



# NextStep

## LEARNING CENTER

## “WHERE EDUCATION TRANSFORMS LIVES!”

### *A Next Step Learning Center Tutor Recounts the 2018 Graduation*

By Melinda Erikson

**N**ext Step Learning Center’s motto came alive right before my eyes, well before the familiar sounds of “Pomp and Circumstance” rang throughout the hall.

Graduates filled the sunny patio at the Sacred Heart Church in Oakland. They donned caps and gowns, posed for photos, and nibbled refreshments, trading gleeful greetings and warm hugs with students and tutors. Clearly, the festivities had already begun.

Beaming family and friends moved into the hall festooned with silver and gold balloons, flowers, and a congratulatory banner above the stage. Also joining the merry crowd were members of the Board of Directors and Co-Founders Sisters Rosemary Delaney and Cynthia Canning. Every seat was filled. Executive Director, Lisa Stringer, welcomed us all. And then the moment: the traditional graduation music began and nearly 60 Next Step students processed to the front of the auditorium with boisterous shout-outs from the audience. As I watched the scene unfold, it reminded me how truly expansive Next Step is. Yes, many of the



students filing by had successfully passed the high school equivalency tests; others had earned diplomas. Some had earned college degrees. Still others were to be inducted in the National Adult Education Honor Society. What an exhilarating feeling to be a Next Step tutor!

Graduate Arianna Johnson opened with the story of her first successful semester at college, encouraging others to pursue their dreams. The full spectrum of Next Step services was honored: Staff recognized outstanding students for their academic gains in literacy and diplomas were awarded to the fifty-three related high school completers. Finally, Nathaniel Hatton recalled his journey from learning basic skills at Next Step to completing his Associates Degree this year. Other students who had earned college certificates and degrees were acknowledged with tears, hugs and expressions of deep gratitude for the support they had received from Next Step along the way.

To rousing cheers, graduates re-joined their fans. Outside in the patio, volunteers had transformed the scene to a place for all to mingle. As if delicious cake was not enough, kids—and even some of us adults—lined up at the cotton candy machine that swirled one airy confection after another. The balloons were gifted to the youngest witnesses of a grand afternoon, all our spirits just as buoyant.



# BEYOND GRADUATION

## Next Step Grads Talk about their Path to College and Careers

It is Tuesday, and for Antionette that means one thing: Working on college homework with her Next Step tutor, Teya. After years of working with Next Step to complete her high school equivalency, you might think that Antionette's time at the center had come to a close. However, she and Teya represent a new trend of continuing college support from Next Step tutors. After graduating earlier this year, Antionette enrolled at Merritt College, where she is taking online classes to become a paralegal. She may be doing homework in the same classroom as last year, but this, she says, is different. "It's like I got taller. I have a broader vision now and am looking forward to a career."

Teya, a retired college teacher and new volunteer, enjoys their time together. "I love the opportunity to stay connected," she shares. "I am passionate about teaching and have always thought of it as a privilege." For Teya, it is Next Step's combination of academic support and personal care that attracted her to volunteer. "I read the mission and thought, 'That is the group of students I want to be with, and that is environment I want to be in.'" We are glad you are here, Teya, and are excited to be a part of what the future holds for Antoinette.

Across the room, recent grad Kimberlyn is also hard at work. She has a message for other working adults without a diploma: "Come to Next Step. They are 100% supportive and will help you put your plan into action. They teach you how to fish. Through support and tutoring they walk you through learning, hand you a degree and say to you, 'Now you are self-sufficient.'"

Kimberlyn works hard as a full time Nursing Assistant,

**90%**  
of Next Step's college students are the first in their family to go to college.

but dreams of better job options within the field. With expanded career options and a living wage in her sights, Kimberlyn completed a Licensed Vocational Nurse program in 2015. Unfortunately, she found the door to using her new skills locked. Kim is one of thousands of Americans who invest time and money in higher education having never completed high school. When classes are over, they discover that a license cannot be obtained without a diploma—a prerequisite for sitting the state exams.

