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2018 Evaluation of the Freedom Schools in
Charlotte, NC

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Center for Educational Measurement and Evaluation

University of North Carolina at Charlotte

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2018 Evaluation of the Freedom Schools in Charlotte, NC

Introduction

This report outlines the results of an evaluation of the Freedom School Partners' Children's Defense Fund Freedom Schools® programs in Charlotte, N.C. during the summer of 2018. The evaluation was a collaborative project between the Center for Adolescent Literacies (CAL) and the Center for Educational Measurement and Evaluation (CEME). Both centers are housed within the College of Education at UNC Charlotte and have extensive records of collaboration with community groups as well as state and local educational agencies. The CEME staff coordinated the data collection process and conducted the data analysis. The focus of this evaluation is on Scholar and Servant Leader Intern (SLI) experiences using data collected from surveys developed by CEME and CAL.

The survey items that were used in the data collection process were developed and piloted during the 2016 Freedom Schools program year. This process was accomplished by a collaborative effort of CAL, CEME, and Freedom Schools. An initial set of draft survey items was developed through an iterative process by CAL and CEME staff. The Freedom Schools program goals and objectives, and the goals of the program evaluation effort were carefully considered as each draft was reviewed and revised. The Freedom Schools staff were given an opportunity to review the draft survey items. Freedom School staff were also interviewed to gather their input regarding whether the survey would meet the needs of the program and effectively solicit the feedback of program participants.

Data Collection Procedures

Procedures for Scholars

After receiving approval from the site coordinators, Freedom School Scholars were invited to complete a written survey during class time. Researchers explained the purpose of the survey to the Scholars and assured the Scholars that their participation was voluntary and anonymous. The researchers assisting with data collection read each question aloud to the participating Scholars. Scholars were instructed to take their time and were encouraged to ask questions as they arose. After the researchers completed data collection, the quantitative data was entered into SPSS Version 25, software used for statistical analyses, including Likert type survey responses. The qualitative data was transcribed and uploaded into NVivo Version 11, a program that aids in the analysis of qualitative data like the open-ended survey questions.

Procedures for Servant Leader Interns

After receiving approval from the site coordinators, Freedom School Servant Leader Interns (SLIs) were invited to complete an online survey using the survey platform SurveyShare. The researchers contacted the SLIs via e-mail to explain the purpose of the survey, that participation would be anonymous and voluntary, and described the process of participation. SLIs were sent three follow-up emails requesting participation, the survey was closed four weeks after the initial participation request. Upon the close of the survey, the researchers downloaded the survey responses and analyzed the data using SPSS Version 25 and NVivo Version 11.

Measures

Each of the three participating groups, Level 1 Scholars, Level 2-4 Scholars, and SLIs received a separate survey to complete. These surveys were used to collect data from Level 1 Scholars and Level 2-4 Scholars at 10 of 17 Freedom School sites in Charlotte and SLIs across

all 17 Freedom School sites. The Level 1 Scholar survey consisted of 29 questions: 12 statements where Scholars responded using two categories (e.g., *Not true for me; True for me*), five short-answer questions, and six demographic questions related to race/ethnicity, sex, age, Freedom School level, grade completed, and number of years in Freedom School. The Level 2-4 Scholars completed a survey composed of 33 questions: 18 items where Scholars' responded according to a Likert scale (e.g., *Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree*), nine open-response questions, and six demographic questions related to race/ethnicity, sex, age, Freedom School level, grade completed, and the number of years in Freedom School. The SLIs completed a survey consisting of 42 questions: 20 statements where Interns responded according to a Likert scale (e.g., *Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree*), 15 short-answer questions, and six demographic questions related to race/ethnicity, sex, age, Freedom School level served, and education status.

Prior to the current program year, the responses from the pilot were analyzed and the survey items were revised. Items that either elicited responses with very little variability, or did not elicit rich responses from program participants were considered for modification. Revisions focused on adjusting the items so that they elicited the most meaningful and complete feedback from program participants. The revisions were reviewed by both CEME and Freedom Schools personnel, survey research experts, and program evaluators.

Results Levels 1-4

Level 1 Scholars Likert Response Results

One hundred and eighty seven Level 1 Scholars completed a 29-question survey. Of the 187 Level 1 Scholars, 100 Scholars identified as African American/Black (52.1%), 55 identified as Latino/Hispanic (28.6%), 7 identified as European American/White (3.6%), 1 identified as

Asian American (0.5%), 20 identified as mixed heritage (10.4%), 4 identified as Other (2.1%), and 5 declined to respond (2.6%). One hundred and one Scholars identified as female (52.6%), 84 identified as male (43.8%), and 7 declined to respond (3.6%). The average age of Level 1 Scholars was seven years old ($M=6.96$, $SD=1.04$), with ages ranging from five to 10 years old.

The most recent grade completed by Level 1 Scholars was 1st grade, with 74 respondents (38.5%), followed by 2nd grade, 60 (31.3%), 53 Scholars had just completed Kindergarten (27.6%), and two Scholars each had just recently completed Pre-K and 3rd grade (1.0%). Level 1 Scholars reported that their number of years in Freedom School ranged from one to five years ($M=1.53$, $SD=.77$). Of the 192 Scholars, 22 attended Freedom School at Shalom Park (11.5%), 16 attended Providence Day School (8.3%), 6 attended Martin Luther King Jr. Middle School (3.1%), 16 attended Highland Renaissance Academy (8.3%), 12 attended Christ Lutheran Church (6.3%), 31 attended Renaissance West STEAM Academy (16.1%), 17 attended Alexander Graham Middle School (8.9%), 12 attended The Grove Presbyterian Church (6.3%), 30 attended Rama Road Elementary (15.6%), and 30 attended Montclair Elementary School (15.6%). A summary of the demographics for Level 1 Scholars are reported in Table 1.

Level 1 Scholars responded to 12 questions in the following categories: Freedom School Experience, Reading, Agency/Making a Difference, Learning & Education, Future Thinking/Goal Setting/Optimism, and Social/Emotional Skills. The results for Scholars' perceptions of their Freedom School Experience, Reading, and Agency/Making a Difference are reported in Table 2. Scholars responded to the extent to which the statement was true for them on a scale from (1) Not true for me to (2) True for me. The majority of Level 1 Scholars reported that they enjoyed Freedom School ($n=175$; 91.1%) and wanted to participate in Freedom School again next year ($n=165$; 85.9%). For Scholars' perceptions of Reading, most Scholars indicated

that their participation in Freedom School made them a better reader ($n=159$, 97.4%), made them enjoy reading more ($n=159$; 82.8%), and encouraged them to spend more time reading ($n=158$; 82.3%). One item examined Scholars' perceptions of Agency/Making a Difference; most Scholars indicated that they wanted to make a difference in their school and community ($n=167$; 87.0%). Table 3 outlines Level 1 Scholars' responses to three items related to their perceptions of Learning and Education: Future Thinking/Goal Setting/Optimism as a result of their experiences. Of the 191 Scholars, 179 reported that they believed they would be a better student after being a part of Freedom School (93.2%). Since being a part of Freedom School, most Scholars indicated that they felt more comfortable asking a teacher for help ($n=174$; 90.6%) and that they wanted to go to college ($n=189$; 98.4%). Level 1 Scholars' perceptions of Future Thinking/Goal Setting/Optimism were measured by one item related to their beliefs about the importance of their future. Most Scholars reported that their future was important to them ($n=175$; 91.1%). In terms of Social/Emotional Problems, Scholars' indicated that most of them know how to ask for help when dealing with conflict or social problems ($n=158$; 82.3%) and know how to work well with others ($n=191$; 99.5%).

