SUMMERS OF ENRICHMENT:
A Report on CDF Freedom Schools®
in Kansas City

June 2013
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FOREWORD
By Gloria Jackson-Leathers, Program Director, Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation

When former Kauffman Foundation Program Director Tom Rhone asked me to take over the Foundation’s work with CDF Freedom Schools® after he retired in 2001, I initially shrugged it off. I didn’t jump at what I later realized was a tremendous opportunity and significant social movement toward empowering today’s youth. To his credit, and my eventual good fortune, Rhone persisted in earnest. I finally agreed to go to Washington, D.C, to meet Children’s Defense Fund President Marian Wright Edelman and learn more about CDF Freedom Schools.

As if being in the presence of this highly respected activist for her work around children and civil rights wasn’t enough, when I subsequently visited Haley Farm for the first time to see CDF Freedom Schools’ training for the entire country, it was truly awe-inspiring.

The high level of organization and rigorous training were certainly impressive. But what I remember being particularly struck by—and what ultimately was the turning point for me deciding to take on the role of program director—was the sheer number of young African-American men I saw involved in CDF Freedom Schools at all levels. I was unexpectedly witnessing a “flip side” to the all too familiar cradle-to-prison drumbeat that continues to echo around this country’s inner-city youth. We hear so much about young African-American men either in jail or on their way to jail. But here, there were black men rising to amazing levels of leadership, participating in training so that they could serve boys and young men who desperately need positive role models. The grounds were filled with countless passionate crusaders training to help ensure that fewer fall victim to the stereotypical path. It was in that moment I knew: I can do this. I’m in.

Historically, the Kauffman Foundation’s youth development work has included all manner of programming aimed at supporting and providing opportunities for Kansas City’s disadvantaged youth. Because of Mr. Kauffman’s strong belief in the importance of education, a number of efforts have focused on schools and related programs throughout the school year. Certainly Project Choice, the Foundation’s flagship educational program started by Mr. Kauffman, which offered at-risk and low-income youth the opportunity for a college education (and from which today’s Kauffman Scholars’ college-access program grew), was an early and telling statement. But this emphasis also begged a question: If the Foundation really wants to make a difference through education, shouldn’t our efforts continue year-round? Everyone knew the summer months mattered as much, if not more, but we weren’t certain about the best way to direct resources to fill that gap.

Summer school had been the traditional option, but inner-city summer enrichment programs were spotty at best, with little or difficult access and no real testing or evaluation of outcomes. Research tells us that if children are already marginal or having problems academically, they will
certainly fall further behind during the summer. Particularly with the continuing problems in Kansas City’s public schools, the inevitability of summer learning loss was more pronounced than ever. So, anything the Foundation saw at the time that looked like a ray of hope caught our attention. Hope was evident in CDF Freedom Schools.

Because Rhone returned an enthusiastic and convincing champion after attending a CDF conference in the early 1990s, Mr. Kauffman quickly recognized the value and fit of the program. He approved the initial funding that began CDF Freedom Schools’ evolution in Kansas City. Later, when Carl Schramm came on as president of the Foundation in 2002, he, too, recognized what had become even greater potential for the program and paved the way for Kansas City CDF Freedom Schools to grow to unprecedented scale, establishing a model for other cities around the country.

CDF Freedom Schools was born out of the Civil Rights Movement, but all young people can benefit from its curriculum and experiences. By design, the program is inclusive of all children, regardless of background. So, scaling the program allowed the Foundation to support much greater diversity and numbers of youth throughout the city. At the same time, CDF Freedom Schools provided an exciting and upbeat environment independent of regular school, but in a familiar venue that parents knew and trusted, and through which we were able to gauge the kinds of differences the program made. Indeed, an important part of the Foundation’s commitment was the inclusion of an independent evaluation, which was essential to the program’s success and has been held up nationally as a standard for funders of other CDF Freedom Schools to promote measurable outcomes.

Edelman has always characterized CDF Freedom Schools as a program that provides the cornerstone of learning by instilling a love of reading. She maintained, “If children can read, they have the foundation to be able to do most anything.” And we’ve seen this bear out time and again through this program. However, the transformation that occurs is not simply a result of the curriculum. CDF Freedom Schools foster an environment where kids are taught to honor themselves, treat others with respect, and understand the importance of giving back—all reflections of the guiding principles Ewing Kauffman also hoped to instill in young people everywhere.

From the beginning, the CDF Freedom Schools program was an obvious fit with the Foundation’s mission. Having a natural synergy with Project Choice (and later with its successor, Kauffman Scholars), CDF Freedom Schools tapped these programs to find a ready pool of college-age interns to teach and guide younger students, referred to in the program as “scholars.” Further testament to the power and momentum of CDF Freedom Schools, once in college, a majority of the program’s scholars, themselves, return to serve as interns, paying forward all that CDF Freedom Schools gave them and continuing the virtuous cycle that develops the next generation of leaders and mentors.
The Kauffman Foundation is extremely proud to have shone a spotlight on the importance of enriching summer and after-school educational opportunities for Kansas City’s disadvantaged youth and to have helped create a literacy and leadership model for other communities nationwide. During the period of Kauffman Foundation support from 1995 to 2012, our work with CDF Freedom Schools has changed numerous lives. These outcomes can be seen on an individual level, within families and communities, and reflected in the organizations and policies that impact our youth.

Through CDF Freedom Schools, we have witnessed the emergence of countless young leaders who have gone on to achieve academically, succeed professionally, and become contributing members of society. We have improved parent engagement, helped bind families, and strengthened local communities. We have learned strategies that have been taken back to the public schools, helping them become better equipped to deal with the difficult challenges they continue to face. We’ve rallied churches to develop structured youth programs and foster relationships across congregations of different faiths. We have helped inform the national dialogue and supported policy and program development through the Children’s Defense Fund. And, we have seen local leaders continue to adapt and innovate to ensure the future growth of CDF Freedom Schools through a number of creative new strategies.

When CDF Freedom Schools first began, and still today, we talked about the Foundation’s role in seeding initiatives and serving as an incubator, so that we could test and roll out programs that could be brought to scale and eventually replicated nationally for the greatest possible impact. Certainly, with CDF Freedom Schools, we were not merely playing in our own little sandbox.

Through the Children’s Defense Fund, this program has flourished into a national movement, and Kansas City has made its mark as the flagship initiative for CDF Freedom Schools. Although the Kauffman Foundation and Kansas City didn’t start CDF Freedom Schools, we’re honored to have partnered with the Children’s Defense Fund to provide a blueprint for successful program scale-up and to help demonstrate the necessity and value of ongoing funding commitments to ensure sustainability. Tempered by a few missteps, characteristic of innovative programs that seek to push boundaries and effect change, our hope is that we have served to visibly move the needle—not only making a difference locally, but also inspiring a nation to answer the imperative to empower young people everywhere.
EWING MARION KAUFFMAN

Ewing Marion Kauffman was born on a farm in Garden City, Missouri, in 1916. His family moved to Kansas City when he was a boy, and he called Kansas City home for the rest of his life.

Following his service in the Navy during World War II, Ewing Kauffman began working as a salesman for a pharmaceutical company. In 1950, his innately entrepreneurial spirit led him to start his own pharmaceutical company in the basement of his home.

He named his company Marion Laboratories Inc., using his middle name rather than his last name so his customers wouldn’t perceive him as a one-man operation. In his first year in business, he had sales of $36,000 and a net profit of $1,000. When he sold his company to Merrell Dow in 1989, it had grown to become a global diversified health care giant with nearly $1 billion in sales and employing 3,400 associates.

Mr. Kauffman brought more to Kansas City than an international business. With his purchase of the Kansas City Royals in 1968, he brought major league baseball back to his hometown, boosting civic pride and the city’s economy. With the same entrepreneurial vision he had always used as his guide, he made the Royals a model sports franchise. The team developed young players who won six division titles, two American League pennants, and a World Series championship in 1985.

