While U.S. college degree attainment has increased to an all-time high of 46% nationwide, serious opportunity gaps for first-generation college students from underserved communities still remain. On average, 65% of low-income youth graduate from high school and 45% will enroll in college, but only 11% will complete postsecondary degrees.

In light of the recent troubling college admissions news, it is critical for disenfranchised youth to have access to a college education in order to meet workforce demands, and to create a better life for themselves, their families, and future generations.

Now is the time for colleges and universities to build truly inclusive institutions and for peer organizations to provide the support to close the gap and level the playing-field for first-generation college students, our future leaders.

First-generation college students face multiple barriers to college access and completion - financial constraints, limited knowledge of how to navigate the college and financial aid application process, and community or family stresses keep many qualified low-income high school graduates from pursuing or completing college. And while a college education is increasingly important in today’s knowledge-based economy, academic acumen alone does not always lead to successful employment. Lack of social capital can create a crucial gap in one’s employability.

Students Rising Above works to close these gaps and helps students break the cycle of poverty and achieve their college and career dreams. With SRA’s support, 91% of our students graduate from college in 5 years or less (eight times the national average) with little to no student loan debt and 88% are entering career-ladder positions or grad school within 12 months post-graduation. The success of SRA Alumni proves that when we invest in our students’ vast potential, the benefits are real, measurable, and widespread.

In celebration of College Signing Day - May 1, 2019 - we are thrilled to share that 100% of our 75 Rising Stars High School seniors have committed to attend college this fall. They will matriculate at over 30 colleges and universities across the country, including Connecticut College, Davidson College, Duke University, Oberlin College, Pitzer College, Sonoma State University, Swarthmore College, UC Berkeley, UCLA, UC Merced, University of Pennsylvania, Wesleyan University, Williams College, and Yale University.

As our 75 Rising Stars High School seniors prepare for their college-to-career journey, we’re beyond proud of our 93 upcoming college graduates, a majority of whom will be the first in their families to complete their postsecondary degree this spring and enter into the workforce. We are here for our students every step of the way - and applaud all first-generation college students across the country!
Internships are a key part of the college-to-career experience. Data shows a majority of employers believe that internship experience is of paramount importance when they consider recent college graduate job candidates. Paired with a strong resume, high-level internships can be the make-or-break key to landing the career-ladder jobs that lead so many first-generation college students to success.

We had the opportunity to sit down with one of our most dedicated internship partners and change-maker, Cynthia Chandler, Adjunct Professor for the University California, Berkeley School of Law and Director of BALI, Bay Area Legal Incubator, an Oakland-based, social-mission, legal incubator launched by the Alameda County Bar Association to accelerate the launch of affordable, community law practices.

Ms. Chandler has been an SRA advocate for over 10 years, having hired 15+ SRA interns and aspiring law professionals and proudly shares this message with potential employers: "If you want a go-getter, hire from Students Rising Above!"

Read the Q&A below for more inspiration!

**BALI’s mission is extremely powerful and seems like you do incredible work. What do you do and what was your inspiration behind founding BALI?**

Cynthia: *In short, I am a fairy godmother: I help entrepreneurial attorneys from disenfranchised communities realize their dreams of building innovative, visionary, and sustainable community law practices that have social impact. More specifically, I am launching and building a social mission legal incubator to accelerate the development of law practices with community impact.*
How did you hear about Students Rising Above and what excited you about the organization?

Cynthia: I first heard about Students Rising Above over 10 years ago through a friend and previous colleague and have since hired over 15 SRA interns over the years. I’ve always run nonprofits that have served similar under-resourced communities; working with SRA students felt like an extension of the organization and it has been a perfect fit since day one.

What has your experience been working with Students Rising Above?

Cynthia: Completely positive! I have never encountered more professional, capable and dedicated undergrad law interns as SRA scholars. It’s such a joy to mentor this amazing group of young people and also know that each and every student that comes through the door is highly capable and passionate about pursuing a future in the legal profession.

What surprised you in working with this group of students?

Cynthia: I have hired over 600 interns over the last decade and each and every time I work with Students Rising Above, I am pleasantly surprised by the caliber of talent - all SRA interns come prepared, professional and eager to learn. I think this really speaks to not only the dedication of each SRA scholar, but also invaluable professional development training and skills they are receiving through Students Rising Above.

Have you seen any results across your organization as a direct result of these internships?

