

# 2015 NEW YORK LIFE EXCELLENCE IN SUMMER LEARNING AWARDS



From churches and libraries to schools and homes, the winners of the 2015 New York Life Excellence in Summer Learning Award and the new Founder's Award, recognizing drop-in or informal program models, show that students can experience high-quality summer learning in many diverse settings. NSLA recognizes this year's winning programs for demonstrating excellence in accelerating academic achievement and promoting healthy development for low-income children and youth.

*"These programs bust the myth that summer learning is boring or punitive by offering some of the most engaging, individualized and hands-on learning opportunities available to young people today," said Sarah Pitcock, CEO, NSLA.*

Research shows that most children lose up to two months of math skills during summer breaks, and lower-income children also lose two to three months of reading skills without practice. This cumulative loss contributes significantly to the achievement gap, yet only one-third of households report having a child enrolled in a summer learning program. These award-winning programs strive to curb these losses, while employing research-based practices to build 21st Century skills for college and career success.

"We are pleased to once again partner with one of the nation's leading authorities on summer learning," said Marlyn Torres, senior program officer, New York Life Foundation. "The Excellence in Summer Learning Award has grown into a program that has improved the quality of summer learning programs, which provide thousands of children across the country with enriched summer experiences."

## The 2015 Excellence in Summer Learning Award winners are:

### **Pittsburgh Public Schools' Summer Dreamers Academy,**

a free academic and enrichment camp for students entering first to eighth grade with average and below-average performance. In the 2013-14 school year, the program showed a positive impact on math scores of rising fourth graders and showed a correlation with reduced school absences across all grade levels.

**Project Transformation**, which serves more than 1,000 youth from first to twelfth grade in underserved communities in Dallas, Texas. With a focus on literacy development, leadership cultivation, diversity appreciation and community service, elementary participants in 2014 read over 17,000 books, resulting in 99 percent of students maintaining or improving their reading fluency.

**Rochester Summer Scholars**, a voluntary, free, district-run summer program that reaches 600 elementary students living in Rochester, N.Y., the fifth poorest city in the country. Through a variety of enrichment activities including performance and visual arts, physical activities, and sports, students not only have fun, but also strengthen academic skills.

## The first-ever Founder's Award winner is:

**Rahm's Readers Summer Learning Challenge**, a 24-hour-a-day online, drop-in and take-home program by Chicago Public Library to promote increased literacy, 21st Century skills, and STEAM (Science Technology Engineering, Arts and Mathematics) learning for all young people from pre-kindergarten to twelfth grade. The program served more than 83,000 Chicago children in 2014.



NEW YORK LIFE  
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# CITYWIDE LIBRARY PROGRAM EARNS FIRST FOUNDER'S AWARD

The Chicago Public Library (CPL) is bridging the gap for students during the summer in the Windy City. While doing so, it is becoming a national example for broadening traditional library reading programs.

According to the U.S. Census 2013 community survey, 33.4 percent of Chicago children under the age of 18 live below the federal poverty level. That reality creates barriers to academic access all year-round, but the disparity is most stark during the summer months when students' exposure to new learning experiences is low.

In 2013, the 80-branch Chicago Public Library System, in partnership with the Museum of Science and Industry, revamped its 37-year-old summer reading program to incorporate STEM/STEAM, play-based and hands-on learning for students of all ages. Today, CPL partners with community-based organizations to offer the **Rahm's Readers Summer Learning Challenge**, named after Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel, in every neighborhood across the city and 24 hours-a-day through online and take-home content.

CPL partners with Chicago Public Schools, Chicago Boys and Girls Club, the Museum of Science and Industry, private preschools and camps and other cultural institutions to deliver the Summer Learning Challenge.

Each library in the system is transformed by theme in the summer. More than 1,200 teens supported the Summer Learning Challenge, including the Farrell Fellows, a group of high school interns trained by the Museum of Science and Industry to facilitate STEM learning in library branches throughout the city. Families are also included in the Chicago Public Library's summer programming. Parents and guardians are given a "caregiver packet" to further enrich students' summer skill building and introduce them to the Library system's resources.

"This honor is a tremendous testament to the leadership and continued commitment of the Chicago Public Library and its staff – to give our children the skills and tools they need so they can keep learning, discovering, and succeeding in school and in life," said Mayor Rahm Emanuel.

The Summer Learning Challenge is aligned to the Framework for 21st Century Learning Skills and built on three STEM/STEAM-central learning tracks: Read, Discover, and Create. In the "Read" track, students are given reading goals of 500 minutes sustained in 20 minutes of reading a day. "Discover" involves STEM skills that encourage critical thinking, problem-solving, and digital information literacy, while in the "Create" track, children develop their ability to innovate by completing design challenges.

Student choice is essential to the program's success. Each year, the Library, along with the Museum of Science and Industry, and various other partners, work together to curate and adapt experiences according to age and available resources for each learning goal. Students then create their own pathway within a selected track.

