



News Release

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Contacts:

Detroit Public Schools

Steven Wasko
313-212-5636
steven.wasko@detroitk12.org

Children's Defense Fund

Patti Hassler
202-662-3554
phassler@childrensdefense.org

Academy of the Americas receives DPS' first ever Children's Defense Fund Freedom Schools® designation with MSU and community collaboration

A highly unique opportunity for summer and after-school enrichment for **Academy of the Americas (AOA)** students, alumni and **Michigan State University Urban Immersion Fellows** will begin June 15, 2015 as the Academy of the Americas becomes the first-ever Detroit Public School to be named a nationally-acclaimed **Children's Defense Fund (CDF) Freedom Schools® site**.

The *CDF Freedom Schools* program seeks to boost motivation to read and build strong, literate and empowered students prepared to make a difference in themselves, their families, communities, nation and world. By providing summer and after-school reading enrichment for students who might otherwise not have access to books, the *CDF Freedom Schools* program plays a much needed role in helping to decrease summer learning loss and close achievement gaps.

The **Cynthia Estrada Charity Fund** and **UAW-GM** has awarded a total of \$200,000 to support the *CDF Freedom Schools* partners in Detroit for 2015. **Cynthia Estrada** is Vice President and Director, UAW International Union, General Motors Department. Estrada is the first woman and Latina to serve in that role.

"This is my second year sponsoring *CDF Freedom Schools* in Detroit and I am pleased that Academy of the Americas will be hosting a summer program this year," said Estrada. "Also, in support of the successful Academy of the Americas literacy program in Southwest Detroit last fall, the Cynthia Estrada Charity Fund donated \$20,000 to fund two new bilingual textbook series because reading is the key that unlocks life's treasures."

"We are thrilled that for the first time the Detroit Public Schools are offering the *CDF Freedom Schools* program. Based on the strong performance of *CDF Freedom Schools* programs in public schools in other cities, we hope to see Freedom Schools in every public school in Detroit," said Marian Wright Edelman, president of the Children's Defense Fund.

DPS recently announced a series of school-based transformation initiatives designed to improve academics and competitiveness. Starting fall 2015 Academy of the Americas which added grade 9 during the 2014-15 school year, will expand to grade 10 and continue to add a grade each year through grade 12.

"The *CDF Freedom Schools* program provides our students with an opportunity to enhance their reading skills and instill a love of reading through active learning and engaging instruction," said AOA Principal **Nicholas Brown**. "We are thrilled about the opportunity to host the program and provide the experience for our students."

In partnership with Michigan State University Urban Immersion Fellowship program, Academy of the Americas' *CDF Freedom Schools* program delivered by college students and AOA teachers will provide an engaging summer experience with weekly field trips, social action activities, and STEM and arts-based programming. Community partners including Living Arts, Matrix Theatre, and Playworks will enrich the students' experience. For 20 years the *CDF Freedom Schools* program has helped to generate more positive attitudes toward learning, increase children's self-esteem and connect the needs of students and families to the resources of their communities.

The program, set to begin Monday, June 15 at Academy of the Americas, The program, set to begin Monday, June 15 at AOA, includes weekly parent engagement workshops focusing on how citizens can make a difference presently in terms of social action. Students, parents and community members will also participate in daily *Harambee*, a traditional African activity known to bring children and community members together.

"I am very excited that AOA will be one of 5 new partners to serve as a *CDF Freedom Schools* site this year and thankful for the support of the UAW-GM and Cynthia Estrada Charity fund for helping to make this possible," said Director of Michigan Freedom Schools Expansion **Sheba Rogers**. "Not only will AOA be the first DPS school site, AOA will also be the first site in Michigan to utilize the *CDF Freedom Schools* Latino curriculum supplement which connects children to a rich history of cultures all over the world, with an emphasis on Latino heritage."

The *CDF Freedom Schools* model incorporates the entire Children's Defense Fund's mission by encouraging environments that support children and young adults to excel and believe in their ability to make a difference. Site coordinators and project directors are also trained by CDF to provide supervision and administrative support.

According to Michigan State University's Director of Urban Educators Cohort Program **Sonya Gunnings-Moton**, DPS and the MSU program have held an extensive partnership of their own with a shared vision for high achievement.

"Michigan State University's College of Education is thrilled with the opportunity to engage our Urban Immersion Teacher Candidates in this special effort," said Gunnings. "Academy of the Americas *CDF Freedom Schools* program allows us to build upon our long-standing partnership with Detroit Public Schools, based upon our shared vision for high achievement and social action on behalf of the children and families in Detroit."

Six Servant Leader interns have been hired for the summer program at Academy of the Americas, including two AOA staff members to serve as Program Directors and four Fellows from the MSU Urban Immersion Fellowship Program.

The Servant Leaders and Site Coordinators attended the Children's Defense Fund Freedom Schools national training May 29-June 4, 2015 at the CDF Haley Farm in Clinton, TN and the University of Tennessee-Knoxville. There they learned how to deliver the integrated reading curriculum to best suit the needs of the students.

More about the CDF Freedom Schools® program

According to the *CDF Freedom Schools* program, since 1995, more than 135,000 PreK-12 students have had a *CDF Freedom Schools* experience and more than 18,000 college students and recent graduates have been trained by CDF to deliver this empowering model.

The program provides an exciting Integrated Reading Curriculum (IRC) including carefully chosen developmentally appropriate and culturally relevant books.

The model curriculum supports children and families around five essential components:

- High-quality Academic Enrichment
- Parent and Family Involvement
- Social Action and Civic Engagement
- Intergenerational Servant Leadership Development
- Nutrition, Health and Mental Health

For more information about the CDF Freedom Schools® program, visit <http://www.freedomschools.org>

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The [Children's Defense Fund](#) Leave No Child Behind® mission is 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.