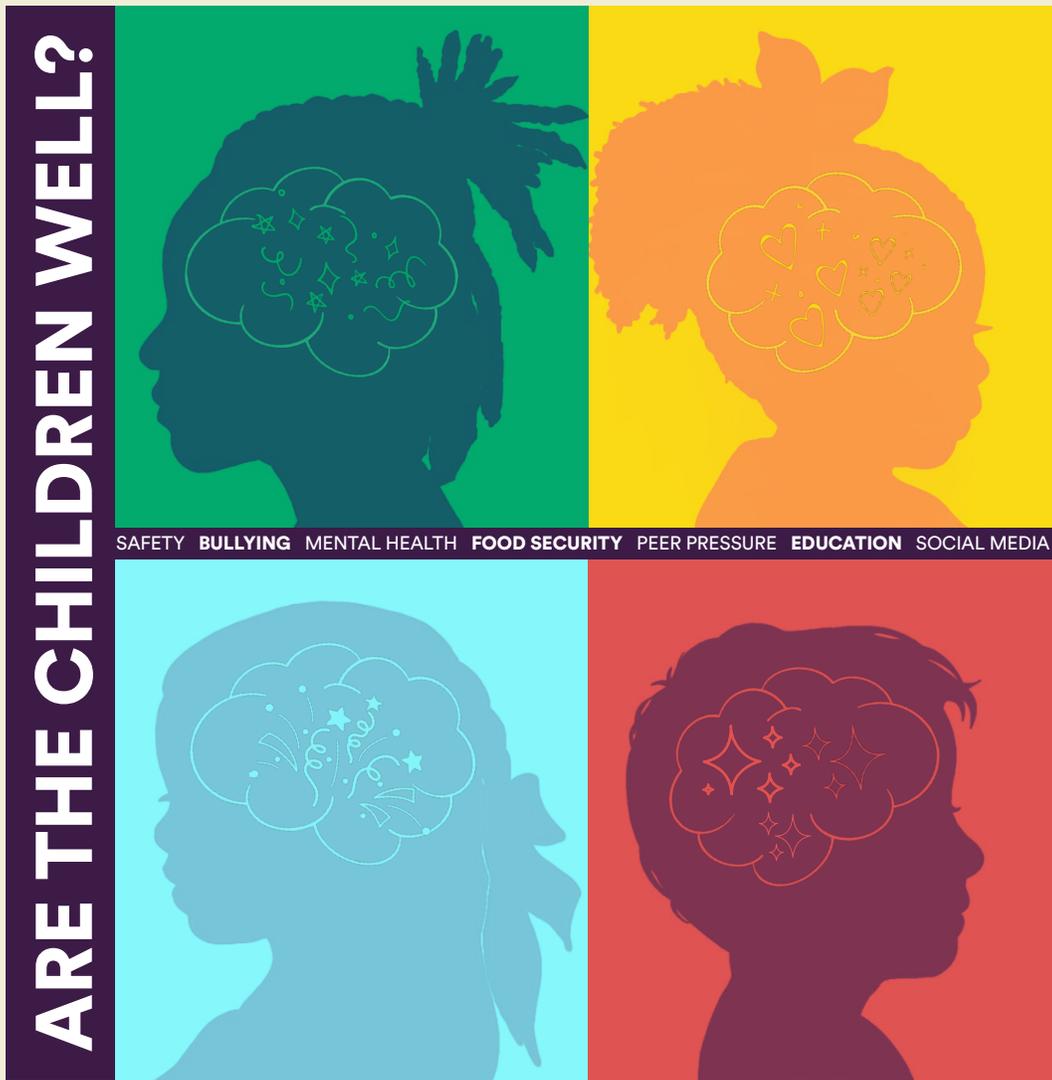


2026 Children's Defense Fund (CDF)
Freedom Schools®

**NATIONAL DAY OF SOCIAL
ACTION TOOLKIT**



2026 Children’s Defense Fund (CDF)
Freedom Schools®

National Day of Social Action Toolkit

TABLE OF CONTENTS

2026 National Day of Social Action (NDSA) Overview	2
Goals of the 2026 National Day of Social Action	5
Getting Started	5
Suggested Activities for the National Day of Social Action	8
Potential Local Education Advocacy Topics.....	12
Extending Beyond the National Day of Social Action.....	13-14
Scholars	13
Parents, Caregivers, and Staff	14
Social Media Engagement: #AreTheChildrenWell?	14
Other Resources to Support Your Efforts.....	15
Get in Touch with CDF’s National or State Offices	16

2026 Children’s Defense Fund (CDF) Freedom Schools® National Day of Social Action: “Mental Health and Social-Emotional Wellness”

Each year, Children’s Defense Fund (CDF) Freedom Schools® partners participate in the National Day of Social Action (NDSA) project—a collective organizing effort centered around CDF’s mission to build community so young people grow up with dignity, hope, and joy.

This year’s NDSA will happen on Wednesday, July 15. NDSA will focus on Children’s Defense Fund’s [Children’s Health and Healing](#) policy agenda item. This agenda item reflects our belief that mental health and social-emotional wellness is a building block for health and has a major impact on our children and youth’s ability to flourish.