Ewing Kauffman’s most enduring legacy to his community and the world is the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation. He established the Foundation with the same sense of opportunity he brought to his business endeavors and with the same convictions. Kauffman wanted his foundation to be innovative—to dig deep and get at the root of issues to fundamentally change outcomes in people’s lives. He wanted to help young people, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, get a quality education that would enable them to reach their full potential. He saw building enterprise as one of the most effective ways to realize individual promise and spur the economy.

Today the mission of the Kauffman Foundation mirrors Ewing Kauffman’s commitment to fostering both ends of the opportunity continuum: education and entrepreneurship.
INTRODUCTION

Ewing Kauffman passionately believed that a high-quality education was the singular key for unlocking the great potential held by young people in our society. Nowhere was this as important to him than among disadvantaged and underserved youth in Kansas City, whom he dedicated his foundation to helping.

Just one year prior to Mr. Kauffman’s death in 1993, an initiative rooted in the American Civil Rights Movement, known as Freedom Schools, had been reborn in Washington, D.C., under the leadership of Children’s Defense Fund President Marian Wright Edelman and the Black Community Crusade for Children® (BCCC). CDF Freedom Schools were modeled after the Mississippi Freedom Summer Project of 1964, when the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee created thirty “Freedom Schools” in Mississippi taught by college students using a curriculum focused on reading, arithmetic, black history, and the philosophy of social change.

As an expression of the values Mr. Kauffman held dear and, in turn, to advance the mission of his philanthropy, in 1995 Kansas City opened its first CDF Freedom School with funding from the Kauffman Foundation. Between 2000 and 2003, the Foundation supported expansion of the program to seven sites, representing a total commitment of $1.9 million during the initial eight-year period. Then, in response to continuing demand for enrollment, in 2004 the Foundation awarded a nine-year $12.9 million grant to scale the program to twenty sites in Kansas City. At the same time, the Foundation provided grants totaling slightly more than $1 million to support a regional partnership with St. Louis CDF Freedom Schools and awarded a four-year $4.9 million grant to the Children’s Defense Fund to build staff, infrastructure, and training on the national level.

Now in twenty-seven states throughout the country, CDF Freedom Schools provide summer and after-school enrichment for school-age children and are similarly led by college-age interns who emphasize reading, writing, mentoring, leadership, and conflict resolution.

Since the program’s inception in Kansas City in 1995, it’s estimated that CDF Freedom Schools have touched the lives of more than 20,000 local children, their parents, and their communities. Results of an independent, multi-year evaluation by Philliber Research Associates confirm the CDF Freedom Schools model helps children achieve academically, improve their reading skills, develop strong character, and strengthen their relationships with family and community. (The study is discussed in greater detail on page 17 of this report.) Organized today under the Kansas City CDF Freedom Schools® Initiative (KCFSI), the program has grown to be recognized by the Children’s Defense Fund as the most successful CDF Freedom Schools’ effort in the nation.

This report was written to document the initiative’s important history; share the experiences, insights and perspectives of those who nurtured and grew the program; demonstrate the scope of its impact; reflect on lessons learned; and recognize those who will carry the torch to help ensure that future generations of CDF Freedom Schools provide opportunities for Kansas City’s youth for many years to come. Near the end of the report, you’ll find short profiles highlighting a few CDF Freedom School participants, get a glimpse into what they are doing today, and learn how the program influenced their lives.
CDF FREEDOM SCHOOLS COME TO KANSAS CITY
Program Grows into Model for the Nation

The Beginnings

In the early 1990s, Dwayne Crompton and Tom Rhone, both longtime educators and child advocacy leaders in Kansas City, attended a CDF Freedom Schools presentation at a Children's Defense Fund national conference in North Carolina. Initially unaware of each other's presence at the gathering, Crompton attended as executive director for KCMC Child Development Corp. (KCMC), and Rhone as Kauffman Foundation program director for youth development. Following the meeting, the two connected, talked about the program, and shared their mutual excitement for bringing CDF Freedom Schools to Kansas City to establish a summer-enrichment alternative for underserved youth in the urban core. Discussions between the two continued, and their enthusiasm grew. As soon as they returned home, both were off and running to get a plan in place and garner local support for a Kansas City CDF Freedom School.

“I was quite impressed with the approach and, particularly, with the involvement of college-age interns as leaders and role models,” Rhone said. “I recall my excitement and speaking with Mr. Kauffman about Freedom Schools immediately upon my return.”

Meanwhile, Crompton worked swiftly to put together a proposal for Rhone to present. “Mr. Kauffman liked the concept, its fit with the Foundation’s mission and the work they were doing through Project Choice, his program to help low-income high school students get a college education,” Crompton said. As a result, the Foundation approved a $50,000 grant to partner with the Children’s Defense Fund; KCMC as the lead agency to provide accounting, grant writing, marketing, and other administrative functions; and Mt. Pleasant Missionary Baptist Church as the site for Kansas City’s first CDF Freedom School.

Rev. L. Henderson Bell, pastor at Mt. Pleasant, helped to identify qualified staff to implement the program. He reached out to longtime educator Carolyn Booker to be the local CDF Freedom School’s first project director and also tapped Sherie Holmes-Leverett, a key leader in Mt. Pleasant’s scholarship program, to be site coordinator. Both were sent to national training at Haley Farm in Clinton, Tennessee, to learn how to implement the program design. After three days, Booker and Holmes-Leverett came back completely convinced of CDF Freedom Schools’ potential for Kansas City. The team went on to hire eight interns, five of whom were college students participating in Project Choice. With designated leadership in place, the program was ready to roll out.

“We sent fliers throughout the inner-city communities, offering the CDF Freedom School as a new, free summer program,” Booker recalled. “Several of the first program scholars also were recruited through Head Start, which KCMC operated locally. The response was unbelievable. We were only able to accommodate eighty-five children, although we could have easily enrolled one hundred or more to start.”
In 1995, Mt. Pleasant Missionary Baptist Church not only became the site of the first Kansas City CDF Freedom School, but also the only one established in the state of Missouri. Mt. Pleasant remained the sole site in Kansas City for five years. During that time, more than 500 scholars participated in the innovative summer program. In those early days, little did anyone know they were planting the seed and cultivating what would eventually be regarded as a CDF Freedom School model for other programs that grew throughout the country.

**Tom Rhone**

Thomas J. (Tom) Rhone was one of the first associates to join Ewing Kauffman when the Kauffman Foundation began; he became a member of the Kauffman Foundation's Board of Trustees in 2003.

A Kansas City civic leader, Rhone is a former principal at Wyandotte High School in Kansas City, Kansas. He joined Marion Laboratories, Inc., in 1984 as a senior professional recruiter. He counseled Ewing Kauffman during the formative days of the Foundation's outreach and initiatives in youth development in Kansas City. Rhone was later appointed program director for Project Choice, which offered at-risk and low-income youth the opportunity for a college education. Originated by Ewing Kauffman, Project Choice operated from 1988 to 2001. Rhone was tapped again in 1995 to oversee the Foundation's role with Kansas City's CDF Freedom Schools.

Rhone had a long career as a professional educator before joining Marion Laboratories. He earned a master's degree in secondary school administration from the University of Denver and was inducted into Phi Delta Kappa, an academic honorary of professional educators.

Rhone worked as a teacher, coach, and assistant principal at Sumner High School in the Kansas City, Kansas, School District and then went on to become assistant principal and, later, principal at Wyandotte High School. He retired as a Foundation associate in September 2001.

**Dwayne Crompton**

Dwayne A. Crompton has dedicated his career and life to the advancement of educational and social issues, and has worked to improve the lives of young children and struggling families of all races. Since graduating from Lincoln University in 1968, he has worked in the field of education in Kansas City. Crompton holds degrees from Lincoln University and the University of Missouri.

After serving as a preschool teacher, elementary school teacher, and public school administrator, he was selected in 1977 as the second executive director of KCMC Child Development Corporation, a non-profit founded in 1970 under the federal Model Cities Demonstration Act to provide child development services for inner-city residents.

Crompton serves as past president of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and was re-elected as president of Child Development Associate (CDA) credentialing for the Council for Professional Recognition.

