

Seigle Avenue Partners Children's Defense Fund Freedom Schools®  
Pilot Outcomes Evaluation

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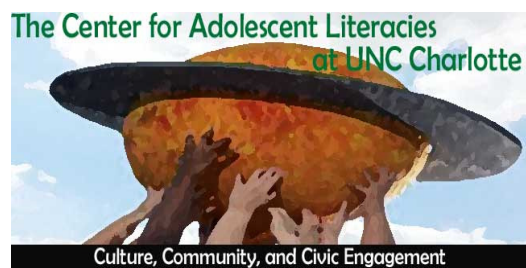
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## Seigle Avenue Partners CDF Freedom Schools® Pilot Outcomes Evaluation

In Summer, 2008, Seigle Avenue Partners hosted its fifth year of the CDF Freedom Schools® Program, providing more than 400 inner-city children with the opportunity to attend a free literacy-based summer camp at one of six sites across Charlotte, North Carolina. Following its successful implementation and expansion of *CDF Freedom Schools*, in early 2009, Seigle Avenue Partners approached The University of North Carolina at Charlotte Institute for Social Capital, Inc. (ISC) to assist in developing a program of outcomes evaluation for the program. Created by the Children’s Defense Fund, Freedom Schools engages children in grades K-8 in a six-week summer program designed to prevent the learning loss that students typically experience over those months when school is not in session, as well as to have a positive impact on children’s character development, leadership, and community involvement. A 2005 evaluation of the Kansas City *CDF Freedom Schools* Initiative, demonstrated a significant improvement in reading abilities for Freedom Schools scholars; however, the current project represents the first effort to evaluate outcomes for participating students in Charlotte.

Due to the relatively short timeline and limited resources available to support initial evaluation efforts, ISC and Seigle Avenue Partners agreed to conduct a pilot evaluation in Summer, 2009, that would involve data collection at two *CDF Freedom Schools* Sites, Billingsville Elementary and Seigle Avenue. It was further agreed that the pilot evaluation would focus specifically on the program’s primary goal of enhancing academic performance for participating children. More specifically, the evaluation was designed to assess the extent to which the program meets the following objectives: (1) to increase children’s “love” of reading; (2) to increase children’s reading performance; and (3) to maintain or to increase children’s reading level from the end of the school year until the beginning of the proceeding school year. It was hypothesized that the program would produce positive outcomes in each of these areas. In addition, it was hypothesized that greater participation in the program (i.e., attendance) would increase the benefits to youth. Feedback was also gathered from students in regard to their experiences with and perceptions of the *CDF Freedom Schools* program.

### METHODOLOGY

The Summer 2009 Pilot Evaluation employed a pretest/posttest single group design. All students in grades 2-8 enrolled at the selected *CDF Freedom Schools* sites (i.e., Billingsville and Seigle Avenue) were invited to participate in the study; however, only those children for whom parent consent was obtained and who provided individual assent were included in the evaluation. A standard set of baseline data were collected for all participating students within two weeks of the program start date, and follow-up data were collected during the last week of the program. In addition, at the conclusion of the program, all participants were asked to complete an End-of-Program Survey. At that time, the research team also obtained demographic and attendance data from program records.

ISC contracted with The Center for Adolescent Literacies to conduct reading assessments for those *CDF Freedom Schools* scholars who had completed grades 2-5. At the Seigle Avenue site, students were assessed using one portion of the Basic Reading Inventory (10<sup>th</sup> Ed.)(Johns, 2005), the graded word list (GWL). At the Billingsville site, scholars were assessed using two

additional measures that assess comprehension and reading in context. The three measures used at the Billingsville site provided a more complete understanding of each scholar’s reading, but both approaches were reasonable in evaluating the overall impact of the *CDF Freedom Schools* reading program.

Measures

The Basic Reading Inventory (10<sup>th</sup> Ed.) (Johns, 2005). The Basic Reading Inventory is an individually administered informal reading inventory with multiple measures used to assess facets of reading. For this evaluation, the research team used Form A and Form B. Forms A and B are equivalent measures used to assess students’ oral reading across three subtests: the Graded Word List (GWL), leveled passages, and comprehension questions that accompany each passage. These three sections capture different facets of the reading process: reading out of context (the Graded Word Lists); reading in context (the leveled passages); and comprehension (the comprehension questions). These three subtests each provide separate measures of a student’s independent, instructional, and frustration reading levels, which can then be synthesized into a single set of scores reported as preprimer (PP) through grade 12. Table 1 provides a brief description of these three reading levels:

**Table 1.** Levels of Reading Assessed with The Basic Reading Inventory

Level	Characteristics
Independent (easy)	Comprehension (90%+) Word Recognition (99%+) Few or no repetitions Very fluent
Instructional (just right; comfortable)	Comprehension (75-85%+) Word Recognition (95%+) Few or no repetitions Fluent Some unknown words
Frustration (too hard)	Comprehension (50%+) Word Recognition (90%+) Word by word reading Many repetitions Rate is slow Lack of expression

