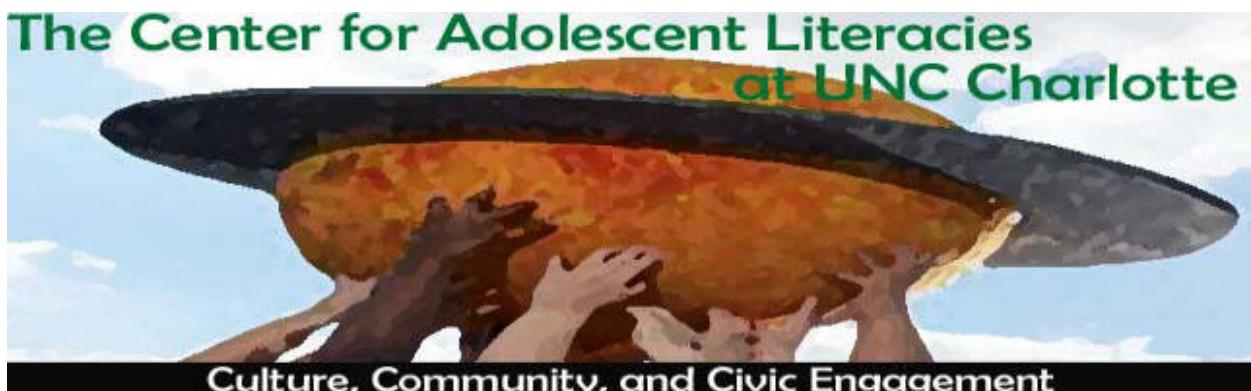


**Bennettsville, South Carolina
Children's Defense Fund
Freedom Schools® Program
Evaluation Report**

Submitted
by



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Overview

This report builds on a program evaluation of the Children's Defense Fund Freedom Schools® programs conducted during the summers of 2009 and 2010 in Charlotte, North Carolina. 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 CDF in Bennettsville, South 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 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 a CDF Freedom Schools program 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 Difference in: My Self, My Family, My Community, My Country, and My World with Hope*,

¹ Information about the Children's Defense Fund and its programs is available at the CDF website: <http://www.childrensdefense.org/>.

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. 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.

Bennettsville, (Marlboro County) South Carolina, is the site where the CDF's *Freedom Schools* was piloted in 1992. In 2010, two Freedom School sites operated in Marlboro County—one in Clio and another at Marlboro County High School. In Bennettsville, 223 school-aged children/Scholars attended, and at the Clio site, 102 attended.

Related Research

CDF Freedom Schools programs are six to eight-week, literacy-based summer learning programs designed for children at risk for school failure. Many of these programs are located in urban areas but some, like the Bennettsville program, are in small towns and rural communities. 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, Entwistle, & Olson, 2007) traces back the achievement gap between high-socioeconomic and low-socioeconomic of 9th grade students to the loss in reading proficiency that occurred 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, the Children's Defense Fund 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 the Marlboro County High School site. The program evaluation sought to assess the extent to which the *CDF Freedom Schools* program met the following objectives for the K-12 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 approximately 25% of Freedom School Scholars at the Marlboro County Freedom School site in Bennettsville, South Carolina (Marlboro County, S.C.). For summer 2010, there were approximately 223 Scholars enrolled in the *CDF Freedom School* program located at Marlboro County High School. Of those, 66 children or just over 29.6% were assessed at least once. The sample was stratified by level, gender, ethnicity, grade and age (see Table 1). The results presented in this report are based on 42 children who were part of our study for which we had complete pre- and post-test data. The 42 Scholars on whom we report fell short of our goal of 25% but provided a reasonable sample size of nearly 19% of the Marlboro County High School site.

Other Factors Regarding to this Study

Two factors related to program scheduling arose during the development and implementation of this evaluation study. First, due to shortfalls in funding for public schools, the Marlboro County School system decided to close its schools one day a week (Fridays) during the summer 2009 as a cost-saving measure. This changed the Bennettsville Freedom School schedule from five days a week to four. Also, the system closed its schools for the week of July 4th. Also, in June a severe thunderstorm that generated high winds came through Bennettsville and knocked down a power pole and transformer near Marlboro County High School. The school was without power for three days resulting in an additional loss of three program days. We discussed these factors with CDF program staff and leadership and moved forward with the evaluation study. We discuss potential implications of these factors in the findings section.