Cynthia: I’ve been able to rely on SRA interns to take the lead in developing efficiency systems. Because of their familiarity with tech, they’ve helped build key infrastructures, as they embrace technology at a more rapid pace.

What does Diversity and Inclusion mean to you?

Cynthia: It means including these important values at the core of decision making and organizational structure. We need to be deliberate in building organizations that foster a more diverse and inclusive culture from its foundation.

Why do you think organizations like SRA are important to our future leaders? What is the impact?

Cynthia: If you don’t have legacy connections, it’s hard to get your foot in the door from the very beginning. Students Rising Above opens entry points for our future leaders and helps them flourish in higher level institutions and career paths once they’re there.

We are proud to partner with hundreds of corporations and organizations in and around the Bay Area and beyond, offering our students invaluable internship opportunities in diverse industries. Check out a snapshot of our internship partners below and follow us on the SRA Blog to see where our students are landing fulfilling internships this summer!
We’re so thankful for our community of over 400 Students Rising Above volunteers. From mentors, corporate volunteers, essay and resume editors, and more - our dedicated network of volunteers help make a direct impact on our students through their hours of support, guidance and expertise.

In keeping with our tradition of honoring our incredible volunteers, we select a volunteer who has embodied the dedication, passion, and commitment of our first Students Rising Above Volunteer of the Year, Donna Gaetano.

It’s our honor to announce the recipients of the 2019 SRA Donna Gaetano Award. Congratulations to Bryce Anderson and Cathy Boutros!

Bryce and Cathy are two of our most committed volunteers, who have dedicated hundreds of hours to SRA over the last 15 years and are both synonymous to the Annual SRA Gala!

Cathy started serving on the SRA Gala Committee in 2004 and has been on the Gala Committee every year since. She has done everything for our Gala from helping with the invitation mailings to managing one of the most critical pieces of the evening - the exciting silent auction, which often times boasts over 60 items! Cathy, a CPA, always had time and heart to put SRA front and center, even in her busy tax season!

Bryce was working at Borel Private Bank & Trust in 2006 when he became interested in SRA. He asked how he could personally get involved and was invited to join the Gala committee. Be careful what you wish for as Bryce has also been part of our Gala Committees ever since! Additionally, Bryce has been a champion for SRA through both his professional and personal life, having brought in new supporters and volunteers to the SRA family. Bryce is always happy to jump in and tackle whatever task needs to get done and we are forever grateful for his commitment!

No matter how you choose to give back, know that it makes a difference and that it is so valued. With warm gratitude, thank you to both Bryce and Cathy for their time and efforts, which directly makes an impact on our students!
We’re excited to announce the appointment of Diana Campoamor and Kim Laughton to the Students Rising Above Board of Directors. Diana Campoamor is the Founder of Nuestra America Fund (NAF), an initiative focused on documenting Latino leadership and best practices in philanthropy. NAF also supports individual and institutional donors that have an interest in strengthening Latino influence in U.S. policy towards their countries of origin.

Prior to NAF, Campoamor served as President of Hispanics in Philanthropy (HIP) for nearly 27 years. At HIP, she grew a small network of funders, from a volunteer group of advocates into a transnational philanthropic network. HIP, under her leadership, invested over $40 million in small Latino nonprofits and leaders. Under Campoamor’s tenure, HIP was recognized with the Kellogg Foundation’s National Leadership in Action Award in 2007 and received the prestigious Scrivner Award for Creative Grantmaking in 2008 for its groundbreaking Funders’ Collaborative for Strong Latino Communities. Her book of essays, Nuevos Senderos: Hispanics and Philanthropy, published by Arte Publico Press in 1999, remains one of the few anthologies to portray Latinos as givers and leaders in philanthropy. Her editorials focusing on policy issues have been published by the New York Times, San Francisco Chronicle, and others. Campoamor received a B.A. from the University of Florida and an M.A. from the University of Miami.

Kim Laughton is President of Schwab Charitable, one of the nation’s largest donor-advised fund providers established with the support of Charles Schwab & Co., Inc. to make charitable giving simpler and more tax-efficient for clients. She is responsible for the general management of Schwab Charitable and the fulfillment of its charitable mission, setting strategy and priorities and ensuring all contractual obligations and goals are met.

