



# CHILDREN'S DEFENSE FUND FREEDOM SCHOOLS® PROGRAM IN LOS ANGELES COUNTY PROBATION CAMPS

## EVALUATION REPORT SUMMER 2013

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*“Prisons don’t disappear problems, they disappear human beings”<sup>1</sup>*

## BACKGROUND

### OVERVIEW OF YOUTH INCARCERATION

With the highest youth incarceration rate in the world, the United States (U.S.) imprisons approximately 70,000 youth nationwide on any given day. The U.S. juvenile justice system, which began shifting in the 1980’s from a rehabilitation to a punishment model, has created a broad sense of “perpetual surveillance,”<sup>2</sup> or “a state of conscious and permanent visibility”<sup>3</sup> for thousands of American youth, especially young men of color.<sup>4</sup>

The exiling of American youth in the juvenile justice system has dire personal, educational, social, and economic effects.<sup>5</sup> Some of the negative effects of youth incarceration include: lower educational achievement, higher unemployment, higher alcohol and substance abuse, increased mental health problems, and higher rates of learning disabilities. Studies have also documented the high costs of incarcerating youth; the U.S. spends \$6 million per year in juvenile corrections and \$88,000 in direct costs per juvenile each year.<sup>6</sup> While youth incarceration has proven to be both harmful and costly, the number of youth in juvenile detention facilities across the country remains high.

### L.A. COUNTY’S JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM

The L.A. County juvenile justice system is the largest system in the nation. In a recent policy brief entitled “*Reforming the Nation’s Largest Juvenile Justice System*,” probation camps in L.A. were characterized as ineffective, operating under an outdated era of

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<sup>1</sup> Davis, A. (2003). *Are Prisons Obsolete?*. New York, NY. Seven Stories Press.

<sup>2</sup> Little (2013). *Boys of Color: Confronting the Invisibility and Hypervisibility Paradox*.

<sup>3</sup> Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Pantheon Books, New York City, NYC.

<sup>4</sup> This sense of surveillance becomes a “permanent” or “internal” material reality for young men of color in America, restricting their innate freedom and justifying their alienation, control, and/or annihilation, a reality best understood using Foucault’s (1977) notion of the Panopticon as a practical metaphor for explaining how social control and power is maintained through *perpetual surveillance*. The Panopticon is a prison tower where the imprisoned are constantly seen, but cannot see if, and when they are being guarded.

<sup>5</sup> Newell, M., & Leap, J. (2013). *Reforming the Nation’s Largest Juvenile Justice System*. Los Angeles, CA., University of California Luskin School of Public Affairs

<sup>6</sup> Aizer, A., & Doyle, J. (2013). *What is the long term impact of incarcerating juveniles?* Retrieved from <http://www.voxeu.org/article/what-long-term-impact-incarcerating-juveniles>.

juvenile justice which relies heavily on penitentiary-like facilities and strictly enforced routines. Recently, a series of lawsuits and allegations in probation camps have identified the following problems in probation camps: “failure to protect youth from harm,” “insufficient and problematic staffing,” and “inadequate rehabilitative and educational services.”<sup>7</sup> To address recent lawsuits and allegations, the L.A. County Probation Department and LACOE have recently advanced a number of efforts, including the following: implementing integrated behavioral treatment models and evidence-based programs like Aggression Replacement Training and interdisciplinary, hands-on, and evidence-based educational programs (i.e. Road to Success Academy); decreasing the staff-to-youth ratio for both Probation Officers and teachers; and moving forward with a probation camp replacement project for Camp Kilpatrick to achieve a small group treatment model.

An additional effort to remedy the problems addressed in recent lawsuits and allegations included piloting the *CDF Freedom Schools* program, which was implemented in two L.A. probation camps in 2013. A brief overview of the *CDF Freedom Schools* program is provided, with a fuller description of the L.A. County Project.

### PILOTING *CDF FREEDOM SCHOOLS* IN LA COUNTY PROBATION CAMPS

The *CDF Freedom Schools* program is a six-week literacy enrichment program for school-aged children. Historically, the primary goal of the *CDF Freedom Schools* program was to help prevent summer reading-loss. Other program goals include increasing children’s love of reading, self-esteem, and cultural awareness. To achieve these goals, the *CDF Freedom Schools* program engages students, schools, families, and communities through an integrated curriculum that supports children and families around five essential components:<sup>8</sup>

1. High Quality Academic Enrichment
2. Social Action and Civic Engagement
3. Intergenerational Servant Leadership Development
4. Nutrition, Health and Mental Health
5. Parent and Family Involvement

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<sup>7</sup> Newell, M., & Leap, J. (2013). *Reforming the Nation’s Largest Juvenile Justice System*. Los Angeles, CA., University of California Luskin School of Public Affairs.

<sup>8</sup> Children’s Defense Fund. (2013). Retrieved from [www.childrensdefensefund.org](http://www.childrensdefensefund.org)

The key features of the *CDF Freedom Schools* program making it uniquely different from other summer literacy programs consist of:

- *Harambee! (Let's Pull Together)*: a 30-minute activity in which scholars, staff, and guests sing motivational songs, cheers and chants, read aloud, and share a moment of reflection.
- *Integrated Reading Curriculum (IRC)*: scholars read culturally relevant books that reflect their images and focus on the theme *I can Make a Difference*.
- *D.E.A. R. (Drop Everything and Read) Time*: right before lunch scholars and staff drop everything and read for 15 minutes.
- Respectful treatment of youth, referred to throughout the program as “scholars.”

Over the course of the last six years, young men and women in juvenile justice facilities have participated in the *CDF Freedom Schools* in four states: Minnesota, Texas, Maryland, and New York. Detention center and camp staff, as well as scholar data, show strikingly important benefits for youth participating in this program, including decreases in violence, behavioral problems, and recidivism rates for program participants; increases in self-confidence; greater access to a structured culturally relevant academic program/curriculum; and development of mentor relationships with Servant Leader Interns (SLIs). Given these promising results in other jurisdictions, CDF-CA and Supervisor Ridley-Thomas believed *CDF Freedom Schools* could be an important effort to improve L.A. County’s probation camps and improve educational opportunities and outcomes for incarcerated youth. In summer 2013, the CDF-CA partnered with LACOE, L.A. County Probation Department and Office of L.A. County Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas (Second District) in piloting the *CDF Freedom Schools* program in two probation camps.

In L.A., *CDF Freedom Schools* operated camp-wide from June 24-July 26<sup>th</sup> at Fred C. Miller Camp School in Malibu and Afflerbaugh Camp School in the City of LaVerne. Together these camp schools served approximately 160 young boys, ranging from 14 and 18 years of age. L.A. County’s incarcerated population is approximately 60 percent Latino, 35 percent African American and 5 percent other.