Table 1. Criteria for Stratification

Criteria	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Gender	Male Female	Male Female	Male Female
Ethnicity	African-American Hispanic White	African-American Hispanic White	African-American Hispanic White
Grade/Age	Kindergarten 1 st Grade 2 nd Grade	3 rd Grade 4 th Grade 5 th Grade	6 th Grade 7 th Grade 8 th 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 & 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 66 Scholars in Levels 1, 2, and 3. The following results are based on 42 children (63% of the original pre-tested sample) with complete pre- and post-test data. The remaining 24 children who participated in the pre-test were not present for the post-test. Table 3 presents the demographic information for the analytic sample population (N=42).

As can be seen in Table 3, Level 2 Scholars represent the largest proportion of the sample (40%). Grades ranged from Kindergarten to 8th grade. Just over half of the sample was male (52%) and all were African-American. The mean age was 10. The vast majority of Scholars participate in the free and reduced lunch program and over half from whom we had data had prior experience with Freedom School Partners. A very small percent were identified as having repeated a grade and none reported having a special need.

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

	%/Mean(SD)
Level	
1	31
2	40
3	29
Gender	
Male	52
Female	48
Child age	10.61 (2.07)
% Free Lunch Program	79
% Special Education	None
% Repeated a grade	12
% Prior Freedom School Partners participation (n=30)	53

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

Procedures

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. Therefore, the evaluation was conducted using Freedom School Levels rather than school grade. Level 1 Scholars are those students who have just completed Kindergarten through second grade. Level 2 Scholars are those students having completed grades three through five. Level 3 Scholars are those students having just completed grades six through eight. Although the Marlboro County High School site included Level 4 students (grades 9-12 students), they were not included in the evaluation as it was not designed to assess students beyond eighth grade. Also, data gathered in 2009 and 2010 at the Charlotte, North Carolina, Freedom School Partners sites assessed K-8 students (FSP Freedom Schools do not as yet have Level 4 students), excluding Level 4 Scholars would provide a better comparison across sites, if necessary.

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.

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.

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, those in grades Kindergarten through 2nd, scored in the second grade range. Based on the post-test 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=42)

Level	N	<i>Pre-test</i>		<i>Post-test</i>	
		M	SD	M	SD
1	13	2.00	1.78	2.15	1.91
2	17	3.53	2.18	4.64	2.34
3	12	6.42	1.16	7.41	0.67

Larger gains were made among children in Level 2 and 3, with the former showing just over a grade level increase and the latter showing a one grade gain over the course of the evaluation.

The results indicate that Scholars improved in regards to their ability to read at an Independent level as measured by the BRI. Many of the younger Scholars were reading independently at grade level. However, Scholars on the upper range of Levels 2 (e.g., 4th and 5th grade) and 3 (e.g., 7th and 8th grade) were not reading at grade level at pre-test. The change over time suggests that older Scholars made gains that helped them get closer to grade level Independent reading levels.

Figure 1 shows the proportion of children who showed gains over the course of the program. Specifically, we found that over a third of the sample (33.3%) maintained Independent reading levels by the end of the summer. The data also show that the majority of the 42 children tested 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 did not “slide” back

during the summer time. Both outcomes are desirable outcomes for Freedom School Participants as identified by the Children's Defense Fund.

