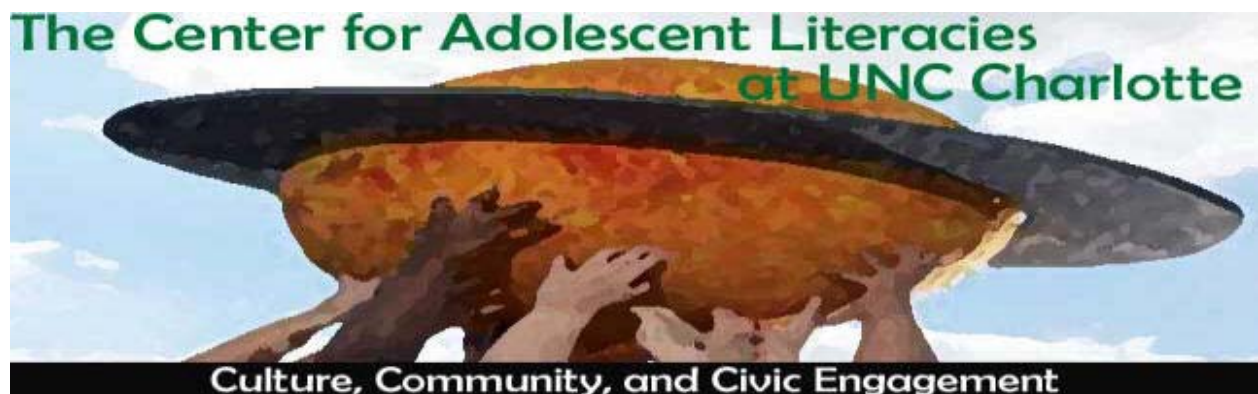# Freedom School Partners
Children's Defense Fund Freedom Schools® Program
Evaluation Report

Submitted
by

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Overview

Expanding on a 2009 pilot evaluation, this report is a program evaluation of Freedom School Partners' Children's Defense Fund Freedom Schools® programs. Conducted by the Center of Adolescent Literacies at UNC Charlotte, the evaluation determines the program's impact on the reading ability of students served by Freedom School Partners in Charlotte, North Carolina, during the summer of 2010.

Freedom School Partners' *CDF Freedom Schools* Program and Evaluation History

The Children's Defense Fund (CDF) is a nonprofit child advocacy organization founded in 1973 to champion the rights of all children but especially those living in poverty. Based in Washington, DC, CDF grew out of the Civil Rights Movement under the leadership of Marian Wright Edelman, who is president of CDF. The Children's Defense Fund Leave No Child Behind® mission states that it seeks "to ensure every child a Healthy Start, a Head Start, a Fair Start, a Safe Start and a Moral Start in life and successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities."[1]

Created by the Children's Defense Fund, *CDF Freedom Schools* programs engage children in grades K-12[2] in a six or seven-week summer program designed to prevent the "learning loss" that students (known as Scholars in the program) typically experience over the months when school is not in session, as well as to have a positive impact on children's character development, leadership, and community involvement. The *CDF Freedom Schools* program provides enrichment with the stated goals of "helping children fall in love with reading, increase[ing] their self-esteem, and generate[ing] more positive attitudes toward learning." CDF reports that more than 80,000 children have participated in Freedom School programs since its inception in 1995. In 2010, approximately 9,600 children in 84 cities participated in Freedom School nationally. Recently, CDF has piloted afterschool Freedom School programs in some of its partner communities.

The *CDF Freedom Schools* program uses a literature based reading curriculum called the Integrated Reading Curriculum (IRC). About 80 books are on the IRC booklist and feature the work of many well-known authors. CDF has developed six weeks of lesson plans for approximately half of the books to help staff and Scholars reflect on the theme *I Can Make a*

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[1] Information about the Children's Defense Fund and its programs is available at the CDF website: http://www.childrensdefense.org/.
[2] Nationally, some *CDF Freedom Schools* sites serve children in grades K-12; however, in Charlotte, NC, Freedom School Partners, Inc., like many Freedom School providers, serves children in grades K-8.

Difference in: My Self, My Family, My Community, My Country, and My World with Hope, Education and Action. The remaining titles are used to create on-site libraries of books for use during silent sustained reading time and for read-alouds as well as for research on history and community service projects. Servant Leader Interns are recruited and provided with training that includes how to implement the Integrated Reading Curriculum. The majority of these Interns are college-age students.

CDF requires that *CDF Freedom Schools* programs be offered at no charge to participating families and that no fewer than 50 children receive service at each site. CDF estimates that the average *CDF Freedom Schools* site costs $59,000 to operate. Community partners, which typically include local houses of worship, schools, colleges and universities, and community organizations, are responsible for raising operating funds for each Freedom School.

In Charlotte, *CDF Freedom Schools* are hosted by Freedom School Partners, a 501(c)(3) organization founded in 1999 that is dedicated to serving at-risk students and families living in poverty. Freedom School Partners' mission is to engage, educate and empower children to succeed in school and in life through quality, year-round educational enrichment programs. Freedom School Partners (FSP) began hosting *CDF Freedom Schools* programs in 2004. In Summer 2010, FSP (formerly Seigle Avenue Partners) held *CDF Freedom Schools* programs at 10 sites. FSP has set a goal of providing 5,000 students in Charlotte Mecklenburg by 2016 with *CDF Freedom Schools.*

Related Research

CDF Freedom Schools programs are six-week, literacy-based summer learning programs designed for inner-city children at risk for school failure. The risk factors these students face include lower academic achievement as measured by grades and on standardized tests, lower graduation rates, and difficulties with reading and literacy.

Summer Learning Loss

The 9-month school schedule currently in widespread use in the United States has its roots in 19th and 20th Century society when 85% of Americans were involved in agriculture. It made sense at the time to standardize school schedules and to have children at home during the summer months to help with farming. Today fewer than 3% of Americans are involved in agriculture and research shows that students' learning is impacted negatively by this block of time away from school.

A meta-analysis conducted by Cooper et al. (1996) integrating 13 studies examining the effects of summer vacation on standardized achievement test scores showed that summer learning

loss equaled at least one month of instruction as measured by grade level equivalents on standardized test scores-on average. An analysis by Hayes and Grether (1983) of 600 New York City schools showed that rich and poor students had a seven-month difference in scores at the beginning of second grade but this widened to a difference of two years and seven months by the end of grade six. What made this particularly striking was the research showing little or no difference in these students' achievement when school was in session: They learned at the same pace. As Hayes and Grether noted: "The differential progress made during the four summers between 2nd and 6th grade accounts for upwards of 80 percent of the achievement difference between economically advantaged ... and ... ghetto schools."