Prior to the launch of *CDF Freedom Schools* in the probation camps, CDF staff and SLIs worked closely with camp school staff, which included certified teachers, Probation Officers, and administrators to accommodate the specific needs of each site. Modifications in the classroom structure, the *IRC*, afternoon activities and weekly field

trips, recommended by site coordinators in *CDF Freedom Schools* in probation camps, included:

- The addition of mathematics, science, or language arts coursework in the afternoon, so that scholars can earn the credits required to earn a degree upon reentry.
- Planning for shorter participation terms among scholars (it is not uncommon for some scholars to attend 10 days at a time as they move in and out of the probation camps).
- Accommodating below-average reading proficiency and allowing for a greater range of reading levels.
- Increased training of SLIs to take on additional responsibilities outside the school day and handle unique challenges, such as gang-related tension among scholars.
- Training of SLIs and certified LACOE teachers in how to collaborate to implement the curriculum.
- Training directly involved in the *CDF Freedom School*, and also providing an on-site introduction to *CDF Freedom Schools* to all staff in the probation camps.

In the case of the L.A. pilot program, modifications were implemented at various levels including the consideration of union contracts currently in place. In this regard the following modifications were achieved:

- The program operated for **5 weeks** instead of 6, in order to accommodate the existing summer session.
- **Combination Staffing** as required by law was achieved using
  - Certified union teachers working side by side in the classroom with SLIs;
  - Principals acting as project directors; assistant principals acting as site coordinators; and
  - Probation staff.
- A 2:17 **teacher-scholar ratio** (meets *CDF Freedom Schools* staffing requirement, as well as LACOE and California state educational staffing requirements).
- Because of the participation of certified school teachers leading the *IRC*, scholars received 2 remedial **credits** per week for a total of 10 credits.
- Considering that the young men in the system cannot leave the camp, except with court authorization, LACOE and Probation contracted with external

partners to **bring activities to the scholars** on Friday afternoons, in place of the weekly scheduled field trip.

- **Parent meetings** were not part of the program. It is quite common that the scholars are housed far from their homes/communities, given the remote locations of most probation camps. Thus, the weekly parent meetings were not implemented. Doing so would have required additional resources, such as transportation for the families, additional staffing to process parents without compromising security, or securing an adequate community space to convene parents on a weekly basis (ideally hosted on the weekends).
- To offer greater cultural depth for all program participants, CDF developed a **Latino Curriculum**, which included lesson plans and books that reflect the Latino culture. The Latino Curriculum was used in conjunction with the traditional *CDF Freedom School* curriculum that focuses more on African American culture.

## EVALUATION DESIGN

In response to a request in May 2013 from the Second District, an outcome evaluation of the *CDF Freedom Schools* program at the two probation camps was conducted. This evaluation was designed and implemented collaboratively between Vital Research and researchers/consultants from the University of California, L.A.'s Black Male Institute and the University of Southern California's Marshall School of Business. Key stakeholders for this evaluation were described earlier, and include LACOE administration, certified teachers, and on-site administrators; Probation administration and Probation Officers; Second District leadership and staff; CDF and CDF-CA, SLIs and Ella Baker Trainers<sup>9</sup> (EBTs) assigned to each camp; and the scholars.

Prior to *CDF Freedom Schools* start-up, evaluators engaged leadership of LACOE, Probation, and the Second District in the evaluation planning process. They reviewed the instruments and helped arrange the logistics of the evaluation, which was invaluable to its success.

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<sup>9</sup> EBTs are former SLIs or Site Coordinators. EBTs are selected by CDF staff and participate in additional training to provide support at new *CDF Freedom School* sites in the areas of planning, logistics, and program implementation.

## METHODS

To examine the impact of the *CDF Freedom Schools* program on scholars, quantitative and qualitative data collection methods were used. Quantitative methods included scholar and staff pre and post surveys, scholar reading scores, and data on scholars' behavior. Qualitative methods included observations and focus groups with scholars, certified teachers, and SLIs, as well as open-ended survey responses. The use of both types of data collection methods (quantitative and qualitative), and inclusion of multiple stakeholders, allowed the evaluation team to triangulate results and gain a more in-depth understanding of the program and its impact on scholars.

### SCHOLAR PRE AND POST SURVEYS

Scholar pre and post surveys measured attitudes toward reading, reading behavior, and self-esteem.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, the post survey included questions to elicit perceived effectiveness of four of the five program components: Academic Enrichment, Civic Engagement, Intergenerational Development and Nutrition, Health, and Mental Health. The post survey also probed scholars' satisfaction with the program and asked participants to make suggestions for improvement. Pre surveys were administered at Week 1 or 2 of the program and post surveys during the last week of the program in Week 5. Pre and post scholar surveys can be found in Appendix A.

### STAFF PRE AND POST SURVEYS

The pre and post staff surveys assessed staff level of satisfaction with the training they received prior to participation with the program. Additionally, the post survey included questions related to staff experiences working with the scholars, the program overall, and suggestions for improvement. Certified teachers, SLIs, Site Coordinators, and EBTs were also asked to share their thoughts about the impact of the program on reading attitudes, self-esteem, and other program objectives (i.e. civic engagement and social justice; intergenerational servant leadership development; nutrition, health, and mental health) of scholars. Staff pre and post surveys can be found in Appendix B. Table 1 includes the number of scholars who completed surveys.

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<sup>10</sup> The Cooper-Smith Self-Esteem Inventory (classroom short form) was used to measure scholars' self-esteem. The short form version of the inventory included 25 questions at an easy reading level.

TABLE 1. SURVEY RESPONSES

DATA SOURCES	# OF RESPONSES
Student Pre Surveys	122
Student Post Surveys	113
Student Pre and Post Matched Surveys	64
Staff Pre Surveys	27
Staff Post Surveys	23

### SCHOLAR READING SCORES

The Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) is a group-administered objective assessment of reading comprehension. The SRI is routinely administered to scholars at the camp schools, and the timing of *CDF Freedom Schools* enabled pre and post measurement of reading skills. Table 2 presents the number of scholars who either completed a Pre-SRI or Post-SRI, as well as the number of matched Pre and Post-SRIs.

TABLE 2. # OF RESPONSES ON THE SCHOLASTIC READING INVENTORY (SRI)

SURVEYS	# OF RESPONSES
Scholar Pre SRI	153
Scholar Post SRI	105
Scholar Pre and Post Matched SRI	105

SRI and enrollment/exit date data were collected by LACOE and analyzed by evaluators in the aggregate group (all scholars), as well as by probation camp. Data were analyzed by probation camp to examine whether environmental factors (i.e. entering reading achievement of scholars, staff, and atmosphere) might play a role in scholars' reading scores.