Level 2-4 Scholars Likert Response Results

Three Hundred and sixty-eight Level 2-4 Scholars completed a survey that consisted of 33 questions. 187 of these Scholars identified as African American/Black (50.8%), 87 identified as Latino/Hispanic (23.6%), 7 identified as European American/White (1.9%), 2 identified as Asian American (0.5%), 2 identified as Native American/American Indian (0.5%), 50 identified as mixed heritage (13.6%), 18 identified as other (4.9%), and 15 declined to respond (4.1%). One hundred and fifty-eight Scholars identified as male (42.9%), 191 identified as female (51.9%), and 19 declined to respond (5.2%). The average age of Level 2-4 Scholars was 11 years old

($M=10.97$, $SD=1.72$), with ages ranging from eight to 17 years old. The majority of these Scholars, 58%, were Level 2 ($n=214$; 58.2%), with 28.3% of the Scholars identifying as Level 3 ($n=104$) and 2.2% identifying as Level 4 ($n=8$). Forty-two Scholars did not disclose their Freedom School level. The average grade completed by level 2-4 Scholars was fifth grade ($M=4.95$, $SD=1.73$), with a range from first to eleventh grade. Scholars reported that their number of years in Freedom School ranged from one to twelve years, with an average of approximately two years in Freedom School ($M=2.54$, $SD=1.73$). Of the 368 Scholars, 39 attended Freedom School at Shalom Park (10.6%), 22 attended Providence Day School (6.0%), 35 attended Martin Luther King Jr. Middle School (9.5%), 40 attended Highland Renaissance Academy (10.9%), 70 attended Christ Lutheran Church (19.0%), 36 attended Renaissance West STEAM Academy (9.8%), 28 attended Alexander Graham Middle School (7.6%), 47 attended Grove (12.8%), 18 attended Rama Road Elementary School (4.9%), and 33 attended Montclair Elementary School (9.0%). A summary of the demographics for Level 2-4 Scholars are reported in Table 4.

Level 2-4 Scholars responded to 18 items that were categorized according to (a) Reading, (b) Agency/Making a Difference, (c) Future Thinking/Goal Setting/Optimism, (d) Learning & Education, (e) Social/Emotional Skills, and (f) Freedom School Experience. Scholars responded using a Likert scale ranging from (1) Strongly Disagree to (4) Strongly Agree. Three items were used to assess scholar's perceptions of reading as a result of their Freedom School experience (Table 5). The majority of Scholars either agreed or strongly agreed that being a part of Freedom School made them a better reader ($n=317$; 86.1%), they enjoyed reading more ($n=259$; 70.4%), and they planned to spend more time reading ($n=216$; 58.7%). In terms of Scholars' perceptions of Agency/Making a Difference (Table 6), the majority of Scholars agreed or strongly agreed

that their participation in Freedom School made them feel good about who they were ($n=328$; 89.1%). Additionally, Scholars agreed or strongly agreed that since being a part of Freedom School they were more proud of their race ($n=336$; 91.3%) and their community ($n=320$; 87.0%). Two items were used to assess Level 2-4 Scholars' perceptions of Future Thinking/Goal Setting/Optimism (Table 6). Scholars indicated that they agreed or strongly agreed that since being a part of Freedom School they felt better about their future ($n=338$; 91.8%) and have plans for what they wanted to do as an adult ($n=296$; 80.4%).

Table 7 summarizes the results for Level 2-4 Scholars' perception of learning and education as a result of their experiences at Freedom School. Most Scholars agreed or strongly agreed that they would be a better student next year ($n=296$; 80.4%) and graduate from high school ($n=310$; 84.2%) as a result of their participation in Freedom School. They also agreed or strongly agreed that their experiences in Freedom School made them feel more comfortable asking for help from a teacher when needed ($n=354$; 96.2%). Most Scholars agreed or strongly agreed that they wanted to go college ($n=337$; 91.6%). For Level 2-4 Scholars' perceptions of social/emotional skills as a result of their Freedom School experience (Table 8), most Scholars agreed or strongly agreed that they were better able to resolve conflicts or problems with others students ($n=277$; 75.3%) and adults ($n=274$; 74.5%). Level 2-4 Scholars agreed or strongly agreed that they knew how to ask for help in dealing with social problem or conflicts with others ($n=295$; 80.2%) and they knew how to work well with others ($n=326$; 88.6%). Table 8 also summarizes Level 2-4 Scholars' perceptions of their Freedom School experience. Overall, the majority of Level 2-4 Scholars agreed or strongly agreed that they enjoyed Freedom School ($n=326$; 88.6%) and wanted to participate in Freedom School again next year ($n=304$; 82.6%).

Findings Level 1-4 Open-Ended Responses

All Scholars, levels 1-4, responded to a series of open-ended questions to illustrate their experiences with (a) Reading, (b) Agency/Making a Difference, (c) Future/Thinking/Goal Setting/Optimism, (d) Learning & Education, (e) Social/Emotional Skills, and (f) Experiences at Freedom School. Specifically, Level 1 Scholars responded to four open-ended questions about their future plans, what they learned from the books they read at Freedom School, their perceptions of how they can make a difference in their community, and their opinions about how Freedom School can be improved. Similarly, Level 2-4 Scholars responded to eight open-ended responses assessing: (1) what they learned from books at Freedom School, (2) how they can make a difference in their school and community, (3) plans for their future, (4) how Freedom School will help them during the next school year, (5) changes in how they work with others, (6) what they enjoyed about Freedom School, (7) what could make Freedom School better for them, and (8) opinions about how Freedom School could be improved. In total, nearly all Scholars across each level responded to each open-ended question, providing substantial support for the data analysis.

Data Analysis

Upon completion of the surveys, the open-ended responses were transcribed verbatim and uploaded into NVivo11, a qualitative data analysis software program. NVivo was used as a tool to assist the researchers with organizing the data, exploring coding patterns, and maintaining an audit trail. Prior to conducting the analysis, the researchers read the transcript of responses for each question to obtain a global sense of the data. The researchers then used a constant comparative approach to data analysis, where the data was classified into categories based on inductive reasoning. Using open coding, the data was organized into initial categories that

described the salient ideas associated with each response. The data was then continuously refined to ensure that the open codes captured similar core concepts. As open codes were compared and defined, the researchers explored relationships and patterns between the codes, and themes emerged from the data.

Level 1 Scholars

Plans for the Future

Level 1 Scholars responded to one open-ended question regarding future plans related to education and career. Most Level 1 Scholars reported that finishing their education was important to them. They described the importance of completing elementary school, middle school, and high school, with most Scholars reporting that they wanted to attend college. Some Level 1 Scholars reported wanting to attend college in particular cities, such as Chicago, Raleigh, and New York City, suggesting that they considered their educational plans in great detail. Other Level 1 Scholars described wanting to attend college because of the level of independence associated with attending a college or university. For example, one Scholar wrote, “I want to go to a university because we can have our own bed, our own room, our own car, our own life.” Additionally, one Scholar reported, “I want to go to college so I can get a job, get a house, a car, and try to help people.”

Additionally, Level 1 Scholars reported a number of occupational interests, including creative and performing arts, professional athletics, helping professions, STEM careers, public service, law, and working in the service industry. Among these career ideas, over half of the Level 1 Scholars stated that they wanted to be teachers, with many specifically reporting that they wanted to be Freedom School teachers. For example, one Scholar wrote, “I want to be a Freedom School teacher because I like being in Freedom School.” Additionally, other popular

career interests included being a performer, professional soccer player, chef, veterinarian, police officer, firefighter, and scientist.

Reading

Level 1 Scholars responded to one open-ended question related to what they learned from the books they read and discussed in Freedom School. Four themes emerged from these responses: History, Valuable Lessons, Skills, and Enjoyment.

History. Many Level 1 Scholars reported learning about notable historical figures and events from the books that they read at Freedom School. Scholars reported learning about Martin Luther King, Jr., Rosa Parks, and Adolf Hitler from the books that they read and discussed.. One Scholar wrote that he or she learned “new stuff [he or she] didn’t know before about MLK Jr.” Another scholar wrote, “I learned that Martin Luther King Jr. inspires me.” Additionally, many Level 1 Scholars reported learning about segregation, the Civil Rights Movement, and the impact of Jim Crow Laws. For example, scholars wrote: “A long time ago black people and white people were separated;” “It is important to have all equal rights;” “Civil Rights Movement. It doesn’t matter if you are black or white.”

Valuable Lessons. Many Level 1 Scholars reported learning valuable life lessons from the books that they read and discussed at Freedom School. They mentioned that the stories have “lessons and solutions in them.” These life lessons and solutions were related to self-efficacy, problem solving, following the rules, and judgment. For example, some Scholars described learning about self-efficacy: “All you have to do is believe in yourself and you can do it;” “Believe that you can make your dreams come true;” and “You can do what you set your mind to do.” Other Scholars reported learning that “every problem can be solved,” “don’t judge a book

by its cover, “follow the rules,” “don’t tell lies to your mom or do something sneaky,” and “we can all be friends.”

Skills. Most Level 1 Scholars reported that the books they read and discussed at Freedom School enhanced their reading and group work skills. Many Scholars reported learning how to read, spell, “take my time reading,” listen, pay attention, and share what they learned with others. Some Scholars reported learning about how to read with friends, “work in a team,” and be respectful when others are reading out loud. Furthermore, Level 1 Scholars also reported that they learned the importance of sharing books with others and learning to be patient when they needed help from the teacher.