SNAP & Medicaid Cuts will negatively impact scholar mental health and social-emotional well-being in schools. Public schools often serve as the only accessible site for services such as counseling, therapy, and a plethora of health screenings. Those most likely to be affected are children and young people from low-income families, those with disabilities, or those from rural communities.

Why participate in the 2026 National Day of Social Action? Because in the United States:

- Investing in mental health and social-emotional wellness ensures that every child, regardless of their background, can thrive.
- The mental health status of young people, a growing concern identified by several federal agencies including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), has seen a consistent decline since the pandemic.¹
- In 2021, more than 4 in 10 (**42%**) students felt persistently sad or hopeless and nearly one-third (**29%**) experienced poor mental health.²
- Black students who experienced intense feelings of hopelessness or persistent sadness were more likely than their White peers to not have been diagnosed with a mental illness.³
- Nearly **40%** of children who receive mental health services receive them at school according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Research from the National Association of School Psychologists shows that early mental health intervention significantly reduces: disciplinary incidents, chronic absenteeism, academic decline.⁴

¹ The Youth Risk Behavior Survey Data Summary & Trends Report: 2013–2023
<https://www.cdc.gov/yrbs/dstr/index.html>

² Emergency TaskForce on Black Youth Suicide and Mental Health
https://watsoncoleman.house.gov/imo/media/doc/full_taskforce_report.pdf

³ Emergency TaskForce on Black Youth Suicide and Mental Health
https://watsoncoleman.house.gov/imo/media/doc/full_taskforce_report.pdf

⁴ How Medicaid Cuts Will Harm Students & Schools
<https://www.aasa.org/resources/resource/how-medicaid-cuts-will-harm-students-schools>

- In a nationwide survey of school district leaders: **86%** use Medicaid funding to pay school health staff like psychologists and nurses, **59%** use it specifically for mental and behavioral health services, **70%** say cuts would reduce mental health services for students, **80%** expect layoffs of school health staff.⁵

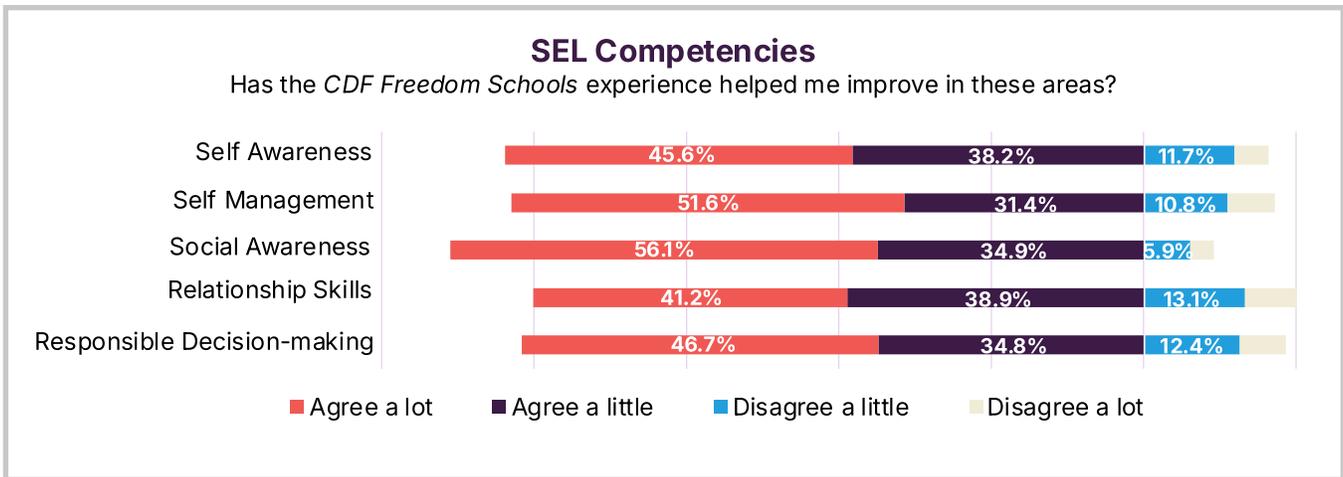
The data is clear. As a nation, we can and must do better. Limited access to mental health support and pathways for social-emotional wellness enrollment creates barriers that may prevent youth from thriving.

We know that when enrolled in a Children’s Defense Fund (CDF) Freedom Schools® program, the children are well.

To maintain these services and support the people who provide them, school districts and states will need to find creative funding strategies and advocacy channels to replace services cut due to loss of federal support.

While states and districts scale back services or delay expansion efforts, thousands of K-12 scholars will be served by *CDF Freedom Schools* in 2026 and will benefit from positive role models, confidence and growth mindset building curriculum and lessons, healthy meals, cultural activities, and other supports which organically contribute to fostering the positive development of children and young people’s mental health and social-emotional learning.

