



Evaluation of 2013 Summer Learning Freedom School Program

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Summary

The Saint Paul Area Council of Churches and Saint Paul Promise Neighborhood (SPACC-SPPN) received funding from the Saint Paul Children’s Collaborative to provide summer learning programming, using the Children’s Defense Fund’s Freedom School approach, to students living in the Promise Neighborhood area in Saint Paul.

The goals of Freedom School are to get students to attend the program consistently and to maintain or improve their positive behaviors, self-esteem, and academic performance. Freedom School also aims to provide quality programming and to implement the Freedom School model with fidelity.

In addition to SPACC-SPPN Freedom School, the evaluation includes two Freedom School sites located in Minneapolis, Kwanzaa Community Church and Park Avenue Youth and Family Services.

Key findings

Program quality and fidelity to the Freedom School model

According to Children’s Defense Fund Freedom School, programs using Freedom School model provide components of best practices for summer learning programs, which include: providing high quality academic enrichment; involving parents in children’s learning; having experienced and trained program staff; offering smaller class sizes with 10 students per adult staff; making learning fun, interactive, and hands-on; and maximizing student participation and attendance. To assess whether SPACC-SPPN, Kwanzaa, and Park Avenue offer high quality programming using Freedom School approach with fidelity, the director of Children’s Defense Fund-Minnesota conducted an observation at each Freedom School site. Results in general show that all the Freedom School sites had implemented the Freedom School model with fidelity. The YPQA results also show that the sites are rated highly on providing a supportive environment to youth and on providing opportunities for positive interaction and engagement.

Attendance

Freedom School offers 30 days of programming. The target for the attendance goal is that 80 percent of students will attend consistently, meaning 22 programming days or more. Results show that the target was met at one site and almost met in the other two sites. Eighty percent of SPACC-SPPN students were consistent participants. Almost three

quarters of Kwanzaa and Park Avenue students were consistent participants (72% and 74%, respectively).

Social skills

On social skills, the Freedom School has two target goals:

- 80 percent of consistent participants will improve or maintain **positive self-esteem or self-confidence**.
- 80 percent of consistent participants will improve or maintain **positive behaviors or social skills** within the program.

Results show that almost all of the consistent participants (90% or more for each item) improved or maintained positive self-esteem or self-confidence and positive behaviors or social skills within the program, as measured by parent and staff surveys.

Academic skills

Freedom School works toward preventing summer loss by improving or maintaining student reading skills. To assess changes in student reading skills while in Freedom School, Wilder Research administered the *Basic Reading Inventory* (BRI) at the beginning and end of the program. Results show that most students on each site maintained or improved at least one level on their BRI reading scores.

Other results based on parent, student, and staff surveys

Parents and staff at SPACC-SPPN and Park Avenue viewed the program favorably. Parents commonly felt that Freedom School has helped motivate their child to do well in school, to learn more about African American culture or heritage; and to develop socially. Some parents also mentioned that their child likes the program and that the program provides a positive learning environment. When asked how Freedom School has helped their child be a better student, parents' most common responses included: their child is more motivated and inspired to do well in school and learn, they have seen reading and writing improvements, their child has more pride and self-confidence, and their child is learning new things. Similarly, Servant Leader Interns stated that the program helped motivate the students to read and learn; that the program made a difference in students' lives; and that the staff are motivated and passionate.

Freedom School recruits and trains college students to be Servant Leader Interns who can provide leadership and positive role models to the students. In a survey developed by the national Children's Defense Fund, Servant Leaders Interns were asked about their views and their own experiences in the program. All Servant Leader Interns responding to the survey had a positive outlook, and gave a "positive" to a "very positive" ratings about their lives, future job career, and the future of the children in the program. Interns reported high levels of community engagement and responsibility, believing that they as individuals can make a difference.

Conclusion and issues to consider

Freedom School programs met nearly all of their stated targets. The program improved or maintained student academic (reading) skills, student behavior or social skills, and self-esteem or self-confidence in the majority of participants. They came close to, but did not quite meet, their student attendance target.

Parents, students, and staff described many positive aspects of the program. They also provided some suggestions for program improvement, such as a longer period of time (8-10 weeks) and more communication and parent involvement. Students wanted longer recess/free time; more or different afternoon activities (e.g. games, events, volunteering opportunities); and better food. Servant Leader Interns offered a variety of suggestions, such as adding new curriculum (i.e., art), putting more focus on lessons for level 3 students, and being more prepared or organized by making sure that books are available so that Interns can teach the scheduled lessons.

Overall, Freedom School programs deliver high quality programming and are using the Freedom School model with fidelity. Areas where there could be improvement include making sure that there is a safe outdoor area, having ratio of 1:10 in all classrooms, and having the Classroom Environment features present in all classrooms.

