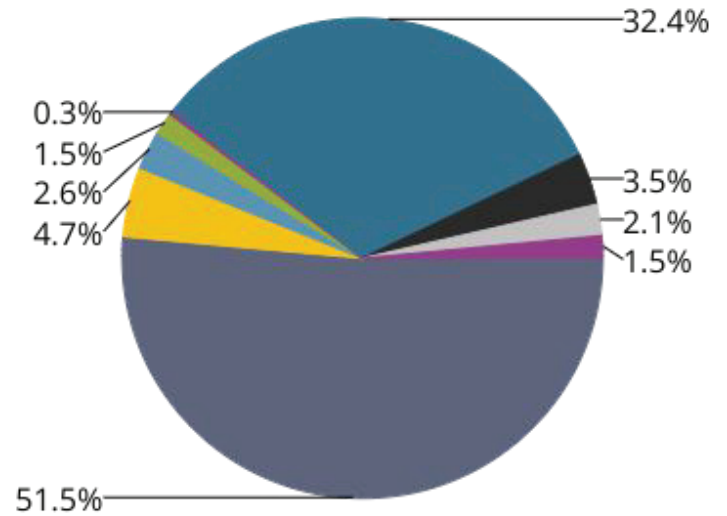
324 Students participated in these programs

Students Per Program



- Literacy 5%
- GED 3%
- Adult Basic Education 36%
- High School Diploma 56%

Student Demographics



- Black
- White
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- Middle Eastern or North African
- South Asian
- Hispanic or Latino
- Asian
- Unknown or Other
- Native Alaskan or American Indigenous

51% Women
49% Men



87

Graduates

Earned a high school diploma or GED

College & Career Program Report

118 Students participated
in this program



75

Enrolled

In college or
vocational programs



89%

Pass Rate

Students passing their
courses or program during
this fiscal year



15

Graduates

Earned a degree or
vocational certificate

Degrees Earned:

9 Vocational Certificates

4 Associate Degrees

2 Bachelor Degrees

Next Step Learning Center provides students with the opportunity to achieve both their education and life goals. We believe in the full development of the human person and in every individual's ability to learn and grow. Next Step students not only make academic gains but also have a safe place to find support, learn life skills, overcome challenges, and heal from trauma.

A Student's Journey

Shervil Dunson, Class of '25



"I am proud of my past, but I know now, my future is more secure."

Back to the Stage

I am living proof that it's never too late to go after your dreams, no matter your age, your past, or the obstacles in your way. I'm going to be 50 years old at the end of this year. And after all these years, all the ups, the downs, the responsibilities, the sacrifices I can finally say something I've waited a long time to feel: I'm proud of myself.

Why? Because I went back to school and I earned my high school diploma.

That's right — after all these years, I am officially part of the Class of 2025. And let me tell you, those words mean the world to me.

Let me take you back a little. I dropped out of high school in the 11th grade. It was 1992. Life moved fast after that. I started a family, raised six children, and I never even thought about going back to school. I was focused on surviving, on providing, on being a mom.

And even though I didn't have a diploma, I always pushed education on my kids. I told them how important it was to finish what they started. Four of them have already graduated. What they didn't know was that I hadn't. I carried that silently.

But then something happened that changed everything. I was working a contracted position with Meta, yes, the company that used to be Facebook, when our department was moved to a different company. We had to reapply for our positions. One of the questions on the application hit me right in the chest, Do you have a high school diploma?

This time, it was required.

Now, I had a decision to make. I could lie, or I could be honest. I chose honesty. I told the hiring manager the truth. I don't have a diploma, but I'm about to go get it.

And do you know what happened? They let me stay. They gave me a chance.

That moment was my wake-up call. I enrolled at Next Step. And to my surprise, I wasn't that far behind. So I hit the

ground running, working during the day, doing assignments at night, being a mom, and still running my business. It was hard, but I kept pushing.

And then I did it. I got my diploma.

That moment I found out I passed, it felt like a weight I didn't even realize I was carrying, had finally lifted.

But I didn't stop there. I asked myself, "What's next?"

Since I already own a business, I knew I needed to learn more, not just how to run it, but how to grow it. So, I signed up for college and am getting support through Next Step's College Transition Program. I'm now studying for my Associate of Science degree in Business and, if everything goes to plan, I'll graduate in 2027 — the same year my youngest daughter graduates from high school.

