

2021 Evaluation of the Freedom School Partners in Charlotte, NC

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2021 Evaluation of Freedom School Partners in Charlotte, NC

The purpose of this report is to present the results of an external evaluation of the Freedom School Partners' Children Defense Fund program in Charlotte, NC during the summer of 2021. The evaluation is a joint effort by both the Center for Adolescent Literacies (CAL) and the Center for Educational Measurement and Evaluation (CEME). Both centers are located at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte within the College of Education. Each center has a specific role in the evaluation process, with CEME staff conducting the data collection and analysis of Scholar and Servant Leader Intern (SLI) self-reported experiences. The focus of this portion of the evaluation is on the experiences of these two populations. The survey items were first developed and piloted in 2016 in a collaborative effort by CAL, CEME, and local Freedom School staff. These items were re-evaluated during the summer of 2020, when we were unable to conduct a full data collection process due to COVID-19 regulations. The items for younger Scholars were given a more age-appropriate Likert scale and some of the items had slight wording changes to target the needs of the evaluation.

Data Collection Procedures

Procedures for Scholars

A group of evaluators were given a schedule to rotate through eight sites on four different days. The evaluators were given a general prompt to read to each group of Scholars and then a specific prompt for each age group of Scholars. The prompt included the purpose of the evaluation and general directions, such as, this survey is anonymous and only select one answer choice. The evaluators read the instructions out loud either to a large group or to small groups. Sometimes, evaluators or other Freedom School staff wrote down the responses for the young Scholars. After all Scholars at a site had completed the survey, the evaluators inputted the Likert-

response items and demographic data into SPSS Version 27 for statistical analysis and entered the open-ended responses into NVivo Version 12 for qualitative analysis.

Procedures for Servant Leader Interns

The evaluators received an email list of 74 SLIs and utilized the SurveyShare platform to distribute a survey to this population. The survey included instructions that explained the purpose of the survey, that anonymity was ensured, and disclosed the voluntary nature of the survey. The SLIs that did not respond to the survey were sent three reminders over the last two weeks of their time with Freedom Schools. The survey remained open for around two weeks, to allow SLIs time to complete it while finishing up their time with the Scholars. These data were also entered into SPSS Version 27 and NVivo Version 12.

Measures

There were four separate groups of participants in the analysis: Level 1 Scholars, Level 2 Scholars, Level 3 Scholars, and SLIs. Previous years included Level 4 Scholars, this year there were no Level 4 Scholars who attended the Freedom School Partners in Charlotte. Many Scholars that would have attended Freedom School as Level 4 Scholars attended “Camp CMS” this year. All surveys included demographic items which included race, gender, age, grade, and years of experience in Freedom School. In addition to these items, the SLIs were asked about current education plans, such as major and college attended.

The Level 1 survey had 12 items that addressed the following four categories: Reading, Agency and Future Thinking, Learning and Education, and Social Emotional/Experience. For each item, Level 1 Scholars selected from two choices: Yes, True for Me (represented with a smiley face emoji) or No, Not True for Me (represented with a frowny face emoji). Level 1 Scholars also answered five open-ended responses.

The Level 2 survey had 18 items that addressed Scholars' perceived abilities and attitudes towards Reading, Agency and Future-Thinking, Learning, Social-Emotional Skills, and Freedom School Experience. For each statement, Scholars selected "Yes, true for me" (smiley face emoji), "Maybe, sometimes true for me" (straight face emoji), or "No, not true for me" (frowny face emoji). The Level 2 survey had five open-ended questions.

The Level 3 survey had 18 Likert-scale items (1=Strongly Disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Agree; 4=Strongly Agree) that addressed the following six categories: Reading, Agency/Making a Difference, Future Thinking/Goal Setting/Optimism, Learning & Education, Social/Emotional Skills, and Freedom School Experience. This survey had eight open-ended questions.

Finally, the SLI survey had 20 Likert-scale items (1=Strongly Disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Agree; 4=Strongly Agree) and 15 open-ended questions.

Quantitative Results Level 1-3 Scholars

The following section of this report includes Scholars' self-reported demographic information. This section provides Scholars' responses to Likert-scale items. Tables for Likert-scale responses can be found in the Appendix.

Level 1 Scholar Demographics

The Level 1 survey was administered to 83 Scholars across eight Freedom School locations. Among this group of 83 Level 1 Scholars, 56 Scholars identified as African American/Black (67.4%), seven identified as Latino/Hispanic (8.4%), five identified as European/White (6.0%), 10 identified as Mixed Heritage (12.0%), one identified as Other (1.2%), and two scholars declined to respond (2.4%). These Scholars included 45 males (54.2%),

36 females (43.4%) and one Scholar who declined to respond (1.2%). The average age was 6.7 years old, ranging from four years to nine years old.

The majority of Scholars were students who just completed first grade ($n = 34$; 41.0%), followed by students who completed second grade ($n = 24$; 28.9%), 20 students who completed pre-K/kindergarten (24.1%), and three students who completed third grade (3.6%). Scholars reported they attended Freedom Schools for one to four years with an average of one year ($M = 1.3$, $SD = 0.6$). The breakdown of the 83 Scholars by site were as follows: 10 Scholars attended Shalom Park (12.0%), five Scholars attended Christ Lutheran Church (6.0%), 16 Scholars attended The Grove Presbyterian Church (19.3%), nine Scholars attended Martin Luther King, Jr. Middle School (10.8%), 11 Scholars attended Marie G. Davis Middle School International Baccalaureate (13.3%), eight Scholars attended University City United Methodist Church (9.6%), 10 Scholars attended QCFT at St. John's Baptist (12.0%), and 14 Scholars attended Charlotte Lab School (16.9%). A summary of the demographic variables for Level 1 Scholars are reported in Tables 1 and 2 (see Appendix).

Level 1 Learning, Future-Thinking, and Experience

Reading Behavior. Level 1 Scholars responded to three items about reading behavior. Most Scholars reported they agreed that since being at Freedom School, they were better readers ($n = 66$; 80.0%), they enjoyed reading more ($n = 70$; 84.3%), and they planned on spending more time reading ($n = 63$; 75.9%).

Agency and Future-Thinking. Two items are categorized into Agency and Future Thinking. Most Scholars reported they wanted to make a difference in their school and community where they live ($n = 69$; 83.1%) and believed their future was important to them ($n = 77$; 92.8%).

Learning and Education. Three items are categorized into Learning and Education.

Most Scholars reported that since being a part of Freedom School, they believed they would be a better student in school this year ($n = 77$; 92.8%), they reported that they felt comfortable asking for help from a teacher when they needed it ($n = 72$; 86.7%), and they knew that they want to go to college ($n = 70$; 84.3%).

Social-Emotional Skills and Freedom School Experience. Two items are categorized into Social-Emotional Skills. In this category, Scholars reported high agreement with the statement that they know how to ask for help when they must deal with problems or have conflicts with someone ($n = 79$; 95.2%). Most Scholars also agreed that they knew how to work well with others ($n = 73$; 88.0%). Scholars responded to two items in the category of Freedom School Experience. In this area, most Scholars agreed they have enjoyed Freedom School this summer ($n = 75$; 90.4%) and want to return to Freedom School again next summer ($n = 72$; 86.7%). These results are reported in Table 3 (see Appendix).

Level 2 Scholar Demographics

The Level 2 survey was administered to 89 Scholars across eight Freedom School locations. Of the Level 2 Scholars completing the survey, 63 identified as African American/Black (71.6%), 15 identified as Latino/Hispanic (17%), three identified as European/White (3.4%), two identified as Asian American (2.3%), one identified as Native American/American Indian (1.1%), four identified as Mixed Heritage (4.5%), and none identified as Other (0.0%). Of the Level 2 Scholars surveyed, 47.2% identified as Male, 49.4% identified as female, and 3.4% declined to provide an answer. Level 2 Scholars disclosed that they most recently finished grades two through five, with most Scholars having just completed fourth grade ($n = 33$; 37.1%), followed by third grade ($n=32$; 36.0%), and fifth ($n = 21$; 23.6%)

grade. The mean age of a Level 2 Scholar was 9.7 years ($SD = 0.9$). The mean years of Freedom School attendance for a Level 2 Scholar was 1.9 years ($SD = 1.1$). Level 2 Scholars attended programs across all eight locations surveyed. Fourteen scholars attended Freedom School at Shalom Park (15.7%), seven Scholars attended Christ Lutheran Church (7.9%), 13 Scholars attended The Grove Presbyterian Church (14.6%), nine Scholars attended Martin Luther King, Jr. Middle School (10.1%), five Scholars attended Marie G. Davis International Baccalaureate (6.7%), 15 Scholars attended University City United Methodist Church (16.9%), nine Scholars attended QCFT at St. John's Baptist (10.1%), and 16 Scholars attended Charlotte Lab School (18.0%). These results are reported in Tables 4 and 5 (see Appendix).

