

Children's Defense Fund Freedom Schools®

Program Description



The *CDF Freedom Schools* program provides summer and after-school enrichment through a model curriculum that supports children and families around five essential components: high quality academic enrichment, parent and family involvement, civic engagement and social action, intergenerational leadership development, and nutrition, health and mental health. In partnership with community based organizations, faith institutions, schools, colleges and universities, the *CDF Freedom Schools* program boosts student motivation to read, generates more positive attitudes toward learning, and connects the needs of children and families to the resources of their communities.

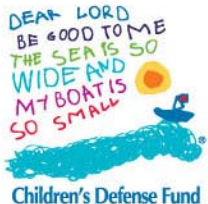
The *CDF Freedom Schools* model incorporates the totality of CDF's mission by fostering environments that support children and young adults to excel and believe in their ability to make a difference in themselves and in their families, schools, communities, country, and world. College students and recent graduates are trained as servant leader interns to deliver the Integrated Reading Curriculum (IRC); young adults are trained as site coordinators and project directors to provide supervision and administrative oversight.

CDF Freedom Schools program sites are safe and restorative learning spaces where:

- children are surrounded by caring adults from their community (at an intern-to-child classroom ratio of 1:10) who share their enthusiasm for learning and reading, and commit to serving them as authentic mentors;
- children read high quality books and are engaged in learning activities that are appropriate to their developmental needs and interests;
- each day in the summer program begins with "Harambee," a 30-minute self-and-group affirming celebration and preparation for the work ahead; the after-school model includes a 15-minute Harambee.
- children receive two nutritious meals and a healthy snack every day in the summer program and nutritious snacks in the after-school program;
- parents are engaged as site volunteers and participate in weekly workshops on children's developmental needs, civic responsibility, and other topics of interest;
- children are supported to dream, set goals for themselves, and cultivate positive attitudes and high expectations;
- young people whose lives have been interrupted and impacted by crises receive consistent, daily service to better understand themselves, their situations, each other, and their potential; and
- families dealing with complex change following crises are afforded quality childcare.

A 3-year study conducted by the Philliber Research Associates of New York for the Kauffman Foundation reported in 2008 that students enrolled in Kansas City's summer Freedom Schools program demonstrated significant improvement in reading. Students in the first through eighth grades increased an average grade equivalent of two months of school over the summer and gained each year they participated in the program. Reading scores for students who participated three summers increased an average of 2.2 grade levels. In December 2010, a two year study of children enrolled in *CDF Freedom Schools* programs in Charlotte, NC and Bennettsville, SC (conducted by the Center of Adolescent Literacies at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte) reported that more than 65% of the children tested improved or showed gains in independent reading by the end of the program, while 25% *did not* suffer summer learning loss.

In summer 2011, *CDF Freedom Schools* partners served over 9,800 children in 87 cities and 27 states (including Washington, D.C.). Since 1995, over 90,000 K-12 children have experienced *CDF Freedom Schools* and over 12,300 college students and young adult staff have been trained to deliver this empowering model.



What Makes CDF Freedom Schools[®] Unique?

The CDF Freedom Schools Approach to Children, Youth and Families

- Focuses on literacy, cultural heritage, parent engagement, intergenerational servant leadership, *and* civic engagement.
- Instills in children, youth and young adults the intrinsic value of reading (helping them build a family library by keeping a book each week), high achievement, community service and social action.
- Promotes a multi-cultural curriculum, books, daily lesson plans and creative activities that are at the core of the Integrated Reading Curriculum and reinforce non-violent conflict resolution and cooperation.
- Expects the Servant Leader Interns to establish consistent relationships with the children.
- Encourages children to believe they can make a difference in themselves, their family, their community, their country and world.
- Begins each morning with “Harambee,” which brings children, staff, parents and community members together to celebrate themselves and each other and prepare for the work ahead.
- Engages parents in the children’s programming and weekly workshops that promote learning about child development, skills needed to succeed and other issues of family concern.
- Connects the complex needs of children and families to the rich resources of the local community.

The CDF Freedom Schools Trained Servant Leader Interns and Staff

- CDF Freedom Schools programs are staffed primarily by college students and recent college graduates who are committed to making life better for children.
- All administrative staff and interns at a program site must be trained by CDF.
- Intensive training teaches interns to be facilitators in the classroom and leaders in the community and promotes team building and community building as avenues to success.
- Servant Leader Interns (and former participants) -- all Black males -- have moved into the teaching profession and are now teachers, assistant principals or principals.

The CDF Freedom Schools Program Model

- Is designed for children in grades kindergarten through 12.
- Is free for children; no child is denied participation due to circumstance of poverty.
- Offers children a 10:1 child/intern ratio.
- Serves nutritious meals and snacks each day.
- Offers three generations – the children and youth, young adult interns, and parents and grandparents – literacy and leadership development.
- Can be implemented successfully by diverse organizations in a variety of settings (e.g., faith based or other community organizations, school districts, higher education institutions, detention centers, etc.).
- Provides local partners a Site Library which remains with the sponsor organization and ongoing technical assistance throughout the year to support program planning and implementation.