Never one to give up easily, Kimberlyn found Next Step online in 2016. "It has so exceeded my expectations," she says. "I could balance work with studying for my GED—everyone is so patient and encouraging." After graduation this summer, Kim was surprised to learn that services do not stop there. She recalls, "I was elated. Honestly, I thought once you graduate your time at Next Step is over, but it's not. They offered me a retired nurse and a MD doctor as tutors to ensure I succeed."

Kimberlyn meets regularly with Next Step's College Transition Coordinator, Jennie, and prepares for her upcoming licensing exam with her tutors. "The exciting part is not just getting tutoring, but learning from them first-hand about the field. They make it come to life and give me advice. That is worth so much."



*Kimberlyn Jefferies at the NSLC Graduation*



*Teya Schaffer and Antionette work on college assignments.*

## TUTOR PERSPECTIVE

*By Peter Candell, Kimberlyn's Next Step Tutor*

Since retiring a few years ago, tutoring has become an important way for me to give back to the Oakland Community. Next Step is a particularly great place to tutor, as it's well organized and does a good job matching the student's needs with the tutor's interests and knowledge.

Working with Kim has been very rewarding, as she is motivated to succeed and really wants to learn. My background in medicine helps to provide her with useful information that she can apply.

Next Step is a very important resource for students in Oakland who need tutoring at many different levels. Having dedicated staff and tutors provides learning opportunities that make a huge difference in students' future successes in life.

## MIKEL'S STORY

*"It feels good to be in college. I never would have imagined myself enjoying getting up and going to school, but the experience so far has been great. Next Step Learning Center gave me a new perspective on life. I once saw school as a nuisance, but now I see it as a way to expand my horizons."*



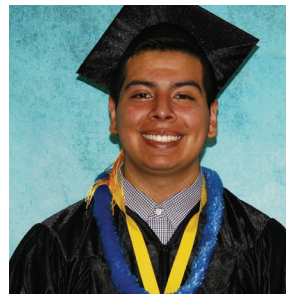
At 16 Mikel realized he was not on the path to a successful future. "It is like I woke up and thought, 'This isn't working.'" He enrolled at Next Step as soon as he was able and started knocking out the tests he thought were so insurmountable.

Mikel took advantage of the College Bridge Course offered to Next Step students who want to practice college-level work and learn about post-secondary programs. The experience convinced him he definitely could and would go to community college. He transitioned into Next Step's College Program, continued to improve his writing with a tutor, and started school at Merritt this fall. Mikel balances three classes with helping to care for his younger siblings, and is happy to be setting a strong example for them. He has always loved kids and is considering a career working with youth.

## OMAR'S STORY

Omar is a thoughtful young man who desires to consistently do things the "right" way. This comes through in his work, his interactions with others and his approach to entering his adult years. He earned his high school diploma at Next Step just in time to enroll at Laney for fall 2018. He had doubts about being ready for college responsibilities and managing both a school and work schedule. He expressed his first year anxiety so succinctly: he was worried about how to complete college level work while simultaneously learning exactly what college-level meant! Omar used the tutoring support available at Next Step for his first assignments and he reports receiving good feedback from his instructors.

*"I hit a groove and have been able to keep up with no problems. I really like that my instructor has us engaged through*

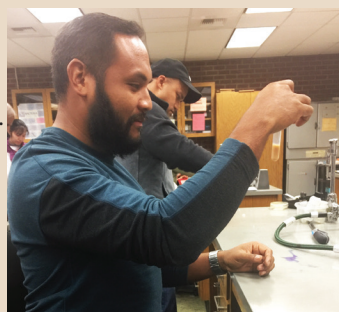


*discussion in class instead of just sitting and taking notes. We actually look at things in the context of our own reality: it's eye-opening."*

## CATCHING UP WITH FORMER GRADUATE, ALAN

**O**n any given week, over 100 students come through the doors of Next Step.

What is not so visible is the group of over 60 former Next Step alums that Jennie Emard, the NSLC college counselor, works with on campuses throughout the Bay Area. Those in the Next Step family may recognize Alan, who graduated at 29 with his GED in 2015. Having spent his teen years working to support his family, Alan embraced education at NSLC and was excited to realize he could receive continued support through the college transition program. He enrolled at Merritt College to pursue his childhood dream of becoming a nurse.



