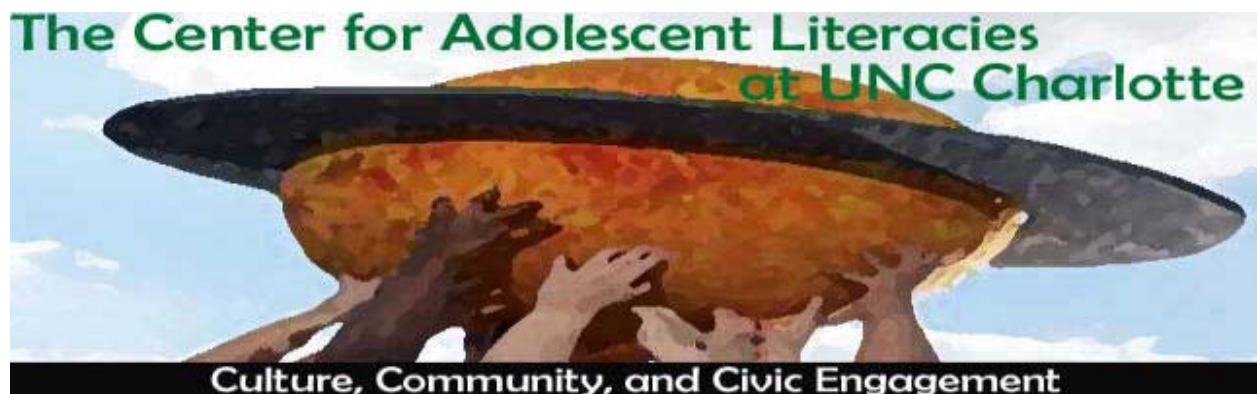


**Freedom School Partners
Children's Defense Fund Freedom Schools® Program
Evaluation Report**

Submitted
by



Written by

D. Bruce Taylor, Ph.D.

Sandraluz Lara-Cinisomo, Ph.D.

Adriana L. Medina, Ph.D.

October, 2011

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Freedom School Partners Children's Defense Fund Freedom Schools® Program Summer 2011 Evaluation Report

Overview

This report, submitted by the Center for Adolescent Literacies at UNC Charlotte, is a program evaluation of Freedom School Partners' Children's Defense Fund Freedom Schools® programs in Charlotte, N.C. The work builds on a 2009 two-site pilot study followed by a 10-site study in 2010. This evaluation examines the program's effect on the reading performance of students served by Freedom School Partners in Charlotte, North Carolina, in the summer of 2011.

Freedom School Partners' CDF Freedom Schools Program and Evaluation History

The Children's Defense Fund (CDF) is a private, nonprofit child advocacy organization that was founded in 1973 to champion the rights of all children, especially those living in poverty. Based in Washington, DC, CDF grew out of the Civil Rights Movement under the leadership of Marian Wright Edelman, who is president of CDF. The Children's Defense Fund Leave No Child Behind® mission states that it seeks "to ensure every child a Healthy Start, a Head Start, a Fair Start, a Safe Start and a Moral Start in life and successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities."¹

Created by the Children's Defense Fund, the *Freedom Schools* program engages children in grades K-12² in a six or seven-week summer program designed to prevent the "learning loss" that students (known as Scholars in the program) typically experience over the months when school is not in session, as well as to have a positive impact on children's character development, leadership, and community involvement. The *CDF Freedom Schools* program provides enrichment with the stated goals of "helping children fall in love with reading, increase[ing] their self-esteem, and generate[ing] more positive attitudes toward learning." CDF reports that more than 80,000 children have participated in Freedom School programs since its inception in 1995. In 2010, there were approximately 142 Freedom School summer programs nationally. Recently, CDF has piloted after-school Freedom School programs in some of its partner communities. In 2011, over 151 Freedom School summer programs were offered throughout the nation.

The *Freedom Schools* programs provide a literature based reading program, the Integrated Reading Curriculum or IRC. About 80 books are on the IRC's booklist and these books feature

¹ Information about the Children's Defense Fund and its programs is available at the CDF website: <http://www.childrensdefense.org/>.

² Nationally, some CDF Freedom Schools serve children in grades K-12; however, in Charlotte, N.C., Freedom School Partners, Inc., like many Freedom School providers, serves children in grades K-8.

the work of many well-known authors. CDF has developed six weeks of lesson plans for approximately half of the books to help staff and Scholars reflect on the themes *I Can Make a Difference in: My Self, My Family, My Community, My Country, and My World with Hope, Education and Action*. The remaining titles are used to create on-site libraries of books for use during silent sustained reading and read-alouds as well as for research on history and community service projects. Servant Leader Interns are recruited and provided with training that includes how to implement the Integrated Reading Curriculum. The majority of Interns are college-age students.