Figure 1. Change over time on the BRI Independent measure

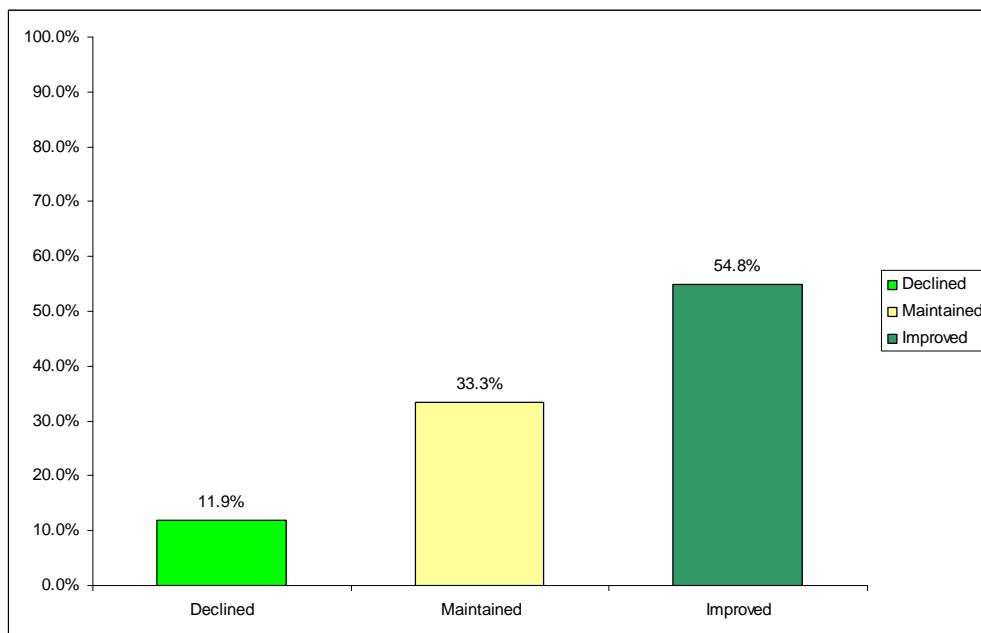


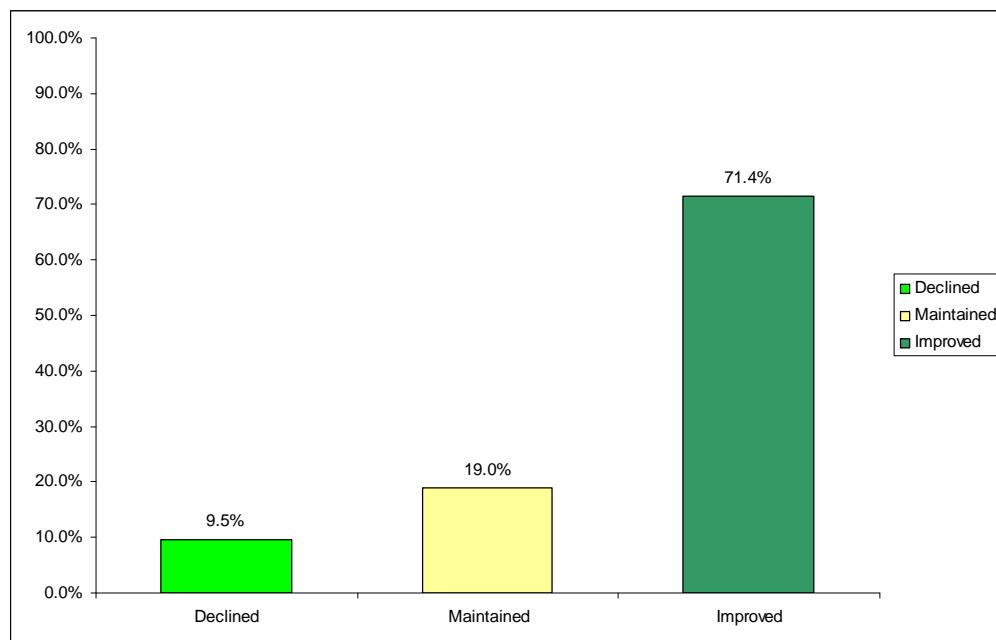
Table 5 shows results from the BRI Frustration scale by level. At pre-test, scholars in Level 1 reached a frustration reading level at fourth grade and Scholars in Level 2 reached frustration at 6th grade, on average. Scholars in Level 3 reached a frustration reading level just above 8th grade at pre-test. This means that, on average, these children found reading material above the 8th grade to be “too hard” (see Table 2 above for details about test scoring). As with the BRI Independent score, on average, Scholars showed improvement of the course of the program. This was especially true for Level 2 and 3 scholars. For example, Level 3 scholars reached level 9 or beyond at pre-test and continued to show growth at post-test as evidenced by the need to assign scores beyond the eighth grade max for this test. 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=42)

