



**children's
defense fund**
Leave No Child Behind®

FALL 2020 K-12 EDUCATION

Introduction to CDF Freedom Schools®

The CDF Freedom Schools® model empowers scholars to excel and believe in their ability to make a difference in themselves, their families, communities, country and world with hope, education and action.

Rooted in the Mississippi Freedom Summer project of 1964, the *CDF Freedom Schools* program is a literacy and cultural enrichment program designed to serve children and youth in grades K-12 in communities where quality academic enrichment programming is limited, too expensive, or nonexistent.

By partnering with schools, faith and community-based organizations, municipalities, colleges and universities, and juvenile detention facilities, we are able to offer this program in these communities at no cost.



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
- Parent and family development
- Civic engagement and social action
- Intergenerational servant leadership development
- Nutrition, health and mental health

Stemming Summer Learning Loss: Our six-week program is designed to strengthen scholars' reading skills and prevent summer learning loss. *CDF Freedom Schools* empowers scholars to maintain and build upon the skills they learn during the school year through exposure to the IRC. Meeting the common core standards, lessons in the IRC consist of **project-based learning** activities and include opportunities for civic engagement, conflict resolution, and social action skill development. IRC books feature heroes, heroines, and settings that reflect the scholars' cultural images and history. The *CDF Freedom Schools* IRC books boost scholars' motivation to read, foster positive feelings about learning, increase **social-emotional learning** and **academic achievement**. All sponsor organizations receive books to use with the IRC guide and books to build out their site libraries. In addition, scholars enrolled in *CDF Freedom Schools* receive weekly distributions of books to build home libraries.

84% of children in CDF Freedom Schools avoid summer learning loss.

Fostering Civic Engagement: The *CDF Freedom Schools* program encourages scholars 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 topics such as fairness, voting rights, education access, and conflict resolution. In addition, each year in July, *CDF Freedom Schools* scholars across the country unite for the National Day of Social Action.

90% of parents saw positive change in their *CDF Freedom Schools* scholars.

Engaging Parents and Families: Scholars are not the only ones served by the *CDF Freedom Schools* program. Parent and family engagement is an essential component of the program. Families are invited to weekly meetings and encouraged to volunteer as guest readers, field trip chaperones, and to join in other community activities.

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

Why the *CDF Freedom Schools* Model Works

A multiyear assessment of *CDF Freedom Schools* showed that the program has a statistically significant, positive effect on children's reading skills, attitudes toward learning, and belief in themselves and in their ability to make a difference in the world around them. Findings from studies of the impact of *CDF Freedom Schools* show that scholars gain an average of eight months of reading skills, with those entering the program below grade level achieving an astounding 1.2 years of reading gains.

CDF believes in an intergenerational leadership model. That's why *CDF Freedom Schools* programs are staffed primarily by college students and recent college graduates, known as Servant Leader Interns, with a 10:1 scholar to teacher ratio. At the beginning of the summer, all *CDF Freedom Schools* staff go through two weeks of intensive training to learn effective classroom management, understand **social-emotional learning**, and prepare to deliver rigorous but engaging lessons. Servant Leader Interns come from communities similar to those in which *CDF Freedom Schools* programs are offered. In *CDF Freedom Schools* classrooms Servant Leader Interns act as mentors and role models whose interactions enable scholars in *CDF Freedom Schools* to envision themselves as future college students, advocates, and leaders. Small-sized classrooms along with the consistent support and nurturance of college-aged mentors and teachers together produce the positive reading gains mentioned above.



CDF Freedom Schools creates 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 can 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 a local elementary school or high school in the community:**

- Extends the academic year through additional practicum hours
- Improves the culture and climate of the traditional school day
- Improves parent relationships through the offering of high-quality academic programming that encourages and motivates them to be a part of their child's learning

The power of caring adults and engaged communities can be the difference-maker in a child's life. So what do scholars, parents and educators say about the CDF Freedom Schools program?



"I do like the fact that they rely heavily on the parents' support, and they do hold them accountable. And it does allow me always to be involved and always be a part of what my son's doing."

— **Ashley Jones**, teacher and parent of CDF Freedom Schools scholar



"We have the brain. We have the mind. We're smart, we're strong, and we can do anything. We learned it in Freedom School. We can do it if we put our mind to it."

— **Camren**, CDF Freedom Schools scholar

"The biggest lesson I learned from Freedom School was to always do your homework. It's important to do your homework so you can grow your brain."

— **Marcalye**, CDF Freedom Schools scholar

"Freedom Schools have taught me a lot as far as structure, as far as how to use positive affirmation to relate to the kids, to allow them to open up and break down the barrier... Freedom Schools, the field trips we've been on, the cheers and chants, just opening up to a new lifestyle has softened me up a little bit."

— **Jalen Morgan**, CDF Freedom Schools Site Coordinator

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.