



**From Vision to Reality:
The SRA Experience**

Unlocking potential— from individuals, for our communities

A NOTE FROM OUR CEO

More than 25 years ago, Students Rising Above (SRA) was founded with a powerful vision: to empower every young person to reach their full potential. Today, we've helped over two thousand first-generation students achieve their college dreams and pursue rewarding careers.

The challenges our students face have grown over the past two decades. The [income gap in the U.S has widened significantly](#). College admissions coaching has become an [\\$8 billion industry](#), benefitting more privileged students in their college applications while putting students from low-income backgrounds at a further disadvantage. As a result, four-year college enrollment for the [wealthiest students stands at 78%](#), and just 28% for those from the lowest-income households.*

Each year, [fewer students from low-income backgrounds can afford the soaring costs of higher education](#). Some opt for community college, while others forfeit college entirely, dramatically jeopardizing their future earning potential.

It is not just individual students who lose out—our communities also suffer as a result of these inequities. Research shows that communities thrive when [all citizens participate](#) in decision-making and governance, and research emphasizes the [strong business case](#) for diversity in the workforce. Some studies even show that when it comes to team performance, [diversity trumps talent](#).

In this wider landscape of education and workforce development, organizations like ours have emerged as vital agents of change. This responsibility drives us to do even more in SRA's next chapter.

To honor our mission, SRA must not only offer our students access to resources and support, we must also work to bring our knowledge and expertise to the thousands of other students who need them, [truly democratizing](#) access to the most fundamental resources required for finding success.

Thank you to SRA's donors, volunteers, partners and stakeholders. Together, we make great things possible.

With gratitude,



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Elizabeth J. Devaney". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Elizabeth Devaney
SRA CEO

* When two-year colleges are included, enrollment rates are 89% and 51% respectively.



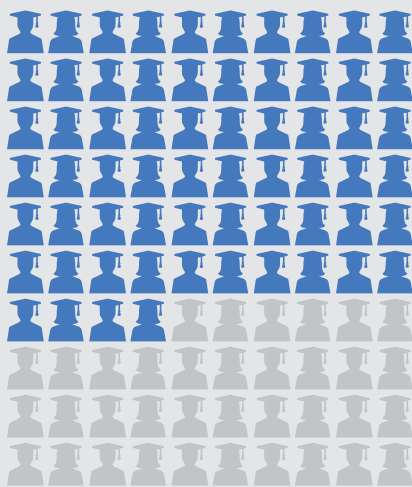
Cultivating Student Success

All students deserve access to a college education. Founded in 1998, SRA is now a leader in college and career success, empowering first-generation students from low-income backgrounds to overcome barriers to social and economic mobility.

SRA's students graduate college at a rate nearly 7 times higher than those from similar backgrounds and at a rate higher than the national average across all demographics.

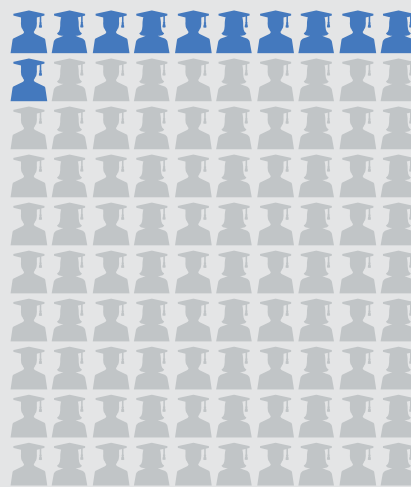
GRADUATION RATE

National average
(across all
demographics)