*Alan studying science in his college lab*

This fall marks the end of three years of part time college and full time work for Alan, and another milestone in his educational journey: the completion of all pre-requisites for the Associate Degree nursing program at Merritt College. A humble and hardworking student, Alan will be joining the #1 ranked nursing program in the state next fall, and they will be lucky to have him. He strives for excellence and achieves it, with a current 3.5 g.p.a. and membership in Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society, all while keeping his focus on his values.

Alan credits Next Step for helping him make it this far through academic and financial support. When he started community college, the NSLC Access Scholarship was all he had to help with textbook and tuition costs for school. He now receives traditional financial aid and is preparing for the switch to full time student next year. It is students like Alan that become the professionals we want to see in our workforce of tomorrow: courageous, tenacious and caring.

# CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP FOR

By Lisa Stringer

**G**rowing up with a learning disability can make you feel inadequate and dampen your ambition. I know for me, my early years in school were filled with frustration and humiliation. I loved to read, but was scolded for being too slow. I spent hours drafting imaginative stories, only to have them returned covered with red spelling and grammar corrections. Teachers told me I was “sloppy” or “lazy”—one told me in front of the whole class that teaching me was like “swimming in molasses.” This moment is the strongest memory I have of school. In the end, I felt school just did not want me so I decided I didn’t want school.

My experience is far from unique. Approximately half of all the students enrolling at Next Step have been in special education, and their stories are much like my own. Decades of research reveals that children with learning and attention issues are as smart as their peers and can achieve at high levels but too often are misunderstood as lazy or unintelligent. Without the right academic or emotional support, we are much more likely than our peers to repeat a grade, get suspended, and drop out. Individuals with learning issues also struggle in the workplace and have high rates of involvement with the criminal justice system. But this downward spiral can be prevented and reversed.

At Next Step we have the ability through tutoring to provide targeted, individualized support—offering a unique opportunity to learn in a way that maximizes strengths and guides through challenges. And it works. Students who were told they would not and could not graduate or learn to read do just that at Next Step. I sat down with one of these gifted and hard-working students to hear what it is like to live and learn with LD.

LD RISK FACTORS
<b>GENETICS</b>
Learning and attention issues tend to run in families.
<b>TOXIN EXPOSURE</b>
Exposure to environmental factors such as lead and fetal exposure to drugs and alcohol have been linked to learning, attention and behavior issues.
<b>ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES</b>
Trauma, such as abuse and neglect, increases the likelihood of being identified with learning or behavioral issues.

## BRENDA'S STORY

**Tell me what school was like growing up:**

Well, I was held back in first grade. At that point, they didn’t know I had a disability. I was diagnosed and they sent me to the resource room after that. It was fun, but I realize now we were not doing much academically. At that time, my mother was in prison and my dad was not in the picture. My grandma made sure I was fed and had a roof over my head, but she couldn’t do too much for me. She only had a 3rd grade education, so she couldn’t help me out with reading.

In junior high, that’s when it got really tough. You just want to fit in, but everyone made fun of us Special Ed kids—they were cruel. You know you are different... we had to sit at different tables in the cafeteria. We were alone all day in the portables at the back of the school. The bell would ring, and other kids would go to different classes, but for us it really didn’t mean anything. We didn’t have any text books, and we didn’t go to classes. I was with students in wheelchairs and all types of needs, so they just gave us photocopies and we sat by ourselves to do them. We didn’t earn many credits, and, honestly, the ones we did get they just sort of passed us through.