Since Laughton became President, Schwab Charitable more than tripled annual grants to charities. Additionally, in Fiscal Year 2018 alone, the organization facilitated nearly $2 billion in charitable grants on behalf of donors. Prior to joining Schwab Charitable, she held a variety of leadership, strategy, and general management positions at Charles Schwab & Co., Inc. Earlier in her career, Laughton was Vice President for Citibank-Asia / Pacific and a Consultant for Bain & Company. She also has served on the Board of the Educational Foundation of Orinda and as the Head of its Investment Committee. She has been recognized by the San Francisco Business Times as one of the most influential women in Bay Area business. She holds a B.A. in Economics and a B.S. in Biology from Stanford University and an M.B.A. from Harvard Business School.

“I’ve been a supporter, along with my family, of Students Rising Above since the beginning and I am excited to continue this commitment as SRA Board Chair,” said Mike Loughlin, former Chief Risk Officer, Wells Fargo. “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. We’re honored to welcome Diana and Kim to our Board, continuing to drive our mission forward.”
We are thrilled to announce that Students Rising Above and the Anthem Blue Cross Foundation have joined forces to form the Healthy Lifestyle Literacy and Health Care Navigation program (HLLHN). The HLLHN program, which is made possible by a grant from the Anthem Blue Cross Foundation, seeks to formalize a preventative lifestyle education program aimed at increasing SRA students’ knowledge of healthy lifestyle topics such as diet, sleep, mindfulness and lifestyle choices. The goal is to help improve their overall quality of life and wellbeing through healthy and preventive behaviors.

Through dedicated health care navigation services and advisors, the program will provide guidance and support in accessing health care, including health insurance access and enrollment, assistance in finding medical, dental, and vision providers, and more. The program intends to reach more than 500 Bay Area students and will help prepare students to be engaged, educated, and empowered in their own health care.

As with all Students Rising Above’s wrap-around support services, the Health Care Navigator, as well as advisors trained in Healthy Lifestyle topics, will work one-on-one with students to resolve their unique issues to ensure that their focus can remain on achieving their educational and career dreams.

"Students Rising Above recognizes the importance of teaching basic healthy lifestyle skills, as well as providing the tips, tools, and support for our students, empowering them to enroll in, access, and utilize their health care plans," said Lorna Contreras-Townsend, Director of Student Programs, Students Rising Above. "Together with the support from the Anthem Blue Cross Foundation, we are thrilled to launch the Healthy Lifestyle Literacy and Health Care Navigation Program, providing even more critical health care services for our students, enabling them to focus on their college-to-career journey."

Comprised of a tightly organized team of trained experts, corporate partners, an engaged student community, and the commitment of both individual donors and foundations, Students Rising Above has created an all-encompassing program that offers thousands of students social-emotional support, academic advising, health care navigation, career guidance, and professional development.

Anthem Blue Cross’ partnership with Students Rising Above focuses on numerous aspects of health and wellness. The grant is part of Anthem Blue Cross’ continuing commitment to improving the lives of the people in the communities it serves.

"Anthem strives to simplify health care and this partnership with Student Rising Above is consistent with that goal by showing young people the importance of a healthy lifestyle and giving them the tools to be successful," said Beth Andersen, Vice President & General Manager of Anthem Blue Cross’ Large Group Business. "We look forward to working with Students Rising Above and helping our future leaders navigate their health care options and lead healthier lives."

By providing comprehensive guidance and support whenever and wherever it’s needed, Students Rising Above accomplishes its mission through a series of proven initiatives that have a direct and profound impact, affecting lives for generations.

Follow us on the SRA Blog to learn more about how we are helping our students lead healthy, balanced lifestyles on their college-to-career journey and beyond!
Students Rising Above and the San José Public Library have partnered to launch San José Aspires, a program to provide San José students with the skills and knowledge needed to achieve their academic and career goals.

San José Aspires, accessed through the SRA Hub, provides nearly 40 participating students with the opportunity to receive scholarship funds from the San José Public Library as they progress through the curriculum.

Through San José Aspires, students will earn up to $500 in scholarship funds for distribution to the vocational school, community college, college, or university of their choice. Students will earn these funds by completing nearly 30 online curriculum modules.

The modules will help students develop the skills needed to accomplish the following:
- Manage the college application process
- Apply for financial aid
- Identify career interests, and apply for career-ladder positions in those fields

In partnership with the San José Library, we’re excited to reach even more underrepresented students across the Bay Area, supporting a successful transition to and through their college-to-career journey. Follow us on the SRA blog for updates!