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National Summer Learning Association chooses three summer learning programs as winners of 2012 Excellence in Summer Learning Award

Programs in California, Ohio, and New York provide low-income students with high-quality summer learning

Editor's Note: Gary Huggins, CEO of the National Summer Learning Association, is available for phone interviews about Excellence in Summer Learning Award winners. To interview Huggins, reporters should contact Kate Shatzkin by phone at 410-856-1370 x208. Two of the winning programs will be in operation through Aug. 3; see availability for media visits in the accompanying advisory.

Baltimore—[The National Summer Learning Association](#) (NSLA) has chosen United Way of Santa Barbara County's [Fun in the Sun Initiative](#), [Ohio State LIFE Sports](#), and [GO Project](#) of New York City as recipients of the 2012 Excellence in Summer Learning Awards.

This annual award recognizes summer programs demonstrating excellence in accelerating academic achievement and promoting healthy development for low-income young people, 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 among more than 50 applicants for the 2012 award.

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 worth of math skills during summer breaks, lower-income children also lose two to three months of reading skills. 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.

"These excellent programs demonstrate the full potential of summer learning to transform the future for young people, helping them boost educational achievement and clearly see a path to college and career," said Gary Huggins, CEO of the National Summer Learning Association.

Drawing on an array of community partners, United Way of Santa Barbara County's **Fun in the Sun Initiative (FITS)** serves 250 young people ages 7 to 18 for seven weeks each summer. All participants come from low-income families and qualify for free and reduced-price meals during the school year.

The FITS program is designed for participants willing to make a multi-summer commitment, and offers a daily emphasis on reading and writing. Afternoon enrichment opportunities include activities in science, technology, engineering, arts, and math (STEAM), service learning, and field trips throughout the summer. In 2011, 82 percent of participants showed gains of 2.1 grade levels in reading comprehension, phonics, and vocabulary skills, according to tests administered at the beginning and end of the program. In addition to receiving lunch and snacks and taking part in daily physical

activity, young people take home bags of fresh fruit and vegetables for the weekend, along with clothing and school supplies. Parents also receive specialized curriculum through weekly Parent Education workshops.

“UWSBC’s Fun in the Sun is thrilled, honored, and humbled to be selected for the 2012 National Excellence in Summer Learning Award. This award is a community-wide recognition, with so many people and organizations helping during the past 16 years,” said Paul Didier, President and CEO of United Way of Santa Barbara County. “In addition to the great sense of community these partners help provide, our focus on research-based and continuous quality improvement activities for many years has paid huge dividends in results for partners, children, and families.”

Run through a partnership between the Ohio State University Department of Athletics and the College of Social Work, the free **LiFE Sports Camp** serves 600 Columbus, Ohio, youth ages 9-15 for four weeks each summer, focusing on teaching participants vital life skills and social competence through sports. The program is built upon a community outreach program operating at OSU for the past 40 years, the National Youth Sport Program. Young people receive free breakfast and lunch as well as free transportation to and from the program.

During the culminating LiFE Sports Olympics, young people develop a team name, team banner, advertisements, posters, family invitations, and radio announcements for the Olympics. In addition, the youth work together to assign roles to their team during the Olympics. Youth also serve as referees, athletes, trainers and coaches. In 2011, 74 percent of the participants reported that they are interested in going to college because of LiFE Sports.

“Over the past five years, LiFE Sports has become a university-wide initiative aimed not only at supporting disadvantaged youth in the Columbus community but also at impacting the field of youth development through teaching, learning, and research,” says LiFE Sports education coordinator Rebecca Wade-Mdivanian. “This award from NSLA is an indicator to our University and community that LiFE Sports is on its way to being a national model for University and community outreach.”

GO Project seeks to address the challenges faced by underperforming students in kindergarten through eighth grade from high-need schools in Lower Manhattan. The five-week GO Summer program serves 494 young people with small classes focusing on reading, writing, and math, along with enrichment classes in subjects such as art, science, martial arts, and creative writing. Approximately 53 percent of GO students have a special education classification and 16 percent are English Language Learners. The GO Summer instructional model includes individualized curricula, certified teacher-led classes, and reading, math, ESL and speech pull-out services with specialists.

GO Project partners with independent schools that provide free classrooms, institutional support, volunteers, and programming resources. In summer 2011, students gained an average of two months’ skills in reading and four months in math, according to tests administered before and after the program.

“Most GO Project students are first or second generation American, low-income children and all are facing serious learning challenges in school at the earliest stages of their academic careers,” said Erica Ahdoot, GO Project Executive Director. “While most low-income students fall behind during the summer months, all GO Project students stay academically engaged throughout the summer, gaining the skills and confidence they need to combat summer slide and start the school year prepared and excited to learn.”

This year’s Excellence in Summer Learning Award winners will be honored Oct. 23 during a luncheon at NSLA’s 2012 national *Summer Changes Everything™* conference in Pittsburgh. To learn more about the conference, visit summerlearning.org/conference.

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The mission of the National Summer Learning Association is to connect and equip schools and community organizations to deliver quality summer learning programs to our nation’s youth to help close the achievement gap. The organization serves as a network hub for thousands of summer learning program providers and stakeholders across the country, providing tools, resources, and expertise to improve program quality, generate support, and increase youth access and participation. *For more information, visit www.summerlearning.org.*