Enjoyment. Many Level 1 Scholars also stated that they learned that reading can be fun. For example, one scholar wrote, “I’ve learned that the books are really good. Reading is fun. I like my teacher.” Another Scholar wrote, “books are important and make me happy.” Level 1 Scholars indicated that reading does not have to be something that is an aspect of school; “reading can be something you do because you want to.”

Agency and Making a Difference

Level 1 Scholars responded to one open-ended question that assessed their understanding of how they can make a difference in their community. The themes of Improving the Environment, Helping Others, and Positive Attitudes emerged from the data.

Improving the Environment. Most Level 1 Scholars reported that they could make a difference in their community by improving the environment. This included keeping the community clean, improving the school environment, improving infrastructure in the community, and building a positive living and working environment for community members. Most Level 1 Scholars described that they could keep the community clean by picking up trash,

recycling, riding their bike, helping others rake leaves, giving rides to others, and not littering. Many Level 1 Scholars stated that they could improve their school environments by following the rules, not running in the classroom, stopping bullying, being a leader at school, and talking to an adult when others are being hurtful. Additionally, some Scholars reported that they could make a difference in their community by helping improve the infrastructure, such as “building houses for those who need it,” “improving the roads,” and “helping others fix up their stores.” A few Scholars reported that they could improve the environment by building a sense of community among others. For example, one scholar stated, “I can be inclusive and help make everybody come together.” Another scholar wrote, “I can help neighbors talk to each other and be friends.”

Helping Others. Most Level 1 Scholars reported that they could make a difference in their community by helping others. Many Scholars reported that they would first help their community by giving to those in need. Their ideas for helping those in need included helping others when they are sick, helping the homeless, those in underserved communities, and those who need financial support. Additionally, some Scholars wrote that they could help others by sharing their knowledge and skills. One Scholar wrote, “I can make a difference in my community by helping others and teaching others who do not know how to read.”

Positive Attitudes. Many Level 1 Scholars stated that they could make a difference in their community by exhibiting positive attitudes that demonstrated caring and respect for others and being willing to confront injustice. One Scholar wrote, “I can make a difference by being respectful, treating people right, and being inclusive.” Another Scholar reported, “I can save the world by being a better person, not being mean, listening to everybody, and not bothering others.” Some Scholars reported that they could make a difference by being “being a leader, not a

follower” and “stopping bad things from happening to those who don’t deserve it.” One Scholar reported his or her willingness to talk to “powerful individuals” to help create change for others.

Improving Freedom School

Level 1 Scholars responded to one open-ended question related to how Freedom School could be improved. Three themes emerged from the data, including Resources, Behavior, and Structure.

Resources. When asked about how Freedom School could be improved, many Scholars listed a number of items that would make Freedom School more enjoyable for Scholars. For example, some Scholars reported that more books, more toys, and better drums for Harambe. Other Scholars reported wanting a bigger classroom space, more food options, and more activities to choose from.

Behavior. Many Level 1 Scholars reported that better behavior from other students would improve their experience at Freedom School. Some Scholars wrote that changing the rules on the bus would help others improve their behavior. Additionally, Scholars wrote that being more respectful of teachers, not cussing, and sharing objects in the class would improve Freedom School. One Scholar wrote, “I would want others not to fight,” which was consistent with other Scholars’ reports that fighting and bullying negatively influenced their experiences at Freedom School.

Structure. Lastly, Level 1 Scholars indicated that changes in Freedom School structure may improve their experiences at Freedom School. Scholars reported that more Freedom School levels, more teachers, and smaller class sizes may improve their experiences. Additionally, Scholars indicated that changing the structure of the Freedom School could make it more

enjoyable for them. This included frequent or longer break time, incorporating time outside, including more activities into the curriculum, and making the Freedom School day longer.

Level 2-4 Scholars

Reading

Level 2-4 Scholars responded to one open-ended question evaluating what the Scholars learned from the books they read and discussed at Freedom School. Five themes emerged from the data, including History, Skills, Enjoyment, Life Lessons, and Self-Improvement.

History. Most Level 2-4 Scholars reported learning about historical events and figures. These Scholars cited learning about Black history, including slavery, the bus boycott, the Civil Rights Movement, and segregation in schools. One Scholar wrote, “I learned about civil rights and about America[’]s history and peoples struggles and strengths. I’ve felt emotional learning my African American history.” Many Scholars reported learning more about Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, and Claudette Colvin. “From Claudette Colvin I learned that she stood for herself when she was sitting in a white passenger’s seat. She was shunned for it though and never given credit.” Additionally, some Scholars indicated that they learned about child labor, the Holocaust, discrimination in Mexico, and historical issues in mental health and homelessness.

Skills. Many Level 2-4 Scholars reported that they developed new vocabulary, comprehension, and concentration skills from the books they read and discussed at Freedom School. For example, some Scholars stated: “I’ve learned new words and it has helped me broaden my vocabulary;” “I’ve learned that there is different feelings that describe characters;” “I learned how to comprehend what I read better and my fluency in reading has improved a lot;” and “What I learned is to take time in reading and do not be fast when you are reading a book so you can concentrate better.” Additionally, some Scholars reported that the books they read and

discussed at Freedom School helped them become better at reading out loud and sharing their understanding of books with the class. One scholar wrote, “I learned how to read better and read out loud. It doesn’t matter if you can or not cause people are not going to make fun of you. We are still going to talk about what we learned from the book if you read bad out loud.” This suggests that the process of reading and discussing books at Freedom School helped Scholars feel more comfortable and confident in their development of reading and comprehension skills.

Enjoyment. Many Level 2-4 Scholars also reported that they learned that they liked reading, and “reading can be a fun hobby.” One Scholar wrote, “Freedom School is really fun and because of Freedom School I want to read more and how I love to read.” Another Scholar stated, “From the book I read...I learned a since we take out details of the book and compare it to our lives. There[’]s a lot to learn about ourselves in the books we read that’s fun.” Many Scholars reported feeling “surprised” that “you can make cool activities and conversations on the books” because they originally believed that reading was simply just a requirement for school. Some Scholars commented that they enjoyed “traveling” to different places in the books that they read. For example, one Scholar stated, “I learned that you get to go a lot of places that you’ve never been to in the books that we read I went to the past.”

Life Lessons. Numerous Level 2-4 Scholars reported learning “lessons of stories that are really lessons of life.” The life lessons reported by these Scholars were related to gratitude, responding to adversity, making mistakes, and judging others. Many Scholars reported that they felt more grateful for what they have because “everyone is struggling in their own way.” Additionally, some Scholars discussed the importance of responding constructively to adversity and persevering through difficult times. During difficult life events, Scholars discussed the importance of “being resilient,” “being accountable,” “staying strong on the inside,” and

“keeping your head up.” Moreover, some Scholars discussed the notion of “owning our mistakes.” One Scholar remarked, “I learned it’s okay to make mistakes and it’s our job to own up to them and try to fix them when we can.” Some Scholars described what they learned about judging others, a few Scholars wrote, “not everyone is how they appear;” “don’t judge a book by its cover;” “people can be struggling even if you can’t see it.” Overall, many Scholars indicated that the books they read at Freedom School were relatable: “they helped me in my difficulties in real life.”

Agency and Making a Difference

Level 2-4 Scholars responded to one open-ended item about how they can make a difference in their school and their community. The themes that emerged from these responses included: Improving the Environment, Modeling, Giving, and Safety.

Improving the Environment. Like Level 1 Scholars, most Level 2-4 Scholars reported that they could make a difference in their school and in their community by improving the environment. Many Scholars reported that they could pick up trash, educate others about pollution, recycle, create a community garden, “building things for the kids,” and planting trees. One Scholar wrote, “I can help others learn how to not let things go to waste.” In addition to improving the physical environment, some Scholars also described the importance of improving relationships between community members to develop a positive socioemotional environment. Some Scholars indicated that they would “listen to the needs of others,” “help people understand to not think bad of other people,” and “help others feel important to the community.”

Modeling. Some Level 2-4 Scholars indicated that they could make a difference in their school and their community by modeling positive attitudes and behaviors. One Scholar wrote, “I can make a difference by showing out in a good way, have people agree and will stand right

beside you.” Other Scholars stated: “I can be an example for younger people;” “I can make a difference in my school by following the rules that people don’t really follow that much so I can show them why its good to follow these rules;” and “show others the importance for standing up for what’s right.” Some Scholars also discussed the importance of “leading by example” and being “a leader not a follower.”

