Freedom School Partners

Children's Defense Fund Freedom Schools® Program

Evaluation Report

Submitted
by

The Center for Adolescent Literacies at UNC Charlotte

Culture, Community, and Civic Engagement

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OVERVIEW

Over the past 10 years, the Center for Adolescent Literacies at UNC Charlotte has conducted program evaluations for the Freedom School Partners' Children's Defense Fund Freedom Schools® programs in Charlotte, N.C. The focus of these evaluations has been on reading outcomes of Scholars (youth) in the program and, more recently to include data on Scholar and Servant Leaders Intern (SLI) experience. This is the ninth report of reading outcomes for Scholars in 10 of the 17 Charlotte Freedom School program sites during the summer 2018.

In this report, we share findings and analysis related to reading outcomes for Level II and III Scholars (youth) enrolled at 10 Freedom School sites in 2018 as measured using the *Ekwall-Shanker Reading Inventory* (Shanker & Cockrum, 2013)[1]. Additionally, we provide a snapshot of previous year's outcomes and a review of published research related to reading and summer learning loss.

Freedom School Partners' CDF Freedom Schools Program

The Children's Defense Fund (CDF) is a private, nonprofit child advocacy organization that was founded in 1973 to champion the rights of all children, especially those living in poverty. Based in Washington, DC, CDF grew out of the Civil Rights Movement under the leadership of Marian Wright Edelman, founder and former president of CDF. The Children's Defense Fund Leave No Child Behind® mission states that it seeks "to ensure every child a Healthy Start, a Head Start, a Fair Start, a Safe Start and a Moral Start in life and successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities."[2] CDF describes Freedom Schools as a program that "seeks to build strong, literate, and empowered children prepared to make a difference in themselves, their families, communities, nation and world today." In short, Freedom School is a summer program with a mission of empowerment that includes a significant focus on literacy.

Created by the Children's Defense Fund, the Freedom Schools program engages children in grades K-12[3] in a six week summer program designed to prevent the "learning loss" that students (known as Scholars in the program) typically experience over the months when school

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[1] We note that the inclusion of Level II and Level III Scholars in 2018 differs from previous evaluations conducted in earlier years. From 2009 through 2017, Level I Scholars as well as Level II and Level III Scholars were assessed.
[2] Information about the Children's Defense Fund and its programs is available at the CDF website: http://www.childrensdefense.org/.
[3] Grade and age ranges vary by Freedom School site. Some programs serve children across the K-12 span while others focus on K-5 or K-8.

is not in session. The Freedom Schools program also aims to have a positive impact on children's character development, leadership, and community involvement. The CDF Freedom Schools program provides enrichment with the stated goals of "helping children fall in love with reading, increase[ing] their self-esteem, and generate[ing] more positive attitudes toward learning." CDF reports that more than 150,000 children in grades K-12 have participated in Freedom School programs since its inception in 1995. In the summer of 2018, there were 11,830 Scholars in Freedom School programs in 87 cities and 28 states including Washington D.C. The Scholars are grouped by grade levels with Level I Scholars having just completed Kindergarten, first or second grade. Level II Scholars come from grades three through five and Level III Scholars from grades six through eight. There is a Level IV high school program at some sites nationally, including one site in Charlotte but that group was not included in this evaluation.

The Freedom Schools programs provide a literature based reading program called the Integrated Reading Curriculum or IRC. About 80 books are on the IRC's booklist and these books feature the work of many well-known authors. CDF has developed six weeks of lesson plans for approximately half of the books to help staff and Scholars reflect on the themes *I Can Make a Difference in: My Self, My Family, My Community, My Country, and My World with Hope, Education and Action*. The remaining titles are used to create on-site libraries of books for use during silent sustained reading and read-alouds, as well as for research on history and community service projects. Servant Leader Interns are recruited and provided with training that includes how to implement the Integrated Reading Curriculum. The majority of Interns are college-age students.

In Charlotte, CDF Freedom Schools are hosted by Freedom School Partners (FSP), a 501(c)(3) organization founded in 1999 that is dedicated to serving children and families living in poverty. FSP's mission is to "promote the long-term success of children by preventing summer learning loss through igniting a passion for reading and inspiring a love of learning." FSP began hosting Freedom Schools programs in 2004 at one location serving 100 scholars. In 2018, Freedom Schools served 17 sites and more than 1,100 Scholars. FSP partners with community groups, faith-based organizations, colleges and universities, and corporations, which provide volunteer and financial support.

Freedom School sites in Charlotte range in size from approximately 50 to 100 scholars and operate five days a week, from 8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Transportation is provided, and Scholars are served breakfast, lunch and a snack. Freedom School programs are offered at no charge to participating families beyond a $40 per family enrollment fee. Parents are asked to attend parent meetings and volunteer in the program.

A typical day at a Freedom School follows a pattern. After breakfast, the Scholars, site coordinator and interns come together for Harambee, a Kiswahili word for "let's pull together." Harambee is a time of celebration and affirmation akin to a daily pep-rally that includes songs, chants, and a read-aloud of a short book by a community member. Integrated Reading Curriculum, or IRC, follows Harambee. During IRC students go to their classrooms with their Intern for a 2-1/2 hour period of literacy activities built around the reading of culturally-diverse books. The program has a 1:10 Intern to Scholar ratio, and Scholars and Interns read, discuss and engage in activities drawn from the books. Following IRC, Scholars participate in D.E.A.R. (Drop Everything and Read) time, a daily period of silent reading where Scholars are able to self-select books. Following IRC, Scholars then eat lunch and engage in afternoon enrichment activities. The enrichment activities vary by site but include a mix of traditional summer activities like swimming and sports but also yoga, field trips to museums and other local sites, cooking and hands-on co-curricular activities that include an academic focus.

Evaluation History

As has been noted, this research builds on research conducted over a 10-year period including a pilot evaluation conducted at two Freedom School sites during the summer 2009. The evaluation was extended to additional sites after 2009 in order to provide a larger sample size to provide statistical significance in the findings. Ten or more sites have been included in the evaluation since 2010.

Two reading assessment measures have been used to capture pre/post data in these evaluations. The *Basic Reading Inventory* (BRI) 9th Edition (2008) and 10th Edition (2010) Form A and B was used between 2009 and 2015[4]. In 2016, the BRI was used at 14 sites while the *Ekwall/Shanker Reading Inventory* or ESRI (Shanker & Cockrum, 2013) was piloted at four sites. Following a review of results along with an analysis of the implementation from the BRI and ESRI in 2016, the ESRI was chosen as the assessment tool for 2017 and 2018.

