NEXT STEP LEARNING CENTER

WHERE EDUCATION TRANSFORMS LIVES

Mark your calendar!

Graduation
July 10, 2026
Invitations
coming soon!

NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2026

NEXT STEP LEARNING CENTER STUDENTS

- BUILD BASIC LITERACY
- EARN A HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA OR GED
- GAIN LIFE SKILLS
- SUCCEED IN COLLEGE
- EMBARK ON SUSTAINING CAREERS

your support matters!

Next Step relies on the generosity of individuals like you to fulfill our mission and transform lives through education! Please consider making a donation, designating Next Step as your workplace match, or including Next Step in your will or estate.

Scan the QR code to give today!

Questions?

Contact Erin (510) 251-1731

www.nextsteplc.org

Dear Friends,

What a year it has been. With all the suffering that is happening around the world, it may be difficult to appreciate the positive actions and relationships that are around us. My heart goes out to all who have been affected in some negative way. Still, I believe there are always rays of hope.

One of those rays of hope is Next Step - our oasis in the midst of the turmoil around us. It is a relief and a gift to know that there is strength and stability in this place, and that we are thriving in spite of all the uncertainty. Next Step is buzzing along in its own world. Our tutors and staff work very hard to maintain a positive atmosphere, encouraging students to get to their 'next step.'

Next Step students are flourishing and remarkably resilient. When they get knocked down, which sometimes happens, they get right back up. They are improving their reading skills, working toward graduating, obtaining employment, entering training programs, and starting or continuing college. They are making a better life for themselves and their families. This year, we have over 60 graduates thus far and it's only April.

Join me in welcoming back Philip Arca as our Executive Director!

Next Step staff and our ACOE partners are so fortunate to work each day with our amazing and compassionate, volunteer tutors who assist and support our students. We are also forever grateful to our donors whose continuing generosity makes it all happen. Together, we are committed to Sr. Cynthia's and Sr. Rosemary's dream of transformation through education. Thanks to all of you, Next Step and its vision are alive and well.

Happy Spring!

Peggy Presley

Peggy Presley, Director of Programs

Meet Isata from the Class of 2026

At age 14, **ISATA** came to the U.S. from Sierra Leone, longing to fulfill her father's dream and her own of getting an education. Raising her eight children was Isata's first priority, "but now that they're grown, it's time for me to do something for myself." Since 2023, Isata has come to Next Step twice a week. She has completed her English, history, and science credits and is now working on algebra. At first, it felt intimidating, like learning a new language. With the help of her teacher, Nicole, and her tutors, Isata is breaking down the problems, simplifying the steps, and gaining understanding. She can't believe that she will graduate soon -- "It's like music to my ears!" Her diploma will be the first in her family and an important example she wants to set for her children. In this final stretch, Isata sees her dream becoming a reality. She says, "I want it so bad!"

Meet Mathew from the Class of 2015

MATHEW enrolled at Next Step in 2014 and completed his high school equivalency in 2015. With Next Step's college support, Mathew earned an Associate's Degree in Computer Science at Chabot College and went on to receive his Bachelor's Degree in Computer Science at San Francisco State University. In 2023, Mathew got an internship with BART focusing on network and cyber security. This led to an offer of full-time employment as a Computer Support Administrator. Today, Mathew's career continues to progress at BART as a Computer Support Coordinator, and he happily shared the news of his engagement to be married. Congratulations, Mathew!

Meet Meaza from the Class of 2023

I have lived in the U.S. for 18 years and I can see why they call it 'The Land Of Opportunities.' But in my experience, I have learned that to succeed, you have to work hard and be dedicated to your aim.

Meaza

Often the path that leads a student to Next Step is tremendously challenging. This was the case for **MEAZA**, who came to the United States from Ethiopia with her husband and infant, seeking better opportunities for her family. She faced many obstacles as an immigrant but got her Certified Nursing Assistant license, worked full time, and raised two children. In 2022, Meaza enrolled at Next Step and earned her high school diploma in 2023. With the help of Jennie, our College Transition Coordinator, she completed her Medical Assisting certification in February, increasing her earning potential and expanding her career options. Meaza's story of growth and persistence exemplifies the spirit of Next Step students.

Meet My from the Class of 2017

I was so nervous when I enrolled at Next Step, but I received far more support than I expected. I was able to get my education despite the detours in my journey. I never imagined I would be where I am today, with a degree and a career that I am really proud of.

My

MY enrolled at Next Step in 2015 after arriving in the U.S. from Vietnam. She could barely speak English. Just over a year later, My earned her G.E.D. and graduated in 2017. With Next Step's support, she enrolled at Laney College and completed her Associate's Degree in Science. Hoping to pursue a radiological technology program, her path was unfortunately impacted by the pandemic. With courage and determination, My changed course and earned a Bachelors of Science in Financial Accounting from CSU East Bay. My has now accepted a position with an accounting firm and is so excited for what the future brings.