The use of the Basic Reading Inventory for the evaluation should be examined. The BRI presents a challenge for younger participants who cannot read any of the word lists or passages and therefore, do not have an Independent score. Moving forward, we can either find another more appropriate tool for assessing student reading skills or only assess older students.

Finally, we do not have all needed evaluation data from Kwanzaa Community Church. In the future, we may want to have a better process for supporting Freedom School in data collection, such as offering Wilder Research supports to collect the survey data for programs that needed it.

Overview

Research indicates that, on average, students lose skills over the summer. However, not all students experience summer learning losses. Children from higher income families continue to learn during summer while lower income children are more likely to lose ground. Research also indicates that summer learning loss is cumulative; over time, the difference between the summer learning rates of low-income and higher-income students contributes to the achievement gap (McCombs et al., 2011).

To prevent summer learning loss and provide an enriching summer learning opportunity, the Saint Paul Area Council of Churches (SPACC) and the Saint Paul Promise Neighborhood (SPPN) collaborated in 2013 to provide Freedom School summer learning programming to students living in the Promise Neighborhood area in Saint Paul.

The previous summer, SPACC and SPPN each sponsored a summer Freedom School in Saint Paul. As a result of their individual experiences, SPACC and SPPN decided it was timely to join forces and work together. A collaborative Freedom School in 2013 allowed SPACC and SPPN to concentrate on the delivery of an excellent program that maximized available resources, utilized existing networks of community partners, and built on the collective experience and wisdom of staff and leadership from both organizations. The collaborative was supported by the Saint Paul Children's Collaborative, City of Saint Paul, Saint Paul Public Schools, and Children's Defense Fund-Minnesota.

Evaluation for Freedom School also expanded in 2013. In addition to evaluating the SPACC-SPPN Freedom School site in Saint Paul, the evaluation assessed two Freedom School sites in Minneapolis, Kwanzaa Community Church and Park Avenue Youth and Family Services.

This report describes the characteristics of students attending Freedom School during 2013 summer at each of the sites and overall, their attendance in the program, and their social skill and academic outcomes. Additionally, the Children's Defense Fund-Minnesota collected data on program implementation and quality. Parents and students were asked in their survey about their perceptions of the benefits of Freedom School, and staff completed a survey about their experience as Servant Leader Interns.

Description of Freedom School

The Children’s Defense Fund Freedom School model provides specific curriculum with five essential components: high quality academic enrichment; parent and family involvement; social action and civic engagement; intergenerational servant leadership development; and nutrition, health, and mental health. The Freedom School program recruits and trains Servant Leader Interns to implement the Freedom School curriculum. The majority of Interns are college-age students.

The Freedom School program was provided Monday through Friday for five weeks. Kwanzaa and Park Avenue offered programming from June 17 through July 26, 2013 and SPACC-SPPN offered programming from July 15 through August 23, 2013.

The typical daily schedule was:

8:00-8:30	Breakfast
8:30-9:00	Harambee (“pulling together”)
9:00-10:30	Integrated Reading Curriculum, Reading, Conflict Resolution, and Social Action
10:30-10:45	Morning break
10:45-11:45	Integrated Reading Curriculum (part 2)
11:45-12:00	Drop Everything and Read (D.E.A.R)
12:00-1:00	Lunch and recess
1:00-3:00	Afternoon activities

In addition, the Saint Paul’s Parks and Recreation offered an after-care program to SPACC-SPPN Freedom School children who needed it. The after-care was also provided every day for five weeks. Once a week, parents were invited to attend Parent Involvement and Education workshops.

Program logic model

The following is the Freedom School program logic model that was developed by Children’s Defense Fund-Minnesota.

