

2013 NEW YORK LIFE EXCELLENCE IN SUMMER LEARNING AWARDS

“New York Life is proud to partner with NSLA to help support academically enriching programs for low-income children during the summer,” said New York Life Foundation President Christine Park. “We congratulate these winning programs that are demonstrating what’s possible when schools and community-based organizations join together with shared vision and common goals.”

From math-gaming technology to Common Core-aligned research projects, the winners of the 2013 New York Life Excellence in Summer Learning Awards exemplify the promise of innovative strategies to help children and educators make the most of the summer. This year, the National Summer Learning Association (NSLA) recognizes three outstanding programs that are successfully boosting academic achievement and healthy development for low-income youth during the critical time of summer. The 2013 winners are Boston Summer Learning Project, Connecticut Pre-Engineering Program Summer Gaming Challenge (CPEP), and Freedom School Partners in Charlotte, N.C.

- **At Boston Summer Learning Project**, certified teachers and youth development professionals collaborate to lead students through hands-on projects based around an “essential question” such as, “What does it mean to be living?” The program is designed to spark critical thinking and mastery of academic skills through engaging and enriching activities—and students are seeing tangible results in English Language Arts and math skills.
- **At CPEP**, students challenge each other in math skill-building computer games and build projects with Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) themes. Blending cutting-edge educational gaming software, face-to-face teacher-led instruction, and engaging challenges, the program makes math fun and helps students improve their math proficiency.
- **At Freedom School Partners**, mornings are filled with literacy-building activities led by highly trained college students while afternoons involve field trips, physical activities, and enrichment with an emphasis on Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math (STEAM) learning. Over the past four summers, the vast majority of students have maintained or gained progress in their reading levels.



PHOTO BY TIFFANY KNIGHT

The winners of the New York Life Excellence in Summer Learning Awards were selected from more than 90 applicants based on a rigorous application and interview process and measured by NSLA’s Comprehensive Assessment of Summer Programs, a research-based assessment tool designed to measure the quality of summer programs across 80 indicators. Winning programs demonstrate exemplary practices in overall programming, including supporting staff, schools, and other program partners in fulfilling shared goals. Ultimately, the winners serve as leaders in high-quality summer learning—making a tangible difference in the lives of America’s youth.

“Research shows us the losses that occur when we fail to maximize the opportunities of summer for all youth,” said Sarah Pitcock, Interim CEO of the National Summer Learning Association. “These award-winning programs, however, show us the accelerated gains that are possible when we make the most of every day. Whether it’s through rigorous content, project-based learning, STEM challenges, or in-depth instruction in visual and performing arts, these programs create a springboard from school year to school year for children, schools, and families.”



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BOSTON SUMMER LEARNING PROJECT

BOSTON SUMMER LEARNING PROJECT SHOWS IMPACT OF CITYWIDE PARTNERSHIPS



For students in the Boston Summer Learning Project, learning doesn't just happen in a classroom. The program, which serves more than 1,700 low-income youth from elementary through high school, takes place at 28 sites ranging from college campuses to nature preserves to neighborhood nonprofits. Led by Boston Public Schools and Boston After School & Beyond, the Summer Learning Project is driven by strategic partnerships with 18 community-based organizations that work closely with program leaders and certified teachers to promote quality learning while having fun. The project was launched as part of the Boston Opportunity Agenda—the city's education pipeline collaborative.

Activities at all sites are designed around an "essential question"—a strategy that integrates the Common Core State Standards through engaging project-based activities. For example, at Camp Ponkapoag in Massachusetts' Blue Hills, Boston Public School teachers and YMCA staff led students through answering the question, "What does it mean to be living?" They did so through writing and illustrating a book about the camp's ecosystems, taking hikes, and completing visual arts projects.

At the Sociedad Latina site, students who were primarily middle school English language learners explored the question,

"What does it mean to be an entrepreneur?" The youth wrote a business plan, which incorporated grade-level math in financial projections, and completed a culminating entrepreneurship project tied to a chosen enrichment activity, such as planning for the opening of an art gallery.

"The Boston Summer Learning Project is a great example of how we become much more impactful when we work together—the city, our schools, nonprofits, teachers, parents, and students," said Boston Mayor Thomas M. Menino. "Learning should never stop simply because it's July or August, and through these partnerships our students are getting a great education so they're ahead of the game in the fall."

"Our programs are rigorous enough to count for school credit and engaging enough to attract students voluntarily," said executive director of Boston After School & Beyond, Chris Smith. "Because we are able to take advantage of all the resources our partners have to offer, youth are able to have a unique learning experience that not only helps them academically but also allows them to build life skills."

The results show that the approach is successfully helping students avoid the risks of summer learning loss, which research attributes as a significant factor that widens the achievement gap. In 2011, an evaluation from the National Institute on Out-of-School Time found students' English language arts skills improved by 12 percent and math skills improved by 17 percent. In 2012, English language learners demonstrated particularly impactful academic gains—32 percent in ELA and 33 percent in math.



CPEP

AT CPEP, STUDENTS ARE GAME TO LEARN

Certified teachers and interactive video games may seem like an unlikely pairing, but at CPEP's Summer Gaming Challenge, the combination makes for a memorable summer learning experience—with a positive educational impact.