Level	<i>N</i>	<i>Pre-test</i>		<i>Post-test</i>	
		<i>M</i>	SD	<i>M</i>	SD
1	13	4.23	2.05	4.46	1.90
2	17	6.00	2.15	7.41	2.37
3	12	8.50	0.90	9.58	0.51

Figure 2 shows the proportion of children whose reading cap either “declined”, “maintained” or “improved” over time on the BRI Frustration scale. The data indicate that the vast majority showed growth over the course of the program. Specifically, 71.4% of Scholars were able to reach a new reading cap or frustration level at post-test. An additional 19% were able to maintain their reading cap. In the context of summer reading loss, maintenance in reading ability is a positive outcome (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2003; Cooper et al., 1996). A small proportion (9.5%) showed a decline in reading cap. The reading ability, as measured by the BRI, of close to 10% of the Scholars declined over the course of the program.

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. Over 50% of Freedom School Scholars showed improvement in their Independent reading levels, their ability to read texts on their own, and 71.4% showed improvement in their ability to read challenging texts (the Frustration reading level). Nearly a third maintained (showed no loss) in their ability to read Independent level texts, while 19% maintained their ability to read Frustration level texts. The percentage of students showing reading loss was at least or close to 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. The ERAS was used in the evaluation study conducted in Charlotte, North Carolina, as well as in Bennettsville, South Carolina, and in both cases, findings from the ERAS conflicted with data gathered from student interviews.

On average, there was a slight decline in attitudes regarding recreational reading among Level 1 Scholars. Generally, recreational reading attitudes provide information regarding students' personal or out-of-school reading of texts they choose. The data indicated that Scholars showed little to no change in their attitudes regarding recreational reading. Similar patterns were found in the ERAS recreational scores, with Scholars showing virtually no change in academic reading attitudes over time. However, this conflicted with post-assessment interviews conducted with Scholars (discussed later in this report) which indicate that Scholars attitudes toward Freedom School and its reading program were strongly positive.

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?

To answer this evaluation question, three open-ended questions were asked of each Scholar. The three open-ended questions were the following:

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?

The open-ended questions yielded interesting insights from the Scholars. The same 42 Scholars who participated in the pre- and post-assessment with the BRI were interviewed from the Marlboro County High School Freedom School Program site and each responded to all three questions.

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 and for retrieving and counting the codes, but it does not interpret the data. For each open-ended question, words, phrases, or statements were coded. Later, the codes were grouped by common themes.

For the first open ended question, 157 words, phrases, and statements were coded and 31 codes emerged that were collapsed into five themes. For the second open-ended question, 30 words, phrases, and statements were coded and 11 codes emerged that were collapsed into three themes. For the third open-ended question, 42 words, phrases, and statements were coded and 14 codes emerged that were collapsed into three themes (See Table 6).

This totaled 217 words, phrases, and statements that were coded. All of these codes were grouped by common themes and further collapsed based on commonalities and yielded five major themes that answered the overarching evaluation question: What were Freedom School Scholars' perceptions regarding the reading component in the Freedom School Program? The five major themes were: Fun, Reading Experience, Books, Interactions with Others, and Comprehension-related Strategies (See Table 7).

Table 6. Frequency of Codes for the themes that emerged for each Question

Open-Ended Question 1		Open-Ended Question 2		Open-Ended Question 3	
Codes	Frequency	Codes	Frequency	Codes	Frequency
Reading Experience	53	More Books	12	Fun	23
Books	48	More Reading Activities	10	Enjoy Reading and Books	14
Interactions with Others	27	Other Activities	8	Activities and Trips	5
Comprehension-related Strategies	17				
Fun	11				
Total	156*	Total	30	Total	42

Note: * One student stated he/she does not like reading.