We're going to walk that stage together. Mother and daughter, different platforms, one high school the other college.

July 11, 2025. That was the day my children saw me walk across the stage, not just as their mom, but as someone who never gave up.

Everything I've done, every class, every test, every late night unpacks this truth: it's never too late to go after your dreams.

I've learned that failure is just a part of the journey. And age? That's just a number. It doesn't matter how long it's been, or how far off track you think you are. If you're breathing, you still have time.

So if no one's ever told you this, let me be the first: you can still finish what you started.

Failure is not final. Dreams don't expire. And it's never too late.

Thank you.

Next Step Learning Center is pleased and so very proud to announce the establishment of our

Founders' Fund

This fund honors the legacy of our founders and ensures that Next Step can continue to operate completely free of charge to our students. Every dollar gifted to the Founders' Fund goes directly to support our program and operational costs.

A Message from Next Step's Co-Founders

Many of you reading this Annual Report know that Next Step Learning Center was founded by the Sisters of the Holy Names in 1994, over 30 years ago. We three were the Co-Founders, but our idea of a new nonprofit that would serve low-income Oakland residents -- who for many reasons had not completed their high school education, or who simply had a desire for more education -- was supported by all of the Sisters in our community. They encouraged our dream, and off we went!

Many of you have been part of Next Step's amazing support base of volunteers and financial contributors from the very beginning (or at least for many, many years). You have made all the difference and we are beyond grateful.

Not every small nonprofit organization lives to be 30 years old or more, but thanks to your incredibly generous and consistent support, Next Step is alive and well and its mission continues to transform the lives of our students and their families. Day by day, it makes an immeasurable difference in our communities and in our world, really.

As you may know, Next Step has no State or Federal funding. Everything depends on the generosity of individuals who share its mission and a shrinking number of foundations who support smaller nonprofit organizations. This means that Next Step has been and is able to make an important difference in our world because of you! Thank you from the bottom of our hearts.

We are so proud and happy to be able to say with confidence that, with the leadership of Next Step's Board of Directors, the amazingly talented and committed staff, the volunteer tutors who engage daily with our students, and the generous and critically important contributions of our donors, Next Step Learning Center is thriving, as are its students.

We hope you will continue to support this wonderful organization and its mission and to help ensure its vibrant and life-changing future.

With Appreciation,
Sisters Cynthia Canning, Rosemary Delaney,
and Margaret Kennedy

To make your donation to the Founders' Fund,
please scan the QR code here →
or go to our website at www.nextsteplc.org



“ When making a gift to the Founders' Fund, you are not just making a donation. You're making a promise. You are promising our students a chance, an opportunity, to create a better life through education. ”

Erin Derkacht Ubaldo, Director of Administration & Development

Honoring Past Board Members

MARY BRUTOCAO has been both a member of the Board of Directors and a volunteer tutor from almost the very beginning of Next Step's 31-year history. She also generously served as the Secretary of the Board for decades and she continues her weekly tutoring to this day, making a difference in the lives and futures of countless students and their families. Mary has brought abundant gifts of both intellect and heart to this work, all of it as a volunteer. These include the skills and understandings she gained as a family law attorney and her years of volunteer work at the winter homeless shelter organized by Sister Rosemary Delaney at St. Mary's - St. Francis Parish in the Oakland flatlands. Mary embraced Next Step's mission fully and met each student she tutored with warmth and welcome, joining in the celebration of the annual graduation ceremony to celebrate their determination and their accomplishments. Additionally, Mary and her husband John Kemp have been generous donors and ambassadors for Next Step for many decades, often sharing their lovely home to host an event and to introduce Next Step and its mission to the broader community. Mary was among Next Step's pioneers, and her impact is beyond measure.

- Sr. Cynthia Canning, Next Step Co-Founder



Mary Brutocao with a student



Peter Boero with his wife, Linda

In 2015, **PETER BOERO**, a native of Oakland, became a member of Next Step Learning Center Board of Directors with a wealth of knowledge about the city, the Sisters of the Holy Names, and how to engage others in the mission of Next Step. His early education introduced him to the Sisters of the Holy Names at St. Theresa School. Later his children attended, and he was an involved and generous parent. His expertise in business began as a partner in the family business where he honed his people and business skills. He later served as Director of Advancement for St. Mary's College High School. As Chair of the Development Committee at Next Step, Peter initiated friend and fundraising events which brought a new group of supporters! During the pandemic, he and the members of the Development Committee contacted news outlets and other organizations to find new tutors and donors for Next Step. Peter's heart was a beat ahead so Next Step Learning Center could continue its mission into the future.