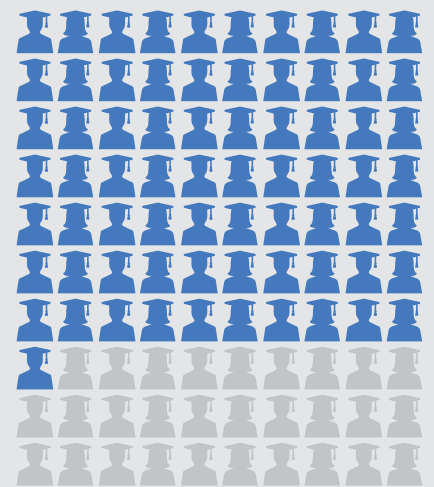
64%*

For students from
first-generation,
low-income backgrounds



11%

SRA
Students



71%

*Source: [U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics](#)

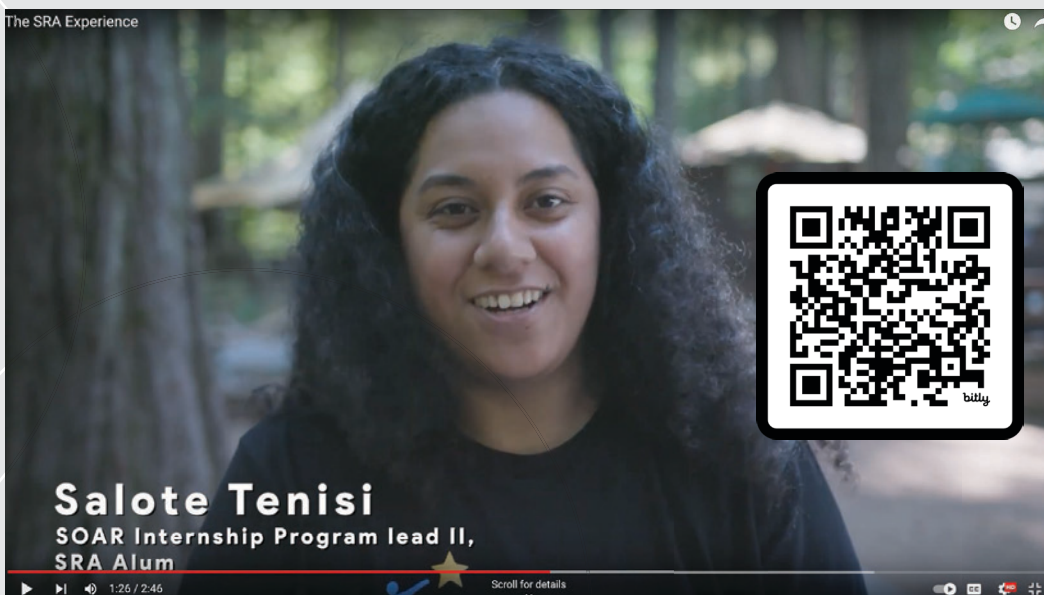
Empowering Social and Economic Mobility

SRA MISSION

SRA empowers students facing systemic barriers to define and find success through education, career, and in life.

SRA VISION

SRA envisions a world in which every person can achieve economic and social equity.



From Vision to Reality: The SRA Experience

WHY REPRESENTATION MATTERS

Extensive research shows that students thrive when mentored by individuals whose identities and experiences reflect their own. At SRA, our diverse team and Board of Directors represents the students we serve. By having similar lived experiences, we are better able to truly understand the challenges faced by BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color), first-gen students from low-income backgrounds.



SRA STUDENTS



98%

BIPOC

84%

first-gen

OVER

95%

low- to moderate-income

10%

currently or formerly have been in guardianships, foster care, or have experienced homelessness*