CDF-MN Freedom Schools Logic Model



RESOURCES	ACTIVITIES	OUTCOMES	LONG-TERM IMPACT
Lesson plans, book list, supplies and materials.	Integrated Reading Curriculum (IRC) – The curriculum is meant to be activity-oriented. It is designed to excite, inspire, delight, enchant and rejuvenate.	Improved enjoyment in reading	Scholars will improve their academic achievement, especially in reading
Books purchased, consultants for afternoon activities (optional), supplies purchased and ordered	Book Collection and Afternoon Activities – In the classrooms, scholars read books that celebrate a wide variety of cultures and experiences. Children, parents, and staff are introduced to a superb collection of books that reflect their own images and focus on the theme I Can Make a Difference (“I can make a difference in myself,” “I can make a difference in my family,” “I can make a difference in my community,” “I can make a difference in my country,” “I can make a difference in my world” and “I can make a difference through hope, education, and action”). This collection of books is part of an integrated reading curriculum (IRC) in which books, activities, field trips, and games all relate to and reinforce each other.	Improved positive attitudes towards learning Improved critical thinking Improved problem solving skills Improved self-esteem	
Resources to support annual Social Action Day theme (research about the topic, talking points, media release and lesson plans).	National Day of Social Action – Children learn to apply critical thinking and problem-solving skills as they become more responsible members of their communities. Servant leader interns encourage the children not only to explore the problems facing their communities, but also to become active in working toward solutions.		
Freedom School national training for Servant Leader Interns	Ella Baker Child Policy Training Institute –The CDF Freedom Schools national office prepares young adults to provide an enriching experience for the children they serve, and to be part of a future generation of servant leaders.	Program employs skilled Servant Leader Interns. Servant Leader Interns improved on their own leadership skills.	Servant Leader Interns will be a positive role model for the scholars, and enable them to give back to the community.
Staff to coordinate weekly meetings, food (optional), supplies, develop weekly parent empowerment topic, childcare (optional), facilitator/trainer for the weekly topic	Parent Empowerment – The CDF Freedom Schools program offers parents and family members the support and skills they need to help their children succeed. Parents, or a representative of the household, are required to participate in weekly workshops focused on the educational and social development of children, parenting, CDF initiatives and other activities that build parent empowerment and family success.	Increased parent knowledge about children’s development, in general. Increased parent involvement in children’s learning.	Parents are empowered to help their children succeed in school and life.

Student characteristics

Characteristics of students enrolled in each of the Freedom School sites are presented in Figure 1. Student demographic information were collected and entered into the Sprockets database by each Freedom School site staff. A total of 485 students participated in Freedom School sites: 351 students at SPACC-SPPN, 92 students at Kwanzaa, and 42 students at Park Avenue.

Freedom School grouped the students for instructional purposes by their grade levels: grades K-2 (level 1), grades 3-5 (level 2), and grades 6-8 (level 3). Grade-level data are available for SPACC-SPPN and Park Avenue. In both sites, more students were in levels 1 and 2 than level 3.

There were more girls participating in Freedom School than boys. The largest racial/ethnic group of students was Black/African American (57-99%). Slightly more than one-third of Park Avenue students (36%) were Hispanic. There were very few Multiracial students (1-7% at each site), American Indian, Asian, and White students (1-2% at SPACC-SPPN only).

1. Freedom School student characteristics (N=485)

	SPACC-SPPN	Kwanzaa	Park Avenue
Grade (Level)			
K	15%	-	17%
1	14%	-	17%
2	13%	-	7%
3	15%	-	21 %
4	11%	-	7 %
5	11%	-	17 %
6	9%	-	7 %
7	8%	-	7%
8	3%	-	-
Total number (grade)^a	350	-	42

1. Freedom School student characteristics (N=485) continued

	SPACC-SPPN	Kwanzaa	Park Avenue
Race/ethnicity			
American Indian	1%	0%	0%
Asian	2%	0%	0%
Hispanic	0%	0%	36%
Black	89%	99%	57%
White	2%	0%	0%
Biracial/Multiracial	6%	1%	7%
Total number (race)^a	316	92	42
Gender			
Female	53%	52%	67%
Male	47%	48%	33%
Total number (gender)	350	92	42

^aData are not available for some students. Kwanzaa did not enter the student grade-level data into the Sprockets database.

Program attendance

Freedom School sets a participation target:

- 80 percent of students will **participate on a consistent, ongoing basis** (defined as 22 of 30 programming days)

Results show that at SPACC-SPPN, 80 percent (282 out of 351) of students were consistent participants, meeting the target. The target of 80 percent of consistent participation was almost met at Kwanzaa and Park Avenue. Almost three-fourths (72%) of students at Kwanzaa (66 out of 92 students) and Park Avenue (74% or 31 out of 42 students) were consistent participants. Across the three sites combined, 78 percent (379 out of 485 students) were considered to be consistent participants. Participants who attended the Freedom School programs consistently are similar to the participants who attended the programs inconsistently in the proportions of students who are Black and Hispanic, female and male, and in each Freedom School instructional level. Although Freedom School model offers 30 programming days, Kwanzaa and Park Avenue did not offer the 30 programming days during summer 2013 due to the Fourth of July holiday.

Program implementation

To assess the extent to which Freedom School sites implement high quality programming following the Freedom School model, the youth development director of Children’s Defense Fund-Minnesota conducted an observation at each site. The director (observer) used the national Children’s Defense Fund Freedom School[®] Site Visit Form 2013 and the Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPQA). The observation was conducted once at each Freedom School site during the mid-program period.

