



Helping high school students plan and  
prepare for a future that's *best for them*.

## 2024-2025 **Impact** Report



# LETTER FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

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*In every high school hallway, there's a student standing at a crossroads. Maybe they're unsure of what comes next. Maybe the options feel overwhelming. Maybe they've simply never had the chance to explore what's possible.*

*That's where **Project Next** steps in, partnering with schools to help students turn uncertainty into direction.*

*As someone who spent nearly twenty years as a high school counselor, I've seen firsthand the monumental task our educators carry. Schools are expected to educate, nurture, and prepare young people for life—all at once. The challenge isn't that we need to try harder; it's that we need to **try differently**.*

*This year, we reached more students than ever. We expanded to **five Future Centers** across San Marcos and Escondido, partnered with **400+ professionals**, and walked alongside thousands of young people as they discovered what's next for their future.*

*Students who once described themselves as "lost" are now charting clear paths—earning apprenticeships, pursuing higher education or training, landing their first jobs, and realizing they do belong in rooms that once felt out of reach.*

*At Project Next, we meet students where they are, give them the tools and guidance to build **clarity, confidence, and connections**, and stand beside them as they take their next step.*

*Because talent is everywhere, but opportunity is not—and that's a gap we refuse to accept.*

*Our impact this year is proof of what's possible when educators, businesses, and community champions collaborate to reimagine what readiness can look like. But to continue this momentum, we need more partners who share our belief that every student deserves the chance to own their next.*

**Join us.** Volunteer, collaborate, invest, or simply share our story. Together, we can ensure no student crosses that graduation stage wondering "Now what?"—but instead walks with a plan, a purpose, and the power to shape their future.

*With gratitude and determination,*

*Lisa Stout*

LISA STOUT | EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

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## Key Accomplishments

- Recipient of San Diego County Office of Education Equity Excellence Award
- Finalist, Nonprofit Executive of the Year, San Diego Business Journal
- Finalist, Nonprofit of the Year, Medium Size, San Diego Business Journal
- Nominated, Lisa Stout, Rising Star in the Nonprofit Sector, San Diego Magazine
- Launched 2 new Future Centers





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# PROJECT NEXT STAFF



**LISA STOUT**  
Executive Director



**SARA MONTTOOTH**  
Programs Director



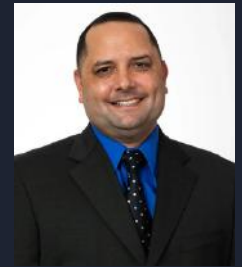
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& Development



**KATHY GALLAGHER**  
Finance/Operations



**JIM BETTENCOURT**  
Public Information  
Officer

## CAREER COACHES



**ALEJANDRO ARELLANO**



**AMANDA MORALES**



**TATIANA OSORIO**



**LIONEL SAULSBERRY**



**ADRIANA TOLEDO**  
FINANCIAL AID COACH



**CLINT TYSALL**



# FUTURE CENTERS

## Where students discover what's possible.

Every day, students walk into our Future Centers with questions about their next step—and leave with direction, confidence, and support.

Our five Future Centers welcomed students **5,300** times this year. Each visit represents a moment of courage, curiosity, or growth: a student exploring their interests, preparing for a job interview, or realizing for the first time that their dreams are within reach.

### CLARITY

**470 students** completed the **SuperStrong® Interest Assessment**, helping them identify their strengths, align their interests with career pathways, and see a future that fits.

### CONFIDENCE

Over **300 students** created professional resumes, practiced interviewing, and gained real-world readiness through **42 mock interviews**. Additionally, **283 students** participated in **Interview Skills Day**.

### CONNECTIONS

**90 Future Center events** generated **2,400+ student touchpoints**, connecting young people with **400 professionals** across **100 hours** of immersive experiences—from Skillshops and Career Chats to large-scale industry events.

### COACHING & MENTORSHIP

Career Coaches provided over **1,300 one-on-one sessions** to nearly **900 students**, offering personalized support with resumes, job applications, college planning, and goal setting.

### FINANCIAL AID SUPPORT

Our Financial Aid Coach helped **350+ students** complete financial aid applications and understand their options—ensuring cost isn't a barrier to opportunity.