Generosity. Most Level 2-4 Scholars reported that they could make a difference in their school and their community by helping those in need. These Scholars indicated that they could help others by being more generous, such as volunteering, giving of their time, and donating goods. Some Scholars described ways that they could volunteer in their school and their community, such as giving out lunch bags, organizing a food drive, organizing a “book bag collection,” and “creating an organization to teach people to read.” Many Scholars described specific populations that were in need and how they could donate time, money, and goods to support them. For example, “I can donate to homeless people. This way they can be off the streets and stop surviving by begging for food and money.” Another Scholar wrote, “I can make kids who are not treated well a safe place (foster).” Other Scholars described donating books, shelter, means for transportation, and food to those in need.

Safety. Many Level 2-4 Scholars indicated that they could make a difference in their school and their communities by increasing safety. These Scholars suggested that they could improve the safety in their school by stopping bullying and improve safety in their communities by stopping violence and drug activity. Some Scholars suggested that they could stop bullying by “not making fun of anybody,” “being nice to everyone, even those I don’t like,” “standing up to bullies,” and “telling an adult when bullying is happening.” Likewise, some Scholars reported that they could stop violence in their communities by “stop the shooting,” “stop gang related

things,” “no more beating people up,” “help others talk instead of use guns,” “stop drug use,” and “end murder.” Additionally, some Scholars described how they could promote safety in their school and in their neighborhood. For example, one Scholar stated, “I can build a safe place for kids to go when there is violence on the street.”

Future Plans

Level 2-4 Scholars responded to one open-ended question that asked them to describe their plans for their education and what they want to do when they are an adult. Like Level 1 Scholars, most Level 2-4 Scholars reported that finishing their education was important to them. They described the importance of completing middle school and high school, with most Scholars reporting that they wanted to attend college. Many Scholars reported that attending college can help them achieve a better life. For example, one Scholar wrote, “My plans are to go to college so I can have a better life and live my dreams.” Another Scholar stated, “I will study a lot in college so I can achieve my dreams and goals.” A few Scholars indicated that they wanted to attend Ivy League Schools to “receive the best education.”

Level 2-4 Scholars reported a number of similar occupational interests to Level 1 Scholars, including creative and performing arts, professional athletics, helping professions, STEM careers, public service, politics, and working in the service industry. Like Level 1 Scholars, most Level 2-4 Scholars wanted to be teachers. Many Level 2-4 Scholars indicated that they wanted to be teachers because: “I want to help out kids;” “I want to help people learn;” and “I want to help kids be smarter.” Other popular career interests included being an artist, professional football player, chef, doctor, nurse, business person, and engineer.

Learning and Education

Level 2-4 Scholars responded to one open-ended question evaluating how Scholars believed that their experiences at Freedom School would help them in the next school year. The themes that emerged from the data included, Reading Performance and Confidence.

Reading Performance. Nearly all Level 2-4 Scholars reported that their experience at Freedom School would improve their reading skills and performance on reading tasks in the next school year. Most Scholars indicated that Freedom School would help them with their vocabulary, attention span, languages, comprehension, reading level, and reading fluency. One Scholar wrote, “it really does help me I came from an I to a R in reading level since Freedom School.” Another Scholar wrote, “It will help me become a better reader and become fluent with words I don’t understand.” Additionally, most Scholars reported that their Freedom School experience would help them perform better on reading related tasks and the End-of-Grade (EOG) Reading Comprehension tests. One Scholar stated, “Sometimes when you don’t read over summer you get behind and don’t do as well on tests. Freedom School will help me do better and pass my EOG’s.”

Confidence. Many 2-4 Scholars also suggested that their experience at Freedom School would improve their confidence during the next school year. Scholars wrote: “being in Freedom School has helped me realize how brave I can be in class and stop being shy;” “it will help me not stutter and embarrass myself reading in front of the class and encourage me to be more engaged in our lessons;” “it will build my confidence up so I will be able to talk out loud when I need something I hope.” This suggests that Scholars who were struggling may feel more comfortable participating in reading with the class and larger discussions than before they started Freedom School.

Social and Emotional Skills

Level 2-4 Scholars responded to one open-ended question assessing how they work with others after being a part of Freedom School. Three themes emerged from these responses: Teamwork, Communication, and Positive Attitude.

Teamwork. Many Level 2-4 Scholars reported that their experiences at Freedom School changed how they approached group work and their ability to contribute to a team. Some Scholars reported that before Freedom School, they preferred to work individually. However, after attending Freedom School, many Scholars reported the benefits of teamwork. “I let them say their ideas and I make one and we can combine them and make a wonderful idea,” “The changes for me of working with others is really good because I don’t trust other kids but now I trust kids in Freedom School.” Other Scholars reported experiencing personal growth from working with others at Freedom School, such as being more “cooperative,” “helpful,” “understanding,” “open,” “less selfish,” and “more a team player.”

Communication. Additionally, many Level 2-4 Scholars reported that their experiences at Freedom School helped them work better with others by improving their communication skills. These Scholars suggested that participating in group work at Freedom School helped them “ask for help,” “speak up more,” “participate more,” and “learn to respectfully disagree.” Furthermore, some Scholars also indicated their experiences at Freedom School helped them better communicate during conflicts. “I talk to the person and not just go off.” “I try to hear their opinion even if I don’t agree.” “If any one tries to mess with me I will now tell an adult.”

Positive Attitude. Many Level 2-4 Scholars also reported that since being a part of Freedom School they had more positive attitudes toward others. Scholars described themselves as becoming more “open-minded,” “patient,” “friendly,” “honest,” “kind,” “respectful,” and “trusting.” Before Freedom School, some Scholars indicated that they struggled with working

with others because they were suspicious of them. However, these Scholars reported they developed more “trust in other people” and more “confidence that others can help.” Scholars reported that since being a part of Freedom School, they were more open to developing new friendships and getting to know other Scholars before making judgments.

Freedom School Experience

Level 2-4 Scholars responded to three open-ended items related to their Freedom School experience. These items assessed what they liked about Freedom School, what could make Freedom School better for them, and how could Freedom School be improved.

Liked. Most Level 2-4 Scholars reported that they enjoyed the activities at Freedom School, specifically the field trips, Jubilee, and Harambe. One Scholar reported, “I liked that we get to go on field trips, get to do cheers and chants and reading, and HARAMBE!” Many Scholars also reported how they enjoyed meeting new friends, getting to know their classmates, and working with the teachers and interns. One Scholar wrote, “My teacher and classmates are amazing and they make me feel warm and welcome to be around.” Another scholar wrote, “I liked that we read and how close we got as a class and all the places we got to go together, mostly Jubilee.”

Areas for Growth. Like Level 1 Scholars, Level 2-4 also had suggestions of how to improve Freedom School. When asked about how Freedom School could be improved or what would make Freedom School better for them, the Scholars listed a number of suggestions. Some Scholars reported wanting a bigger classroom space, more food options, more activities to choose from, and more books. Some Scholars reported wanting better interns, teachers, and bus drivers. For example, one Scholar wrote, “having better interns that don’t curse or make fun of

you.” Another Scholar wrote, “I need a better bus driver. The bus drivers are mean. She drives so fast she was inches from hitting a car.”

Again, Like the Level 1 Scholars, many Level 2-4 Scholars indicated that changes in Freedom School structure may improve their experiences at Freedom School. Scholars reported that more Freedom School levels, more teachers, and smaller class sizes may improve their experiences at Freedom School. Additionally, Scholars indicated that changing the structure of the Freedom School could make it more enjoyable for them. This included adjusting breaks to include more frequent or longer break time, fewer rules and more freedom, more interaction between levels and sites, and including other subjects in the curriculum.

Servant Leader Intern Likert Response Results

Fifty-seven SLIs completed a survey that consisted of 42 questions about demographics, their experiences as Freedom School SLIs, and whether these experiences will influence future plans. Of the 57 SLIs, 34 identified as African American/Black (59.6%), 2 identified as Latino/Hispanic (3.5%), 15 identified as European American/White (26.3%), 2 identified as Asian American (3.5%), 2 identified as mixed heritage (3.5%), and two declined to respond (3.5%). Eleven SLIs identified as male (10.9%) and 44 identified as female (77.2%). On average, SLIs were approximately 20 years old ($M=20.58$, $SD=2.15$), with ages ranging from 18 to 32 years old. Of the SLIs that completed the survey, 21 SLIs served Level 1 (36.8%), 24 SLIs served Level 2 (42.1%), and 10 served Level 3 (17.5%). Most Interns identified their educational status as an undergraduate student ($n=49$; 86.0%), with other Interns identifying as graduate student ($n=2$; 3.5%) and college graduates ($n=3$; 5.3%). A summary of the SLI demographics is provided in Table 9.