## SCHOLAR BEHAVIORAL CHANGES

The following data on scholar behavior were collected by Probation and provided in the aggregate. Selected behavior is described in this evaluation to explore possible changes under the *CDF Freedom Schools* model, and included:

1. Number of Youth Incidents (Fights)
2. Number of Uses of Force
3. Number of School Referrals & Suspensions

## FOCUS GROUPS

Focus groups were designed to provide a more in-depth account of how the scholars at the camps felt about the *CDF Freedom Schools*. Over the course of the summer, evaluators were able to talk to a cross-section of scholars (n=42) from each site, as well as SLIs (n=8), credentialed teachers (n=10), and site coordinators (n=2). Focus group questions were designed to gain insight into critical information that participants took away from the program. Discussion guides can be found in Appendix C.

## OBSERVATIONS

Evaluators, consultants, CDF-CA staff, and Second District staff conducted a total of 75 hours of informal observations at each of the probation camps. Observations were done before and after focus groups, interviews, survey administration, and Harambee. The purpose of the observations was to gather information regarding the culture of the probation camps, to examine fidelity of the curriculum as implemented, and to meet the teachers, SLIs and site coordinators. Information related to the following categories was noted during the observations:

- **Physical setting** – a rich description of the location of the camp, including where participants and staff were situated.
- **Social or interpersonal setting** – who was clustered with whom, and how groups and individuals were arranged in the probation camps.
- **Activities** – a description of the activities (i.e. Harambee, IRC, and afternoon activities).
- **Content** – a description of the resources and materials used and discussed.
- **Interactions** – a description of verbal and nonverbal interactions between the various stakeholders involved (i.e. the scholars, SLIs, certified teachers etc.).

Following the observations, evaluators and consultants met with staff from the Second District to talk about what they had observed, which revealed salient themes that ran across observations from these meetings. These data were used to help corroborate findings uncovered by other data collection methods including the surveys and focus groups.

## ANALYSIS

All quantitative data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). SRI pre and post scores, along with enrollment and exit dates, were provided by LACOE in an Excel spreadsheet. In addition, qualitative data from the open-ended survey items were coded and themed in *Microsoft Access*. Lastly, audio-taped focus groups were transcribed verbatim and analyzed.

## PROGRAM OUTCOMES OVERALL AND BY OBJECTIVE

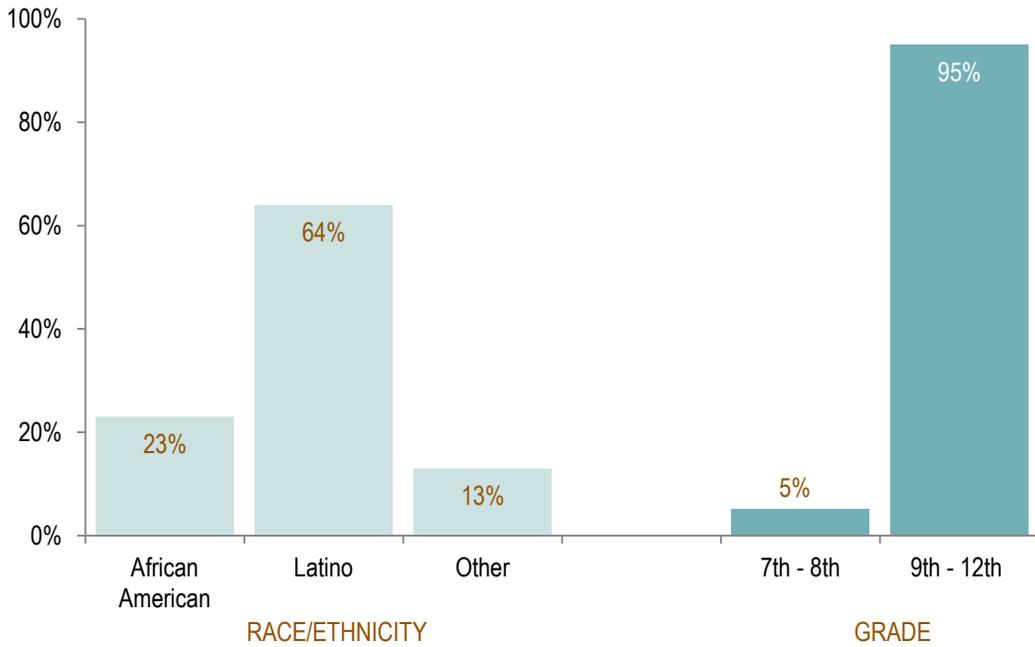
### DEMOGRAPHICS

A total of 171 scholars at both probation camps participated in the evaluation, very close to the capacity of the camps. However, with only 64 pre-post matches, it is possible that self-selection played a role in survey participation. Initially, there had been skepticism among leadership and staff that the scholars would be willing to complete surveys at all, particularly given the identification code for matching. Another early concern was that scholars may not share their honest perceptions in a survey. However, the data revealed a typical range of responses, and there was a respectable 61% response rate (based on LACOE's reported n=105 scholars whose pre and post reading scores were collected during the 5-week program).<sup>11</sup> Among the survey participants, all of the scholars were male, with a racial/ethnic breakdown of 64% Latino/Hispanic, 23% African American/Black, and 13% "Other" or identified as having more than one ethnicity. Furthermore, 95% of the participants were between the ages of 15-18. Prior to coming to *CDF Freedom Schools*, the highest grades completed by the participants were grades 9 -12 (95%). See Figure 1 for demographic details.

