



**For Immediate Release**

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**National Center for Summer Learning at Johns Hopkins University Names  
Greenville's Bridges to a Brighter Future One of Nation's  
Best Summer Learning Programs**

*Program at Furman University Serves Low-Income High School Students in Greenville*

***Editor's Note: Ron Fairchild, executive director of the National Center for Summer Learning at Johns Hopkins University, is available for phone interviews about Bridges to a Brighter Future. To interview Fairchild, reporters should call Jeanne Johnson at (410) 516-6180.***

**Baltimore** -- The National Center for Summer Learning at The Johns Hopkins University has named Bridges to a Brighter Future at Furman University one of the nation's best summer programs, selecting it from dozens of applicants across the country. Bridges serves students from all 14 public high schools in Greenville County and a charter school.

The 2009 Excellence in Summer Learning Award recognizes summer programs that demonstrate excellence in accelerating academic achievement and promoting positive development for young people.

Beginning on **June 13**, about 75 low-income, academically promising teenagers will participate in four weeks of learning, life-changing experiences and fun at Bridges to a Brighter Future at Furman University. Bridges is an engaging academic enrichment program that has helped 100 percent of its participants graduate from high school and **93** percent of them enroll in college, an impressive accomplishment given that South Carolina has one of the nation's lowest high school graduation rates.

Each summer, students live in Furman dorms and take classes in math, English, social studies, science, art and electives, such as music and video production, pottery, watercolor and improv theatre. Students take classes from 9:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. four days a week, taught by Greenville County master teachers; almost all of the teachers have been selected as Teacher of the Year. On Wednesdays, first-year students take field trips to area locations that most have never visited before, such as the Greenville County Museum of Art. Rising juniors and seniors tour about five to seven colleges every summer. Weekends are a mix of fun and community service – movies are shown Friday nights; there's community service on Saturdays and outings to the roller rink, bowling alley or teen center on Saturday nights. Parents visit on Sundays, and students enjoy pool parties on Sunday afternoons.

“Bridges to a Brighter Future stands out as an exemplary summer learning program, especially for teenagers,” says Ron Fairchild, executive director of the National Center for Summer Learning. “The program builds academic success, self-confidence, leadership, resiliency and life skills. It tries to meet individual student needs and creates a culture of high expectations. This program is a perfect example of the kind of educational innovation that closes the achievement gap.”

Bridges is designed to prevent learning loss during the long summer break, a particular concern for low-income students. According to the National Center for Summer Learning, studies show students fall an average of almost 2.6 months behind in math skills, and low-income children fall behind an average of two months in reading while their middle-income peers tend to make slight gains. Johns Hopkins researchers recently found that 65 percent of the achievement gap between poor and more advantaged ninth-graders can be explained by unequal summer learning experiences during the elementary school years.

Bridges began in 1997 after a Greenville woman read an article about a program that bridged the gap between dreams and reality for economically or culturally challenged students. Her gift formed an endowment for Bridges. Students at Bridges come from families that earn less than \$35,000 a year, and 78 percent of their parents have a high school education or less. Students spend three summers at Bridges, starting as rising sophomores and staying until they are rising seniors. Bridges doesn't end when school begins again in the fall. Support continues with Saturday College, in which students return to Furman once a month for tutoring, college planning workshops and activities.

“We are extremely proud to be recognized by the National Center for Summer Learning with this award,” said Tobi Swartz, who has been the director of Bridges for five years. “Bridges is a holistic program. Our foundational core is academic enrichment, but we do a lot outside the classroom to address personal and emotional development. Living on campus is transformational. Many of our students do not have stable home environments; coming to a place with structure, three meals a day and people who care about them is life-changing.”

Furman University is a private, undergraduate liberal arts college of 2,600 students in Greenville, S.C. Widely recognized for its rigorous academic program and strong faculty, the university has a chapter of Phi Beta Kappa and ranks among the nation's top colleges in the number of National Merit Scholars enrolled.

During the week of July 6, cities around the country will hold events to raise awareness of the importance of high-quality summer learning opportunities in the lives of youth and their families. The week's activities will culminate with Summer Learning Day on July 9, an annual national event organized by the National Center for Summer Learning to focus attention on how quality summer learning programs help close the achievement gap and promote healthy development. At Bridges, TBD.

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*The National Center for Summer Learning works to ensure that children and youth in high-poverty communities have access to quality summer learning programs. Based at the Johns Hopkins University School of Education, the Center engages in research, develops policy, and delivers professional development to increase the quality of and*

*funding for programs for low-income children, and to make summer learning a public policy priority. The Center focuses national attention on how high-quality summer learning programs help close the achievement gap, lead to higher graduation rates, and promote healthy development. For more information, visit: [www.summerlearning.org](http://www.summerlearning.org)*