Level 2 Learning, Future-Thinking, and Experience

Reading. Scholars responded to three statements about reading behavior and attitudes toward reading. In response to the statement, "Since being at Freedom School, I am a better reader"; 44 Scholars (49.4%) responded "Yes, true for me", 35 Scholars (39.3%) responded "Maybe, sometimes true for me", and 10 Scholars (11.2%) "No, not true for me." In response to the statement, "Since being at Freedom School, I enjoy reading more"; 44 Scholars (49.4%) responded "Yes, true for me", 30 Scholars (33.7%) said "Maybe, sometimes true for me", and 15 Scholars responded "No, not true for me." Finally, in response to the statement, "Since being a part of Freedom School, I plan on spending more time reading", 28 Scholars (31.5%) responded "Yes, true for me", 37 Scholars (41.5%) said "Maybe, sometimes true for me", and 22 Scholars (24.7%) said "No, not true for me."

Agency and Making a Difference. Level 2 Scholars responded to three items on the topics of Agency and Making a Difference. Most Scholars felt good about who they were. In response to the statement, "Since being a part of Freedom School, I feel good about who I am",

59 Scholars (66.3%) responded “Yes, true for me”, 24 Scholars (27.0%) responded “Maybe, sometimes true for me”, and six Scholars (6.7%) said “No, not true for me.” Most Scholars also felt prouder of their race and community since being a part of Freedom School. In response to the statement, “Since being a part of Freedom School, I am more proud of my race”, 71 Scholars (79.8%) responded “Yes, true for me”, 10 Scholars (11.2%) responded “Maybe, sometimes true for me”, and eight Scholars (9.0%) responded “No, not true for me.” In response to the last statement, “Since being a part of Freedom School, I am more proud of my community”, 59 Scholars (66.3%) responded “Yes, true for me”, 25 Scholars (28.1%) said “Maybe, sometimes true for me”, and five Scholars (5.6%) responded “No, not true for me.”

Future-Thinking and Goal Setting. Level 2 Scholars responded to two items pertaining to their future. Most Scholars felt more positively about their future after being a part of Freedom School. In response to the statement, “Since being a part of Freedom School, I feel better about my future”, 52 Scholars (58.4%) responded “Yes, true for me”, 27 Scholars (30.3%) responded “Maybe, sometimes true for me”, and 10 Scholars (11.2%) said “No, not true for me.” Most Scholars also indicated that they had plans for their future. In response to the statement, “Since being a part of Freedom School, I have plans for what I want to do when I am an adult”, 54 Scholars (60.7%) said “Yes, true for me”, 16 Scholars responded “Maybe, sometimes true for me”, and 19 Scholars (21.4%) responded “No, not true for me.”

Learning and Education. Level 2 Scholars responded to four items regarding topics related to learning and education. For each item, most Scholars responded positively to prompts about their commitment to learning and the pursuit of education. In response to the statement, “Since being a part of Freedom School, I think I will be a better student in school this year”, 61 Scholars (68.5%) answered “Yes, true for me”, 19 Scholars responded “Maybe, sometimes true

for me”, and nine Scholars responded “No, not true for me.” In response to the statement, “Since being a part of Freedom School, I feel comfortable asking for help from a teacher when I need it”, 58 Scholars (65.9%) responded “Yes, true for me”, 26 Scholars (29.6%) answered “Maybe, sometimes true for me”, and four Scholars (4.6%) responded “No, not true for me.” In response to the statement, “Since being a part of Freedom School, I will stay in school and graduate from high school”, 69 Scholars (78.4%) responded “Yes, true for me”, 14 Scholars (15.7%) answered “Maybe, sometimes true for me”, and five Scholars (5.6%) responded “No, not true for me.” Finally, in response to the statement, “Since being a part of Freedom School, I know that I want to go to college”, 59 Scholars (66.3%) responded “Yes, true for me”, 22 Scholars (24.7%) responded “Maybe, sometimes true for me”, and eight Scholars (9.0%) responded “No, not true for me.”

Social-Emotional Skills. Level 2 Scholars responded to four items regarding perceived growth in the area of social-emotional learning. Most Scholars felt comfortable solving conflicts with adults and asking for help when handling conflicts with others. More Scholars responded positively to items regarding adult relationships than conflicts and interactions with peers. In response to the statement, “Since being a part of Freedom School, I know how to better resolve conflicts or problems with other students”, 35 Scholars (39.8%) responded “Yes, true for me”, 42 Scholars (47.7%) answered “Maybe, sometimes true for me”, and 11 Scholars (12.5%) responded “No, not true for me.” In response to the statement, “Since being a part of Freedom School, I know how to resolve problems or conflicts with adults”, 46 Scholars (51.7%) answered “Yes, true for me”, 26 Scholars (29.2%) responded “Maybe, sometimes true for me”, and 17 Scholars (19.1%) answered “No, not true for me.” In response to the item, “Since being a part of Freedom School, I know how to ask for help in dealing with social problems or conflicts with

others”, 50 Scholars (56.8%) responded “Yes, true for me”, 25 Scholars (28.4%) responded “Maybe, sometimes true for me”, and 13 Scholars (14.8%) answered “No, not true for me.” Finally, in response to the statement, “Since being a part of Freedom School, I know how to work well with others”, 43 Scholars (49.4%) responded “Yes, true for me”, 37 Scholars (42.5%) answered “Maybe, sometimes true for me”, and seven Scholars (8.0%) responded “No, not true for me.”

Freedom School Experience. Level 2 Scholars responded to two items about their experience at Freedom School this summer. Most Scholars responded positively to both items, indicating that they enjoyed Freedom School and would like to return next summer. In response to the statement, “I have enjoyed Freedom School this summer”, 71 Scholars (79.8%) responded “Yes, true for me”, 17 Scholars (19.1%) answered “Maybe, sometimes true for me”, and one Scholar (1.1%) responded “No, not true for me.” In response to the statement, “I want to do Freedom School again next summer”, 62 Scholars (69.7%) responded “Yes, true for me”, 19 Scholars (21.3%) answered “Maybe, sometimes true for me”, and eight Scholars (9.0%) responded “No, not true for me.” Level 2 Scholars’ survey results are reported in Table 6 (see Appendix).

Level 3 Scholar Demographics

The Level 3 survey was administered to 58 Scholars across seven Freedom School locations. Within this group, 35 identified as African American/Black (61.4%), eight as Latino/Hispanic (14.0%), nine identified as Mixed Heritage (15.8%), two identified as European American/White (3.5%), one identified as Native American/American Indian (1.8%), one identified as Asian American (1.8%), and one identified as Other (1.8%). When asked to report gender, 27 scholars identified as Male (47.4%), 26 identified as Female (45.6%), and four

identified as Other (7.0%). The average age of Level 3 Scholars was 12.6 years old ($SD = 1.1$), with ages ranging from 11 to 15 years old.

Most Level 3 Scholars were students who completed 6th grade ($n = 32$; 56.1%), followed by students who completed 8th grade ($n = 15$; 26.3%), eight students had completed 7th grade (14.0%), and two students had completed 5th grade (3.5%). Scholars reported they attended Freedom Schools for a range of one to seven years with an average of three years ($M = 3.2$; $SD = 2.2$). The breakdown of the 58 Level 3 Scholars by sites were as follows: 11 attended Christ Lutheran Church (19.0%), nine Scholars attended The Grove Presbyterian Church (15.5%), 18 Scholars attended Martin Luther King, Jr. Middle School (31.0%), five Scholars attended Marie G. Davis Middle School International Baccalaureate (8.6%), six Scholars attended University City United Methodist Church (10.3%), one Scholar attended QCFT at St. John's Baptist, and eight Scholars attended Charlotte Lab School (13.8%). A summary of the demographic variables for Level 3 Scholars are reported in Tables 7 and 8.

Level 3 Learning, Future-Thinking, and Experience

Reading. Three items came from the Reading category. Most Scholars reported they agreed or strongly agreed that being at Freedom School made them a better reader ($n = 51$; 87.9%), they enjoy reading more because of their experience at Freedom School ($n = 40$; 69.0%), and they plan on spending more time reading ($n = 31$; 53.4%).

Agency, Making a Difference, and Goal Setting. Five items were categorized into Agency/Making A Difference and Future Thinking/Goal Setting/Optimism. Most Scholars reported that they feel good about who they are ($n = 51$; 87.9%), are prouder of their race ($n = 52$; 89.7%), and are prouder of their community ($n = 46$; 79.3%) because of Freedom School.

Most Scholars reported that they feel better about their future ($n = 49$; 84.5%) and have plans for what they want to do when they are an adult ($n = 47$; 81.0%) because of Freedom School.