For the past eighteen years, Crompton has been part of the leadership of Kansas City’s CDF Freedom Schools. He now serves as chairman of the board of the Mt. Pleasant Education and Development Corporation, which operates KCFSI, the Saturday Reading Academy, and Teen Leadership Academy.
Scaling the Program

By 2002, Kansas City’s inaugural CDF Freedom School site at Mt. Pleasant had been up and running for several years, with two additional sites added in 2000: St. James United Methodist Church in Kansas City, Missouri, and King Solomon Baptist Church in Kansas City, Kansas.

Upon visiting these early CDF Freedom Schools, Kauffman Foundation President Carl Schramm witnessed firsthand how the program was working, and what he saw led him to support a major expansion. He was impressed by the eagerness and exceptional behavior of the scholars. He recognized that CDF Freedom Schools offered better ratios, more attention, and a fun, supportive environment. And, he knew Kansas City was continuing to invest money in its schools, but the investments were yielding little change or improvement.

In 2003, the Kauffman Foundation funded expansion of the program from three to seven sites and, in 2004, awarded a nine-year grant of $12.9 million to the newly formed Kansas City CDF Freedom Schools® Initiative (KCFSI) to expand the program to twenty sites, nineteen of which were realized by the program’s peak in 2008. As a result of these commitments, CDF Freedom Schools grew to unprecedented scale in Kansas City and eventually became the largest and most successful program in the country.

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- Central States Conference SDA
- Christian Fellowship Baptist Church
- Grace United Community Ministries
- Jamison Memorial Temple CME Church
- Mt. Olive Baptist Church
- Mt. Pleasant Missionary Baptist Church
- New Haven Baptist Church
- Palestine Missionary Baptist Church
- Pleasant Green Baptist Church
- Rainbow Mennonite Church
- Second Baptist Church
- Second Missionary Baptist Church
- Shalom Baptist Church
- St. James United Methodist Church
- St. Peter’s CME Church
- Zion Grove Missionary Baptist Church

### 2008
- Bethel-House of Prayer Church
- Calvary Temple Baptist Church
- Centennial United Methodist Church
- Central States Conference SDA
- Christian Fellowship Baptist Church
- Community Missionary Baptist Church
- Grace United Community Ministries
- Jamison Memorial Temple CME Church
- Kansas City Community Church
- Mt. Pleasant Missionary Baptist Church
- Mt. Olive Baptist Church
- New Haven Baptist Church
- Oak Ridge Missionary Baptist Church
- Palestine Missionary Baptist Church
- Pleasant Green Baptist Church
- Rainbow Mennonite Church
- Second Baptist Church
- St. James United Methodist Church
- St. Peter’s CME Church

### 2009
- Bethel-House of Prayer Church
- Centennial United Methodist Church
- Central States Conference SDA
- Christian Fellowship Baptist Church
- Grace United Community Ministries
- Jamison Memorial Temple CME Church
- Kansas City Community Church
- Mt. Pleasant Missionary Baptist Church
- New Haven Baptist Church
- Oak Ridge Missionary Baptist Church
- Palestine Missionary Baptist Church
- Pleasant Green Baptist Church
- Rainbow Mennonite Church
- Second Baptist Church
- St. James United Methodist Church
- St. Peter’s CME Church

### 2010
- Bethel-House of Prayer Church
- Centennial United Methodist Church
- Central States Conference SDA
- Christian Fellowship Baptist Church
- Grace United Community Ministries
- Mt. Pleasant Missionary Baptist Church
- Oak Ridge Missionary Baptist Church
- Palestine Missionary Baptist Church
- Pleasant Green Baptist Church
- Rainbow Mennonite Church
- Second Baptist Church
- Sheffield Family Life Center
- St. James United Methodist Church

### 2011
- Bethel-House of Prayer Church
- Centennial United Methodist Church
- Christian Fellowship Baptist Church
- Friendship Baptist Church
- Grace United Community Ministries
- Harvest Church International
- Learning Zone
- Mt. Pleasant Missionary Baptist Church
- Oak Ridge Missionary Baptist Church
- Rainbow Mennonite Church
- St. Peter’s CME Church

### 2012
- Bethel-House of Prayer Church
- Central States Conference SDA
- Christian Fellowship Baptist Church
- Grace United Community Ministries
- Friendship Baptist Church
- Mt. Pleasant Missionary Baptist Church
- Oak Ridge Missionary Baptist Church
- Rainbow Mennonite Church
- St. Peter’s CME Church

“Compared with other cities with CDF Freedom Schools, Kansas City has been somewhat unique in locating the program in faith-based sites in the community,” said Rev. Darren Faulkner, interim executive director for KCFSI. “CDF doesn’t mandate that the program be housed in a church or other faith-based site, although there are specific requirements around student-to-teacher ratios, lunchrooms, restrooms, division of space, and the ability to accommodate at least one hundred children per site.” In addition, KCFSI requires that each church pay 10 percent of its respective operating costs to host a CDF Freedom School.

According to Faulkner, KCFSI has always maintained that faith-based sites offer established, familiar venues that are safe and trusted havens for the community. The Mt. Pleasant CDF
Freedom School served as a model for the other faith-based sites in Kansas City and today remains the largest site in the country, presently serving 165 children.

Prior to the expansion, KCMC’s role as lead agency for Kansas City CDF Freedom Schools transferred to Mt. Pleasant; the church continued to effectively administer the program for the initial three sites. However, as the number of children and locations grew through subsequent scaling of the program, it became challenging for Mt. Pleasant to serve as the grantee agency for the entire program.

“Mt. Pleasant did a great job programmatically, but it didn’t have the resources of KCMC,” Crompton explained. “As the program was scaled, it became very difficult to manage, and the needs grew beyond the church’s capacity. They had to work on plans for the program to become sustainable and, at the same time, scale it six-fold. To their credit, they were able to step up fully to nineteen CDF Freedom School sites, but it was just too much.”

As a result, between 2009 and 2012, the number of sites eventually pared back to its current nine to become more manageable. The number of children served annually has grown from one hundred in 1995 to more than 900 in 2012. Today’s program has greater geographic reach throughout the urban cores in Kansas City, Missouri, and Kansas City, Kansas, and sites are aligned to increase overall program efficiency and effectiveness.

“Kauffman funding and the growth of the Kansas City program over the years allowed it to be a great learning lab that helped CDF determine how to best administer Freedom Schools on a national level. Kansas City served as a beta site and incubator. As an early partner, Kansas City worked with us to identify and define key roles, and to develop policies and procedures—fundamentals we could then replicate elsewhere. For example, it was apparent that, as we grew, it was becoming increasingly difficult to train everyone every year. Kansas City helped us think through ways to modify training by establishing a strong local partner and using experienced interns who had already trained for three years. The approach added cost efficiencies while maintaining overall training goals. Kansas City tested the method locally and then shared the program nationally.”

Jeanne Middleton-Hairston
National Director,
CDF Freedom Schools
LESSON LEARNED:
Strong local leadership is necessary to ensure effective implementation of the program and proper management of its growth.

It’s easy to get excited about a creative, new solution for solving tough, age-old problems underlying our society—particularly when those problems directly affect our youth, and the solution offers the promise of lifting those children out of disadvantaged environments, giving them opportunity, and helping to propel them toward a better tomorrow. However, despite the honorable intentions of the most eager and enthusiastic champion, and the strategic and tactical guidance of an expertly crafted model, having the right people, with the right skills, and the right commitment—on the ground locally—is the only way to ensure successful delivery and growth of even the best program.

First, recognize that dedicated vision and leadership are essential—beyond having a committed and talented program staff who run the day-to-day operations. Appoint a qualified leader and have clear succession plans in place for critical positions to ensure effective future leadership. For programs with multiple partners and oversight, make sure each institution’s role is clearly defined and documented. Continue to review and update plans regularly.

Next, identify the specific skills needed for implementation and management before recruiting the best people for the job. And, be sure to institute ongoing local training and professional development beyond what is provided on the national level.