**What did it feel like to go back to those portables every day?** It felt like walking to death row. I was so embarrassed. There were a lot of disruptions in there—lots

## BARRIERS TO SUCCESS

### REPEATING A GRADE

A third of students with LD have been held back a year, which increases the risk of dropping out.

### SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

Students with disabilities are more than twice as likely to be suspended as those without; the loss of instruction increases school failure and aversion.

### DROPPING OUT

Students with LD drop out at nearly three times the rate of all students.

### UNEMPLOYMENT

Only 46% of working-aged adults with LD are employed.

### NOT FINISHING COLLEGE

Young adults with LD enroll in four-year colleges at half the rate of the general population. Their completion rate is only 41%.

# STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES



*Brenda studies high school science with her tutor, Meg.*

of kids with behavior problems. We would all stop and watch the fights. We didn't grow.

**What happened in high school?** High school was much the same. I got pregnant in the 8th grade. The father was older, an adult, and I think he could see how shy and vulnerable I was. When my son was born, I met with a social worker. My mother didn't show up for the meeting, so they asked me if I wanted to be emancipated. I said yes and just started working after that. I was a workaholic and a mom to my son and later my daughter. After the way I grew up, I conditioned myself to being a good mom and providing. I always told myself that after my kids graduated high school, I would go back myself.

**What was it like to come to Next Step Learning Center?** Coming to Next Step felt like coming back to first grade, but it has been a good first grade. I'm learning step by step. I came in January of 2017 and I thought I would graduate by August 2018. At first I was frustrated that I didn't make it, but then I thought, 'Hey lady, you're still in the race; stop being so hard on yourself.' My Next Step family made sure I didn't quit. I am on track to

graduate now. It feels good.

**Do you feel like you have a disability today?** Honestly, no. I was one of those kids who slipped through the cracks, and I didn't get a good start in life. I feel that no one even tried to teach me. The tools weren't given to me to navigate this thing called education. People are told they have this thing called LD—it holds them back. Today I feel smart, capable.

**What are you looking forward to after graduation?** I'm excited. My mom is excited. I will be the only one of her kids to get a diploma, and I hope I can inspire my brothers to get theirs. I want to go to college. I feel like I'm 21 again! I hope to go into teaching so I can give kids the chance I never had.

## GET INVOLVED

To donate, volunteer or get involved, visit us at [www.nextstepplc.org](http://www.nextstepplc.org) or call 510-251-1731.



## WAYS TO HELP

### RAISE AWARENESS

Learning issues can look like laziness or lack of intelligence. Environments like Next Step that remove stigma and keep high expectations are key.

### FOCUS ON POST-SECONDARY TRANSITIONS

Helping students prepare early for college greatly improves outcomes. Next Step programs focus on transitions and promote resilience and academic skills as they enter college and work.

### PERSONALIZE LEARNING

Aligning learning with students' interests, strengths and needs helps all learners, especially those with LD. Next Step's one-on-one approach is proven to improve outcomes.

### BUILDING SELF-ADVOCACY SKILLS

Helping students understand how they learn and practicing accommodations are essential for success. These skills are fostered at Next Step through mentoring and training.

# A YEAR IN REVIEW

## Next Step Learning Center Where education transforms lives



*"The only way I know how to move forward is with help. At Next Step I got the help I needed to become the person I always knew I could be"*

Next Step Student



### Mission Results

70+ dedicated volunteers.  
3,600 Hours of volunteer time  
donated.

10,000 instructional  
hours provided.



490 low-income students  
served



3 on-site community partners  
2 new programs launched  
1 continuum of services



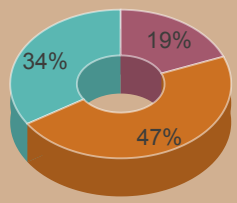
350 students increased their literacy,  
correlating to higher employment, housing and  
civic participation right here in your  
neighborhood.