SLIs were provided 20 statements and asked to respond to the extent to which they agreed with each statement using a Likert scale ranging from (1) Strongly Disagree to (4) Strongly Agree. Tables 10 through 13 summarize the SLIs' responses to each item and their perceptions of their (a) Freedom School Experience, (b) College, Career, and Future Plans, (c) Volunteering, Community Engagement, and Advocacy, (d) Agency/Soft Skills, and (e) Final Thoughts.

Six items were used to assess SLIs' perceptions of the Freedom School Experience (Table 16). The majority of SLIs agreed or strongly agreed that they enjoyed their work as an Intern ($n=55$; 96.5%) and would return as a Freedom School Intern in the future ($n=49$; 86.0%). Most SLIs agreed or strongly agreed that they possessed skills that aided them in their work at Freedom School ($n=55$; 96.7%) and that they learned new skills as a result of their work at Freedom School ($n=52$; 91.2%). The majority of SLIs also agreed or strongly agreed that they experienced successes ($n=54$; 94.7%) and challenges ($n=50$; 87.7%) in their work as Freedom School SLIs.

For SLIs' perceptions of College, Career, and Future Plans, three items were used to assess any changes in their educational or career plans as result of their Freedom School experience (Table 17). Most SLIs disagreed or strongly disagreed that their plans for their education ($n=43$; 75.4%) and career ($n=39$; 68.4%) changed as a result of their Intern experience. However, approximately, 20 to 25 percent of SLIs reported that their plans for education ($n=11$; 19.3%) and career ($n=15$; 26.3%) changed as a result of their Intern experience at Freedom School. Additionally, most SLIs disagreed or strongly disagreed that their economic prospects changed as a result of their experiences as a SLI ($n=34$, 59.6%), with approximately one-third of SLIs reporting changes in their economic prospects ($n=17$; 29.9%).

SLIs also responded to questions about their perceptions of volunteering, community engagement, and advocacy as a result of their experiences at Freedom School. These results are summarized in Table 12. Most SLIs agreed or strongly agreed that their vision for making a difference ($n=52$; 91.2%) and their view of their ability to make a difference in the community and world ($n=49$; 85.9%) changed as a result of their Freedom School experience. SLIs agreed or strongly agreed that they were more likely to work in the community ($n=44$; 77.2%) and advocate for both children ($n=50$; 87.7%) and families ($n=50$; 87.7%) living in poverty. Furthermore, Interns agreed or strongly agreed that their Freedom School experience changed or expanded their understanding of education ($n=46$; 80.7%) and multiculturalism ($n=42$; 73.7%).

In terms of Interns' perceptions of Agency/Soft Skills (Table 19), the majority of Interns' agreed or strongly agreed that they enhanced their leadership skills ($n=52$; 91.2%), and were better at working with others ($n=53$; 93.0%). They also agreed or strongly agreed that they were better able to talk and work with others ($n=55$; 94.7%), and were better at adapting to changes in a variety of contexts as a result of their Freedom School experience ($n=53$; 93.0%). The majority of Interns also noted that they would recommend the role of SLI to others ($n=52$; 91.2%). These results can be found in Table 10.

Servant Leader Intern Open-Ended Response Findings

SLIs responded to a series of open-ended questions via SurveyShare to illustrate their experiences at Freedom School, future plans, community engagement and advocacy, agency and soft skills, and general feedback. SLIs responded to 16 open-ended items related to likes and dislikes at Freedom School, skill development, successes and challenges at Freedom School, changes in education, career, and economic prospects, changes in community engagement and multiculturalism, changes positive or negative changes in life, and feedback on Freedom School

operations and organization. Of the 57 SLIs who responded to the survey, almost every SLI responded to each open-ended question, providing substantial support for the data analysis. Data was analyzed using the same procedures described above.

Freedom School Experience

SLIs completed 5 open-ended questions related to their Freedom School Experience. Interns were asked to describe what they liked and disliked about Freedom School, their successes and challenges as Freedom School Interns, their skills development, and their perceptions of Freedom School's areas for growth.

Liked/Disliked. The SLIs listed a variety of likes and dislikes related to their experiences at Freedom School. They reported that they liked the ability to make a positive impact on the Scholars and to witness their growth throughout the program. They also reported that they enjoyed the relationships they formed with the Scholars and the staff at their sites.

Some SLIs wrote:

“I really enjoyed getting to know all of the [S]cholars this summer. It felt great knowing that I was making a difference in my scholar's life. I also enjoyed meeting some of the people I worked with. I made some great friends and I can't wait to see where our friendships will go.’

“[I] loved being able to make [a]n impact on the lives of the children I worked with as well as having my life impacted by them. Also, I love the sense of community that freedom school gives the kids. Many of our Scholars were living with a lot of instability at home and freedom school gave them all the opportunity to escape from that environment for a few hours everyday to just be a kid. I also love the concept of the

integrated reading curriculum because the lessons are both comprehensive and entertaining for the kids.”

“Some things that I liked about my work as a Servant Leader Intern is the bond and impact that I created with my [S]cholars, they know they can come to me for anything they need and I'll be there for them.”

The SLIs also described aspects of their Freedom School experience that they disliked, such as miscommunication between staff, lack of training to manage behavioral issues, and disorganization in field trips and afternoon activities. For example, some SLIs wrote:

“This summer was difficult for me because of the Scholars that I had and the lack of field trips that level 1's had. I had a class of 13 kids and 9 of them had ADHD/ADD, among other disorders that I wasn't trained to handle. I didn't feel prepared this year, like I did last year. This year tested myself and my coworkers alot.”

“I disliked the lack of training on how to deal with Scholars with mental and behavioral problems.”

“I disliked the poor communication between the Freedom School regional staff to our Site Coordinator as well as the communication between the staff and partners. There were many logistics that could have been much more organized.”

“Dislikes: negative interpersonal relationships with interns, lack of communication/involvement with site coordinator/regional coordinator regarding interpersonal employee rapport, lack of professional behavior in the workplace.”

Though the SLIs described aspects of their Freedom School experience that were not enjoyable, most SLIs noted that their experience at Freedom School contributed to a sense of accomplishment and demonstrated their desire to help others learn.

Successes/Challenges. The SLIs responded to one open-ended item asking them to describe the successes and challenges that they faced in their work as a SLI. For successes, many SLIs described creating a positive learning environment. These SLIs reported that they were able to make learning fun, help Scholars feel supported, create a safe space for Scholars to share and grow, and support the Scholars in developing reading skills. For example, SLIs wrote:

“Scholars who were shy became more outspoken and Scholars who struggled with their behavior began to find different ways to cope instead of using their anger;” “I had successes with having my Scholars trust me enough to let me know personal things about them; “Successes- creating an environment where students can be themselves and communicate their feelings.”

“Some of my successes come in the cases of Scholars who come to Freedom School very quiet, reserved, and scared but end up leaving Freedom School more confident and more brave. For example, this summer I had a student who rarely spoke above a whisper. For the first two weeks [he] didn’t speak at all and when he did I could barely hear it. And even though it was so difficult for him to speak and he got scared I never stopped giving him the opportunities to speak in class and speak privately with me. Overtime he began to

“speak more and even though it was just a whisper I considered it to be a massive success because every time he did speak he looked so proud of himself.”

Conversely, many SLIs reported a variety of challenges related to managing difficult behavior. Some SLIs described incidents of Scholars being “cruel,” “aggressive,” “violent,” “hurtful,” and “alarming.” Some SLIs described feeling frustrated and defeated during difficult classroom situations. Other SLIs reported that they felt disheartened by Scholars limited behavioral management or progress. One SLI wrote:

“...a challenge I had this summer came in the form of students that I wasn’t really able to reach. At the beginning of the summer I had one boy who admitted to me that he had anger issues and I hope that throughout the summer we would be able to work together to help him work through those issues. For the first two weeks it seemed as if we were making a lot of progress, but then it all kind of fell apart. Towards the end of the summer he was more angry and violent than he was at the beginning of the summer and it was really difficult to deal with because I felt as if him and I made a lot of progress towards him dealing with his anger issues. It was very hard to face the fact that, in the end, our efforts weren’t as successful as I hoped they would be.”

