



## CDF Freedom Schools© Program Frequently Asked Questions (revised 3.16.18)

### What is a CDF Freedom School?

**CDF Freedom Schools©** is a six-week summer reading program, developed by the **Children's Defense Fund** in 1995, to help increase literacy, self-esteem, socio-emotional skills, and a love of learning in children in grades K-8. The target audience is low-income, public school children who otherwise may not have access to books and educational enhancement programs during the summer, particularly African-American, Latinx, and biracial children from at-risk communities. The goal is to reduce summer learning loss and break cycles of violence and despair, which disproportionately impact low-income children. The program is named for Freedom Schools developed in Mississippi during Freedom Summer 1964. **More than 12,000 children across the United States participate in Freedom Schools each year in more than 120 cities.**

### What is the Nashville Freedom School Partnership?

The **Nashville Freedom School Partnership**, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, was organized in December 2014 to promote, plant, seek funding and sustainability, and provide CDF Freedom Schools© in the Metro Nashville (Tenn.) area, in partnership with public schools, faith-based and other community partners. Our 2017-18 funding and in-kind resource partners include: ALIAS Chamber Ensemble, the Children's Defense Fund, Belmont United Methodist Church, Gordon Memorial United Methodist Church, West End United Methodist Church, Fisk University, Tennessee State University, Trevecca Nazarene University, Vanderbilt Divinity School, Watson Grove Baptist Church, Writers' Block performance troupe, the Civil Rights Room of the Nashville Public Library, United Methodist Communications, and West End United Methodist Church.

### What are the operating hours and dates?

Freedom Schools generally operate annually for six weeks, from 8 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. daily. The dates for 2018 are Monday, June 11 through Friday, July 20. Our locations are: **Gordon Memorial Church**, 2334 Herman St., in North Nashville, for

grades 5-8, and **Watson Grove Baptist Church**, 1415 Horton Ave., in South Nashville, for grades K-8

#### What is included and what is the cost to families?

Freedom Schools operate at **no cost** to participating families, 85 percent of whom live at or below the state poverty level. All scholars receive two healthy meals and a snack each day and a book to take home each week. Mornings begin with an exuberant celebration called *Harambee* (Swahili word, meaning, “Let’s pull together”), and include singing, dancing, stomping, cheers and chants, all designed to build community and motivate scholars to learn. The rest of the morning is devoted to literacy enhancement. Afternoon activities focus on developing children’s socio-emotional skills, with activities such as art, music, drama, spoken word, dance, skill building for nonviolent conflict resolution, field trips and more. In lieu of fees, parents and guardians participate in a weekly family empowerment and peer-mentoring group. **Parents are also required to donate at two (2) hours of volunteer time or donate snacks for interns each summer.** In addition, we invite parents/guardians to attend **Parent Empowerment workshops** to help teach and learn from each other about creating better opportunities for children and youth.

#### What is taught in CDF Freedom Schools?

The program is primarily focused on reading, specifically improving recognition and use of words and enhancing comprehension. The curriculum, called the **Integrated Reading Curriculum**, is developed by professionals in education to coincide with and compliment core curriculum taught by public schools. The curriculum is activity-oriented, designed to motivate, excite and inspire children to read. A distinguishing component is that **the books and curriculum reflect the cultural heritage and identities of Black, Brown, and biracial children**, particularly children of color, so that scholars see themselves and adults from their communities reflected as decision-makers, change-agents, heroes and leaders. The overall theme for the summer is “I Can Make A Difference!” **The goals of the program are to build literacy and critical thinking among our scholars, AND to build their capacity to affect positive personal and social change in their homes, schools and communities.**

#### What impact does Freedom School have on students?

A report from Brookings Institution found a class-based gap in reading loss: upper- and middle-class students tended to improve their reading scores over the summer, while students from low-income families lost ground. Of Nashville Freedom School parents surveyed in 2017, 93% said they saw marked increases in their children’s reading *ability* and 87% said they saw an increase in their child’s *love* of reading after Freedom School ended.

A report card from the Children's Defense Fund said students demonstrated an average of an 11-month increase in instructional reading levels for low-income children enrolled in Freedom School. And almost no Freedom School students experience a decline in their reading skills. Children and youth also experience an

increased appreciate of their culture and community as well as increased ability to solve conflict without violence and aggression.

