"At American Student Assistance, we have always strived to empower all students to pursue the futures they envision. However, the path there hasn’t always been so clear.

Guided by our research, we’ve decided to meet kids where they are with digital career exploration experiences. In 2022, we doubled down on this direct-to kid approach and mobilized every arm of ASA to expand career readiness learning across the country. Together, we’ll help millions of students bring their futures into focus."

—Jean Eddy
President & CEO
Five years ago, we set out to understand how and where kids acquire knowledge to plan their futures, as well as how systems are failing to prepare them for major career decisions. We learned that 45% of Gen Z feel they lack enough information to make a career decision and that both career- and self-exploration should begin in middle school—a time when sentiments about one’s future are typically those of curiosity, rather than of stress. Once students enter high school, those feelings only become weightier. Stress becomes a bigger factor. However, we also know that if kids are given the resources to use their high school years for experimenting with careers in tangible ways—through work-based learning, for example—they can discover where their passions lie long before they’re faced with major decisions about them.

With a strong understanding of the problem, and with a powerful vision for the future, we started the development of our free, self-directed digital ecosystem of career exploration experiences—beginning with the Future Network video series in 2018. Later, we launched Futurescape, a game-like career and personality exploration tool. In 2022, we continued to grow our ecosystem with yet a third platform, Next Voice—a kid-centric experience that meets a critical need for 21st-century skill-learning and provides young people with an opportunity to self-advocate for social issues shaping today’s world.

But we didn’t stop there. To further our impact and truly change the way kids learn about careers and navigate postsecondary education pathways, we funded promising models, gave grants to schools, states, and other nonprofits, and explored programs both within and beyond the classroom. We provided professional development and evidence-based resources to educators, furthered our research into the state of career exploration and work-based learning, investigated foundational skills necessary to workforce readiness, and delved into the barriers hindering widespread acceptance of non-degree pathways.

Since starting these efforts, we’ve begun to understand the efficacy of career exploration even more deeply. We saw promising new models, innovative solutions, and pockets of excellence in districts and schools whose stellar outcomes showed highly engaged and confident students feeling less stressed about their futures. Our research told us that while classroom-based career exploration is effective, it’s challenging to scale nationally. We confirmed our suspicion that self-directed, digital learning opportunities beyond the classroom are the best way to scale equitable access, and give young people nationwide the decision-making agency they crave.

Now, we face a fork in the road. Today, there’s no shortage of career-learning opportunities—but the vast majority are limited to classroom settings. Many of our peers will stay the course and further develop these school-based solutions; we’ll continue to applaud and support them—but we are going to take a path less traveled. After successfully impacting more than 12 million kids with our free ecosystem of direct-to-kid digital experiences, we’ve decided to heavily invest in its expansion, and give even more students the chance to have their voices heard beyond the classroom. This bold step will change the way young people learn about careers. It will ensure they have ample opportunity to explore their passions, try on careers before making decisions, and learn to confidently navigate whatever path they choose to take after high school.

Our digital resources will sit alongside curated experiences from our partners. This strategy will ensure that all kids have agency over their learning paths and an equal opportunity to explore, experiment, and build valuable career-ready skills. But there’s a deeper purpose to this strategy. Once fully realized, kids will have what they’ve needed for far too long: the ability to know themselves, know their options, and make informed, confident decisions about their futures.

We want to reach and engage 15 million kids in 2023, and we’re well on our way towards that goal.

Jean Eddy, President & CEO
Driving Lasting Change

A Message From ASA’s Board Chair, Larry Gennari

Over the past five years, ASA has strategically pivoted its mission to change the way middle and high school kids learn about careers. In that time, we’ve spoken with thousands of young people about their learning preferences, heard their greatest challenges around future planning, and came to better understand where they needed help in making informed, confident choices to achieve their education, career, and lifelong goals.

We know that kids crave voice and choice and want to take an active role in what, how, and when they learn — especially when it comes to their careers. Knowing this, it’s no surprise that kids are more receptive to meaningful, relevant learning experiences driven by their interests and passions; it’s no surprise they gravitate towards experiences delivered in formats that reflect their learning style. However, learning opportunities that possess all these traits aren’t uniformly offered throughout the US — and therein lies the problem.

Roughly 50% of kids have decided not to go to college this year, and 59% are unaware of other pathways that lead to well-paying jobs and satisfying, productive careers. If kids aren’t going to college and can’t find other paths, how exactly do we expect them to prepare for becoming tomorrow’s leaders?

So, all of us at ASA began to ask ourselves, “What if?”

What if learning experiences helped kids envision a positive future for themselves and started them on a path to get there?

