

Evaluation of the Kansas City CDF Freedom Schools Initiative

Highlights

The Kansas City *CDF Freedom Schools*[®] initiative provides a six-week summer program for young people in kindergarten through the eighth grade. *CDF Freedom Schools* are designed to have a positive impact on educational enrichment, cultural appreciation, character development, parental support, leadership, and community involvement.

This report is based on data collected during a three-year evaluation of the Kansas City *CDF Freedom Schools*. It analyzes the effects that Kansas City *CDF Freedom Schools* have on scholars, their parents, interns, and the churches that host Kansas City *CDF Freedom Schools*. Findings from these data indicate that:

- ❑ A total of 18 churches hosted Kansas City *CDF Freedom Schools*.
- ❑ A total of 3,274 scholars attended Kansas City *CDF Freedom Schools*.
- ❑ Scholars benefited as a result of their participation in Kansas City *CDF Freedom Schools*.
 - ❑ Reading abilities of Kansas City *CDF Freedom Schools* scholars significantly improved over the summer. Reading abilities of scholars improved more than similar students not in Kansas City *CDF Freedom Schools*; the reading abilities of students not enrolled in any academic summer program declined. Gains in reading were greater for:
 - ❑ older scholars in Level III (sixth through eighth graders);
 - ❑ girls;
 - ❑ scholars from lower income families;
 - ❑ scholars who attended multiple years; and
 - ❑ scholars attending schools that implemented the *CDF Freedom Schools* model best.
 - ❑ Parents report that their children demonstrate:
 - ❑ greater love of learning;
 - ❑ greater appreciation of their culture;
 - ❑ greater conflict resolution skills;
 - ❑ greater acceptance of responsibility; and
 - ❑ greater social adjustment.Parents of comparison students do not report similar growth.
- ❑ College-aged students were selected to be interns because they demonstrated leadership, community involvement, political awareness, and contributions to charity. These interns were more likely to:
 - ❑ retain their involvement in these things at follow-up than comparisons were;
 - ❑ increase their interest in news and political involvement, while these decreased among comparisons; and
 - ❑ plan to become teachers after they graduate from college.
- ❑ Kansas City *CDF Freedom Schools* are an important addition to the ministry of the host church. These churches have histories of service to their communities and Kansas City *CDF Freedom Schools* allow them to provide additional support and service.

*CDF Freedom Schools[®] is a federally registered mark of the Children's Defense Fund.

Participants in Kansas City CDF Freedom Schools

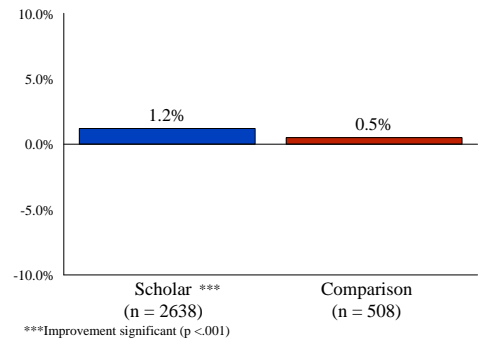
Between 2005 and 2007, 3,274 scholars enrolled in Kansas City *CDF Freedom Schools*.

- Half came from single parent homes, but 44% live with two parents.
- Almost all (94%) live in homes with at least one wage earner.
- Two-fifths receive free lunch, but another two-fifths pay full price
- One in five live in a household with an annual income less than \$20,000; but one in six have families with incomes above \$75,000.
- Half of the scholars attended at least 90% of the time.
- Half of the scholars who were eligible returned the following year.

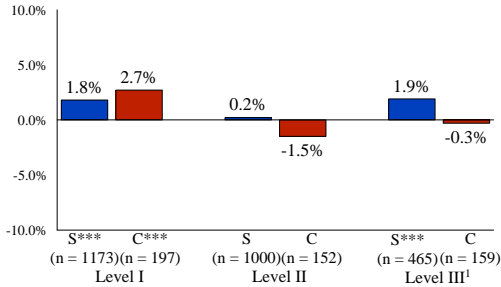
Impact on Scholars

During the six weeks of Kansas City *CDF Freedom Schools*, the average scholar demonstrated a significant improvement in reading. End-of-school scores were 1.2 percentile points higher than assessments completed during the first week. Scholars in the first through eighth grades increased an average grade equivalent of two months of school. Students in the comparison group did not demonstrate similar improvements. The average comparison student only demonstrated an improvement of .5 percentile points which was not a significant gain.