The Graded Word Lists (GWL) are sets of lists, each containing 20 words, that are designed to allow a student’s independent, instructional, and frustration reading levels to be identified quickly and easily. Students are presented with a word list and asked to read the words aloud at a comfortable pace. As the student reads down each list of words, the reading specialist records the student's responses in a performance booklet. Students receive credit for reading words correctly on a first reading (sight reading) and then have the opportunity to try to reread (analysis) words they missed on a second reading. The GWL is scored as follows: 19-20 correct (sight and analysis) is independent, 14 to 18 (sight and analysis) is instructional, and 13 or fewer is frustration.

The Basic Reading Inventory also contains a Graded Reading Passages section, which consists of short, grade appropriate passages of text that are read aloud while the reading specialist monitors 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 makes. The scoring for this section varies a bit by the passage. The assessor counts miscues including words skipped, words inserted, and word said incorrectly. Scores are reported at the independent, instructional, and frustration levels. 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, but assessors are encouraged to supplement the questions with retelling and discussion. Scores are reported at the independent, instructional, and frustration levels.

The Hemingway: Measure of Child and Adolescent Connectedness (Hemingway; Karcher, 2006). Since no instrument could be identified that specifically addressed children's "love of reading," the researchers selected the Hemingway Measure of Child and Adolescent Connectedness, which includes subscales for children's connectedness to (i.e., caring for and feelings about) reading and school, for use in this evaluation. The 57-item short form of the Hemingway is designed to be an effective assessment tool for interventions with the goal of reducing problem behaviors through the promotion of social development. In addition to providing an overall connectedness score, the Hemingway measures four individual domains of connectedness: Being Social, Being Academic, Being Related, and Becoming, which can also be conceptualized as connectedness to friends, school, family, and self. The Hemingway can be further evaluated from the three ecological levels of connectedness: Connectedness to Self, Connectedness to Others, and Connectedness to Society. The Connectedness to Self scale consists of the following subscales: Connectedness to Self, present and future, which has an alpha of 0.83. Connectedness to Others has five subscales: parents, siblings, friends, teachers, and peers, with alphas that range from 0.71-0.94. The Connectedness to Society scale consists of the school, neighborhood, and reading subscales, with alphas ranging from 0.73-0.91. A validation study of the Hemingway demonstrated excellent test-retest reliability and internal consistency (Karcher, 2001).

End of Program Survey. For purposes of this evaluation, the researchers developed an End-of-Program Survey, consisting of 12 multiple-choice and 3 open-ended questions, to elicit information about participants' attitudes toward the *CDF Freedom Schools* program. More specifically, participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they enjoyed the program and their feelings about the way they were treated by the staff and interns. The survey also asked participants to rate their reading levels before and after attending the program. In addition, it sought to measure participants' desire to attend the program next year and their motivation to encourage other students to attend. Through open-ended questions, participants shared their opinions regarding aspects of the program that they liked the most and the least. Finally, students were asked to provide suggestions on how to improve future *CDF Freedom Schools* programs.

## Data Collection

At both study sites, one of four research team members, each a trained reading specialist, administered the reading assessment at both pre- and post-test. Students were assessed individually in a private location. The reading specialist asked the student to read a list of 20 words from the Graded Word List (GWL), while the researcher recorded the student's responses in a performance booklet. After completing the GWL, students at the Billingsville site were asked to read from the Graded Reading Passages (GRP) of the Basic Reading Inventory.

The Hemingway was administered to students in small groups based on their grade level (i.e., K-2, 3-5, and 6-8). When the students demonstrated an ability to read and to comprehend the survey independently, the researcher instructed them to complete the survey at their own pace. However, the researcher read the survey questions aloud to (primarily younger) groups of children who experienced difficulties with the survey.

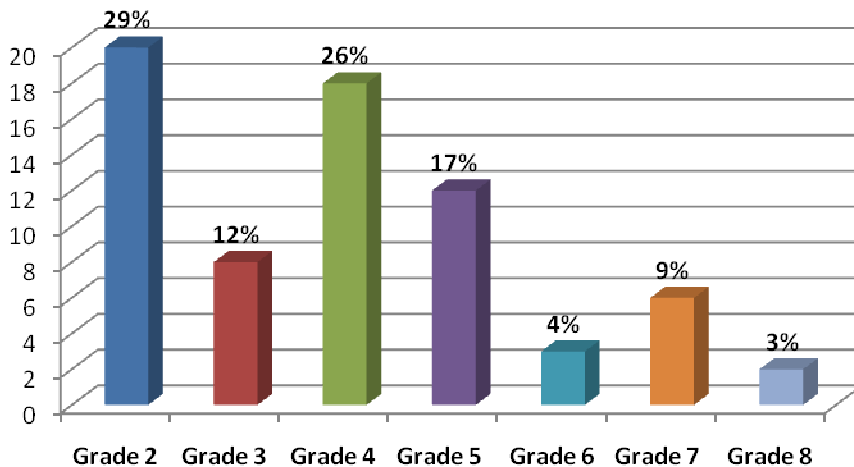
Teachers in the *CDF Freedom Schools* administered the End-of-Program Survey in their classes during the last week of the program. The research team provided the teachers with instructions and an administration script.