SRA STAFF

77%

BIPOC

57%

first-gen

32%

SRA alumni

SRA BOARD OF DIRECTORS

64%

BIPOC

36%

first-gen

21%

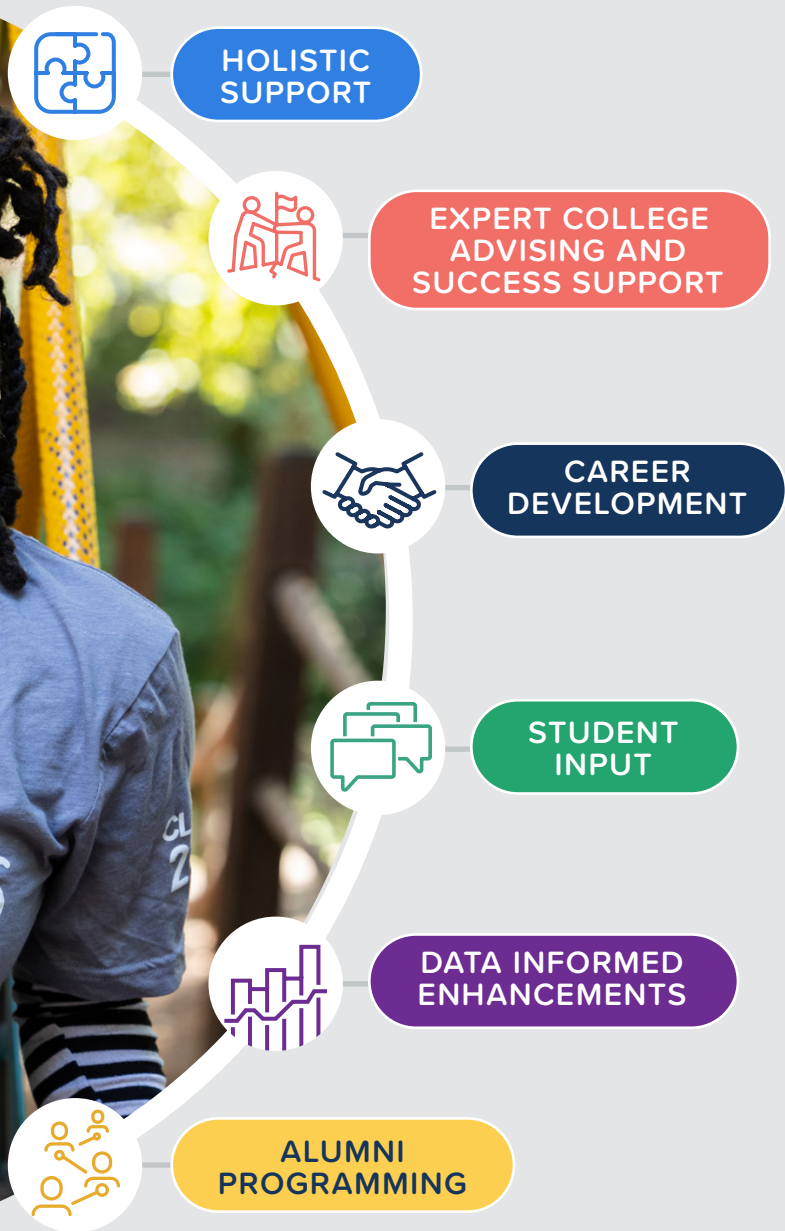
SRA alumni

*Rising Stars data only

Student-Centered Programming

INDIVIDUALIZED PATHS TO SUCCESS

Our program models have been crafted to ensure each student receives expert guidance and individualized support as they define and find their path to success.





HOLISTIC SUPPORT

Beyond academic guidance, SRA provides wraparound services necessary for college success. From health care navigation and mental health to financial support for food and housing, SRA supports students whatever their needs are and whenever they arise.



EXPERT COLLEGE ADVISING AND SUCCESS SUPPORT

Each SRA student works with a Student Success Team that includes College Admissions Counselors, College & Career Advisors and the Career Development team—the majority of whom are mental-health first aid certified and have received training in trauma-informed care.



CAREER DEVELOPMENT

SRA's Career Development curriculum offers a robust set of career exploration experiences, skill-building workshops, and professional development opportunities to ensure that each student has the knowledge and skills they need to strategically navigate a career path upon graduation.