The Site Visit Form has four sections: 1) Classroom Environment, 2) Site Management, 3) Overall Site Environment, and 4) Program Elements. In the Classroom Environment section, the observer rates whether specific classroom features and relationships with Servant Leader Interns are “present for all classes,” “present for some classes,” or “not present at all.” Examples of Classroom Environment items include: daily schedule [is] posted, cooperation contract [is] posted, Servant Leader Interns demonstrate strong mentor relationships with scholars, and scholars are engaged in classroom activities. The Site Management items are rated by observer on a scale of 1 (the lowest) to 4 (the highest or best). Examples of Site Management items include: communication among staff is positive and respectful and the site is well organized. The observer rates Overall Site Environment as “present” or “not present” on items such as: daily attendance forms and other paperwork (licenses, permission slips, and media release forms) are current; scholar enrollment forms and medical information is accessible and in a lockable desk or file cabinet; and[there is] safe outdoor space for outdoor activities. Similar to the Site Management items, the Program Element items are rated from 1 (the lowest) to 4 (the highest or best). Program Elements include: providing two nutritious meals and snacks; planning and carrying out social action projects and finale; providing afternoon activities; having 10:1 staff ratio; following the IRC curriculum; staff having a daily debrief; and organizing parent workshops. Within these elements, observer assesses whether specific practices occurred. For example, the observer notes whether the theme relates to curriculum and all of the scholars are included (for finale plans element), and whether the site hosts weekly meetings, the topics are relevant to community needs, and parent attendance records are maintained (for parent workshop element).

The observer also used selected YPQA scales to assess program quality. These scales are: staff provides a welcoming atmosphere and staff supports youth with encouragement (Supportive Environment); youth have the opportunities to practice in small groups (Interaction); and youth have opportunities to reflect (Engagement). All items in the scales are rated on a 1 (the lowest) to 5 (the highest) scale.

Results in general show that all the sites had implemented the Freedom School model with fidelity. One site received the highest scores on all the Site Visit Form items, meaning all Classroom Environment features were rated “present for all classes,” all Overall Site Environment items were rated “present,” and all Site Management and Program Element items received a rating of 4 (the highest or best). The other two sites also scored very high. One site had 15 of the 18 Classroom Environment features “present for all classes” and three features “present for some classes.” These three features included posting a welcome sign, weekly theme, and daily lesson agenda. Items about the positive relationships between Servant Leader Interns and scholars were “present for all classes.” Similarly, all Overall Site Environment items were rated “present” and all Site Management and Program Element items received the highest ratings, except on the social action item that received a 3 on a rating scale of 1 to 4. The other site had 14 of the 18 Classroom Environment features “present for all classes.” On the other four items, the site received a rating of “present for some classes.” These items included: Daily schedule [is] posted, weekly theme [is posted], CDF Freedom School books [are] on display, and scholars are engaged in classroom activities. All Overall Site Environment features were also rated as “present,” except for “safe outdoor space for outdoor activities,” which was rated “not present.” The site was managed well, with all Site Management items receiving a 3 or 4 rating. Similarly, all the Program Element items were rated highly (a rating of 3 or 4), except on one item where not all classrooms maintained a 1:10 ratio and received a rating of 2.

Results based on the four YPQA scales show that all the sites were rated highly on providing a supportive environment to youth (Figure 2). The average ratings ranged from 4.3 to 5.0 (on a 1 to 5 scale) on “staff provides a welcoming atmosphere” and “staff supports youth with encouragement” scales. Lower average ratings, but still quite high, were given to “youth have opportunities to practice in small group” scale, with all sites receiving an average rating of 3.6, and “youth have opportunities to reflect” scale, an average rating ranging from 3.5 to 4.0.

2. Program quality

YPQA scales	Mean ratings		
	SPACC-SPPN	Kwanzaa	Park Avenue
Staff provides a welcoming atmosphere	4.3	5.0	5.0
Staff supports youth with encouragement	5.0	4.3	4.3
Youth have the opportunities to practice in small groups	3.6	3.6	3.6
Youth have opportunities to reflect	4.0	3.5	4.0

Social skill outcomes

Freedom School sets two target outcomes on student social skills:

- 80 percent of consistent participants will improve or maintain **positive self-esteem or self-confidence**.
- 80 percent of consistent participants will improve or maintain **positive behaviors or social skills** within the program.

To assess student social skills and self-esteem, Freedom School staff collected parent, student, and staff surveys. The parent survey asked parents about their perspectives on changes in students' social skills and self-esteem (i.e., whether students improved, stayed the same, became worse), as a result of students' participation in the program. The student survey asked students about their perspectives on their own behaviors, such as whether they make unique and positive contributions to their group, whether they cooperate well with other people, or act responsibly. Similar to the parent survey, staff were asked about their perspectives on changes in students' social skills and self-esteem as a result of students' participation in the program. Surveys were administered once at the end of the program. Parent surveys were collected primarily during a parent night. Students completed their surveys in one of their sessions, and staff completed their surveys during one of their class preparation times. Of note, surveys were completed at the SPACC and Park Avenue. Kwanzaa staff, parents, and students did not complete the surveys.