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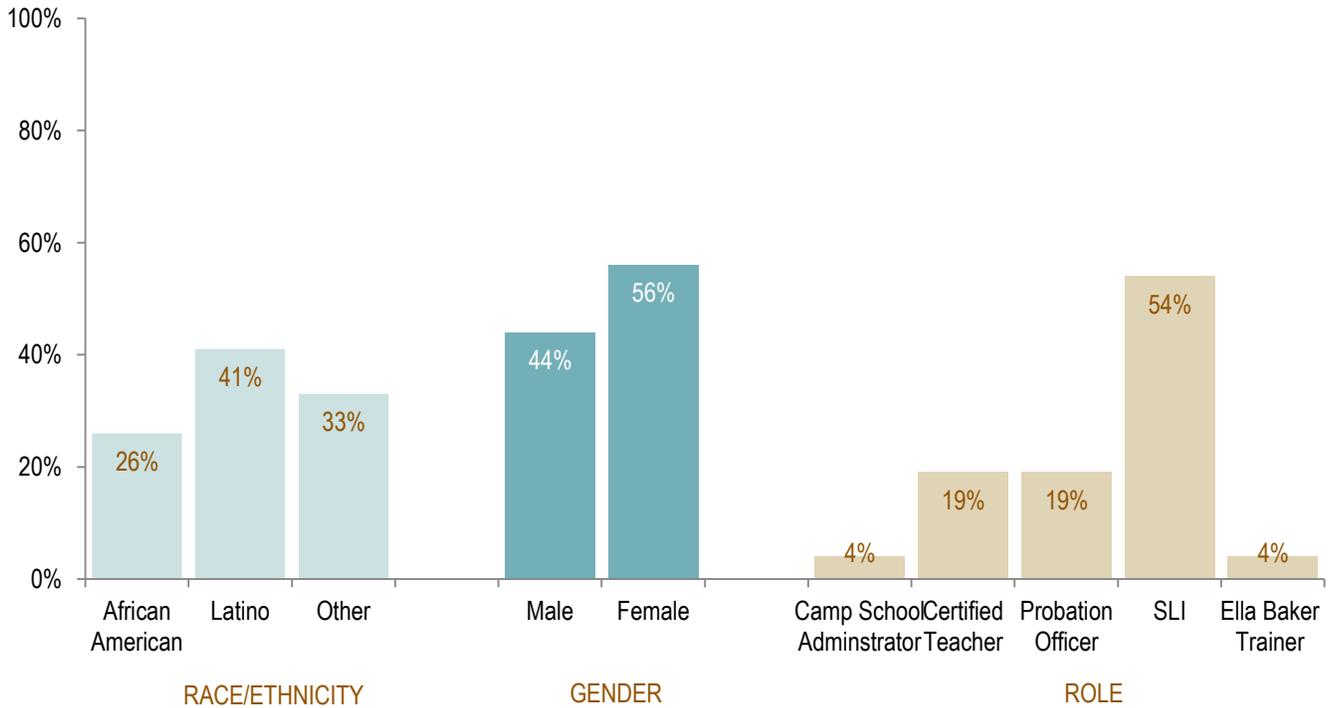
<sup>11</sup> Scholars were assured of the confidentiality of their survey data, and that their participation in the pre and post surveys was strictly voluntary.

FIGURE 1. SCHOLAR DEMOGRAPHICS



Estimating approximately 45 on-site staff at the two probation camps, 50%-60% of the staff completed the survey. It is possible that this was a self-selected sample as well, particularly because the majority of the respondents were SLIs (54%). Over half were female, and about two thirds were people of color, as shown in Figure 2.

FIGURE 2. STAFF DEMOGRAPHICS



## OBJECTIVE 1: HIGH QUALITY ACADEMIC ENRICHMENT

### Scholars' Interest in Reading

Overall, scholars' interest in reading increased throughout the program. On the post surveys, the majority of scholars indicated that they were highly interested in reading. Specifically, they indicated that they were *somewhat interested* or *very interested* in learning about new things (89%), reading a book in their free time (70%), getting a book for a present (50%), and being a better reader (83%). Furthermore, on the post surveys, the majority of scholars *agreed* or *strongly agreed* with the following survey items: *I like to do as much reading as I can* (76%); *I have books at camp that I enjoy reading* (80%); and *I am comfortable with reading aloud* (78%). On the post surveys, staff also indicated that scholars' interest in reading increased throughout the program with 90% of staff having agreed that *CDF Freedom Schools* generated more interest in reading among the scholars.

Post survey and focus group results indicate that scholars' interest in reading increased as a result of the *CDF Freedom Schools* books being interesting/stimulating and culturally relevant. On the post surveys, the majority of scholars agreed that they liked the books they read at Freedom Schools (83%) and expressed appreciation that the Freedom Schools books were written about people like them (75%). The majority of staff also agreed that the curriculum was relevant to scholars' interests (61%) and the Freedom Schools books were appropriate for scholars' life experiences (57%). In the focus groups, scholars indicated that the manner in which Freedom Schools introduced them to stimulating literature and culturally relevant stories increased their interest in reading. Select quotes from the scholar focus groups follow:

- *What I like about Freedom School are the books we read. Freedom Schools have these books that you can relate to like Where Bad Kids Go, The Bees, you know, and like Force by Fire. Those books made me more interested.*
- *Ok, when I first got to Camp Miller, I wasn't into reading. So, when I came here, it's like, I'm not just gonna sit here and just do my time and do not do nothing. So, I started reading books, like two books in one day. So, I started reading more books. And basically, reading books that it is what I do now. I'm into it.*

### Scholars' Reading Behavior

Overall, scholars' reading behaviors were positive to begin with and improved throughout the program. Survey results revealed that not only did their reading interest

slightly increase, but also the amount of time they spent on reading. For example, on post surveys, scholars reported reading more frequently in their free time; on the pre-survey, 56% of scholars indicated that they read at least 3-4 times a week, whereas, 60% indicated the same amount on the post.

In the focus groups, scholars also reported reading more frequently during the program. One scholar stated: *I read a lot here at Freedom School. Because on the outs, I wasn't even reading, I wouldn't even pick up a book, but here I do more work. I stay on task.*

### Scholars' Reading Level

LACOE provided data on the number of days scholars were in the program, as well as the pre and post SRI scores. Most scholars (81%) were enrolled in *CDF Freedom Schools* for at least four weeks. Overall, scholars' reading levels improved as a result of participating in *CDF Freedom Schools*. Participants showed reading gains on the SRI. Additionally, surveys and interviews with scholars also revealed qualitative gains in reading.

Overall, the SRI scores for scholars were higher on the post than pre, both at Camp Afflerbaugh and Camp Miller. On average, reading scores increased by 51 points (See Table 3).