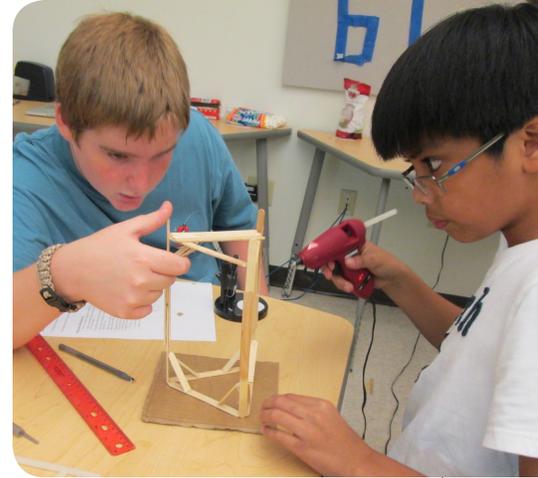
Hundreds of rising seventh and eighth graders from five low-income communities and three suburban communities in Connecticut participated in CPEP's Summer Gaming Challenge. The participants significantly improved their mathematics, problem-solving, and 21st century skills, including collaboration, critical thinking, creativity, and communication. Since 2010, the program has grown from one site with 60 students to six sites with more than 385 students.

By blending cutting-edge educational video-gaming technology, face-to-face teacher-led instruction, and challenge-based, hands-on projects, CPEP creates a transformative learning opportunity for the students and certified teachers who facilitate the programs. Each day, youth work with certified teachers to practice pre-selected math skills and use the math-gaming software to master the skills at their own pace. The teachers leverage the analytics from the gaming system to develop the teaching strategies that would most effectively address each student's mathematics deficiencies. Students earn points, badges, and significantly increase their self-confidence as they compete in live games and weekly tournaments with their peers from around the state and even from around the world.

Youth also participate in hands-on STEM-themed design challenges each week. The challenges are framed as real-life scenarios that prompt students to develop creative solutions. The challenges incorporate skills and concepts from disciplines such as digital media, engineering design, and physics. Participants also engage in daily physical recreation in the program, and Fridays are filled with field trips or fun camp-wide events, like the outdoor CPEP Olympics field day.

"Even as students learn new math skills and strengthen their critical thinking and problem-solving abilities, they truly have fun," said CEO of CPEP, Bruce Dixon. "We intentionally create this kind of environment from starting the day with team cheers to celebrating the end of the program with a Student Expo."

CPEP's Summer Gaming Challenge has produced dramatic results. In the past three years, participants improved their math proficiency by an average of 35 percent. Daily attendance averaged 92 percent, and 97 percent of the students have agreed or strongly agreed that the program helped them learn mathematics.



"We believe in the power of innovative, engaging instruction that uses the latest technology to close the achievement gap and help youth succeed," said CEO of CPEP, Bruce Dixon. "Students in our program not only improve math skills by the end of the summer, but they also have a genuinely fun time building confidence, friendships, and skills that will help them for life!"



FREEDOM SCHOOL PARTNERS

FREEDOM SCHOOL PARTNERS INSPIRES A LOVE OF READING WHILE HAVING FUN

It may be known as the Queen City, but many children in Charlotte, N.C. face challenges that are anything but royal. According to census statistics, one in four children in Mecklenburg County lives at or below the poverty line, and school district data suggests that there are nearly 60,000 local children in need of high-quality summer opportunities.



“Our impact extends far beyond academic achievement. We are helping develop character strengths in children and connecting them to a broader community that believes in them,” said FSP executive director, Mary Nell McPherson.

At Freedom School Partners (FSP), 1,250 students across 19 locations in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School District are keeping their brains engaged and boosting their literacy skills through high-quality summer learning experiences.

For executive director Mary Nell McPherson, FSP is about “so much more than just literacy and academic work.” The program inspires children to fall in love with books and experience all the joy that comes with reading. Children participate in the Integrated Reading Curriculum, which engages them in culturally-relevant books and activities that relate to their life experiences.

FSP has been highly successful. In recent years, on average, students in third through eighth grade gained more than one year’s worth of reading skills over the course of the program, and students in kindergarten through second grade gained nearly a year’s worth of literacy skills.

FSP students, or scholars as the program calls them, kick off each day with a youth-led Harambee ceremony—a high-energy pep rally that sets the tone for a day of learning together. After a morning exercise of songs with accompanying dance moves and chants, the students listen to a guest reading from a local community leader.

After Harambee, scholars break into multi-age classrooms, where they receive reading instruction that includes conflict resolution, problem solving, and social action—all led by highly-trained college student interns. Through this internship component, FSP provides a professional development experience for aspiring teachers, educators, and the next generation of education advocates.

Afternoons are spent in enrichment activities, with a particular emphasis placed on STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math) learning. This portion frequently includes field trips to places such as science museums, family farms, and college campuses. FSP also provides students with two nutritious meals and a snack each day.

Community partnerships make it possible for students to have memorable learning experiences. For example, as part of a series on workplace exploration, younger students toured a Caterpillar truck factory while older students visited a law school for a lesson in trademark law. A partnership with the local arts center allowed FSP students a chance to see a Broadway production of The Lion King.



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