More recent research shows that the impact of summer learning loss may be greater than shown in earlier studies (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2003). This deficit is so pronounced that Allington and McGill-Franzen dub summer reading loss as the "smoking gun." Allington has reported that the cumulative effects of summer reading loss can mean that struggling readers entering middle school may lag two years behind peers in their ability to read. Additional research (Alexander, Entwisle, & Olson, 2007) traces back the achievement gap between high–socioeconomic and low–socioeconomic of 9th grade students to the loss in reading proficiency that occured over the summer months in the elementary grades. Summer learning loss across the elementary school years accounted for more than half the difference in the achievement gap between students from high–socioeconomic and low–socioeconomic families. A study by Kim (2004) published by The Center for Evaluation of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences highlights that low-income and minority students experience greater summer reading loss but suggests that summer reading mitigates this negative impact.

The issue of summer learning loss is not only debated in scholarly journals. Recently, *Time Magazine* published a cover story entitled "The Case Against Summer" (Von Drehle, 2010) in which it reported:

> The problem of summer vacation, first documented in 1906, compounds year after year. What starts as a hiccup in a 6-year-old's education can be a crisis by the time that child reaches high school. After collecting a century's worth of academic studies, summer-learning expert Harris Cooper, now at Duke University, concluded that, on average, all students lose about a month of progress in math skills each summer, while low-income students slip as many as three months in reading comprehension, compared with middle-income students.

Calls to reorganize school calendars and extend the school year have been suggested as a way to deal with the issue of summer learning loss (Aronson, Zimmerman & Carols, 1998; Jimerson, Woehr, Kaufman & Anderson, 2003; Silva, 2007; WestEd, 2001; Woelfel, 2005).

Risk Factors

Attainment of a high school diploma is a protective factor against adult poverty (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2007). Yet, data from the Education Research Center suggests that 37% of North Carolina students do not graduate from high school. Data from the Alliance for Excellent Education places dropout rates in Charlotte-Mecklenburg at over 40%. This data shows a disparity between the graduation of White students (nearly 70%) and African American students (under 50%). Poverty exacerbates these problems. In North Carolina, 71% of rural students live in areas of concentrated poverty with graduation rates at 50%.

Why Literacy Matters

Literacy is a key aspect of school completion. Results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) for 2007 show that 36% of fourth-grade and 29% of eighth-grade public school students in North Carolina scored below the Basic level in reading. Only 23% of fourth-grade and 26% of eighth-grade students scored at the Proficient level. The situation for students in transitional communities (urban and rural) is dire. Data from the U.S. Department of Education and the National Center for Education Statistics shows that nearly 70% of low-income fourth-graders cannot read at a basic level. Researchers found that the percentage of struggling readers in a classroom negatively influenced every student's reading performance, undermining the benefits of comprehensive literacy instruction. This disparity can, in part, be attributed to unequal access to summer learning opportunities during the elementary school years (Children's Defense Fund, 2008).

These factors impact students as they move into adulthood. According to the National Assessment of Adult Literacy, 40 to 44 million adults (aged 16+) in the U.S. function at the lowest literacy levels. In North Carolina, nearly 25% of adults (about 1 million) experience reading and writing difficulties that seriously affect their daily lives and that of their families. The impact of low-literacy affects families' economic and physical well-being. In addition to the challenges of finding stable jobs with adequate pay and benefits, individuals with low literacy pay four times the national average in health care costs ($21,760 vs. $5,440), have higher hospitalization rates, and have increased incidents of medication and treatment errors.

Given the challenges of summer learning loss, literacy attainment, and their potential impact on issues such as graduation rates, there is a need for more research on summer programs and their potential to address these issues. A 2005 evaluation of the Kansas City Freedom School Initiative demonstrated a significant improvement in reading abilities for *CDF Freedom School* scholars. A pilot evaluation conducted in 2009 by UNC Charlotte was the first effort to evaluate outcomes for participating Scholars in Charlotte. In early 2009, Freedom School Partners

approached the University of North Carolina at Charlotte Institute for Social Capital, Inc. (ISC) to develop an outcomes evaluation for the program. A pilot program evaluation was conducted at two *CDF Freedom Schools* program sites for summer 2009. Results from the pilot evaluation were promising. This pilot study showed that of the 51 participants in grades two through five, 57% showed their reading levels increase as assessed in the *Basic Reading Inventory*, 10th Ed (Johns, 2008). Twenty-nine percent maintained in their ability to read and just under 14% showed some decline. A recommendation that stemmed from the pilot evaluation was the continuation of programmatic evaluation.

Objectives and Research Questions

In 2010, Freedom School Partners contracted with the Center for Adolescent Literacies at UNC Charlotte and its external business unit, Adolescent Literacy Services, to implement an outcome evaluation project to examine the impact of *CDF Freedom Schools* program on children participating at all ten FSP sites. The program evaluation sought to assess the extent to which the *CDF Freedom Schools* program met the following objectives for the K-8 students (Scholars) enrolled:

- To increase children's reading performances

- To maintain or to increase children's reading levels from the end of the school year until the beginning of the proceeding school year

- To increase children's "love" of reading

The research questions that guided the evaluation were the following:

1. Did Freedom School Scholars show any change in their Independent and Frustration reading levels as measured by the Basic Reading Inventory?

2. What were the academic and recreational reading attitudes of Freedom School Scholars as measured by the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey?

3. What were Freedom School Scholars' perceptions regarding the reading component in the *CDF Freedom Schools* program?

Study Design and Measures

The evaluation aimed to assess 25% of Freedom School Scholars at all ten of the 2010 Freedom School Partners Freedom School sites. For summer 2010, there were approximately 550

Scholars enrolled in the *CDF Freedom Schools* program in Charlotte. Of those, 189 children or just over 34% were assessed. The sample was stratified by level, gender, ethnicity, grade and age (see Table 1). The results presented in this report are based on 132 children who were part of our study for which we had complete pre- and post-test data.

Table 1. Criteria for Stratification

Criteria	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Gender	Male	Male	Male
	Female	Female	Female
Ethnicity	African-American	African-American	African-American
	Hispanic	Hispanic	Hispanic
	White	White	White
Grade/Age	Kindergarten	3rd Grade	6th Grade
	1st Grade	4th Grade	7th Grade
	2nd Grade	5th Grade	8th Grade

Instruments

Scholars were pre-assessed within the first two weeks of the program (between June 22 and July 1, 2010). Post-assessment was conducted during the last two weeks of the program (July 26 through August 5, 2010). Pre- and Post-Assessment consisted of administration of *The Basic Reading Inventory* (Johns, 2008) and the *Elementary Reading Attitudes Survey* (McKenna and Kear, 1990). Three open-ended questions were added to the post-assessment session. Each of the instruments is described below.