A survey of K-12 scholars who participated in 2025 programming found that *CDF Freedom Schools* helped scholars grow in each of the five Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) core competency areas.

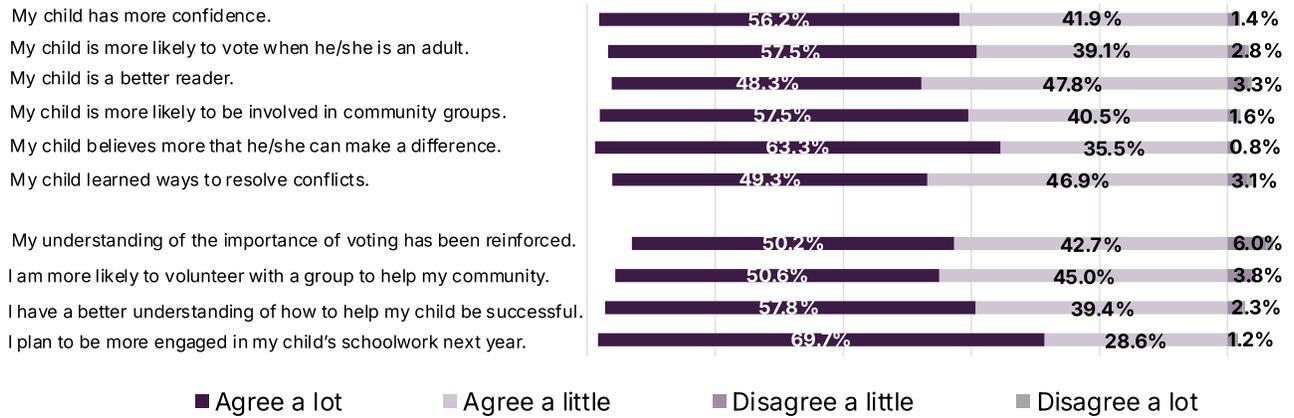


Parents see the changes, too. A summer 2025 survey of parents whose children participated found that nearly all parents agreed that program elements helped build their child(ren)’s positive sense of self and overall mental health.

⁵ How Medicaid Cuts Will Harm Students & Schools
<https://www.aasa.org/resources/resource/how-medicaid-cuts-will-harm-students-schools>

Parent Survey

Have you and your child changed after the *CDF Freedom Schools* program?



Join thousands of scholars in coming together this summer as they pose the question #AreTheChildrenWell?

We must continue to uplift mental health and social-emotional wellness as a necessary investment, tout its successes, and work together to advocate for necessary improvements.

#AreTheChildrenWell?

Goals of the 2026 National Day of Social Action

- **Understand** the importance of access to tools that support mental health and social-emotional wellness that address the barriers keeping scholars from thriving.
- **Equip** scholars, families, and communities to communicate their experiences with mental health and wellness and their vision for schools that prioritize healing.
- **Mobilize** families and communities to support scholars in demanding increased investment in mental health and social-emotional wellness supports that set them up for success.

Getting Started

This 2026 National Day of Social Action Toolkit is intended as a guide to help you reach your organizing goals for Wednesday, July 15. While we hope you adopt a plan to host one of the events outlined in this toolkit, we understand that you must plan events tailored to your local community. As you plan your activities, keep the following organizing steps in mind.

Step 1 Establish Your Goals (March-April)

Steering Committee. Pull together a steering committee of community members including but not limited to past and future scholars, parents, literacy advocates, faith leaders, elected officials, public safety officials, and others from the neighborhood. Take a few minutes for introductions and why they volunteered to support your efforts. Talk about which NDSA activity might work best for your community, where the activity should take place, and what you will need to make sure scholars are safe and their needs are met (whether that's bottled waters and snacks, AV equipment, school buses, protest permits, etc.) *Consider using resources provided to help steering members understand both the importance of mental health and social-emotional wellness, and how your local needs fit into the national wellness campaign.*

- As you talk about goals, make sure they are specific and doable.
- Think BIG and positive.
- Include the community, especially potential guests or speakers, by inviting them early on. *Consider engaging your site in an "mental health and social-emotional wellness" week where you feature guest speakers, videos, podcasts, and books centered on this topic. See resource folder for specific resources to support.*

Cost and time commitments. Since your group will have limited time, money, and people, make sure you prioritize meeting goals. Write out all of your big ideas in that first meeting. Quantify cost estimates of each action, as well as the action steps (linked to timelines) needed from each individual to make the event happen. Rank the events and decide which is most attainable for your site.

Step 2 Consider General Logistics Tips (March-May)

Here we offer basic tips for ensuring the public event runs smoothly and reinforces the message you want to deliver to participants, public officials, and the media. Choose a site that will allow you to accommodate the number of people you hope to draw. Do not choose a bigger site than you think you will need. It looks better if a space is packed.

- Check with the local governing body to see if any special permits, certificate of insurance, or user fees are needed.

