



children's
defense fund
Leave No Child Behind®

FALL 2020 FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

Introduction to CDF Freedom Schools®

The CDF Freedom Schools® program is a six-week summer literacy and cultural enrichment program aimed at empowering K-12 scholars to believe in their ability to make a difference in themselves, their families, communities, country, and the world with hope, education, and action. Through reading and the idea that a person of faith can rally a community to understand the urgency and necessity of making a difference, we help scholars change how they think about learning.

Rooted in the Mississippi Freedom Summer project of 1964, the *CDF Freedom Schools* program is designed to serve K-12 scholars in communities where quality academic enrichment programming is limited, too expensive, or non-existent. By partnering with faith and community-based organizations, schools, municipalities, colleges and universities, and juvenile detention facilities, we are able to offer these programs at no cost to the families and communities they serve.


The *CDF Freedom Schools* program enhances children's motivation to read and makes them feel good about learning. At the same time, the program connects families to the right resources in their communities. *CDF Freedom Schools* scholars engage in CDF's research-based, multicultural **Integrated Reading Curriculum (IRC)** that supports them and their families through five essential components:

High-Quality Academic Enrichment: The *CDF Freedom Schools* model is designed to strengthen scholars' reading skills and prevent summer learning loss. Multi-year assessments have shown that scholars exposed to *CDF Freedom Schools'* research-based, multicultural Integrated Reading Curriculum (IRC) have consistently maintained or gained an average of eight months in their reading skills. The *CDF Freedom Schools* model requires a 10:1 scholar to instructor ratio to allow for more intimate learning settings.



"Kids who come back have higher reading levels and are doing better in school. But even more than that, their personalities really blossom because they know that they're loved and they know they're cared for here."

— Charlie Marrs,
CDF Freedom Schools
Site Coordinator



We believe that representation matters. For this reason, the IRC features culturally relevant texts with heroes and heroines that reflect the scholars' images. IRC lesson plans are pre-written and include **social action, civic engagement, conflict resolution, and self and community empowerment** activities. The relevancy of texts and lesson plans to scholars' lives boosts their motivation to read, encourages them to foster positive feelings about learning, and leads to overall increased **academic achievement**.

85% of children and youth in CDF Freedom Schools avoid summer learning loss.

Parents and Family Engagement: Scholars are not the only ones served by *CDF Freedom Schools* program sites. Mandatory parent and family engagement sessions are built into the program model. As a result, parents and guardians must attend weekly meetings, volunteer as guest readers or field trip chaperones, and join in other site-based activities. The purpose of this is to build community among the families served by any given *CDF Freedom Schools* site.

More than 90% of parents said they were more likely to be engaged in their child's education after being involved in CDF Freedom Schools.

Fostering Civic Engagement: The *CDF Freedom Schools* program encourages scholars throughout their childhood and adolescence to embrace their cultural history and reinforces confidence in their abilities to create positive changes in the world. *CDF Freedom Schools* scholars participate in book discussions and social action projects that address fairness, voting rights, and education access. In addition, each year in July, *CDF Freedom Schools* scholars across the country unite for the National Day of Social Action (NDSA).

Even during the pandemic, CDF Freedom Schools scholars took the time to tell adults why voting matters. Sites participated in NDSA by hosting marches, voting registration drives, and creating social media posts to make their voices heard.

Intergenerational Servant Leadership: The *CDF Freedom Schools* programs are staffed primarily by college students and recent college graduates, known as Servant Leader Interns.

In *CDF Freedom Schools* classrooms, Servant Leader Interns come from similar backgrounds and communities of the scholars they are serving, and as a result, they act as mentors and role models for scholars. Servant Leader Interns go through rigorous training to learn about classroom and behavior management, trauma-informed teaching practices, and how to take on instructors, mentors, role models, and community builders.

Their interactions enable scholars to envision themselves as future college students, advocates, and leaders. Our program is more than just a summer experience; it's a lifetime commitment to the movement of social justice.

Nutrition, Health, and Mental Health: *CDF Freedom Schools* sites must offer two nutritious meals and a snack daily to all scholars enrolled in programming. The program model also includes a two-hour afternoon activity block during which sponsors are encouraged to offer physical and mental health programming for scholars.



How Can *CDF Freedom Schools* Help Your Local Community?

CDF Freedom Schools creates safe spaces for scholars, parents, and educators to come together and engage in meaningful action that allows communities to grow academically and socially. With hope, education, and action, communities are able to learn from one another and provide resources and support to address community needs. **Here are a few benefits of hosting a *CDF Freedom Schools* program at faith-based organizations:**

- Expand current community outreach efforts and initiatives through expanded services
- Increase visibility in the community, attracting more people to the congregation
- Continue the legacy of faith-based leaders during the Civil Rights Movement whose leadership inspired and paved the way for the *CDF Freedom Schools* program

“To see them in their classrooms utilizing Freedom School principles gets me kind of excited. We’re impacting the community outside those six weeks.”

— **Dwayne Crompton**,
founder of Kansas City
CDF Freedom Schools

Interested in starting a *CDF Freedom Schools* site in your community?

To apply, sponsor organizations (such as churches, schools, and school districts, community organizations, etc.) should complete an application and budget worksheet online at

<https://www.childrensdefense.org/programs/cdf-freedom-schools/>

Some additional information:

- The Children's Defense requires sites to serve a minimum of 30 children.
- As a response to the ongoing pandemic, sponsor organizations can operate in-person, virtual, or hybrid programs based on their community needs.
- The cost to sponsor a program is set at \$285 per scholar.
- As a part of the partnership, the Children's Defense Fund provides sponsoring organizations training on its multicultural, research-based Integrated Reading Curriculum, accompanying reading and site library books, training, program monitoring, and evaluation.
- Staff working in *CDF Freedom Schools* programs must attend mandatory virtual training meetings throughout the year.



Contact the *CDF Freedom Schools* national office to learn more about how you can start your application to sponsor a *CDF Freedom Schools* site. Our team can be reached via phone at (202) 662-3543 or by email at freedomschools@childrensdefense.org.