Basic Reading Inventory 10th Edition (Johns, 2008)

The Basic Reading Inventory (BRI) is an individually administered informal reading inventory with multiple measures used to assess facets of reading. For this evaluation, the research team used Form A (pre-test) and Form B (post-test). Forms A and B are equivalent measures used to assess students' oral reading across three subtests: the Graded Word List (GWL), leveled passages, and comprehension questions that accompany each passage. We report on the results based on the comprehension questions because it yields the most accurate assessment of a child's performance (Johns, 2008).

The BRI contains a Graded Reading Passages section, which consists of short, grade appropriate passages of text that are read aloud by the student while the assessor monitors reading accuracy. For Oral Reading Accuracy, students are asked to read passages aloud; the assessing adult records the different types of errors or "miscues" the student makes. The scoring for this

section varies by passage. The assessor counts miscues including words skipped, words inserted, and word said incorrectly. Scores are reported at the Independent, Instructional, and Frustration levels. For Oral Reading Comprehension, passages are a mix of expository and narrative form. Explicit comprehension questions about details from the text are provided after each passage is read aloud. The questions are scored, and based on the number answered correctly, a determination is made regarding the comprehension level for that passage. Scores are reported at the Independent, Instructional, and Frustration levels (Johns, 2008).

The BRI yields information regarding reading proficiency and estimates an individual's Instructional, Independent, and Frustration reading level for different passages. We are reporting information on Scholar's Independent and Frustration levels to capture the range of their reading abilities. For purposes of analyses, we do not include the Instructional levels because students' Instructional levels often fall across a range of grade levels, which make analysis difficult. For example, a student (Scholar) might have an Independent level of grade 3, an Instructional level of grade 4 through 5, and a Frustration level of grade 6. We feel that the Independent and Frustration levels capture the "floor" and "ceiling" reading levels for Scholars. Table 2 provides characteristics of the Independent and Frustration levels.

Table 2. Levels of Reading Assessed with the Basic Reading Inventory

Level	Characteristics
Independent (easy)	Comprehension (90%+) Word Recognition (99%+) Few or no repetitions Very fluent
Frustration (too hard)	Comprehension (50%+) Word Recognition (90%+) Word by word reading; Rate is slow Many repetitions; Lack of expression

Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (McKenna & Kear, 1990)

The Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (ERAS) estimates reading attitude levels for both academic and recreational reading. A child's attitude towards reading influences his/her reading performance. The purpose of the ERAS is to quickly estimate students' attitudes toward reading. The test consists of 20 items that present a brief, simply worded statement about reading. The four response options have pictures of Garfield depicted in emotional states ranging from very happy to a little happy and a little upset to very upset. Each question is read to the student and then the student is asked to respond by circling one picture of Garfield that

is closest to his/her own feeling. Each response is scored from 1 to 4, with "very upset" scored 1 and "very happy" scored 4. Scores are summed based on two scales: recreational and academic. Academic reading is reading associated with school. As such, books or assignments emanating from school would fall into this area. Recreational reading is that reading of texts outside of the school setting such as independent reading of books selected by a student at home. Each of the subscales is made up of 10 items for a maximum of 40 points each. The first 10 items address recreational reading while the last 10 items address academic reading. A total score is derived by adding the scores for each subscale for a total of 80 points. For example, the ERAS asks students to respond to the following question in the recreational reading section: "How do you feel about reading for fun at home?" Students select one of the following responses: the "very happy" Garfield if they feel strongly positive about reading for fun at home, the "little happy" Garfield, the "little upset" Garfield, or the "very upset" Garfield if they do not like reading for fun at home. A question that helps to determine attitudes toward academic reading is: "How do you feel about reading in school?"

Open-ended Questions

For the purpose of this evaluation, three open-ended questions were developed to elicit Scholars' perspective on the reading components of the program. The following were the questions asked:
1. Tell me about the reading part of Freedom School. What did you like?
2. What would have made the reading program at Freedom School better for you?
3. What else would you like me to know?

Data Collection

The participants were assigned an identification number for tracking purposes and to de-identify them for analysis. The identification number was used to code and analyze the data. The evaluation employed a pre-test/post-test single group design. At all sites, trained researchers administered both the pre- and post-assessments. All Scholars were assessed individually. Each session took approximately between 25 – 40 minutes to complete. During the pre-assessment session, the researchers obtained brief demographic information from each participant (gender, age, and grade).

Sample

The pre-test sample consisted of 189 Scholars in Levels 1, 2 and 3. Of the 189 pre-tested, 132 Scholars were administered the post-test. The remaining 57 children who participated in the pre-test were not present for the post-test. The following results are based on 132 children

(73% of the original pre-tested sample) with complete pre- and post-test data. Table 3 presents the demographic information for the sample population.

As can be seen in Table 3, we were able to recruit close to equal proportions of Scholars at each level. Grades ranged from Kindergarten to 8th grade, with the average Scholar having completed the fourth grade at the time of the pre-test. Just over half of the sample was male (54%) and most were African-American. The mean age was 10. The vast majority of Scholars participate in the free and reduced lunch program and over half had prior experience with Freedom School Partners. A very small percent were identified as having a special need or having repeated a grade.

Table 3. Demographic characteristics of children with pre- and post-test data

	%/Mean(SD)
Level	
1	36
2	38
3	26
Grade Completed	4.27 (2.24)
Gender	
Male	54
Female	46
Race/Ethnicity	
African-American	90
Hispanic	9
Bi-racial	1
Child age	10.30 (2.58)
% Enrolled in Free and Reduced Lunch Program (n=129)	85
% Special Education (n=127)	6
% Repeated a Grade (n=125)	11
% Prior Freedom School Partners Participation (n=120)	57

Note: Level 1 includes scholars Kindergarten through 2nd grade; Level 2 includes 3rd through 5th grade; and Level 3 includes 6th through 8th grade.

Findings

Program Evaluation findings will be reported and discussed by evaluation question. The evaluation question will be restated and the results provided followed by a discussion of the findings. For purposes of our analysis we report findings by Freedom School Scholar level. In Freedom School, Scholars are grouped for instructional purposes in grade level ranges. Level 1 Scholars are those students who have just completed Kindergarten through second grade. Level 2s are those students having completed grades three through five. Level 3s are those students having just completed grades six through eight. FSP does not serve Level 4 students (grades 9-12 students) although some *CDF Freedom Schools* programs in other locations serve Level 4 high school students. We chose to conduct our analysis using Freedom School Levels rather than school grade levels because this is how the Scholars were grouped for instruction.

The quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 17.0 (SPSS, 2008), a statistics software program designed for use with closed-ended data (e.g., BRI scores). Scores were computed according to the test guidelines described above and means were computed based on those scores by Level.

Research Question 1: Did Freedom School Scholars show any change in their Independent and Frustration reading levels as measured by the Basic Reading Inventory?

Table 4 shows results from the BRI Independent scale by level. On average, Scholars in Level 1 (grades Kindergarten through 2nd) scored just above first grade reading level. Based on these results, there was a small gain from pre- to post-test among this age group.