While there has been some difference between the results of the BRI and ESRI, the findings across all evaluation years have remained relatively consistent. Between 80% and 90% of Freedom School Scholars grew or maintained in their ability to read as measured by the BRI and the ESRI across two measures of reading—the Independent Level (a level at which a child can read on their own) and the Frustration Level (the level at which a child cannot read successfully even with support). Figure 1 provides information about the percentages of Scholars who showed losses, maintained or showed gains in reading at the Independent Level for the BRI in years that reading inventory was used. Figure 2 provides this information for the ESRI data.

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[4] Form A and B did not change from the 9th to 10th editions of the *Basic Reading Inventory* so the assessments used between 2009 and 2015 were consistent.

Figure 3 and Figure 4 are snapshots of Frustration Level reading for the BRI and ESRI, respectively.

Important data were gathered in 2010 regarding students' attitudes towards the reading component of Freedom School with the overwhelming majority demonstrating positive attitudes towards the program (as determined in an analysis of Scholar interviews). The Scholars comments pointed to the engaging nature of the books and activities that are part of the IRC and to the role of the Servant Leader Interns as positive aspects of the program.

Figure 1. 2010-2016 Independent Level Results from the *Basic Reading Inventory*

BRI Independent Levels

Declined | Maintained | Improved

Year	Declined	Maintained	Improved
2016	14.63%	39.80%	45.58%
2015	12.00%	32.40%	55.60%
2013	16.50%	25.90%	57.60%
2012	8.20%	29.20%	62.60%
2011	9.30%	37.40%	53.30%
2010	10.60%	36.60%	50.80%
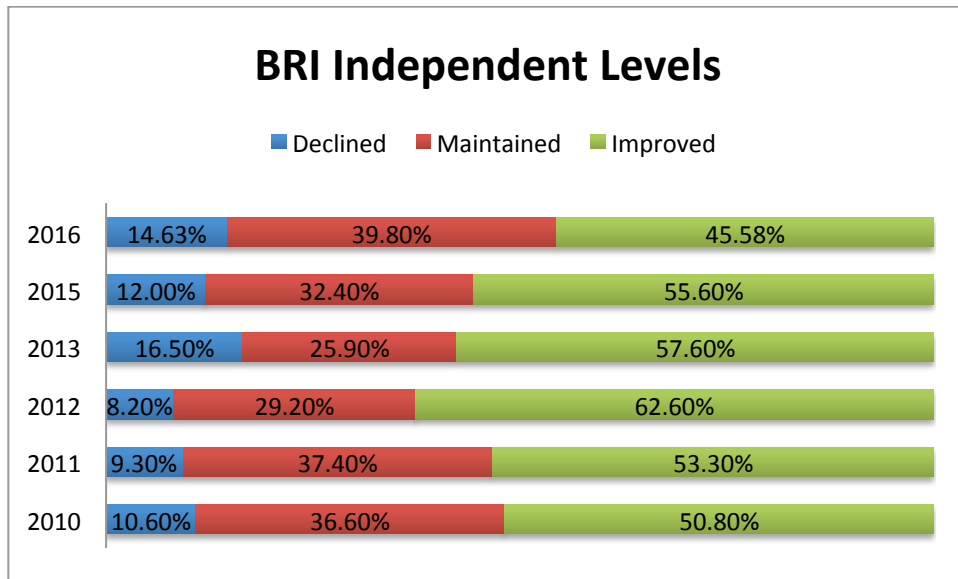
Figure 2. 2016-2017 Independent Level Results from the *Ekwall-Shanker Reading Inventory*

ESRI Independent Levels

Declined | Maintained | Improved

Year	Declined	Maintained	Improved
2017	21.80%	24.00%	54.20%
2016	11.40%	35.40%	53.20%

Figure 1 and Figure 2 suggest that patterns of change in reading from pre- to post-test are similar across years and from the BRI to ESRI. We note that 2017 is a year where a larger percentage of Scholars (21.8%) showed declines in reading proficiency at the Independent Level.