Learning and Education. Four items were categorized into Learning and Education. Most Scholars reported that they feel that they will be a better student next year ($n = 51$; 87.9%) and that they feel comfortable asking for help from a teacher when needed ($n = 47$; 81.0%). Most Scholars also reported wanting to stay in school and graduate from high school ($n = 53$; 91.4%) and that they wanted to go to college ($n = 49$; 84.5%).

Social Emotional Skills and Freedom School Experience. Six items were categorized into Social/Emotional Skills and Freedom School Experience. Most Scholars reported they know how to better resolve conflicts or problems with other students ($n = 42$; 72.4%), they know how to resolve conflicts or problems with adults ($n = 40$; 69.0%), they know how to ask for help in dealing with social problems or conflicts with others ($n = 44$; 75.9%), and they know how to work well with others ($n = 51$; 87.9%) because of their time in Freedom School. In regard to the Freedom School experience, the majority of scholars reported they enjoyed Freedom School this summer ($n = 54$; 93.1%) and reported they wanted to do Freedom School again next year ($n = 48$; 82.8%). Level 2 Scholars' survey results are reported in Table 9 (see Appendix).

Level 1 Open-Ended Item Response Results

Future Plans

All Level 1 Scholars responded to a question about their plans for college, jobs, and/or career after high school. Overall, there were 11 categories of responses to the question: 10 career areas and one regarding their education after high school. Nine Scholars reported wanting to go to college one day. The most selected category mentioned aspiring to future jobs and careers as community helpers. Several Scholars listed the specific jobs of police officer, teacher, and

builder. One Scholar answered, “I want to help teachers and help kids.” Two scholars mentioned wanting to work at Freedom School when they are older.

Twelve Scholars mentioned science and healthcare fields as plans for jobs and careers after high school. Some Scholars listed scientist or doctor, others were more specific and expressed a desire to be a robotic engineer, zookeeper, astronaut, and veterinarian. Scholars mentioned wanting to work in art-related professions. Specific jobs in this area were fashion designer, artist, and make-up stylist. Retail and food service jobs were mentioned as plans for some Scholars. Several responses involved athletics: basketball coach, gymnastics, Ninja master, and wrestler. Two Scholars wrote they wanted “to be a YouTuber.” They also mentioned other entertainment or influencer careers musician, TV director, and singer.

Reading

Scholars were asked to describe what they learned from the books that they read and discussed in Freedom School this summer. Four themes were developed from the analysis: character development, learning about a topic, Black history, and specific details from a book.

Character Development. Many Level 1 Scholars tied lessons or different morals learned from a text to something they can apply to their own lives. They included statements like, “actions speak louder than words”, “work first then play”, “treat people the way you want to be treated”, and “never give up.” Many Scholars mentioned ideas about bullying, helping others, treating others with kindness, and doing their best.

Learning. Another common area addressed in what Scholars learned from books was specific to new skills they learned as a result of reading in Freedom School. Scholars responded they learned more about how to draw, how to go to college, how to spell better, and math.

Black History and Current Events. Scholars mentioned reading books about topics like slavery, discrimination, Civil Rights, and skin color. Specifically, Scholars reported learning “in the south, Black people were treated bad” and “slaves left their families.” Several Scholars mentioned details about Joe Biden’s childhood. One Scholar wrote about Katherine Johnson, an African-American NASA mathematician who helped put the United States on the moon.

Book Details. Level 1 Scholars named titles of books and specific details from books as things they learned while reading this summer in Freedom School. Scholars mentioned details about animals, historical figures, and specific characters or events from books they read. The specific book titles listed included, *Go Dog Go* by P.D. Eastman, *Mighty Robot* by Dave Pilkey, and *Juice Box Bully* by Maria Dismondy.

Agency and Making a Difference

Level 1 Scholars were asked how they can make a difference in their community. After the responses were coded and grouped, three major themes emerged: environmental responsibilities, taking action, and helping others.

Environmental Responsibilities. Scholars noted specific actions that they could take to help the environment and take care of Earth. Most of these comments were about recycling, picking up trash, and cleaning up after yourself or others. Several Scholars discussed growing their own gardens and adding neighborhood gardens.

Take Action. The group of Level 1 Scholars listed specific actions they could take to help their community. Some ideas included giving hugs, being kind, not bullying, and making others feel welcome. Scholars had ideas to make additions to their community in the form of new playgrounds, neighborhood pools, and creating space for fields to play in and parks.

Helping Others. Some comments from Scholars were more specific ways they can directly help others in their community. Several statements were about helping homeless people by giving them food or money. Other comments were about helping people learn new skills and understand the law.

Improving Freedom Schools

The Level 1 Scholars were asked how Freedom Schools could be improved or made better for them. The themes that emerged were behavior modifications, activities, and resources.

Behavior Modifications. Comments from Scholars about improvements to the Freedom Schools program were often about behaviors of other Scholars and rules specific to their classrooms or sites. Two Scholars mentioned their Freedom School experience would be better if they did not have to earn their recess each day. Other Scholars mentioned more general behavior modifications such as, “being good”, “scholars be[ing] nice[r]”, “listen to teachers the first time”, and “using nice words.”

Activities. Scholars mentioned several activities they would like to have more of or add to their routines at Freedom School. Scholars described wanting to have more projects, watch more movies, more slides, more games, and more water activities. Other responses were more general and said, “it could be better” or “have more fun.”

Resources. Many of the Scholars commented about the food choices during Freedom School. Some Scholars wanted healthier food choices and others wanted more specific items like “cupcakes”, “smoothies”, and “pizza.” Two Level 1 Scholars would like to be able to bring phones to Freedom School and use iPads. Other suggestions included adding more classmates, more teachers, and adding new levels to serve more Scholars.

Level 2 Open-Ended Item Response Results

Level 2 Scholars responded to a total of five open ended questions that asked about their experience at Freedom School. Scholars were asked about their future career goals, what they've learned from the books they read this summer, how to make a difference in their community, and any ways to improve the Freedom School program. There is also a final open-ended question for any additional comments that the Scholars may want to report. A total of 89 Level 2 Scholars were asked to describe what they have learned from the books they read this summer.

Reading

Books. The scholars mentioned several books that they had been exposed to this summer during their time at Freedom School. This includes two scholars mentioning *Sadoko and the One Thousand Paper Cranes* by Eleanor Coerr, and one Scholar each mentioned *Juice Box Bully* by Maria Dismondy, *William Still & his Freedom Stories* by Don Tate, and *Home to Medicine Mountain* by Chiori Santiago.

Lessons Learned. The Scholars mentioned learning how to help their community, to be kind to others, and to be aware of what is happening in the community around you. Several Scholars mentioned the importance of character development, such as speaking up for yourself, not bullying, and some mentioned being inspired. One Scholar mentioned the importance of treating others the way you would want to be treated, another mentioned standing up for others.

Historical and Current Events. Several scholars mentioned influential figures, like Harriet Tubman, William Still, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Simone Biles, and Serena Williams. The Scholars also mentioned learning of the impact of our current President and Vice President, Joe Biden and Kamala Harris. The scholars mentioned specific historical events as well, such as racism, Black awareness, and equal rights.

Reading Behavior. The Scholars mentioned the need to be a better student, to learn to read, and that books are good. One scholar stated, “I am a good reader because of Freedom School.”

Making a Difference

Acts of Service. The Scholars mentioned two main ways that they demonstrate acts of service: by cleaning up the Earth and recycling. Scholars mentioned things like telling people not to litter, picking up trash, stopping water pollution, and to stop cutting down trees. Two Scholars mentioned the importance of recycling.

Activism. The Scholars mentioned three main ways that they demonstrate activism helping others, taking action and modeling, and speaking up. Scholars mentioned things like donating or selling food to those less fortunate and helping with groceries. The Scholars mentioned how to help certain populations through helping others, helping people in need, helping a church, or their families. One Scholar mentioned the importance of donating to foundations. Scholars mentioned how to take action by spreading kindness and being nice to other people. One Scholar mentioned hosting a neighborhood cookout, another mentioned helping people understand other people’s feelings. Five scholars mentioned the importance of speaking up for yourself and others by telling an adult if something happens, ask others to not bully, and through holding others accountable for their actions.

Behavior. Some of the behaviors that Scholars mentioned are above, such as helping others or standing up for others. Four Scholars also discussed the importance of stopping gun violence, fighting, and violence.

Future Plans

The Scholars were asked to share their plans for college, jobs and/or careers after high school. As expected, Scholars responded with a wide variety of interests and goals.

Education. A total of 24 scholars mentioned specific educational programs or settings they would like to attend. Several mentioned the desire to go to college and mentioned such universities as University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Howard University, and Morehouse College. Some Scholars mentioned the need to make good grades and indicated the importance of trying to get a scholarship to help pay for college.