Table 4. Mean scores for the BRI Independent scores by level (N=132)

| | N | Pre-test | | Post-test | |
		M	SD	M	SD
Level					
1	48	.94	1.44	1.21	1.70
2	50	2.52	1.78	3.68	2.22
3	34	4.76	1.54	6.18	1.64

Clearer gains were made among children in Level 2 and 3, with the former showing over a grade level increase and the latter showing substantial gains over the course of the evaluation. The results indicate that Scholars improved in regard to their ability to read at an Independent level as measured by the BRI. Many of these Scholars were not reading independently at grade

level in the pre-test assessment, thus, it could be concluded that a portion of Scholars made gains that helped them attain grade level Independent reading levels.

Figure 1 shows the proportion of Scholars who showed gains over the course of the program. Specifically, we found that over a third of the sample (38.6%) maintained Independent reading levels by the end of the summer. The data also show that at least half of the 132 children assessed (50.8%) improved or showed gains in independent reading as measures by the BRI at the end of the program. Another way to interpret this data is to say that most students maintained or gained Independent reading levels at grade level and did not "slide" back during the summer time. Both outcomes are desirable outcomes for Freedom School Partners and the Children's Defense Fund program model.

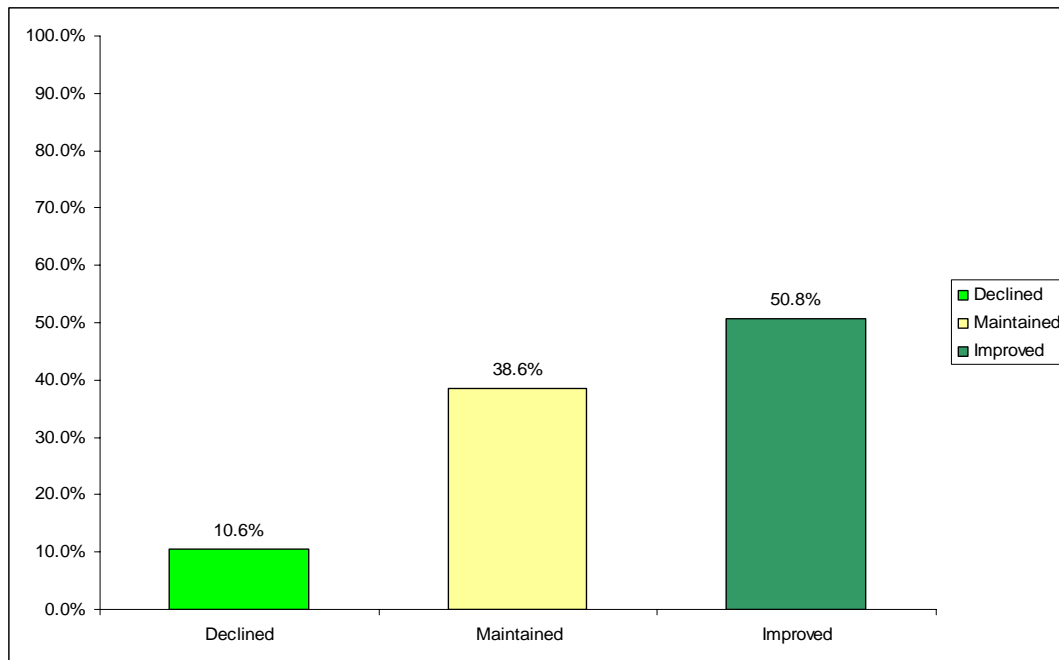**Figure 1.** Change over time on the BRI Independent measure

Table 5 shows results from the BRI Frustration scale by level. On average, Scholars in Level 1 reached a frustration reading level at 3rd grade. On average, Scholars in Level 2 reached frustration at just above 6th grade. On average, Scholars in Level 3 reached a frustration reading level at 8th grade. As with the BRI Independent score, on average, Scholars showed improvement over the course of the program. For example, Level 1 Scholars (children in grades Kindergarten through 2nd) reading cap was 2.48, on average, which means that these children found reading material just above the 2nd grade to be "too hard" (see Table 2 above for details). However, at post-test, these same children found reading material just above the 3rd grade to

be too difficult. This represents an increase in reading ability. This trend was found across all three Levels.

Table 5. Mean scores for the BRI Frustration scores by level (N=132)

Level	N	*Pre-test*		*Post-test*	
		M	SD	*M*	SD
1	48	2.48	2.29	3.21	2.48
2	50	5.10	2.06	6.48	2.30
3	34	7.29	1.27	8.47	1.62

Figure 2 shows the proportion of children whose reading cap either "declined," "maintained," or "improved" over time. The data indicate that the vast majority show growth over the course of the program. Specifically, 65.2% of Scholars were able to reach a new reading cap or frustration level at post-test. An additional 25% were able to maintain their reading cap. In the context of summer reading loss, maintenance in reading ability is a positive outcome. A small proportion (9.8%) showed a decline in reading cap.

Figure 2. Change over time on the BRI Frustration measure
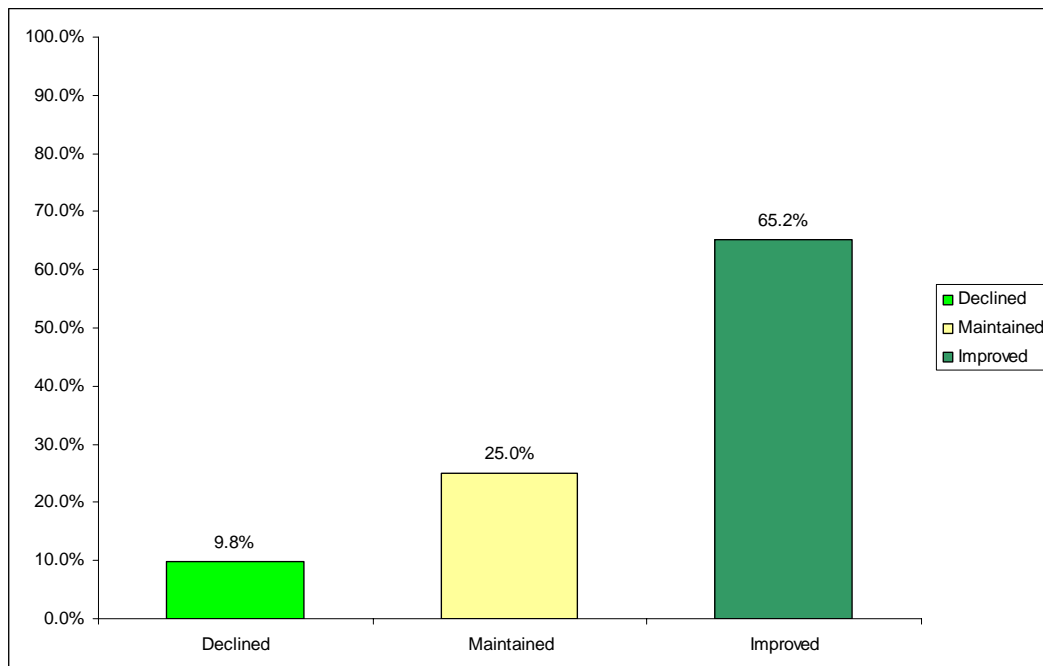
These data on changes in Independent and Frustration reading levels indicate significant progress in reading on the part of many Freedom School Scholars. While it was not within the scope of this research to determine causality—that is, we do not know why the reading levels of these students' improved, maintained, or declined—there seems to be a correlation between attending Freedom School during the summer and changes in reading ability as measured by the BRI. Just over 50% of Freedom School Scholars showed improvement in their Independent reading levels, their ability to read texts on their own, and over 65% showed improvement in their ability to read challenging texts (the Frustration reading level). Nearly 40% maintained (showed no loss) in their ability to read Independent level texts, while 25% maintained their ability to read Frustration level texts. The percentage of students showing reading loss was approximately 10% for both the Independent and Frustration reading levels.