- Sr. Joan Doyle, Current Board Member

with Gratitude and Appreciation

PETER RAFFO served on Next Step's board from 1993 to 2025.

Peter joined the board as an original member when Next Step was founded. Before then, he helped feed unhoused community members at a local shelter, where he was known as the "milkman" because he stocked the refrigerators with milk for all the meals. One of Next Step's founding sisters, Sister Rosemary Delaney, also served at the shelter and tagged Peter to help launch Next Step's board. Peter answered that call to service, and he proudly served on the board until last year, heading the board's Finance Committee. As Chair of the committee, Peter was diligent in questioning line items in the finance reports and budget to ascertain that all designated monies were used on student services. "It was a pleasure being on the board all those years," Peter said. Next Step's success and profound impact on its students' lives inspired Peter's exceptional service on the board. He was deeply impressed by the students' dedication in the face of challenges, and he especially enjoyed interacting with tutors and attending graduation ceremonies in his "very best" attire.

-David Pereda, Current Board Member

JIM VOHS came to Next Step Learning Center as a member of the Board of Directors after an illustrious 40-year career at Kaiser Permanente, including 17 years as President, CEO, and Chairman of the Boards of Kaiser Foundation Health Plan, Inc., and Kaiser Foundation Hospitals, Inc. An article about Jim's leadership at the time of his retirement described him as "a creative champion of innovation and improvement." Jim brought these qualities and more, including the highest integrity, to his service as a member of Next Step's Board. He also reached out to former colleagues and other professionals for the benefit of Next Step. Two of these individuals were central to the success of the capital project in 2006, which resulted in Next Step's beautiful, light-filled, and mortgage-free program site. These were talented Oakland-based architect Barbara Westover, and project director/manager Glenn Isaacson, CEO of CMA, Inc. in San Francisco. Both were so impressed with Next Step's mission and with Jim's commitment to it, that they independently chose to donate their services - an amazing contribution! Committed, wise, other-centered, and generous in all ways, Jim Vohs made a difference that is lasting and beyond measure for Next Step Learning Center and all who have been and continue to benefit from its mission and services.

- Sr. Cynthia Canning, Next Step Co-Founder



Jim Vohs with Sister Cynthia Canning

EVELYN (EVIE) ASHCROFT's contributions to Next Step Learning Center are innumerable and invaluable. From the very early time of Next Step's establishment in West Oakland, she generously became a reliable, knowledgeable, committed, hardworking and steady board member for the new and pioneering venture. Her special nonprofit and human resources expertise guided many board decisions and policies over the years and her sense of the mission always elevated board discussions. As Chair of the board, Evie took on more responsibility and handled the role with poise and professionalism.

I particularly remember Evie stepping forward over the years to take charge of the Board's evaluation of the executive directors and helping steer the strategic planning processes. Her leadership always assured success. Her priorities were optimal. Initiating a gift from the board to Peggy Presley in recognition of her 20 years of selfless service is but one example of Evie's understanding and embodiment of the spirit of Next Step. Evie's legacy remains a big and wonderful part of Next Step's culture.

- Greg Schopf, Current Board Member

Thank You for Your Service!



“Our Tech Heroes” was an article that appeared in Next Step's Spring 2011 Newsletter. The article said,

“As a small non-profit organization with a modest budget, Next Step does not have internal IT staff. Throughout our 16-year history, we have been blessed by the extraordinary talent of two very special individuals.”

One of the individuals recognized then was **MIKE VOORHIES**, and now, more than thirty years

since our founding, we continue to honor Mike for his steadfast support of Next Step. Mike has given countless hours to improve our IT infrastructure and everyday operations. He has patched together equipment to create working laptops and desktops for our students to use; kept our network running smoothly for staff; and generously been on call for tech emergencies. Without the commitment of people like Mike (and his wife Randi!), Next Step would not be the place that it is today. We are so grateful for his decades of service.