STUDENT INPUT

SRA offers multiple avenues through which students can provide closed loop feedback to the organization and its leadership team, allowing us to regularly update and adapt our tools, resources, and supports to better meet the changing needs of our students.



DATA INFORMED ENHANCEMENTS

SRA's Data Strategy and Insights team collaborates with SRA staff to refine program operations as well as enhance and adapt our services, ensuring no need is left unmet for our entire student population.



ALUMNI PROGRAMMING

SRA's Alumni Program provides clear pathways for students to continue to be a part of the SRA community after college graduation through leadership development, skills and knowledge sharing, community building, and volunteerism.

SRA PROGRAM MODELS

RISING STARS

SRA's flagship program—Rising Stars—serves over 400 students annually from the nine counties of the San Francisco Bay Area. The Rising Stars program begins just before students' senior year of high school, offering highly personalized, wraparound services and financial support until after students' college graduation and entry into a first job.



STUDENTS ONLINE ACHIEVING RESULTS (SOAR) PROGRAM

The SOAR program annually supports nearly 300 students attending 2 or 4-year colleges in the US. An entirely virtual, cohort-based advising program providing personal interaction, peer mentoring, advising, and access to SRA's exclusive online college and career resources, the SOAR program operates on an annual basis, allowing students to apply and join at the beginning of each school year.





Celebrating Student Successes



FOUNDED IN THE POWER OF STORYTELLING

In 1998, Primetime Anchor Wendy Tokuda and Community Relations Manager Javier Valencia launched a series of news stories on KRON4, profiling Bay Area teenagers who were overcoming remarkable obstacles to carve their path to success. After each Students Rising Above story, they would ask viewers to donate money to help send those kids to college. The stories touched a nerve, raising millions of dollars, inspiring viewers to volunteer to help, and eventually the project morphed into the non-profit, Students Rising Above. The series went on to win numerous national and local awards including a Peabody, a National Emmy for Public Service, and three Regional Emmy Awards.

In her many years of profiling our students and involvement in the organization, Wendy has gotten to know hundreds of SRA students and has maintained deep and meaningful relationships with many of them. She eventually moved the series to KPIX CBS 5, which continues to feature SRA students, as they tell their own narrative of success in college, career and life.



STUDENTS DEFINING AND FINDING THEIR SUCCESS

Telling stories from students' own perspectives boosts confidence and catalyzes self-actualization, both key elements to student success. At SRA we practice ethical storytelling by empowering our students to practice developing their own public narratives and owning their story.



[*Belonging in the SRA Community*](#)

SRA asked students—How do you define success in your education, career, and life?

THIS IS WHAT THEY TOLD US...

Just making it to college is already a big success for me. I define my success personally as when I'm able to give back to my family what they've given to me. In my career I view success as how much I'm able to help people and make a positive impact on their lives.



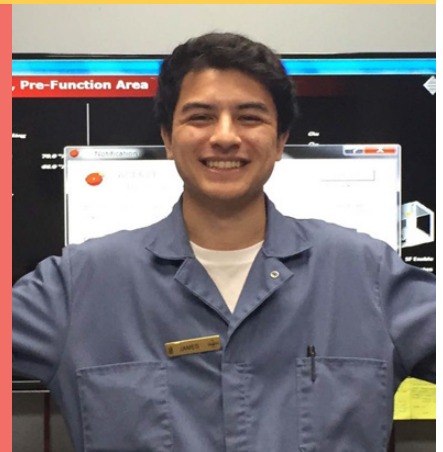
Progress is success, to me... being able to progress from one goal to another (in any aspect of life).



I define success as being happy with your career, maintaining a work life balance and not living pay check to pay check.



For me success is having a good job that pays more than the minimum wage, not having to worry about money, letting my parents rest, having a good education that will benefit me later on, and doing what I like doing as a job.



A New Way of Doing Things...