Career/Job Goals. There was a wide range of career or job goals for these Scholars including creative arts, business, community helpers, cosmetology, education, food service, health care, influencers, professional sports, retail and STEM careers. The creative arts careers included things like an artist, painter, or designer. Two Scholars mentioned their desire to work in real estate, another mentioned being a CEO, and another mentioned working at a bank. Several Scholars mentioned being a police officer, lawyer, or having an animal sanctuary. Several more Scholars mentioned being a chef or working at a restaurant. A total of 10 Scholars mentioned wanting to be a doctor, vet, or pediatrician. An additional 10 Scholars expressed interest in being an influencer on YouTube, a gamer, or to have their own show. A total of 15 Scholars expressed interested in being a professional athlete including football, martial arts, basketball, and gymnastics. Finally, in the STEM careers, scholars mentioned being an engineer, an astronaut, an architect, and a paleontologist.

Other Life Goals. While most Scholars discussed their desire to have a career, others mentioned different life goals. Some mentioned they were not sure what they wanted to do when they were adults, and some indicated the need to earn money to help their family or to move out on their own.

Ideas for Improvement

The Scholars were asked how Freedom School could be made better for them. These ideas could be categorized further into Procedures or Rules that Scholars would like to have implemented, specific content that Scholars would like to have received, and other suggestions regarding food, water bottles, and extracurricular activities. Several Scholars mentioned the need for no bullying, no fighting, and for others to be kind. One Scholar suggested they should be allowed to design their classroom. Several Scholars emphasized the desire for more content areas in subjects like math and reading. It was also mentioned that they could always learn more. Some Scholars reported that they would like to receive better food choices. Finally, there were additional activities mentioned like going to the pool, more recess, and allowing for more water play activities (we note that offsite activities that have consistently been a part of the Freedom School program—fieldtrips, going to water parks, skating rinks or pools to swim—were cut in 2021 due to COVID-19 precautions).

Additional Comments.

All Scholars are encouraged to give additional feedback regarding the program on the last item. Most of these comments include statements like “I have enjoyed being here” and “Freedom School is really fun.” There were some responses that were more concerning, like “there is a lot of fighting” and “I don’t like being bullied.” Some Scholars mentioned their personal or academic growth by saying “they helped me grow” and “I enjoy making friends and talking about information that I didn’t know.” Finally, one Scholar stated how they hope they can come back next year, and another stated they’d like to work here one day.

Level 3 Open-Ended Item Response Results

Reading

Level 3 Scholars were asked to discuss what they learned from the books that they read and discussed in Freedom School over the summer. Four themes emerged from Scholars' responses, including Books, Lessons Learned, Historical and Current Events, and Reading Behavior.

Books. Scholars discussed several book titles throughout their responses, including, *Pinned* by Sharon Flake, *Bang* by Barry Lyga, *I am Me* by Karla Kuskin, and the *March* series by John Lewis, Andrew Aydin, and Nate Powell. One Scholar mentioned that the books that they read were “good deep books.”

Lessons Learned. Many Scholars discussed the lessons that they learned by reading and discussing books in Freedom School. Scholars responded with lessons such as, violence isn't the answer, people go through different things and you can't judge others, being angry doesn't get you anywhere, and fight for what you believe in. One Scholar said, “I learned from the book *March* not to discriminate [against] people because of their skin color.” Several scholars also mentioned that they learned that they could make a difference in themselves, their families, and communities.

Historical and Current Events. Level 3 Scholars disclosed that they remember learning about Black history, Black rights (or human rights in general), the Civil Rights Movement, the Birmingham Church Bombing, and other historical events. Several Scholars also mentioned discussing and learning about the Black Lives Matter Movement. One Scholar enjoyed learning about their history and hopes to learn more about history in the future.

Reading Behavior. Many Scholars responded that they improved as readers as a result of attending Freedom School and reading and discussing new books. Several Scholars mentioned that they improved their skills and confidence in reading aloud. A couple of Scholars discussed

that they found a new or rekindled love for reading. One Scholar wrote “Freedom School has been really fun! I already loved books, but Freedom School has rekindled that flame.” Another Scholar said that they had a larger vocabulary as a result of Freedom School. One Scholar responded, “In the area of reading, I’ve gotten better, more open. I only read certain books. Not anymore.” And finally, some Scholars mentioned that they were able to read chapter books more quickly than before.

Making a Difference

Level 3 Scholars responded to one question about how they could make a difference in their communities. The following themes emerged from Level 3 Scholars’ ideas about making a difference and include acts of service, activism, and positive behavior.

Acts of Service. Most Level 3 Scholars discussed various acts of service to improve their communities. Scholars discussed environmental acts of service such as planting more trees, not littering, cleaning up, and picking up trash. Other Scholars addressed acts of service involving people, including helping the homeless, providing food and clothing to people in need, and donating items no longer needed. One Scholar suggested helping younger students at their school with sight words. Several other Scholars suggested more general acts of service, such as volunteering, charity, and community service.

Activism. Many Level 3 Scholars provided responses that fit into the category of activism. Scholars suggested that they could stop bullying, speak up for others, and tell others to be nice and kind. Another Scholar suggested that they could teach others to be leaders and show them how to be kind to others. One Scholar suggested that they could ask for more community events that brought people together and gave them something to do in the community. Finally, one Scholar mentioned that they could improve their community by stopping racism.

Positive Behavior. Many Level 3 Scholars also discussed their own behavior as a means to improve their communities. Many Scholars suggested that they could stop bullying and promote kindness. Several Scholars discussed the idea of speaking out or speaking up for others. One Scholar said that they could be a role model for younger students. Several Scholars discussed ideas involving working hard, getting good grades, being respectful in school, and doing well in school to improve their communities. One Scholar said that they could improve their community by “being a leader and showing other people how to lead and be kind and nice to others.” This quote exemplifies what many Scholars learned, which was to set a good example for others and lead the way to positive change.

Future Plans

Level 3 Scholars were asked to share their career and/or job goals and other plans for themselves as adults. Scholars responded with a wide range of aspirations and the themes include: Education, Career/Job Goals, and Other Life Goals.

Education. Many scholars discussed the role of education in their future plans. Some Scholars mentioned finishing school and attending college. One Scholar stated that they would like to attend cosmetology school. While another Scholar said that they would like to attend college for a while and then become an architect. Several Scholars mentioned wanting to get good grades and do well in school. One Scholar said, “I want to be a lawyer like my gramps and my dream college is University of North Carolina at Charlotte or North Carolina State.” While another scholar wished to study two majors while in college.

Career/Job Goals. Most scholars listed a job or career that they hoped to pursue as an adult. Scholars listed jobs in the following fields: healthcare, STEM, the Arts, teaching, professional sports, entrepreneurship, and law. Scholars who wanted to go into health

care mentioned becoming a pediatrician, veterinarian, physical therapist, and doctor. Many Scholars showed interest in a career in STEM. Jobs of interest included computer coder, engineer, programmer, computer engineer, chemist, biologist, inventor, and computer scientist. Many Scholars were also interested in careers within the Arts, including, cosmetologist, nail technician, theater, artist, photographer, singer, interior designer, animator, designer, and actor. One student mentioned wanting to become a teacher and another wanted to be a majorette coach. Scholars wrote that they would like to pursue the following sports careers: tennis player, volleyball player, dance teacher, basketball player, NBA player, or NFL player. Several students expressed interest in taking on an entrepreneurial role and owning their own businesses. And finally, a couple of scholars hoped to attend college and become lawyers.

Other Life Goals. In addition to the education and career plan goals laid out above, several students discussed other life goals. A couple of students mentioned that they would like to travel as adults. Several other Scholars also stated that they would like to buy houses, pay their bills, help others, and have good lives. One student specifically said, “I’m going to get a house, a job, pay the bills and live a good life.”

Learning and Education

All Level 3 Scholars were asked to describe how Freedom School would help them to be more successful during the upcoming school year. The following themes emerged from Scholars' responses: Study Skills, Setting Goals, Positive Feelings, Content Knowledge, and Social-Emotional Skills.

Study Skills. Most Level 3 Scholars discussed how Freedom School has helped them to develop and strengthen their study skills. Many Scholars responded specifically about improved reading skills, including reading aloud more confidently, reading better, synthesizing text, reading more, comprehending texts, and answering questions. Some Scholars also talked more generally about newly acquired skills, such as, keeping up with the workload and asking for help or asking questions.

Work Ethic. A couple of Scholars specifically addressed an improved work ethic. These Scholars discussed that they now have more positive feelings about high school and want to persevere and finish school. One Scholar said, “well with high school, I wasn't sure about it but then they explained how good high school was and how I can get help in school.” Another Scholar would like to try harder in school this year. Finally, one Scholar said that Freedom School helped them to keep up with a larger workload that they hope to maintain in the upcoming school year.

Content Knowledge. A couple of Scholars stated that they had greater content knowledge as a result of being enrolled in Freedom School. Scholars felt more prepared to handle the content in History and ELA classes this coming school year.