What if they gave young people a voice in conversations impacting their futures — and a choice in what they learned, when they learned it, and how? What if those experiences met kids where they already are (on their mobile devices), and capitalized on their zest and inclination to learn beyond the four walls of a classroom?

To challenge ourselves further, we asked: What if an organization could build a universe of high-quality, self-directed digital experiences that enable all teens to explore and experiment with careers anytime, anywhere, and in ways that align with their interests, aptitudes, and passions? And what if this truly helped them navigate their education pathways after high school? What if we leveraged these opportunities to drive meaningful, lasting change for our kids and their future selves?

Challenge accepted. The answers to those questions are exactly what ASA has brought to life.

Larry Gennari, Chair of the Board of Directors

ASA’s Board Members

Stephanie Crimmins
Head of Consulting, Fidelity Investment

Patty Diaz-Andrade
Chief Impact Officer, OneGoal

Carol Fulp
Founder & CEO, Fulp Diversity Consultants

Thomas R. Graf
Executive Director, Massachusetts Educational Financing Authority

Ken Jones
VP and CFO, John T. & Catherine D. MacArthur Foundation

Emily McCann
Social Entrepreneur and Former CEO of Citizen Schools

Alex Rappaort
Entrepreneur; Founder and former CEO, Flocabulary

Carla Thompson Payton
VP for Program Strategy, W.K. Kellogg Foundation
Our Mission
American Student Assistance® (ASA) is a non-profit that aspires to help students know themselves, know their options, and make informed decisions about their education and career goals. Our mission is to change the way middle and high schoolers learn about careers so that they feel empowered to pursue the futures they envision.

Unfortunately, too many middle school students aren’t aware of the scope of education and career opportunities available – and too few high schoolers have the chance to experiment with those paths before they’re faced with deciding which to pursue. A prevailing social stigma about non-degree career pathways further complicates matters for students, who aren’t adequately equipped with the tools they need to source and identify credible information to inform their plans.

Our approach to tackling this challenge is multifaceted, aimed at driving true, lasting change for all students – no matter their zip code. This means we’re funding models that allow middle schoolers to explore careers, high schoolers to test them out, and we’re connecting those models with individuals, organizations, and policymakers with the power to magnify their scale. Central to this work is our consistent effort to understand Gen Z themselves, and we’re doing this by learning their digital behaviors to ensure the solutions we build work for them.

Our Vision
We envision millions of students nationwide having equitable access to career information starting in middle school. We see a world in which all students can obtain well-paying, rewarding careers that grow from a range of education backgrounds. To us, this means directly helping students develop career-ready and lifelong skills through work-based learning opportunities; it means changing the national perception of non-degree career pathways and redefining what it means to succeed; it means giving students greater freedom to choose the education they want to pursue after high school, find their voice, and learn how to use it in pursuit of a world they hope to build.

By creating digital experiences that scale, we’re able to reach millions of students nationwide with critical information and resources. By investing in the future of career learning and the organizations bringing it to life, we’re able to nurture partnerships that strengthen our cause, foster change in policy, and shift the national conversation about student success. Today, we’re giving over 12 million students the opportunity to try out the many paths their career journeys could take – and we’re doing it on their terms. Tomorrow, we hope to witness this rising workforce excel in their careers with the confidence, competence, and passion required to participate in an evolving economy.
Throughout 2022, we used large-scale, rigorous quantitative projects, along with smaller qualitative studies and teen advisory panels to guide every action we took — from shaping our organizational strategy and product development efforts to informing our advocacy platform and corporate social responsibility philosophy. These critical insights also helped to position ASA as a thought leader in the career education space and to influence the national discussion about how to best prepare students for successful futures.

Understanding the needs of students and the issues they care about drove us to expand access to the career exploration tools, information, and experiences that students require. This meant broadening and innovating our digital, direct-to-kid approach with the introduction of a new platform to our ecosystem of career exploration experiences. It meant advocating for the expansion of work-based learning, postsecondary pathways, and career exploration opportunities. And, it meant investing in and giving to like-minded organizations that are creating programs and solutions that fuel more career-focused education, intentional postsecondary pathways, and workforce development opportunities.

Now, let’s take a closer look at how these efforts all came together to bring the future into focus for millions of students.

**It All Starts With Listening**

Throughout 2022, we spread our message online, in national publications and media, and at career education events across the country. These efforts led to earned media coverage in Forbes, Fortune, Psychology Today, and USA Today, along with a TODAY Show segment featuring Jean Eddy about how high school graduates are increasingly pursuing non-four-year college degrees.