Once the program is operational, remember that a grand vision for expansion requires an equally grand vision for managing growth, particularly with long-term commitments. Expand at a manageable pace and don’t exceed the program’s ability to finance the operation. Capacity is key, but effective scaling doesn’t have to involve a vast number of sites. The goal should be to serve the greatest number at the fewest sites, thereby eliminating duplication of services and lowering administrative costs.

Be sure to have mechanisms in place that allow evaluation of the program three, five, and ten years down the road. Remain true to the long-range plan and always have diverse sources of funding. Community buy-in is critical for the longevity of any initiative. If the community wants the program, it will support long-term strategies for its success.

Lastly, imbue the program with a very big heart but run it like a business. Establish a board that is truly engaged, committed to the project, and plays an active role, particularly when it comes to funding. Insist on an annual review of the business plan and involve the board and funders to evaluate all aspects of the program, including operating budgets, sustainability, resources (including human capital), marketing, and public relations.
WITHIN THE WALLS OF CDF FREEDOM SCHOOLS
“Something Inside So Strong”

Mission and Philosophy

The strength and determination that are reflected from within CDF Freedom Schools represent the guiding philosophy of the program and form the basis of a bond that is shared by individuals involved at every level. CDF Freedom Schools seek to empower parents, children, young adults, and the community around the daily theme: I can make a difference in myself, my family, my community, my country, and my world through hope, education, and social action.

By definition, the mission of KCFSI is to provide a safe environment for the operation of a literacy-based summer program managed by caring adults who utilize teaching techniques that nurture, build self-esteem, foster leadership, and develop a love for reading among youth.

The program provides six weeks of summer enrichment for urban youth ages five to seventeen using a model curriculum that supports children and their families around five essential components: high-quality academic enrichment; parent and family involvement; civic engagement and social action; intergenerational leadership development; and nutrition, health and mental health.

The core beliefs central to CDF Freedom Schools are:

- All children are capable of learning and achieving at high standards.
- Culture and community conditions influence child learning.
- Appreciation and knowledge of one’s culture engenders self-worth and the ability to live in community with others.
- Education, teachers, and mentors are transformative agents.
- Literacy is essential to personal empowerment and civic responsibility.
- Effective teaching requires planning, creativity, and implementation, with reflection and processing.
- Learning communities that offer a sense of safety, love, caring, and personal power are needed for transformative education.
- Classroom discipline and management are integral parts of instructional practice.
- Parents are crucial partners in children’s learning and need supports to become better parents.
- As citizens, children and adults have the power to make a difference in their communities and be advocates for themselves.

CDF Freedom School sites are designed to be safe, restorative learning spaces where adults and young adults from the community share an enthusiasm for learning and reading, and
commit to serving as mentors at a classroom ratio of 1:10. Parents are engaged as site volunteers and participate in weekly workshops on children’s developmental needs, civic responsibility, and other relevant topics.

During the day, children read high-quality books and are engaged in learning activities that are appropriate to their developmental needs and interests. They receive two nutritious meals and a healthy snack each day. The program gives families access to free high-quality childcare and allows young people, whose lives may have been interrupted and impacted by crises, to receive consistent, daily service to better understand themselves, their situations, each other, and their potential.

All children are encouraged and supported to dream, set goals, and cultivate positive attitudes and high expectations—principles that are expressed every day in CDF Freedom Schools through the song “Something Inside So Strong,” which serves as a kind of anthem for the program.

“Scholars sing this hymn every day during Harambee! It is a constant throughout Freedom Schools,” said Nita Daniels, 2008 site coordinator for the Mt. Pleasant CDF Freedom School. “Embracing the words, feeling the song, and having it as something to carry with them is such a critical piece for children.”

A Day in the Life of a Scholar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8:00–8:30 a.m.</td>
<td>Breakfast with Children and Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:30–9:00 a.m.</td>
<td>Harambee!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:00–10:30 a.m.</td>
<td>Integrated Reading Curriculum, Conflict Resolution, Social Action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:30–10:45 a.m.</td>
<td>Morning Break</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:45–11:45 a.m.</td>
<td>Integrated Reading Curriculum (cont.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:45–Noon</td>
<td>D.E.A.R. (Drop Everything and Read)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noon–1:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:00–3:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Afternoon Activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Dismissal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:30 p.m.</td>
<td>Daily Debrief Meeting</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Harambee! Pulling Together

In all CDF Freedom Schools, Harambee! is a time of informal sharing when children and staff come together to celebrate themselves and each other. Harambee is a Kiswahili word meaning "let's pull together." The phrase was first used as a call for unity upon the release of Jomo Kenyatta, a political prisoner who was harshly treated for seeking freedom from Britain for his home country of Kenya. Toward the end of his stay in prison, Kenyatta was elected the first president of the newly independent Kenya. In his first speech as president to his countrymen, he asked that all people hearing his voice join hands. He then instructed them to shout Harambee three times, the third time being the loudest. Even today, Harambee is used to settle disputes and other conflicts in Kenya.

In CDF Freedom Schools, Harambee! has six components:

- Reading aloud
- Motivational song
- Cheers/chant
- Recognition
- Moment of silence
- Announcements
KCFSI Organizational Structure

KCFSI is one of only a few programs in the country that has centralized administration and accountability, serving to facilitate CDF Freedom Schools for multiple sites and coordinating on their behalf with school districts, nonprofits, and other community partners throughout the region.

“Our structure in Kansas City has been somewhat unique,” Faulkner said. “For a long time, we were the only program with centralized administration and accountability, but we’ve been the model for at least one other CDF Freedom School program in North Carolina. The approach has helped in terms of scaling the program and giving us the ability to evaluate and develop strategies for Freedom Schools citywide.”

The organizational structure of KCFSI includes key roles at both the initiative and site levels. An executive director, program manager, and program assistant provide oversight and administration at the initiative level; the program is managed by a project director and site coordinator at each location, and implemented primarily by college-age student interns.

KCFSI staff training is rigorous and ongoing, including an initial three-day session at Haley Farm in Clinton, Tennessee, for site coordinators, interns, and project directors; a week-long program for interns and site coordinators at the Ella Baker Child Policy Training Institute at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville; a week of site-based training for all staff; and ongoing local training and professional development provided through the Carolyn Booker Skills Development Institute.

Ella Baker Child Policy Training Institute

The Ella Baker Child Policy Training Institute teaches college-age interns to become trainers, who then work to develop other interns to serve in CDF Freedom Schools across the country. In honor of Ella Jo Baker, a hero of the Civil Rights Movement who inspired and guided emerging leaders, the training program promotes the principles of servant leadership by fostering an understanding of the connection between effective programs and public policy, and the importance of community development, political advocacy, and coalition building. The strong ethic of service is evident across generations, as community leaders support these servant leaders while they teach and mentor younger children in CDF Freedom Schools. KCFSI is responsible for graduating a great number of students from this elite corps of trainers.

Carolyn Booker Skills Development Institute

The Carolyn Booker Skills Development Institute provides local training in Kansas City for all CDF Freedom School staff, from project directors, site coordinators, and interns to culinary and custodial personnel, and certified teachers. Named in honor of longtime Kansas City educator and first Kansas City CDF Freedom School Project Director Carolyn Booker for her dedication to children and passion for education, the Institute’s mandatory local training focuses on classroom management, curriculum implementation, operations, safety and emergency procedures, teambuilding, and leadership development. Training is held for three to five days every year during mid- to late May.
LESSON LEARNED:
Continue to expand and evolve a view of what the program can and should be; experiment and innovate to meet changing needs.

When an educational enrichment program has stood the test of time the way CDF Freedom Schools has, a need to adjust both the model and delivery along the way is to be expected. As the world evolves and changes, so, too, will the needs of the program, its participants, and the resources available to operate it.

CDF Freedom Schools have recently come to a major inflection point. The need to expand the program to incorporate the mechanics of reading, include math in the curriculum, and partner with local school districts to ensure specific educational goals are met is clear. However, as changes are made, it’s essential that the founding principle to foster a love of reading remains intact. The integrity of the model must be maintained, including the key components of student interns, parent engagement, and leadership development.