“ I walked into the Future Center just looking for a job but after lots of meetings with my career coach, I walked out with a plan for my future that I'm excited about. – Student ”

“ Project Next doesn't just prepare students for the future—it changes how they see themselves in the future. – School Counselor ”

# PROGRAMS

Our programs don't just equip students for the future — they help them believe they have one worth pursuing. Many experience, often for the first time, being truly heard, supported, and guided toward real possibilities.

## FOCUSED FUTURES PROGRAM

Many students furthest from opportunity grow up believing that higher education or career training “isn't for people like me.” Focused Futures changes that narrative by guiding students through a two-year journey of exploration, goal-setting, and mentorship that helps them identify their strengths, uncover possibilities, and take actionable steps toward college, training, or meaningful careers— rewriting the story of what's possible for their future.

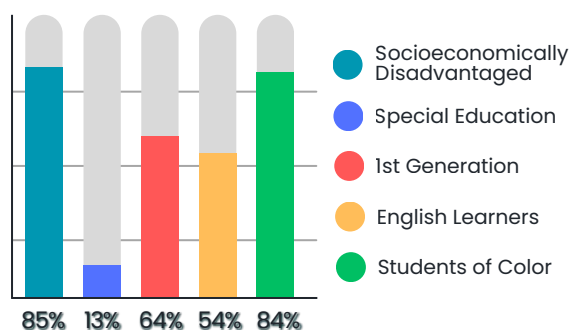
This year, **109 students** gained guidance that helped them transform doubt into direction.

When students believe in themselves, the outcomes follow:

**75%** of all participants now have a post-graduation plan.

**72%** are pursuing high education or training

*“Before I found the Future Center, I didn't really think college was for someone like me. But being here, having people actually listen and help me figure things out—it made me believe in myself. Now I know I want to help other kids like me see what's possible too.” — Participant*



*“Because of Project Next, I know that I belong in these spaces- and I'm unafraid to walk through the doors.” — Participant*



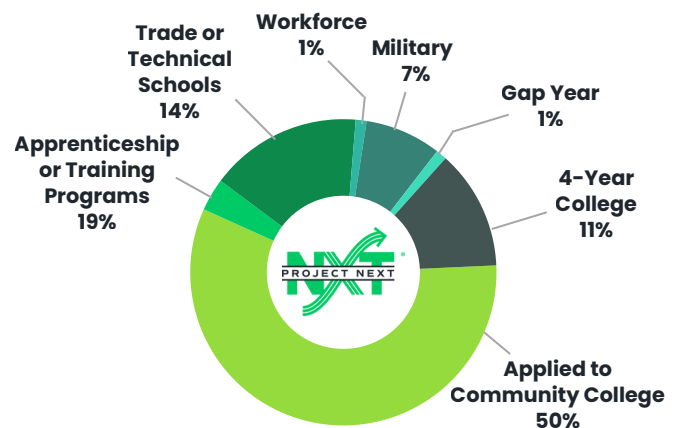
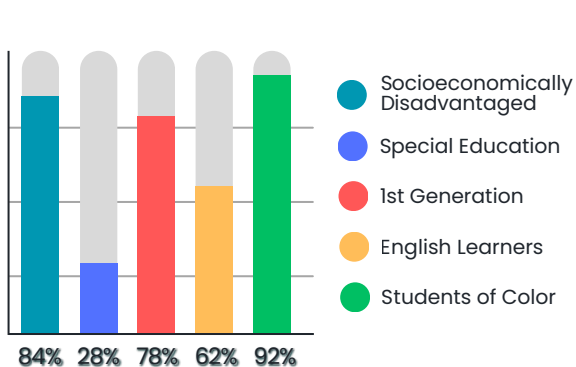


# XCELERATE PROGRAM



For students who aren't on the college track, the future can feel out of reach. Xcelerate meets them where they are, offering the mentoring, career exposure, and skill-building they need to move forward with purpose.

This year, **83 students** discovered pathways they never knew existed. By year's end, 87% had applied to or enrolled in higher education or training, joined the workforce, or enlisted in the military.



*"I've never been a big fan of school, so I just assumed my options after high school were pretty limited. College isn't for me but I had no idea what else was out there. Then I found Xcelerate. I've met people with legit jobs that don't require college, jobs I didn't even know existed. Now I know I have options and that feels real good." - Participant*

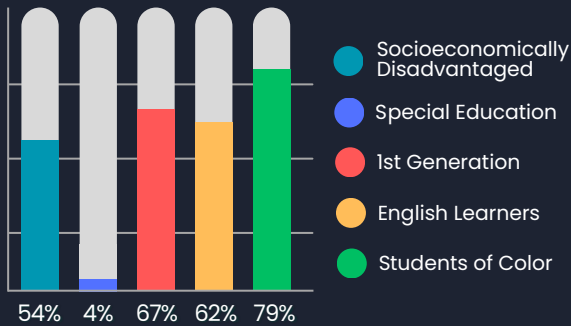
# AMBASSADOR PROGRAM: VOICES THAT LEAD

Empowered students inspire others.