Many SLIs felt unprepared to address the behavioral issues that were present in the classroom and believed these detracted from many Scholars’ ability to learn at Freedom School.

Skill Development. The SLIs responded to two open-ended items about the skills that they possess that supported their work as SLIs and any new skills learned as a result of their work. They reported that their communication skills, interpersonal skills, leadership skills, and organizational skills bolstered their work as SLIs. Some SLIs indicated that their communication

skills helped them clearly convey ideas, instructions, and expectations to Scholars. These skills also helped them listen effectively to Scholar needs. Many SLIs described their interpersonal skills as fundamental aspects of building positive, meaningful relationships with their Scholars. Some interpersonal skills reported by the SLIs were empathy, patience, compassion, cooperation, humor, and ability to treat all Scholars the same. Many SLIs also described the importance of having leadership skills to serve as a model for the Scholars. One SLI wrote, “I love being a role model and kids look up to me as one so I try to do the best I can to be a great leader.” For some SLIs, these leadership skills helped them be more organized and manage their classroom. One SLI reported, “Organizations skills, leadership skills, teaching skills. These have helped me with classroom management and ensuring a safe environment. I also encourage my students to affirm themselves each day.”

Furthermore, most SLIs reported learning about patience and classroom management from their work as SLIs. One SLI wrote:

“A new skill that I have learned as a result of my work as a Servant Leader Intern would have to be patience is key because I learned that sometimes you have to give the kids a break because they cannot just sit in one spot for a long period of time and just read, so you have to be patient with them and give them maybe five minutes in between reading just to get up and move.”

Other SLIs described the importance of developing “patience in a sometimes chaotic environment,” being flexible and able to adjust to difficult situations, and being able to model patience. The SLIs also reported gaining “valuable classroom management skills that could be applied to future teaching.” One SLI wrote, “Being and SLI has strengthened my classroom management skills as well as given me the confidence I need to lead my very own classroom

within an actual school system.” Another SLI stated, “I have learned so much about how to work with kids and how to discipline them. Although my class was not always perfect, I now have more confidence working with children because I know how to balance love and toughness.” Most SLIs indicated that their patience, flexibility, and classroom management skills would help them in future careers.

Areas for Growth in Freedom School. SLIs responded to two open-ended items requesting feedback about improving site operations, training, and organization. Most SLIs reported that they were satisfied with their experiences. Many SLIs suggested more resources for smaller sites, more organization and communication for field trips, better scheduling processes for afternoon activities, more ESL instruction, and more training for dealing with difficult behavioral or mental health related issues. Many SLIs felt unprepared to adapt the IRC for learning disabilities and to manage the difficult situations that arose in their classrooms. One SLI stated:

“I just think that training should put a lot more emphasis on teaching us what it will be like to be in a difficult classroom with students with all sorts of problems. I think learning about ADHD and other issues that kids may face would be more beneficial than classes on more abstract topics. I think it would be great to learn about how to break up bullying, what to do when a scholar mentions suicide, how to deal with Scholars who can't pay attention, etc. I think that would have helped my class and all the other classes at my site to work a lot smoother. I definitely would not have felt as overwhelmed in the first few weeks.”

Another SLI wrote:

“...Freedom School needs to be more intentional about the children who are enrolled in the program. College undergrads are not educated enough to teach students the mechanics of reading. We are not trained to work with illiterate children or children with severe behavior issues but both of these groups of children are frequently enrolled in the program. We are not doing right by these children by enrolling them in a program that frankly, lacks the resources to support them.”

Most SLIs reported that the training was beneficial, but more training is needed in these areas to help them feel prepared to manage the situations that arise in their classrooms. Other SLIs suggested having ESL training to help with parents and children who are not English speakers.

College, Career, and Future Plans

SLIs responded to four short-answer questions that asked them to explain changes in their career-related plans as a result of their experiences as Interns in Freedom School and how they might use what they learned from Freedom School in their experiences in the future.

Change of Plans. According to the Likert responses, most SLIs disagreed that they plan to change their educational or career plans as a result of their Freedom School experience. Nine SLIs indicated that Freedom School influenced them to change their educational plans. These SLIs indicated that they now wanted to change their major to “doing something with kids,” education, school counseling, social work, or an “advocacy-related” field. Fourteen SLIs reported that they wanted to change their career plans as a result of their Freedom School experience. These SLIs indicated that they are now considering working for a non-profit agency, serving as an advocate for children, becoming a principal, and joining Teach for America. Other SLIs reported that their Freedom School experience made them not want to be a teacher. Additionally, SLIs indicated that their Freedom School experience made them want to strive to

make more money in order to give money to programs that support Scholars and lower income communities.

Using their Freedom School Experience. SLIs responded to one open-ended item related to how they will use what they have learned from their Freedom School experience in the future. Most SLIs reported that they would use their Freedom School experience by advocating for children and underserved populations, embracing diversity, and using their experience to inform their work in future classrooms. Many SLIs reported that they would advocate for better public education, better school resources, and better treatment of immigrant children. One SLI described the importance of giving voice to children in need, "...just letting people know that children need a voice and we as adults are that voice they need."

Additionally, many SLIs described the Freedom School experience as "eye-opening," increasing their awareness of diverse needs of underserved and underrepresented groups. As a result, some SLIs reported that they would incorporate culturally relevant and inclusive practices in their future classrooms. For example, two SLIs wrote:

"I want to be a teacher, so lots of what I learned will help me in my future classroom someday. Hopefully, I will be a more engaging teacher who feels comfortable working with all different kinds of diversity. I am white, and I learned so much about cultures and experiences other than what I am familiar with. That learning certainly changed the way I approach my aspects of my life."

"The things I learned about classroom management, how to give clear instructions, how to foster good relationships with students, how to create a culturally inclusive classroom,

and how to be an altogether better person are all things that I will incorporate into my classroom when I become a teacher.”

Largely, many SLIs described how the skills they learned at Freedom School are universal and will help them in a variety of areas of their life. For example, one SLI stated, “Freedom School has been life changing for me. The skills this program teaches go beyond the teaching profession and are valuable in just about any career.”

Volunteering, Community Engagement, and Advocacy

SLIs completed three open-ended questions about changes in their thoughts about their ability to make a difference in their community and world, their thoughts about education and multiculturalism, and their thoughts about children and families living in poverty.

Thoughts about Making a Difference. About half of the SLIs reported changes in their thoughts about making a difference, mainly related to their perceived ability to make a difference. These SLIs reported learning that they are capable of contributing to changes in the community, even if they are small and simple changes. “I just really see now how anything you do, not matter how big or how small, really does make an impact.” Another SLI described how his or her role as an SLI was serving as a change agent for the Scholars:

“Before Freedom School I only did community service in terms of getting hours for high school. Because of that, I never really understood the true impact in them and importance of community service. When I started Freedom School, because we get paid, I never really considered it to be community service. But, after the very first day of my very first week of training at Freedom School I realized that I was part of one massive community service. Throughout training and throughout the summer I have grown a love and appreciation for community service because I’m able to see the people that I am helping.

Every day when I come into work, I look at all of the Scholars and I see the effect of my community service. [Through] The real freedom school I have truly been able to see the effect that community service can have on a community and, in turn, the world.”

Overall, the SLIs reported that they learned how they can make a difference as students and that they have a responsibility to give a voice to others.

Thoughts about Education and Multiculturalism. About half of the SLIs reported that they experienced changes in their thoughts about education and multiculturalism, and most of these changes were related to developing a different perspective. Most SLIs reported changes in their understanding of the educational system and expressed fear that “there are so many cracks...that our children are falling into.” Some SLIs reported learning about how children of color experience the educational system and how various cultures are marginalized by the educational system. One SLI wrote:

“I have been a child of the [a school] system my entire life and seeing these kids made me realize that [some schools are] HORRIBLE in its efforts to help children in an education setting. My Scholars have told me stories of them being turned away or shamed for their lack of knowledge or understanding about a topic (and all of them were children of color). [Schools] need to change drastically or else FSP won't even be enough to help these kids.”

Other SLIs described how much their experience at Freedom School made them appreciate and embrace diversity. Some SLIs described developing more awareness about their biases and being more open-minded toward individuals who are different than them. “I have realized many of my implicit biases and I have learned to push those to the side. I learned that every student is different and some may need different levels of attention so it is important to build that

relationship to be able to reach every student and make sure they comprehend the world around them.” The SLIs cited the importance of incorporating culture into the curriculum and connecting the books with real life experiences of the Scholars.