Figure 3. 2010-2016 Frustration Level Results from the *Basic Reading Inventory*

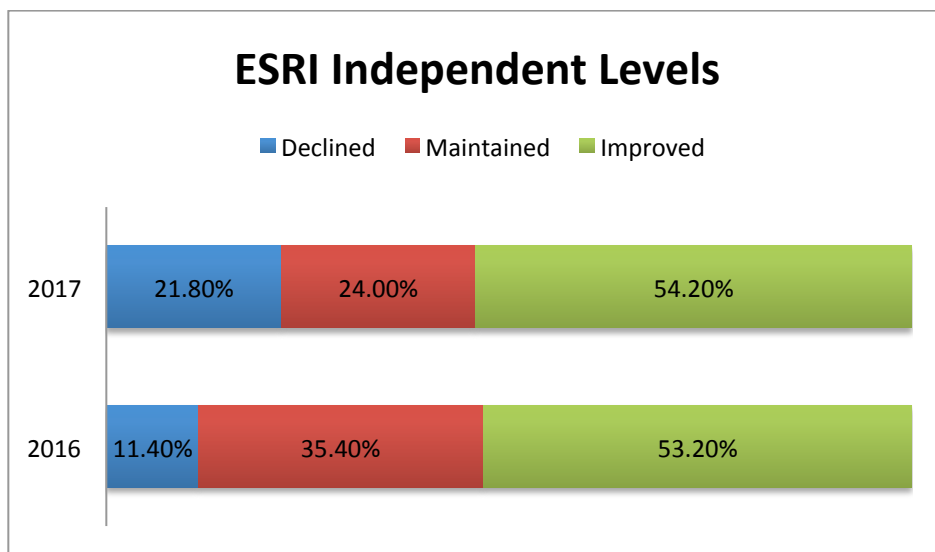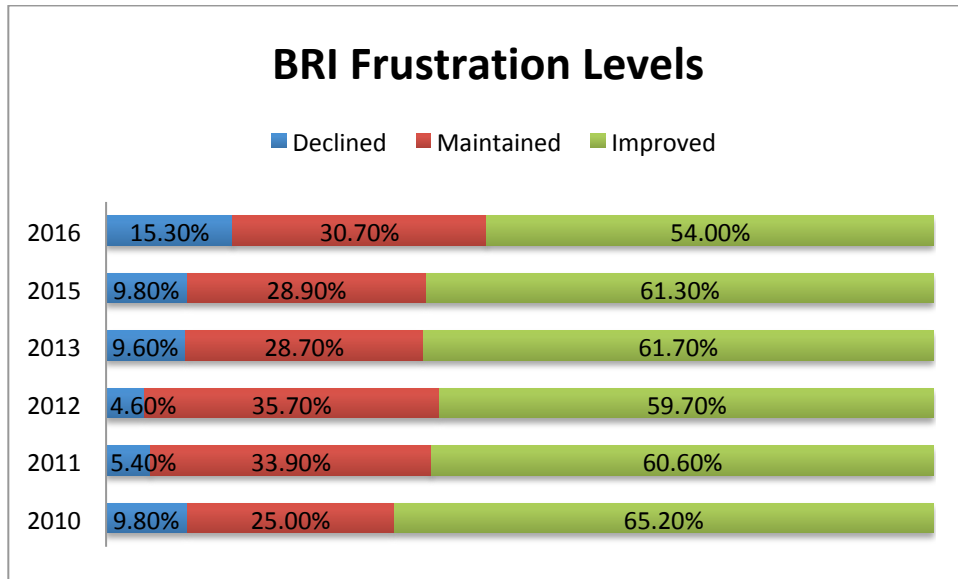**Figure 4.** 2016-2017 Frustration Level Results from the *Ekwall-Shanker Reading Inventory*
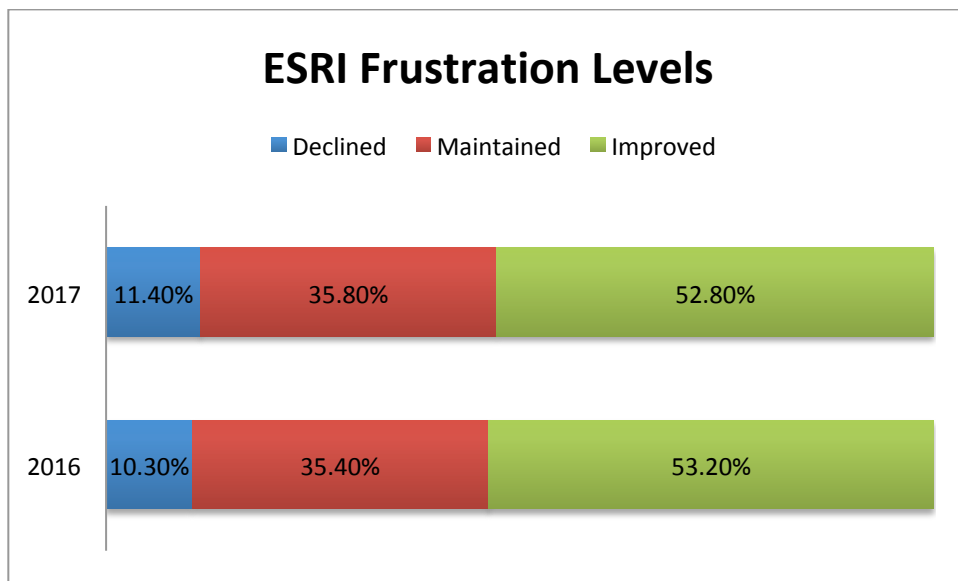
Figure 3 and Figure 4 show similar distributions of change from losses to gains across the years and from the BRI to the ESRI. We also note that there is a pattern showing a greater degree of gain in Frustration Levels, on average, than with Independent Levels.

Below is an overview of the research objectives and design, followed by findings and a discussion of results. We have created an Appendix section and have moved the review of related research about summer learning loss and a rationale for the use of informal reading inventories (IRIs) to the end of the report.

OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

History

Research documenting reading outcomes for Freedom School Scholars goes back to 2005 with an evaluation of the program by the Kansas City Freedom School Initiative, which demonstrated a significant improvement in reading abilities for Freedom School Scholars. UNC Charlotte was the first to evaluate outcomes for participating Scholars in Charlotte. In early 2009, Freedom School Partners approached the University of North Carolina at Charlotte's Institute for Social Capital, Inc. (ISC) to develop an outcome evaluation for the program. A pilot program evaluation was conducted at two Freedom School sites in summer 2009. Results from the pilot evaluation were promising. This pilot evaluation showed that of the 51 participants in grades two through five, 57% showed an increase in their reading levels as assessed in the *Basic Reading Inventory*, 9th Ed (Johns, 2008). Twenty-nine percent maintained their reading performance and just under 14% showed some decline. The promising pilot evaluation results led to the continuation of program evaluation.

In 2010, Freedom School Partners contracted with the Center for Adolescent Literacies at UNC Charlotte to implement an outcome evaluation project to examine the effect of Freedom Schools on children participating at all ten FSP Freedom School sites. The program evaluation sought to assess the extent to which the CDF Freedom Schools program met the following objectives for the K-8 students (Scholars) enrolled:

- To increase children's reading performances
- To maintain or to increase children's reading levels from the end of the school year until the beginning of the following school year
- To increase children's "love" of reading

Present Evaluation – Summer 2018

This year's evaluation continues with a pre/posttest format at 10 Freedom School sites in Charlotte using the ESRI to understand how participation in Freedom School affects the reading performance of Scholars during the summer of 2018. One significant change in 2018 is that only Level II and Level III Scholars were included in the evaluation. FSP conducted a separate assessment of Level I Scholars in which the Center for Adolescent Literacies did not participate. Data from this separate assessment is not included in this report.

The research questions that guided the evaluation were adjusted accordingly. This evaluation was guided by the following questions:

- *Did Level II and III Freedom School Scholars show any change in their Independent and Frustration reading levels from pre- to posttest as measured by the Ekwall/Shanker Inventory (ESRI)?*
  - Specifically, did children exhibit a change in reading performance over time?
  - If there was a change, was the change from pretest to posttest statistically significant?
  - What proportion of Freedom School Scholars maintained or improved reading performance over time?
  - Did differences in performance over time differ by Scholar demographic characteristics? If so, how?

METHODS

Evaluation Design and Measures

The initial report of Level II and Level III Scholars we received at the outset of pre-assessment listed 530 Scholar participants across the 10 evaluation sites. From this list, we were able to assess 368 Scholars using the ESRI Form A at pre-assessment and from that group, 284 Scholars were evaluated at post-assessment.

The sample was stratified by level, gender, and ethnicity (see Table 1). The evaluation included a pretest-posttest design using only an intervention group (i.e., children who were exposed to the Freedom School Program). This design allows investigators to measure change in reading performance from the start of the program to the end. The goal was to identify approximately 300 Scholars at the pre-test phase across the 10 sites to provide a sufficient sample size to conduct the necessary analyses.