TABLE 3. OVERALL SRI RESULTS

PRE SRI SCORE	POST SRI SCORE	DIFFERENCE IN SCORE	SIGNIFICANT (P <.05)
749	800	51	Yes

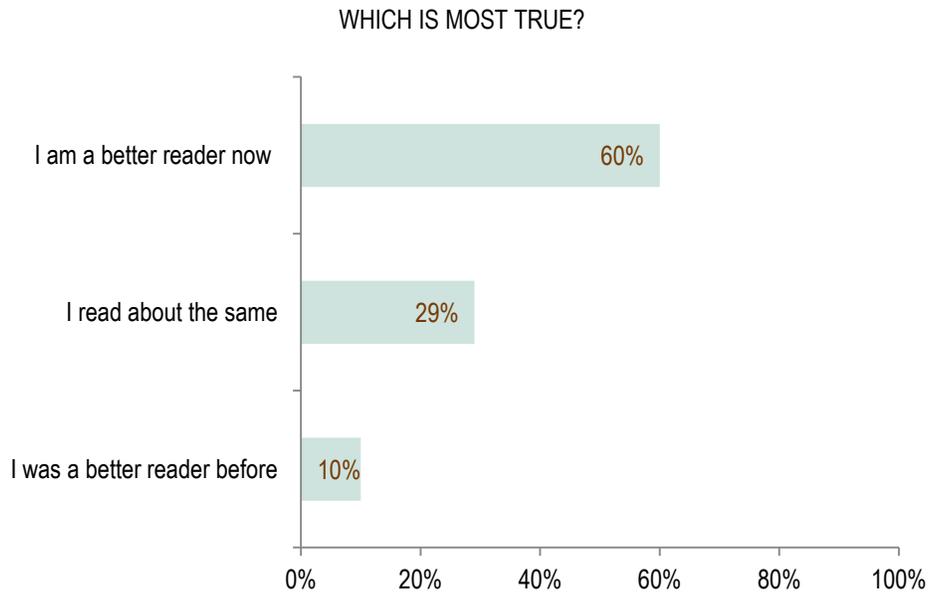
Disaggregating data by camp revealed that Camp Afflerbaugh reading scores significantly increased. The average reading scores increased by 60 points from the pre to the post (See Table 4). Reading scores at Camp Miller did not significantly increase, however, they did improve from 884 to 921.

TABLE 4. SRI RESULTS BY CAMP

CAMP	PRE SRI SCORES	POST SRI SCORES	DIFFERENCE IN SCORES	SIGNIFICANT (P <.05)
Afflerbaugh	648	708	60	Yes
Miller	884	921	37	--

In addition to improved reading scores on the SRI, scholars indicated on the post surveys and in focus groups that their reading level increased as a result of participating in the program. When asked which of the following statements was most true for them “I am a better reader now than I was before”, “I read about the same as I did before Freedom School”, and “I was a better reader before I came to Freedom School”, 60% of the scholars selected statement 1 (See Figure 3).

FIGURE 3. SELF ASSESSMENT OF READING ACHIEVEMENT AFTER EXPOSURE TO CDF FREEDOM SCHOOLS



In the focus groups, two scholars commented:

- *Freedom Schools helped me with my vocabulary. We have a word wall, now I know all of these big words like ‘empathy,’ you know, like ‘bombastic,’ and there are a lot of more difficult words. It’s improved my vocabulary.*
- *Well, I didn’t really go to school at all. So, it’s like everything I do here I wish I could have done before. Because then I wouldn’t have had to go through this ever again. Like, you know, when I came here, I was – I didn’t know how to spell that much, I didn’t know how to read that good. I didn’t know how to write at all. So, it’s like Freedom Schools is kind of improved everything that I know how to do.*

Staff also observed improved skill development in the scholars. On the post survey, 76% of staff agreed that the program improved scholars’ reading abilities. Additionally, in the focus groups, one teacher commented: “They [scholars] started bringing in their own

*books and showing me what they read on their own time. That all plays a part in letting them know that their reading is improving.”*

In summary, using two sources (scholars and staff) and three methods (survey, focus groups, and test scores) the data converge to confirm that *CDF Freedom Schools* accomplished its objective of academic enrichment, including engendering a love of reading and improving reading achievement.

## OBJECTIVE 2: SOCIAL ACTION AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

The two probation camps each selected civic engagement topics around issues of gun control and safety surrounding Trayvon Martin’s death. Scholars showed more interest in social action activities and being engaged in their communities. On post surveys, the majority of scholars (85%) agreed that they wanted to become more involved in their community. Further, in the open-ended comments, scholars indicated that they would like to make a difference in themselves and community by advancing their education (30%), making positive changes, (19%), and helping others (7%).

- *To show people that it is never too late and life isn’t a joke, just do good and get your education while you are young.*
- *I can become something better than what I am doing now. Instead of destroying, I can help rebuild.*
- *I would like to make an organization for juvenile minors to help them to learn how to read.*

Moreover, some scholars (17%) indicated the social action activities were useful to them and will help them to make good decisions in the future.

- *Stay out of trouble by reading on free time.*
- *Not mess up in life, try to do good.*
- *To get along and reunite to make things right.*

The staff also agreed with the scholars in that there was more interest among the scholars in giving back to the community (77%). The majority of staff also indicated that their own interest in giving back to the community increased as a result of working at *CDF Freedom Schools*. On the post surveys, staff indicated they would like to make a difference in their community by helping others/volunteering (35%) or serving as a role model/inspiring others (20%).

- *Within the community I would like to open a charter school adopting some of the Freedom School ways.*
- *Would like to reach as many 'troubled' adolescents as possible to make a change for the better in reading, pro-social skills, etc.*
- *I would like to inspire my family and my students to have a more positive outlook on life by modeling that behavior.*
- *I would like to influence others through knowledge and acceptance. I will educate and be an example of those around me.*

On the post survey, 91% of staff indicated that they were more interested in (committed to) working with youth in the juvenile justice system because of their *CDF Freedom Schools* experience. Most staff (81%) also reported that they had a more positive outlook toward the educational system because of their involvement in the program.

In summary, richer qualitative data were obtained about scholar and staff responses to the social action and civic engagement opportunities provided by *CDF Freedom Schools* than we have seen in evaluating the program outside the probation camps. This suggests that scholars in probation camps might be particularly sensitive to implementing this objective and that this portion of the curriculum was implemented very effectively in the probation camps this summer.

### OBJECTIVE 3: INTERGENERATIONAL SERVANT LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Freedom School staff (teachers, SLIs, and Probation Officers) provided a positive and nurturing environment for scholars. The majority of the scholars indicated on the post surveys, that the *CDF Freedom Schools* teachers, SLIs, and Probation Officers were friendly and made them feel good about themselves.<sup>12</sup> One scholar commented: *What I like most about Freedom Schools is we got teachers who care, like my teacher, she cares, so you gotta respect her. I like her like my grandma.*

In the focus groups, scholars mentioned that *CDF Freedom Schools* teachers played a positive role in their desire to learn and participate in the activities.

- *I want to make my Probation Officer proud, make my teacher proud, make the SLI proud. I do my work and everything and it makes me feel good to have those accomplishments.*
- *I love Ms. X, one of my teachers, she knows how to read a book so good, like when she reads, you want to listen, the way she sounds, its like real life. So I think if she keeps*

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<sup>12</sup> Out of the three, Probation Officers received the lowest ratings.