Parent and staff perceptions

Parents of 126 students who participated for 22 days or more completed the parent survey, including parents of 118 SPACC-SPPN and eight Park Avenue students, representing 42 percent and 26 percent of consistent participating students, respectively. Results of the parent survey show that almost all parents rated their child as having improved or maintained positive self-esteem or self-confidence (96-99%) and positive behavioral or social skills (90-98%) since participating in Freedom School (Figure 3).

The staff survey was completed for 187 consistent participants at SPACC-SPPN and 31 consistent participants at Park Avenue, for a total of 218 completed surveys. The survey response rates are 66 percent for SPACC-SPPN and 100 percent for Park Avenue. Similar to parents, staff rated almost all students who consistently participated in the program as having improved or maintained a positive self-esteem or self-confidence (96-97%) and positive behavior or social skills within the program (95-99%) (Figure 3). It should be

noted that there is a small number of parents who completed the parent survey at Park Avenue and the results should be taken into consideration when interpreting the results.

3. Positive behaviors/social skills and self-esteem/self-confidence: parent and staff views ^a

	Parents ^b			Staff ^b		
	SPACC-SPPN N=116-118	Park Avenue N=8	Total N=124-126	SPACC-SPPN N=183-187	Park Avenue N=29-31	Total N=214-218
<i>Self-esteem/self-confidence</i>						
Having decision making skills.	97%	100%	97%	95%	100%	96%
Having the ability to express his/her feelings.	96%	100%	96%	98%	94%	97%
Having self-esteem and pride in his/her heritage.	99%	100%	99%	97%	86%	96%
<i>Behaviors/social skills</i>						
Behaving well	91%	87%	90%	96%	97%	95%
Getting along well with other children.	97%	100%	97%	97%	97%	97%
Using non-violent problem solving skills.	94%	87%	94%	95%	96%	95%
Showing positive interactions with me.	97%	100%	98%	98%	100%	99%

^a Consistent participant only.

^b Parent and staff select the response options: "Did not need to improve," "significant improvement," "moderate improvement," "slight improvement," "no change (maintain low level)," "slight decline," "moderate decline," or "significant decline." Percent "Did not need to improve," "significant improvement," "moderate improvement," "slight improvement" make up the percentages above.

Staff members were also asked to name students' strengths and challenges in an open-ended format. In terms of students' strengths, staff most often reported that the students participate in class discussions (16%), enjoy reading (16%), have leadership skills (14%), get along well with classmates (10%), and have positive attitudes (10%). In terms of challenges, staff most often reported students' lack of focus or being inattentive (29%). Other common student challenges included shyness or lack of confidence (10%), does not listen or follow directions (8%), and has poor attitudes (7%).

Student perceptions

Surveys were administered to third grade students and older. Students were asked to rate their own behaviors. A total of 119 students who consistently participated in the program completed the survey, including 103 SPACC-SPPN students and 16 Park Avenue students, representing 67 percent and 100 percent of third grade and higher, consistent participants, respectively. Most students in both SPACC-SPPN (87%) and Park Avenue (94%) reported that they can do most things if they try, indicating “I do this often and well.” Almost 90 percent of Park Avenue students (88%) also rated “I do this often and well” on the “I can work out my problems” item. Three-quarter of SPACC-SPPN (74%) and Park Avenue (75%) also did well on “I can do many things well” and “I help other people” items, respectively (Figure 4).

An item rated low by both SPACC-SPPN and Park Avenue students was “I am a peacemaker,” with 44 percent of SPACC-SPPN and 31 percent of Park Avenue students indicating they did this often and well. Other items that were rated low by Park Avenue students included “I act responsibly” (25% indicating “I did this often and well”) and “I respect other people” (31% indicating “I did this often and well”) (Figure 4).

4. Positive behaviors/social skills and self-esteem/self-confidence: student views ^{ab}

	SPACC-SPPN N=101-103	Park Avenue N=16	Total N=117-119
I am a good listener	55%	38%	54%
I help other people	55%	75%	59%
I am a peacemaker	44%	31%	43%
I cooperate well with other people	58%	56%	58%
I act responsibly	60%	25%	55%
I respect other people	69%	31%	64%
I can work out my problems	62%	88%	66%
I can do most things if I try	87%	94%	88%
I can do many things well	74%	60%	73%
I make unique and positive contributions to my group	57%	60%	57%

^a Consistent participant only.