At SRA, we continually examine our approach to achieve our mission. With the insights from our Data Strategy and Insights team, we are equipped to pinpoint specific areas where program enhancements will yield tangible benefits for our students and contribute to their overall success.

Recently, we initiated three unique programs to enhance how we support students.



[A new way of doing things—Black student experience](#)

SRA IMPACTING DIVERSITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

A FOCUS ON BLACK STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES

SRA launched the Black Student Experience Initiative to address a diminishing proportion of Black students enrolling in our programs and accessing our services. Facilitated by SRA's Black Student Experience Specialist, this initiative seeks to revitalize SRA's understanding of the needs of our Black students with a community-led approach. Through targeted programming and activities, this initiative dismantles barriers that hinder Black student success, ultimately increasing student retention, improving graduation rates, and focusing on overall well-being within the Black student community.



% OF BLACK/AFRICAN-AMERICAN INDIVIDUALS AT:

UC SYSTEM

Students: **4%**

Advisors: **8%**

Tenure-Track Faculty: **3.4%**

CSU SYSTEM

Students: **4%**

Staff: **6.2%**

Tenure-Track Faculty: **4.1%**

SRA

Students: **12.9%**

Staff: **13%**

Board of Directors: **14%**

SRA is working to improve these numbers

LEVERAGING TECHNOLOGY TO SOLVE INTERNALLY AND LEAD EXTERNALLY

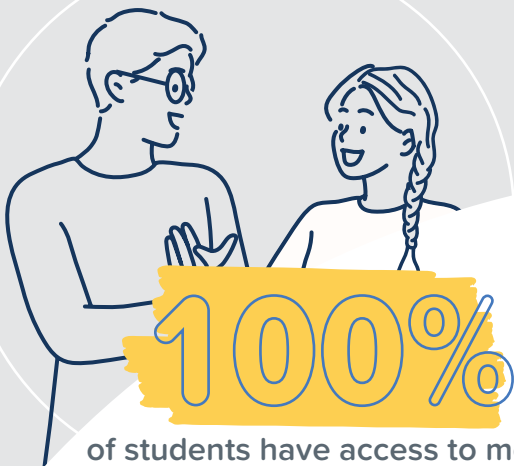
SRA'S SOCIAL ENTERPRISE AND PRODUCT INNOVATION TEAM

SRA's Social Enterprise and Product Innovation (SEPI) team collaborates with SRA staff and SRA students and alumni to create new tools and techniques to improve student engagement, reduce advisor administrative load and enhance program efficacy. **SEPI builds solutions that create more time for the most important aspect of our work: building relationships.**

SEPI first develops, tests, and perfects solutions to address internal challenges at SRA, then converts the most effective into improvements that can be implemented by other college access and career success organizations. This innovative internal incubator approach not only improves capacity for SRA and helps reimagine student engagement, but creates an expansive sector-wide partnership community, democratizing access to tools and resources.



A new way of doing things—SEPI



of students have access to mental health services like 1:1 counseling and group therapy through TalkSpace



of full-time program staff, including advisors and counselors, are mental health first-aid certified



of program staff have received training on trauma-informed care

ADDRESSING THE MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS

A mental health crisis is plaguing postsecondary students, especially those from marginalized communities. Yet White students seek out treatment at much higher rates than students of color. (One recent study found that among students struggling with their mental health, only 23% of Asian-American, 26% of Black students, and 33% of Latinx students sought treatment, compared to 46% of White students.)

SRA is proud to offer access to no-cost mental health services and regular therapy to all of our students and staff.

SRA students face a multitude of barriers to mental health treatment, including cultural stigma surrounding mental health, lack of access to medical insurance, high costs of mental health services, and lack of diverse university-affiliated counselors.

Converting a Degree into a Fulfilling Career and Meaningful Life

DEVELOPING THE DIVERSE LEADERS OF TOMORROW: CAREER DEVELOPMENT

From the beginning of their college experience, SRA's Career Development team works with students as they define their path to success.