In Charlotte, *CDF Freedom Schools* are hosted by Freedom School Partners, a 501(c)(3) organization founded in 1999 that is dedicated to serving at-risk students and families living in poverty. FSP's mission is to "engage, educate and empower children to succeed in school and in life through quality, year-round educational enrichment programs." Freedom School Partners began hosting *CDF Freedom Schools* in 2004. FSP held Freedom School programs at 10 sites during the summer of 2010 and at 15 sites during the summer of 2011. FSP has set a goal to serve 5,000 students in Charlotte Mecklenburg by 2016. FSP partners with faith-based organizations, colleges and universities, and corporations to host each Freedom School site, with site partners providing volunteer and financial support. Locally, the average Freedom School site costs \$60,000 for a five week, 50-scholar site (or \$200 per child per week).

Freedom School sites in Charlotte range in size from 50 to 100 scholars. Freedom School operates five days a week, from 8:00 – 3:00pm, and transportation is provided for children. Children are served breakfast, lunch and a healthy snack. Freedom School programs are offered at no charge to participating families, and families are asked to attend parent meetings and volunteer in the program during the summer.

This research builds on a pilot evaluation study conducted during the summer 2009 and 2010. The 2009 study showed that approximately 57% of Scholars grew in their ability to read as measured by the Frustration level of the Basic Reading Inventory (BRI; Johns, 2008), while 29% maintained their reading proficiency and just under 14% declined in reading proficiency. The summer 2010 findings extended that research and the findings were similar in nature. Nearly 90% of Freedom School Scholars grew or maintained in their ability to read as measured by the BRI. Furthermore, important data was gathered regarding students' attitudes towards the reading component of Freedom School with the overwhelming majority demonstrating positive attitudes towards the program (as determined in an analysis of the Scholar interviews).

Related Research

Freedom Schools programs are six-week, literacy-based summer learning programs designed for impoverished children at risk for school failure. The risk factors that children in poverty face

include lower academic achievement as measured by grades and on standardized tests, lower graduation rates, and difficulties with reading and literacy. Recent research on the CDF *Freedom Schools* programs has focused on leadership aspects of the Freedom School program and the impact on college-age Servant Leader Interns (Jackson, 2009a) and implications for teacher education (Coffey, 2009; Jackson, 2009b). Few studies have documented the impact on Scholars' reading. The following is a brief review of the relevant research.

Summer Learning Loss

The 9-month school schedule currently in widespread use has its roots in 19th and 20th Century society in which 85% of Americans were involved in agriculture. It made sense at the time to standardize school schedules and to have children at home during the summer months to help with farming. Today fewer than 3% of Americans are involved in agriculture and research shows that students' learning is impacted negatively by this block of time away from school.

A meta-analysis conducted by Cooper et al. (1996) integrating 13 studies examining the effects of summer vacation on standardized achievement test scores showed that summer learning loss equaled at least one month of instruction as measured by grade level equivalents on standardized test scores, on average. An analysis of the research of Hayes and Grether (1983) with high- and low-poverty students in 600 New York City schools showed that rich and poor students had seven-months difference in scores at the beginning of second grade but this widened to a difference of two years and seven months by the end of grade six. What made this particularly striking was the research showing little or no difference in these students' achievement when school was in session: They learned at the same pace. As Hayes and Grether noted: "The differential progress made during the four summers between 2nd and 6th grade accounts for upwards of 80 percent of the achievement difference between economically advantaged ... and ... ghetto schools."

More recent research shows that the impact of summer learning loss may be greater than found in earlier studies (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2003). This deficit is so pronounced that Allington and McGill-Franzen dub summer reading loss as the "smoking gun." Their research has reported that the cumulative effects of summer reading loss can mean that struggling readers entering middle school may lag two years behind peers in their ability to read. Additional research (Alexander, Entwisle, & Olson, 2007) traces the achievement gap between high-socioeconomic and low-socioeconomic 9th grade students to the loss in reading proficiency that occurs over the summer months throughout the elementary grades. Summer learning loss across the elementary school years accounted for more than half the difference in the achievement gap between students from high-socioeconomic and low-socioeconomic families. A study by Kim (2004) published by The Center for Evaluation of the American

Academy of Arts and Sciences highlights that low-income and minority students experience greater summer reading loss but suggests that summer reading mitigates this negative impact.

The issue of summer learning loss is not only debated in scholarly journals. Recently, *Time Magazine* published a cover story entitled “The Case against Summer” (Von Drehle, 2010) in which it reported:

The problem of summer vacation, first documented in 1906, compounds year after year. What starts as a hiccup in a 6-year-old's education can be a crisis by the time that child reaches high school. After collecting a century's worth of academic studies, summer-learning expert Harris Cooper, ... concluded that, on average, all students lose about a month of progress in math skills each summer, while low-income students slip as many as three months in reading comprehension, compared with middle-income students.

Calls to reorganize school calendars and extend the school year have been suggested as a way to deal with the issue of summer learning loss (Aronson, Zimmerman & Carols, 1998; Jimerson, Woehr, Kaufman & Anderson, 2003; Silva, 2007; WestEd, 2001; Woelfel, 2005).