## RESULTS

### Student Outcomes

A total of 69 students in grades 2-8 participated in the Summer 2009 pilot evaluation of *CDF Freedom Schools*. Over half (57%; n=39) were enrolled at the Billingsville Elementary School site, and 43% (n=30) attended the Seigle Avenue site. The overwhelming majority of students (98%; n=68) were African American. Gender data were collected from only those students in grades 2-5. Of these students, approximately half (55%; n=32) were female; 45% (n=26) were male. Students ranged in age from 7 to 12 years, with an average age of 9.36 years. As shown in Figure 1, students in the lower grades comprised the largest portion of the sample, with 29% (n=20) of students having completed grade 2; 12% (n=8) having completed grade 3; 26% (n=18) having completed grade 4; 17% (n=12) having completed grade 5; 4% (n=3) having completed grade 6; 9% (n=6) having completed grade 7, and 3% (n=2) having completed grade 8.

**Figure 1.** Grade level distribution of sample.



## Reading Performance

As shown in Table 2, a total of 51 students in grades 2-5, 20 at the Seigle Avenue site and 31 at the Billingsville site, completed the reading assessments at both pretest and posttest. Another seven students participated in the assessments, but they provided data at only one of the assessment time points, such that they could not be included in the analyses of reading performance outcomes. Slightly more than half (58%; n=30) of the sample for analysis were female, and 41% (n=21) were male. The overwhelming majority (98%; n=50) were African American. Students ranged in age from 7 to 12 years, with an average age of 9.37 years at pretest. A breakdown of participating students by site and grade is included in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Number of *CDF Freedom Schools* Scholars by Site with Pre- and Posttest Data

Site	FS Scholar Completed Pre- & Post-test (Grade Level Completed)					Subtests the BRI Used
	2	3	4	5	Total	
<b>Seigle Avenue Freedom School</b>	6	2	7	5	20	GWL
<b>Billingsville Freedom School</b>	11	4	10	6	31	GWL, Passages & Comprehension
<b>Total</b>	17	6	17	11	51	

Early in the planning stages of this evaluation, based on the literature and our experiences with tutoring and other educational programs, we determined that, consistent with the program goal of preventing summer learning loss, a positive outcome would consist of a students' maintaining his or her reading level from pre- to posttest. Accordingly, we hypothesized that the reading level for the majority of *CDF Freedom Schools* participants would not change over the course of the summer. However, the results showed that our hypothesis was wrong.

Analyses of the reading assessment data evidenced that nearly 60% of *CDF Freedom Schools* scholars gained in their reading levels, while approximately 30% remained level. Tables 3 and 4 provide a detailed report of levels of reading achievement—growth, maintenance, and loss—by program site.

**Table 3.** Seigle Avenue *CDF Freedom Schools* scholar reading level results

FS Scholar Level of Growth or Decline	No.	%
<b>Maintained</b>	6	30%
<b>One year's growth</b>	12	60%
<b>One year's loss</b>	2	10%

**Table 4.** Billingsville *CDF Freedom Schools* scholar reading level results

FS Scholar Level of Growth or Decline	No.	%
<b>Maintained</b>	9	29%
<b>One year's growth</b>	11	35%
<b>Two year's growth</b>	4	13%
<b>Three year's growth</b>	2	6%
<b>One year's loss</b>	4	13%
<b>Two year's loss</b>	1	3%

At the Billingsville site, 54% of all scholars assessed (n=17) showed growth of at least one year, with 19% (n=6) showing growth of two or more years. Almost 30% of students (29%, n=9) maintained their level of reading (no growth and no loss), and 16% (n=5) showed some decline. Figures for the Seigle Avenue site are remarkably similar in proportion, with 70% of students (n=14) demonstrating an improvement in reading, and 30% (n=6) maintaining their reading level over the summer. However, these results show less variation; the ranges of gain and loss were greater at Billingsville. It is important to note that we believe this is a result of having used the additional assessment measures (reading passages and comprehension) at Billingsville and does not reflect significant differences in the quality of the two programs.