Shepherds of the program must be willing to make practical changes to sustain the program. For example, the redesign/re-tooling of learning materials, increased local training, and limited travel are the kinds of strategies that warrant consideration. In particular, creative use of technologies, such as Skype and webinars, should be evaluated for the ability to reach and impact greater numbers of scholars while reducing costs.

Equally as important, those responsible for the next generation of CDF Freedom Schools should embrace creativity and openness about new funding partners and sponsors. The most prescient leaders will bring together diverse resources in new ways and reach out to the mainstream community so children can see a future that is wide-ranging and crosses borders.

Efforts need to go beyond urban churches to include suburban churches, school systems, and the business community. Program champions must cast a wide net and test boundaries, working to involve diverse entities, such as homeless shelters, juvenile detention centers, Catholic archdioceses, Jewish community centers, colleges, universities, and more.

“If you give slow learners a week at a Freedom School, you can’t identify them afterward. Kids demand of each other that they produce. They learn from and live up to each other’s expectations through positive peer pressure.”

Rev. L. Henderson Bell, Pastor, Mt. Pleasant Missionary Baptist Church

“Being a part of Freedom Schools as an intern was pretty amazing. I discovered a lot of kids weren’t reading where they should have been. But they were still so eager to read, despite feeling really self-conscious about their ability. Freedom Schools are structured in such a way that everybody belongs. It builds a close community of all kinds of kids. And, as an intern, the experience was as empowering for me as it was for them. I’d never seen kids get so excited about reading. The experience really influenced my work today as a seventh through eleventh grade coach helping prepare kids to succeed in college.”

La Trisha Hudson, 2007 Intern, Kansas City CDF Freedom Schools
PERSPECTIVES ON THE IMPACT OF CDF FREEDOM SCHOOLS

Quantitative and qualitative evaluation of Kansas City CDF Freedom Schools has played an important role in the program’s longstanding operation and success. Through formal assessment of academic and social skills impact, as well as anecdotal evidence from those involved in a variety of capacities, KCFSI has confirmed the positive impact of the program and also shed light on what’s working, what’s not, and where changes need to be made.

The Philliber Research Associates Evaluation

A key component of Kauffman’s support of KCFSI included a three-year evaluation of the program’s impact on scholars, parents, interns, and churches. Conducted by Philliber Research Associates between 2005 and 2007, the study included eighteen CDF Freedom School sites in Kansas City, which enrolled a total of 3,274 children during the three-year period. Half came from single-parent homes, and 44 percent lived with two parents. Ninety-four percent lived in homes with at least one wage earner; one in five lived in a household with an annual income of less than $20,000; and one in six families had incomes above $75,000. Half of the scholars attended at least 90 percent of the time, and the same number, who were eligible to do so, returned the following summer.

“Freedom Schools have a ‘village’ impact, something that I think is really missing today. It used to be communities were built around shared neighborhoods, schools, churches, and even workplaces. Now everything is spread out. But Freedom Schools help foster a tight-knit nucleus. The program brings everyone together and helps build relationships and a sense of community. There are a variety of social and economic styles represented, but there is always an opportunity for everyone to learn, share, and give back.”

Stacy Jackson, Parent, Kansas City CDF Freedom Schools

“Kauffman invested significantly in the evaluation component and really set an early example,” said Jeanne Middleton-Hairston, national director, CDF Freedom Schools. “Historically, funders fund programs but not measurement of outcomes. The Kansas City Philliber study allowed us to leverage credible research to show the impact of Freedom Schools and help build the program nationally.”

Results confirmed that the CDF Freedom Schools’ model helps children achieve academically and improves reading skills, develops strong character, and strengthens relationships with family and community.

According to the evaluation, gains in reading were greatest for scholars in sixth through eighth grades, girls, scholars from lower-income families, those attending multiple years, and those attending locations that implemented the Kansas City CDF Freedom Schools’ model best.

Specific findings from the study follow:

- Scholars’ end-of-school reading scores on average were 1.2 points higher than they were during the first week, compared to an increase of just 0.5 percent for students in the non-CDF Freedom School comparison group. Scholars increased their reading ability an average grade equivalent of about two months, which compares favorably with other similar programs and offsets the decline in reading abilities many students experience during the summer.
Level 3, or the oldest, scholars (sixth through eighth grades), and Level 1, or the youngest, scholars (second grade and lower), demonstrated significant gains in reading scores, with increases of 1.9 percent and 1.8 percent, respectively; Level 2 scholars (third through fifth grades) showed only a very slight increase of 0.2 percent.

Reading scores for scholars with an annual family income of less than $40,000 increased 1.3 percent; those with an annual family income of $40,000 or more increased 0.8 percent. Both groups increased more than similar comparison groups.

The study shows a direct relationship between the ratings a school received for how well it implemented the program model and the scholar reading scores for that location: the higher the implementation score, the greater the average reading gains. On a scale from one to ten, scholars in programs that received average ratings of 8.5 or higher demonstrated a reading score improvement of 1.9 percent; those in programs having an implementation score of 7.1 to 8.4 demonstrated a reading score improvement of 1.3 percent; and those in programs receiving a score of 7.0 or below improved their reading score by just 0.7 percent. It’s also interesting to note that schools where implementation scores increased from one year to the next had corresponding gains in reading improvement, while those with decreased scores had reduced gains.

Scholars’ average reading scores continued to improve each year they participated in the program, with those participating for three summers showing an increase of 2.2 percent, compared to a 1.4 percent increase after two summers and just 0.2 percent after one summer. Gains among comparison students were only half those of scholars, creating an ever-widening gap in reading achievement over time. These data suggest that scholars not only increased their skills during the summer but also entered school in the fall more ready to continue learning.

In addition to reading ability, the Philliber study looked at scholars’ attitudes toward learning, cultural appreciation, community involvement, conflict resolution, acceptance of responsibility, and social adjustment. Data were obtained from surveys completed by parents of scholars at the beginning of the summer program and again in October, following resumption of the regular school year. Comparison parents completed surveys on the same schedule.

On five of the six dimensions of character development, parents reported a slight positive change in their children, with Love of Learning and Cultural Appreciation increasing relatively more at 1.1 percent and 1.6 percent, respectively. Parents of comparison students reported declines on five of the six dimensions. Drops in four of these were significant, with Community Involvement plummeting by 4.2 percent; Conflict Resolution Skills declining by 2.9 percent; Acceptance of Responsibility dropping by 1.7 percent, and Social Adjustment edging downward by 1.2 percent.

“The thing that strikes me most is how important and significant Freedom Schools are to parents. So many continue to voice their gratitude about what the program has meant to them. I remember parents telling me that they learned more through Freedom Schools than in all their years of parenting. In particular, they said how much they got out of the parents’ workshop and from sharing experiences with other parents or family members who were raising children.”

Shyree Holmes-Leverett, Inaugural Site Coordinator, Kansas City CDF Freedom Schools
The evaluation also found that interns were positively influenced by their Kansas City CDF Freedom Schools experience. Both interns and comparisons were involved in charities, community organizations, leadership, and politics before the program began. However, according to the study, interns were more likely to retain their involvement at follow-up than were comparisons. Interns also increased their interest in the news and their political involvement, while these decreased among comparisons. A substantially greater number of interns planned to enter the field of teaching than their comparison-group counterparts.

Study findings additionally demonstrated that Kansas City CDF Freedom Schools are a valuable asset for growing and strengthening host churches. While these churches have strong histories, the program provided a way for them to fill an important gap in their ministries, while attracting new families to their church.

**Social Skills and Behavior Assessment**

KCFSI commissioned the Kansas City Area Education Research Consortium to conduct an assessment of the effects of CDF Freedom Schools on children’s social skills and behaviors during the summer of 2011. The study showed that, overall, scholars experienced positive changes during the six-week program.

