

# RISING STAR

## CELEBRATE



In 1998, Wendy Tokuda had a vision. A vision to open the doors toward college for first-generation, low-income students who had demonstrated a deep commitment to education and strength of character while overcoming tremendous odds.

During these first five years and through countless student stories of hardship, perseverance and hope, told through the lens of award-winning journalist Wendy Tokuda and Javier Valencia, this vision became a reality. In 2003, with the official naming as a 501(c)(3) organization, Students Rising Above was born.

**Now in its 20th year, Students Rising Above is closing the opportunity gap and building the next generation of a more diverse and representative workforce.**

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Students Rising Above is continuing to invest in first-generation college students who are motivated to change the trajectory of their lives through education. We are proud to share:

- 800+ students from nine Bay Area counties have been sent on their college-to-career journey
- **91 percent graduate from college in 5 years or less** - eight times the national average for students from similar backgrounds
- SRA students graduate from college **with little to no student loan debt**
- 15,000+ registered users on the SRA Hub, a virtual platform, scaling a decade of college and career advising expertise, reaching the maximum number of students across the country

It is with warm gratitude that we thank our dedicated angel investors, donors, partners and growing alumni community. With your commitment and support, SRA students are reaching their social, academic, and professional potential and transforming into our future leaders.

Here's to 20 years strong and many more to come! Celebrate with us on social media: **#20YearsofSRA**

Thank you,  
Carolina Martín, Executive Director  
Students Rising Above

## Stevon Cook, SRA Alum and Board Member Named President of the San Francisco Board of Education



Stevon Cook, CEO Mission Bit, providing SRA summer interns with tools and opportunities to teach coding and tech skills

***"We all have responsibility to improve our communities. We are the ones we've been waiting for." - Stevon Cook***

September 25, 2018 marks an exciting day for Students Rising Above! Stevon Cook, SRA alum, board member and CEO of Mission Bit, the San Francisco computer programming start-up, striving to eliminate the tech divide for youth living in poverty across the Bay Area, has been named President of the San Francisco Board of Education. Stevon succeeds Hydra Mendoza as the Board President.

With a deep-rooted commitment to creating opportunities for the next generation, Stevon has played an active role in Bay Area education and policy programs for over 10 years. Stevon is a third generation San Franciscan and alum of Thurgood Marshall High School. During his undergraduate years at Williams College in rural Massachusetts, he became active in business and a leader in a community service organization called the Griffin's Society. Upon graduating with a degree in American Studies, Stevon returned to San Francisco to serve in the first graduating class of the Mayor's City Hall Fellows program.

In 2016, Stevon was elected to the San Francisco Board of Education, most recently serving as Vice President and now as President on the Board of Education.

*"Stevon has been part of the SRA family for over a decade and we are so thankful for his passion for the organization and commitment to making change," said Carolina Martín, Students Rising Above Executive Director. "We are proud of everything Stevon has accomplished thus far, including the exciting announcement as the President of the San Francisco Board of Education. We're looking forward to continuing this journey together, paving new pathways for our students across the Bay Area and beyond."*

It is because of our dedicated donors, supporters and partners that over 800 first-generation college students in and around the Bay Area have been able to pursue their dreams of obtaining a college degree, with little to no student loan debt.

**Read on for an exclusive Q&A with Stevon to learn how he has gotten where he is today, and his vision for the future of education.**



Stevon Cook, CEO Mission Bit, President, San Francisco Board of Education, SRA Alum & Board Member

**How have you accomplished all of your successes and milestones over the last decade?**

*Stevon: I'm driven by my deep-rooted passion for making an impact and leaving a legacy that my community can be proud of, as was true for my grandmother and great grandfather, who both lived every day to serve others.*

*I believe that I have an opportunity and responsibility to continue this legacy and be of service for the next generation.*

### What led to your interest and now leadership in politics, education and tech?

*Stevon: At a young age, my grandmother introduced my sister and me to historical figures that had created social change. We spent much of our downtime writing and practicing public speaking.*