Urban Youth

At-risk youth tend to have lower reading achievement scores than children from middle- and high-income households. Each school year, the reading achievement gap grows and much of the distance accrues during the summer when children are not as inclined to read. A recent study by Hughes-Hassell & Rodge (2007) examined the leisure reading habits of 584 urban adolescents (grades 5 – 8). One of their findings indicated that summer reading was not a “popular” activity for either male or female urban youth. However, it is known that for at-risk children, summer reading is essential to bridge the reading achievement gap (Allington & McGill-Frazen, 2003; Kim, 2004). Schacter (2003) studied the summer reading achievement of 61 first graders in Los Angeles. His study found that an 8-week summer reading “camp” experience had bearing on vocabulary, comprehension, phonics, and oral reading. Thus, for at-risk urban children, a summer program that focuses on reading has the potential to positively influence reading achievement.

Reading and Literacy Rates

Literacy is a key aspect of school completion. Results from the 2007 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) indicate that 36% of fourth-grade and 29% of eighth-grade public school students in North Carolina scored below the Basic level in reading. Only 23% of fourth-grade and 26% of eighth-grade students scored at the Proficient level. The situation for

students in transitional communities (urban and rural) is dire. Data from the U.S. Department of Education and the National Center for Education Statistics shows that nearly 70% of low-income fourth-graders cannot read at a basic level. This research found that the percentage of struggling readers in a classroom negatively influenced every student's reading performance, undermining the benefits of comprehensive literacy instruction. This disparity can, in part, be attributed to unequal access to summer learning opportunities during the elementary school years (Children's Defense Fund, 2008).

Objectives and Research Questions

History

Given the challenges of summer learning loss and literacy attainment and their potential impact on such issues as graduation rates, there is a need for more research on summer programs and their potential to address these issues. A 2005 evaluation of the Kansas City Freedom School Initiative demonstrated a significant improvement in reading abilities for Freedom School Scholars. The pilot evaluation conducted in 2009 by UNC Charlotte was the first effort to evaluate outcomes for participating Scholars in Charlotte. In early 2009, Freedom School Partners approached the University of North Carolina at Charlotte's Institute for Social Capital, Inc. (ISC) to develop an outcomes evaluation for the program. A pilot program evaluation was conducted at two Freedom School sites for summer 2009. Results from the pilot evaluation were promising. This pilot study showed that of the 51 participants in grades two through five, 57% showed their reading levels as assessed in the *Basic Reading Inventory*, 10th Ed (BRI; Johns, 2008). Twenty-nine percent maintained their reading performance and just under 14% showed some decline. A recommendation that stemmed from the pilot evaluation was the continuation of programmatic evaluation.

In 2010, Freedom School Partners contracted with the Center for Adolescent Literacies at UNC Charlotte and its external business unit, Adolescent Literacy Services, to implement an outcome evaluation project to examine the effect of Freedom Schools on children participating at all ten FSP Freedom School sites. The program evaluation sought to assess the extent to which the *CDF Freedom Schools* program met the following objectives for the K-8 students (Scholars) enrolled:

- To increase children's reading performances
- To maintain or to increase children's reading levels from the end of the school year until the beginning of the proceeding school year
- To increase children's "love" of reading

The research questions that guided the evaluation were the following:

1. Did Freedom School Scholars show any change in their Independent and Frustration reading levels as measured by the Basic Reading Inventory?
2. What were the academic and recreational reading attitudes of Freedom School Scholars as measured by the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey?
3. What were Freedom School Scholars' perceptions regarding the reading component in the *CDF Freedom Schools* program?

Present Study – Summer 2011

In 2011, the research design for the continued program evaluation of FSP was modified based on the findings of the 2010 evaluation. The research questions that guided the evaluation were adjusted accordingly. The following research question guided the 2011 program evaluation of Freedom Schools:

- *What is the effect on the reading performance of students participating in a Freedom Schools program as determined by the Basic Reading Inventory?*

Study Design and Measures

The 2011 evaluation aimed to assess 30% of Freedom School Scholars across all 15 sites of the 2011 Freedom School Partners Freedom Schools. For summer 2011, there were 986 Scholars enrolled in the program. The sample was stratified by level, gender, ethnicity, and grade (see Table 1). The results presented in this report are based on children for whom we obtained complete pre- and posttest data. The evaluation included a pretest-posttest design using only an intervention group (i.e., children who were exposed to the Freedom School Program).

Table 1. Criteria for Stratification

Criteria	Level I	Level II	Level III
Gender	Male Female	Male Female	Male Female
Ethnicity	African-American Hispanic White	African-American Hispanic White	African-American Hispanic White
Grade/Age	Kindergarten 1 st Grade 2 nd Grade	3 rd Grade 4 th Grade 5 th Grade	6 th Grade 7 th Grade 8 th Grade

The summer 2011 evaluation design was based on a power analysis – a method by which researchers determine the number of participants needed to detect statistically significant change over time in group means. Based on the estimates, sampling was used to select the number of FSP Scholars need by level, gender, grade, and ethnicity at each site.