*doing that it makes it more interesting, people want to know how to read like that, how to make the story come to life.*

- *Yes, Harambee not only gets you involved in the activities, it gets your teachers involved too; your teachers are hyped about teaching you that day and it gives you a good vibe like 'ok, I want to learn today.'*

Scholars also indicated on the post-surveys that the SLIs were positive in their approach of interacting with the scholars. Many scholars felt that the SLIs set a good example for them (92%) and said they would like to become a SLI one day (73%).

Additionally, the positive environment created by the staff at *CDF Freedom Schools*, helped the scholars to get along better with the other scholars and staff at the probation camps. On the post surveys, the majority of scholars indicated that *CDF Freedom Schools* helped them to get along better with the teachers (82%), Probation Officers (69%), and other scholars (79%). In the focus groups, scholars mentioned the ways in which *CDF Freedom Schools* helped them build better camaraderie and unity with the other scholars in the camp (i.e. from different racial and gang lines).

- *The thing that I like most about Freedom School is basically the unity part, when we come together, you, we work as a team you know. If one of us is reading, we all reading. If one of us is doing an art project, we all do an art project, you know, so it brings, you know, the united, and you know, we all get along.*
- *It bonds, like before it was kind of race, like the Blacks with the Blacks, the Mexicans with the Mexicans, the Whites with the Whites; but what happened since Freedom School started, you been seeing more combined stuff, like playing basketball and stuff.*

From the perspective of the staff, *CDF Freedom Schools* also helped scholars build better relationships. On the post surveys, staff *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that *CDF Freedom Schools* helped scholars get along better with the teachers (82%), Probation Officers (88%) and other scholars (88%).

Observational data of scholar behavior provided by LACOE was analyzed to determine if scholars exhibited better behavior throughout the program. Overall, data suggests that scholar behavior improved with some exceptions (See Table 5).

- The number of school referrals and suspensions decreased at both probation camps, from 38 to 25 at Camp Miller, and 128 to 54 at Camp Afflerbaugh.

- The number of ‘youth on youth’ incidents at Camp Miller decreased (from 6 to 3), whereas there was a slight increase in the number of ‘uses of force’ (from 1 to 3). For Afflerbaugh, the opposite was true; while there was an increase of ‘youth on youth’ incidents (from 11 to 17), there was a decrease in the number of ‘uses of force’ (from 5-3).

TABLE 5. OBSERVED BEHAVIORAL CHANGES OF YOUTH IN CDF FREEDOM SCHOOLS<sup>13</sup>

CAMP MILLER	MAY 2013	JUNE 2013	JULY 2013	-/+
# of youth on youth incidents (fights)	6	5	3	-
# of uses of force	1	1	3	+
# of school referrals & suspensions	38	35	25	-
CAMP AFFLERBAUGH	MAY 2013	JUNE 2013	JULY 2013	-/+
# of youth on youth incidents (fights)	11	13	17	+
# of uses of force	5	4	3	-
# of school referrals & suspensions	128	42	54	-

In summary, both staff and scholars endorsed positive intergenerational experiences as a result of their *CDF Freedom Schools* experience. Scholars associated the overall cooperative approach of the program, characterized by daily Harambee to set the tone, with their positive intergenerational and peer-to-peer relationship improvements. Peer-to-peer improvements were somewhat inconsistent judging by the behavioral changes recorded at each probation camp, but the overall trend of less fighting and fewer school referrals and suspensions is very encouraging. Anecdotally, there was some certified teacher and administrator turnover during the program. Because Probation Officers are deployed on a 24/7 basis, staffing may seem inconsistent and reassignment or turnover of officers at these two probation camps was not explored. The percentage of all staff who received intensive national *CDF Freedom Schools* training, local training, or orientation is not known, but should be explored to assess its sufficiency. The nature of the three types of incidents could be further explored with Probation Officers, LACOE, and scholars in future evaluations.

<sup>13</sup> The *CDF Freedom School* session took place from June 24-July 26, 2013

#### OBJECTIVE 4: NUTRITION, HEALTH, AND MENTAL HEALTH

CDF Freedom Schools provided scholars with a positive environment that scholars were able to benefit from both mentally and physically. On the post surveys, the majority of scholars agreed with the following survey items:

- *Harambee got me energized for the day. (86%)*
- *Activities in Freedom School helped me to express myself (thoughts, feelings, emotions) in a positive way. (83%)*
- *Harambee songs helped me think more positively about myself. (79%)*

In the focus groups and post surveys, scholars were asked what they liked most about CDF Freedom Schools. The majority of scholars mentioned Harambee because it was high energy and it prepared them for learning.

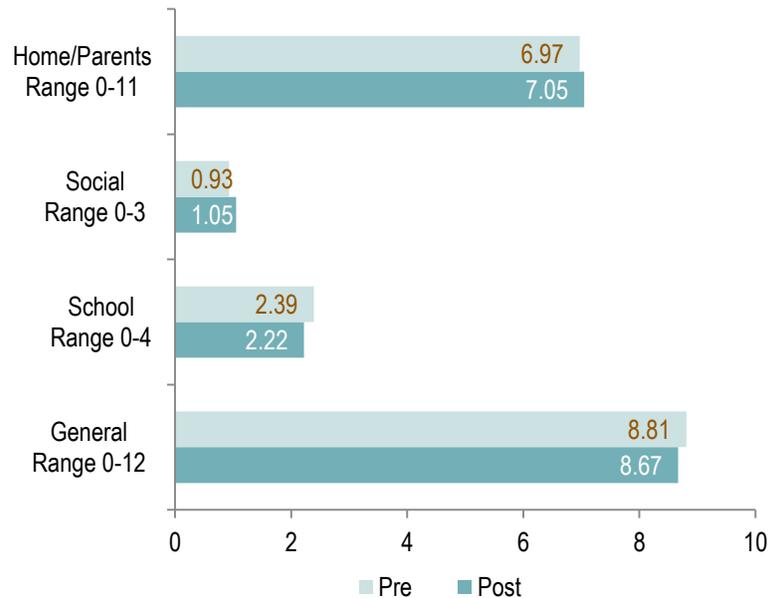
- *Harambee is my favorite part of the day, best thing about Freedom School.*
- *Harambee just gets me hyped, excited and ready for the day.*
- *Everybody loves Harambee, it helps with learning so much.*

In the focus groups, scholars also mentioned that Harambee gave them the opportunity to shed their labels as gang members because Harambee helped to create a sense of unity. One scholar commented:

- *So you know, gangsters don't play soccer, gangsters don't dance and all that, so when they first started Harambee, everybody was just standing around saying what the f@k is this? Then after awhile, you just get into it, and now you have these gangsters jumping, singing, and coming together. I love Harambee!*

In addition to the physical and mental benefits of Harambee, effects of CDF Freedom Schools on self-esteem were also examined. Surveys measured four subtypes of scholar self-esteem. Home/parental self-esteem and social self-esteem increased slightly, while school and general self-esteem decreased slightly. There were no significant differences between pre and post scores (See Figure 4).