#### “Love of Reading”

In order to examine the impact of *CDF Freedom Schools* programs on students’ “love of reading,” a series of dependent-group t-tests were conducted to determine whether there was any significant change in students’ scores on the Connectedness to School Subscale, the Connectedness to Reading Subscale, and the Overall Connectedness Scale of the Hemingway Measure of Connectedness from pre- to posttest. A total of 61 students (27 at Seigle Avenue and 34 at Billingsville) completed the Hemingway measure of connectedness at both pretest and posttest. Analyses were conducted separately for younger (grades 2-5) and older (grades 6-8) students since different versions of the Hemingway (based on age) were administered to the two groups.

For the younger group, 50 students (22 at Seigle Avenue and 28 at Billingsville) in grades 2-5 completed the pre-adolescent version of the Hemingway measure. Over one third (36%; n=18) were in grade 2; 10% (n=5) were in grade 3; 32% (n=16) were in grade 4; and 22% (n=11) were in grade 5. Students ranged in age from 7 to 12 years, with an average age of 9.38 years at the time of pretest. A little less than two thirds (64%; n=32) were female, and 36% (n=18) were male. Reflecting the sample as a whole, the majority were African American (98%; n=49).

No statistically significant changes in students’ scores on the two subscales (Connectedness to School and Reading) or the Overall Connectedness Scale were detected from pre- to posttest. However, at both time points, students had high connectedness scores (>2.5 on the 4-point scale) on all three scales: M=3.14 and 3.14 for Connectedness to School, M=3.02



and 2.99 for Connectedness to Reading, and M=3.05 and 3.07 on the Overall Connectedness Scale.

A total of 11 students (6 from Billingsville and 5 from Seigle Avenue) completed the Adolescent version of the Hemingway. Most (54%; n=6) were in grade 7; 27% (n=3) were in grade 6; and 18% (n=2) were in grade 8. The average age was 12.91. All of the students in the older group were African American, and the majority (73%; n=8) were female. As with the younger group of students, there were no statistically significant changes in older students' scores on the Connectedness to School, Connectedness to Reading, or Overall Connectedness Scales. Notably, however, these students' scores at pretest were relatively high -for Connectedness to School (M=4.04) and Overall Connectedness to School (M=3.82). (Scores at or above 3.5 indicate high levels of connectedness.) At pretest, the mean score for Connectedness to Reading was 3.00.

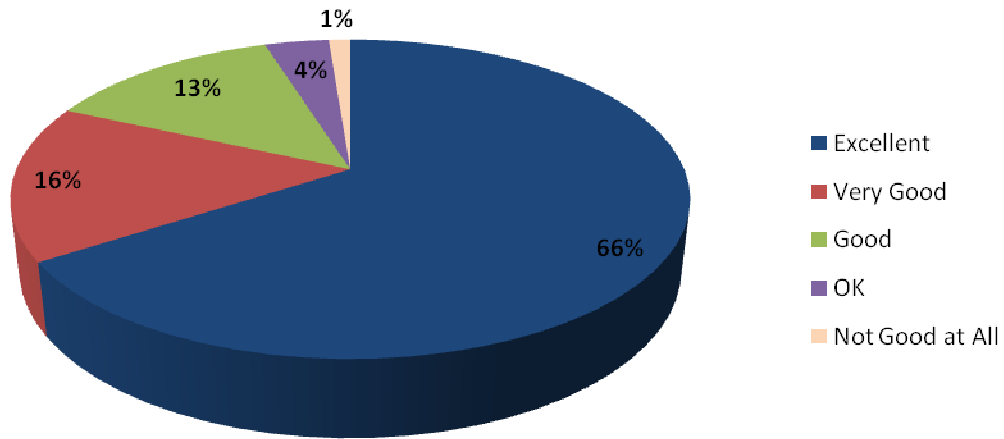
### Examination of Factors Influencing Outcomes

The small number of students (n=46) who completed both the reading assessments and the Hemingway at pretest and posttest prevented our conducting analyses of the extent, if any, to which improvements in connectedness were associated with improvements in reading. In addition, complete attendance data could not be obtained from program records at the Seigle Avenue site. Accordingly, the researchers could not analyze the impact of attendance on student outcomes as planned. However, attendance data were obtained for a total of 31 students in grades 2-5 at the Billingsville site, and these data provide some insight into the potential role of attendance in achieving positive outcomes for students. Attendance rate was calculated by dividing the total number of days that the student attended the program by the total number of days that the program was in session. Among those students in grades 2-5, over half (58%; n=18) had an attendance rate of 90% or higher; 26% (n=8) had rates between 80% and 90%; and only 16% (n=5) had rates that were equal to or less than 70%. Most students (67%; n=21) were enrolled in *CDF Freedom Schools* for the first time. Of the ten students who had attended previously, seven had attended once, two had attended twice, and one had attended four times.