In partnership with more than 250 corporations and organizations, SRA offers career exploration events, professional mentorship programming, and internship opportunities to ensure SRA students have the agency and skills needed to find fulfilling professions.

Students grow into the diverse leaders of tomorrow, and bring a wealth of diverse experiences and perspectives to their future employers. SRA's Career Development program influences hiring practices and diversity and inclusion initiatives at companies while fueling the economic mobility of our students.

SRA students represent the diverse tapestry of the world we live in—they are our next generation of leaders.



[Internship Video from Minami Tamaki](#)



SRA'S ALUMNI ENGAGEMENT

SRA's Alumni Program ensures former students have continued support and connection to the SRA network after college graduation. Led by SRA alum Edylwise Fernandez Romero, the Alumni Program offers financial, mental health, and career development resources, including a virtual portal for all 25 cohorts of SRA alumni to network, post jobs and internships, and re-engage with SRA through volunteer opportunities.

A handful of graduates are selected to represent the alumni community and lead the direction of the program as part of the Alumni Council. The Alumni Council's collective wisdom and expertise will help SRA better serve the needs and aspirations of the alumni community, fostering an even stronger connection and support system for our graduates.



Join Our Movement and Support Our Students!

VOLUNTEER AND CORPORATE PARTNERSHIPS

SRA relies on our community to help us support our students. There are a variety of ways you or your company can be involved.

MENTORSHIP

SRA offers various mentoring opportunities that give community members a chance to work with our students in highly impactful and meaningful ways through one or more of the following programs:

- ★ **Career Mentoring** (*Informational Interviews*)
- ★ **New Grad Mentor Program**
- ★ **Summer Mentor Program**
- ★ **Grad School Exploration**
- ★ **Essay Coaching**

CAREER DEVELOPMENT VOLUNTEERING

SRA relies on our network of over 250 employer partners and volunteers to offer:

- ★ **Quarterly Workshops:** Organized by SRA's Career Development team, volunteers engage with students in small group or panel discussions, conduct interview practice sessions, or assist with resume/cover letter reviews. Companies can sponsor a workshop or host one at their office.
- ★ **Career Insight Days:** Hosted at the offices of Bay Area companies, our team partners with you to craft a meaningful agenda for SRA students and your company's volunteers.

- ★ **Virtual Internship Info Sessions:** Share insights about upcoming internship opportunities with students and facilitate Q&A sessions virtually.

- ★ **Internship Application Coaching:** Offer personalized coaching to a student in your industry, assisting with resume, cover letter, and interview preparation.

CORPORATE AND FOUNDATION GIVING

SRA has a vibrant community of foundation and corporate partners who give back to SRA through sponsorships and grants. Our work—championing social justice through education—aligns with a variety of philanthropic priorities and values.

GIFTS FROM INDIVIDUALS

Donations from individuals help SRA deliver resources where students need them the most. Individual giving allows community members to engage more deeply in our work and support our students as they find success in education, in career, and in life.

LEGACY GIVING

When community members include SRA in their long term plans, they create a powerful legacy by committing to the education and economic equity of the next generation. Including Students Rising Above in your estate plan is a profound way to support SRA's mission and vision.

Please reach out to learn more and we will connect you with the best SRA team member for your interests:

(415) 333-4222 | info@studentsrisingabove.org

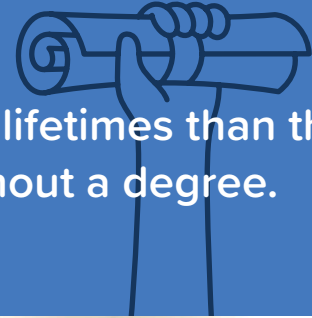


College graduates earn

\$1.2M

more

over their lifetimes than their peers without a degree.



SRA has served **nearly**

2,000

students... that means a collective earning increase of



\$2.4B and counting!



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