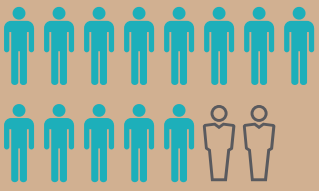
### Student Body at a Glance



#### High School Education



- < 1 year
- < 2 years
- 2 - 3 years



78% of students live  
on less than 1/3 of the  
area median income



Average math level at  
entry: 5th grade

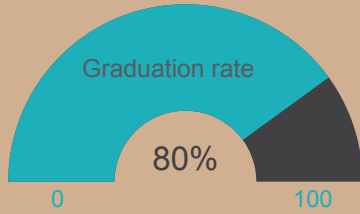


Average reading level at  
entry: 6th grade



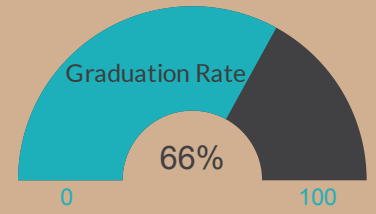
# Return on Investment

## Next Step Learning Center



Cost per student  
**\$1,559**

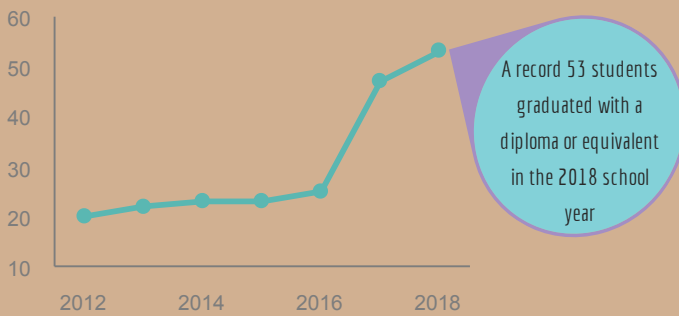
## Oakland Unified School District



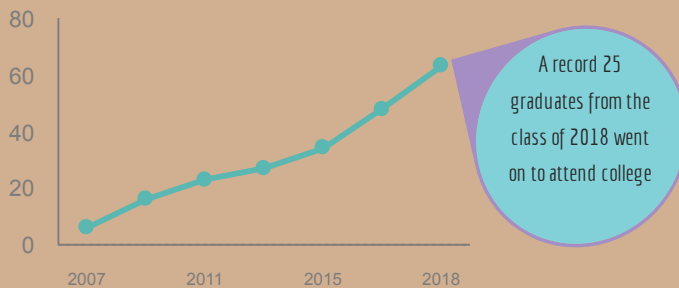
Cost per student  
**\$19,945**

## Program Growth

Next Step Graduates by Year



Next Step Graduates in College



## Student Growth

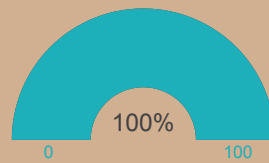


**94%**  
of graduates are working, in college or both within 6 months of completing

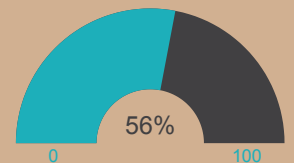


**3.16**  
The average GPA of Next Step college students

Peralta Community College Retention Rates



Next Step Learning Center  
Peralta students



Peralta Average



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## NEIGHBORS HELPING NEIGHBORS

### THE NEXT STEP WAY

New tutor Fariha (left) works on math with new student Nikki. What makes Next Step so special is the ability of the community to come together to build a stronger future. Thank you to all our tutors for your time, energy and talents. And thank you to all our students for your strength, determination and hope.

Learn more at  
[www.nextsteplc.org](http://www.nextsteplc.org)  
or call 510-251-1731.