### Student Satisfaction with the Program

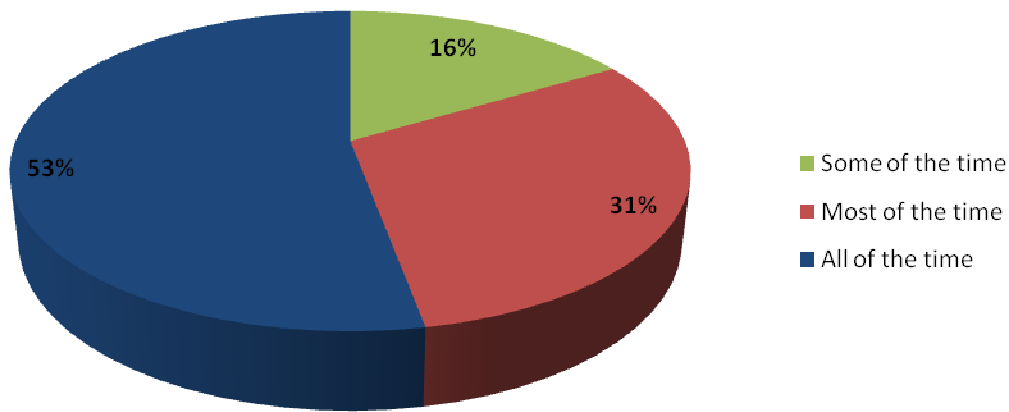
A total of 85 students across the two evaluation sites completed the End-of-Program Survey. Overall, approximately two thirds (66%; n=54) of students indicated that the Freedom Schools program was excellent; 16% (n=13) rated the program as “very good,” 13% (n=11) as “good,” and 4% (n=3) as “OK.” Only one student felt that the program was “not good at all.”

**Figure 2:** Overall Rating of Freedom Schools



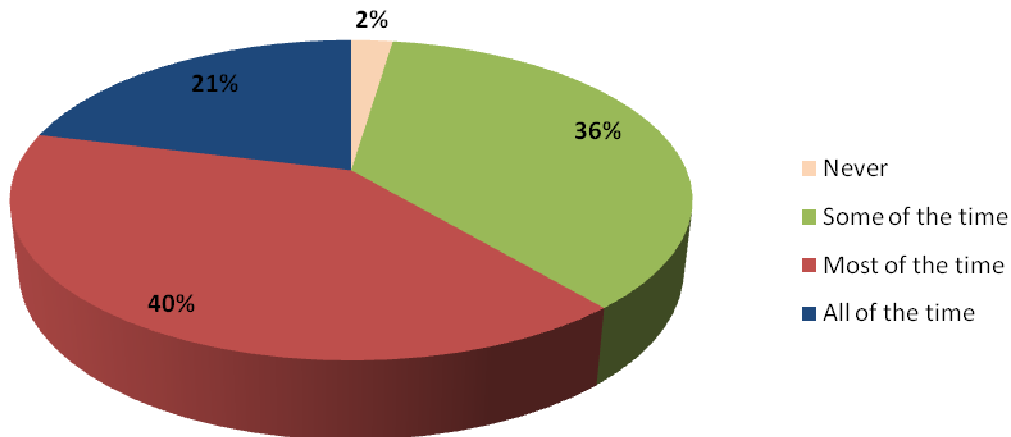
Fifty three percent (53%; n=45) of students reported that they enjoyed Freedom Schools “all of the time,” while approximately a third (31%; n=26) indicated that they enjoyed the program “most of the time.”

**Figure 3: Students' Enjoyment of Freedom Schools**



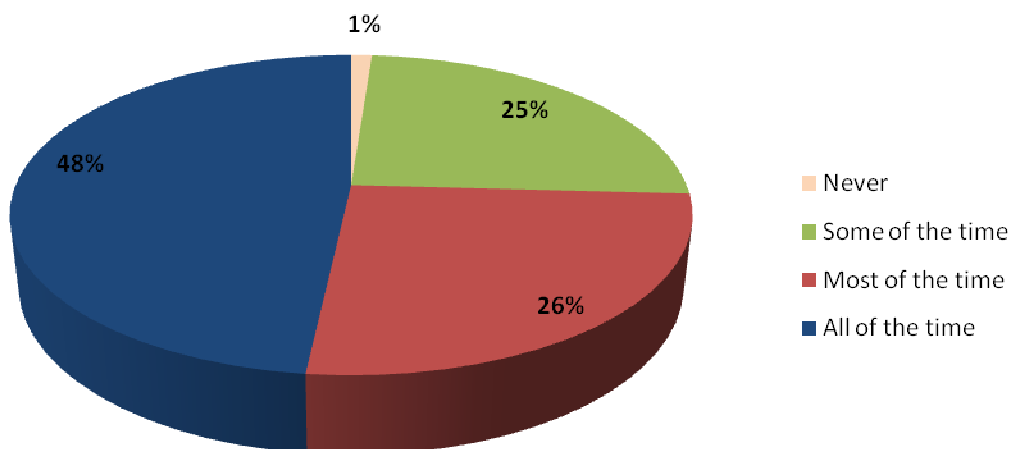
Some students felt that the staff at Freedom Schools were friendly most of the time (40%; n=34), while an almost equal proportion felt that staff members were friendly some of the time (36%; n=31).

