



## **Freedom School Partners Children's Defense Fund Freedom Schools® 2016 Program Evaluation Report**

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Since 2009, the Center for Adolescent Literacies at UNC Charlotte has conducted seven evaluation studies of Freedom School Partners' Children's Defense Fund Freedom Schools® programs in Charlotte, N.C. Over this period of time, a similar research design was used that included pre- and post-testing of children participating in the program (known as Scholars) using the *Basic Reading Inventory* (BRI), 10<sup>th</sup> Ed. (Johns, 2010) Forms A and B. Results from these evaluations varied but followed a pattern with approximately 60% to 65% of Scholars showing gains in reading, 25% to 35% maintaining in their ability to read, and 5% to 10% declining in their ability to read as measured by the BRI at the Frustration level (a ceiling level in a child's ability to read).

For the 2016 program evaluation, the Center for Adolescent Literacies continued with this research design but added an additional reading measure, the *Ekwall/Shanker Reading Inventory* or ESRI (Shanker & Cockrum, 2013). The BRI pre/post testing was conducted at 14 of the 16 Freedom School Partners program sites and the ESRI was used at four of the 14 sites with some Scholars assessed with the BRI and others with the ESRI. Our goal for using both the BRI and ESRI was twofold: 1) to provide an additional reading assessment to compare results to the BRI, and 2) to determine which of these measures could be utilized by Freedom School staff to evaluate all or most Scholars at all program sites in future years. Both assessment tools measure Independent (a floor level reading score, a level at which a child can read on their own) and the Frustration level (a ceiling level or level at which a child can no longer read even with assistance).

Results of this evaluation using the BRI were consistent with previous years' studies indicating that the majority of Scholars maintained or improved in their ability to read as measured using the BRI. At the Independent or "floor level," nearly 46% of Scholars improved, nearly 40% maintained and just under 15% declined. At the "ceiling" or Frustration levels, 54% increased while nearly 31% maintained and just over 15% declined. These results follow a similar pattern those reported in previous studies conducted the Center for Adolescent Literacies but vary by degree. That is, a somewhat smaller group of Scholars showed increases in Independent and Frustration levels than previous years. Variation from year to year are likely due to differences in sample size and composition as well as site level variation not accounted for within this research (our analysis is across sites, not site by site).

Evaluation results using the *Ekwall/Shanker Reading Inventory* (ESRI) with Scholars at four sites yield a similar pattern to results as measured using the BRI on both the floor and ceiling level scores. The greatest percentage change is for Scholars showing increases in reading and the smallest percentage is for those who declined. However, we noted small differences in degree with the ESRI with a slight increases in the percent of Scholars showing increases (approximately 61% on the ESRI and 53% on the BRI at the Frustration level). A similar pattern held for reading as measured at the Independent level. There was minor variation across assessments, BRI and ESRI, as to the degree of growth for Level I, II, and III Scholars. Differences in scores on the BRI and ESRI are likely due to differences in passages and question types as well as small differences in scoring conventions.

The results of this evaluation using the ESRI in addition to the BRI provides some measure of confirmation to results reported using the BRI. Additionally, it was determined that the ESRI requires less time to administer, eight to 12 minutes per administration on average at pre and posttest, suggesting that using the ESRI would place a "lighter footprint" for assessment on the program and be more cost effective. We see two other promising benefits of the ESRI: 1) the scoring matrix that accounts for both miscues and comprehension questions lends itself to fidelity in scoring, and 2) it is easier to explain and therefore would likely make training of assessors less time intensive.

The full report of the 2016 evaluation of the Freedom School Partners' Children's Defense Fund Freedom Schools® programs may be obtained at the website of the Center for Adolescent Literacies at UNC Charlotte: <http://literacy.uncc.edu/>.