Table 1. Criteria for Stratification

Criteria			
Level	I (K-2)	II (3-5)	III (6-8)
Gender	Male	Male	Male
	Female	Female	Female
Ethnicity	African-American	African-American	African-American
	Hispanic	Hispanic	Hispanic
	Other	Other	Other

Recruitment Procedures

Participants were recruited at enrollment by Freedom School Program staff. Parents were informed about the evaluation and were invited to participate. Consent for participation in the evaluation was obtained from parents by Freedom School Program staff. Participation was voluntary, and Scholar agreement was confirmed at pre- and post-assessment by the assessment team. Freedom School Partners provided the evaluation team with a list of Scholars for whom consent was obtained. Scholars with parental consent were then randomly selected based on the stratification criteria described above.

Assessment Measures

The *Ekwall/Shanker Reading Inventory* (ESRI; Shanker & Cockrum, 2013) is an individually administered reading inventory with multiple measures used to assess reading. For this evaluation, the research team used Form A for the pretest and Form C for the posttest. These are equivalent measures used to assess students' oral reading. Form A and C include a Graded Word List (GWL), Graded Reading Passages, and Oral Reading Comprehension Questions that accompany each passage. The ESRI has a single GWL, the San Diego Quick Assessment (SDQA), that has lists of 10 words each. The single set of ESRI word lists are used for pre- and posttest administration. The ESRI instructs assessors to start all students on the pre-primer (PP) lists of words and to have the student continue reading until he or she makes three or more errors on any one list. Once a student makes three errors on a single list of the GWL, test administration is stopped. The lowest list with three or more errors where the administration was stopped is the Frustration level. The list with two errors is determined to be the Instructional Level, and the list with one error (or less) is the Independent Level

The Graded Reading Passages on the ESRI consist of short, leveled passages of text that are read aloud by the Scholar while the assessor documents reading accuracy by noting miscues. The passages on the ERSI go through the 9th grade level, one grade level beyond the BRI. Miscues include words skipped, words inserted, and words said incorrectly. The ESRI has

assessors say any unknown words that a student cannot read after a five second pause. Scores are reported at the Independent, Instructional, and Frustration levels based on scales provided for each passage. Passages are a mix of expository and narrative forms with accompanying comprehension questions about details from the text. Scores for the ESRI for each passage are computed using a matrix that includes a dimension for the number of comprehension questions missed and number of word recognition errors. More weight is given to comprehension than word recognition errors. Scores are reported at the Independent, Instructional, and Frustration levels (Shanker & Cockrum, 2013). The ESRI computes the Independent and Frustration levels using the same percentages as the BRI (Table 2).

Table 2. Levels of Reading Assessed with the *Ekwall/Shanker Reading Inventory*

Level	Characteristics
Independent (easy)	Comprehension (90%+) Word Recognition (99%+)
Frustration (too hard)	Comprehension (50%+) Word Recognition (90%+)

Scores on the ESRI are computed for each outcome range from pre-primer to ninth grade.

Data Collection Procedures

At enrollment, Freedom School Partners, which shared the data with the research team for the sole purpose of this evaluation, collected demographic information about each participating Scholar (e.g., grade, race or ethnicity, and prior Freedom School Program participation).

Scholars were selected to participate in the pretest during the first six days of the program (June 19-25, 2018) and Scholars who participated in the pretest and who were present at the time of the assessment participated in the posttest during the last week of the program (July 26, 2018). Participants were assigned a de-identified number for data tracking purposes, to protect their identity, and for data analysis.

Sample

The enrollment list of Level II and Level III Scholars we received at the outset of pre-assessment had 530 Scholar names across the 10 evaluation sites. However, not all of these Scholars were available for assessment. Some who initially enrolled chose not to attend the program, and others who did attend, were absent on the day of the pre-assessment test. During the pre-assessment, our team gathered reading data using the ESRI Form A from 368 Level II and III Scholars. This sample size reflects 69% of expected enrollment.

Only those Level II and III Scholars who participated in the pre-assessment test (N = 368) were included in the post-assessment test. At post-assessment, 284 Scholars, or 77% of the pre-assessment total, were tested. Of those, 48 were not able to achieve the lowest level of pre-primer or primer on the independent on the pretest; 46 were in Level II and two were in Level III. Two hundred forty-five Scholars had complete Independent test data and 284 had complete Frustration data. This report is based on all available data.

Analysis Plan

Scores on the ESRI were computed for each outcome range from pre-primer to ninth grade. For analysis purposes, Scholars who performed at pre-primer or primer were assigned a score of zero. Sixteen Scholars received a pre-primer score on the Independent pretest; 13 were in Level II and three in Level III. The same number (but not the same Scholars) received a pre-primer score on the Independent posttest. Again, 13 were in Level II and three in Level III. Seventeen Scholars received a pre-primer score on the Frustration pretest. Of those, 16 were in Level II. Only one Scholar received a pre-primer score on the frustration posttest. Scholars who reached a ceiling score of ninth grade at the Independent, Instructional or Frustration level at pre- and posttest were assigned a score of 10 to capture their upper limit. While those Scholars may be able to read beyond 9th grade level, assigning a 10 allows us to capture the Scholar's minimum upper limit. Nine Scholars received a 10 as their Frustration pretest score and eight received the max score on the posttest.

The results begin with demographic data for those who had complete pre- and posttest data for the Independent and Frustration measures. Next, we provide means and standard deviations for the pre- and posttest by Level. To determine whether there is a statistically significant difference from pre- to posttest (also referred to as a within subject test), we conducted a Wilcoxon signed-rank test for the whole sample and for each Level. The Wilcoxon signed-rank test is a non-parametric hypothesis test designed to test differences in a sample that is not normally distributed, as is the case here. This test takes the place of the paired t-test for normally distributed data. The next set of results shows the change in scores (posttest minus pretest) to compute the proportion of Scholars whose reading performance declined, was maintained, or improved over time.

To explore associations between a change in scores and key Scholar demographic characteristics, we conducted Spearman correlations for continuous variables and Kruskal-Wallis for categorical predictors (e.g., Scholar Level). An alpha level of .05 was used to determine significance for all tests. The analyses were conducted using SPSS version 24.0.

Results

The sample is characterized in Table 3, which provides demographic characteristics for Scholars who had complete Independent and Frustration data (pre- and posttest) as well as all Scholars who completed any tests.

Table 3. Scholar Descriptive Statistics by Sample Type

	Complete Pre- and Posttest Independent Data (n = 245)	Complete Pre- and Posttest Frustration Data (n = 284)	All Scholars (N = 368)
	Percent/M(SD)		
Race/Ethnicity			
African American/Black	63.4	62.5	62.9
Hispanic/Latino	30.0	31.8	32.6
Asian/Asian American	0.8	0.7	0.8
European American/	2.9	2.5	1.9
White, non-Latino			
Mixed Heritage	2.9	2.5	2.7
Other			
% Female	55.2	55.4	55.6
% Participation in Free/Reduced Lunch	95.1	94.3	94.8
% Grade repeated	6.2	7.8	8.7
% Prior FSP experience/enrollment	66.3	65.6	63.7
Level			
II	62.7	66.5	67.4
III	37.3	33.5	32.6
Grade	5.10 (1.53)	4.94 (1.54)	4.89 (1.54)

Note: All percentages and means are based on available data.

