

2014 NEW YORK LIFE EXCELLENCE IN SUMMER LEARNING AWARDS

"We partnered with the National Summer Learning Association to recognize three outstanding organizations that are helping to reduce the achievement gap in their communities," said Marlyn Torres, Vice President, New York Life Foundation. "The three organizations honored offer 'best-in-class' enrichment programs that provide opportunities for children to practice essential skills during the summer months."

Through a nationally recognized literacy program model, college and career exploration with law internships, and mentorships with STEM professionals, this year's New York Life Excellence in Summer Learning Award winners are rewriting the futures of children and youth with whom they work. These students are using the summer as a time for not only academics, but enriching real-world experiences and self-exploration.

This year's winning programs are focused on ensuring the children in their community are reading at grade-level by third grade. The programs also are nurturing youths' interests in law and STEM to help them pursue higher education.

"Our 2014 award winners exemplify the best in summer learning and the impact that high-quality summer learning opportunities can have on student success," said Sarah Pitcock, CEO of the National Summer Learning Association. "From rural communities to large urban cities, these programs are offering an engaging combination of rigorous academics and meaningful enrichment to students who otherwise might lack these important opportunities."

Research has shown that summer learning loss is a significant contributor to the achievement gap. Every summer, low-income youth lose two to three months in reading achievement while their higher-income peers make slight gains. Further, most youth lose about two months of grade-level equivalency in math skills. Year after year, this loss accumulates with lifelong consequences.

Defying that reality, these high-quality programs are leading the way in closing achievement and opportunity gaps in their communities. This year's winning programs are:

Partners for Education at Berea College Upward Bound Math and Science Program immerses sixty high school students each summer in a residential program on the campus of Berea College. Young people from the rural Appalachian region of Eastern



PHOTO BY YMCA OF GREATER CHARLOTTE

Kentucky are given STEM and life experience that they otherwise would not have experienced in their hometowns.

NJ LEEP's College Bound Summer Session was recognized by First Lady Michelle Obama on National Summer Learning Day 2014. The First Lady's remarks captured why the program has taken Excellence in Summer Learning honors. "At the New Jersey Law Education Empowerment Program, I hear you guys are connecting students with internships and mentors from local law firms," she said. "I was a lawyer. And that was one thing I wish I had done, I never worked in a law firm before. This is such great experience, because you'll have some idea what you're doing when you go to law school."

YMCA of Greater Charlotte has taken a local literacy program for kindergarten to third-grade students and turned it into a national model. **Y Readers'** staff work with a "Four-Blocks Literacy Model," which includes Guided and Self-Selected Reading, Writing, and Working with Words through a technique that focuses on high-frequency words and common spelling patterns. The result: a winning program rolled out to nearly fifty YMCA's nationwide in the summer of 2014.



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PARTNERS FOR EDUCATION AT BEREA COLLEGE UPWARD BOUND MATH AND SCIENCE PROGRAM (UBMS)

At *Partners for Education at Berea College Upward Bound Math and Science Program (UBMS)*, days start with “Morning Circle,” an activity in which all program staff—leadership included—and students share special announcements, news, and birthdays. A special ribbon is also presented from one youth to another, recognizing something positive that the recipient did. Every morning the “Morning Circle” sets the tone for a safe and supportive environment between youth and staff.

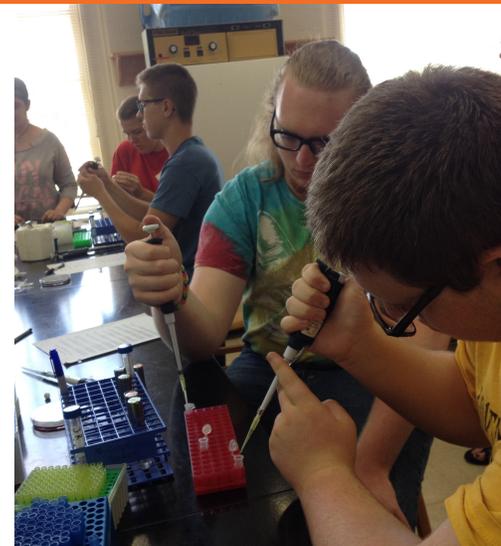
UBMS began in 1999 as a federally funded U.S. Department of Education TRIO program. Today, it serves sixty high school students from low-income rural Appalachian families in Eastern Kentucky. Students remain on Berea College’s campus five days a week for six weeks, where the focus is on nurturing an interest in STEM education and careers that would normally go undiscovered in their isolated rural towns. In this area, less than 20 percent of adults hold bachelors degrees, and over 24 percent live below the poverty level.

Morning academics include project-based classes in STEM and humanities. For example, one group of students collaborated on building a functioning hovercraft, while another group of students—feeling that with the emergence of digital technology, users have lost a basic understanding of photography—built their own camera, demonstrating the mechanics of how the very first such devices captured images.



The afternoon consists of an hour of physical activity involving sports that many of the youth have never been exposed to, such as, yoga, racquetball, and swimming. An ACT preparatory class follows, and then it’s on to self-exploration work focused around higher education and career options in a course called “Future Building.” Here, students are administered a personality test that helps them learn more about themselves and explore career options in a more informed context. Some students even have the opportunity to be mentored by STEM professionals that volunteer for the program. Evenings involve enriching coursework not offered in the students’ public schools, such as *Islamic Language and Culture* and *Poetry through Paint*.