- **27 times** quoted and **83 times** mentioned in news media
- **Over 2,600** media placements with **1.8 billion** impressions
- **Over 10 million** social media impressions
- **23** leadership sessions at industry events
WE INNOVATE
Meeting Kids Where They Are, Outside of the Classroom

Doubling-down on Digital, Direct-to-kid

In 2018 we realized that when you meet kids where they are, and give them the tools to learn when they want, how they want, they start exploring and experimenting with careers earlier and can see their futures more clearly. Over the past year, we saw continued success across ASA’s digital ecosystem as it impacted millions of kids nationwide.

In 2022 alone, our three digital tools impacted more than 12 million kids and provided them with vital information for exploring career and education paths after high school. This impressive outcome not only validates our research into the way kids learn and their need for additional career planning support, but it also sets the stage for the ecosystem’s expansion as it continues to provide kids with engaging digital experiences that are accessible beyond the classroom.

To date, everything we’ve designed reflects the voice of kids and everything we’ve built has been done in lockstep with Gen Z themselves. In 2022, we spoke with more than 2,700 kids and held 13 user experience sessions that informed the design, copy, and content of our newest tool, Next Voice. Going forward, we will lean heavily into this method to support the development of our next digital tool and move steadily towards our goal of impacting 15 million kids by the end of 2023.

Future Network
This original video series spotlights Gen Z as they explore and learn about different careers directly from professionals. Since its launch in 2018, Future Network has achieved more than 38 million video views, with over 5 million video views in 2022 alone. The network’s sustained success not only proves its value as an entertaining career exploration tool — it also reinforces kids’ continued enthusiasm for learning directly from their own peers, in digital spaces.

Futurescape
ASA’s personalized career exploration tool has demonstrated the importance and success of student-led career planning. In 2022, over 6.5 million kids used Futurescape to help discover career paths that align with their passions and skills, with many uncovering career opportunities they hadn’t previously considered. More importantly, over the past year we saw Futurescape drive deeper engagement among kids as they explored education requirements, salary ranges, and other aspects of careers. Since its launch in 2020, Futurescape has been used by over 11 million kids and continues to grow in popularity.

Next Voice
Young people—Gen Z in particular—crave agency. They’re anxious to make their voices heard, impatient for a better world, and yearning to have a say in shaping it. In the fall of 2022, we gave them a way to do all that through Next Voice, a digital experience we created to help kids explore and advocate for social issues they care about. Co-created with a nationwide panel of more than 60 dedicated teen advisors and validated with feedback from thousands more, Next Voice is distinguished by a suite of resources that help kids develop an ability to self-advocate through the lens of issues they care about.

Already being used by more than 400 thousand kids, Next Voice’s reach is anticipated to gain traction and grow exponentially as we continuously refine it based on direct feedback from the very kids who use it.
WE ADVOCATE
Sharing Our Vision To Change Policy and Mindsets

Supporting all middle and high school kids along their career-planning journeys is at the core of our advocacy strategy. We’re doing this by encouraging the expansion of more direct-to-kid, career-connected learning opportunities. In 2022, our advocacy efforts specifically pursued three critical areas: work-based learning, expansion of career exploration, and postsecondary education pathways.

We know that each of these areas is crucial to helping students bring their vision for a successful future into focus, which is why we have chosen to advocate at the state and federal level for expanding opportunities within them. It’s also the reason we boldly pursued conversations with key influencers, educating them on precisely why policy changes and funding are so badly needed in these key areas.

Areas of Impact

To measure the impact of our advocacy work, we considered all possible attribution factors — from coalition building to policy change and much in-between. As a result, we identified three main areas of impact that indicate our efforts were successful in influencing key decision makers:

**Work-based Learning**

**EFFORT:** We educated influencers on the importance of state and federal funding for work-based learning opportunities, specifically entrepreneurship experiences and internships for high school students. To support this effort, we conducted in-depth interviews with 10 state leaders who are currently implementing their own programs to meet these needs. We then compiled our findings into a Best Practices Guide that offers specific recommendations for states about how to advance supportive policies for work-based learning.

**IMPACT:** Our Best Practices Guide earned significant attention from education leaders eager to enact policy in their states. The guide also furthered our larger campaign to ensure every young person has a career-connected learning experience prior to leaving high school.

**Career Exploration**

**EFFORT:** We continued to voice the need for expanded career exploration in middle school through written reports, coalition-building, conferences, webinars, and supporting state projects – all of which strengthened our case that middle school students deserve stronger opportunities to know themselves and their career options. Examples of this effort include our partnership with the State of Delaware to expand middle school career exploration alongside research into the efficacy of career exploration in grades 7-12. These findings will be shared widely with policy makers, key influencers, and funders so that the effort can be replicated in other states.