As the table shows, African-American/Black Scholars represented the largest proportion of Scholars across all three samples. In contrast, Asian/Asian Americans had the smallest proportion. Females made up more than half the samples and the vast majority of Scholars participate in the free lunch program in their respective schools. Less than 10 percent of the sample had a history of repeating a grade; those who had complete Independent data had the

smallest proportion (6.2%). More than half the samples had previously attended a Freedom School Program and represented Level II Scholars. The mean grade was similar among those who had complete Frustration data and the entire sample. Those with complete Independent data were slightly older, which can be explained by the number of Level II Scholars who were not able to achieve the lowest Independent score (i.e., pre-primer or primer).

Independent Reading Performance

As shown in Table 4, on average, Scholars in Level II performed just under third grade level (M = 2.72, SD = 1.38) on the pretest. However, the posttest mean was higher at 3.37 (SD = 2.12), a mean difference of .65. Results from the Wilcoxon signed-rank test indicate scores from pretest to posttest for Level II Scholars was statistically significant (Z = -5.92, p < .001). Level III Scholars had a mean score of 3.33 (SD = 1.60) on the pretest and 4.90 (SD = 2.57) on the posttest, a mean difference of 1.57 or more than one full grade. The difference from pretest to posttest among Level III Scholars was also significant (Z = -5.43, p < .001). The mean score among all Scholars who completed the pretest was just under third grade level (M = 2.94, SD = 1.49) and 3.90 (SD = 2.39) on the posttest. While the mean difference was just under one full grade at .96, the difference in performance from pretest to posttest was statistically significant (Z = -8.013, p < .001).

Table 4. Mean (Standard Deviations) Independent Scores by Scholar Level

	Pretest		Posttest	
	N	M (SD)	N	M (SD)
Level				
II	203	2.72 (1.38)	180	3.37 (2.12)
III	117	3.33 (1.60)	94	4.90 (2.57)
Total	320	2.94 (1.49)	274	3.90 (2.39)

Figure 5 shows that among the 245 Scholars with compete pre- and posttest data necessary to compute a change in scores, 19.2% showed a decline in Independent reading performance over time. A higher proportion (23.7%) were able to maintain Independent reading performance from pre- to posttest. More than half (57.1%) showed an improvement in Independent reading performance. Based on the Independent change in score (posttest minus pretest score), results from the Spearman correlations indicated that grade was significantly associated with higher scores (r = .170, p = .008). No other associations were found. Of the 48 Scholars who were not able to achieve the minimum Independent pretest score, 30 were able to do so on the posttest.

Figure 5. Distribution of Independent Reading Performance Over Time (N = 245)
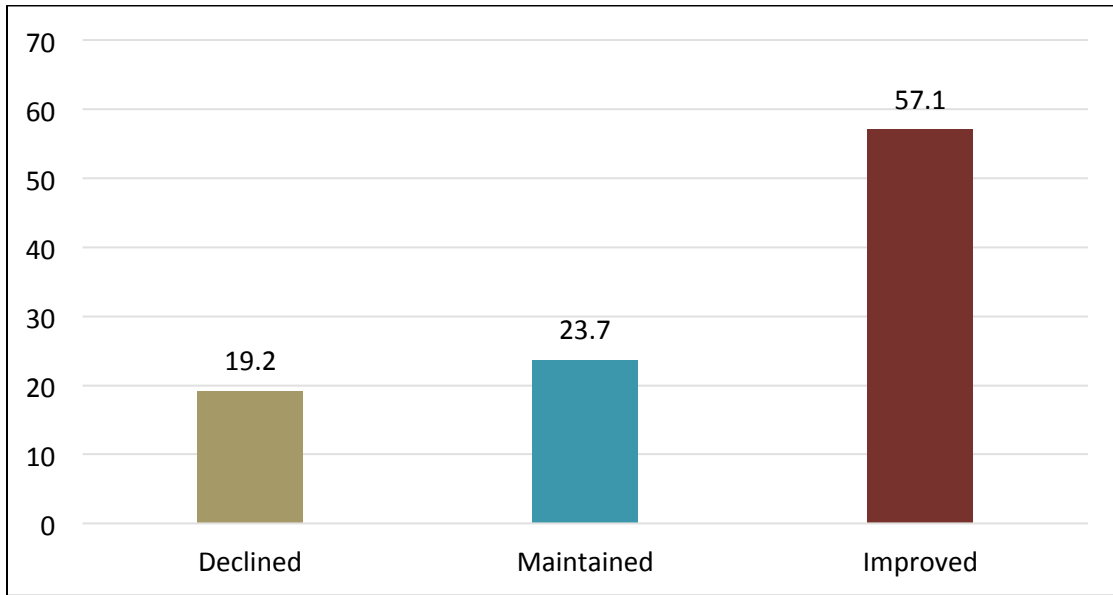
While these Scholars could not be included in the figure above because they did not have pretest data, it is important to acknowledge that 63% improved. Eleven (23%) of the 48 Scholars without a minimum Independent pretest score did not have posttest data either due to absence or dropout. Seven (14%) did not improve.

## Frustration Reading Performance

Table 5 shows that, on average, Level II Scholars (grades 3 to 5) scored 4.75 (SD = 2.16) on the Frustration pretest and Level III Scholars scored 6.00 (SD = 1.82). Mean scores on the posttest improved among Scholars in both Levels. There was an average of more than one grade, or 1.31, of improvement among Level II Scholars and nearly two full grades among Level III Scholars. When splitting the sample by Level, results from the Wilcoxon signed-rank test indicated that the difference from pretest to posttest among Level II Scholars was significant (Z = -8.10, p < .001) as was the difference among Level III Scholars (Z = -6.76, p < .001). The mean pretest score for the entire sample was 5.16 (SD = 2.13). Across all Scholars, there was more than a full grade improvement or 1.52 from pretest to posttest. Results from the Wilcoxon signed-rank test shows that the group difference from pretest to posttest was statistically significant (Z = -10.56, p < .001).