Table 7. Themes and Frequency based on Codes

Themes	Frequency of Codes
Books (Books, More Books, and Enjoy Reading and Books)	74
Reading Experience (Reading Experience and More Reading Activities)	63
Fun	34
Interaction with Others	27
Comprehension-related Strategies	17
Other Activities (Other Activities and Activities and Trips)	13
Total	228

Books

Scholars indicated that they “*liked the books.*” This was the strongest theme that emerged. Scholars listed their favorite books and were happy about having choice in the books that they read. In addition, Scholars were able to articulate that they enjoyed books that they could relate to and that were culturally relevant to them.

- “*The books are great.*”
- “*The books are good.*”
- “*The books are fun.*”
- “*Every year there are good books.*”
- “*You get to read any kind of book that you want.*”
- “*Get to pick your own books.*”
- “*I like the books we read. None were boring. They kept my attention. Most based on facts, things that actually happened. I like reading stories like that.*”
- “*Helps me understand what's happening in the world. I know what to avoid and what to go to. The books tell you about life things.*”
- “*More books.*”
- “*More reading time.*”
- “*More time to read.*”

The fact that Scholars indicated that they enjoyed the books and that they enjoyed having choice in the books they read is important because one cannot enjoy the reading experience if one does not enjoy the book one is reading. Also, having a say regarding what book an individual wants to read is likelier to guarantee a better reading experience. One of the goals of Freedom School is to help Scholars fall in love with reading. A good book and being allowed to choose books to read are a way to reach that goal.

The Scholars indicated that they want more of what is already great about Freedom School, more books to read and more time to read. Based on these interviews, Scholars perceptions regarding the reading component of Freedom School were largely focused on the books they read.

Reading Experience

Scholars indicated that they enjoyed the reading experience. Scholars felt that the reading experience was positive, they enjoyed the teacher and felt that they learned. Only one student stated that he/she “doesn’t like reading.” Scholars indicated that they liked “*just reading*” and the silent sustained reading time allocated to “*just read.*” Silent sustained reading (SSR) is an allotted period of uninterrupted time where students read a book of their choice. This period of time is often also called DEAR time (Drop Everything and Read time). Through reading, one Scholar noted that he “*gained knowledge*”. Scholars’ favorite reading experience was the read aloud. The responses captured were unclear sometimes as to whether the reading aloud practices were conducted by the teachers or the students; however, reading aloud emerged as a positive experience. The following are quotes that exemplify this theme:

- “*I like reading out loud.*”
- “*To be able to have your voice heard to other people.*”
- “*It’s fun hearing people read to us.*”
- “*When people read to us. I don’t know some words but when they say it I do.*”
- “*These books we get to read during DEAR time.*”
- “*DEAR time is favorite.*”
- “*I feel excited that they read the book because I’ve heard about it before. I like to read them and get them out of the library. I like to look at pictures, makes sounds, and beats with it.*”
- “*Reading books makes us smart.*”
- “*I get smarter and smarter.*”
- “*Feels like you are really there.*”

Again, one of Freedom School’s goals is for Scholars to fall in love with reading. This is likelier to happen if Scholars are given the time to read. Reading takes time. During Freedom School, these Scholars indicated that they are aware of this need for time to read and that this time to experience reading is valued during Freedom School.

Fun

The Freedom School Scholars’ perceptions of the reading component of the program were overwhelmingly positive. Overall, Scholars found Freedom School to be “fun!” Other responses were “*Nice,*” “*Good,*” and “*I liked it.*”

- “*It’s fun when we learn.*”
- “*It is very fun. It is very cool.*”

- “Really fun activities.”
- “Kinda fun because I like to read.”

Interaction with Others

Scholars indicated that they enjoyed the group activities where they were able to interact with others. It seems that these interactions gave the Scholars a sense of community. Specifically, they enjoyed the social aspects of reading, such as “*you work with friends*,” and being able to “*get into groups*,”

- “*Groups are fun.*”
- “*Time with friends.*”
- “*We all got to split into groups to read one section then all come together to tell each other what the book was about.*”
- “*You work with friends in the book.*”
- “*You get to interact with other Scholars. Tell what you think.*”

While most of the reading might have been done individually, Scholars indicated that they enjoyed interacting with others before, during, and after the reading experience. It is often during this interaction that additional comprehension occurs. Scholars bring their understanding of the reading to the group and as they share their thoughts and ideas, they socially further construct their understanding of what they read. This interaction before, during, and after reading is beneficial in aiding with comprehension.