**Figure 4: Students' Perception of Staff Friendliness**



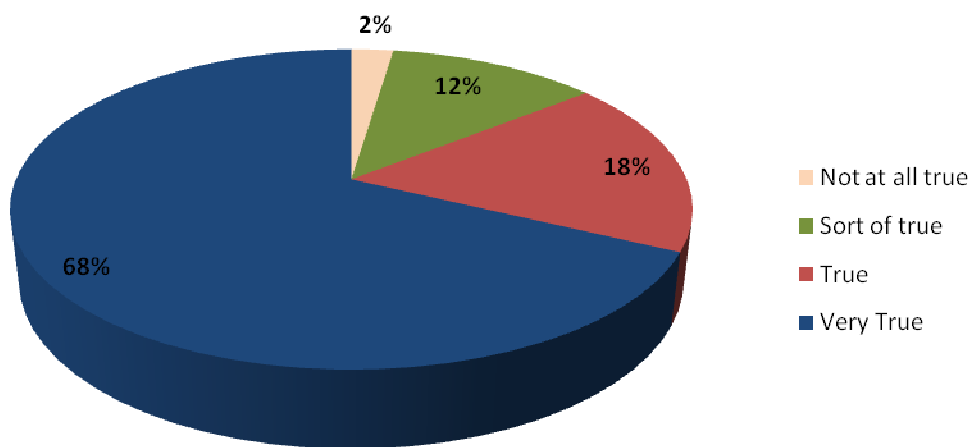
In general, students felt that the staff of Freedom Schools made them feel good about themselves, with 48% (n=41) reporting that the staff made them feel good about themselves “all of the time,” 26% (n=22) stating that staff made them feel good “most of the time,” and 25% (n=21) indicating that this happened “some of the time.”

**Figure 5:** Students' Perception of their Treatment by Staff



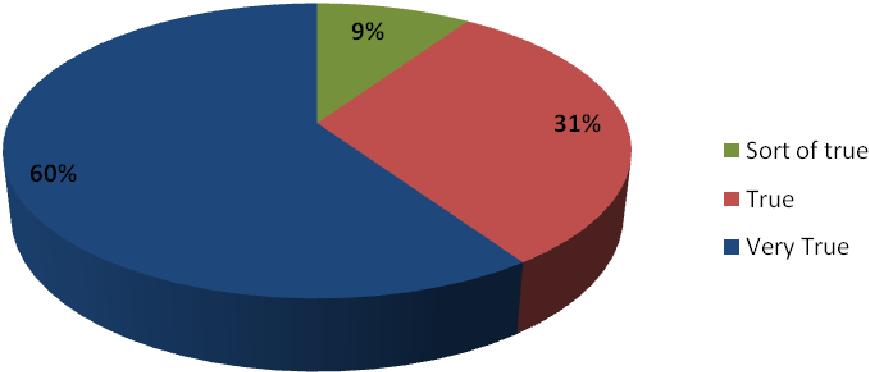
Most (68%; n=57) respondents strongly believed that the interns served as good role models.

**Figure 6:** Students' Perception of Interns as Good Role Models



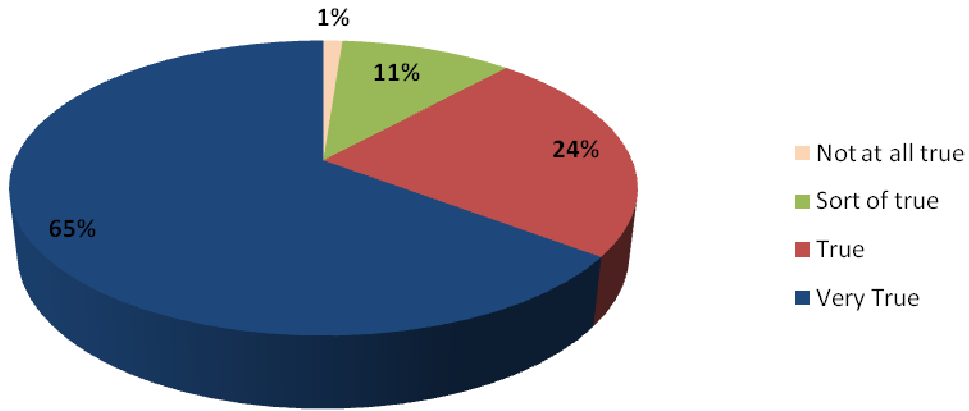
An overwhelming majority (91%; n=76) of students felt that their classroom was a good place for learning.