Table 5. Mean (Standard Deviations) Frustration Scores by Scholar Level

	Pretest		Posttest	
	N	M (SD)	N	M (SD)
Level				
II	248	4.75 (2.16)	189	6.06 (2.47)
III	120	6.00 (1.82)	95	7.92 (2.21)
Total	368	5.16 (2.13)	284	6.68 (2.54)

As Figure 6 shows, of the 284 Scholars who had pre- and posttest data, 11.6% declined over the course of the intervention. In contrast, close to a quarter (24.6%) of Scholars were able to maintain performance from pre- to posttest. However, more than half (63.7%) showed improvement over time.

Figure 6. Distribution of Frustration Reading Performance Over Time (N = 284)
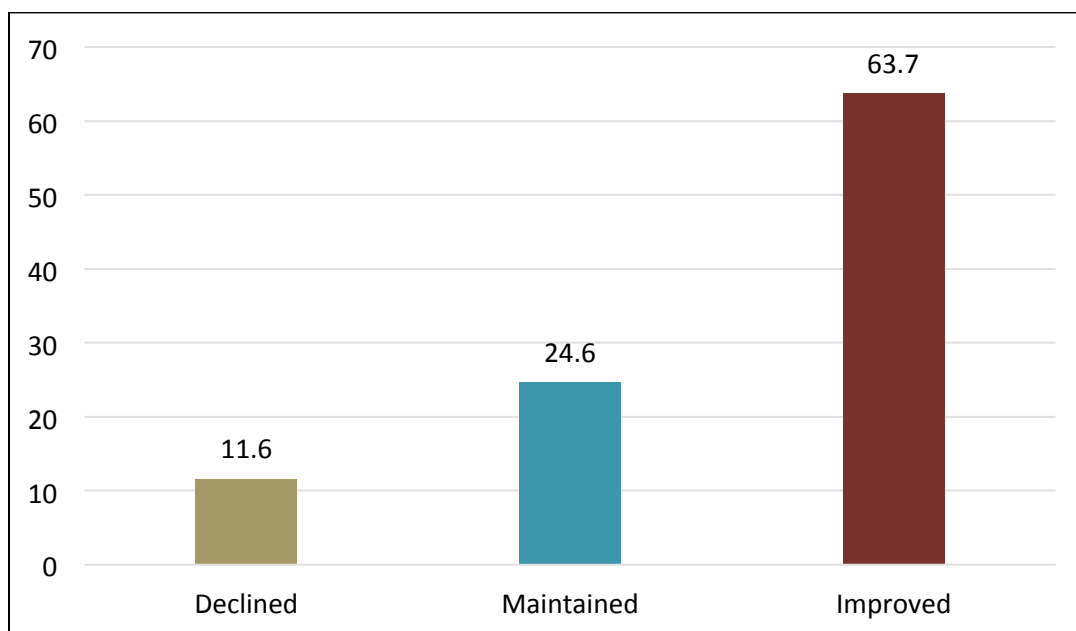
As with the Independent test, there was a significant correlation between grade level and a change in Frustration Level scores (*r* = .184, *p* = .002). Results from the Kruskal-Wallis test also indicated that there was a significant difference in change in scores by Scholar Level (H = 7.415, *p* = .006). No other associations were observed.

DISCUSSION

The aim of this evaluation was to determine whether the Freedom School Program had an impact on Scholars' Independent and Frustration reading performance. On average,

Independent and Frustration scores improved from pre- to posttests. These results were supported by the Wilcoxon signed-rank tests, which showed that Scholars in each level significantly improved from pretest to posttest. It is important to note that Scholars in Level II exhibited smaller grains than Scholars in Level III, which suggests that additional efforts can be invested into helping younger participants experience larger growth. It is promising, however, that Scholars at both levels experienced more than a full grade improvement in the Frustration measure, which captures the "hardest" level the Scholar was able to reach. This suggests that Scholars were able to push themselves during the posttest. Additionally, results using the change in scores demonstrated that more than half of the Scholars improved from pre- to posttest on both measures. Still, it is important to note that close to 20 percent of all Scholars declined over time on the Independent measures, which captures the "easiest" reading levels. Additional exploration indicated that Level II Scholars made up 70 percent (n = 33 of 47) of Scholars whose performance declined on the Independent reading measures. As noted previously, additional resources should go toward helping younger participants experience growth over the course of the program. Please note that while a smaller proportion of Scholars' performance declined on the Frustration measure, Level II Scholars comprised 70 percent of those who did (n = 23 of 33). Thus, investments in improving reading performance in Level II Scholars should also focus on strengthening ceiling levels.

We also explored whether there was an association between Scholar characteristics and a change in scores. The results indicated that grade was significantly and positively correlated with changes in scores on both tests. We also found a significant association between Scholar Level and Frustration change scores, with those in Level III demonstrating a higher mean change in scores. These findings support the results discussed above, which highlight the fact that older Scholars receive a higher degree of benefits in terms of reading change. Given the concern that achievement gaps observed during the early elementary school years lead to further academic struggles, it is especially important that the Freedom School Program look at ways to reduce the risk of long-term academic decline in its younger, Level I, participants. Investments in teaching strategies that can help younger Scholars maintain or improve reading are recommended. Additionally, an examination of instructor skills or training might also yield important information about why younger Freedom School Scholars exhibit a higher proportion of decline compared to older Scholars.

THE CENTER FOR ADOLESCENT LITERACIES AT UNC CHARLOTTE

The Center for Adolescent Literacies at UNC Charlotte is an instructional center focused on developing instruction to make literacy and learning relevant and effective for adolescents and those who work with them. The Center also will conduct and support research and service in support of its primary mission.

The mission of the Center for Adolescent Literacies (CAL) at UNC Charlotte is to advance the literacy achievement of adolescents in urban school settings and to develop pedagogies for adolescents and those who work with them to prepare them to be productive and empowered 21st century citizens. Specifically, the objectives of our center are as follows:

- To provide community outreach
- To build cultural understanding and awareness
- To promote community engagements
- To encourage civic engagement through service learning
- To equip teachers, parents and pre-service teachers with knowledge, skills, and dispositions for supporting and scaffolding adolescent literacy and service learning
- To develop and provide collaborative professional development to promote adolescent literacy
- To encourage collaborative involvement among all stakeholders (including teachers, students, parents/guardians and university faculty).

Evaluation Leadership Team

Dr. Bruce Taylor is the Director of the Center for Adolescent Literacies at UNC Charlotte and is a Professor in the Department of Reading & Elementary Education. Over the past 15 years, Dr. Taylor has provided leadership in developing the ReadWriteServe (RWS) community-based literacy initiatives at UNC Charlotte. These programs include America Reads, the Urban Youth in Schools Internship, and RWS Tutor Training. He is the author and co-author of numerous peer-reviewed articles, book chapters, and technical reports and co-author of three books. His research examines the social and cultural aspects of literacy and learning of adolescents and, in particular, ways to meet the academic learning needs of diverse and marginalized students. He has led several reading program evaluation projects. Dr. Taylor teaches undergraduate, master's level, and doctoral courses that focus on content-area and adolescent literacy, digital literacies in education, and sociocultural aspects of language and literacy.