In July, Next Step Learning Center bid a fond farewell to **MONICA BERSON**, our bookkeeper for nearly 20 years. As she embarks on new adventures with her family, we thank Monica for her work and contribution to our mission.



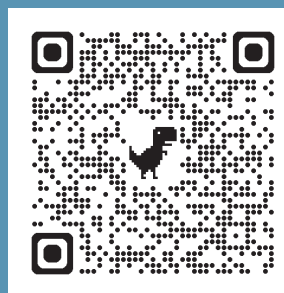
Next Step's Strategic Plan to Secure Our Future

Honoring our past and securing our future is the theme for this year. Doing so effectively requires Next Step to be intentional about the decisions we make to ensure both our program and operational sustainability. With this in mind, we will be developing a strategic plan process over the course of this new fiscal year. The goal of this process is to identify what's been working, what can be improved upon, and how we can successfully track and effectively communicate our successes to our broader community.

The type of process we hope to pursue for our strategic plan is one grounded in the reality of the day-to-day work we do, the challenges our students face, and the need to secure our financial future. We also want to improve the way we share and celebrate all the amazing things that happen here at Next Step.

As part of this process we want to hear from you! With your feedback, we can learn more about how best to connect with our community.

Please scan the QR code and take a few minutes to share your thoughts in our survey. We would appreciate your participation by December 1st.



Your opinion helps shape the vision that will guide us through the end of this decade!

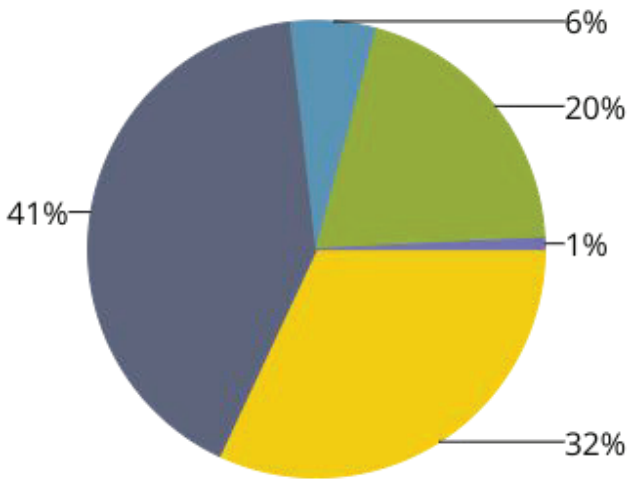


“ Graduating from Next Step Learning Center has been a transformative experience. With the incredible support of patient and professional tutors, I not only achieved my high school diploma but felt empowered every step of the way. The staff's kindness and dedication made this journey memorable. If you're looking to finish high school, this amazing organization provides everything you need, including a personalized graduation ceremony complete with a tailored cap and gown! ”

Benicia Bell, Class of 2025

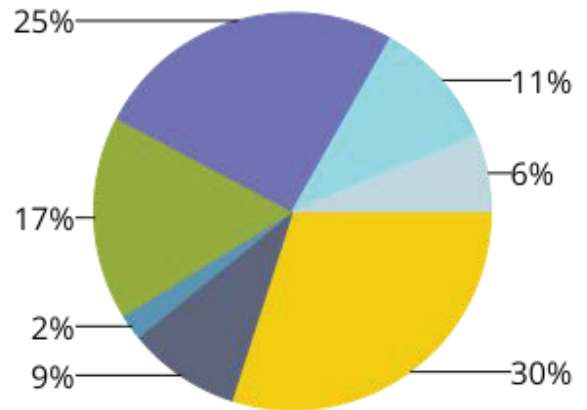
Financials

Revenue



- Individual Donations 32%
- Foundation Grants 41%
- Religious Organizations' Contributions 6%
- Investment Income 20%
- Other Sources 1%

Expense



- Adult Basic Education & Literacy Programs 30%
- College & Career Programs 9%
- High School Diploma/GED Programs 2%
- Fundraising & Development 17%
- Administrative Management 25%
- Facilities & Maintenance 11%
- Miscellaneous Expenses 6%

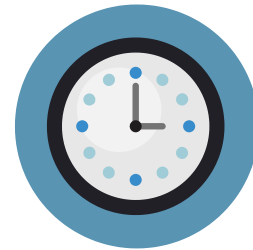


In-Kind Services
\$568,292

Alameda County
Office of Education



Volunteer Tutors
50



Volunteer Hours
3,138

Partners and Funders

Foundation and Community Support

- The Cook Family Foundation
- The JEC Foundation
- The Kirannada Foundation
- The Neal and Amelia McDaniel Family Fund
- St. Charles Borromeo Catholic Church
- Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary



With deepest gratitude,
we acknowledge every individual donor.
Your generosity changes lives!