*It was my senior year at Thurgood Marshall High School when my interest in politics solidified, following a very public and nationally televised fight that broke out due to unrest in leadership of our school. This was when my urgency to perform well and create change set in.*

*It was my transition to Mission Bit, when I knew this was an exciting leadership opportunity to put things in the hands of young people, opening their minds and changing their future.*

### What does Students Rising Above mean to you?

*Stevon: Students Rising Above means community. A community of individuals, all who have the same objective in mind - to provide opportunity for low-income, first-generation students to successfully get to and through college and transition into adult life.*

*I am so grateful for SRA's commitment to me and helping lay the groundwork for my future. Students Rising Above provides such an incredible resource for today's youth, who I truly believe are the future of this country.*

### Do you have tips for students who are pursuing an internship and / or entering the workforce?

*Stevon: Beyond nailing down your resume and pitch, I always standby asking yourself one question: "how badly do I want this?" From there, go where there's the greatest need and don't be afraid to ask for opportunities.*

### What is your vision for the future of education?

*Stevon: One of my top goals is to position our communities to do better for themselves, with the public school system being at the forefront and foundation to create this change.*

**Read more on our blog by visiting <https://studentsrisingabove.org/media/#blog>**



## Welcoming Mike Loughlin as Students Rising Above Board Chair and New Board of Directors



Mike and Sarah Loughlin at the 15th Annual Students Rising Above Gala, March 22, 2018, Ritz-Carlton, San Francisco

We're excited to announce that long-time Students Rising Above supporter and board member, Mike Loughlin, has been named SRA Board Chair, effective July 1, 2018.

Mike has been a dedicated SRA board member for over five years and recently retired after 37 years with Wells Fargo and predecessor banks. He retired as Wells Fargo's Chief Risk Officer, a role he held for 12 years, and previously spent 25 years in various line and staff functions, including chief credit officer of the Wholesale Bank, head of Corporate Banking and head of the Private Bank. Mike received a B.A. in history from the University of California, Berkeley, where he played water polo and earned two NCAA championships.

Mike will serve as the Students Rising Above Board Chair, helping us continue to break social and economic cycles of poverty by providing a new generation of a more diverse workforce. The Loughlin family has been committed to Students Rising Above for over a decade in many different capacities, including student mentorship, volunteering and Gala committee members, and we are thankful for their passion for the organization and dedication to our students and alumni.

**Read the complete Q&A with Mike Loughlin, SRA Board Chair**  
**here: <https://studentsrisingabove.org/media/#blog>**

Additionally, **Students Rising Above is thrilled to welcome Carolyn Reiser and Walter “Buzz” Stewart to SRA’s Board of Directors.** Carolyn is a Partner at Shartsis Frieese LLP, a leading San Francisco law firm, and is a senior member of the firm’s corporate department and investment management practice group. Carolyn received concurrent B.A. and M.A. degrees in philosophy, *summa cum laude*, from Yale University and subsequently studied philosophy in Frankfurt, Germany as a Fulbright Scholar. She holds a J.D. from Yale Law School.

Walter “Buzz” Stewart brings to SRA in-depth knowledge and 20 years of experience with data analytics and use of digital applications, more than 30 years of success in writing federal and industry funded grant proposals, entrepreneurial success with start-ups, and experience as a university faculty member and teacher. Buzz earned his Ph.D. at Johns Hopkins University, where he served on the faculty for 15 years. He also received his Masters of Public Health from UCLA and BS in Psychobiology from UC Riverside.

On behalf of the SRA student and alumni community, we are grateful for our Board of Directors, who are all key stakeholders in helping us provide new opportunities and pathways for first-generation college students today and for years to come.

## 5 Reasons Why to Fly-In to College



Marilyn Nguyen, KIPP San Jose Collegiate senior and SRA Class of 2019, visiting Duke University, September 21, 2018

It's Fly-In season! Just last week, SRA high school seniors started flying around the country to visit colleges they dream of attending next year. As fall continues, many more SRA students will participate in Fly-Ins from as close as Southern California to as far as Maine.