^b Youth select the response options: “I do this often and well,” “I can do better and I will improve,” or “I need a lot of improvement.” Percent “I do this often and well” is reported.

Academic outcomes

The target for the academic outcome of Freedom School is:

- 70 percent of participants will improve or maintain **reading skills**.

Student reading skills were assessed using the *Basic Reading Inventory Eleventh Edition* (BRI) (Johns, 2012). The BRI has been used by The Center for Adolescent Literacies at University of Carolina Charlotte for several years to study the reading skills of Freedom School participants there (Taylor and Lara-Cinisomo, 2012) and has recently been adopted as a reading measure by the national Children’s Defense Fund Freedom School.

The BRI has a word recognition section consisted of graded word lists and reading passages, and a comprehension section. On both graded word lists and reading passages, a student is asked to read aloud lists of words and passages, respectively, while the assessor documents the student’s reading accuracy. Then the student is asked a series of questions about the reading passages to determine his or her comprehension levels. In each section, scores are reported at Independent, Instructional, and Frustration levels. At Independent level, a student has excellent word recognition and comprehension and makes no or a few repetitions. On the other hand, at Frustration level, a student is unable to recognize or read many words, lacks reading fluency and expression, and therefore, cannot answer many of the comprehension questions correctly. Each child received an Independent score and a Frustration score. These scores are a composite of the graded word lists, reading passages, and comprehension. For this evaluation, we examined the changes from students’ BRI Independent and Frustration levels (scores) at pretest to their Independent and Frustration scores at posttest. The Independent and Frustration levels range from preschool- to eighth-grade level.

The following are a more detailed explanation for BRI taken from the by The Center for Adolescent Literacies at University of Carolina Charlotte (Taylor, Medina, and Lara-Cinisomo, 2010).

“The BRI yields information regarding reading proficiency and estimates an individual’s Instructional, Independent, and Frustration reading levels for different passages. We are reporting information on Scholar’s Independent and Frustration levels to capture the range of their reading abilities. For purpose of analyses, we do not include the Instructional levels because students’ Instructional levels often fall across a range of grade levels, which make analysis difficult. For example, a student (Scholar) might have an Independent of grade 3, an Instructional level of grade 4 through grade 5, and a Frustration level of grade 6. We feel that the Independent and Frustration levels capture the “floor” and “ceiling” reading levels for Scholars.”

The following Figure shows the characteristics of the Independent and Frustration levels (Taylor, Medina, Lara-Cinisomo, 2010).

5. Levels of reading assessed with the Basic Reading Inventory

Level	Characteristics
Independent (easy)	Comprehension (90%) Word Recognition (99%+) Few or no repetitions Very fluent
Frustration (too hard)	Comprehension (50%+) Word Recognition (90%+) Word by word reading; Rate is slow Many repetitions; Lack of expression

Wilder Research administered the BRI assessments one-on-one with students. We planned to have 120 students included in the assessments: 20 students from each Kwanzaa and Park Avenue and 80 students from SPACC-SPPN. Pretests and posttests were conducted during the first and the last two weeks of the program, respectively.

Prior to the pretest, Wilder received student names and some demographic information (gender, race, and instructional level) on potential participants from each Freedom School site. This information was gathered from the program application with parental permission. Wilder aimed to assess more than 120 students at pretest, expecting some attrition from pretest to posttest. Based on the available student information, we randomly selected a proportionate number of students based on the total number of students in gender and level groups (level 1: grades K-2, level 2: grades 3-5, and level 3: grades 6-8). As mentioned earlier, most students were African American or Black.

Data are available for 94 students who had pre- and post-BRI scores. We assessed a total of 128 students at pretest. Some students who were assessed at pretest left the program before posttest (12 students) or were absent during the posttest period (4 students). We then excluded 18 students who did not have Independent score at pretest and posttest due to their inability to read the word lists or passages.

Of the 94 students with pretest and posttest scores, 66 students participated at SPACC-SPPN, 17 students at Kwanzaa, and 11 students at Park Avenue. Characteristics of students with pre- and post-BRI scores are presented in Figure 6. Compared to the overall participating student characteristics shown in Figure 1, higher percentages of students assessed are in level 3 and lower percentages of students are in level 1. As mentioned

earlier, there were younger participants who could not read and therefore did not receive any scores. There were also slightly more girls than boys.