Using the Social Skills Improvement System (SSIS) Assessment, a tool that measures changes in social skills and problem behaviors, scholars were given an SSIS pre-assessment during the first week of the summer program and a post-assessment during the last week. The assessment looked at social skills in the areas of assertion, communication, cooperation, empathy, engagement, responsibility, and self-control. The problem behaviors evaluated were bullying, externalizing, hyperactivity/inattention, and internalizing, as well as autism for children under age eight only.

Using zero to represent a baseline of no change at all, each child’s score was then examined for significant gains or losses between their initial and final assessment over each of the seven social skills and four problem behaviors. Although most of the margins of change are relatively small, the time between SSIS assessments was only six weeks, so any margin of change at all is considered noteworthy (See Figure 1).

“Kansas City Freedom Schools gave the national program credibility and legitimacy. Having Kansas City and Kauffman in the room, and especially having an evaluation—having Kansas City do well—gave other partners hope. They began thinking: ‘If they can do it, we can do it. There is concern about low-income kids or children of color doing well. It does matter, and organizations will fund it.’ The confidence genuinely rippled across the country.”

Jeanne Middleton-Hairston, National Director, CDF Freedom Schools
**Figure 1: Social Skills and Behavior Improvements**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>All Scholars</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Skill</td>
<td>Assertion</td>
<td>+0.456**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Behavior</td>
<td>Internalizing</td>
<td>-0.974***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Age Group 8-12        |                       |                  |
| Problem Behavior      | Internalizing        | -1.124***        |

| Age Group 13-18       |                       |                  |
| Social Skill          | Communication         | +0.564*          |
| Social Skill          | Cooperation           | +0.723*          |
| Social Skill          | Assertion             | +1.309***        |
| Social Skill          | Overall Social Skill Score | +4.340*** |

*Minimum probability of significance: *** 99%; ** 95%; * 90%

Key findings from the study follow:

- Scholars overall showed a decrease of -0.974 in internalizing behavior, defined as feeling anxious, sad, lonely, and exhibiting poor self-esteem. The decrease was most pronounced for scholars eight to twelve years of age, who showed a score of -1.124.

- Older scholars, thirteen to eighteen years of age, increased their level of assertion +1.309, defined as initiating behaviors such as asking others for information, introducing oneself, and responding to the actions of others. Scholars overall showed at +0.456 change in assertion.

- Older scholars also increased their level of cooperation +0.723, defined as helping others, sharing materials, and complying with rules and directions. These same scholars also increased their level of communication +0.564, defined as taking turns and making eye contact during a conversation, using appropriate tone of voice and gestures, and being polite by saying "thank you" and "please."

- The largest gain overall was found in the older scholars who showed a significant and positive increase in their overall social skills score of +4.340.

It’s interesting to note that the pre-assessment identified empathy as an area of relative weakness among all KCFSI scholars from every age group in every site, and particularly for scholars ages thirteen to eighteen years, when compared to the average scoring range for children across the country. Empathy is defined as showing concern and respect for others’ feelings and viewpoints. Based on this evidence, it was recommended that future CDF Freedom Schools develop conversation and lessons around the subject of empathy for their older scholars.
LESSON LEARNED:
Ongoing evaluation of the program—both quantitative and qualitative—is essential for success.

Assessments of scholars’ reading ability, relationships with family and community, and social skills and behaviors are critical to determining the impact of CDF Freedom Schools on young people.

We know that reading skills, particularly among lower-income and minority students, generally decline during the summer months, leaving them behind when they return to school in the fall. So, understanding Freedom Schools’ ability to counter summer learning loss is particularly key.

However, as CDF Freedom Schools expand and evolve, it will be increasingly important to look at ways to evaluate new aspects of the program, including the impact on math learning or other academic goals, as well as on operational strategies, such as the effects of new kinds of partnerships and delivery models.

The Kauffman Foundation invested significantly in the evaluation of Kansas City CDF Freedom Schools. In fact, it was a stipulation of the grant that supported taking the program to scale. Future funders need to recognize the importance of their involvement in supporting this piece, and evaluation should be ongoing, including informal assessment of CDF Freedom Schools. Talking with stakeholders regularly and documenting their input is a key source of valuable, qualitative input, particularly for long-running operating programs. Rather than waiting until funding winds down and everyone is looking back, put in place a plan to systematically gain insights in real time to help inform the program as you go.

“Freedom Schools strive to identify those latent talents children possess and translate them into something productive . . . The irony is Freedom Schools are seen as a poverty program focused on the black community that works. Of course, it works in the black community because there are fewer college graduates and less ability to direct children academically. In reality, it is an accelerated program that moves all children to excellence.”

Rev. L. Henderson Bell, Pastor, Mt. Pleasant Missionary Baptist Church
SUSTAINING KANSAS CITY’S “NEXT GENERATION CDF FREEDOM SCHOOLS”

Costs of the Program

In 2012, Kansas City CDF Freedom Schools served nearly 900 children at nine sites across Greater Kansas City with an operating budget of about $1 million. Since its inception, the program has worked to maximize donor dollars, consistently allocating at least 90 percent of funds for program-related expenses. Currently, 6 percent of the budget covers administrative costs, and 3 percent goes toward fundraising. Keeping delivery costs low remains a priority, with expenses estimated at $986 per child.

When CDF Freedom Schools first began at Mt. Pleasant Missionary Baptist Church in 1995, the Kauffman Foundation served as the sole funding source, with additional assistance from Harvester’s Summer Program, which provided food to CDF Freedom School students. With the continuing evolution of CDF Freedom Schools and the Kauffman Foundation’s nine-year grant ending in 2012, KCFSI is developing strategies to secure new sources of funding to sustain Next Generation CDF Freedom Schools. This era will be marked by continued respect for the traditions and integrity of the CDF Freedom Schools model while, at the same time, fostering innovative ideas and creative solutions for ensuring the program’s future success.

For example, KCFSI is now applying the key principles, goals, and philosophy of CDF Freedom Schools—which have proven to be highly effective during the summer—to inform new programs throughout the year designed to meet the growing needs of inner-city youth. Reinforcing a mindset around the importance of literacy and leadership, these program extensions, including a Saturday Reading Academy, Saturday Leadership Academy, after-school programs, and a Pre-Kindergarten Literacy Boot Camp, establish important partnerships and create economies and synergies around the traditional CDF Freedom Schools model.

What’s Next for KCFSI?

KCFSI’s development plan for Next Generation CDF Freedom Schools includes a number of strategies to ensure sufficient funding support for programming, including a matching grant program, fundraising events, and diversification of partnerships across the community.

KCFSI continues to seek institutional partnerships to provide greater financial sustainability and allow for the natural growth of the program. The organization has identified several new grant sources, as well as developed a directed matching grant program, which asks various corporate and foundation supporters to match KCFSI’s fundraising efforts dollar for dollar, up to $50,000. The combined goal for monies raised through the matching program is $100,000. KCFSI also

“We didn’t envision the level of commitment needed to be successful. We must be inclusive of all faiths and beyond, and identify ways to touch more lives. A core goal of KCFSI has been to partner with faith-based sites. Over the last eighteen years, Kansas City Freedom Schools have become an icon of success. But we need to do this on a larger scale and garner support to make the program more attractive and accessible to everyone. Kids everywhere need to participate in the program as a part of their youth experience—to gain critical skills and develop a foundation for success.”

Rev. L. Henderson Bell, Pastor, Mt. Pleasant Missionary Baptist Church
operates two small fundraising events each year, as well as an annual dinner, which has raised as much as $90,000.

The most widespread funding efforts offering the greatest potential involve KCFSI leveraging a variety of creative partnerships across the community.

“We’re looking at a lot of different partners,” Crompton said. “In addition to the Kansas City, Missouri, School District, we’re working with the Kansas City, Kansas, Hickman Mills, and Raytown School Districts. We’re also seeking a number of corporate sponsors. We need to be open to new ways to gain support for Next Generation Freedom Schools.”