Recruitment Procedures

Participants were recruited for the study through the enrollment process for the Freedom School Program. Parents were informed about the research project and were invited to participate. Consent forms were provided to all parents and collected by Freedom School staff. Each child randomly selected for the study was administered a child assent prior to assessing his/her reading proficiency. The study was approved by the University of North Carolina Charlotte Internal Review Board.

Instrument

The Basic Reading Inventory (BRI; Johns, 2008) is an individually administered reading inventory with multiple measures used to assess facets of reading. For this evaluation, the research team used Form A (pretest) and Form B (posttest). Forms A and B are equivalent measures used to assess students' oral reading across three subtests: the Graded Word List (GWL), Graded Reading Passages, and Oral Reading Comprehension questions that accompany each passage. The BRI is an appropriate assessment that provides flexibility in diverse educational settings that emphasize literacy (Nilsson, 2008).

The BRI Forms A and B begin with a Graded Word List (GWL) section in which students read lists of 20 words. These lists begin at the Pre-primer (PP) level and progress to the 12th grade level. The BRI instructs assessors to begin the GWLs two grade levels below a student's current grade. This convention was followed in this assessment program. The student (or Scholar in this case) reads the sets of word lists until an Independent, Instructional and Frustration level are determined.

The Graded Reading Passages section consists of short, grade appropriate passages of text that are read aloud by the scholar while the assessor documents reading accuracy. For Oral Reading Accuracy, students are asked to read passages aloud; the assessing adult records the different types of errors or "miscues" the student/scholar makes. The assessor counts miscues including words skipped, words inserted, and word said incorrectly. Scores are reported at the Independent, Instructional, and Frustration levels based on scales provided for each passage.

For Oral Reading Comprehension, passages are a mix of expository and narrative form. Explicit comprehension questions about details from the text are provided after each passage is read aloud. The questions are scored and based on the number answered correctly; a determination is made regarding the comprehension level for that passage. Scores are reported at the Independent, Instructional, and Frustration levels (Johns, 2008). These levels—Independent, Instructional, and Frustration—describe a reader's ability to read a text with a certain degree of

accuracy and to understand or comprehend its meaning. A reader at the Independent level will read a text with few errors or miscues and have a solid understanding of what he or she read. At the Instructional level, a reader makes a few mistakes or miscues and less understanding of the text. A Frustration level text is difficult to read and to understand for a reader. Table 2, below, quantifies these three levels.

The BRI yields information regarding reading proficiency and estimates an individual’s Instructional, Independent, and Frustration reading level for different passages. We report on the results based on the Total BRI score—a composite of the GWL, passages and comprehension questions that gives greatest weight to comprehension because it yields the most accurate assessment of a child’s performance (Johns, 2008). For the purpose of this report, we report on two outcomes based on performance on the GWL, passages and comprehension: Independent and Frustration Reading, which allows us to capture the range of their reading performance. Table 2 provides characteristics of the Independent and Frustration Reading performance. Scores for each outcome range from pre-primer to eighth grade. For analysis purposes, those who perform at pre-primer or primer are assigned a score of zero. Scholars who reach a ceiling score of eighth grade at the Independent, Instructional or Frustration level at pre- and posttest are assigned a score of nine to capture their upper limit. While those Scholars may be able to read beyond ninth grade level, assigning a nine allows us to capture the Scholar’s minimum upper limit.

Table 2. 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

Data Collection

The pretest was administered during the first two weeks of the program (between June 20th and June 28th, 2011) and posttests was administered during the last two weeks of the program (July 22nd through August 1st, 2011). As noted above *The Basic Reading Inventory* (Johns, 2008) was used to determine Independent (floor) and Frustration (ceiling) reading levels during the pre- and posttest periods.

Participants were assigned an identification number for tracking purposes and to de-identify them to protect their identity. The identification number was also used to track the data. All Scholars were assessed individually. Each session took approximately between 25-30 minutes to complete. Prior to the pretest, the researchers obtained demographic information about each participant (gender, age, and grade) from the program coordinator, which was gathered from the program application with parental permission. The child assent was administered at the time of data collection.

Sample

Two hundred twenty-four scholars (23%) of the enrolled original 986 Scholars were assessed. Of those 224, 182 (81%) had complete pre- and posttest for the Independent reading outcome. Of the 42 scholars without complete data, 40 were unable to reach independence or a floor score due to limited reading skills. Of those 40, 23 were kindergarteners, 8 were first grade scholars, 5 were second graders, and the remaining 6 were third through sixth grade scholars. Of the 224 scholars assessed, 221 (97%) had complete pre- and posttest data for the Frustration reading outcome. We were able to assess slightly more scholars at the ceiling or Frustration level because it captures the reader's threshold as compared to independence, which assesses floor or reading without failure. Three of the 224 had incomplete data.