6. Characteristics of students assessed in reading at pretest and posttest

	SPACC-SPPN N=66	Kwanzaa N=17	Park Avenue N=11
Grade (instructional level)			
Level 1 (K-2)	21%	18%	27%
Level 2 (3-5)	41%	47%	55%
Level 3 (6-8)	38%	35%	18%
Student race/ethnicity			
Black	89%	100%	82%
Gender			
Female	55%	71%	75%
Male	45%	29%	25%

Reading results in Figure 7 are shown for overall Freedom School sites by levels. Results are reported for all students regardless of their participation level (i.e., consistent and inconsistent). Almost all students (97%) participated consistently. Results show that, on average, students in each level improved from pretest to posttest on their Independent and Frustration scores. Overall results also show that most students maintained or improved at least one level on their Independent score (79%) and Frustration score (90%).

7. Overall Freedom School reading results

Level	N	Mean Scores			Percent improved or maintained
		Pretest	Posttest	Change	
Independent level (score)					
Level 1	20	1.20	1.75	+0.55	75%
Level 2	41	3.76	4.44	+0.68 ^a	88%
Level 3	33	6.03	6.33	+0.30	70%
Overall	94	4.01	4.53	+0.52 ^a	79%
Frustration level (score)					
Level 1	19	3.95	4.58	+0.63 ^a	89%
Level 2	39	6.82	7.00	+0.18	82%
Level 3	33	8.33	8.67	+0.34 ^a	100%
Overall	91	6.77	7.10	+0.33 ^a	90%

^a Significant results.

Looking at individual Freedom school sites, results show that students in each site improved from pretest to posttest, on average. Most students on each site also maintained or improved at least one level on their Independent (64-88%) and Frustration (81-100%) scores. Note that the number of assessed students in Kwanzaa and Park Avenue are small (Figure 8).

8. Freedom School site reading results

Site	N	Mean Scores			Percent improved or maintained
		Pretest	Posttest	Change	
Independent score					
SPACC-SPPN	66	4.12	4.71	+0.59 ^a	79%
Kwanzaa	17	3.71	4.24	+0.52 ^a	88%
Park Avenue	11	3.82	3.91	+0.09	64%
Frustration score					
SPACC-SPPN	64	6.91	7.13	+0.22 ^a	91%
Kwanzaa	16	6.44	6.81	+0.37	81%
Park Avenue	11	6.45	7.36	+0.91 ^a	100%

^a Significant results.

Attitudes toward learning

Nearly all parents and staff in the survey reported that the students have improved or maintained positive attitude toward learning. Staff also reported that nearly all students improved or maintained their attentiveness in their class. Sixty-one percent of students at SPACC-SPPN and Park Avenue combined reported that they did well on reading at least one new book each week (Figure 9).

9. Positive behaviors/social skills and self-esteem/self-confidence

	SPACC-SPPN	Park Avenue	Total
Student	N=103	N=16	N=119
I read at least one new book each week	63%	56%	61%
Parent	N=116	N=8	N=124
Having positive attitude toward learning	97%	100%	97%
Staff	N=185-186	N=30-31	N=216
Having positive attitude toward learning	96%	100%	97%
Being attentive in your class/program	96%	93%	96%

Other findings

This section summarizes the survey results on student and parent satisfaction with the Freedom School program at SPACC-SPPN and Park Avenue. Results are reported for the Freedom School students who attended the program consistently. Additionally, this section discusses the results of the Servant Leader Interns (SLI) survey, which asks staff about their experiences in this position.

Parent and student satisfaction with the program

Parents in the survey were asked in open-ended format how Freedom School has benefited their children in general and how Freedom School has helped their child be a better student. A total of 116 parents (92%) answered the questions, including 109 SPACC-SPPN parents and seven Park Avenue parents. Parent answers were coded into themes, and each answer could have multiple themes. Results are reported for both sites combined.

Parents most commonly felt that the program benefitted their child by: helping their child to be motivated to do well in school; learning more about African American culture or heritage; and developing socially. Some parents also mentioned that their child liked the program and that the program provided a positive learning environment. Each of these themes is present in the responses of 12 to 20 percent of the parents.

When asked how Freedom School has helped their child be a better student, parents' most common responses (each reflecting 12 to 16 percent of the parents) included: their child is more motivated and inspired to do well in school and learn; they have seen reading and writing improvements; their child has more pride and self-confidence; and their child is learning new things.

Parents were also asked how Freedom School can better serve their families in the future. Most parents (90%) answered this question. Almost half (46%) of the responding parents said that Freedom School is good as it is. One in ten parents wished to have a longer period of time (8-10 weeks) (13%) and more communication and parent involvement (12%). Also, a few others suggested increased reading, math and science instruction, healthier snacks and meals for their children.

Similarly, students were asked in an open-ended format to name one thing that they liked about Freedom School. One-third of the 118 responding students said they liked Harambee ("pulling together"), the cheers, and chants the best. The other top categories, representing the responses of 12 to 13 percent of students, included liking the recess or free time;

reading time and the books, including Drop Everything and Read and Integrated Reading Curriculum; and field trips.

