

**Post Scholars/Seigle Avenue Partners Freedom School
Pilot Outcomes Evaluation Report**

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In early 2009, Seigle Avenue Partners approached The University of North Carolina at Charlotte Institute for Social Capital, Inc. (ISC) to assist in developing a program of outcomes evaluation for its CDF Freedom Schools® Program. Created by the Children’s Defense Fund, Freedom Schools engage children in grades K-8 in a six-week summer program designed to prevent the “learning loss” that students typically experience over those months when school is not in session, as well as to have a positive impact on children’s character development, leadership, and community involvement.

Due to the relatively short timeline and limited resources available to support initial evaluation efforts, ISC and Seigle Avenue Partners agreed to conduct a pilot evaluation in Summer, 2009, that would involve data collection at two Freedom School Sites, Billingsville Elementary and Seigle Avenue. It was further agreed that the pilot evaluation would focus specifically on the program’s primary goal of enhancing academic performance for participating children. More specifically, the evaluation was designed to assess the extent to which the program meets the following objectives: (1) to increase children’s “love” of reading; (2) to increase children’s reading performance; and (3) to maintain or to increase children’s reading level from the end of the school year until the beginning of the proceeding school year.

It was hypothesized that the program would produce positive outcomes in each of these areas. In an effort to inform the new initiative of the Charlotte Post Foundation aimed at increasing school performance among African American Youth, a subset of the data obtained through the Freedom Schools Summer 2009 pilot evaluation for students designated as Post scholars was analyzed separately. The results of those analyses are reported here.

METHODOLOGY

The Summer 2009 Pilot Evaluation employed a pretest/posttest single group design. All students in grades 2-8 enrolled at the selected Freedom Schools sites (i.e., Billingsville and Seigle Avenue) were invited to participate in the study; however, only those children for whom parent consent was obtained and who provided individual assent were included in the evaluation. A standard set of baseline data were collected for all participating students within two weeks of the program start date, and follow-up data were collected during the last week of the program.

ISC contracted with The Center for Adolescent Literacies to conduct reading assessments for those Freedom School scholars who had completed grades 2-5. At the Billingsville site, which all Post Scholars attended, students were assessed using the Basic Reading Inventory (10th Ed.) (Johns, 2005). The Basic Reading Inventory is an individually administered informal reading inventory with multiple measures used to assess facets of reading. For this evaluation, the

research team used Form A and Form B. Forms A and B are equivalent measures used to assess students' oral reading across three subtests: the Graded Word List (GWL), leveled passages, and comprehension questions that accompany each passage.

These three sections capture different facets of the reading process: Reading out of context (the Graded Word Lists); reading in context (the leveled passages); and comprehension (the comprehension questions). These three subtests each provide separate measures of a student's independent, instructional, and frustration reading levels, which can then be synthesized into a single set of scores reported as preprimer (PP) through grade 12. Table 1 provides a brief description of these three reading levels:

Table 1: Levels of Reading Assessed with The Basic Reading Inventory

Levels	Characteristics
Independent (easy)	Comprehension (90%+) Word Recognition (99%+) Few or no repetitions Very fluent
Instructional (just right; comfortable)	Comprehension (75-85%+) Word Recognition (95%+) Few or no repetitions Fluent Some unknown words
Frustration (too hard)	Comprehension (50%+) Word Recognition (90%+) Word by word reading Many repetitions Rate is slow Lack of expression

The Graded Word Lists (GWL) are sets of lists, each containing 20 words, that are designed to allow a student's independent, instructional, and frustration reading levels to be identified quickly and easily. Students are presented with a word list and asked to read the words aloud at a comfortable pace. As the student reads down each list of words, the reading specialist records the student's responses in a performance booklet. Students receive credit for reading words correctly on a first reading (sight reading) and then have the opportunity to try to reread (analysis) words they missed on a second reading. The GWL is scored as follows: 19-20 correct (sight and analysis) is independent, 14 to 18 (sight and analysis) is instructional, and 13 or fewer is frustration.

The Basic Reading Inventory also contains a Graded Reading Passages section, which consists of short, grade appropriate passages of text that are read aloud while the reading specialist monitors reading accuracy. For Oral Reading Accuracy, students are asked to read passages aloud; the assessing adult records the different types of errors or "miscues" the student makes. The scoring

for this section varies a bit by the passage. The assessor counts miscues including words skipped, words inserted, and word said incorrectly. Scores are reported at the independent, instructional, and frustration levels. For Oral Reading Comprehension, passages are a mix of expository and narrative form. Explicit comprehension questions about details from the text are provided after each passage, but assessors are encouraged to supplement the questions with retelling and discussion. Scores are reported at the independent, instructional, and frustration levels.

One of four research team members, each a trained reading specialist, administered the reading assessment at both pre- and post-test. Students were assessed individually in a private location. The reading specialist asked the student to read a list of 20 words from the Graded Word List (GWL), while the researcher recorded the student's responses in a performance booklet. After completing the GWL, students were asked to read from the Graded Reading Passages (GRP) of the Basic Reading Inventory.