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Appendix A: Review of Research

Note: This review of related research is updated with each evaluation cycle. We review the research literature and add to this section but retain much of what has been reviewed in earlier reports.

Freedom Schools programs are six-week, literacy-based summer learning programs designed for children at risk of school failure. The risk factors that children in poverty face include lower academic achievement as measured by grades and on standardized tests, lower graduation rates, and difficulties with reading and literacy. Literacy is a key aspect of school completion. Results from the 2015 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) indicate that 27% of fourth-grade and 28% of eighth-grade public school students in North Carolina scored below the Basic level in reading. Only 38% of fourth-grade and 30% of eighth-grade students scored at or above the Proficient level. While these scores are not significantly different from 2013, they continue to raise concerns about the reading ability of school-age children in North Carolina.

Youth from low-income households tend to have lower reading achievement scores than children from middle- and high-income households. Each school year, the reading achievement gap grows and much of the distance accrues during the summer when children are not as inclined to read. A recent study by Hughes-Hassell and Rodge (2007) examined the leisure reading habits of 584 urban adolescents (grades 5 – 8). One of their findings indicated that summer reading was not a "popular" activity for either male or female urban youth. However, it is known that for at-risk children, summer reading is essential to bridge the reading achievement gap (Allington & McGill-Frazen, 2003; Kim, 2004). Schacter (2003) studied the summer reading achievement of 61 first graders in Los Angeles. His study found that an 8-week summer reading "camp" experience had bearing on vocabulary, comprehension, phonics, and oral reading. Thus, for at-risk urban children, a summer program that focuses on reading has the potential to positively influence reading achievement. More recently, a study of 31 six and seven-year-old children enrolled in a summer program with a structured reading program showed benefits in stemming summer learning loss (McDaniel, McLeod, Carter & Robinson, 2017).

Research on the CDF Freedom Schools programs has focused on the historical context of the program (Watson, 2014), ideological contexts (Smith, 2010), leadership aspects of the Freedom School program, the impact on college-age Servant Leader Interns (Jackson, 2009a) and implications for teacher education (Coffey, 2009; Davis, 2010; Jackson, 2009b; Jackson, 2011). Stanford (2017) documented the instructional practices of three current classroom teachers who formerly served as Servant Leader Interns (SLIs) in Freedom Schools. An overview of the Freedom School program was published in Teaching Tolerance (Williamson, 2013). Bethea (2012) published results of a study that indicate that involvement in the Freedom School

program in Oakland, California had a positive influence on Scholars' racial identity and views toward African/African American culture. Pre- and posttest results also showed an increase in social skills strategies and a future commitment to social action; however, the study showed no statistically significant increase in attitudes toward reading. Howard (2015) examines Freedom Schools as a model for reimagining education for Black children that re-centers learning, literacy, and culture in an atmosphere that is free from a police presence in schools.

Summer Learning Loss

The 9-month school schedule currently in widespread use has its roots in 19th and 20th Century society in which 85% of Americans were involved in agriculture. It made sense at the time to standardize school schedules and to have children at home during the summer months to help with farming. Today fewer than 3% of Americans are involved in agriculture and research shows that students' learning is impacted negatively by this block of time away from school.

There is a growing body of research about summer learning loss including the publication in the last year of a comprehensive book on the subject, *The Summer Slide: What We Know and Can Do about Summer Learning Loss* (Alexander, Pitcock, & Boulay, 2016). A review of research (meta-analysis) by Kim and Quinn (2013) on summer reading interventions conducted in the United States and Canada from 1998 to 2011 showed that summer reading interventions that employed teacher-directed literacy lessons had a positive effect on K-8 participants' reading comprehension. The effect of these summer interventions was stronger for children from low-income backgrounds than from mixed-income backgrounds. A recent study by Gershenson and Hayes (2017) on the summer activities of exceptional students, which they define as English language learners and students with an individualized educational plan (IEP), shows that these students are less likely to participate in organized summer programs but show greater gains in reading than other groups of students. Bowers and Schwarz (2018) documented gains for low-SES children participating in a summer literacy program at a local community center. Meta-analyses conducted by Cooper et al. (2000 and 1996) integrating studies examining the effects of summer vacation on standardized achievement test scores showed that summer learning loss equaled at least one month of instruction as measured by grade level equivalents on standardized test scores. An analysis of the research of Hayes and Grether (1983) with high- and low-poverty students in 600 New York City schools showed that rich and poor students had a seven-month difference in scores at the beginning of second grade, but this widened to a difference of two years and seven months by the end of grade six. What made this particularly striking was the research showing little or no difference in these students' achievement when school was in session: they learned at the same pace. As Hayes and Grether noted: "The differential progress made during the four summers between 2nd and 6th grade accounts for

upwards of 80 percent of the achievement difference between economically advantaged ... and ... ghetto schools."

Research from the past decade shows that the impact of summer learning loss may be greater than found in earlier studies (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2003). This deficit is so pronounced that Allington and McGill-Franzen dub summer reading loss as the "smoking gun." Their research has reported that the cumulative effects of summer reading loss can mean that struggling readers entering middle school may lag two years behind peers in their ability to read. Additional research (Alexander, Entwisle, & Olson, 2007) traces the achievement gap between high–socioeconomic and low–socioeconomic 9th grade students to the loss in reading proficiency that occurs over the summer months throughout the elementary grades. Summer learning loss across the elementary school years accounted for more than half the difference in the achievement gap between students from high–socioeconomic and low–socioeconomic families. A study by Kim (2004) published by The Center for Evaluation of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences highlights that low-income and minority students experience greater summer reading loss but suggest that summer reading mitigates this negative impact. A 2014 study by Menard and Wilson suggests that the effect on students with reading disabilities (RD) is greater than on non-RD students while another study (Sandburg Patton & Reschly, 2013) suggests greater impact on younger students.

The issue of summer learning loss is not only debated in scholarly journals. In 2010, *Time Magazine* published a cover story entitled "The Case against Summer" (Von Drehle, 2010) in which it reported:

> The problem of summer vacation, first documented in 1906, compounds year after year. What starts as a hiccup in a 6-year-old's education can be a crisis by the time that child reaches high school. After collecting a century's worth of academic studies, summer-learning expert Harris Cooper, ... concluded that, on average, all students lose about a month of progress in math skills each summer, while low-income students slip as many as three months in reading comprehension, compared with middle-income students.