- Make sure the site is accessible with adequate parking for cars, buses, and news trucks as well as public transportation.
- Make sure there are restrooms nearby.
- Engage a reliable sound, staging, and lighting company, and ensure a technician is available to assist during the event. If you cannot secure that kind of support, consider investing in a quality set of speakers and a karaoke machine instead.
- Have a rain plan. Be flexible and able to move indoors or under tents (weather permitting) if the day calls for rain.
- Choose a time in the day that will maximize exposure. Events that coincide with local news' morning, noon, or evening shows are more likely to be covered than events that do not.
- Provide directional signs and a map ahead of time so press and participants can find their way to the location.
- Create a program that clearly delivers your message while engaging the crowd. Use an MC who is charismatic but understands the issue at hand.
- Invite local celebrities (think news anchors, radio DJs, athletes, coaches, etc.) to attend or promote the event.
- Add visuals that demonstrate your message (i.e. backdrops, posters, banners, props, etc.)
- Get badges, credentials, t-shirts, hats, etc. for volunteers so they are easily identifiable to scholars, parents, and site staff.
- Provide scholars and staff with shirts for the event. Tie-dye works just fine as well.
- Follow up with volunteers, supporters, or attendees to thank them and let them know ways to stay engaged beyond NDSA.

Note: If your site is in a state or locale that is not open to initiatives promoting Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI), put the safety of your scholars, families, and communities first and consider a less public event. Select the elements from above that are doable but if you are not comfortable, DO NOT overexpose your scholars, nor their families, nor your community.

Step 3 Build a Strong Base of Support (April-June)

Recruit volunteers who can help move the event from the planning stage through execution.

The following groups might be interested in supporting:

- Childcare centers, children's advocates, school leaders and teachers, other out of school time programs, social service providers.
- Faith-based institutions.
- Civic organizations, neighborhood associations, tenant groups, and social clubs.
- Local businesses.
- Sports leagues.
- Parent groups and PTAs.
- Healthcare professionals, hospitals, and local mental health providers.
- Student organizations, youth clubs, sororities, and fraternities.

These groups and others can play a role by:

- Endorsing your event.
- Contributing money, sponsoring your event, or otherwise providing in-kind donations for supplies needed like bottled waters, juice boxes, ice, coolers, snacks, printing photocopying and photocopying services, AV equipment, transportation, security, and other supplies.

- Doing a mailing to members of the community inviting them to join your site's NDSA actions.
- Offering speaking opportunities for you to solicit monetary or in-kind support from members of their organizations or congregations.

Engage supporters by:

- Letting them know the day of action is a part of a larger children's movement and they will be joining hundreds of communities nationwide as we demand change.
- Asking local businesses to hang flyers recruiting supporters.
- Asking local faith organizations to add an announcement about the day in their newsletters, publications, or other announcements.
- Setting up information tables at community fairs, flea markets, or farmers markets.
- Sending an announcement to local organizations already tackling mental health and social-emotional wellness access work in your community.

Step 4 Communicate Effectively

Publicity can help you reach a broader audience while energizing those already committed to your cause. Consider the following ideas to generate positive press around your event:

- 1. Pursue media coverage.** Use CDF's colorful graphics and combine with your own to highlight the importance of the event.
- 2. Send out press releases about NDSA and your specific activity.** Releases can be sent to metro reporters of your daily and weekly newspapers, school and company newsletters, radio and television stations, and other community groups mentioned in Step 2 above. See press release template in the Appendix for example. *Again, do not overexpose your scholars if you are in a state or locale where DEI initiatives are unwelcome.*
- 3. Write Letters to the Editor or articles for local newsletters.** Call radio talk shows and tell listeners about NDSA, why it matters, and how to get involved.

Potential talking points to incorporate:

The Children's Defense Fund Freedom Schools National Day of Social Action is:

1. A collective organizing project that is carried out in hundreds of communities nationwide.
2. A day for community members to come together and affirm our shared responsibility as individuals, families, and communities to listen to scholars' perspectives on mental health and social-emotional well-being, and to ensure every young person leaves the system prepared to engage meaningfully in civic life and the workforce.
3. A nonpartisan call to action at a critical time in our nation's history.
4. A day to affirm what unites us; a loving desire to hear our children articulate their vision of growing up in joyful, healthy, hopeful environments that support the development of their unique identities.
5. A day to send a message to the small group of people pushing for the reduction in funding supporting mental health and social-emotional wellness, the politicians standing idly by and watching, and the business and cultural leaders that they must support the next generation by providing access to high-quality mental health and social-emotional wellness support.
6. An issue with a clear message: Are the Children Well?

Suggested National Day of Social Action Activities

There are many ways to work towards achieving the goals of both NDSA and your local site. The following ideas we suggest you undertake as a part of the national movement. You can decide to do one, combine multiple, or build upon any of these activities.

If you find you need help getting started once you have decided on your activity, feel free to post your preliminary plan in the Cvent platform for other partners to give suggestions and feedback. Contact Ciara Mackey-Hall from the national office at cmackeyhall@childrensdefense.org for specific questions about any of the actions.