FIGURE 4. SCHOLAR SELF-ESTEEM

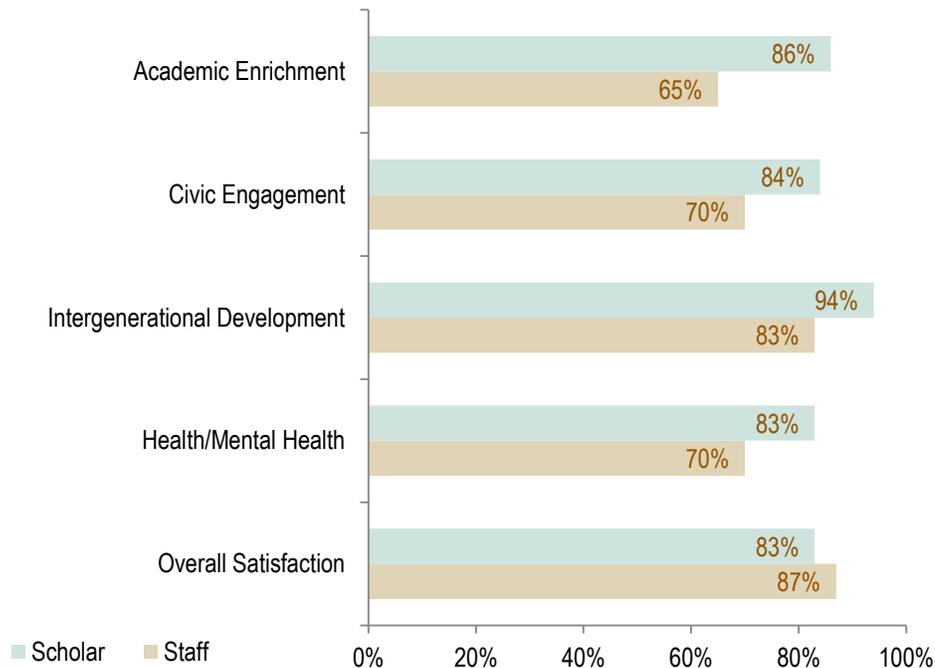


In summary, the health benefits of *CDF Freedom Schools* always have to be inferred because health is not a specific curriculum topic. Harambee appears to have a personal focusing and self-expression effect as well as an intergenerational effect, both in traditional programs and at the probation camps. Based on the relative absence of scholar comments, physical fitness opportunities were not as predominant here as they are in traditional programs. Because nutritional opportunities were not mutable at the probation camps, no survey questions about food or nutrition were asked. The self-esteem results at the probation camps were quite similar to those of traditional *CDF Freedom Schools* programs in L.A. It is unclear whether the Cooper-Smith Self-Esteem Inventory is not sensitive enough to detect change or whether the program itself is not long enough or does not address self-esteem directly enough to engender measurable change.

#### PERCEIVED PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS

Overall, scholars and staff were very satisfied with *CDF Freedom Schools*. On the post surveys, scholars and staff reported high satisfaction with the program as a whole and with each of its individual components (See Figure 5).

FIGURE 5. PERCENT OF POSITIVE PERCEPTIONS  
(COMPOSITE SCORES)

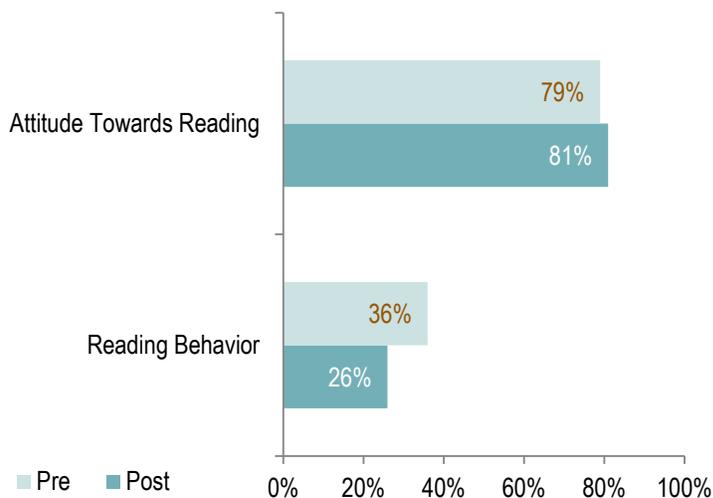


Further, scholar ratings on the individual satisfaction items on the post surveys indicated that they were highly satisfied with the program.

- *I enjoyed the Freedom School program (86%).*
- *I would like to participate in the Freedom School program when back in my community (73%).*
- *I would recommend the Freedom School program to other students (83%).*

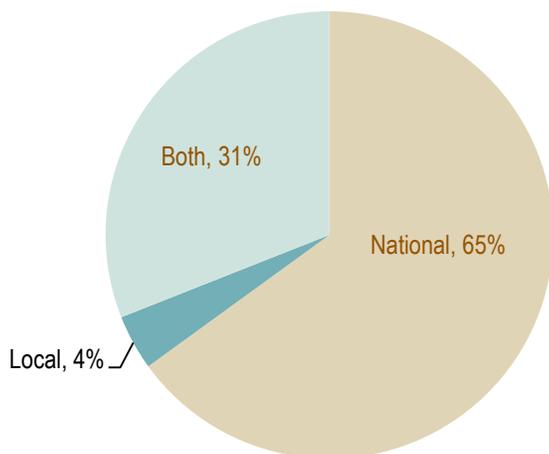
On the post survey, the majority of scholars also reported that *CDF Freedom Schools* is good the way it is and suggested nothing should be changed. In addition, scholar data suggested that their attitudes and behaviors toward reading also improved during the course of the program, as shown in Figure 6.