Thoughts about Poverty. Approximately half of the SLIs reported changes in their thoughts about poverty since being a part of Freedom School. These changes were primarily related to learning about children’s basic needs and how they can influence a child’s ability to learn at school. Some SLIs reported personal experiences with poverty and described how it helped them connect with Scholars who were enduring similar situations. These SLIs discussed how being able to connect with their experiences fuels their desire to create change for individuals living in these circumstances. One SLI stated:

“I wouldn’t say that my thinking towards children and families living in poverty has changed as much as I would say that my dedication to those children and families has increased. I’ve always been passionate about helping families in poverty because I grew up as a child in a family living in poverty. Being part of his Freedom School only reinforced my dedication to helping people who are or have been in the same situation that I was in.”

Additionally, some SLIs reported that they learned about the types of organizations that help individuals living in poverty and the resources needed by these individuals. Many SLIs reported that those living in poverty are often invisible to larger society, and Freedom School helped them see how they can bring more attention to these issues.

Agency and Soft Skills

SLIs completed one short-answer question where they discussed how their life has changed in positive and/or negative ways as a result of their Freedom School experience. The

changes described by the participants can be categorized into two themes: Purpose and Awareness.

Purpose. Most SLIs reported that their experience at Freedom School was a positive influence on their life by providing them with a new sense of purpose. “It is not an exaggeration to say, Freedom School has changed my life for the better and has given me a purpose for my life.” Many SLIs described how Freedom School has emboldened them to create change:

“My life has changed in a good way because Freedom School has given me something to take pride in. I am a big advocate for freedom school and I encourage anyone who cares about our young Scholars to come and be a beacon of light. I have also found myself becoming more mature because I have to be a good role model for the Scholars and hold myself accountable for my actions whether good or bad.”

“It has changed in a good way by relighting a passion for social justice and education. More importantly I know I have the ability to make a difference in every aspect of my life no matter what career path I choose.”

“My life has changed for the better since becoming an intern because I’ve started to realize that the world is much bigger than me. When you’re a college student in your early 20s sometimes you feel as if everything is all about you and your future. Not to say that that’s a bad thing, but it does end up creating this kind of self-centered mentality. When I started Freedom School and I saw my Scholars for the first time I was forced to accept that the task of educating children is bigger than me. It’s a task so much bigger than me that I can’t afford to bring my personal woes and dramas into work because these children deserve more than someone who only comes to work to think about themselves and not others.”

Awareness. Many SLIs reported that their experience at Freedom School positively influenced their life by changing their perspective and awareness of others. Some SLIs reported that their experiences at Freedom School helped them re-evaluate their judgments and assumptions of others, encouraging them to be more open-minded. “Positively, I have become less likely to make assumptions about peoples' home life. Little things like saying "parents" vs "parents or guardian" can make a difference. I've found that oftentimes we project our personal situation onto other people and that's not fair.” “I can truly say that working with my team has made me more open to work with others and to get to know people before I judge them.” Some SLIs indicated that they learned to ask questions about others’ experiences before making assumptions and they were open to hearing others’ stories. For some, as they became more open, they also developed more acceptance. One SLI explained, “I have become more comfortable working with other coworkers who have different beliefs than me.” For many SLIs, Freedom School exposed them to new ideas, cultures, and concepts, which increased their awareness of others’ experiences. For example, one SLI wrote:

“I think one of the best things was learning to work with people who live such different lives from me, and learn what it is like to be in their shoes and learn what their experiences have been. I have never really sat down and talked with people of a different race from me about the topic of race and prejudice, so getting to have those conversations with my coworkers was truly life changing and really altered my view of American society.”

Overall, Freedom School helped many SLIs form new perspectives about themselves, others, and the world around them.

Recommendations

According to the quantitative and qualitative data reported by Levels 1-4 Scholars and SLIs, Freedom Schools provided Scholars and SLIs with a valuable learning experience. Level 1-4 Scholars reported learning about the process of developing as a reader and specific content that shaped their outlook on the world around them. Many Scholars learned that reading can be fun and can allow them to “travel” to new places without leaving home or school. They reported learning about life lessons, history, culture, and ways that they can make a true difference in their schools and communities. The Scholars reported learning that “practice makes perfect,” and reading at Freedom School can help them improve their comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency.

Likewise, many SLIs learned that they are capable of affecting change and contributing to the growth and development of others. Through Freedom School, many SLIs reported developing a sense of self-efficacy as a future educator or benefitting professionally by learning many skills that could translate to any career in the future. Most SLIs described cultivating a newfound sense of awareness and self-exploration. Many SLIs reported the importance of examining their own implicit biases and recognized the need to engage in culturally inclusive practices that amplify various cultures, perspectives, and voices in the classroom.

Although most of the Scholars and SLIs experiences at Freedom School were positive, some themes consistently emerged across participants that highlight areas for improvement across Freedom Schools in Charlotte. According to many of the Scholars, there is a need for more resources to support their reading. Across levels, Scholars reported needing more books in the classroom. They also indicated that they needed bigger classrooms, and in some cases, smaller class sizes to enhance their learning. Scholars recommended modifications to the

structure of Freedom School, suggesting that they needed longer or more frequent breaks embedded in the schedule. While these changes may vary in feasibility, the Scholars indicated that these changes could impact their learning.

Additionally, many Scholars reported that behavioral issues in the classroom impeded their learning and negatively affected their experiences. Physical altercations between some Scholars influenced other Scholars' perceptions of safety on the bus and in the classroom. Some Scholars reported feeling bullied by others, contributing to a negative perception of the Freedom School learning environment. These behavioral issues suggest that more preparation for SLIs may be needed to help them address and manage these issues that arise in their classrooms.

This area for growth related to managing behavioral issues was also described by SLIs. Many SLIs reported feeling unprepared for the many behavioral and mental health concerns that arose in their classrooms. Some SLIs reported encountering issues with ADHD, suicidality, bullying, fights, and other severe behavioral issues. Other SLIs reported feeling ill-equipped to manage issues of low literacy or English as second language. Based on these reports, it appears that more training is needed to help SLIs recognize, address, and manage the behavioral and mental health issues that could arise in their classrooms. It is also apparent that SLIs need a clear protocol in the steps that need to be taken with crisis issues, such as suicidality and self-harm. Training is needed to help SLIs modify the curriculum for Scholars who report issues with literacy or English as their second language.

Summary

Scholars and SLIs reported experiencing a sense of belonging and efficacy at Freedom School. For Scholars, this translated into positive experiences with reading, confidence in their ability to work with others, and beliefs that they can make a difference in their communities and

schools. For SLIs, their experiences at Freedom School influenced their sense of purpose in life, their efficacy in helping others succeed, and their ability to form positive working relationships with others to support the mission of Freedom Schools. With these experiences, both Scholars and SLIs expressed that they would bring what they learned at Freedom School to their schools, communities, and future careers, illustrating the ripple effect of Freedom Schools in Charlotte.

Appendix

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Level 1 Scholars

	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Min	Max	Mode
Race/Ethnicity	192	--	--	--	--	African American/Black (<i>n</i> =100)
Sex	192	--	--	--	--	Female (<i>n</i> =101)
Age	192	6.96	1.04	5	10	--
Grade in School	191	--	--	--	--	First Grade (<i>n</i> =74)
Number of Years in Freedom School	191	1.53	.77	1	5	--
Site	129	--	--	--	--	Renaissance West STEAM Academy (<i>n</i> =41)

Table 2

Level 1 Scholars' Perceptions of Freedom School Experience, Reading, Agency/Making a Difference

Item	Not True for Me		True for Me	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Freedom School Experience				
<i>I enjoyed Freedom School this summer.</i>	16	8.3	175	91.1
<i>I want to do Freedom School again next year.</i>	25	13.0	165	85.9
Reading				
<i>Since being a part of Freedom School I am a better reader.</i>	28	14.6	159	82.8
<i>Since being a part of Freedom School I enjoy reading more.</i>	32	16.7	159	82.8
<i>Since being a part of Freedom School I will spend more time reading.</i>	33	17.2	158	82.3
Agency/Making a Difference				
<i>I want to make a difference in my school and community.</i>	25	13.0	167	87.0

Table 3

Level 1 Scholars' Perceptions of Learning and Education, Future Thinking/Goal Setting/Optimism, Social/Emotional Skills