ACTIVITY #1: “Mental Health and Social-Emotional Wellness” March and Rally

Organize an event that gives scholars access to opportunities to engage in public speaking and peaceful demonstrations. During this event, the site should create space for scholars and parents to talk about the importance of centering mental health and social-emotional wellness, and reimagine what it looks like for a system to take proactive approaches to supporting mental and social challenge in an effort to prevent scholars feeling left to navigate these challenges on their own. *See pages 12 for sample topics.*

The site should allow time for scholars and the community to march to and from a predetermined location. Creative work submissions for the rally agenda can include but should not be limited to poetry, raps, or songs that uplift mental health and social-emotional wellness. While time may only allow some scholars to be included in the speaker line-up, allow all scholars to make signs, cheers, or chants to contribute to the march.

Site Staff Steps:

- Decide the scope and scale of the gathering: a children’s parade around the neighborhood, a rally in town square or city hall, a march/rally combo in front of the state capital, etc.
- Ensure your steering committee includes a broad cross-section of the community to help plan the event’s focus, plan and execution of the event, and build turnout.
- Decide on the final message you will share with the press and public. *Consider using language shared in the potential talking points above and facts from the resources provided in the Appendix or by visiting childrensdefense.org/our-work/cdf-freedom-schools/national-day-of-social-action/*
- Determine what literature or digital materials will be distributed to those who attend the event. *Add both your sponsor organization’s logo and the CDF Freedom Schools logo to show you are part of a national movement.*
- Work with scholars to create and practice spoken word, raps, songs, skits, art works, and tributes to be performed or displayed on NDSA.
- Participate in media training to learn one or two talking points in case you are interviewed.

Scholar Steps:

- Create and practice spoken word, raps, songs, skits, art works, and tributes to be performed or displayed on NDSA. Pieces should be practiced at the site in front of a crowd and in front of parents to help develop public speaking skills.

- Design flyers and posters to bring to the rally and march site.
- Participate in media training to learn one or two talking points and practice what a news interview could be like.

ACTIVITY #2: Art As a Form of Protest

Gallery Walk and Talk

Have scholars consider which resources and spaces in their lives currently have a positive impact on their mental health and social-emotional well-being. Encourage them to think about resources and spaces that help them feel seen, safe, and equipped with the tools they need to navigate challenges related to their well-being.

Examples:

- If Ashley struggles with anxiety and her safe space is her school's wellness center, her painting might include her facilitating a healing circle with her peers, showing the importance of having welcoming spaces. Her caption may be "invest in spaces that keep us calm."
- If Marcus is feeling overwhelmed with balancing schoolwork and home responsibilities, but benefits from having a trusted adult he can talk to that helps him find a good balance, his photography can capture moments of trusted counselors and wellness coordinators uplifting him. His caption might be, "Every scholar deserves someone who checks in on them."
- If Amanda has been impacted by bullying but finds resolution in restorative practices, her collage might show restorative justice circles and one-on-ones that promote healing. Her caption may be, "Building community is a form of healing."

Scholars should name their art pieces and include captions that speak to the need for mental health and social-emotional wellness support, and the investments needed to help it be great for all children.

Scholars may choose their art medium, however, suggested options include painting, spray painting, collage, illustrating, sketching, or photography.

Site Staff Steps:

- Consider utilizing the afternoon activity lesson plans to explore the topic of mental health and social-emotional wellness, and the activity about creating photography and collage self-portraits.
- Build time into afternoon activities leading up to NDSA for scholars to create their art pieces.
- Plan events and invite elected officials and families to the gallery walk ahead of time. *Consider hosting gallery walks during the time normally slotted for parent workshops.*
- Support scholars as they curate their galleries and art walks.
- Build out the program schedule. Consider reserving 30 minutes for the walk-through and 30 minutes for invited mental health professionals, wellness practitioners, community-based mental health providers, or school board members to share their reflections and participate in an open forum to hear scholars' positive feedback about their schools and the desired investments called out in their artwork.
- Consider inviting mental health specialists or art therapists to the space to support any need that may arise.

Scholar Steps:

- Create artwork that represents your future self, feeling joy from safe spaces and resources created to support mental health and social-emotional challenges. Think about your favorite counselors, safe spaces, and wellness practices.
- Create art programs to guide guests as they walk through your gallery.
- Stand next to your art and explain its meaning to people who have questions.
- Practice talking about the positive impacts of scholars' mental health being prioritized, supported, and invested in.

ACTIVITY #3: Host a Resource Fair

Resource fairs are a great way to bring awareness of resources that promote mental health and social-emotional wellness. They are an opportunity for you to build connections between providers and provide scholars and families with direct access to providers and resources. Resource fairs can increase visibility of services, reduce stigma, and create space for families to learn how to access the support they need.

Invite scholars and the community at large to learn about mental health and social-emotional wellness resources. Partner with community-based organizations, service providers, school staff, and advocacy groups to table or conduct workshops. Scholars should open and close this event, giving them a chance to speak publicly on the topic. Throughout the event, scholars should be given the opportunity to ask questions, rank resources, and provide feedback to providers.