Social Emotional Skills. Some Scholars responded to this question and focused on social-emotional learning and how it would help them in the coming school year. Scholars mentioned that they had opportunities to make friends. They also discussed how Freedom School provided them with an opportunity to rejoin society after a disruptive year of pandemic learning and improve their mental state. One Scholar said, “it made me feel good about school and it made me feel that I can be anything I want.”

Social-Emotional Skills

Level 3 Scholars were asked to share how their work with others had changed since being a part of Freedom School. The following themes emerged: Confidence, Cooperation, Group Study Skills, and No Difference.

Confidence. Scholars provided responses that demonstrated how they felt more confident in their social skills in the upcoming school year. Several Scholars stated that they found it easier to talk to others, start conversations, and felt greater comfort overall. One Scholar stated, “I have gotten closer with people and shown my true colors.” Showing one’s true colors or true self was a common experience for Freedom School Scholars.

Cooperation. Another theme that emerged was cooperation. Scholars said that their experiences improved their ability to work in groups, to have better communication with others, to not worry about fighting, and to balance speaking and listening. One Scholar said, “I try to be less bossy, and I let them speak more” while other scholars said, “I talk a little bit more” and “I learn[ed] to talk.” Scholars commonly addressed their role in speaking up or listening more while giving other students the chance to speak more frequently.

Group Study Skills. Some Scholars provided answers regarding study skills in the context of group work or working with others. Scholars responded stating that they stay on task more often, put forth more effort, display greater concentration, and ask questions when they need clarification. Scholars also discussed partner roles and how their perceptions of balancing work have changed. One Scholar said, “I used to do the work on my own but now I hold my partner accountable for their work and I don't get angry with them.”

No Difference. Finally, some Scholars indicated that there was no change in their work with others since being a part of Freedom School. Most Scholars who responded this way clarified that they already worked well with others. There was one Level 3 Scholar who

indicated that they worked poorly with others prior to Freedom School and felt as though that had not changed as a result of their time at Freedom School.

Enjoyable Parts of Freedom School

Level 3 Scholars were asked what they liked about Freedom School. Scholars responded in many ways. The following themes emerged: People, Challenging Work, Positive Feelings, and Freedom School Content/Activities.

People. Many Scholars stated that they enjoyed the people at Freedom School. Responses indicated that Scholars liked the Freedom School teachers, interns, and staff and said that they were funny, kind, cool, and made Freedom School fun. One Scholar said, “The Interns are nice and help us learn”, while another Scholar said, “I like the teachers and how cool they are.” Scholars also enjoyed spending time with friends, different people, and people who were like them. One Scholar said, “I liked being able to interact with other people” and another Scholar said that they liked that there were “a lot of people who understand me and have the same personality.”

Challenging Work. Scholars indicated that they enjoyed being challenged at Freedom School. Scholars said that they enjoyed mentally challenging work, being challenged in general, learning new things each day, becoming better readers, and growing/learning. One Scholar said, “we do fun things and we learn new things every day.”

Positive Feelings. Some Scholars enjoyed Freedom School because being there made them feel good. Scholars enjoyed meeting and interacting with people that were just like them. Scholars also enjoyed that they could just be themselves and they never felt judged by others. One Scholar said, “I liked that everyone here is just like me and never judge[s] me.”

Freedom School Content/Activities. Many Scholars indicated certain activities or content at Freedom School that they enjoyed. Scholars noted that they liked Harambee, learning about the Olympics, IRC, the game room, free time, and dancing. One Scholar said, “I like when we do the dances in the morning and the teachers, they [are] really funny.” Other Scholars shared positive feelings towards content and activities by simply stating that they enjoyed activities, or everything. Several Scholars appreciated the new books that they got to read. While other Scholars said that they enjoyed breakfast, snacks, and lunch at Freedom School.

Ideas for Improvement

Scholars were asked how Freedom School could be improved for them. The following themes for areas of improvement emerged: Procedures/Rules, Content, and Other Suggestions.

Procedures/Rules. Many Scholars had feedback regarding procedures or rules for Freedom School. A couple of Scholars said that they would like to change or eliminate Harambee. One Scholar said that the amount of yelling bothered them. One Scholar suggested that being able to move freely throughout the building would make for a better Freedom School experience. Another Scholar suggested mixing up the schedule. Another suggestion was to hold Freedom School at a better location. Scholars stated they would like to have more SLIs. And finally, Scholars want flexibility in how work is completed – some want more group activities, while others want more opportunities to work alone.

Content. Several Scholars said that they would like help in other content areas, in addition to receiving instruction in reading. One Scholar said Freedom School could be better by “helping me with other things too.” A couple of Scholars said that Freedom School could be made better by incorporating more math. Another Scholar suggested that Freedom School incorporate better activities and remove DEAR (“Drop Everything and Read”).

Other Suggestions. Several Scholars commented on other aspects of Freedom School that they would like to change. One Scholar would like Kidz Bop songs removed from the Freedom School playlist, one Scholar would like to be more active, and one Scholar wished that they could have more time to play and socialize with other Scholars. This Scholar said they would like “more play time just to socialize.”

Additional Feedback

Level 3 Scholars were provided the opportunity to give additional feedback at the end of the survey. Many Level 3 Scholars indicated that they did not have any additional feedback for Freedom School, however those who did respond had very positive feedback. Many Scholars who responded to this question said that Freedom School was fun, enjoyable, made them feel happy, and that it allowed them to become a better reader. Several Scholars used this space to recommend Freedom School to others and state that they would like to return to Freedom School next year. One Scholar wrote, “it’s an AMAZING experience, I recommend it!” While another Scholar said, “my experience in Freedom School was good and I would like to come again.” One Scholar used this space to request better food, however the same scholar stated that they generally liked the books and enjoyed the people at Freedom School.

Servant Leader Intern Likert Item Response Results

SLI Demographics

A survey aiming to understand the SLIs’ perspective on the Freedom School experience was sent to 74 Interns. A total of 33 SLIs responded to the survey via SurveyShare. These Interns identified as Black ($n = 16$; 50.0%), White ($n = 10$; 31.3%), Latinx ($n = 4$; 12.5%), Mixed and/or Other ($n = 1$; 3.1%). Most Interns identified as Female ($n = 28$; 87.5%), were between the ages of 18-24 ($n = 30$; 93.8%), and are currently working on their undergraduate degree ($n = 28$;

87.5%). These Interns worked across three levels; Level 1 ($n = 11$; 34.4%), Level 2 ($n = 15$; 46.9%) and Level 3 ($n = 6$; 18.8%). Results for SLI demographics are reported in Table 10 (see Appendix).

SLI Experience, Future Plans, Agency, and Service

The Servant Leader Interns were asked about their perceptions of the Freedom School experience, of college and career plans, of volunteering and community engagement, and their perceptions of agency on a Likert scale of (1) Strongly Disagree to (4) Strongly Agree. The first set of six items aimed to understand the SLI perception of the Freedom School experience. All but one SLI ($n = 29$; 96.7%) stated they either agreed or strongly agreed that they enjoyed their work over the summer, and only seven (24.1%) indicated they would not like to return as an SLI. On the items regarding current skills or learning new skills while serving as an SLI, all 30 (100%) indicated they agreed or strongly agreed that the Freedom School experience was a fostering environment. One (3.3%) indicated that they did not experience successes while at Freedom School, and 29 (100%) indicated they experienced challenges while serving as an SLI.

The next set of three items asked questions regarding their college or career plan. Most of the SLIs ($n = 22$; 68.8%) stated it did not change their educational trajectory nor did it change their career choice, but 10 (31.3%) indicated that it had. Finally, 21 SLIs (67.7%) indicated their economic prospects had changed due to their experiences at Freedom School.

The next set of items referred to volunteering, community engagement and multiculturalism. All but one SLI ($n = 32$; 97.0%) viewed themselves as difference makers in their community. All but one SLI ($n = 32$; 97.0%) either agreed or strongly agreed that their vision for making a difference had expanded because of their experience with Freedom School. Almost all ($n = 30$; 93.6%) indicated they would be more likely to work in the community

because of their experience with Freedom School. 28 SLIs (87.5%) indicated their understanding of multiculturalism had changed or been expanded because of their time at Freedom School. Finally, all SLIs indicated they are more likely to advocate for children ($n = 32$; 100%) and families ($n = 31$; 100%) in poverty as a result of their time at Freedom School.

The final set of survey questions asked SLIs to indicate skills or experiences that gave personal ownership and agency to the Freedom School experience. All 33 SLIs (100%) indicated they developed leadership skills and indicated they are now better able to talk and work with others who are different from them because of their experience. All but one SLI ($n = 32$; 97.0%) stated they were better at working with others. And all 32 SLIs (100%) indicated they are better able to adapt to change because of their experience at Freedom School. SLI survey results are reported in Tables 11 through 14 (see Appendix).