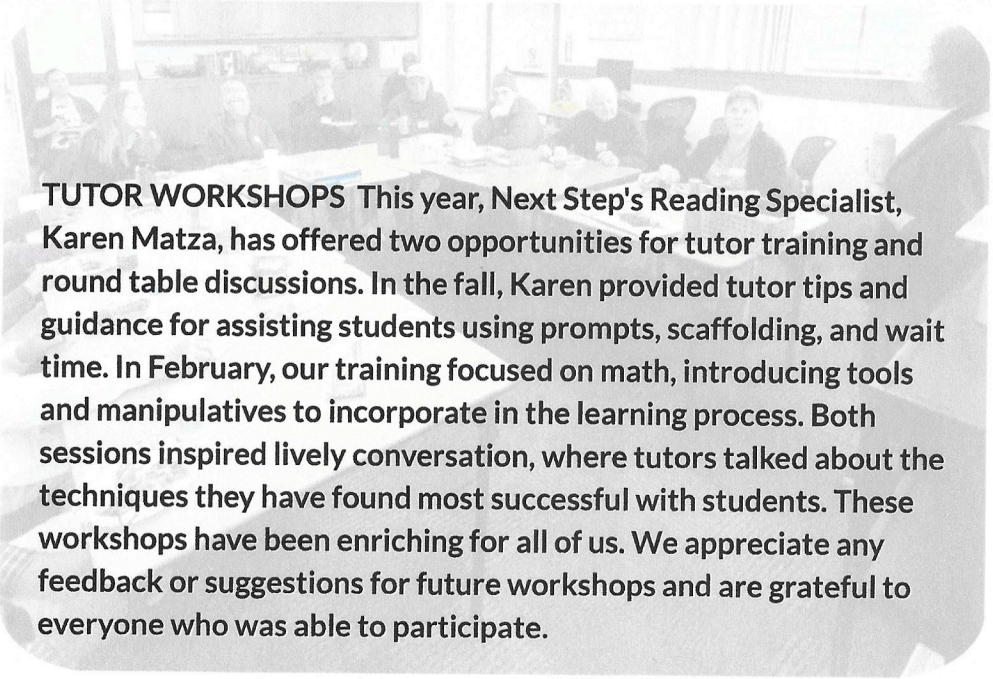
Tutors Transform Lives

Next Step currently has 45 volunteers who have collectively logged 2182 hours of tutoring so far this school year!

2182 hours

45 tutors

Karen Matza, Reading Specialist



TUTOR WORKSHOPS This year, Next Step's Reading Specialist, Karen Matza, has offered two opportunities for tutor training and round table discussions. In the fall, Karen provided tutor tips and guidance for assisting students using prompts, scaffolding, and wait time. In February, our training focused on math, introducing tools and manipulatives to incorporate in the learning process. Both sessions inspired lively conversation, where tutors talked about the techniques they have found most successful with students. These workshops have been enriching for all of us. We appreciate any feedback or suggestions for future workshops and are grateful to everyone who was able to participate.

Become a Tutor!

There is no experience needed to become a tutor. We will support you in every way.

We only ask that you be willing to commit at least two hours a week to helping our students work through their assignments.

Please call Peggy or Erin to learn more about becoming a tutor. (510) 251-1731

TUTOR APPRECIATION In recognition of our exceptional team of volunteers, our annual Tutor Appreciation Luncheon was held in January. It was a wonderful afternoon of catching up with each other personally and sharing the joy of our experiences and community at Next Step.

what's new at next step?

The Board and Staff of Next Step Learning Center are very pleased to announce the return of Philip Arca as our Executive Director. Philip has a deep dedication to our mission, a love for our students, and immense gratitude for our volunteers, donors, and community supporters. Welcome back, Philip!

Next Step Learning Center Staff

Philip Arca, 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*

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

I am proud to be part of this community, where students and volunteers learn together. I hope to partner with existing and new stakeholders to build a bright and sustainable future for Next Step.
- Philip, Executive Director

Board of Directors

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Ryan Falvey, Treasurer
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Robert Palmer
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At Next Step, we create educational pathways out of poverty.

double your impact!

Did you know that your employer could double your donation to Next Step? If your employer has a matching gift program, your gift to Next Step could go twice as far. You'd be surprised how many companies match charitable contributions made by current, retired, and even part-time employees.

Please scan this QR code to see if your company will match your donation to Next Step. It takes just a few short minutes to double your impact!

Even in retirement, my former employer continues to match my donations to Next Step. It's remarkable how much farther my support goes when it's doubled, and for a small organization, that added impact really matters. - Rob, donor

I give a shout-out to my tutor for helping me a lot and for having patience with me.
- Anthony, student