Research Question 2: What were the academic and recreational reading attitudes of Freedom School Scholars as measured by the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey?

Results of the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (ERAS) were inconsistent and thus should be interpreted with caution. We report our findings here but suggest that the ERAS may not be an effective assessment to use in the future as the findings were at odds with an analysis of the open-ended questions.

On average, there was a slight decline in attitudes regarding recreational reading. Generally, recreational reading attitudes provide information regarding students' personal or out-of-school reading of texts they choose. Here, we see that Scholars showed a decline in their attitudes regarding recreational reading. Further analysis indicates that average pre-test recreational scores are statistically and significantly different from average post-test scores on this scale. This suggests that Scholars experienced a decline in their attitudes toward recreational reading (e.g., reading on a Saturday).

Unlike the pattern found in the ERAS recreational scores, results on the ERAS academic scale were less consistent across Levels. Level 1 and Level 3 Scholars reported a slight improvement in academic reading attitudes. In contrast, Level 2 scholars showed virtually no change in academic reading attitudes over time.

Preliminary findings regarding the survey should be interpreted with caution. In reviewing the ERAS data, our team hypothesizes that this assessment may not accurately measure students' reading attitudes in the context of a summer program. The focus of the ERAS is on reading during the academic school year and on recreational reading. Summer programs such as

Freedom Schools are not referenced in the assessment. In spite of this, it was our belief that pre- and post-assessment using the ERAS could yield a useful measure of students' attitudes toward reading. In hindsight, we wonder if students lacked a clear point of reference to the summer reading program. For example, during the pre-assessment administration of the ERAS, we wonder if students, who had just left public school, were referencing those reading experiences rather than thinking of the summer program. Also, at the post-administration phase, we speculate that Scholars, who were in the final days of the Freedom School and working on performances for the programs' finales, may have experienced reading or testing fatigue. Therefore, we find the ERAS not to be a suitable assessment of students' reading attitudes for summer programs.

Research Question 3: What were Freedom School Scholars' perceptions regarding the reading component in the Freedom School Program?

The open-ended questions yielded further insights from the Scholars. There were 137 Scholars interviewed from 10 *CDF Freedom Schools* Program sites and each responded to all three questions. The number of Scholars interviewed at each site ranged from 10 to 16, with 14 being the average. To answer the evaluation question, a qualitative analysis was performed using Hyper RESEARCH data analysis software (HyperRESEARCH, 2009). This software provides a systematic tool for coding qualitative data (retrieving and counting those codes) but does not interpret the data. For each open-ended question, words, phrases, or statements were coded. Later, the codes were grouped by common themes. Codes and themes are presented below for each open-ended question.

Open-Ended Question 1: Tell me about the reading part of Freedom School. What did you like?

From the 137 responses, 543 words, phrases, and statements were coded and 65 codes emerged. The codes were collapsed based on commonalities and four major themes were created: Reading Program Strategies, Creative Activities, Books/Genres, and Sense of Community (see Tables 6 - 10).

Overall, the responses were positive. Of the 543 coded responses, 535 were positive (98.5 %) and only 8 were negative (1.5 %). There were 42 generic positive comments (8%) such as *"Nice," "Cool," "Fun," "Good,"* and *"I liked it."* The rest of the 493 positive comments (91%) fell into the four themes.

The themes are ranked based on the frequency of responses that fell into each and are presented in that order. The themes and the codes comprising each are also presented below (see Tables 6 - 10).

<u>Reading Program Strategies</u>

Scholars indicated that they enjoyed activities that can be identified as specific reading program strategies. This was the strongest theme that emerged. As seen in Table 6, Scholars indicated that they had a positive attitude toward reading. They could also name specific strategies that they participated in and enjoyed throughout the program. Strategies such as "creating KWL charts,"[3] "making predictions," and "asking questions."

Scholars stated that reading aloud was also something that they liked about the Freedom School program. The data suggest that Scholars were pointing to two forms of read aloud practices—those read alouds conducted by the Interns and read alouds conducted by the Scholars. Some of the comments were ambiguous on this matter but clearly read aloud in these two forms was popular among the Scholars who participated in this study.

In addition, the Scholars enjoyed the opportunity for independent sustained silent reading (SSR). Sustained silent reading time refers the period of uninterrupted time for students to engage with a text in the school or classroom setting. Although research is not conclusive about the benefits of SSR time, many in the literacy community see it as fundamental to reading because it allows students to practice reading and thereby improve their reading ability. It can also allow students to have access to books that they choose and therefore potentially be of greater interest to the students. For these and other reasons, SSR is often included in a balanced literacy program. The Scholars and Interns refer to SSR time as DEAR time (Drop Everything and Read). The comments below provide a sample of Scholars' responses relating to read aloud, silent reading and classroom activities related to reading:

- *"I feel kind of good about it. You get to read one page of the book out loud. I think it's cool and kind of fun--the activities--when we get to play with play dough."*
- *"Teacher reading to me. DEAR time."*
- *"You get to read by yourself in the afternoon before lunch."*

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[3] KWL is a reading strategy created by Donna Obgle in 1986 that activates learners' prior knowledge by asking them what the Know, what the Want to know, and what the Learned. The Know-Want-Learn form the acronym KWL, which is usually presented as a three-column chart with the K in the first column, W in the second and L in the third.

Scholars' understanding the purpose of reading also emerged within this theme. As can be seen by these quotes below, Scholars understood why reading is important:

- *"You need to know how to read to be good at things."*
- *"[Reading] helps you with education."*
- *"I think it's good because my future needs it. You need to know how to read to be good at things. I like reading more better. I've got more understanding. I like the books. It's better than school. In Freedom School you get to read the books in groups and ask questions."*
- *"I can get the connection between the book and reality."*

The fact that Scholars could articulate specific reading program strategies and connect those to their own lives suggests that these Scholars have a strong sense of self-efficacy regarding reading.