Through a recently established partnership with the Kansas City, Missouri, School District’s Promise Academy, KCFSI receives year-round reimbursement directly from the state for Average Daily Attendance (ADA) of children living within district boundaries who participate in its after-school literacy program. “It allows Freedom Schools to start the year with nearly one-third of its operating budget covered,” Crompton explained. “This is the kind of partnership we need more of.”

Another example of an innovative partnership is KCFSI’s agreement with the Hickman Mills School District to provide a Saturday Leadership Academy for one hundred middle school students at Smith-Hale College Preparatory Academy. The six-week program, held in both the fall and spring, consists of literacy, leadership, college preparation, and self-esteem-boosting initiatives, and includes a strong parent-involvement component.

KCFSI is also working to create efficiencies and identify ways to become more cost-effective. Already serving larger numbers of scholars at fewer locations, the organization is working toward further consolidation at sites having even greater capacity. “We would like to see 1,000 children served every year but at fewer locations,” Faulkner said.

A long-term goal involves the renovation of another facility owned by Mt. Pleasant that could become a CDF Freedom School site and accommodate 200 scholars. “Our average daily attendance is about 85 percent with 886 scholars. We have very good numbers that clearly demonstrate interest and commitment from children and their families,” he noted.

Faulkner added that sustainability goes beyond the actual dollars of financial support: “We’re building critical partnerships that may not be providing funds but are bringing much-needed in-kind support in the way of supplies, food, and facilities for classrooms or training. Their contributions are equally important.”

KCFSI is considering other supplemental sources of funding as well, including parent assessment fees, fundraising campaigns, additional grant opportunities, state vouchers, and earned service fees.
“The shelf life of the average Freedom School is two to three years,” Faulkner said. “Typically, programs run out of money, and then they are done. We not only want to sustain the program, we want to grow it.”

Faulkner added that the ultimate goal of Next Generation CDF Freedom Schools is a year-round presence in Kansas City—nine months during the regular school year plus summers. “We don’t know yet exactly what this will look like,” he said. “It might look like a charter-type model but with traditional Freedom Schools during the summer months. What we do know is that for future sustainability, we will always need third-party entities like the school districts or a Kauffman Foundation to be able to raise $1 million to serve 900 students every year.”

LESSON LEARNED:
Sustainability requires a clear understanding of, commitment to, and specific skills to secure ongoing funding.

From the beginning, KCFSI didn’t have deep involvement and commitment from the larger community to help sustain it. With the Kauffman Foundation virtually funding the program in its entirety for more than fifteen years, an understanding of the need to cultivate additional sources for future sustainability failed to make its way to the forefront.

Long-term funding commitments are extremely valuable in developing and growing CDF Freedom Schools. However, regardless of whether the program has a primary source of funding, additional partners should be identified early and engaged often to gain support and ensure a continuous flow of financial support.

Make sure the responsibility is shared with service providers, who should set goals and benchmarks to identify new sources of funds. However, recognize that fundraising is both art and science, and most lack the skills and understanding needed to be effective. Develop local training to teach those who want to run CDF Freedom Schools how to solicit and win grants. While there is excellent national training on curriculum, parenting, afternoon activities, field trips, team building, and how interface with children and parents, there is little opportunity to get effective training on how to fundraise and be sustainable. Because there are community-specific issues that may affect success, including critical needs, unique characteristics, key players, and the overall fundraising landscape, training must be provided locally.

Don’t forget that families are also resources for financial support. With one in six locally having incomes of $75,000 or more, parents should be asked to do their fair share. Incorporate a sliding fee schedule based on ability to pay.

Lastly, a marketing and branding strategy is critical in order to “sell” the program and secure third-party funding. Include this in the business plan. Efforts should involve actual CDF Freedom School scholars, whenever possible, to help tell the program’s story and show its results. People need to see what is happening and believe in the program to support it. Publicize and merchandise outcomes and success stories at every opportunity.
The National Perspective: Where We’ve been, What Lies Ahead

An interview with Children’s Defense Fund President Marian Wright Edelman

Q: How has CDF Freedom Schools evolved over the years?

We’re seeing a transformation of the program. Today, we’re moving beyond instilling a love of reading to include more of the mechanics of reading, and we’re adding math. We’re more focused on closing the achievement gap and are now working with school districts to help meet critical goals for math and reading scores.

Q: Has anything surprised you about the program?

An unexpected benefit that we’re witnessing is how CDF Freedom Schools has served to create a pipeline of minority teachers and educators as a result of the experiences of interns and scholars. Many realize a calling to the profession and have a strong desire to continue to work to make a difference in the lives of children in need. Our target is to have a CDF Freedom School in every historic black college in the country, so that we can expose students to the power of the movement and help build an even stronger base of educators to teach and mentor our youth.

Q: What were Kansas City’s most significant contributions to the program?

Kauffman Foundation funding for nine years allowed Kansas City to be a great learning lab for CDF Freedom Schools. We applaud Kauffman for setting the standard for incorporating assessment, so we have measurements that tell us the program is working and are a key element in demonstrating its success. Kansas City has shown itself to be a creative force, ahead of the game in expanding the view and potential impact of CDF Freedom Schools. The program is attracting new sponsors and cultivating unexpected partnerships that pull together diverse resources and demonstrate outreach to the mainstream community. Kansas City has really helped us understand what a flexible program CDF Freedom Schools can and should be.

Q: What are key lessons learned from CDF’s experiences with Kansas City CDF Freedom Schools?

We’ve learned a lot since Kansas City started its first CDF Freedom School in 1995. We know the model works in terms of its focus on literacy, parent engagement, the role of college-age interns, and leadership development. But we now know we need to change the culture around sustainability and diversification of the program’s funding base. We must experiment, innovate, and expand delivery of the CDF Freedom Schools’ model. At the same time, we’ve come to understand the power of having strong local leadership and a visionary to provide strategic guidance and a long view.

Q: What does Kansas City’s program need to be successful in the future?

I believe lasting power will show itself in Kansas City. Foremost, it will be necessary to strengthen community engagement overall. Also, programs need to institute church fund matching on a sliding scale so they have “skin in the game.” Then, we need to work with all CDF Freedom Schools and grantees to teach them how to identify funding sources and effectively apply for grants to broaden and sustain the program. Continued success will require a bottom-up approach that fuels the movement, not one that merely administers the program from the top down. In doing so, we need to re-weave the fabric of families and communities. CDF Freedom Schools will be at its most effective when implemented year-round, rather than just during the summer, and when it’s viewed not as a remediation model but as an empowerment model.
Marian Wright Edelman

Marian Wright Edelman, founder and president of the Children's Defense Fund (CDF), has been an advocate for disadvantaged Americans her entire professional life. Under her leadership, CDF has become the nation’s strongest voice for children and families.

Edelman, a graduate of Spelman College and Yale Law School, began her career in the mid-1960s when, as the first black woman admitted to the Mississippi Bar, she directed the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund office in Jackson, Mississippi. In 1968, she moved to Washington, D.C., as counsel for the Poor People's Campaign that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., began organizing before his death. She founded the Washington Research Project, a public interest law firm and the parent body of the Children's Defense Fund. For two years she served as the Director of the Center for Law and Education at Harvard University and, in 1973, began CDF.

Edelman served on the Board of Trustees of Spelman College, which she chaired from 1976 to 1987, and was the first woman elected by alumni as a member of the Yale University Corporation, which she served from 1971 to 1977. She has received more than one hundred honorary degrees and numerous awards for her work, including the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2000, the nation’s highest civilian award, and the Robert F. Kennedy Lifetime Achievement Award for her many writings.

She is a board member of the Robin Hood Foundation and the Association to Benefit Children, and is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations, the American Philosophical Society, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and the Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences.

“Freedom Schools is an excellent model for gathering an entire community around ‘children doing well,’ a vehicle with which to organize a multitude of stakeholders around a win-win. Communities always have a number of caring entities—educators, churches, chambers of commerce, junior leagues, community foundations—that want to ‘do good.’ But often, they are going in too many different directions with little to show for their efforts. The beauty of the Freedom Schools’ model is it allows everyone to organize around providing good books to those in need, training enthusiastic young interns to help develop future leaders, and teaching our kids in safe environments. Stakeholders can each provide a piece, and everyone who makes the program work can take ownership of its success. We’ve seen a lot of growth in communities where this has happened. Kansas City has been able to do it very well around the church community, but, for sustainability, it will be necessary to involve new and different partners. Churches can’t do it alone.”