At Project Next, we believe that when students have a voice in shaping their experience, they become the most powerful advocates for change.

This year, 24 students served as Project Next Ambassadors, representing their peers, supporting Future Center activities, and sharing their stories at school and community events. Along the way, they gained hands-on experience in leadership, communication, and collaboration.

“Through Project Next, I’ve learned to speak up for myself and for others. I used to be nervous about talking to professionals—now I see that my story has power. — Ambassador”



## 2024–2025 Project Next High School Ambassadors

Samara Allen Lanum  
Cassidy Baum  
Kaydence Buckmaster  
Casey Carroll  
Betsy Duran

Violeta Emigdio  
Emireth Escobedo  
Delilah Garcia Calderon  
Saul Guillen  
Diego Haro

Addison Isaac  
Jaden Knight  
Nancy Mendiola  
Janice Merino  
Paige Mumma

Brianna Narvaiz  
Jasmin Perez  
Mayrany Quiroz  
Bianca Rodriguez  
Hazel Rodriguez

Daisy Rubio  
Adela Sanchez  
Nancy Telles  
Sydney Williams

Leadership isn’t a title. It’s the courage to share your voice.





# READI PROGRAM: OPENING DOORS IN REAL ESTATE

Representation builds belonging.

Through our continued partnership with the University of San Diego's Burnham-Moores Center for Real Estate, Project Next brought the Real Estate Awareness & Discovery Initiative (READI) semester-long program to students at Mission Hills and Escondido High Schools.

This year, 20 students explored real estate careers- from architecture and development to finance, management, and design- through company visits and conversations with industry professionals.

Programs like READI help students see new possibilities and see themselves in fields where they've historically been underrepresented- turning awareness into aspiration.

“ I learned so much about the business side of real estate and the many different jobs within it. I met people who looked like me, who inspired me to think bigger. — Student ”



“ Commercial real estate offers many diverse career opportunities that are rarely seen by students in underserved communities. As a commercial real estate owner/executive, I have tried various ways to reach into these underserved areas to attract talent into our industry....and, wasn't very successful. The READI program is a huge step forward with this goal by planting seeds with high school students in these areas and providing insight and connections to commercial real estate as a career option. —Dennis Cruzan, Principal and Founder at CRUZAN ”





# EVENTS

When students experience the world beyond the classroom, they start to see their place in it. Project Next events connect young people with professionals, workplaces, and real-world opportunities that bring learning to life. Each experience helps students replace uncertainty with confidence—and transforms “I don’t know what’s next” into “I’m ready for it.”

## CONNECT TO CAREERS

Connect to Careers events are vital for bridging the gap between education and the workforce. These events connect high school students with local professionals and industry leaders, providing crucial exposure to career opportunities.

### Special thanks to our participating companies:

ASML  
Bernards  
Cal Coast Credit Union  
City of San Marcos  
CSUSM  
DPR Construction  
Dr. Bronner’s  
EDCO  
Erickson-Hall Construction  
First Responders  
Frontwave Arena  
General Automics  
Harrah’s Resort Southern California  
Hunter Industries  
Jack in the Box

JP Morgan Chase & Co.  
Lozano Smith LLP  
Lusardi Construction  
Marsh McLennan Agency  
North County Transit District  
Palomar Health Rehabilitation Institute  
Quality Controlled Manufacturing Inc.  
Thermo Fisher Scientific  
TrueCare  
Turner Construction  
US Bank  
Vallecitos Water District  
Viasat  
WD-40 Company

**130** | **150** | **30**  
Students | Professionals | Companies

*“The event allowed for me to speak and make connection with others in different fields that I never imagined myself in. It made me open my mind up to new opportunities.” – Student*





## CAREER NEXTPEDITIONS

**Turning curiosity into career clarity.** Through immersive, behind-the-scenes visits to local companies, students explore a variety of careers, discover new interests, and see firsthand what it takes to succeed in different industries.