The Summer Learning Challenge has grown each year, serving over 83,000 Chicago children in 2014. Participants in 2013 demonstrated higher than anticipated scores from the prior school year, particularly in reading and math. Participant surveys also showed increased engagement with reading and learning, increased levels of comfort with learning opportunities, new interest in STEM/STEAM, and an increase in the overall enjoyment of reading and learning.



Data sharing among schools, libraries and partner organizations help track how students are doing and identify where gaps in services exist.

Volunteer roles for teens engage youth in implementation of the program and provide work experience.

Hands-on projects give youth fun STEM and project-based learning opportunities.

WINNING



STRATEGIES

# WORK HARD, PLAY HARD IN PITTSBURGH



Imagine a world governed by three simple rules: 1. Be nice. 2. Work hard. 3. Have fun. While these rules may seem rudimentary, they are the cornerstone for an unforgettable summer experience for the children who attend **Pittsburgh Public Schools' Summer Dreamers Academy**.

A free academic and enrichment "camp," Summer Dreamers Academy began in 2010 to revamp Pittsburgh Public Schools' traditional summer school and combat summer learning loss. It has since served 2,100 rising first to eighth graders. The program fosters a deep sense of culture, community and support.

Campers arrive at 8:30 am for a healthy breakfast, which is followed by a Camp Meeting and Match and English language arts academic blocks. Campers can be seen tackling real world problems in math, and acting out scenes in books they are reading. After lunch, students participate in fun enrichment activities facilitated by dozens of partners including the Carnegie Science Center, Citiparks, Pittsburgh Cares and Bike Pittsburgh. Activities vary from mosaics to water polo to judo classes, in order to stimulate social skills, increase personal responsibility and reinforce academic skills. Field trips are also a mainstay.

Even within camp halls, it is not uncommon to feel this community from the shouts of "woohoo" or the fist bumps

between campers, whom are all striving to win the "Spirit Stick," and staff members, who live by the motto, "If you want them to be warm, you have got to be HOT!" The enthusiastic and engaged staff consists of certified, experienced Pittsburgh Public Schools teachers and on-site coordinators who not only participate in training specifically for the Summer Dreamers Academy, but are also able to bring what they learned during the summer back to the classroom in the fall, thus enhancing professional development for their peers. Dedicated and purposeful, the staff continually strives to make the program better each year by evaluating goals using surveys, focus groups and observations and, then, adjusting practices accordingly to achieve even more success.

Rising fourth graders who attended the 2013 program had higher scores on a general mathematics knowledge assessment compared to their peers who applied but were not selected to attend. Participation in summer 2014 had a positive, statistically significant effect on oral reading fluency scores for rising first through third graders. Participation in the Summer Dreamers Academy was correlated with a reduction in 2013-14 school year absences across all grade levels and with a positive, significant increase effect on GPA.

Maybe, the solution to summer learning loss lies in three simple rules: Be nice, work hard and have fun.

## WINNING



## STRATEGIES

An annual Request for Proposal process secures diverse community partners to provide engaging enrichment opportunities that are aligned with program goals.

Staffers lead by modeling a culture of enthusiasm, positivity and high expectations; morning "spirit stick" rallies set the tone for the day.

A partnership with Cities of Learning connects Summer Dreamers enrichment with digital badging efforts to equip young people with 21st century skills.

# RELATIONSHIPS DRIVE PROJECT TRANSFORMATION

**R**elationships are at the heart of everything that **Project Transformation**—Greater Dallas does. From visiting youth and families at home to hosting volunteers for one-on-one reading sessions with elementary students, Project Transformation emphasizes relationship building to help each young person realize their unique potential. The program also puts a deep emphasis on youth leadership development, staffing its program with 100 college-aged young adults who invest in the lives of at-risk students while learning about poverty and other challenges that face the local community. Since its founding in 1998, Project Transformation has sought to tackle three challenges through one summer-learning program: meet the academic, physical and socioemotional needs of children from low-income communities; give college students opportunities to develop as young adult leaders; and revitalize struggling churches through community engagement.

Project Transformation serves more than 1,000 youth in first through twelfth grades, with 90 percent of participants qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch. Project Transformation helps students build literacy skills by assessing their reading levels and tailoring activities and books to their interests. The program also provides opportunities for fun enrichment activities like field trips and developing community service projects.

It takes a lot of adults and community support to provide the kind of intensive, hands-on interaction at the center of Project Transformation's model, and the program has built a strong web of community collaborators. Each year the program engages about 1,500 local volunteers to read with children for 40 minutes each day. One hundred trained AmeriCorps Members help staff the summer program, and visit participants' homes, getting to know the families in an informal setting which builds strong, trusting relationships and forms lasting bonds. Project Transformation also works with numerous nonprofits and churches around Dallas, which familiarizes participants with new services and helps these community-based organizations make connections in new neighborhoods. One partner, North Texas Food Bank, provides more than 59,000 meals to Project Transformation participants annually.