**IMPACT:** Our studies elevated teens’ voices and deepened our understanding of their career exploration needs, which in turn guided our efforts to support them by backing those looking to make policy change. Our support will lead to the launch of a pilot program in Delaware that will reach 3,600 middle school students in 2023 and expand statewide by 2024.

**Postsecondary Education Pathways**

**EFFORT:** We partnered with Jobs for the Future (JFF) to launch a national narrative change campaign aimed at fostering widespread acceptance of non-degree career pathways among students and employers. This effort led to our joint research study, Degrees of Risk. We also co-launched Expand Opportunities, a digital hub offering resources and market scans on emerging education-to-career pathways for policymakers, employers, and students alike. Finally, a survey of policy influencers gave insights into peoples’ perceptions of these pathways, and ultimately investigated how they may be funded through federal policy.

**IMPACT:** Our effort to shift the national narrative around postsecondary education pathways has led to significant discussion in the media and among education influencers about changing perceptions on the topic; it’s also increased philanthropic investments into non-degree paths. Our impact is also evident through growing coalitions of support dedicated to changing policy and practices to better align with the future of postsecondary education.

“[High schooler] Yulissa was behind on credits because she didn’t get the support she needed. After the Big Picture Learning network paired her with three mentors who helped her land internships at Netflix and The Discovery Channel, Yulissa quickly proved herself as a radically excellent thinker, designer, and artist. She is now completely up to date on her credits and planning to graduate high school in 2023.”

—Kyle Denman

Big Picture Learning Coordinator

“*We hope to equip students, employers, and policymakers with the information on the efficacy of non-degree options and inspire them to tackle any perceived risk to exploring the pathway, career, or talent that’s right for them.*”

—Jean Eddy

President & CEO
In the spirit of fueling a vibrant ecosystem of solutions that can help millions of students to bring their future into focus, we launched our own impact investing initiative in the spring of 2022. Over the past two years, impact investing has soared over 40% worldwide and continues to gain significant momentum across the U.S. education sector.

Our investment strategy aims to generate significant K-12 student outcomes in three key areas: career-focused education, intentional postsecondary pathways, and workforce development. Over the next four years, we’ll invest up to $125 million in funds and private companies that are developing solutions addressing these key areas and that show potential for generating favorable financial returns.

To elevate our commitment to this initiative, we appointed David Wilton, the former head of Morgan Stanley’s impact fund, to our Internal Investment Committee. Mr. Wilton is also an instructor of impact investing at the Frankfurt School of Economics and longtime manager of the International Finance Corporation’s global emerging market investment program. His unparalleled expertise will strengthen our best-in-class financial versatility in a changing market.

Collectively, we’ll work to double our assets and continue expanding our impact by helping other organizations scale their solutions to reach more students. In this role, we also gain the opportunity to build relationships with these organizations and explore potential partnerships.

Investment Strategy

ASA’s longstanding commitment to strategic investments is underpinned by our pledge to advance mission-aligned programs and solutions. Our ethos this year was no different, although we opted to adopt an investment model that’s better positioned to meet the demands of an evolving demographic, economy, and to generate market rate returns with impactful outcomes. We believe this strategic pivot will safeguard the success of future generations for years to come.

To date, we’ve made seven investments totaling $33.75 million. And that’s just the beginning. Our approach will continue to revolve around three core principles:

- **Leverage ASA’s financial resources** to support funds and private companies providing new or enhanced opportunities for kids to know themselves, know their options, and make informed decisions in pursuit of their education and career goals.
- **Make consistent investments** towards our $125 million goal that reaffirm our commitment to this work.
- **Generate income** that grows our assets while supporting mission-oriented activities with scalable impact.

“Impact investing at ASA seeks to create a positive social impact that is measurable while also making market rate financial returns. Philanthropy alone cannot solve our society’s problems; non-profit capital investment can play a key role.”

—Rilwan Meeran  
Vice President, Mission Impact Investing
Corporate Social Responsibility
Our philanthropic work serves as a critical testing ground to gain insight into what works best for students, fuel innovation, and inform needed policy change. In 2022, our corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategy focused on the funding of programs that are actively working to meet the key areas we supported throughout the year.

Specifically, the $6 million we granted in 2022 drove innovation for both pilot programs and longstanding initiatives united by a common goal: to improve opportunity for underserved youth by expanding access to career-learning within and beyond the classroom. We also collaborated with major national funders in an effort to help them invest in promising solutions while exploring new opportunities together.