Table 6. Frequency of Codes comprising the theme Reading Program Strategies

Reading Program Strategies	
Codes	**Frequency**
Reading Attitude	65
Strategies	43
Reading Aloud	27
Independent Sustained Silent Reading	22
Purpose for Reading	5
Total	162

<u>Creative Activities</u>

Scholars indicated that they *"liked the activities"* they participated in throughout the Freedom School Program. In particular, Scholars noted with positive recollection the activities that were related to reading and/or that extended to other areas of the curriculum (See Table 7). As the Scholars said:

- *"Every time we finish a book we always do things."*
- *"We get to do stuff about every book."*
- *"We do activities around the books."*

The most noted activities were drama, writing, and art. For drama, the students mentioned that they enjoyed putting on *"skits," "performing plays," "acting out the parts of the book,"* and *"making a movie."* For writing, Scholars indicated that they enjoyed *"journaling after reading," "writing about pictures,"* and *"writing a letter."* For art, Scholars said they enjoyed working with *"play dough, "doing art to show what we read," "drawing pictures," "making collages,"* and *"color[ing]."* On a few occasions, Scholars recalled a specific activity such as "*made a bookmark"* or *"made a certificate for our role models."* Overall, Scholars liked *"report[ing] in creative ways"* to the books they read.

Of importance here is the fact that Scholars are given the opportunity to respond to literature in various ways (written and oral) that connect with other areas of the curriculum (art, music, drama, etc.). Their responses indicate how Scholars have related to and comprehended the text.

Table 7. Frequency of Codes comprising the theme Creative Activities

Creative Activities	
Codes	**Frequency**
Related to reading and extending to other curricular areas	115
Recall of a specific activity	11
Field trips	4
Total	130

<u>Books/Genre</u>

As can be seen in Table 8, Scholars indicated that they *"like the books"* read throughout the *CDF Freedom Schools* program. Many recalled a specific or favorite book they encountered during the program. They also indicated specific genres they enjoyed: adventure, mystery, dinosaur, funny, realistic fiction, and Black History. Scholars also indicated that they enjoyed books they could relate to:

- *"We read stories that a lot of us can relate to."*
- *"Read good and interesting books about African American life, kids' struggles."*

In addition, Scholars liked that they were able to have access to books:

- *"Every day we get to read and every Friday we get to take them home!"*
- *"We get to keep some of our books."*
- *"I like being able to keep books."*

They also indicated that they enjoyed having choice:

- *"You can read whatever book you want."*

Table 8. Frequency of Codes comprising the Theme Books/Genres

Books/Genres	
Codes	**Frequency**
Likes Books	40
Recall of Specific/Favorite Book	24
Genre Specific	20
Relevant Literature	15
Access to Books	9
Choice	9
Total	117

<u>Sense of Community</u>

Scholars indicated that they liked the sense of community they felt during the *CDF Freedom Schools* program (See Table 9). Specifically, they enjoyed the social aspects of reading, such as *"talking," "being able to get into groups," "picking a partner,"* and *"reading together."* They also enjoyed the sharing, teaching and learning that occurred.

Scholars also compared their experience this summer to past experiences in Freedom School as well as to their school experiences. For the most part, this summer's experience was better than or the same as other reading related experiences at school and at Freedom School in the past. However, since we did not examine the students' school experiences, we cannot really make much of these comparisons other than to note that Scholars are comparing their experiences during Freedom School to other similar experiences.

Scholars liked the safe reading community they experienced. They felt accepted, acknowledged, comforted, and felt they received the assistance they needed:

- *"I can be creative and free to say what I want."*
- *"You feel good here 'cause you're with people who don't laugh if you get something wrong."*
- *"They understand."*
- *"They hang up our work."*
- *"They help you out if you don't understand something."*

Scholars also enjoyed the routines of the program, such as Harambee, a morning pep-rally that includes cheers, chants, and a guest community reader.

The fact that Scholars said that they liked the Reading Program Strategies, the Creative Activities, the Books/Genres, and the Sense of Community indicates that the *CDF Freedom Schools* program is offering a program that fosters a high-level of engagement for the participating Scholars. The question asked to Scholars was "tell me about the reading program" and the responses ranged from reading related comments to feeling a sense of belonging.

**Table 9.** Frequency of Codes that comprise the theme Sense of Community

Sense of Community	
Code	Frequency
Social Component of Reading	41
Comparison to School or Past FSP Experiences	17
Safe Reading Community	15
Routine	4
Total	77

Open-Ended Question 2: What would have made the reading program at Freedom School better for you?

From the 137 responses, 192 words, phrases, and statements were coded and 14 codes emerged. The codes were collapsed based on commonalities. Overall, the responses were positive with some of the comments being coded as generically positive and the others falling into one of four specific themes. These themes include comments about: Activities related to reading, Books and book choice, Uninterrupted silent sustained reading (SSR), and Community building (See Figure 3).

These themes were not very different from what the Scholars indicated they liked in Open-Ended Question 1. Of the 192 coded responses, 42 were generically positive (22%); that is, these answers were positive without offering specific suggestions. For example, one Scholar answered this question by stating, "It's already better…make it longer." These comments indicated that the Scholars were satisfied with the reading program. The rest of the coded responses (78%) fell into one of the four themes listed above and detailed in Figure 3 below. These answers included specific suggestions regarding the reading program with most suggesting that the Scholars wanted more of certain components already in the reading program.