The transition from high school to college is a critical one for many students—even more so for low-income youth. One way the program strives to support this transition is by having students take a first year, college-level, research-based course taught by a Berea College professor. Students with a passing grade receive credit towards their college career. The payoff of this program? In 2013, 75 percent of participating youth enrolled in post-secondary education. The state of Kentucky’s average is 63.10 percent.



UBMS works with school guidance counselors, teachers, and current students to help recruit participants for their program.

They also work with other college access providers, such as GEAR UP, to help identify students who could benefit from their services.

NJ LEEP COLLEGE BOUND SUMMER SESSION



Every Friday in the summer, you'll find professionally dressed ninth-graders from **NJ LEEP's College Bound Summer Session** at a local law firm, courthouse, or corporate legal department learning about the practice of law. During the program, students also gain hands-on experience about criminal law and the trial process through a mock trial competition heard by a sitting New Jersey or federal judge. Rising tenth-graders complete paid internships at participating law firms and corporations, where they work directly with attorneys on staff.

Serving 145 high school students in northern New Jersey through a partnership with Seton Hall Law School, the five-week summer program allows youth to build skills through law-related activities and college-focused instruction. The goal is to support them in succeeding academically and ultimately gaining admission to four-year colleges and universities. Throughout the program, youth participants can be found on either the campus of Seton Hall University School of Law or in a professional setting, such as a local law firm or a corporation's legal department.

Participating youth come from Newark and surrounding neighborhoods where roughly half of the students in the public school system have demonstrated high school reading proficiency and only 38 percent of youth have high school math proficiency. The majority of participants come from low-income, minority families.

College and career preparation is a significant focus of NJ LEEP, with rising eleventh-grade students participating in an SAT prep-course. The program offers both specific test strategy instruction, as well as general content development. The course works with students individually and in a group on math, writing, comprehension, analysis, and vocabulary, while helping to build confidence in their test-taking ability. Twelfth-grade youth participate in the College Application Program, in which they are asked to create a resume, research colleges, complete multiple drafts of their personal statement, fill out the common application, and begin compiling scholarship and financial aid forms.

Students are required to attend the program for all four years of their high school career. As a result, the program fosters the building of relationships that often continue well after students have moved on, with program "graduates" staying in touch and supporting one another well into their college careers.

NJ LEEP's average daily attendance is 97 percent. The average SAT increase is 250 points, and 100 percent of graduates matriculate onto college, with 90 percent of their youth who complete all four years of the program matriculating to four-year colleges and universities. Youth go on to attend colleges such as, Princeton University, Rutgers University, Mt. Holyoke College, Bowdoin College, Loyola University, and Georgetown University.

NJ LEEP works with Newark Public Schools (NPS) to facilitate recruitment sessions for their program.

They also build and maintain relationships with various schools to conduct school-based, law-related educational programming during the year.



YMCA OF GREATER CHARLOTTE Y READERS

At the *YMCA of Greater Charlotte*, third-grade reading proficiency is a strategic priority. In 1999, the *Y Readers* program began with forty students. Today, this exemplary program focused on ensuring that children reach third-grade reading proficiency serves more than 500 kindergarten through third-grade students every summer across 10 public schools and three school districts. Y Readers has proven especially critical, as in 2013 North Carolina passed legislation that requires districts to retain third-graders who are not proficient in reading.

According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation, studies show that if a child lives in poverty and can't read by third-grade, he/she may never catch up and is thirteen times more likely to drop out of high school. Locally, Y Readers serves Title I schools that have an average reading proficiency score of 23 percent.

Y Readers is offered for six weeks with a curriculum designed to build a child's literacy abilities, engage interests, and maintain a fun, camp-like atmosphere. Classrooms are decorated with a theme, such as the jungle or under-the-sea. Students can even choose an alter-ego for all six weeks of the program; for example, one student might choose to be their favorite superhero.

Y Readers' staff work with a "Four-Blocks Literacy Model," which includes Guided and Self-Selected Reading, Writing, and Working with Words. This instructional model is flexible and allows students to learn in a way that is individualized to their needs.



Children spend their afternoons participating in literacy-infused enrichment in art, music, science, tech, and physical activity. One example: Using Reader's Theater scripts, students read aloud and act out a play. They create a mask for their character, and collaborate with each other to assign roles, rehearse, build a set, and perform their play for an audience. Students also take field trips to the local YMCA for swimming lessons, visit their local library, and enjoy the outdoors, boating on a local lake.

Through its affiliation with the YMCA of the USA, Y Readers became a National Signature Program for Summer Learning in 2012. The program's model was piloted in five cities in 2012, expanded to 29 cities in 2013, and to 49 cities in the summer of 2014. YMCA of the USA has also designated the YMCA of Greater Charlotte as a Proof Point Y, for having achievement gap efforts result in 80 percent or more positive outcomes.

In summer 2014, Y Readers in Charlotte served 527 children with a 93 percent completion rate. Students improved their reading level by an average of 3.1 months. All participants were pre- and post-tested, and 86 percent of students improved or maintained their reading level.



The YMCA of Greater Charlotte has a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools that allows them to measure their impact using district reported data.

An additional benefit of the MOU is to align Y Readers with the priorities and needs of the local school district.

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