The Project Transformation approach is paying dividends. By building strong relationships with community-based organizations, college-aged AmeriCorps Members, and adult volunteers, Project Transformation is able to decrease summer learning loss. In 2015, community volunteers provided more than 11,500 hours of one-on-one reading time with elementary participants, resulting in 90 percent of students maintaining or improving their reading fluency. In addition, 80 percent of students indicated they were very likely to apply for college or university.



A large network of community partners contributes to a multi-faceted and cost-effective program.

Home visits ensure that all staff members get to know families and encourage parent and caregiver engagement.

Training and staffing the program with 100 volunteers benefits the students served by the programs and develops future young leaders.

WINNING



STRATEGIES



# SETTING STUDENTS AND STAFF UP FOR SCHOOL-YEAR SUCCESS WITH SUMMER LEARNING

**R**ochester Summer Scholars began in 2011 as part of The Wallace Foundation's national study to learn whether voluntary, district-led summer programs that include academics and enrichment activities can improve educational outcomes for children in low-income, urban communities.

Rochester is the fifth poorest city in the country. Rochester City School District's (RCSD) poverty rate is 85 percent. In 2012-13, only 48 percent of the city's students graduated from high school, and only five percent of these graduates are considered college and/or career ready by New York State Standards. Rochester Summer Scholars, aimed at eliminating summer learning loss for 600 city students, runs seven and a half hours



## WINNING STRATEGIES



A well-branded program name empowers students and builds self-confidence as learners.

Summer programs can act as a laboratory for improvements that can also benefit the school year classroom.

Early planning of the curriculum and an exciting instructional theme keeps students motivated and striving to do their best.

per day, five days a week for five weeks during the summer and offers free transportation and meals to families. Daily activities include 80 minutes of math, 80 minutes of English language arts (ELA) and two 80 minute blocks of enrichment activities, such as rock climbing, yoga and glass crafting, which are designed to instill confidence in students to succeed. The program uses data and formative assessments to individualize academic support for their participants. Meanwhile, student engagement in Math and ELA is enhanced by integration in game-oriented themes like last summer's "Where in the World is Carmen Sandiego?" where daily clues of the story in each classroom build curiosity and anticipation for the next adventure.

For RCSD, summer learning is an extension of school year learning. Planning takes place throughout the school year with summer

and school year staff participation and, during the summer, professional learning and quality improvement is prioritized. Summer Scholars is used as a laboratory for the district and teachers to improve curriculum and school day practices; innovations and successes are brought into the school year.

The program's engagement with families is led by a team of certified teachers, behavior support specialists, and family volunteers who strengthen and build relationships that carry into the school year. Summer Scholars also excels at branding their program in a way that feels like a true summer camp experience to families and youth.

Staff retention for Summer Scholars is high. Staff members are enthusiastically engaged with students throughout the day, and strong relationships and mutual respect among staff and students is evident. One student exclaimed upon seeing the summer program director in the fall, "I wrote a book on Summer Scholars. I brought it in when I started school and the librarian put it on the shelf. I am an author!"

Early indications show that enthusiasm translating to academic performance. Students who attended the 2014 summer program entered the 2015 school year with stronger math skills than those who did not attend.



## ABOUT THE NEW YORK LIFE EXCELLENCE IN SUMMER LEARNING AWARDS

The New York Life Excellence in Summer Learning Award and Founder's Award recognizes outstanding summer programs that demonstrate excellence in accelerating academic achievement and promoting healthy development for low-income children and youth between pre-kindergarten and twelfth grade.

Since 2004, the Excellence in Summer Learning Award program has been a critical strategy of the National Summer Learning Association (NSLA) to support the growth and visibility of top-quality summer learning programs. Over time, it has matured into a program with far-reaching implications for improving the quality and impact of the summer learning field as a whole.

In 2015, NSLA introduced the Founder's Award to further expand its reach and better document outstanding practices and models for summer learning in the field. The awards program provides a growing knowledge base that NSLA uses to educate policymakers, funders, and the public on best practices and standards of quality for summer learning. With in-depth applications from nearly 500 programs serving a combined 442,852 youth, the Excellence Award competition offers an unparalleled look at the summer learning landscape. Learn more at [summerlearning.org/ExcellenceAward](http://summerlearning.org/ExcellenceAward).

### *About the National Summer Learning Association*

The National Summer Learning Association is the only national nonprofit exclusively focused on closing the achievement gap by increasing access to high-quality summer learning opportunities. NSLA recognizes and disseminates what works, offers expertise and support for programs and communities, and advocates for summer learning as a solution for equity and excellence in education. NSLA's work is driven by the belief that all children and youth deserve high-quality summer learning experiences that will help them succeed in college, career, and life.

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