



NEW YORK LIFE
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National Summer Learning Association Announces Winners of 2015 New York Life Excellence in Summer Learning Awards

*High-Quality Programs in Dallas, Pittsburgh, Rochester, and Chicago Are Using
the Summer Months to Close the Achievement Gap for Low-Income Students*

Baltimore -- With millions of students heading back to school across the country, many communities and school districts are celebrating their creative efforts to keep young people learning and growing through high-quality summer learning programs. The [National Summer Learning Association](#) (NSLA) announced today four exemplary programs that have earned the coveted 2015 New York Life Excellence in Summer Learning Award and NSLA's new Founder's Award, demonstrating that summer is indeed a season for learning.

Both annual awards recognize 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 professional development for program staff and collaboration with community partners in fulfilling shared goals for student and family engagement. The new Founder's Award recognizes drop-in or informal program models, and the Excellence in Summer Learning Award recognizes enrollment-based models. The four winning programs -- Pittsburgh Public Schools, Project Transformation (Dallas area), Rochester City School District, and Chicago Public Library -- were chosen from 90 applicants for the 2015 awards.

"Our 2015 award winners and finalists 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. "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."

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 households report having a child enrolled in a summer learning program. Excellence Award winning programs strive to curb these losses, but also employ research-based practices to build 21st Century skills for college and career success.

"We are pleased to once again partner with the National Summer Learning Association (NSLA), which is 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."

2015 New York Life Excellence in Summer Learning Award Winners

Pittsburgh Public Schools' [Summer Dreamers Academy](#) is a free academic and enrichment camp designed to combat summer learning loss among rising first to eighth grade students with average and below-average performance. Since 2010, the program has provided 2,100 campers with engaging classes in reading and math, as well as high-quality enrichment programming ranging from fencing and judo to creative and performing arts, technology development, and community service. In 2013-2014, rising fourth graders in the program had higher scores on their mathematics assessment when compared to peers who had applied but were unable to attend. Participation also correlated with a reduction in 2013-2014 school year absences across all grade levels.

[Project Transformation](#) provides holistic, multi-faceted, comprehensive educational and leadership programming for 1,021 first through twelfth grade youth in underserved communities in Dallas, Texas. The summer program's four pillars are literacy development, leadership cultivation, diversity appreciation, and community service. Through building strong relationships with community-based organizations, college interns, and adult volunteers, Project Transformation is able to decrease summer learning loss by ensuring that every child receives one-on-one enrichment to maintain reading fluency and realize their own unique potential. In 2014, program volunteers read over 17,000 books with elementary students, resulting in 99 percent of students maintaining or improving their reading fluency. While in the high school leadership program, 89 percent of students indicated increased confidence in making future education and career decisions.

[Rochester Summer Scholars](#) in Rochester, N.Y. is a voluntary, free, district-run summer program that includes academics and enrichment activities aimed at eliminating summer learning loss among 600 elementary students living in the fifth poorest city in the entire country. Since 2011, Rochester Summer Scholars has distinguished itself from a traditional district summer program by providing a variety of enrichment activities, including performance and visual arts, physical activities, and sports. Through Rochester Summer Scholars' unique and well-balanced programming of academic and enrichment activities, elementary students have an opportunity to gain the academic skills, self-confidence, and the emotional perseverance to overcome summer learning loss. As a result of the program, students who attended the 2014 summer program entered the 2015 school year with stronger math skills than those who did not attend.

NSLA Founder's Award Winner

NSLA's first Founder's Award winner, [Rahm's Readers Summer Learning Challenge](#) is 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 uses a variety of learning modalities and strategic partnerships to provide meaningful learning opportunities to children and families in Chicago, Ill. The Museum of Science and Industry has been a key partner in developing the STEM curriculum for the Library's annual program. As a part of the Chicago Public Library system, the program is offered annually in 80 different library branches throughout the city and has become a national model for broadening traditional summer library programs. The program 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.

The 2015 New York Life Excellence Awards finalists also include, The Boys & Girls Club of El Dorado, El Dorado, Ark.; Consolidated School District of New Britain, New Britain, Conn.; Fresno County Office of Education, Fresno, Calif.; NYC Summer Quest, New York, N.Y.; Steppingstone Scholars, Inc., Philadelphia, Pa.; The Steppingstone Foundation, Boston, Mass.; Whittier City School District, Whittier City, Calif.

This year's winners and finalists will be celebrated during the New York Life Excellence in Summer Learning Awards Luncheon at the National Summer Learning Association's [Summer Changes Everything™ National Conference](#) in Baltimore, Md., October 13, 2015. Winners will be given an award designed and produced by students of the 2013 Excellence Award winner, the Connecticut Pre-Engineering Program, a summer program focused on STEM education in Middletown, Conn.

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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

NSLA's New York Life Excellence in Summer Learning Award and Founder's Award annually recognize outstanding summer programs or models that demonstrate excellence in accelerating academic achievement and promoting healthy development for low income young people between pre-kindergarten and twelfth grade. Since 2004, in-depth Excellence Awards applications from nearly 500 programs serving a combined 442,852 youth have offered an unparalleled look at the summer learning landscape. In 2015, NSLA introduced the Founder's Award to recognize informal or wraparound summer learning models that can be implemented at scale in many community settings.