**Figure 7:** Students' Perceptions of Freedom Schools Classroom as a Good Place for Learning



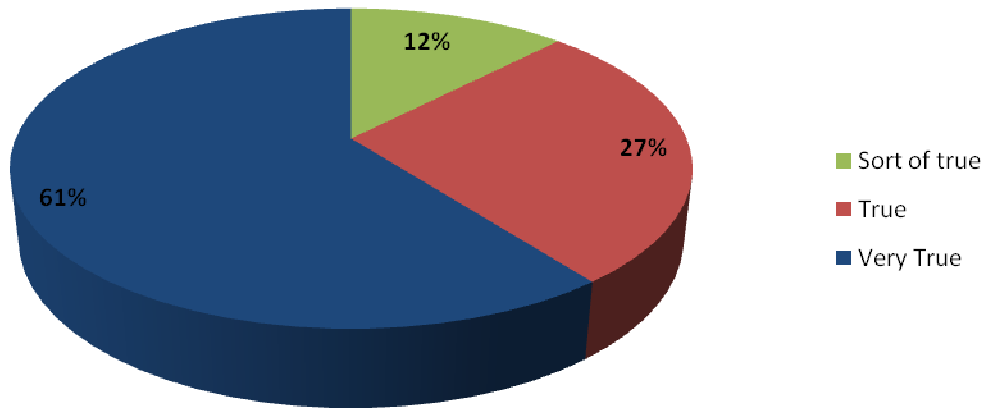
Similarly, 89% of respondents (n=75) felt that the things they learned in Freedom Schools will help them to do better in school.

**Figure 8:** Students' Perceptions of Impact of Freedom Schools on Future School Performance

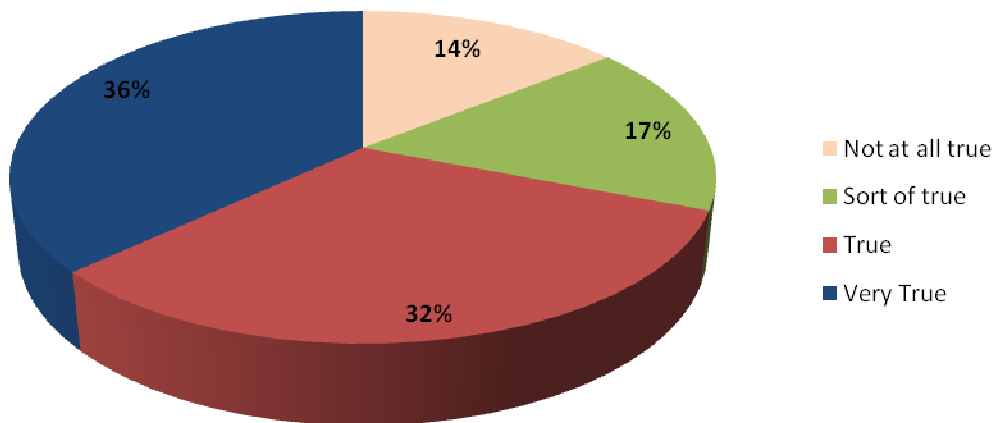


Eighty eight percent (88%; n=71) of students indicated that they would like to attend Freedom Schools next year (Figure 9), and 69% (n=58) indicated that they will tell their friends to attend the program next year (Figure 10).