Students apply for Fly-Ins during the summer and early fall. If accepted, the colleges fly the students in, where they will spend one or two nights with other high school seniors from similar backgrounds, attend classes and presentations, and learn about the school. **Fly-Ins are extraordinarily competitive; with acceptance rates at 10-15 percent; they are consistently more competitive than getting accepted into the college itself!**

Despite this difficulty, every year SRA has had at least 10 students selected to attend Fly-Ins. This year, with 10 acceptances out of 22 applicants, SRA has a much higher acceptance rate than the 15 percent average, with many more expected. While we've had students visit Lewis and Clark, University of Pennsylvania, and Wesleyan almost every year, we now have students participating in Amherst, Bowdoin, and Duke Fly-Ins, to name just a few.

### Here are the top reasons why to Fly-In:

1. Students can **visit a college campus even if you do not have the financial means**
2. Because Fly-In Programs focus on underrepresented students, all the programming and hosts are chosen with that population in mind
3. Students can learn what you want in your college experience: Large or small? Urban or rural?
4. Even if a student is not accepted to a Fly-In, it shows their interest to the college and **many colleges will provide a leg up to Fly-In applicants**
5. They are FUN! Students meet many peers from similar backgrounds with the same dream of going to college

As first-generation, low-income students, most of whom are of color, getting accepted by Students Rising Above may be the first time that they have realized that college is a possibility. **It is difficult to make a decision about applications with limited knowledge; Fly-Ins can make up that gap.**



*"Visiting Bowdoin, I didn't know what to expect. However as the days went on, I slowly started to fall more and more in love with it," said Lilliana Sandoval, senior at Antioch High School. "From the students to the faculty to the town, there's a great sense of community. I also really enjoyed how close it is to nature, right out your back door."*

Fly-Ins are a critical part of the college application process for first-generation students. They provide an excellent way for students to explore new college options that they never would have heard of without the encouragement from their SRA Advisors and College Outreach Team.

**Read more on our blog by visiting <https://studentsrisingabove.org/media/#blog>**



## Internship Spotlight: Building Pathways to Change The World

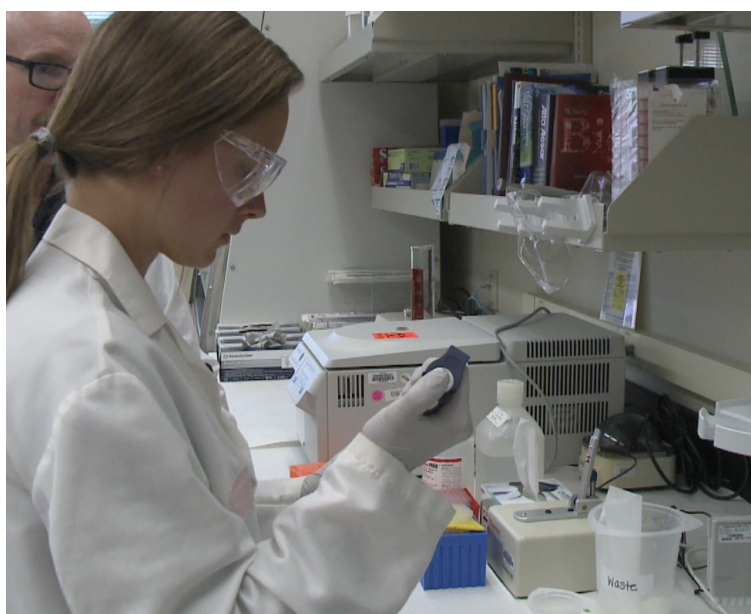
This summer, SRA students pursued internships with leading Bay Area companies, including **Autodesk, Cisco, Facebook, Google, Kaiser Permanente**, among others. These incredible internship opportunities are made possible by our robust multi-year Career Development curriculum, comprised of workshops, webinars, an extensive network of career mentor volunteers in a broad range of professions, and individualized coaching. We are committed to ensuring that when our students graduate, they have strong resumes filled with meaningful professional experiences that have given them the skills, confidence, and connections to be competitive as they transition from college into the workforce.