Comprehension Related

Scholars mentioned enjoying participation in activities that aid in reading comprehension (e.g. discussion, asking and answering questions, working on vocabulary, retelling, and acting it out).

- “*After you read, you can ask the teacher a lot of questions.*”
- “*When we get in a circle and talk about the book.*”
- “*I like when we read a book and discuss it.*”
- “*Let kids do role play on each book.*”
- “*Activities afterwards – skits and making passages about what I thought.*”
- “*You have to come up with a creative way to summarize what you read.*”

From the outside, reading might look like a passive activity, but research shows that it is a very active one (Barr, Sadow, & Blachowicz, 1990; Short & Harste, 1996). There are lots of things happening within the reader and between the reader and the text that lead to comprehension and enjoyment of the reading experience. These comments suggest that Scholars in Freedom School are engaged in reading activities that are active and engaging. The fact that Scholars could articulate many of these active reading strategies and that they were helpful and enjoyable is a plus.

Other Activities

It seems that Scholars would like to experience a balance between reading related activities already offered and other activities. There were several Scholars who felt a need to balance reading time with play time.

- “*A little more amusement.*”
- “*Make it better by spending more time reading then play. Then read then play.*”
- “*We should visit places where famous people have written books. Field trips.*”
- “*Need gym time.*”

These comments suggest, not surprisingly, that Scholars want and need both mental and physical activity. Ultimately, Scholars want an experience at Freedom School that is not “all work and no play!”

Discussion of Findings

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

This program evaluation builds on an evaluation study conducted during the summer 2009 in Charlotte, N.C. 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 findings of the 2009 evaluation in Charlotte, N.C. and 2010 evaluation in Bennettsville, S. C. are similar in nature. In the 2009 Marlboro County site evaluation, just over 90% of Freedom

School Scholars grew or maintained in their ability to read as measured by the frustration level scores obtained from the BRI. These gains came despite interruptions to the Freedom School program schedule in Bennettsville that came about as a result of adverse weather and school budget cuts. 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

This study suggests that *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 Level 2 and 3 students. Level 1 Scholars showed the smallest gains. We noted that more Level 1 Scholars who participated in the pre-testing were at or near grade level in reading while far more of the Level 2 and 3 Scholars pre-tested were behind grade level. The findings that these Level 2 and 3 Scholars made greater gains than Level 1 Scholars suggests that the Freedom School program has the potential to help them get closer to the reading levels of school-age peers who read on grade level.

It is not within the scope of this study to know why older Scholars made greater gains—a finding that we also noted in our assessment of the Charlotte, N.C. Freedom Schools. We offer a possible explanation that we also shared in our report of the 2010 Freedom School Partners programs in Charlotte. 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

Based on the data from the first open-ended question (What do you like about the reading part of FSP?), out of the 157 words, statements, and phrases coded, 153 (97%) were positive in nature and expressed a positive attitude toward the reading components of FSP and thereby a positive outlook on reading. Three (1.9%) of the responses were neutral and 1 (0.6%) expressed a dislike of reading.

The data suggest that the reading experiences were perceived by the Scholars as engaging and relevant. Scholars said they liked the books and classroom activities such as discussions, read alouds, and art-based activities. However, in both the program evaluation at Bennettsville, S.C. and in Charlotte, N.C., 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. 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 *CDF Freedom Schools* program impact on participating students' reading. However, this research conducted in Bennettsville, S.C. viewed along with the research conducted in Charlotte, N.C. suggest that the majority of students participating in the Freedom School 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, this research conducted during the summer 2010 in Bennettsville, S.C. builds on the 2009 pilot study conducted. Results from this study along with data collected in Charlotte, N.C. during the summer 2009 and 2010 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.

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 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

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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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