Item	Not True for Me		True for Me	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Learning & Education				
<i>After my experience with Freedom School this summer, I think I will be a better student next year.</i>	11	5.7	179	93.2
<i>Since being a part of Freedom School I feel more comfortable asking for help from a teacher when I need it.</i>	17	8.9	174	90.6
<i>Since being a part of Freedom School I want to go to college.</i>	23	12.0	166	86.5
Future Thinking/Goal Setting/Optimism				
<i>My future is important to me.</i>	17	8.9	175	91.1
Social/Emotional Skills				
<i>I know how to ask for help when I have to deal with social problems or have a conflict with someone.</i>	31	16.1	158	82.3
<i>I know how to work well with others.</i>	26	13.5	165	85.9

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics for Level 2-4 Scholars

	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Min	Max	Mode
Race/Ethnicity	353	--	--	--	--	African American/Black (n=187)
Sex	349	--	--	--	--	Female (n=191)
Age	364	10.97	1.72	8	17	--
Freedom School Level	327	--	--	--	--	Level 2 (n=214)
Grade in School	362	4.95	1.73	1	11	
Number of Years in Freedom School	357	2.54	1.73	1	12	--
School Site	368	--	--	--	--	Christ Lutheran Church (n=70)

Table 5

Level 2-4 Scholars' Perceptions of Reading

Item	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>		<i>Disagree</i>		<i>Agree</i>		<i>Strongly Agree</i>	
	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
1. <i>Since being at Freedom School I am a better reader.</i>	3	.8	47	12.8	208	56.5	109	29.6
2. <i>Since being at Freedom School I enjoy reading more.</i>	23	6.3	84	22.8	155	42.1	104	28.3
3. <i>Because I participated in Freedom School I plan on spending more time reading.</i>	26	7.1	124	33.7	133	36.1	83	22.6

Table 6

Level 2-4 Scholars' Perceptions of Agency/Making a Difference and Future Thinking/Goal Setting/Optimism

Item	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>		<i>Disagree</i>		<i>Agree</i>		<i>Strongly Agree</i>	
	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
Agency/Making a Difference								
5. <i>Since being a part of Freedom School I feel good about who I am.</i>	9	2.4	29	7.9	127	34.5	201	54.6
6. <i>Since being a part of Freedom School I am more proud of my race.</i>	10	2.7	18	4.9	124	33.7	212	57.6
7. <i>Since being a part of Freedom School I am more proud of my community.</i>	5	1.4	37	10.1	167	45.4	153	41.6
Future Thinking/Goal Setting/Optimism								
9. <i>Since being a part of Freedom School I feel better about my future.</i>	8	2.2	19	5.2	151	41.0	187	50.8
10. <i>Since being a part of Freedom School I have plans for what I want to do when I am an adult.</i>	14	3.8	54	14.7	117	31.8	179	48.6

Table 7

Level 2-4 Scholars' Perceptions of Learning and Education

Item	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>		<i>Disagree</i>		<i>Agree</i>		<i>Strongly Agree</i>	
	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>12. Since being a part of Freedom School I think I will be a better student next year.</i>	4	1.1	40	10.9	140	38.0	181	49.2
<i>13. Since being a part of Freedom School I feel comfortable asking for help from a teacher when I need it</i>	14	3.8	42	11.4	134	36.4	176	47.8
<i>14. Since being a part of Freedom School I will stay in school and graduate from high school.</i>	2	.5	8	2.2	96	26.1	258	70.1
<i>15. Since being a part of Freedom School I want to go to college.</i>	7	1.9	19	5.2	95	25.8	242	65.8

Table 8

Level 2-4 Scholars' Perceptions of Social/Emotional Skills and Freedom School Experience

Item	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>		<i>Disagree</i>		<i>Agree</i>		<i>Strongly Agree</i>	
	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
Social/Emotional Skills								
<i>17. Since being a part of Freedom School I know how to better resolve conflicts or problems with other students.</i>	19	5.2	65	17.7	164	44.6	113	30.7
<i>18. Since being a part of Freedom School I know how to resolve conflicts or problems with adults.</i>	18	4.9	67	18.2	158	42.9	116	31.5
<i>19. Since being a part of Freedom School I know how to ask for help in dealing with social problems or conflict with others.</i>	21	5.7	45	12.2	159	43.2	136	37.0
<i>20. Since being a part of Freedom School I know how to work well with others.</i>	13	3.5	31	8.4	158	42.9	154	41.8
Freedom School Experience								
<i>20. I enjoyed Freedom School this summer.</i>	10	2.7	21	5.7	99	26.9	227	61.7
<i>21. I want to do Freedom School again next year.</i>	22	6.0	33	9.0	78	21.2	225	61.1

Table 9

Descriptive Statistics for Freedom School SLIs

	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Min	Max	Mode
Race/Ethnicity	57	--	--	--	--	African American/Black (n=34)
Sex	57	--	--	--	--	Female (n=44)
Age	53	20.58	2.15	18	32	--
Freedom School Level Served	57	--	--	--	--	Level 2 (n=24)
Educational Status	57	--	--	--	--	Undergraduate (n=49)

Table 10

SLIs' Perceptions of Freedom School Experience

Item	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>		<i>Disagree</i>		<i>Agree</i>		<i>Strongly Agree</i>	
	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
4. <i>I enjoyed my work as a Freedom School Servant Leader Intern this summer.</i>	0	0	2	3.5	18	31.6	37	64.9
5. <i>I would like to return in the future as a Freedom School Servant Leader Intern</i>	1	1.8	7	12.3	18	31.6	31	54.4
6. <i>I possess skills that have helped me in my work as a Servant Leader Intern.</i>	1	1.8	1	1.8	22	38.6	33	57.9
7. <i>I have learned new skills as a result of my work as a Servant Leader Intern.</i>	1	1.8	3	5.3	23	40.4	29	50.9
8. <i>I have experienced successes in my work as a Servant Leader Intern.</i>	1	1.8	0	0	23	40.4	31	54.4
9. <i>I have experienced challenges in my work as a Servant Leader Intern.</i>	2	3.5	3	5.3	21	36.8	29	50.9

Table 11

SLIs' Perceptions of College, Career, and Future Plans

Item	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>		<i>Disagree</i>		<i>Agree</i>		<i>Strongly Agree</i>	
	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
9. <i>My plans about my education have changed as a result of my experience as a Freedom School Servant Leader Intern (decision to attend college, change of major or degree, transferring to another college or school).</i>	12	21.1	31	54.4	6	10.5	5	8.8
10. <i>My plans about my work or career choices have changed as a result of my experience as a Freedom School Servant Leader Intern.</i>	11	19.3	28	49.1	10	17.5	5	8.8
11. <i>I believe my experiences as a Freedom School Servant Leader Intern has changed my economic prospects</i>	5	8.8	29	50.9	14	24.6	3	5.3

Table 12
SLIs' Perceptions of Volunteering, Community Engagement, and Advocacy

Item	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
13. <i>I view myself as a difference maker in my community and world.</i>	1	1.8	1	1.8	22	38.6	30	52.6
14. <i>My vision for making a difference has changed or expanded as a result of my Freedom School experience.</i>	1	1.8	4	7.0	18	31.6	31	54.4
15. <i>I am more likely to work in my community as a result of my experience with Freedom School.</i>	2	3.5	8	14.0	19	33.3	25	43.9
16. <i>My understanding of education has changed or expanded as a result of my Freedom School Experience</i>	2	3.5	5	8.8	28	49.1	18	31.6
17. <i>My understanding of multiculturalism has changed or expanded as a result of my Freedom School experience</i>	3	5.3	10	17.5	26	45.6	16	28.1
18. <i>I am more likely to advocate for children living in poverty as a result of my Freedom School experience.</i>	1	1.8	3	5.3	12	21.1	39	68.4
19. <i>I am more likely to advocate for families living in poverty as a result of my Freedom School experience.</i>	1	1.8	3	5.3	12	21.1	38	66.7

Table 13
SLIs' Perceptions of Agency/Soft Skills

Item	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>		<i>Disagree</i>		<i>Agree</i>		<i>Strongly Agree</i>	
	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
23. <i>I have developed or enhanced my leadership skills as a result of my Freedom School experience.</i>	1	1.8	3	5.3	12	21.1	38	66.7
24. <i>I am better at working with others as a result of my Freedom School experience.</i>	1	1.8	1	1.8	21	36.8	32	56.1
25. <i>I am better able to talk and work with others who are different from me as a result of my Freedom School experience.</i>	1	1.8	0	0	26	45.6	28	49.1
26. <i>I am better at adapting to changes that take place (at work, home, social contexts) as a result of my Freedom School experience.</i>	1	1.8	1	1.8	23	40.4	30	52.6