Servant Leader Intern Open-Ended Item Response Results

In addition to indicating their level of agreement on survey items, SLIs were also provided the opportunity to respond to 15 open-ended questions detailing their experience this summer at their Freedom School site. A total of 30 SLIs elected to complete this portion of the survey. The questions prompted SLIs to describe their likes and dislikes, skill development, successes, and challenges with the program. Additionally, the SLIs were asked to describe the impact of their experience on their own educational goals, future career goals, and economic perspectives. They also responded to questions on their views of community service, education and multiculturalism, changes to their ideas on poverty, and how their life had changed because of their experience at Freedom Schools. The open-ended questions concluded with an opportunity to provide additional feedback.

Freedom School Experience

SLIs were asked five questions about their Freedom School experience. The SLIs described their likes and dislikes, skill development, and success and challenges.

Liked. More than half the SLIs described the positive connections and relationships they established with the Scholars when detailing what they liked about their experience with Freedom Schools. Several SLIs noted they enjoyed making an impact on the children and being able to provide for their community. One SLI wrote, “I enjoyed working with a small group of Scholars where I was able to make a difference in my Scholars lives.” In addition to establishing relationships with Scholars, several SLIs described forming positive relationships with their fellow interns.

Five SLIs described how the experience they received in instructional practices would prepare them for careers in teaching. Several interns indicated how rewarding it was facilitating students' reading skills. One SLI stated, “I liked getting to read diverse texts and have in-depth conversations with Scholars.” Another intern wrote, “I enjoyed gaining new skills that I can use in my work going forward. I also enjoyed getting to know each child and working with them to develop better literacy skills.”

Disliked. Three significant findings emerged from the qualitative analysis of what the SLIs disliked about the program. The first was associated with not having a break time away from the Scholars. At least five interns discussed that it was difficult to work all day without a break. One SLI stated “I did not like how there is no break for the SLIs during the day. I think giving at least a 10-minute break for teachers during the day to reset would help to bring them more energy in the afternoon as the morning.” Another wrote “I think there was too much responsibility on the SLIs and not enough adequate training. It was emotionally draining to not have a break all day.”

Other SLIs noted that the work was harder than they expected, that student behavior was challenging, and at times it was difficult to keep the Scholars engaged. One intern stated, “The work was really draining, and I felt that I wasn’t doing the right things even though I was trying my hardest.”

Another finding was associated with the absence of field trips. SLIs from previous years missed the field trips. Consequently, afternoon activities emerged as an area of dislike for several SLIs. They reported that students struggled with interest and engagement in some of the afternoon activities. An intern wrote, “I wish we had more afternoon activities that the kids really liked.”

The last finding is in the area of organization and planning. At least five SLIs wrote that they disliked unexpected changes that left them feeling unprepared. An intern describes “Activities and adjustments during the summer created complications that required serious flexibility.” Several SLIs documented issues with disorganization in leadership. One scholar stated, “A lack of timely organization and knowing next steps with enough time to prepare.” A few SLIs noted inadequate time to prepare with one SLI writing, “I did not like lesson planning. If I am taking time out of my day on a weekend or after to work to do this, I need to get paid. It’s highly time-consuming.”

Skill Development. The SLIs answered two open-ended questions about skills they possessed that helped them and skills they developed as an SLI that assisted them in their work. Seven scholars stated that having patience really helped them in their work. Six scholars stated creativity, five stated educational experience, four stated strong communication skills, three mentioned leadership skills, and two spoke about having determination and purpose.

The SLIs also documented the skills they acquired through their work as an SLI. Twelve interns wrote about skills related to behavior management, while others documented effective communication skills, patience, and problem-solving. One intern stated “A new found patience for Scholars that have not yet learned how to manage and express their anger in a safe and healthy way.” Three interns described skills relating to instructional strategies.

Successes and Challenges. Approximately half of the SLIs described their relationship with the Scholars as an area of success. This included facilitating relationships that allowed the scholars to open up and establish trust. Another area of success was student growth. Several SLIs noted growth in reading skills while others described student growth in confidence and comfort sharing their ideas and thoughts. At least seven SLIs described classroom management as an area of success. One intern wrote, “I truly connected with my small class of Scholars and was able to create a strong classroom community.”

Challenges were predominately centered around student behavior. Approximately half of the interns reported student behavior as an issue. One intern wrote, “Behavioral challenges were the main issue and the lack of initial support with these issues. I did not feel like I was appropriately trained to deal with these serious and complex behavioral issues.” Another intern also described a lack of support with behavior management:

Sometimes when I faced a challenge, I would let my site coordinator know that this was something I was not used to / hard for me. At times I was dismissed and told we all have challenges. It was challenging being talked down to and to the point where I was nervous to bring any information that I needed help with because I was talked down to in a condescending manner.

Additional challenges included remaining positive, student engagement, student’s academic abilities, and time management. One intern described “Trying to fulfill emotional and mental needs, always showing up as my best self, feelings of weariness.”

College, Career, and Future Plans

The SLIs responded to four open-ended questions that asked them to explain changes in their future education plans, their future career plans, their economic perspectives, and how they will use their experiences in the future.

Change of Plans. Slightly less than half of the students reported no change in their academic plans. These interns indicated that they plan to continue their courses of study. Approximately six interns reported that this experience confirmed their interest in working with children and two interns reported a renewed interest in their academic plans as a result of their experience with Freedom Schools. An SLI stated, “I want to be a teacher even more. I loved the experience.” One SLI reported new interest in becoming an educational psychologist. Other SLIs expressed an interest in social work, while another intern was inspired to make a career change, they wrote “I have been inspired by Children’s Defense Fund and Freedom School Partners’ work with educational policy and will likely pursue similar nonprofits and Non-Government Organization’s that also address education.” Conversely, five SLIs indicated that this experience helped them recognize that they do not want to be a teacher. One intern wrote, “This summer has taught me that even though I love education, I don’t believe being in the classroom every day is the best option for me.”

Future Plans. When asked how the SLIs will use the skills they acquired from their Freedom School experience in the future, more than half of the interns indicated that the skills would serve them in working with children. They spoke in broad terms of how the experience would help them in the classroom, with child counseling, child welfare, and in their personal lives. Several interns viewed their summer with Freedom School as a growth experience and several also mentioned how it has made them more philanthropic. One intern wrote:

I will use it to give back to schools. I want to help support programs like Freedom Schools in the future. I have seen how critical building these literacy skills can be and want to help these children any way that I can.

Volunteering, Community Engagement, and Advocacy

The SLIs responded to three open-ended questions that asked of any changes in their thoughts regarding community service and the ability to make a difference, education and multiculturalism, and children and families living in poverty.

Thoughts about Making a Difference. One finding that emerged from the SLIs' written responses was a growing awareness about the needs in their community and a genuine desire to make a difference. One SLI wrote, "Freedom School really showed me how education is one of the most important ways you can make a difference and build relationships in the community." At least nine SLIs indicated a desire to do more community service as a result of their experience with Freedom Schools. One of those interns wrote, "I have grown to view children as a vessel for community service."

Thoughts about Education and Multiculturalism. A small group of interns reported no change in their thoughts related to education and multiculturalism, with some attributing that to an already existing awareness of these issues. However, most interns shared a variety of thoughts on this topic. Their statements included the need for educational reform, attention to educational inequities, and the importance of a multicultural curriculum so everyone feels like their voice is valued. One intern wrote, "I now have a profound respect for the ways a profound education can change and impact a child's life." Others recognized that education is a challenging field, the importance of role models, and the impact of diversity. An SLI stated, "I have gained a deeper understanding for incorporating multiculturalism that diverges from [my] own culture in education."

Thoughts about Poverty. At least one-third of the respondents indicated a desire to do more for their community as a result of their experience at Freedom Schools. One SLI wrote, “I want to make a difference, specifically in the lives of children and families living in poverty.” Three SLIs seemed to recognize the importance of supporting not only students but their families and were planning for careers in child welfare, social work, and counseling. Several SLIs described an increased awareness of the issues facing those living in poverty. Some SLIs stated they developed more compassion for their community and indicated an increase in their motivation to advocate for these children and their families.

Agency/Soft Skills. The SLIs completed one short answer question that asked how their life had changed in good and/or negative ways as a result of their intern experience. All but one intern described positive life changes. Five SLIs described positive work relationships and effective collaboration with fellow interns. Some of the specific changes the SLIs described were leadership skills, teacher preparation, the importance of addressing behavioral concerns proactively, and a stronger interest in education. Others spoke more broadly, describing how it was a positive experience, they believed they made a difference, experienced personal growth, and developed a greater awareness of issues in urban education. One intern wrote:

I better understand the situation of some children and why they may think the way they think. I now have the resources to help advocate for change and to expand the minds of future generations and be representational to those who may not see a teacher that ‘looks like them.