This month, we're highlighting a few of our favorite summer 2018 internship stories! Watch **Centurion Barron, UC Merced** sophomore and Engineering intern with **The Ritz-Carlton, San Francisco** and **Olivia Di Santo, San Diego State University** junior and Preclinical and Translational Pharmacokinetics **Genentech** Intern share their journey in pursuing dreams of working in leading roles in engineering and biotech.

**Christin Ayers, CBS San Francisco Bay Area KPIX 5 reports: [cbsSF.com/sra](http://cbsSF.com/sra).**



Centurion Barron, UC Merced sophomore and Engineering intern with The Ritz-Carlton, San Francisco



Olivia Di Santo, San Diego State University, Preclinical and Translational Pharmacokinetics Genentech Intern



Christina Craner, SRA Alum with Mae Isidro CSU Sonoma junior at Internship in Building Community, Columbia University

**Mae Isidro CSU Sonoma** junior spent her summer in New York City with **Building Community at Columbia University**. Read on for Mae's journey, a perfect example of the myriad of ways SRA students grow, both personally and professionally, through our robust internship program.

My internship this summer was at Columbia University in New York City. I was working for the Internship in Building Community (IBC) as a Residential Advisor and Program Assistant for Columbia's Summer Program for High School Students, responsible for making sure all students in our program were safe, while also giving them a chance to experience New York City. I was very nervous leaving my family and going across the country since it was going to be my first time getting on a plane alone, but I knew I wanted to try something different.

Before the internship started, I was intimidated about working with students who were "different" than me. All my life I had been around and grew up with people with similar backgrounds: extreme poverty, violence, struggles, abuse, etc. These students were different, they came from wealthy families from actresses and actors to CEOs, and that was very nerve racking. I was afraid that my "struggle" would show and they would not be open to building relationships with me since they might look at me as "unrelatable." It was common for me to find insecurities and put myself down since I started this internship being closed off, scared and quiet because I didn't know if I belonged.

As I kept myself busy making friends, being a New York tourist, and working, I realized that I had not been homesick at all. With the help of Christina Craner, an SRA Alum who had worked with Columbia IBC multiple summers, I didn't need to call back home. It felt like home, working with her in the office since we both were students rising above all the obstacles that came our way. I was not constantly calling home and that just shows a lot about the fun I had there and how important it was for me to prioritize my education. I was putting myself first - and I cannot express how happy I was in New York. Looking back, I cannot remember the last time I felt this true happiness.

Not only was I able to become a tourist in New York, from going to museums, Times Square, the Apollo Theater, and more, I also had the opportunity to visit Washington, DC with the help of my internship. I was able to tour the Capitol and see the White House for the first time! When I was a junior in high school applying to SRA, I never thought I'd be able to obtain these opportunities that SRA has provided for me.

Everything changed from the beginning of my summer to the end. I started to realize applying for this internship was one of the best decisions I made in my life. Spending my summer in New York City brought my self-esteem up and erased this idea that I had about rich and poor people being "different." I started becoming comfortable in my own skin and those who know my story, understand that took a lot of courage. Spending the whole summer in New York has been my highlight of the year. I learned what true happiness felt like, I became such a positive person. I could not wait to bring this "new" Mae back home. For any SRA students who are thinking about applying to internships but are scared of leaving what feels like home to you, JUST DO IT. Let those worries go and explore the unknown. You won't regret it!

Read more on our blog: <https://studentsrisingabove.org/media/#blog>

## Mark Your Calendars!

Join **Artquest Sunday, October 14, 2018** from 1 p.m. - 4 p.m., at St Mark's Episcopal Church in Palo Alto. We invite you to meet SRA students and pursue beautiful artwork from local artists, 30 percent of proceeds benefiting SRA!

Learn more about the featured artists

**REGISTER HERE:**

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/artquest-reception-registration-49961105010>