Your event should include interactive scholar-led wellness activities that keep attendees engaged. Ideas for scholar-led activities may include making your own fidget toy, favorite coloring pages, meditation, yoga, breath work, mindfulness playlist development, etc.

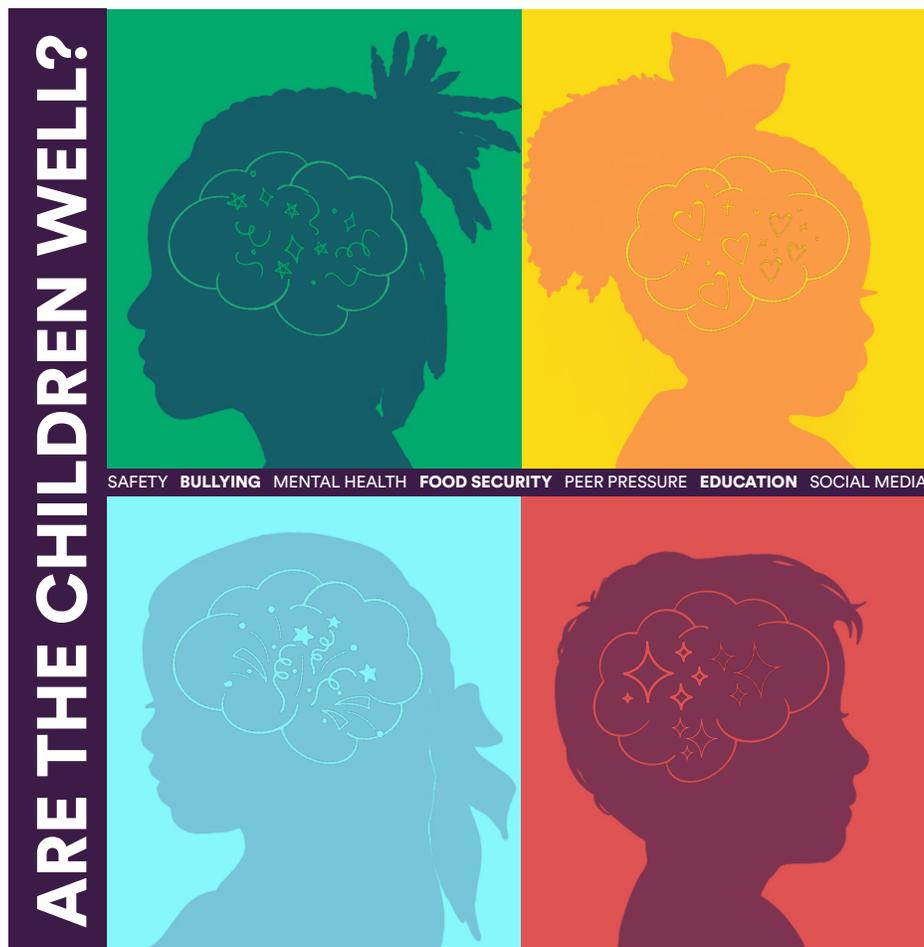
Encourage scholars to take on leadership roles in planning and facilitating the event. Create space for scholars to share their experiences and highlight gaps in current resources available to them.

Site Staff Steps:

- Discuss the topic and potential plan with parents. Invite parents to support with planning and securing permits, vendors, space, etc. Consider using an NDSA lesson plan to help explain the day, the topic, and the actions to parents during a parent workshop.
- Invite parents, volunteers, elected officials, mental health professionals, wellness practitioners, community-based mental health providers, school board members, and other resources and personnel who can support in highlighting the importance of mental health and social-emotional wellness to join your day of action.
- Ensure resources and providers who are invited are aligned with the current needs of scholars and families. Encourage them to build strong relationships with your scholars and families.
- Develop a run-of-show with roles and responsibilities for scholars for program components.
- Support scholars as they identify gaps in available supports for mental health and social-emotional wellness. Prepare your scholars to share their experiences with these gaps in their schools and communities.

Scholar Steps:

- Share public places in the community that make you feel good, happy, safe, etc. Write a letter inviting people from that place to your resource fair.
- As a full group, create a list of things that positively support scholars' mental health and emotional wellness at school. Create a second list of things scholars would like to see reflected in their schools (i.e., counselors, peer-to-peer mentorship, music, arts, culturally responsive curriculum, etc.)
- Assign roles, discuss who will take the lead on facilitating the event, delivering announcements, leading the wellness activities, and delivering testimonials to highlight the need for mental health support and resources.
- For scholars taking lead on the wellness activity, work together to develop a scholar-led wellness activity to engage participants. Make it fun and interactive, and help participants feel comfortable engaging in wellness practices.
- For scholars giving testimonials, develop a 2-minute speech that highlights your experience with gaps in mental health supports in what you would like to see implemented to better support students in your schools and communities.



Potential Local Education Advocacy Topics

For sites that need support in selecting a local education issue that impacts your community, consider the following list.

1. End Food Insecurity for Students

- Ensuring access to nutritious meals and resources for families to reduce depression, behavioral challenges, and emotional distress caused by child hunger.