The Hemingway: Measure of Pre-Adolescent Connectedness (Karcher, 2001) was administered to students in small groups based on their grade level (i.e., K-2, 3-5, and 6-8). When the students demonstrated an ability to read and to comprehend the survey independently, the researcher instructed them to complete the survey at their own pace. However, the researcher read the survey questions aloud to (primarily younger) groups of children who experienced difficulties with the survey. The Hemingway is a 40-item measure of the strength of the connection or relationship between the responding child and friends, parents, and teachers, as well as the degree of their caring for school, culture, religion, and their futures. Specifically, the Hemingway was developed with subscales at three ecological levels: connectedness to others [i.e., parents and friends], to society [i.e., culture, future, religion, and school] and to oneself [i.e., self-esteem and identity]. The most recent version of the measure has generated internal subscale reliability alpha coefficients between .72 and .93 (Karcher, 2001). The Hemingway was used in this evaluation to assess connectedness to reading (i.e., "love of reading) and school, along with overall connectedness.

RESULTS

Student Outcomes

Ten Post scholars in grade 2 participated in the evaluation. The majority (90%; $n=9$) of the sample was male. Students ranged in age from 6 to 9 years, with an average age of 8 ($SD=.816$) at pretest. The entire sample was African American.

Reading Performance

Nine students completed the reading assessments at both pretest and posttest. One student completed the assessment at only one of the time points, and was therefore excluded from the analyses of reading performance outcomes.

Early in the planning stages of this evaluation, based on the literature and our experiences with tutoring and other educational programs, we determined that, consistent with the program goal of preventing summer learning loss, a positive outcome would consist of a students' maintaining his

or her reading level from pre- to posttest. Accordingly, we hypothesized that the reading level for the majority of Freedom School participants would not change over the course of the summer. However, the results showed that our hypothesis was wrong.

Results of the analyses revealed that the two thirds (67%) of the Post scholars maintained their reading level (no growth or loss). One-third showed a growth of one or more years, of which 22% (n=2) showed a year’s growth and 11% (n=1) showed a three year growth.

Table 2: Post Scholars’ Reading Levels

FS Scholar Level of Growth or Decline	No.	%
Maintained	6	67%
One year's growth	2	22%
Three year's growth	1	11%

“Love” of Reading

In order to examine the impact of Freedom School on students’ “love of reading,” a series of dependent-group t-tests were conducted to determine whether there was any significant change in students’ scores on the Connectedness to School Subscale, the Connectedness to Reading Subscale, and the Overall Connectedness Scale of the Hemingway Measure of Connectedness from pre- to posttest.

No statistically significant changes in students’ scores on the two subscales (Connectedness to School and Reading) or the Overall Connectedness Scale were detected from pre- to posttest. Despite a slight decline in scores from pretest to posttest, students’ level of connectedness was still relatively high at both time periods on the two subscales and on the overall connectedness scale (Scores at or above 2.5 indicate high levels of connectedness): M=3.18 and 3.14 for Connectedness to Reading, M=3.42 and 3.33 for Connectedness to School and M=3.02 and 2.99 on the Overall Connectedness Scale.

Examination of Factors Influencing Outcomes

The small number of Post students who completed both the reading assessments and the Hemingway at pretest and posttest prevented our conducting analyses of the extent, if any, to which improvements in connectedness were associated with improvements in reading. However, attendance data were obtained for the 9 Post students, and these data provide some insight into the potential role of attendance in achieving positive outcomes for students. Attendance rate was calculated by dividing the total number of days that the student attended the program by the total number of days that the program was in session. Forty percent (44%; n=4) had attendance rates of 90% or higher; 33% (n=3) had rates between 80% and 90%; and 22% (n=2) had rates between 70% and 80%. The one student who was not included in the analysis had an attendance rate between 60% and 70%.

CONCLUSIONS

The data obtained through reading assessments of the Post children clearly demonstrate that Freedom School had a positive impact with regard to reading. It is beyond the scope of this evaluation to assign a cause for these results; we cannot know with certainty why the program helped approximately 33% of Post students grow in their ability to read. However, there are a number of factors that might be contributing to this positive outcome. Foremost among these is the fact that the Freedom School reading curriculum is literature-based and focuses on comprehension. Students read and discuss engaging, culturally relevant books. They write in response to what they are reading and use art and other creative activities that may be more motivating and engaging than other types of reading (e.g., school reading instruction). It is probably not fair to say that the Freedom School curriculum is helping students gain one, two or three years in their ability to read. Rather, we believe Freedom School may create conditions that are more motivating and engaging, using interesting books and instruction, which help students realize more of their own potential. Also, reading is a complex task that involves simultaneous cognitive, physical, and social processes. Assessment tools such as the Basic Reading Inventory are not finely tuned to capture all of this complexity or to determine a student's precise reading level. While they are useful to show change in learning over time, such as in this evaluation, such assessments tell us little about the cause of that change. It may be that some students had good and bad days when the assessments were given, but clearly there is a pattern that emerges from this data showing that Freedom School is a place where many students improve in their ability to read.

Unfortunately, we were unable to detect any statistically significant improvement in students' love of reading using the Hemingway Measure of Connectedness. However, it seems likely that a longer intervention period (i.e., beyond six weeks of summer programming) may be required to effect changes in children's connectedness to school, connectedness to reading, and overall connectedness. Alternatively, the small sample size for these analyses may have accounted for the lack of statistically significant findings.

In conclusion, the results from this first pilot evaluation of the CDF Freedom Schools program are extremely promising, particularly in regard to the ability of the program to enhance reading skills among inner-city children.