Figure 3. Percent of Responses per Theme
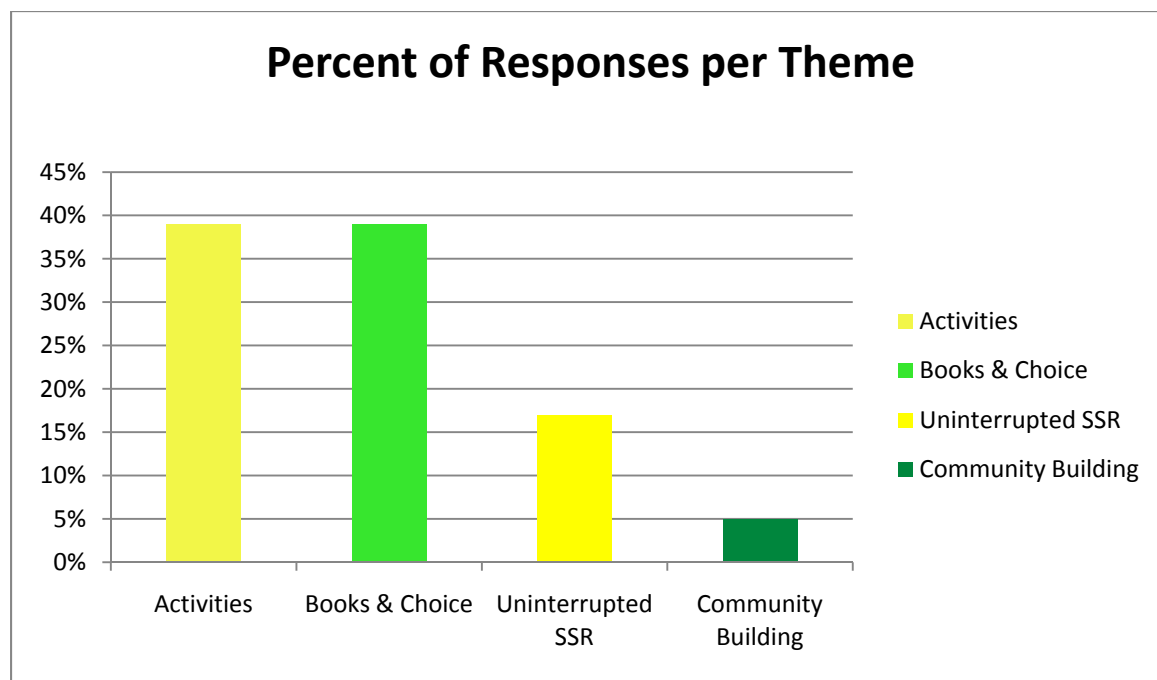
Activities: Scholars indicated they wanted more activities. Not only did they want more of the same such as *"do more plays," "more role playing," "drawing," "read the books to us," "read aloud," "color," "more field trips," and "more skits,"* but they also indicated that they would like to *"play games,"* do *"more physical activities,"* and *"play basketball."*

Books and Choice: Scholars indicated that they wanted *"more books," "longer books," "more variety,"* and *"more choice."*

Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading: Overall, Scholars indicated that they wanted "more independent reading time." However, it should also be noted that responses within this theme

varied. Some Scholars said they felt that they did not have enough SSR time while others indicated that they had enough or too much SSR time. A small number of Scholars said that their view of SSR time depended on what they were reading.

Community Building: Scholars wanted a clear discipline system in place so that they knew what was expected. Comments that fell into this theme include:

- *"Tell the kids to stop arguing."*
- *"Get along better and listen more."*
- *"No arguing for a book or ripping the pages from the book."*

We see most comments that fall into the first three themes—Activities, Books and Choice, and Uninterrupted SSR—as positive in nature. Most suggest that Scholars like specific parts of the reading program and want more of that. The overall picture we see in these comments is about balancing elements of the program. The comments regarding Community Building were few in number but specifically about classroom atmosphere issues that often arise in schools and programs that work with youth.

Open-Ended Question 3: What else would you like me to know?

From the 137 responses, 185 words, phrases, or statements were coded. The codes were collapsed based on commonalities and themes were created. Overall, 51 (28%) of the responses were *"nothing to add;"* thus, Scholars were satisfied with the fact that they were able to express their likes and needs by answering the first two open-ended questions.

The other responses were similar to those received in the first two questions. They were either reiterations of what they liked or what they wanted. Scholars indicated they liked the *Activities* (written, oral, field trips, etc.) and that they wanted different *Activities* (sports, swimming, electronic games). Again, they repeated the *Books and Genres* they liked and reiterated the value of *Choice* and of *Uninterrupted Silent Sustained Reading* time. They also restated the importance of *Community* (friends, groups, Interns). Scholars mentioned that they *"really liked"* Harambee, a morning pep-rally that includes singing and dancing where Scholars feel that they *"get hyped up and they wake us!"*

The only new statements were those related to what can be themed to be the *Benefits and Perception* of the Freedom School Program and participants. Eight percent of the Scholars felt that Freedom School Program allowed them the *"freedom to express [themselves]"* and taught

behaviors and social skills they felt they needed for the future. The following quotes exemplify this theme:

- *The [Freedom School Program] "teach[es] you real-life things."*
- *"The teachers teach us how to become a better person."*
- *"If people think Freedom School has a bad reputation for kids, it doesn't. Freedom School is good for kids. They teach fun kids good stuff, how to be respectful to people. If you're mad and want to tell someone, Freedom School will tell you how to say it."*

These comments are similar in nature to those in which Scholars connected reading to their own lives (important for school, work, life, for example) but suggest broader connections of Freedom School to their lives ("real-life things" and teaching "how to become a better person.") Overall, Scholars understand *"why it's call Freedom School . . . we get freedom to do stuff that's fun, to express ourselves, and to read aloud."*

Discussion of Findings

In this section we summarize our findings, suggest recommendations and discuss the limitations of this study.

This program evaluation builds on a pilot study conducted during the Summer 2009 in which the BRI was administered to just over 50 *CDF Freedom Schools* Scholars at two sites in Charlotte, N.C. Results of that study showed that approximately 57% of Scholars grew in their ability to read as measured by the Frustration level of the BRI, while 29% maintained and just under 14% declined.

The 2009 and 2010 evaluation findings are similar in nature. This year, nearly 90% of Freedom School Scholars grew or maintained in their ability to read as measured by the BRI. Furthermore, important data were gathered regarding students' attitudes towards the reading component of Freedom School with the overwhelming majority demonstrating positive attitudes towards the program (as determined in an analysis of the Scholar interviews). In the following section we offer a discussion of the data collected and analyzed during the Summer 2010.

We first discuss the findings suggested by the quantitative analysis, primarily from the Basic Reading Inventory (BRI) and then our analysis of the qualitative data derived from the open-ended questions.

Reading Gains

If there is one single overriding outcome of this study, it is that Freedom School Partners' *CDF Freedom Schools* programs benefit the majority of participants by helping them maintain or improve in their ability to read. The results of the BRI pre- and post-assessment show that a majority of all three groups of Scholars (Level 1's, 2's and 3's) improved or maintained in their ability to read. The level of improvement was more pronounced among the older groups of students with Level 3 Scholars showing the greatest gains and Level 1 Scholars showing the smallest gains. It is not within the scope of this study to know why this trend was observed; however, we offer a possible explanation. The Freedom School reading program focuses on what we call a literature based approach to reading. That is, student participants read books together with an adult Intern and discuss them. Reading sub-skills such as phonics, phonemic awareness, and fluency are not stressed. The primary focus seems to be on comprehension or meaning making, a skill that builds over time as a reader matures. Younger participants (grades K-2, for example) may be at a point in their reading where they still need to focus on these skills and, therefore, may gain less as measured by the BRI. While we can only speculate about this, we find this a plausible explanation.

