



## **As state fiscal crisis deepens, YMCA summer school program lifts budget burden for Hartford and East Hartford public school systems**

With public school districts facing unprecedented budget woes, the YMCA of Greater Hartford is picking up the \$300,000 tab for summer school for nearly 300 students at Hartford's Simpson-Waverly Elementary School and East Hartford's Anna E. Norris Elementary School through the Y-BELL (Building Educated Leaders for Life) Power Scholars Academy™ (PSA). PSA is a partnership between YMCA of the USA and BELL designed to help increase the K-8 students' academic achievement during the summer months so they return to school in the fall ready to succeed.

"With charitable support, the YMCA provides the staff, teachers, materials and leadership to administer extended school year programming to students whose summer studies would otherwise be coming out of the school budget," says Kristen Pollard, vice president of child development for the YMCA of Greater Hartford.

Summer 2017 is the fifth year that Y-BELL has provided summer services. This year's enrollment of 144 students from each district is more than triple the number of students served at the program's inception five years ago. Students who participated in PSA in 2016 turned an expected 2 month summer learning loss into an average 1.5 month gain in reading skills, and an average two month gain in math.

Starting on June 26, PSA scholars will attend sessions five days a week for six weeks. Certified teachers will lead 90 minutes of literacy and 90 minutes of math instruction each day using Scholastic's reading/math curricula, as well as a leveled reader's library of multicultural titles. BELL recruited, trained, and hired academic teachers to lead literacy and math instruction, and enrichment teachers to teach STEM, arts, and other hands-on courses in the afternoon.

Studies show that without access to summer learning activities, such as camp, travel, and visits to libraries and museums, children from low-income environments can experience more significant learning loss than their more economically stable peers. Over time, low-income children continue to lose ground and by the fifth grade, many are two to three school years behind their middle- and high-income peers. BELL and the YMCA work together to eliminate the summer opportunity gap, accelerate students' academic achievement, and close the achievement gap.

"The YMCA of Greater Hartford is committed to ensuring that all children, regardless of financial circumstance, have access to programs and experiences that will help them become strong, active learners and achieve their fullest potential," said Harold Sparrow, President and Chief Executive Officer, YMCA of Greater Hartford. "Through our collaboration with BELL, we will be sending nearly 300 students back to school ready to learn, grow, and succeed."

PSA complements the Y's other educational programming, including Y-Achievers, Y-TIP (Teen Incentive Program), early education programs and before /after school programs to help youth succeed in school. The Y worked with BELL and Hartford and East Hartford Public Schools to identify students, whose eligibility was based on test scores, grades and teacher recommendations.

The Y-BELL PSA is based on the BELL Summer program model, which is a full-day learning experience that combines small group, rigorous academic instruction with fun, hands-on enrichment activities, field trips and service projects. The model is designed to help students enhance skills in subjects such as reading, writing, math and science, while also engaging families in the education process.

Support from corporations and foundations helped the YMCA of Greater Hartford deliver a truly exceptional summer learning experience to scholars.

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The YMCA of Greater Hartford is a non-profit 501 (c) (3) charitable organization established in 1852 and is one of the nation's oldest YMCA's. The YMCA of Greater Hartford builds strong communities by helping individuals reach their fullest potential through transformative programs that promote Youth Development, Healthy Living and Social Responsibility. We help people reach their fullest potential by: putting a caring adult in the presence of every child; being good stewards of the resources entrusted to us; and working in partnership to eliminate the disparities in health and education. In 2016 the YMCA of Greater Hartford served more than 120,000 people, including 66,000 children, in 52 towns and cities throughout the Hartford, Litchfield, Tolland and Windham counties. YMCA programs put the values of caring, honesty, respect and responsibility into practice to build healthy spirit, mind and body for all participants. [Ghymca.org](http://Ghymca.org)