Special thanks to our partners:

ABCSD  
ACR Program, Palomar College  
Action Heating & Air  
Cultura  
Palomar College Nursing Program  
Palomar Institute of Cosmetology  
Resmed  
San Diego Automotive Technology Career Day  
San Diego International Airport  
SDG&E  
Show Imaging  
Trades Day at Palomar College  
Viasat

*"What I liked best about this event was that I learned about a career path that I didn't know about and was able to get more exposure to different careers." — Student*

**12** | **76** | **347**  
Company Visits | Professionals | Students

## NEXTWORKING

**Turning introductions into opportunities.** Through guided networking with professionals, students learn how to start meaningful conversations, share their stories, and build relationships that open doors. They walk away not only with contacts, but with confidence.

Special thanks to:

Chase Bank, Gafcon PM-CM LLC, and SDG&E for hosting individual Nextworking Events.

**206** | **199** | **31**  
Students | Professionals | Companies

*"I liked the emphasis on tiny details and how it instilled confidence in me that I can network effectively." — Student*





# INTERVIEW SKILLS DAY

**Turning uncertainty into confidence.** Interview Skills Day gives students the tools and practice to walk into any interview with confidence and professionalism. With direct feedback from industry volunteers, students learn how to present themselves, share their strengths, and leave lasting impressions.

**283**  
Students

**66**  
Professionals



*"I loved getting the 'inside scoop' on what employers look for. I learned plenty of great tips, and got to ask my professional about how these skills can apply to future interviews." — Student*

## SKILLSHOPS

**Turning real-world questions into lifelong skills.** Skillshops equip students with essential knowledge for life beyond high school — from budgeting and taxes to goal-setting and future planning. These hands-on workshops help students build the practical skills that aren't always taught in classrooms but shape the foundation for adult success.

*93% of students agreed or strongly agreed that the **presentation content** was helpful.*

*91% said the session will help them make real decisions as an adult, especially around financial choices and career readiness.*

*"It helped me understand credit cards and loans — things adults deal with every day." — Student*

**48**  
Skillshops

Life Skills &  
Financial Literacy



# CAREER CHATS

**Turning conversations into career possibility.** Career Chats bring professionals into the Future Centers to share their journeys, answer student questions, and offer honest insight into their industries. Students walk away with new understanding, expanded horizons, and inspiration for their own next steps.

**17**  
Sessions

Dozens of  
professionals &  
industries

*Over 90 percent of Career Chat participants said the session will help them make decisions about their future, whether college, career, or post-grad planning.*

*"This made me more confident about what I want to do after high school." — Student*



## "FUND YOUR NEXT " INITIATIVE:

### REMOVING BARRIERS TO WHAT'S POSSIBLE

Every dream deserves a plan—and a path to afford it.

For many students, the financial aid process can feel overwhelming, especially when their families are unfamiliar with the system or unable to help them navigate it. Fund Your Next helps ensure that cost never becomes the barrier that closes a door.

This year, our Financial Aid Coach supported **392 students** in completing their FAFSA or CADAA applications — each one a door opened to college, training, or career opportunities that might otherwise have felt out of reach.

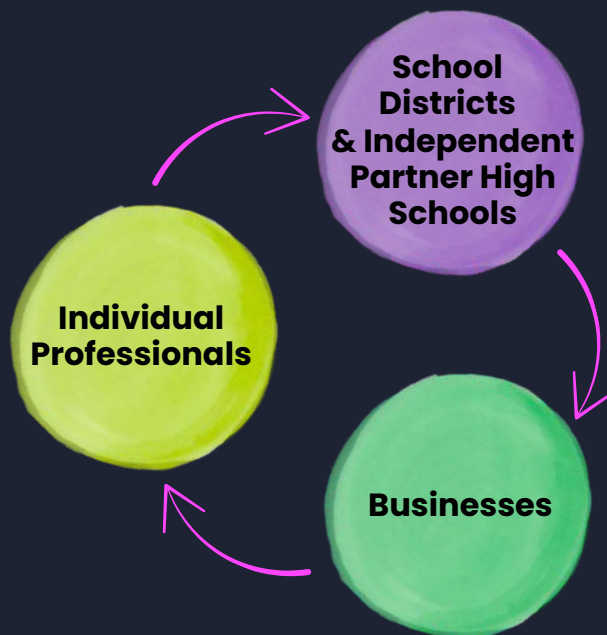
*"I didn't think college was even an option for me because I had no idea how to pay for it. Project Next walked me through it, step by step—and now I'm enrolled." — Student*





# KEY PARTNERS

Collaboration with **individual professionals**. Local professionals passionate about students volunteer their time and talent to share their career journeys and provide a glimpse into day-to-day in their field. This year over **400 local professionals**, representing **over 130 companies**, gave their time, talent, and treasure to help our students.