\$503,741
Total
Contributions

“ At Next Step, students don't leave with just a diploma,
but with a belief in themselves that they can do
what they want to do, and be who they want to be. ”

Daniel, Volunteer Tutor & Donor

Next Step Learning Center Staff

Jael Myrick, Executive Director
Peggy Presley, Director of Programs
Erin Derkacht Ubaldo, Director of Administration & Development
Jennie Emard, College Transition Coordinator
Karen Matza, Reading Specialist
Tracey Kaufman, Operations Coordinator

Nicole Crosby, Opportunity Academy Teacher*
Lisa McCarty, Opportunity Academy Teacher*
Monique Guerrero, Opportunity Academy Paraeducator*

Board of Directors

Sumana Lahiry, Board Chair
Joan Doyle, SNJM, Secretary
Ryan Falvey, Treasurer
Eugene Brown, Jr.
Linda Orrick, SNJM
David A. Pereda
Stephen Sanger
Gregory Schopf
Maureen Viani, SNJM

* Leveraged positions through our partnership with
Alameda County Office of Education

Leave a Legacy of Lifelong Learning

PLANNED GIVING POSSIBILITIES

As we look to secure our future, one of the best ways to guarantee our program's sustainability is through planned giving. You can do this in several ways:

Include Next Step Learning Center in your will or estate. One of the simplest planned gifts is a bequest through your will, in which you designate either a specific dollar amount or a percentage of your estate after other disbursements. You can make certain that your loved ones are taken care of, and also help to sustain the mission of Next Step Learning Center.

Donate appreciated stocks directly to us using our secure online platform. Donating stocks directly to Next Step ensures that we receive the full market value of the stock. Donating stock is easy - simply scan the QR code below to be taken to Next Step's stock donation page.

Designate NSLC to your United Way or Your Cause contributions at work. Ask your employer if they support any giving campaigns or are looking to add a non-profit organization to their list of supported causes. Some employers will even match your contribution allowing each dollar to go farther in support of our work.

Make monthly or quarterly gifts. Your monthly or quarterly contributions add up over time to a significant financial impact. Recurring gifts allow Next Step to plan for the future with a stable and reliable source of funding.

Create a Legacy Fund, sponsored by you, your family, or your organization. By creating a Legacy Fund, you can support an area of our operations or programming that is especially meaningful to you.



Please contact Erin to ask questions
or discuss planned giving possibilities for you.

eubaldo@nextsteplc.org
(510) 251-1731

We encourage you to speak with your attorney, tax professional, or estate preparer to learn more about what all of these options entail.



A Student's Journey

Malique Bell, Class of 2022

Spring
2022

Malique enrolls at Next Step after leaving high school to help support his family during a time of instability which included becoming unhoused. He successfully graduates in 2 months, thanks to the flexibility of the high school diploma program.

Summer
2022

Malique enrolls at Merritt College as a Psychology major.

Fall
2022

Malique obtains an internship at New Door Ventures for career planning and job skill development.

Winter
2022

Malique completes his 6-month internship at Chavez Disability Advocates in Oakland, CA.

Spring
2024

Malique graduates with a 4.0 grade point average from Merritt College with an AS-T in Psychology.

Fall
2024

Malique starts his junior year at San Francisco State University, receiving support from Next Step to secure his student housing and maximize his student aid.

Spring
2025

Malique is accepted to Management Leadership for Tomorrow Career Prep Program with a full scholarship.

Fall
2025

Malique obtains an internship with COOP Careers, a competitive 9-month fellowship for future careers in business and data.



“I don't know what it's like to feel what the staff at Next Step must feel -- to know how much they were a part of my life. I am exploring what I will apply my studies toward for my career when I graduate, but I know that the opportunities I have today are directly linked to the support I have received at Next Step.”

- Malique Bell

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Oakland, CA 94607

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www.nextsteplc.org
(510) 251-1731



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