Principles Guiding Our CSR Strategy:
- **Help** give back to the community by serving as a strong nonprofit partner.
- **Focus** grant-making efforts on increasing equity and economic opportunity.
- **Fill** information and opportunity gaps with high-quality, impactful solutions.
- **Test and scale** solutions that drive improved outcomes nationwide.
- **Source** programs with the potential to inform policy change and influence thought leadership.

Philanthropic Highlights
Over the past year, we have been inspired to see many of our grantees realize positive outcomes as a direct result of our support.

**Some highlights include:**

- **Association of Middle Level Education (AMLE):** We partnered with AMLE on another year of Solve Together, a joint initiative and national competition designed to encourage middle schoolers to build 21st-century skills and explore careers through project-based learning. In the coming year, we’ll be co-publishing a direct-to-kid version of our 2021 playbook, *Career Exploration in the Middle Grades*.

- **Big Sisters of Greater Boston:** Our collaboration with Big Sisters of Greater Boston led to the publication of a Digital Toolkit that provides youth-serving organizations tips and strategies for implementing successful career readiness programs.

- **Clayton Christensen Institute:** We continued our work with this nonprofit thinktank to produce *Building & Strengthening Students’ Networks*, a playbook that suggests strategies, tools, and metrics for educators to help students navigate postsecondary pathways that match their interests and goals.

- **Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship (NFTE):** Our ongoing partnership with this global nonprofit led to a successful 17th annual *National Youth Entrepreneurship Challenge*, NFTE’s eight-month-long series of business plan and pitch competitions that supported the expansion of their programming to 12 states.

- **Catalyze Challenge:** In partnership with a number of national funders, our continued work with Catalyze Challenge led to the support of 40 innovative solutions designed to drive equity through career-connected learning. These grantees included employers, community-based organizations, and educators looking to help young people nationwide build career identities and workplace skills.

"[Big Sisters of Greater Boston] helped me learn more about myself as a person and better understand what I want to be when I become an adult. This program gave me opportunities and resources that are going to help me find my path.”

—Joi
Student, 16
Social Impact Bond

In 2021, ASA secured a $100 million social bond to deepen our impact in helping students make informed education and career decisions. In 2022, ASA continued to use the bond to greatly expand our digital, direct-to-kid career exploration experiences and expand availability of and access to high-quality, career-connected learning services and opportunities centered on 6th-12th graders — with an emphasis on marginalized or economically disadvantaged communities and students who have faced barriers to education success. ASA funds were allocated to programs that sought wide-reaching change in five key areas:

- Career Exploration
- Influencing Change
- Postsecondary Pathways
- Work-based Learning
- Digital Career Exploration Experiences

Total Spend: $17.44 million

2022 Summary Financial Statement (in thousands)

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PART FIVE

THE ROAD AHEAD

We believe in every student’s potential—it’s what gets us out of bed in the morning. And we know that by giving them the right tools, resources, information, and help, we can reimagine, redefine, and revolutionize the school-to-work journey. In 2023, we will continue to be a champion of this cause and forge ahead as a national thought leader, elevating topics critical to learner success. To expand our impact even further, we will organize our efforts around the following goals and principles:

Innovation
Digital innovation will remain our primary avenue for impacting kids moving forward. Alongside continued optimizations to our existing digital ecosystem, 2023 will see the launch of our fourth digital, direct-to-kid tool—a platform designed to incentivize kids to take meaningful action towards planning their careers and one that rewards them for doing so. By the end of 2023, our goal is to have impacted 15 million kids through this ecosystem.

Advocacy
Our initiatives in 2023 will focus on the continued expansion of postsecondary pathways—especially those that lie beyond traditional four-year college degrees. We will also continue to develop new work-based learning opportunities and deepen the impact of youth voice in policy.

Investment
We will invest $20-$30 million in 2023 as we continue to collaborate with innovative management teams, investors, and entrepreneurs who are similarly driven to solve challenges within three key areas: career-focused education, intentional postsecondary pathways, and workforce development.

Corporate Social Responsibility
Our commitment to corporate social responsibility will continue through funding initiatives that drive impact for students. This will give us deeper insight into their needs, the policies affecting them, and help us understand where to focus our advocacy efforts and funding long-term. We will also expand our grantee network and take a more intentional approach to grant-making—one that upholds ASA’s mission to increase opportunity for all young people.

Our work is far from over—but with these efforts and more, we know we can help give every student the power to bring their future into focus.
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A plan for every student.
A path for every future™

For more information, visit https://www.asa.org/about or contact Judy Goldstein at jgoldstein@asa.org.