Additional Feedback

The SLIs were given the opportunity to provide additional comments or suggestions for improving the SLI experience including, but not limited to, feedback for on-site operations, field trips, training, and organization. As anticipated, there was a great deal of feedback on the absence of field trips. The SLIs reported that the absence of field trips really impacted student

engagement and indicated how much the students missed them. Another finding was concern over afternoon activities. Several SLIs reported issues with student engagement, a need to re-think some of the afternoon activities, and having backup activities. One SLI wrote, “It definitely puts a lot on the shoulders of SLIs to present afternoon activities every day, especially when some sponsors provided weak activities and directions.”

In terms of training, three interns described a need for additional training in classroom management and how to work with students with behavioral issues. One intern felt it was important to be more aware of the Scholars’ learning needs. Suggestions were also offered to provide SLIs with breaks and to consider having SLIs switch classes. Two interns described the need for more support. One intern felt that the IRC lesson plans left very little room for flexibility or differentiation.

In terms of literacy, one intern felt a screening tool would be helpful to better understand the literacy needs of the Scholars. Another felt that more literacy-based activities were necessary, while another SLI noted reading deficits as a challenge. One intern suggested decodable books for struggling readers. One intern wrote at length regarding her concerns over differentiation:

I think the IRC curriculum should incorporate evidence-based practices to fully promote literacy and learning. The scholars come from various backgrounds and learning levels. It would be helpful to the SLIs if they were more equipped and aware of the Scholars' learning needs. The lessons in the IRC leave very little room for flexibility and differentiation. Those who are significantly below their reading and learning level should be provided more resources. I would highly recommend multiple classes for the upper levels (3 and 4). There should be a minimum in those classes. Addressing the different learning levels and differentiation was very difficult.

In terms of feedback, one SLI suggested better feedback should be elicited from staff when outside observers come to the site. Another suggested providing actionable feedback from evaluations with the necessary resources to implement those changes. A few interns discussed the challenges from continuous changes and issues with leadership. One intern stated, “This year

has not been a good Freedom School summer” but did not offer specific suggestions. Another intern wrote, “I would just emphasize that there is a lot of outside preparation.”

Recommendations

Findings from the quantitative and qualitative data analysis of Scholar and SLI survey responses guide the following recommendations for improvement in four main areas: Content, Procedures, Behavior, and Activities.

Content

One main recommendation in the area of reading content emerged from SLI responses. Some SLIs described they could have better supported student’s reading development if they had more information about student reading abilities. Ideas proposed included screening measures to better identify the specific needs of Scholars. In this same sentiment, the SLI’s described the need for subsequent flexibility within IRC to meet the needs of students with low reading ability.

Scholars also reported feelings about reading content, such as feeling more confident in applying skills learned for the upcoming school year in the subject areas of reading and history. Another recommendation that emerged from Scholars in Levels 2-3 was to incorporate support in additional content areas such as math. This suggestion was also made in the prior year of evaluation (Bottoms et al., 2019). The interest in math related content could potentially be addressed through the incorporation of engaging problem-based learning projects, such as STEM related activities that address multiple content areas in a single project.

Procedures

Another important theme that emerged from the responses was a need to modify procedures to improve the experience for SLIs. Several SLIs mentioned the need for a duty-free break time. SLIs often mentioned the draining nature of working with children and the

importance of having an opportunity to recharge before continuing on with the day. The SLIs reported the challenging nature of their work at Freedom School. The characteristic of patience repeatedly emerged as something that was either drawn upon as a pre-existing skill or developed while working at Freedom School. The importance of being able to step away from the students would aid SLIs in maintaining the patience required to address challenging behaviors and diverse learning needs.

Unexpected changes to the schedule also emerged as a concern in the analysis of SLI responses. SLIs reported lesson planning was time-consuming and a variety of unexpected changes left them feeling unprepared. Providing SLIs with instructional planning time could mitigate concerns over unexpected schedule changes, providing time for those in leadership to provide support, and could also provide SLIs a break from direct supervision of Scholars.

Behavior

A third underlying theme that emerged from both the analysis of Scholar surveys and SLI surveys was behavior concerns. While most Scholars reported that Freedom School provided them skills for conflict management and personal development in the areas of cooperation and communication, concerns were still raised about bullying, fighting, and the need to be kind to others. This was echoed in the SLI surveys. SLIs enthusiastically reported on the positive relationships they were able to establish with Scholars but often found behavior management problematic. A specific recommendation offered by SLIs was to offer more training in behavior management strategies.

Activities

The final underlying theme that emerged were ideas regarding activities that could make the program more enriching. As a consequence of restrictions on field trips due to COVID-19, afternoon activities seemed to take on greater significance. Both the Scholars and SLIs believed these activities could be more engaging for Scholars.

In conclusion, the following recommendations are offered:

1. Consider implementing a formative reading assessment.
2. Evaluate opportunities to incorporate differentiated instruction within the IRC curriculum.
3. Evaluate the possibility of incorporating academic support in the area of mathematics.
4. Incorporate scheduled breaks for SLIs.
5. Provide SLIs with instructional planning time.
6. Provide additional training in positive behavior intervention strategies.
7. Facilitate more engaging on-campus activities when field trips are not permissible.

Summary

The findings from Scholars and SLI survey responses highlight several positive attributes within the 2021 Freedom School experience. Across all levels, Scholars reported high agreement that Freedom Schools positively influenced their self-perception as a reader and believed the skills acquired at Freedom School would positively impact their performance in the upcoming school year. Scholars were able to recall important themes from the texts they experienced this summer, for example, the importance of community service, self-advocacy, and lessons learned from historical events and inspirational figures. Scholars reported enjoyment of the content and genre of featured texts.

As a result of Freedom School, most Scholars across all levels believed they developed important social/emotional skills such as the ability to ask for help to deal with problems or to resolve conflict. Scholars positively reported pride in themselves, their community, and pride in their race. Scholars viewed themselves as being able to make a difference through acts of service, activism, and modeling positive behavior in their community. Over three-fourths of the Level 2 scholars anticipated graduating from high school and at least two-thirds plan to attend college. These percentages increased to over 80% in Level 3 Scholars.

Both Scholars and SLIs valued the relationships formed at Freedom School. The overwhelming majority of Scholars and SLIs reported positive agreement when asked if they enjoyed Freedom School this summer and planned to return next year. The recommendations that emerged from this evaluation indicate that only minor adjustments are required to improve the success of this impactful program.

References

- Bottoms, B. L., Lambert, R. G., & Taylor, B. (2019). *Evaluation of the Freedom Schools Partners in Charlotte, NC* (CEMETR-2019-09). Charlotte: University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Center for Educational Measurement and Evaluation.

Appendix

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics for Level 1 Scholars

	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
Race/Ethnicity		
African American/Black	56	67.4
Latino/Hispanic	7	8.4
European American/White	5	6.0
Asian American	2	2.5
Native American/American Indian	0	0.0
Mixed Heritage	10	12.0
Other	1	1.2
Sex		
Male	45	54.2
Female	36	43.4
Prefer not to answer	1	1.2
Grade in School		
Kindergarten*	20	24.1
First Grade	34	41.0
Second Grade	24	28.9
Third Grade	3	3.6
FS Site		
Shalom Park	10	12.0
CLC	5	6.0
The Grove	16	19.3
MLK	9	10.8
Marie G. Davis	11	13.3
University City UMC	8	9.6
QCFT at St. John's Baptist	10	12.0
Charlotte Lab School	14	16.9

Note. * One pre-kindergarten student included in count

Table 2
Age and Number of Years Attended for Level 1 Scholars

	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>	<i>Mode</i>
Age	81	6.7	1.1	4	9	7
Years Attended	82	1.3	0.6	1	4	1

Table 3*Level 1 Scholars' Perceptions*

Survey Item	Not True for Me		True for Me	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Freedom School Experience				
I enjoyed Freedom School this summer.	8	9.6	75	90.4
I want to do Freedom School again next year.	11	13.3	72	86.7
Reading*				
I am a better reader.	17	20.5	66	80.0
I enjoy reading more.	13	15.7	70	84.3
I will spend more time reading.	20	24.1	63	75.9
Learning and Education*				
I think I will be a better student in school this year.	6	7.2	77	92.8
I feel comfortable asking for help from a teacher when I need it.	11	13.3	72	86.7
I know that I want to go to college.	13	15.7	70	84.3
Social/Emotional Skills*				
I know how to ask for help when I have to deal with problems or have a conflict with someone.	4	4.9	79	95.2
I know how to work well with others.	10	12.0	73	88.0
Agency and Future Thinking*				
I want to make a difference in my school and community.	14	16.9	69	83.1
I will spend more time reading.	6	7.2	77	92.8

Note. *Survey items began with the sentence stem: "Since being at Freedom School,..."

