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National Summer Learning Association Announces Winners of 2014 New York Life Excellence in Summer Learning Awards

*Programs in Charlotte, N.C., Newark, N.J., and Berea, Ky., showcase the best in
summer learning for low-income students*

Baltimore—[The National Summer Learning Association](#) (NSLA) has announced the YMCA of Greater Charlotte, NJ LEEP and Partners for Education at Berea College as recipients of the 2014 New York Life Excellence in Summer Learning Awards. The annual award recognizes summer programs demonstrating excellence in accelerating academic achievement and promoting healthy development for low-income children and youth, as measured by NSLA's Comprehensive Assessment of Summer Programs. Winning programs also demonstrate exemplary practices in overall programming, including supporting staff, schools, and other program partners in fulfilling shared goals. The three programs were chosen from 62 applicants for the 2014 awards.

"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 established that low-income students are disproportionately at risk to lose academic skills during the summer. While most children lose up to two months of math skills during summer breaks, lower-income children also lose two to three months of reading skills without practice. The cumulative effects of this "summer slide" contribute significantly to the achievement gap, yet only one-third of low-income families report having a child enrolled in a summer learning program. Excellence Award winning programs strive to curb these losses, but also employ other research-based practices to build 21st Century skills, confidence, parental engagement, and future aspirations.

"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 Maria Collins, 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."

New York Life Foundation has partnered with NSLA to honor programs demonstrating the best in high-quality summer learning, and awards each winning program with \$10,000.

At the **YMCA of Greater Charlotte's Y Readers program**, more than 500 first-, second- and third-graders who are reading below grade level participate in a reading-intensive program designed to help them get caught up over the summer. Last year the program was offered in three Charlotte, N.C.-area school districts for six weeks and a total of 192 hours of programming. The program has proved especially important in light of recently passed state legislation that requires districts to retain third graders who are not proficient in reading.

Y Readers is centered on a curriculum designed to build student's literacy abilities, while still maintaining a fun, camp-like atmosphere. Students spend mornings participating in literacy-focused activities, while afternoons are spent doing enrichments that often weave in the reading curriculum, like performing Reader's Theater scripts or making masks of book characters.

Y Readers has made a tangible impact on students' literacy: In 2013, students improved their reading level by an average of three months, and 86 percent of all students maintained or improved their reading skills. This successful model has already expanded to dozens of other Y locations and will continue to do so in 2015.

At **NJ LEEP's College Bound Summer Session**, approximately 140 high school students participate each summer in a five-week program focused on building skills through law-related activities and college-focused instruction. On the campus of Seton Hall Law School, ninth-graders participate in a "Summer Law Institute," learning about criminal law and trial process and participating in a mock trial competition. Rising tenth-graders work in paid internships at law firms and corporations such as Prudential Financial. Eleventh-grade students participate in SAT preparation, and twelfth-graders are guided through the college application process, while also completing a college-level western philosophy curriculum designed to ensure students learn essential study skills.

Participating students come from Newark and surrounding neighborhoods, where roughly half of students in the public school system have demonstrated high-school reading proficiency and only 38 percent of students have high-school math proficiency. The majority of NJ LEEP students come from low-income, minority families and the program strives to empower youth to succeed academically and gain admission to four-year colleges and universities.

One hundred percent of the students who have graduated from NJ LEEP's college bound program have gone on to college, with students currently attending institutions such as Rutgers University, Georgetown University and Princeton University.

The **Partners for Education at Berea College Upward Bound Math and Science program** serves 60 high school students from low-income Appalachian families in Eastern Kentucky. For six weeks each summer, students stay in residence halls on Berea College's campus, receive meals, take classes that include Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) projects, engage in ACT preparation, explore careers and take field trips to other colleges. In the evenings, students also have opportunities to take enriching classes typically unavailable at their local school, such as Islamic Language and Culture or Poetry through Print. For students who have completed twelfth grade, the program offers a chance to earn college credit through a first-year college-level research course taught by a Berea professor.

Fewer than 20 percent of local residents hold a bachelor's degree, and the economic depression and rural isolation of the area limits students' access to STEM opportunities. But through the Upward Bound Math and Science program, students have the chance to experience

life on a college campus and undertake rigorous, fun STEM experiences like visiting a fossil bed and learning about archeology.

Youth who have participated in the program have enrolled in postsecondary institutions at a higher rate than Kentucky students. In 2013, 75 percent of students from the program went on to postsecondary education, compared to 63 percent of students statewide.

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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 in summer learning, develops and delivers capacity-building offerings and convenes and empowers key actors to embrace summer learning as a solution for equity and excellence in education. For more information, visit www.summerlearning.org.