



**Children's Defense Fund  
Bennettsville, South Carolina Freedom Schools® Program Evaluation Report**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Center for Adolescent Literacies at UNC Charlotte conducted an evaluation of the Children's Defense Fund Freedom Schools® program held at Marlboro County High School in Bennettsville, South Carolina during the summer of 2010 to determine the program's impact on the reading ability of students.

Findings of the summer 2010 evaluation show that just over 90% of the 42 Freedom School Scholars who participated in the pre- and post-evaluation assessment grew or maintained in their ability to read as measured by the Basic Reading Inventory, 10<sup>th</sup> Edition (BRI). Specifically, the data show that nearly three-fourths of the 42 children assessed (71.4%) improved or showed gains in their Frustration reading level as measured by the BRI at the end of the program. Frustration levels can be thought of as a "ceiling" or upper-most level of a child's reading ability. We found that of the sample (19.0%) maintained their ability to read (at a Frustration level) by the end of the summer. These data indicate that most students maintained or gained in their ability to read did not "slide" back during the summer time. Both outcomes are desirable for Freedom School Scholars in the Children's Defense Fund program model given the wealth of research that documents summer learning loss especially among low-income and minority students.

The results of the BRI pre- and post-assessment show that a majority of Scholars across all levels of the program from Kindergarten through 8<sup>th</sup> grade improved or maintained in their ability to read. The level of improvement was more pronounced among the older groups of students with Level 2 and 3 Scholars (grades 3-5 and 6-8) showing the greatest gains and Level 1 Scholars showing the smallest gains (grades K-2).

The evaluation also examined Scholars attitudes towards reading in the Freedom School program. During the post-evaluation phase, Scholars were asked about the reading part of the Freedom School experience and 97% of comments were positive. Students said about Freedom School that they liked the books and classroom activities such as discussions, read alouds, and activities that followed the reading and discussion of the books. Here is one response from a Scholar:

*"I like the books we read. None were boring. They kept my attention. Most based on facts, things that actually happened. I like reading stories like that."*

Findings of this evaluation suggest that *CDF Freedom Schools* programs like the program at Marlboro County High School in Bennettsville, South Carolina benefit the majority of participants by helping them maintain or improve in their ability to read and may build positive attitudes toward reading.

The full report of the 2010 evaluation of the Children's Defense Fund Freedom Schools<sup>®</sup> programs may be obtained at the website of the Center for Adolescent Literacies at UNC Charlotte: <http://literacy.uncc.edu/> .