2. Prevent and Address Bullying in Schools

- Implementing restorative practices and proactive approaches to bullying to protect students' mental health and well-being.

3. Promote Healthy Social Media Practices

- Ensuring students are connected to support systems and are learning healthy habits that reduce harmful mental health impacts of social media.

4. Eliminate Mental Health Stigma

- Normalizing conversations about mental health and increasing awareness of mental health campaigns for students to feel comfortable seeking mental health support.

5. Increase Funding for Health Staff in School

- Investing in counselors, psychiatric social workers, and nurses to ensure students have access to adequate support in school.

6. Reduce Chronic Absenteeism and Protect School Budgets

- Addressing root causes of absenteeism while protecting school budgets that fund essential resources at school sites.

7. Protect and Strengthen the Social Safety Net

- Expand SNAP eligibility and access to health care resources that support families, students, and their well-being.

8. Expand Funding for After-School Programs

- Investing in after-school programs that provide safe spaces, enrichment activities, and social-emotional development for students.

9. Implement Culturally Responsive Curriculum

- Adopting a curriculum that reflects students' identity, culture, and lived experience to foster an environment of belonging, connection and engagement.

10. Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Programs

- Implementing SEL programs in schools to help students build emotional intelligence, resilience, empathy, and effective communication skills, which are key to success in both school and life.

11. Support and Protection for Immigrant and Refugee Students

- Creating programs and policies that ensure immigrant and refugee students have access to the support they need to succeed academically, including language services and cultural integration programs.

12. Support and Protection for Unhoused Students and Students in Foster Care

- Addressing the unique needs of students experiencing homelessness or in foster care, ensuring they have stable access to education, housing support, and additional resources.

Extending the National Day of Social Action Beyond July 15

Consider engaging the community in one or more of the following activities to show that scholar's voices were heard:

It is never too late! Funding can be moved around to meet the needs of your community. If your school has cut mental health services in SY2026-2027, pack the halls and demand the services be reinstated. Advocate for your needs. Call for more counselors, more CDF Freedom Schools programs, more therapists, and more school nurses.

SCHOLARS

- Join or partner with local youth councils, mayor's youth advisory boards, or municipal wellness committees to advocate for stronger youth mental health supports in your city. Encourage local government leaders (school board, city council, health department, etc.) to include youth voices in conversations about community safety, public health, recreation, and education policies that impact social-emotional well-being.
- Partner with local mental health organizations, community health clinics, libraries, and youth-serving nonprofits to host youth-led wellness days. Scholars can share their experiences, advocate for expanded access to wellness supports, engage in decompression activities, and more.
- Create and distribute 6×6 "Mental Health Matters," "Are The Children Well?," or "The Children Are Well" signs or stickers to display in barbershops, salons, community centers, faith institutions, libraries, small businesses, and public spaces.
- Organize youth listening sessions with school and district leaders, school board members, or city officials where scholars share their experiences and propose solutions such as wellness rooms, peer support programs, and increased access to trusted adults and mental health professionals.
- Lead peer-to-peer wellness initiatives in your school such as student affinity groups, wellness clubs, or healing circles where scholars can connect, support one another, and identify shared goals for community wellness.

Extending the National Day of Social Action Beyond July 15

Consider engaging the community in one or more of the following activities to show you listened to scholars and will continue to carry the torch:

PARENTS & SITE STAFF

- Stay connected with Children’s Defense Fund (CDF). Reach out to national staff to be connected with a CDF trained child advocate or faith leader who can support your community in meeting with lawmakers and participating in other follow-up actions during the August recess for policymakers. Similarly, host a [Children’s Sabbaths event](#) in October to keep the issue at the forefront.
- Host community wellness convenings that bring together caregivers, educators, mental health professionals, faith leaders, and youth-serving organizations to discuss youth mental health needs and identify local solutions. Use these gatherings to build partnerships and coordinate ongoing support for scholars and families.
- Advocate at school board meetings, city council meetings, and county commission meetings for increased investment in youth mental health services, including more counselors, social workers, and accessible community-based mental health programs. Share scholar stories and community perspectives to influence local policy and funding decisions.
- Collaborate with faith institutions, barbershops, salons, recreation centers, and community-based organizations to create trusted spaces where families can access mental health information, referrals, and support without stigma.
- Encourage parents, caregivers, and community members to serve on school committees, advisory boards, or local commissions that influence youth services, public health, and education to ensure scholar well-being remains a priority.

Social Media Engagement

No matter which activity you choose, please help make NDSA trend by using the following hashtags:

#AreTheChildrenWell?
#ChildrensHealthandHealing
#nationaldayofsocialaction
#cdfreedomschools

Tag Children’s Defense Fund’s social media accounts for a chance to be reposted.

Instagram-@childdefender1973
TikTok-@childrensdefensefund

Twitter-@ChildDefender
Bluesky-@cdf1973.bsky.social

Other Resources to Support Your Local NDSA Efforts

This year, the *CDF Freedom Schools* national office will be providing the following resources to support your efforts. Before editing any hyperlinks, **download your own copy** to avoid altering the original template.