#### Who teaches the children?

Classes are taught by specially trained **Servant Leader Interns**—college and graduate students ages 19-30—who must apply for their positions and undergo a rigorous interview process and a criminal background check. These young adults work with no more than 10 children each so that the students get more focused attention from young adults who are excited about inspiring them. Most interns are young adults of color who themselves have overcome poverty, violence, and an indifferent public education system to get to college. They are eager to share their experience and wisdom with our scholars, and the scholars respond to adults who “know their story.” Our interns report that Freedom School is a life-changing experience for them, and many go on to become teachers, social-workers, lawyers, medical professionals, psychologists, urban planners, etc. —most also becoming lifelong advocates for the poor and for children. The interns are supervised by a **Project Director** and a **Site Coordinator**, who function onsite as team leaders and liaisons between the community and the Freedom School. Beginning in summer 2017, we have added a **Junior Internship** designed to give job training and life skills to youth in grades 10-12. The Junior Internship is funded and supported by West End United Methodist Church in Nashville, and pays a stipend to high schoolers whose families show a financial need and reside in North Nashville.

#### What are the benefits to children who attend Freedom Schools?

According to the CDF Freedom School researchers, 81% of K-3 children who participated in 2015 showed gains in reading and literacy; 90% of all scholar report no loss in reading comprehension. (Low-income children typically lose 2-3 months of learning during the summer.)

#### What does it cost to operate a Freedom School?

In 2017, **the estimated cost of a Freedom School is about \$70,000 for 50 students and \$120,000 for 100 students.** (This represents about \$1,200 per child.) This includes all meals and snacks, art and office supplies, classroom and take-home books, national and local training and stipends for interns and other staff, scholar field trips, meals and materials for parent meetings, insurance, and transportation.

#### How are Freedom Schools organized, developed, and funded?

Freedom Schools are supported through partnerships with community groups, colleges and universities, faith-based organizations, public school districts, corporate donors, grants and private gifts. This collaboration is essential, since there is simply is not enough public school funding alone to provide quality summer programming for *every* children who needs it. These partnerships organize to raise money and create a sustainability plan for the Freedom Schools in their area. **The Nashville Freedom School Partnership**© organized in December 2014 to

coordinate the establishment and undergirding of Freedom Schools in Nashville, Tenn.

#### What roles to community volunteers play in Freedom Schools?

Each day at each location, a Read-Aloud Guest shares her/his favorite book, poems, essays or chapter of a book with Freedom School scholars. The goal is to demonstrate the importance of reading in all vocations and life circumstances. Our guest readers have included former Mayors Karl Dean and Megan Barry, 1960s Freedom Rider Dr. Ernest Rip Patton, and business, religious, civil and educational leaders from across Middle Tennessee. In addition, guest artists offer yoga, spoken-word, dance, music, drama and improv classes and demonstrations for scholars and parents.

#### Who are the community partners so far in Nashville Freedom Schools?

Currently, we have established partnerships with (and have commitments for funding and/or in-kind contributions from) Fisk University, the Wesley Foundation at Tennessee State University, Vanderbilt Divinity School, Gordon Memorial United Methodist Church, the Cal Turner Fellowship Program for Moral Leadership, the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry of The United Methodist Church, Belmont United Methodist Church, the Temple Congregation Ohabai Sholom, the Dollar General Literacy Foundation, the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, the Fringe Foundation, the Metro Action Council, the Wolf Foundation, the Cal Turner Family Foundation, the Cal Turner Fellowship Program for Moral Leadership, the Fringe Foundation, Watson Grove Missionary Baptist Church, West End United Methodist Church, the Nashville District of the United Methodist Church.

#### What are the plans for Nashville Freedom Schools?

In summer 2018, we plan to host up to 120 children at two locations in Nashville. The Nashville Freedom School Partnership's objective is to plan, plant and sustain at least eight (8) Freedom School sites in Nashville over the next ten years, including at least one Spanish-language program and one program in a juvenile justice facility.

*For more information, contact **Garlinda Burton**, Nashville Freedom School Partnership, 615.497.1398, [info@nashvillefreedomschools.org](mailto:info@nashvillefreedomschools.org). Mailing address 104 Fitzpatrick Court, Nashville, TN 37214; website <http://nashvillefreedomschools.org>.*