Jeanne Middleton-Hairston, National Director, CDF Freedom Schools
FREEDOM SCHOOL SPOTLIGHT
*Where Are They Now?*

A few participants from throughout CDF Freedom School's history in Kansas City shared what they’re doing now, what the program has meant to them, and how participation in CDF Freedom Schools has impacted their lives.

“CDF Freedom Schools freed me to learn about and appreciate African-American history and social justice.”

- Jessikha Williams, Scholar, Class of 1995

Jessikha Williams has been involved with CDF Freedom Schools in one form or another since she was just eight years old. Starting out as a scholar with the very first CDF Freedom School in Kansas City in 1995, Williams went on to work as both a junior intern and intern, a teacher’s aide, and a general volunteer. Most recently, she became an Ella Baker Trainer, one of an esteemed group whose job it is to train other CDF Freedom School interns, site coordinators, and project directors.

“Freedom Schools helped me learn about and appreciate African-American history—something we never really talked about that much during school,” Williams said. “The program opened my eyes and made me want to learn about some very important issues related to social justice that I would not have been aware of otherwise.”

Williams graduated in 2012 from the University of New Mexico with a major in architecture and a minor in art. She said she chose this school because she wanted to go somewhere where she could meet new people: “I didn’t really want to follow the crowd. I wanted to break out and find my own way.”

Williams is still figuring out how to best use all of her skills, including art, architecture, and what she sees as some unique abilities acquired through her experiences with Freedom Schools. “Overall, I want to be an artist,” she explained. “I just don’t want to put myself in a box.”

Regardless of Williams’ exact career path, CDF Freedom Schools will remain a part. “It’s my dream to continue to be a part of Freedom Schools in some capacity for the rest of my life, holding different positions and being involved as the program grows,” she said.
“CDF Freedom Schools freed me to believe that anything is possible.”

- Ronell Bell, Scholar, Class of 1995

Ronell Bell, a fifth-grader in the CDF Freedom School class of 1995, remembers not wanting to leave once he got there. “It was like a second home, only better,” Bell said. “My living situation growing up was kind of bad, and the Mt. Pleasant Freedom School was a safe haven for me and for one of my siblings. We knew we could always get a hot meal and that we would be shown love. We got to get away from the negativity.”

Bell added that, if it weren’t for CDF Freedom Schools, he doesn’t know what, if any, positive role models he would have had. “Freedom Schools taught me to believe that anything is possible,” he said. “I saw people like me making it. They talked with us about college and told us we could get an education and do something more. It really opened another door for me.”

Bell went on to serve as a CDF Freedom School intern in 2003 and a site coordinator from 2008 to 2009. He attended Missouri Western State University and graduated in 2009 with a bachelor’s degree in physical education and a minor in athletic coaching. He received the University’s Senior of the Year Award in that same year. Today, Bell works as a behavioral therapist for both adults and children and is a minister at Mt. Pleasant Missionary Baptist Church.

“CDF Freedom Schools freed me to pursue my true calling as an educator.”

- Lovell Seals, Intern, Class of 1995

Lovell Seals, a Project Choice student at Kansas State University in 1995, was unexpectedly recruited as an intern for the first CDF Freedom School class because another intern dropped out.

“The Freedom Schools program was a gateway to my profession as an educator,” Seals recalled. “At the time, I was pre-med, but the program brought out an inner love and ability in me. I was fortunate to have several really talented, dedicated, and passionate mentors. I saw how natural it was for me to work with students and effectively deliver instruction to them—the rapport came so easily.” Seals later changed his major and never looked back.

Seals went on to graduate from Xavier University in New Orleans in 1999, becoming the first college graduate in his family. He worked as a fifth-grade teacher in both New Orleans and Memphis before starting his own tutoring business in 2002. Through his company, Success Educational Services, Seals became a certified provider of in-home tutoring for the Department of Children Services and is a state-approved supplemental service provider offering after-school tutoring in Tennessee.
“Freedom Schools freed me to witness the positive impact the program can have as kids grow up, go through college, and become adults.”

- Nita Daniels, Site Coordinator, Class of 2008

Nita Daniels had seen and known the passion for CDF Freedom Schools for many years prior to her involvement as a site coordinator. “My aunt, Carolyn Booker, was the very first project director, so I saw firsthand the impact the program was having,” Daniels said.

Prior to her role as site coordinator, Daniels served as a volunteer providing the Mt. Pleasant staff with office and administrative support. “When the opportunity presented itself, I was happy to volunteer,” she said. “I had worked in education and knew the importance of what was happening with Freedom Schools.”

According to Daniels, the program brings out a young person’s belief in him/herself. “A lot of kids were shy, introverted, and lacked the ability to express themselves,” she recalled. “Freedom Schools drives that ability. A child who probably never had experienced that level of confidence experiences it after one summer with Freedom Schools. It’s amazing to work today with successful, talented professionals in the community—people who were Freedom School kids and are now adults—who say, ‘I am the way I am because of my connection with Freedom Schools.’”

Today, Daniels serves as dean of students for the Ewing Marion Kauffman School, a Kansas City, Missouri, public charter school that provides college preparatory education for students in grades five through twelve.
ABOUT THE KANSAS CITY CDF FREEDOM SCHOOLS PARTNERS

The Children’s Defense Fund

The Children’s Defense Fund (CDF) is a non-profit child advocacy organization that has worked relentlessly for forty years to ensure a level playing field for all children. CDF champions policies and programs that lift children out of poverty, protect them from abuse and neglect, and ensure their access to health care, quality education, and a moral and spiritual foundation. Supported by foundation and corporate grants, and individual donations, CDF advocates nationwide on behalf of children to ensure they are always a priority.

The Black Community Crusade For Children®

The Black Community Crusade For Children® (BCCC), co-convened by CDF with Dr. John Hope Franklin and Dr. Dorothy Height, was quietly launched in 1990 to combat one of the worst crises the Black child and family faced since slavery. Over the past two decades, BCCC’s successes include the CDF Freedom Schools® program; the Harlem Children’s Zone; youth leadership development programs that have trained 20,000 young leaders; economic empowerment work in seventy-seven “Black Belt” southern counties; and the place-based policy work of PolicyLink.

Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation

The Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation was established by the late entrepreneur and philanthropist Ewing Marion Kauffman. Based in Kansas City, Missouri, the Kauffman Foundation is among the largest foundations in the United States with an asset base of approximately $2 billion. The vision of the Foundation is to foster “a society of economically independent individuals who are engaged citizens, contributing to the improvement of their communities.” In service of this vision, the Kauffman Foundation focuses its grant making and operations on two areas—education and entrepreneurship—which founder Ewing Kauffman saw as two ends of a continuum.

Kansas City CDF Freedom Schools® Initiative

Formed in 2004, The Kansas City CDF Freedom Schools® Initiative (KCFSI) is a joint venture of the Children’s Defense Fund’s Black Community Crusade for Children® (BCCC), the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, the Mt. Pleasant Missionary Baptist Church, and the KCMC Child Development Corporation. KCFSI provides educational programs and summer enrichment activities to help urban children ages five to seventeen enjoy and become proficient in reading, improve math skills, increase self-esteem, and develop positive attitudes toward learning. Under the KCFSI umbrella, the joint venture in 2012 operated nine CDF Freedom Schools in Kansas City.

KCMC Child Development Corporation

KCMC Child Development Corporation (KCMC) was founded in 1970 under the federal Model Cities Demonstration Act to provide high-quality early education to inner-city children throughout Greater Kansas City. KCMC served as the grantee agency for Kansas City CDF Freedom Schools during its early years prior to the program’s 2004 expansion. The agency also was responsible for administering Kansas City Head Start and the Child and Adult Care Food Program, as well as operating two child development centers.