Changes in GRADE Scores

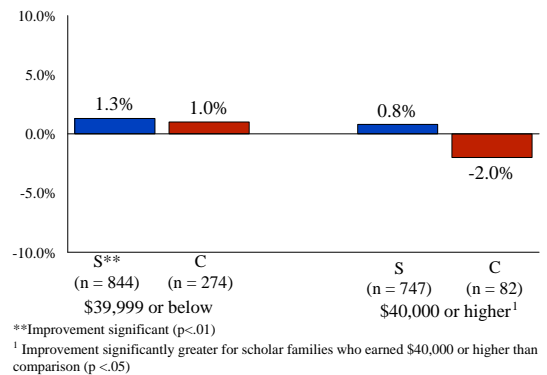


Changes in GRADE Scores by Scholar Level



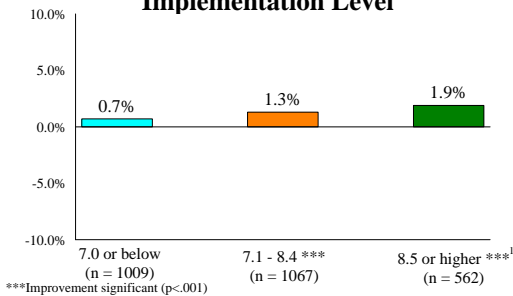
Level I scholars (those in the second grade or lower) and Level III scholars (those in the sixth through eighth grades) demonstrated significant gains in reading. Scholars in Level III went up an average grade equivalent of .4, or an increase of about half a year. The reading abilities of students in the Level III comparison group declined.

Changes in GRADE Scores by Income



Scholars with a family income of under \$40,000 demonstrated greater increases in their average score than scholars from households with a family income of \$40,000 higher. Both groups increased more than similar comparisons.

Changes in GRADE Scores by Implementation Level



Visits were made to individual Kansas City *CDF Freedom Schools* during the middle of each summer to observe how well the *CDF Freedom Schools* model had been implemented. Scholars attending Kansas City *CDF Freedom Schools* that received average ratings of 8.5 or higher demonstrated greater improvements than scholars in Kansas City *CDF Freedom Schools* that received an average of 7.0 or below. Scholars in schools with scores 7.1 or above also had significant changes between the beginning and end of the summer. Schools whose implementation scores increased from one year to the next had corresponding gains in reading improvement while those whose scores decreased had reduced gains.

Scholars gained each year they participated in *CDF Freedom Schools*. Scholars who participated three summers went up an average of 2.2 grade levels between their first and last assessments. Gains among comparison students were only half those of scholars, creating an ever widening gap in reading achievement over time. These data suggest that Kansas City *CDF Freedom Schools* scholars not only increase their skills during the summer, but enter school in the fall more ready to continue learning.

Summary: Scholars participating in Kansas City *CDF Freedom Schools* increased their reading ability an average of .2 grade equivalents, or about two months.

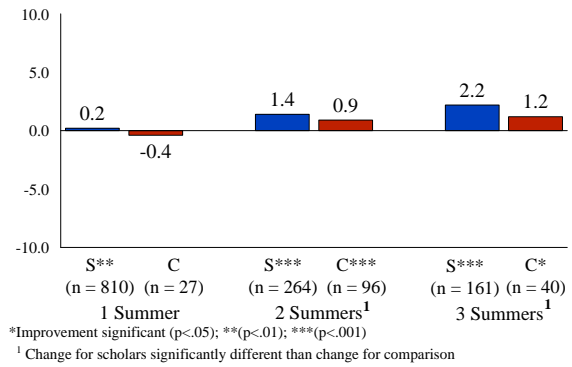
While this may not seem like a large gain, it compares favorably with other out-of-school-time programs and offsets the decline in reading abilities many students experience.

Gains in reading were greater for:

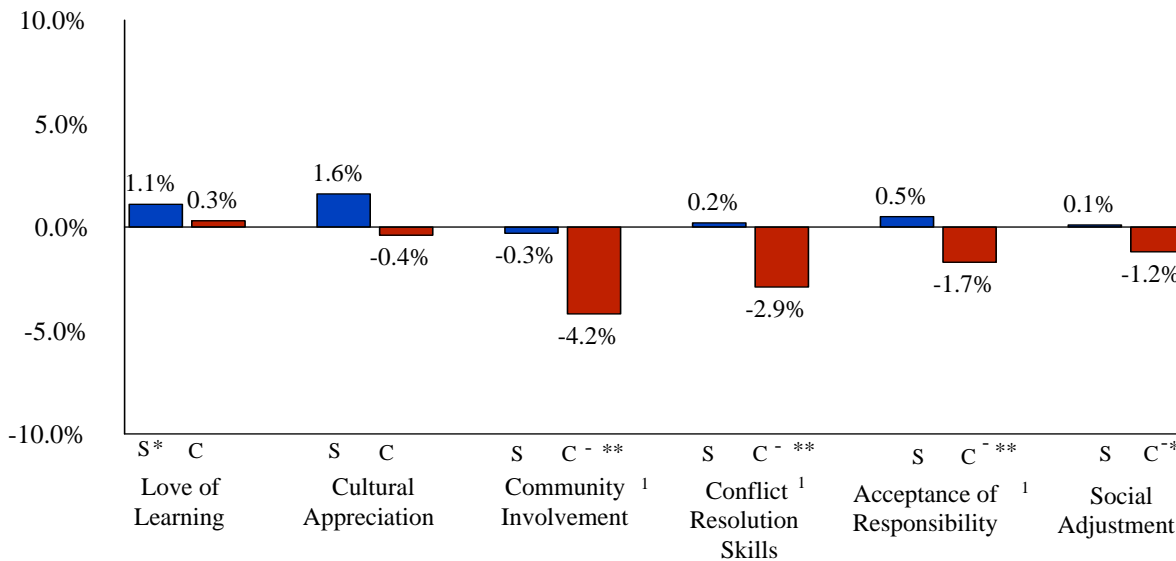
- ❑ older scholars in Level III (sixth through eighth graders);
- ❑ girls;
- ❑ scholars from lower income families;
- ❑ scholars attending multiple years; and
- ❑ scholars attending schools that implemented the *Kansas City CDF Freedom Schools* model best.

In addition to reading ability, scholars' attitudes toward learning, cultural appreciation, community involvement, conflict resolution skills, acceptance of responsibility, and social adjustment were also assessed. These data were obtained from surveys completed by parents of scholars at the beginning of Kansas City *CDF Freedom Schools* and again in October after the resumption of the regular school year. Comparison parents completed surveys on the same schedule.

Changes in Grade Equivalents by Length of Participation



Changes in Character Development



S = Scholar (N = 755) CA=625
 C = Comparison (N = 610) CA=412

*Difference significant (p<.05); ** (p<.01)

¹ Change for scholars significantly different than change for comparison

On five of the six dimensions of character development, parents of scholars report a slight positive change in their children. Parents of comparison students, on the other hand, report declines on five of the six dimensions. Declines in four of these areas are significant: community involvement, conflict resolution skills, acceptance of responsibility, and social adjustment.

Lessons Learned

LESSON 1: Scholars' reading abilities benefit directly from participation in Kansas City CDF Freedom Schools.

One of the most exciting findings is the scholar's positive reading gains. While the gains are not large, they are real. The reading skills of comparison students not enrolled in any other academic program declined over the summer. Reading gains among *Kansas City CDF Freedom Schools* scholars are greatest among some of the hardest to serve groups. Middle school students gained more than younger students and scholars from low-income families gained more than those who were more affluent.

LESSON 2: Scholars demonstrate positive character development from participation in Kansas City CDF Freedom Schools.

Parents of *Kansas City CDF Freedom Schools* scholars see small, but positive changes in their children. Four to five months after attending *Kansas City CDF Freedom Schools*, the parents rate their children higher on five of the six dimensions assessed. Parents of comparison students see declines in their children's cultural appreciation, community involvement, and acceptance of responsibility. Growth in these areas is important because it translates to improved attitudes, improved behavior, and improved academic performance.

LESSON 3: Kansas City CDF Freedom Schools that most fully implement the CDF Freedom Schools model have the best results.

CDF Freedom Schools in Kansas City were rated on a scale from one to ten based on how well they implemented the *CDF Freedom Schools* model. The higher the implementation score, the greater the average reading gains among scholars.

LESSON 4: Continued participation in Kansas City CDF Freedom Schools increases the impact on reading achievement.

Scholars who participated for at least three years increased their reading skills by 2.2 grade equivalents, compared to 1.4 for those who participated two years, and 0.2 for those who participated only one. The average student in the comparison group increased less than a grade equivalent each year. Scholars who attended *Kansas City CDF Freedom Schools* for three years demonstrated gains almost twice the size of those in the comparison group.

LESSON 5: Interns are positively influenced by their Kansas City CDF Freedom Schools experience.

Both interns and comparisons were involved in charities, community organizations, leadership, and politics before *Kansas City CDF Freedom Schools* began. However, interns were more likely to retain their involvement at follow-up than comparisons were. They also increased their interest in the news and political involvement while these decreased among comparisons. A substantially greater number of interns plan to enter the field of teaching.

LESSON 6: Kansas City CDF Freedom Schools are a valuable asset in host churches.

Churches that host *Kansas City CDF Freedom Schools* have histories as strong churches. However, *Kansas City CDF Freedom Schools* have provided them a way to fill an important gap in their ministries and attract families from the community that were not previously part of their church. Host churches are developing outreach programs to retain these families after *Kansas City CDF Freedom Schools* ends.



Evaluation of the Kansas City Freedom Schools Initiative was conducted by:

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