Analysis Plan

For purposes of our analysis, we report findings by Freedom School Scholar level. In Freedom School, Scholars are grouped for instructional purposes in grade level cohorts. Level I Scholars are students who have just completed Kindergarten through second grade. Level IIs are students having completed grades three through five. Level IIIs are students having just completed grades six through eight. We chose to conduct our analysis using Freedom School Levels rather than school grade levels because this is how the Scholars are grouped for instruction.

Prior to conducting data analysis, the data were entered and cleaned. For example, to capture the range in reading abilities, pre-primer scores were converted into zeros to capture the Kindergarten level reader and those who exceeded the eighth grade score were assigned a nine to capture their minimum upper limit. Nine scholars received a score of nine because they reached the upper limit of the test before they reached frustration and 45 Scholars were assigned a max score of nine at posttest.

To answer our research question, we computed change scores from pretest to posttest for Independent and Frustration reading performance based on the composite score, which

captures performance on the Graded Word List, the Graded Reading Passages and Oral Reading Comprehension described above. The following section provides three sets of results for each outcome (Independent and Frustration). The first set of results shows means and standard deviations for the pre- and posttest by level. The next set of results provides a distribution that shows the proportion of children whose reading performance declined, was maintained, or improved over time. To determine whether there is a statistically significant difference between these three groups, we conducted the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test, which is a non-parametric hypothesis test designed to test differences in a sample assessed using repeated measures. The Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test will allow us to determine whether there is a statistically significant difference in means or groups (declined, maintained and improved) among Scholars who were assessed at pre- and posttest. Non-parametric methods allow us to work with data that is ranked such as the use of grades.

Results

We begin with a description of the sample. Table 3 shows the demographic information for the entire sample and subsamples that had complete data for each of the outcomes of interest, those with pre- and posttest data. The first column provides information based on the 224 children assessed. The second column provides information regarding the sample that had pre- and posttest data for the Independent Reading performance measure (n=182). The last column is based on 221 Scholars who had pre- and posttest data for the Frustration Reading performance measure. While we aimed to recruit equal proportions of Scholars across levels for each measure, program recruitment, absences, Scholar enrollments, and attrition resulted in larger proportions of Level I and Level II Scholars (see first column), with 40% Level I, 41% Level II, and 19% Level III. Some sites did not have programs for Level III Scholars and for sites that did, there tended to be fewer Level III Scholars than Level I and Level II Scholars. There was a larger proportion of Level II Scholars who completed both the pre- and post- Independent Reading measure. The differences might be explained by test completion rates. Fewer younger Scholars, such as those in Kindergarten, were able to complete the assessment to a point at which an Independent reading score was obtained.

African Americans made up the vast majority of the participants across the three samples; similar proportions of Hispanics are represented across the samples. Just over half of all the samples were female. Grades ranged from Kindergarten to 8th grade, with the average Scholar having completed the third grade. A small percentage of Scholars had repeated a grade and the mean attendance was 93% of program days across all three samples. The difference between the number of observations in column C and those in the other two columns is due to a larger number of Scholars who completed testing for the Frustration level than scholars who were able to be assessed at the Independent level. For example, the majority of kindergarteners

(71%) were unable to complete the assessment and consequently did not receive an independent reading score. Thus, a lower number of observations are reported in column B than column C, which includes all but 3 Scholars from the total sample.

Table 3. Demographic characteristics of children with pre- and posttest data

	Column A: Total Sample Assessed	Column B: Independent Reading Measure	Column C: Frustration Reading Measure
	Percent/Mean(SD)	Percent/Mean(SD)	Percent/Mean(SD)
Observations	224	182	221
Level			
1	40	29	40
2	41	48	40
3	19	23	19
Race/Ethnicity			
African American	75	75	76 ⁱ
Hispanic	18	19	19
White	3	2	3
Asian	1	1	1
Other	3	3	1
Gender			
Male	46 ^a	46 ^e	46 ^j
Female	53	53	54
Grade Completed	3.30 (2.24) ^b	3.82(2.03) ^f	3.29 (2.25) ^k
% Repeated a Grade	19 ^c	17 ^g	16 ^l
Attendance	.93 (2.40) ^d	.93 (.09) ^h	.93 (.09) ^m

Note: Level I includes Kindergarten through 2nd grade; Level II includes grades 3-5; and Level III includes grades 6-8. ^a Based on 220 responses; ^b Based on 220 responses; ^c Based on 216 responses; ^d Based on 223 responses; ^e Based on 180 responses; ^f Based on 179 responses; ^g Based on 174 responses; ^h Based on 181 responses; ⁱ Based on 215 responses; ^j Based on 217 responses; ^k Based on 217 responses; ^l Based on 213 responses; ^m Based on 220 responses.