Table 4
Descriptive Statistics for Level 2 Scholars

	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
Race/Ethnicity		
African American/Black	63	71.6
Latino/Hispanic	15	17.1
European American/White	3	3.4
Asian American	2	2.3
Native American/American Indian	1	1.1
Mixed Heritage	4	4.5
Other	0	0.0
Sex		
Male	42	47.2
Female	44	49.4
Prefer not to answer	3	3.4
Grade in School		
Second Grade	3	3.4
Third Grade	32	36.0
Fourth Grade	33	37.1
Fifth Grade	21	23.6
FS Site		
Shalom Park	14	15.7
CLC	7	7.9
The Grove	13	14.6
MLK	9	10.1
Marie G. Davis	6	6.7
University City UMC	15	16.9
QCFT at St. John's Baptist	9	10.1
Charlotte Lab School	16	18.0

Table 5
Age and Number of Years Attended for Level 2 Scholars

	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>	<i>Mode</i>
Age	88	9.7	0.9	8	11	10
Years Attended	89	1.9	1.1	1	5	1

Table 6
Level 2 Scholars' Perceptions

Survey Item	Not True for Me		Sometimes		True for Me	
	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
Freedom School Experience						
I enjoyed Freedom School this summer.	1	1.1	17	19.1	71	79.8
I want to do Freedom School again next year.	8	9.0	19	21.3	62	69.7
Reading*						
I am a better reader.	10	11.2	35	39.3	44	49.4
I enjoy reading more.	15	16.9	30	33.7	44	49.4
I will spend more time reading.	22	24.7	37	41.6	28	31.5
Learning and Education*						
I think I will be a better student in school this year.	9	10.1	19	21.4	61	68.5
I feel comfortable asking for help from a teacher when I need it.	4	4.6	26	29.6	58	65.9
I will stay in school and graduate from high school.	5	5.6	14	15.7	69	78.4
I know that I want to go to college.	8	9.0	22	24.7	59	66.3
Social/Emotional Skills*						
I know how to better resolve conflicts of problems with other students.	11	12.5	42	47.7	35	39.8
I know how to resolve conflicts or problems with adults.	17	19.1	26	29.2	46	51.7
I know how to ask for help in dealing with social problems or conflicts with others.	13	14.8	25	28.4	50	56.8
I know how to work well with others.	7	8.0	37	42.5	43	49.4
Agency and Future Thinking*						
I feel good about who I am.	6	6.7	24	27.0	59	66.3
I am more proud of my race.	8	9.0	10	11.2	71	79.8
I am more proud of my community.	5	5.6	25	28.1	59	66.3
I feel better about my future.	10	11.2	27	30.3	52	58.4
I have plans for what I want to do when I become an adult.	19	21.4	16	18.0	54	60.7

Note. *Survey items began with the sentence stem: "Since being at Freedom School,..."

Table 7
Descriptive Statistics for Level 3 Scholars

	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
Race/Ethnicity		
African American/Black	35	61.4
Latino/Hispanic	8	14.0
European American/White	2	3.5
Asian American	1	1.8
Native American/American Indian	1	1.8
Mixed Heritage	9	15.8
Other	1	1.8
Sex		
Male	27	47.4
Female	26	45.6
Prefer not to answer	4	7.0
Grade in School		
Fifth Grade	2	3.5
Sixth Grade	32	56.1
Seventh Grade	8	14.0
Eighth Grade	15	26.3
FS Site		
Shalom Park	0	0.0
CLC	11	19.0
The Grove	9	15.5
MLK	18	31.0
Marie G. Davis	5	8.6
University City UMC	6	10.3
QCFT at St. John's Baptist	1	1.7
Charlotte Lab School	8	13.8

Table 8
Age and Number of Years Attended for Level 3 Scholars

	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>	<i>Mode</i>
Age	55	12.6	1.1	11	15	12
Years Attended	56	3.2	2.2	1	7	1

Table 9
Level 3 Scholars' Perceptions

Survey Item	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Freedom School Experience								
I enjoyed Freedom School this summer.	2	3.4	2	3.4	21	36.2	33	56.9
I want to do Freedom School again next year.	4	6.9	6	10.3	19	32.8	29	50.0
Reading*								
I am a better reader.	3	5.2	4	6.9	38	65.5	13	22.4
I enjoy reading more.	5	8.8	12	21.1	30	52.6	10	17.5
I will spend more time reading.	8	14.0	18	31.6	27	47.4	4	7.0
Learning and Education*								
I think I will be a better student in school this year.	3	5.2	4	6.9	32	55.2	19	32.7
I feel comfortable asking for help from a teacher when I need it.	2	3.4	9	15.5	26	44.8	21	36.2
I will stay in school and graduate from high school.	2	3.5	2	3.5	22	38.6	31	54.4
I know that I want to go to college.	5	8.6	4	6.9	27	46.6	22	37.9
Social/Emotional Skills*								
I know how to better resolve conflicts of problems with other students.	7	12.5	7	12.5	28	50.0	14	25.0
I know how to resolve conflicts or problems with adults.	6	10.9	9	16.4	24	43.6	16	29.1
I know how to ask for help in dealing with social problems or conflicts with others.	4	7.1	8	14.3	27	48.2	17	30.4
I know how to work well with others.	2	3.6	3	5.4	32	57.1	19	33.9
Agency and Future Thinking*								
I feel good about who I am.	3	5.2	4	6.9	29	50.0	22	37.9
I am more proud of my race.	2	3.5	3	5.3	22	38.6	30	52.6
I am more proud of the community where I live.	5	8.6	6	10.3	29	50.0	18	31.0
I feel better about my future.	4	6.9	4	6.9	28	48.3	22	37.9
I have plans for what I want for a job or career when I am an adult.	3	5.3	7	12.3	21	36.8	26	45.6

Note. *Survey items began with the sentence stem: "Since being at Freedom School,..."

Table 10*Descriptive Statistics for Servant Leader Interns (SLIs)*

	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
Race/Ethnicity		
African American/Black	16	50.0
Latino/Hispanic	4	12.5
European American/White	10	31.3
Asian American	0	0.0
Native American/American Indian	0	0.0
Mixed Heritage	1	3.1
Other	1	3.1
Sex		
Male	2	6.3
Female	28	87.5
Other	2	6.3
Age		
18-24 years old	30	93.8
25-30 years old	2	6.3
Freedom School Level Served		
Level I	11	34.4
Level II	15	46.9
Level III	6	18.8
Educational Status		
Undergraduate Student	28	87.5
Graduate Student	2	6.3
I already graduated	2	6.3

Table 11
SLIs Perception of the Freedom School Experience

Survey Item	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
	I enjoyed my work as a SLI this summer.	0	0.0	1	3.3	14	46.7	15
I would like to return in the future as a SLI.	1	3.5	6	20.7	14	48.3	8	27.6
I possess skills that have helped me in my work as a SLI.	0	0.0	0	0.0	12	40.0	18	60.0
I have learned new skills as a result of my work as a SLI.	0	0.0	0	0.0	5	16.7	25	83.3
I have experienced success in my work as a SLI.	0	0.0	1	3.3	15	50.0	14	46.6
I have experienced challenges in my work as a SLI.	0	0.0	0	0.0	9	31.0	20	69.0

Table 12
SLIs Perception of College, Career, & Future Plans

Survey Item	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
	My plans about my education have changed as a result of my SLI experience.	10	31.3	12	37.5	8	25.0	2
My plans about my work or career choices have changed as a result of my SLI experience.	8	25.0	14	43.8	5	15.6	5	15.6
I believe my SLI experience has changed my economic perspective.	5	16.1	5	16.1	17	54.8	4	12.9

Table 13*SLIs Perceptions of Volunteering, Community Engagement and Advocacy*

Survey Item	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
	I view myself as a difference maker in my community and world.	0	0.0	1	3.0	15	45.5	17
My vision for making a difference has changed or expanded as a result of my SLI experience.	0	0.0	1	3.0	20	60.6	12	36.4
I am more likely to work in my community as a result of my SLI experience.	0	0.0	2	6.5	17	54.8	12	38.7
My understanding of education has changed or expanded as a result of my SLI experience.	1	3.1	2	6.3	13	40.6	16	50.0
My understanding of multiculturalism has changed or expanded as a result of my SLI experience.	0	0.0	4	12.5	16	50.0	12	37.5
I am more likely to advocate for children living in poverty as a result of my SLI experience.	0	0.0	0	0.0	11	34.4	21	65.6
I am more likely to advocate for families living in poverty as a result of my SLI experience.	0	0.0	0	0.0	9	29.0	22	71.0

Table 14*SLIs Perceptions of Agency/Soft Skills*

Survey Item	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
	I have developed or enhanced my leadership skills as a result of my experience.	0	0.0	0	0.0	13	39.4	20
I am better at working with others as a result of my experience.	1	3.0	0	0.0	14	42.4	18	54.6
I am better able to talk and work with others who are different from me as a result of my experience.	0	0.0	0	0.0	15	45.5	18	54.6
I am better at adapting to changes that take place (at work, home, social contexts) as a result of my experience.	0	0.0	0	0.0	12	37.5	20	62.5