Resources include:

- **Official [2026 NDSA Folder](#) Including:**
 - **Toolkit:** To be used to help plan your 2026 NDSA actions.
 - **Official 2026 NDSA Graphics:** To be used to help you market the collective nature of the 2025 NDSA actions.
 - **Official 2026 Samplers:** [Templates to be used to invite community leaders](#), [NDSA rally agenda](#), [craft press releases](#), and more.
 - **NDSA Afternoon Activity Lesson Plans:** Meant to help you develop your scholar's understanding of the topic in order to engage more intentionally with the day of action. Available in June at: <https://www.childrensdefense.org/our-work/cdf-freedom-schools/national-day-of-social-action/>
- **[A Word from CDF's President and CEO, Dr. Wilson:](#)** Blog post explaining the ties between mental health and Harambee as a social vaccine. Features plug for research on Harambee as a social vaccine from CDF Board Member Dr. Ramesh Raghavan.
- **[Promoting Mental Health Equality by Investing in Organizations: Lessons from Implementation Science:](#)** Journal article about the impact of BIPOC community-based organizations on mental health, and the lack of societal investment in these interventions.
- **[World Health Organization - Health and Well-Being:](#)** Help scholars build an understanding around mental health, what it is and what it's not. Cultivate appropriate language around mental health.
- **[World Health Organization-Mental Health:](#)** Identify and discuss protective factors that contribute to positive well-being.
- **[Kids Count - Mental Health Indicators for Children and Adolescents:](#)** Reports with child health statistics to be used for context, back up opinions, and for posters.
- **[Children's Defense Fund 2023 State of America's Children Report - Child Health Chapter:](#)** Reports with child health statistics to be used for context, back up opinions, and for posters.
- **[Commons Library: Art, Anxiety and Activism:](#)** Exercises for mindfulness, relaxation and anxiety management for posters and art activism activities. Lesson plan exploring and implementing wellness and restorative practices with scholars.
- **[How Medicaid Cuts Will Harm Schools:](#)** Survey of school district leaders to help quantify how the Big Beautiful Bill will impact mental health services and supports available to schools. Use to help connect problem to policy.
- **[Ways to Mitigate the Impact of Medicaid Cuts of Schools:](#)** Follow-up to "How Medicaid Cuts Will Harm Schools." Articulates ways to get involved to lessen the impact of said cuts.

Get in Touch

For more information on CDF's policy issue areas and how they impact the *CDF Freedom Schools* program, please visit the following websites to learn, support, or get involved:

CDF's National Office: childrensdefense.org

CDF-California: cdfca.org

CDF-Minnesota: cdf-mn.org

CDF-New York: cdfny.org

CDF-Ohio: cdfohio.org

CDF-Southern Regional Office: cdf-sro.org

CDF-Texas: cdftexas.org



Tel: (202) 628-8787

Email: freedomschools@childrensdefense.org

Website: childrensdefense.org

Children's Defense Fund Freedom Schools® 2026 National Day of Social Action

Community Engagement Materials* Writing & Design Team

Amber Dukes, B.S. Elementary Education
Sixth Grade Teacher and Ella Baker Trainer
Lawrence Township Metropolitan School District
Indianapolis, IN

Devyn White, BA
Advocacy Programming Manager and
Ella Baker Trainer
EdAllies
Minneapolis, MN

**Geralyn Love, M.S. Industrial
Organizational Psychology**
Elementary School Lead Student
Support Specialist and Ella Baker Trainer
Communities in Schools of Cape Fear
Wilmington, NC

Heather Cooper, M.Ed.
K-12 Educator and Ella Baker Trainer
Turner County High School and Little
Hands, Big Hearts: Little People's
Service Organization
Tifton, GA

Jalyn Gilbert, M.S.E. Educational Leadership
African-American Studies Teacher,
Varsity Women's Basketball Coach,
and Ella Baker Trainer
DECA Middle School & Trotwood-Madison
High School
Dayton, OH

Janell Massaline, B.S. English
Future Center Coordinator and
Ella Baker Trainer
Florida A&M University
Tallahassee, FL

Jathan Melendez, B.S. Political Science
Youth Organizer and Ella Baker Trainer
Community Coalition
Los Angeles, CA

Kayla Tibbs, B.A.
Ella Baker Trainer
Grand Blanc, MI

Kira Galbraith, B.A.
Court Liaison and Ella Baker Trainer
Exalt
New York City, NY

Morgan Parker, B. Ed.
Professional Services Manager and
Ella Baker Trainer
ReThinkEd
Charlotte, NC

Shannon "Shea" Meminger, M.S.E.d.
Middle School Educator and Ella Baker Trainer
New York City Public Schools
Brooklyn, NY

*Community engagement materials include toolkit, afternoon activities, and parent and family engagement activities.
All Ella Baker Trainers are CDF Freedom Schools staff members.



840 First Street NE, Suite 300

Washington, DC 20002

(202) 628-8787

childrensdefense.org