Independent Reading Measure

The following table provides results for the BRI Independent reading scale for 182 Scholars for whom we had pre- and posttest data. The results show that, on average, children in Level I scored at the first grade reading level at pretest. At posttest, children improved by over half a

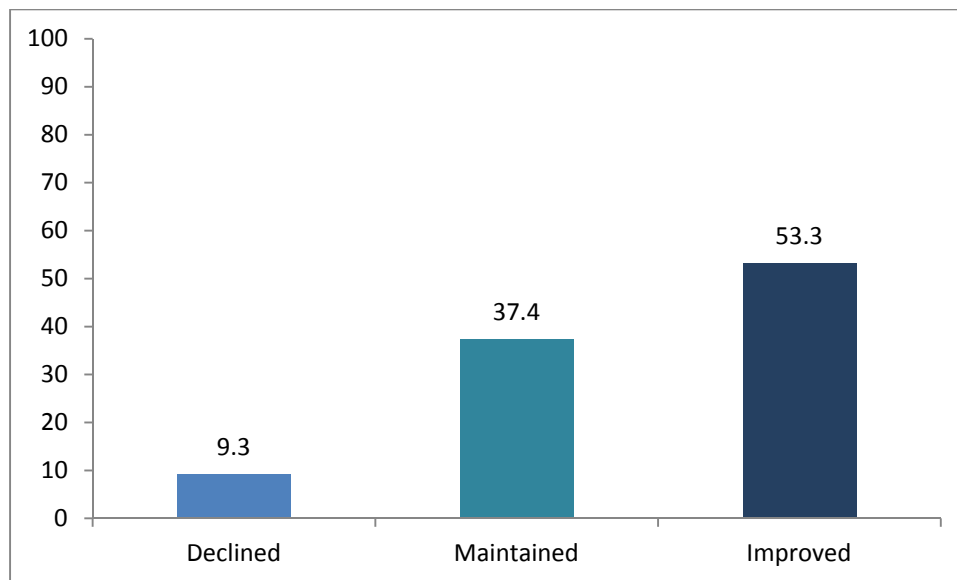
grade. This pattern also emerged for Scholars in Level II. Scholars in Level III showed the most improvement, with close to a full grade of improvement from pretest to posttest.

Table 4. Mean scores for the BRI Independent reading measure by level (N=182)

Level	N	<i>Pretest</i>		<i>Posttest</i>	
		M	SD	M	SD
1	53	1.00	1.93	1.64	1.44
2	87	3.06	1.82	3.85	2.07
3	42	4.90	1.39	5.83	1.82
Total	182	2.88	2.10	3.66	2.39

Figure 1 provided below shows the distribution of Scholars who declined, maintained, and improved Independent reading proficiency over the course of the summer reading program. The vast majority either maintained or improved Independent reading proficiency from pretest to posttest, with more than half showing improvement in reading proficiency over time. A smaller proportion (9.3%) declined over time.

Figure 1. Performance on the BRI Independent Reading Measure over time (percent based on N=182)



Based on results from the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Tests, there is a statistically significant difference in reading performance among these three groups, $Z = 7.33$, $p = .001$.

Frustration Reading Measure

As described above, the BRI yields an Independent reading score and a Frustration or ceiling reading score. Another way to think of the Frustration score is the point at which the Scholar could no longer continue with the test because he/she reached his/her threshold.

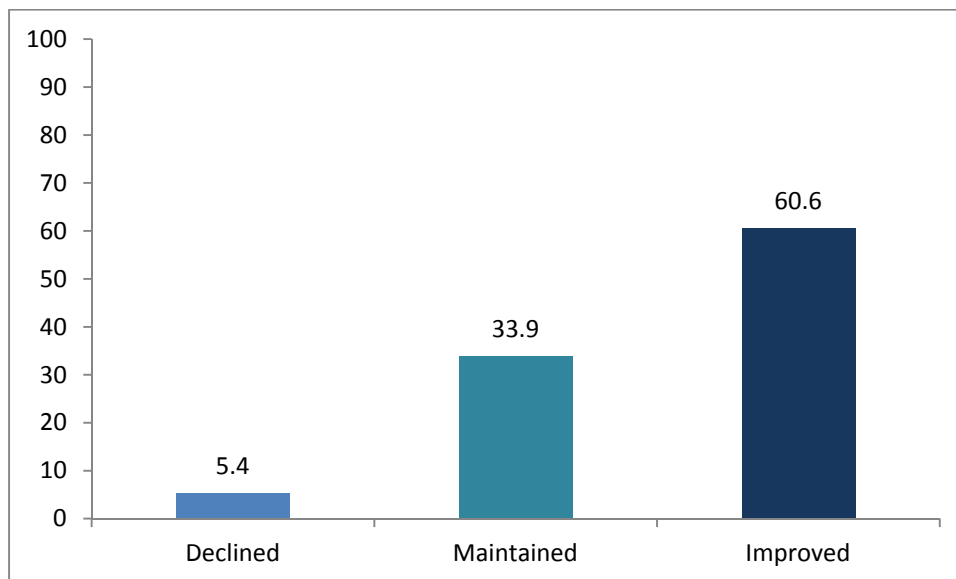
Results shown in Table 5 (below) indicated that Scholars at all levels showed improvement over time. This means that children were able to read at a higher grade level at posttest before they reached frustration or were unable to proceed. Specifically, Level I Scholars reached Frustration just below second grade reading level at pretest and improved to just below the third grade reading level at posttest. Level III scholars' reading performance also improved over time. Level II showed the most improvement with more than a full grade from pretest to posttest.