**School districts and individual partner high schools.** Schools provide the space on campus for our Future Centers, unparalleled access to students, and a strong referral network that includes teachers, social workers and counselors.

**Businesses** host students at their offices for career expeditions, showing students a variety of careers within a company and different types of work environments.

“  
I am not aware of another program in the county that is creating a more effective pathway to student success than Project Next. - Joe Bertocchini, Senior Manager of Student, Industry and Alumni Development Burnham-Moores Center for Real Estate  
”

“  
Project Next has emerged as an essential partner in building bridges between education, industry, and community leaders—ensuring that the next generation of graduates is prepared to contribute meaningfully to North County’s economic vitality. The return on this investment will be seen not only in the lives of individual students, but in the prosperity and resilience of our entire region. - Erik Bruvold, CEO, San Diego North Economic Development Council  
”

## EDUCATION PARTNERS



Escondido High School



Escondido Charter High School



Mission Hills High School



San Marcos High School



Twin Oaks/Foothills High School



# CORPORATE & FOUNDATION PARTNERS



**\$15,000+**

- Issa Family Foundation
- Judith Campbell Educational/Community Foundation
- State Farm Foundation

**\$10,000+**

- Banc of California
- Hunter Industries Inc.
- Kamron Palizban
- Nemeth Foundation
- Nordson Corporation Foundation
- Robert L. and Margaret K. Balmes Family Trust
- The Country Friends
- The Samuel H. French and Katherine Weaver French Fund
- The Welk Family Philanthropies, Inc.

**\$5,000+**

- Arthur P. Pratt & Jeanette Gladys Pratt Memorial Fund
- C.J. Stafford and Dot Stafford Memorial Trust
- Goodwin Family Memorial Trust
- James C. Stewart Charitable Foundation
- Meum Family
- Lennar
- Raytheon
- SDG&E
- TEGNA Foundation
- The Jack in the Box Foundation

## FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

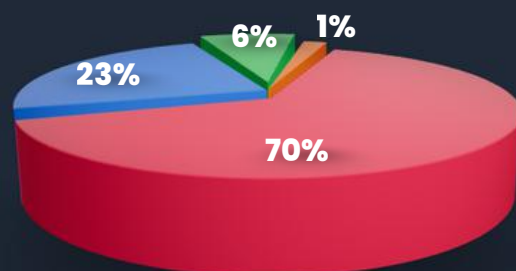
**Every dollar tells a story of impact.**

We believe transparency builds trust—and that each dollar entrusted to us is an investment in possibility.

This year, the majority of every dollar we received went directly to student-centered programs and services.

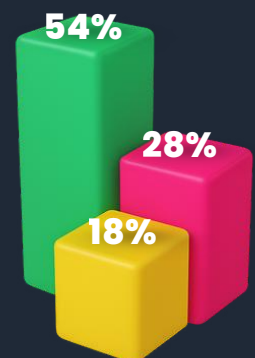
### Donor Types

- Foundation
- Corporate
- Government
- Individual



### Expenses

- Programs
- Administration
- Fundraising





# OUR NEXT

*Our work is only possible because of you.*

*Every student achievement in these pages began with someone who believed in what's possible. A teacher who made a referral. A professional who shared their story. A business that opened its doors. A supporter who invested in a dream.*

*You—our partners, investors, and champions—turn potential into progress. Your support creates belonging, purpose, and confidence for students who might otherwise navigate their futures alone.*

*And because of you, that impact is growing. In the 2025–26 school year, Project Next will expand into two new schools and another district, opening doors for hundreds more students to receive the guidance, mentorship, and real-world experiences that can change the trajectory of a life.*

*Imagine every student walking across the graduation stage not just holding a diploma, but carrying a plan, a sense of purpose, and the belief that they can shape what comes next.*

*That's the future we're building together.*

## **Join us in the NXT Movement!**

Help us bring Future Centers to more schools, more students, and more communities.

**Make an investment, volunteer, or partner today!**



**DONATE**



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