**Figure 9:** Student's Desire to Attend Freedom Schools Next Year

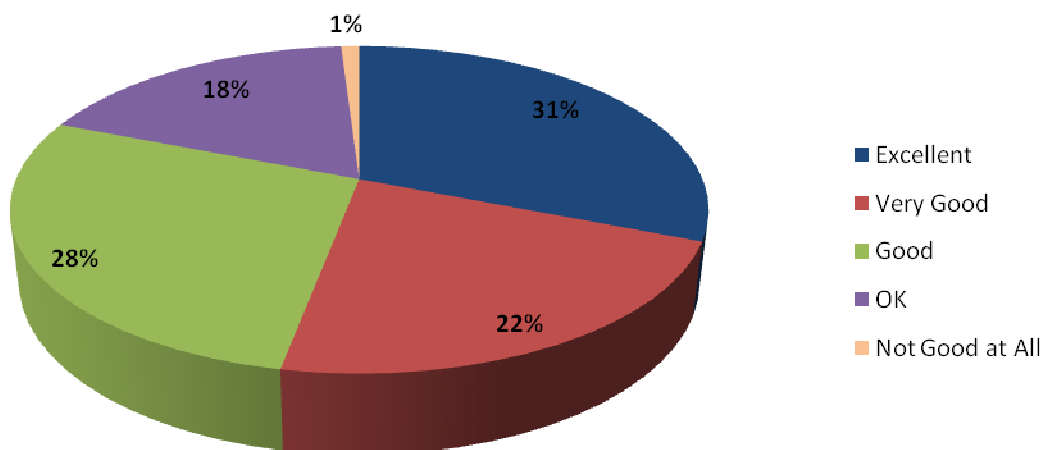


**Figure 10:** Students' Motivation to Invite Other Students to Attend Freedom Schools Next Year



Students were also asked to share their opinions about the books that they read in Freedom Schools. Almost a third (31%; n=26) rated the books as “excellent;” 22% (n=19) rated the books as “very good;” 28% (n=24) as “good;” 18% (n=15) as “ok;” and only 1% (n=1) rated the books as “not at all good.”

**Figure 11:** Students' Ratings of Freedom Schools Books



Students were also asked to rate their own reading abilities before and after participating in Freedom Schools. Students' responses were scored using a 5- point scale ranging from 1 = "not good at all" to 5 = "excellent." Results of a dependent group t-test revealed that as a group, students perceived their reading ability after completing the program (M=4.47) as significantly higher than their reading ability before Freedom Schools (M=3.86) ( $t(84)=-5.51, p=.005$ ).

Through their responses to open-ended questions, participants shared their opinions regarding aspects of the program that they liked the most and the least. Respondents were also asked to provide suggestions on how to improve future Freedom Schools. Of the 83 students who responded to the question "What did you like the most about Freedom Schools?," almost half (48%; n=40) noted the field trips. Harambee time was reported by 17 students, followed by the staff/interns (n=12), reading/books (n=11), and friends (n= 9). When asked about the aspects of the program that they did not like, 20% (n=16) of the 83 students responding indicated that they liked everything. The most frequently mentioned dislike was disharmony among students (n=17). These sentiments are captured in the following three quotes:

Student 1: *Scholars talking negatively about each other*

Student 2: *How we don't listen sometimes and have silly fights*

Student 3: *When everybody act bad sometimes and the teachers yell at us.*

Suggestions for future Freedom Schools included having more trips and activities (n=20), reducing conflict (n=10), and having more students attend the program (n= 6). Eighteen students indicated that they would not change anything.

## CONCLUSIONS

The data obtained through reading assessments of children in grades 2-5 clearly demonstrate that *CDF Freedom Schools* had a positive impact with regard to reading. It is beyond the scope of this evaluation to assign a cause for these results; we cannot know with certainty why the program helped approximately 60% of students grow in their ability to read. However, there are a number of factors that might be contributing to this positive outcome. Foremost among these is the fact that the *CDF Freedom Schools* reading curriculum is literature-based and focuses on comprehension. Students read and discuss engaging, culturally relevant books. They write in response to what they are reading and use art and other creative activities that may be more motivating and engaging than other types of reading (e.g., school reading instruction). It is probably not fair to say that the *CDF Freedom Schools* curriculum is helping students gain one, two, or three years in their ability to read. Rather, we believe *CDF Freedom Schools* may create conditions that are more motivating and engaging, using interesting books and instruction, which help students realize more of their own potential. Also, reading is a complex task that involves simultaneous cognitive, physical, and social processes. Assessment tools such as the Basic Reading Inventory are not finely tuned to capture all of this complexity or to determine a student's precise reading level. While they are useful to show change in learning over time, such as in this evaluation, such assessments tell us little about the cause of that



change. It may be that some students had good and bad days when the assessments were given, but clearly there is a pattern that emerges from this data showing that the *CDF Freedom Schools* program is a place where many students improve in their ability to read.

Unfortunately, we were unable to detect any statistically significant improvement in students' "love of reading" using the Hemingway Measure of Connectedness. However, it seems likely that a longer intervention period (i.e., beyond six weeks of summer programming) may be required to effect changes in children's connectedness to school, connectedness to reading, and overall connectedness. Alternatively, the small sample size for these analyses, along with the fact that students scored relatively high a baseline (i.e., leaving less room for improvement) may have accounted for the lack of statistically significant findings.

Overall, findings from the End-of-Program Survey were very positive. The vast majority of students not only reported a positive experience with *CDF Freedom Schools*, but students also believed that their reading had improved.

In conclusion, the results from this first pilot evaluation of Seigle Avenue Partners *CDF Freedom Schools* are extremely promising, particularly in regard to the ability of the program to enhance reading skills among inner-city children. However, it is important to note that these results should be viewed with caution given the small number of children participating in the pilot study. Future research is needed to confirm that these positive results can be replicated across a larger number of children - and program sites.