Table 5. Mean scores for the BRI Frustration reading measure by level (N=221)

Level	N	<u>Pretest</u>		<u>Posttest</u>	
		M	SD	M	SD
1	89	1.81	1.94	2.71	2.35
2	89	5.35	2.02	6.47	2.20
3	43	7.21	1.70	8.12	1.55
Total	221	4.29	2.88	5.28	3.07

The following figure provides estimates of the proportion of Scholars who declined, maintained, or improved reading proficiency over time. Over half of the Scholars showed improvement from pretest to posttest (60.6%). This means that those scholars were able to read beyond their previous threshold. Over one third maintained mean frustration reading performance, which suggests that while these scholars did not improve, they also did not decline. In contrast to performance in the Independent Reading Measure which had a 9.3 percent decline, only 5.4% declined on the Frustration reading measure.

Figure 2. Performance on the BRI Frustration Reading Measure over time (percent based on N=221)



Again, the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Tests indicated that there is a statistically significant difference in reading performance among these three groups, $Z = 9.35$, $p = .001$.

Discussion of Findings

As discussed earlier in this report, this research builds on evaluation studies conducted during the Summer 2009 and 2010 in Charlotte, N.C. Results of both studies showed that the majority of Freedom School Scholars grew or maintained in their ability to read as measured by the BRI.

Present Study – Summer 2011

As with previous evaluations, there is evidence to suggest that Scholars improve on the two key reading outcomes: Independent and Frustration levels. While the 2010 and 2011 sample was not made up of the same children, which limits our ability to draw parallel comparisons, for illustrative purposes we are able to make general comparisons about patterns that emerged across the two samples. The following summarized the results reported above within the context of the 2010 findings.

With regard to Independent reading performance, the benefits were most pronounced among Level III Scholars. When compared to 2010 results, with the exception of Level III posttest results which were slightly lower than last year's means, this year's means were slightly higher. When comparing the proportion of children who maintained or made gains in Independent reading over the course of the program, 2011 Scholars' Independent reading performance was more likely to improve and less likely to decline compared to 2010 Scholars. With regard to

Frustration reading performance, as with the previous year, Scholars at all levels showed improvement. In fact, a smaller proportion of children declined and a slightly larger proportion maintained performance from pretest to posttest. This year, slightly fewer Scholars showed improvement as compared to 2010. Given that 11 of the 45 Scholars who were assigned a nine at pretest also received a nine at posttest, there is a reasonable amount of chance that those same scholars would have shown growth had our measure been able to capture performance beyond the eighth grade.

While these results are promising, further investigation and data collection will help us better explain associations between program participation and outcomes. For instance, kindergarteners are still at an emergent level in the development of their reading skills; many were unable to proceed with the assessment of Independent reading performance and could not be included in the analysis for that outcome. This raises important questions about the instrument used and its ability to assess emergent readers. If we are to explain the link between the intervention and Scholars' reading performance over time, we should carefully consider alternative measures that assess a range of reading skills before and after experiencing the Freedom School curriculum. Second, while we attempted to determine the correlations between demographic characteristics among our sample (e.g., grade, gender, race/ethnicity), the regression models tested yielded unremarkable results. This suggests that additional data on Scholars might help explain differences found across levels. For instance, attendance data that captures intensity or program dosage could help explain differences in performance over time. In addition to Scholar level data, Intern characteristics might help explain differences in outcomes. While we attempted to test this link, we were unable to determine teacher level effects due to sample size. The goal was to assess at least 3 children at pre- and posttest, however, sample size within classrooms prevented us from testing the effect of teacher and classroom characteristics on scholars' reading performance; close to a third of the Interns did not have a minimum of three children tested. In the future, oversampling of Scholars within classrooms should help ensure we have a sufficient number of children within classroom to assess the effect Intern characteristics has on Scholar outcomes. For example, Intern years of experience in the program might explain why some scholars show improvement over time and others do not.