Calls to reorganize school calendars and extend the school year have been suggested as a way to deal with the issue of summer learning loss (Aronson, Zimmerman & Carols, 1998; Dechenes & Malone, 2011; Dessoff, 2011; Jimerson, Woehr, Kaufman & Anderson, 2003; Silva, 2007; WestEd, 2001; Woelfel, 2005). Additional research focuses on policy and funding towards mitigating summer learning loss as a way to address gaps in academic achievement (Leefatt, 2015) while other research suggests parent tutoring during the summer as a means for helping many struggling readers (Mitchell & Begeny, 2014). More recent research indicates that

summer programs with a math and literacy component can help students realize gains in their math and reading abilities during the summer months (Graham, McNamara & Van Lankveld, 2011; Smith, 2011-2012). Recent scholarship has included more on the role of summer programs to mitigate summer learning loss (McCombs, et al., 2012) and even "do-at-home" activities (Nikirk, 2012). Research on summer learning loss has recently extended to the post-secondary level with research on summer and between-semester knowledge decay (Dills, Hernandez-Julian, & Rotthoff, 2016).

Appendix B. Rationale for the Use of IRIs

The ESRI, like the BRI, is a reading evaluation measure that takes into account different aspects of reading including word knowledge, fluency, and comprehension with greatest emphasis on comprehension, or meaning making. The ESRI is a good fit to both the goals of the Freedom School reading program and also to the contexts of that program. The IRC component of Freedom Schools, described earlier, engages students in the reading of culturally diverse books. Scholars and Interns read, discuss and engage in activities related to the books. The focus of this culturally diverse literature-based experience is on comprehension rather than a subskills approach to reading.

Reading inventories like the ESRI and BRI are well suited to reading programs like Freedom Schools. They have compatible forms for pre- and post-test administration to measure change over the relatively short duration of the program. They span the K-8 grade levels, the grade and age range of Scholars in the Level I, II and III classrooms, and are practical to administer in terms of cost, time and resources. They allow for fidelity in administration so that multiple evaluators could be trained to assess Scholars using common guidelines for administration and scoring and have a solid research base.

Reading assessments have their roots in the early 20th Century but came of age in the 1940s with the study of skills that comprise comprehension (Davis, 1944; Davis, 1968). Today, reading comprehension assessments are the most common type of published reading test that is available, and the most common reading comprehension assessments involve reading of passages followed by questions about the passage (usually literal recall) and then repeat this process with additional "disconnected" passages (p. 6, ETS, 2012). These traditional approaches to measuring comprehension focus on creating items that consist of lists of content and skills rather than an approach that focuses on what students know and should be able to do (ETS, 2012). Variations on this include asking inferential questions in addition to recall questions. Most reading assessments include what is thought of as the basic skill components of comprehension which include word identification, inferences, strategies, vocabulary and lexical knowledge (Sabatini, O'Reilly & Albro, 2012a and 2012b).

Reading assessments fall into two broad categories: formal and informal. Formal assessments are commonly known as standardized tests or measures and have data which often support conclusions about how a student's reading can be compared to other students his or her age. Formal measures are used to assess overall achievement and to compare a student to others at their age or grade. Scores are often given in percentiles or stanines and many are helpful as diagnostic tools or for measuring change over longer periods of time (year to year in schools, for example). Informal reading measures are content and performance driven and are often

used to inform instructional practices or progress monitoring over short intervals for individual students. Leslie and Caldwell (2009) define informal measures as assessments that "do not interpret scores using comparative or normative data or employ standardized procedures for administration and scoring" (p. 410). Informal measures are often used by classroom teachers and others to gain insight into student performance and to inform instruction. Examples of informal assessments with a focus on comprehension include: questions, retellings, informal reading inventories (i.e., the ESRI), think-alouds, and most assessments that fall under the heading of performance or authentic assessments.

Formal and informal assessments measure comprehension but informal measures of reading are better suited for this research because they measure change over a short duration and typically require less time and fewer resources. Formal assessments are usually more expensive to purchase and may require computer administration and/or scoring. There are numerous reading assessments but many of these focus on a narrow range of grades and ages. For example, there are several early literacy assessments such as the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) and the Dynamic Indicators of Basis Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) that span grades K-2 or 3. Informal Reading Inventories (IRI), however, span a larger range of grades from Kindergarten or first grade through grades eight or nine. Costs for IRIs are relatively low and most come in paper/pencil formats although they do require adult one-on-one administration.

The IRI has a long history as a tool for measuring comprehension and reading ability. Most IRIs include measures of word recognition using leveled lists of words and leveled passages read aloud or silently. Nilsson (2008) states in his review of eight IRIs that these assessments provide information about students' strengths and needs as well as charting reading progress over time. Leslie and Caldwell (2009), authors of the *Qualitative Reading Inventory* (Leslie & Caldwell, 2016), raise the following issues about IRIs: 1) readability formulas used to determine passage levels may not accurately measure difference in difficulty of one passage from another, 2) passage equivalency across forms may vary, and 3) questions used to measure comprehension may work differently with different text types and topics. Research conducted by Applegate, Quinn and Applegate (2002) further suggest that IRIs focus more on text-based recall rather than inferential questions. These issues are not unique to IRIs but also reflect concerns with other forms of reading assessments including standardized assessments. Research by Spector (2005) suggests that IRIs are best suited for low-stakes decisions such as assessing reading levels (which aids in book selection and evaluation) but should not be used for diagnosing reading difficulties. Also, IRIs typically do not offer a fine-grained analysis of growth but, rather, measure reading difference in grade-level increments.

Both formal and informal reading assessments are used for program assessment. However, IRIs were used more frequently for short-term pre/post-test administration while standardized

measures were more likely to be administered when repeated measures were not used for purposes of evaluation. The STAR Reading by Renaissance Learning is another test used by some programs for evaluation purposes, but was found unsuitable by our team for several reasons. According to the publisher STAR Reading is "designed for students who can read independently" (Renaissance Learning, Inc., 2010), and some Freedom School Scholars are emergent readers, not yet reading at an independent level. Moreover, STAR is a timed test providing each student a fixed amount of time for reading a passage and then between 45 and 60 seconds to answer questions after which moves to the next question. We felt this also would present problems for emergent and struggling readers. Finally, STAR is a computer-based test, and some Freedom School sites lack access to computers or sufficient numbers of computers to properly administer this type of assessment.

Our analysis of reading assessments, outlined above, led us to the conclusion that IRIs were best suited to the Freedom School evaluation project, and in 2008 we determined that the BRI would be our IRI of choice and based on results from 2016, we adopted the ESRI for the 2017 evaluation.