Attitudes Toward Reading

The data suggest that the materials (culturally relevant books) and classroom activities such as discussions, read alouds, and art-based activities were viewed positively by the majority of participants. However, in the program evaluation, there appeared to be an inconsistency between the responses to the ERAS regarding attitudes toward reading and the responses to the open-ended interview questions. According to the ERAS, students' attitudes toward reading were not perceived as high as their attitudes captured by the open-ended questions (98.5% of these comments being coded as positive and only 1.5% as negative). Earlier, we stated that the ERAS is not designed to capture the reading accomplished in a summer program while the open-ended questions were directly focused on the Freedom School experience. It was beyond the scope of the evaluation to compare these on a "by student" analysis, but we feel confident to say that the ERAS did not meet the needs of our evaluation as we originally thought. Therefore, Scholars' perceptions and attitude about the *CDF Freedom Schools* program were better captured by the open-ended questions which provided valuable insights into their views of the program and which were overwhelmingly positive. Given the theoretical disconnect we believe exists between the questions in the ERAS and the summer reading curriculum, it is the opinion of the evaluation team that the ERAS is not a reliable measure for use in the evaluation of the *CDF Freedom Schools* program.

Evaluation Limitations

As previously stated, it is not within the scope of this study to assign causality regarding the impact of the Freedom School Partners' *CDF Freedom Schools* program impact on participating students' reading. However, this research suggests that the majority of students participating in the program experienced gains or maintained in their ability to read as measured by the BRI.

One limitation of this study is that it does not include an experimental design that would allow results to be measured against a control group of students not enrolled in a summer program with a reading component. While this limits our ability to address causality, a review of the research on summer learning loss and summer reading loss suggests that these results are not aberrant. Moreover, the research conducted during the Summer 2010 builds on the 2009 pilot study conducted. Results from both years are consistent.

It is the opinion of the evaluation team that the Elementary Reading Attitudes Survey (ERAS) is not a reliable measure for use in summer reading programs. An analysis of individual items or a set of specific items on the ERAS might yield interesting results. We found the Scholar interviews provided meaningful data and suggest FSP continue and perhaps expand on this evaluation. However, we would suggest finding or developing a better survey for measuring changes in participants' reading attitudes.

This research was not designed to provide a site by site comparative analysis, but we do find it worth mentioning that the quantitative and qualitative results were similar in nature for all 10 Charlotte area *CDF Freedom Schools programs*. That is, there was little variation among the sites.

Future Directions

Our research questions focused on the impact on Scholars of the reading component of the *CDF Freedom Schools* program and did not include specific data and analysis of the reading program curricula. However, we believe that this program and others like it could be a powerful tool to address such challenging issues as summer learning loss. We recommend additional research to learn more about other potential benefits that the *CDF Freedom Schools* program may offer its Scholars.

This study provides evidence of the impact of the *CDF Freedom Schools* program on Scholar participants' reading. We believe that two broad lines of research would help the Freedom School stakeholders (children, families, educators, funders, and policy makers) to better understand how *CDF Freedom Schools* reading program affects participants. First, we suggest

the development of research utilizing an experimental design. This would allow us to better understand the specific factors that may benefit participants' reading as well as factors limiting participant's growth in reading while comparing outcomes based on participation (those enrolled and those not in the program). While there is a growing body of research on summer learning loss and the impact of specific summer programs to address that, little research explores this from an experimental design. Second, we suggest that expanding this research longitudinally would allow for a deeper understanding of the *CDF Freedom Schools* summer reading program. We suggest that data on Scholars include program attendance, household demographics, school measures and school achievement data, and information about the Interns (for example, years of experience as an intern, other teaching experiences and some demographic data) be included in a longitudinal study. We believe that more research along the lines of this study is warranted. We also see the need for richer qualitative components such as case studies of Freedom School Scholars, observations of classroom interactions among Scholars and Interns, and more in-depth interviews with Scholars, families, program Interns and staff.

The Center for Adolescent Literacies at UNC Charlotte

The Center for Adolescent Literacies at UNC Charlotte is an instructional center focused on developing instruction to make literacy and learning relevant and effective for adolescents and those who work with them. The Center also will conduct and support research and service in support of its primary mission.

The mission of the Center for Adolescent Literacies (CAL) at UNC Charlotte is to advance the literacy achievement of adolescents in urban school settings and to develop pedagogies for adolescents and those who work with them to prepare them to be productive and empowered 21st century citizens. Specifically, the objectives of our center are as follows:

- To provide community outreach

- To build cultural understanding and awareness

- To promote community* engagements

- To encourage civic engagement through service learning

- To equip teachers, parents and pre-service teachers with knowledge, skills, and dispositions for supporting and scaffolding adolescent literacy and service learning

- To develop and provide collaborative professional development to promote adolescent literacy

- To encourage collaborative involvement among all stakeholders (including teachers, students, parents/guardians and university faculty).

Evaluation Team

Dr. Bruce Taylor is the Director of the Center for Adolescent Literacies at UNC Charlotte and is an Associate Professor in the Department of Reading & Elementary Education. Dr. Taylor has provided leadership in developing the ReadWriteServe service learning and literacy initiatives at UNC Charlotte as well as the Academy for Qualitative Research. He is the co-author of two books and is the author and co-author of numerous peer-reviewed articles, book chapters, and technical reports. His research examines the social and cultural aspects of literacy and learning of adolescents and, in particular, ways to meet the academic learning needs of diverse and marginalized students. He has led

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Dr. Adriana L. Medina is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Reading & Elementary Education. Dr. Medina's areas of interest and research include adolescent literacy, teacher education, and educational program evaluation. Her primary teaching responsibilities include undergraduate and graduate courses in reading and content area literacy. Dr. Medina teaches a Literacy for Democracy service learning course at Piedmont Open Middle School in Charlotte and works with the Center on program evaluation projects including the evaluation of summer reading programs.

Dr. Sandraluz Lara-Cinisomo is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Special Education and Child Development. Dr. Lara-Cinisomo is a Developmental Psychologist who continues to conduct research with the RAND Corporation on military children and families. Dr. Lara-Cinisomo's research interests include child and adolescent well-being, as well as maternal mental health. Her research on children includes school-readiness, early childhood educators' belief systems, and an analysis of context and links with child and adolescent well-being. Dr. Lara-Cinisomo is co-PI on the NMFA-funded project that looks at links between deployment experiences and youth functioning; this study also includes an examination of non-deployed caregiver experiences and well-being. Her other research focuses on maternal depression. Dr. Lara-Cinisomo has also worked on other military-related project designed to develop interview instruments of deployed service members and their spouses. Dr. Lara-Cinisomo has also conducted a study using data from the Los Angeles Family and Neighborhood Survey (LA FANS) to identify disparities in major depression among a diverse group of mothers living in Los Angeles. A second study focused on the association between self-reported, previous detection of major depression with mental health specialty use and the use of a primary care physician. Dr. Lara-Cinisomo is leading a third study designed to identify barriers and facilitators to treating Hispanic perinatal mothers suffering from depression.

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