Future Directions

The three years of data collected and analyzed in this evaluation of the Freedom School programs in Charlotte, N.C. from 2009 through 2011 provide a baseline of information that suggests that the vast majority of Scholars enrolled in the program maintain or grow in their ability to read over the period of the program. However, the research team believes this work could be strengthened in the following ways. First, we suggest that a reading assessment

measure that is more sensitive in measuring the reading abilities of pre-emergent readers be identified. Use of such a measure could provide greater clarity about the effect on the youngest Freedom School Scholars, particularly those who have just completed Kindergarten for first grade. Second, if we are to show a direct link between program participation and outcomes, a comparative study using a control group of students with similar demographics to those in the Freedom School program is needed. This would allow for comparison between a group who received the program and a group that did not, which will allow us to better show the effect of the program on students' reading performance. Finally, given sample sizes within classrooms reported above, oversampling is warranted as is the collection of complete Intern characteristics (e.g., years in the program, prior teaching experience, etc.) is required.

The Center for Adolescent Literacies at UNC Charlotte

The Center for Adolescent Literacies at UNC Charlotte is an instructional center focused on developing instruction to make literacy and learning relevant and effective for adolescents and those who work with them. The Center also will conduct and support research and service in support of its primary mission.

The mission of the Center for Adolescent Literacies (CAL) at UNC Charlotte is to advance the literacy achievement of adolescents in urban school settings and to develop pedagogies for adolescents and those who work with them to prepare them to be productive and empowered 21st century citizens. Specifically, the objectives of our center are as follows:

- To provide community outreach
- To build cultural understanding and awareness
- To promote community* engagements
- To encourage civic engagement through service learning
- To equip teachers, parents and pre-service teachers with knowledge, skills, and dispositions for supporting and scaffolding adolescent literacy and service learning
- To develop and provide collaborative professional development to promote adolescent literacy
- To encourage collaborative involvement among all stakeholders (including teachers, students, parents/guardians and university faculty).

Evaluation Team

Dr. Bruce Taylor is the Director of the Center for Adolescent Literacies at UNC Charlotte and is an Associate Professor in the Department of Reading & Elementary Education. Dr. Taylor has provided leadership in developing the ReadWriteServe service learning and literacy initiatives at UNC Charlotte as well as the Academy for Qualitative Research. He is the co-author of two books and is the author and co-author of numerous peer-reviewed articles, book chapters, and technical reports. His research examines the social and cultural aspects of literacy and learning of adolescents and, in particular, ways to meet the academic learning needs of diverse and marginalized students. He has led several reading program evaluation projects. Dr. Taylor teaches undergraduate, master's level, and doctoral courses that focus on content-area and adolescent literacy, multiliteracies in education, and sociocultural aspects of language and literacy.

Dr. Sandraluz Lara-Cinisomo is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Special Education and Child Development. Dr. Lara-Cinisomo is a Developmental Psychologist who continues to conduct research with the RAND Corporation on military children and families. Dr. Lara-Cinisomo's research interests include child and adolescent well-being, as well as maternal

mental health. Her research on children includes school-readiness, early childhood educators' belief systems, and an analysis of context and links with child and adolescent well-being. Dr. Lara-Cinisomo is Co-PI on the NMFA-funded project that looks at links between deployment experiences and youth functioning; this study also includes an examination of non-deployed caregiver experiences and well-being. Her other research focuses on maternal depression. Dr. Lara-Cinisomo has also worked on other military-related project designed to develop interview instruments of deployed service members and their spouses. Dr. Lara-Cinisomo has also conducted a study using data from the Los Angeles Family and Neighborhood Survey (LA FANS) to identify disparities in major depression among a diverse group of mothers living in Los Angeles. A second study focused on the association between self-reported, previous detection of major depression with mental health specialty use and the use of a primary care physician. Dr. Lara-Cinisomo is leading a third study designed to identify barriers and facilitators to treating Hispanic perinatal mothers suffering from depression.

Dr. Adriana L. Medina is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Reading & Elementary Education. Dr. Medina's areas of interest and research include adolescent literacy, teacher education, and educational program evaluation. Her primary teaching responsibilities include undergraduate and graduate courses in reading and content area literacy. Dr. Medina teaches a Literacy for Democracy service learning course at Piedmont Open Middle School in Charlotte and works with the Center on program evaluation projects. Dr. Medina has coordinated school-based program evaluation projects of large-scale educational reform initiatives, namely the Smaller Learning Communities grants through the Miami-Dade County Public Schools District. She has completed several program evaluations – an evaluation of the SUPPORT Network teacher induction program; Starfish, an education program evaluation sponsored by the YMCA of Greater Charlotte; and an evaluation of alternative teacher education programs at UNC Charlotte. Dr. Medina has contributed to previous evaluations of the Freedom Schools Program.

Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge the Center for Educational Measurement and Evaluation (CEME) for their assistance with the power analysis and guidance during the data analysis phase of the project. We would also like to recognize Dr. Rich Lambert, Director of CEME, for his time and contributions to the project. Finally, we would like to thank all of the families who participated in this project. This project would not have been possible without their involvement.

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