Students indicated that they are satisfied with Freedom School, with 36 of 116 students (31%) reporting that they would not change anything about the program. A few children (9 to 10 students) wanted longer recess/free time; more or different afternoon activities (e.g. games, events, volunteering opportunities); and better food.

Staff experience

To assess staff views and experiences in the program, the staff were asked to complete a Servant Leader Interns (SLI) survey. A total of nine Servant Leader Interns completed the survey, six were from the SPACC-SPPN site and three were from the Park Avenue site. Most Interns completing the survey are female. Four Servant Leader Interns had been working for more than one year at Freedom School and the remaining four reported that this was their first year. One person did not answer the question. Three Interns reported that they are in a teacher education program.

The Interns were asked to rate their perspectives on a six-point scale (1=very negative to 6=very positive) on their lives, their future job or career, and the future of the children. Nearly all Interns gave a 5 or 6 rating on each item. Only two Interns each gave a 4 rating on one of the items.

Servant Leader Interns were also asked how much they agreed or disagreed on a six-point scale (1=extremely disagree to 6=extremely agree) regarding their desire to become a teacher, civic responsibilities and duties, and whether or not they think they can make a difference. When asked whether or not they would like to be a teacher, six out of nine Interns answered with a 4 or higher (“agree,” “very agree,” or “extremely agree”). The remaining three did not agree with the statement (“disagree,” “very disagree,” or “extremely disagree”). All of the respondents agreed with the statement “I am interested in a career in politics and government,” giving a rating of 4 or higher.

Nearly all (seven to eight) of the Interns “extremely agreed” that being active in their community is their responsibility, that they vote on a regular basis, and believe they have the tools for leadership. Additionally, eight out of nine Interns “extremely agreed” that they can make a difference for themselves, their family, and their community. Seven out of nine Interns “extremely agreed” that they can make a difference in their country and their world. The other two Servant Leader Interns agreed, but to a slightly lesser degree, that they could help make a difference in their country and their world.

Interns were asked what one thing they liked most about Freedom School. Their answers included that the program helped motivate the students to read and learn, that it made a difference in their students' lives, and that the staff are motivated and passionate. Below are some of their verbatim responses, with some modifications for clarity:

I loved that Freedom School has the ability to take education and make it fun, relevant and challenging for scholars. ...[it] has given me a new insight on the world of education and the disadvantages students of color (like me) have in the world.

I admire and appreciate the empowerment-based education Freedom School offers to our scholars. I believe that it not only increases scholars motivation to read and learn, but it also attempts to awaken and develop their political consciousness.

"I can make a difference" motto. The songs are positive and truly empowering. I believe those words carry a lot of weight and I know they made a difference in those who spoke them and I hope they will continue to do so.

The staff are motivated and passionate.

Servant Leader Interns were also asked in the open-ended format if there was anything they would want to add or change about Freedom Schools. Respondents offered a variety of suggestions, such as adding new curriculum (i.e., art), putting more focus on lessons for level 3 students, having more discussions during parent nights, making sure that the books are available to teach the lessons, giving the trained Interns the authority to teach, and keeping the program multicultural. Below are their responses, edited for clarity.

The level two scholars in my classroom wanted to do art as a rotation in the afternoon. If the schedule permits, I think art would be a great addition for next year.

We can continue to work on the representation of level three scholars [through] the program materials and conversations. It is very easy to focus attention on level one and two because of their love for life is so intense and beautiful.

Reinforce CDF's belief that scholars do not belong to one SLI or another. All scholars are the program's scholars; therefore we all have a collective responsibility for every scholar in our program. It is not acceptable for SLIs to claim some scholars and not others.

Parent night can be improved. Lecturing parents is unnecessary and can be condescending. I believe parent night will be most successful when it is in the format of a group discussion. One of the most successful parent nights this summer was Ms. Michelle's talk on advocating for scholars. This particular parent night had great success because parents were given an ample opportunity to share their experiences. Parents left the meeting feeling empowered and included.

Making sure that the books that we order are [available]. There have been a couple of times that books at [the] program were not delivered to us and other lessons were made up to accommodate the week or couple of days the book was meant for.

Only individuals who have received the intense intentional training at the Ella Child Policy Training Institute should be leading all aspects of the program. This includes the Integrated Reading curriculum, the relationship building with families, disciplining of scholars, the parent engagement nights, and promotion of the program. Some of the parent engagement and a video promoting the program did not entirely reflect the intentionality or mission of the Freedom School program. Both of these aspects at times were not representatives of the students of color in our program or their families.

The entire [Freedom] school could do a single social activity that would exemplify the power of so many people and the difference they all could make.

Keep the program multicultural. Bring Freedom School to after school during the school year.

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