FIGURE 6. SCHOLAR CHANGE IN READING ATTITUDES & BEHAVIORS



Staff ratings of the program were also high on the post surveys. All staff (100%) enjoyed working at the *CDF Freedom Schools* and reported they were satisfied with their experience. Most staff would work with *CDF Freedom Schools* again (86%) and would recommend the program to other probation camps (95%). Staff would also recommend *CDF Freedom Schools* to others as a work opportunity (95%). More specifically, the majority of staff were satisfied with the training they received prior to beginning their role (92%), the assistance they received from CDF (90%), the explanation of materials throughout the program (86%), and the support they received from other staff (87%) (See Figure 7 for type of training received). Staff was also satisfied with the participation of teachers (91%), Probation Officers (78%), and SLIs (100%) in the program.

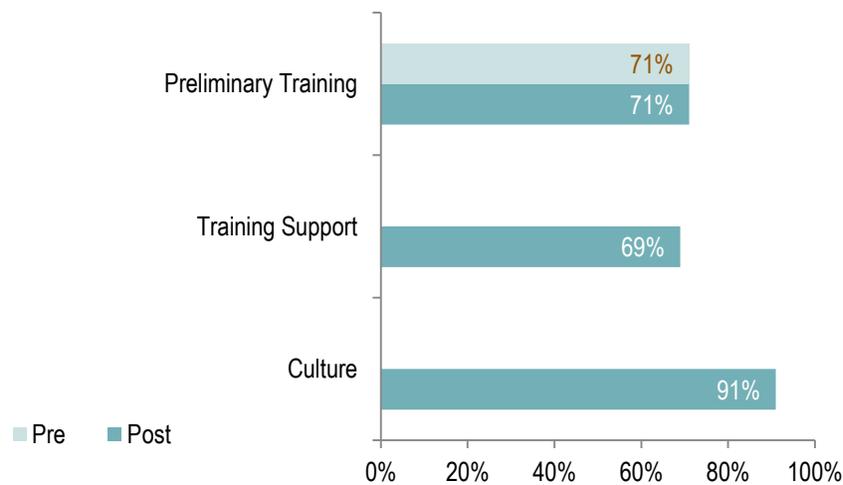
FIGURE 7. TRAINING RECEIVED



Five staff post survey questions were rolled into a composite score for *CDF Freedom Schools* culture (91% perceived effectiveness), as shown in Figure 8. The questions related to teacher, Probation Officer, and SLI level of participation in the program, their enjoyment of working in the program, and being energized by their program experiences. Additionally, when asked what their favorite part of working for *CDF Freedom Schools* was, many staff mentioned working with the scholars.

- *Getting the opportunity to work with these young men and learn that even though they made mistakes they are still young men who have a chance to change.*
- *Working with these at-risk kids.*

FIGURE 8. PERCEIVED EFFECTIVENESS OF SPECIFIC COMPONENTS – STAFF



## AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Implications for program improvement based on staff and scholar program satisfaction results are described here. While scholars and staff were highly satisfied with the overall program, they provided a few recommendations for improvement:

### Improve Curriculum Materials

Of all the program components, staff reported the least satisfaction with the curriculum materials they received from CDF (57%). In the surveys, staff comments suggest that some books were not relevant to the experiences of scholars.

- *I like the curriculum least. The curriculum did a terrible job of appealing to this population.*
- *Some of the books were not relatable to scholars.*
- *The chosen books were not interesting to the scholars. Hispanic literature was seemingly an afterthought. The connection to self, family, etc., and to civil rights should be more purposeful.*

When asked to share ways in which the program could improve, staff suggested changing the books and making them more relevant for youth in probation camps.

- *Need to get more books that this population can relate to.*
- *More interesting books/novels for this population. More variation for chapter share outs.*
- *I think there needs to be more Hispanic books and that the books should be something they are actually interested in reading.*

Scholars agreed with staff sentiments and also expressed they wanted more interesting books.

- *I would change the boring books.*
- *Better books.*
- *Let the kids have the choices for the books.*

Incorporating more relevant literature into the *CDF Freedom Schools* curriculum will help in getting youth more interested in reading books, as well as engaging them in the accompanying activities. The books should be relevant to all cultures represented in the camp, both African American and Latinos/Hispanics. While a Latino curriculum was used, it needs to be better integrated with the traditional *CDF Freedom Schools* curriculum focus on the African American experience.

### More Staff Involvement

On the surveys, staff indicated that there was not enough support or involvement on the part of the Probation Officers at the probation camps. When asked what they liked least about *CDF Freedom Schools*, they mentioned:

- *Lack of Probation staff assistance.*
- *That not all Probation Officers were on board with the program.*

- *The lack of Probation support.*

Scholars also felt that there needed to be greater involvement not only from the Probation Officers, but from all staff at *CDF Freedom Schools*.

- *There should be more staff participating so they can change their attitudes.*
- *Get more people involved.*

Observations revealed that Probation Officers were not as involved as the other staff in the *CDF Freedom Schools* activities (i.e. Harambee). Further, the role of Probation Officers was observed as being limited within the classroom; only sticking to their traditional roles of disciplining and monitoring students. Expanding the role of Probation Officers within the program may be an effective strategy for gaining more program buy-in and support.

### **Additional Training**

Many staff suggested that they would like to receive additional training in the area of classroom management. Other staff suggested they would like additional training on how to work with youth at a probation camp or how to work with certified teachers and/or SLIs.

- *Managing classroom behavior in a probation camp.*
- *How to implement behavior management into the Freedom School way.*
- *More training working with children in the court system.*
- *Education on troubled youth/gang affiliations and discipline in a probation camp.*
- *Offer training on how SLI and teachers can work effectively and balanced.*

Lastly, some staff mentioned that they could have benefitted from more preparation in general, whether it be at the national or regional trainings.

- *More regional training for all.*
- *As we are interns at a probation camp, I would have liked a little more preparation in addition to the training in Tennessee.*

## SUMMARY

Overall, the goals set out for this pilot project were successfully achieved. Scholars increased their love of/interest in reading. Further, reading skills of scholars significantly improved on the SRI and ratings of their own reading ability were higher after the program. Staff also perceived scholars' reading interest and reading ability as increasing. Although scholar self-esteem did not measurably improve, in open-ended survey comments and in focus groups, scholars described many examples of improved self-esteem. Scholars were also observed exhibiting greater confidence and resiliency. Observational data confirms that scholars' behavior and interactions with others (scholars, SLIs, Probation Officers, and teachers) improved throughout the program as there were significant decreases in suspensions and referrals at both probation camps. Further, scholars felt more united in the program where associations were developed across racial and gang lines in the probation camps. Additionally, scholars were driven by the social action activities in their classes; they felt more empowered to give back to the community. SLIs served as role models for the scholars while teachers had a positive impact on the scholars learning. Lastly, scholars were engaged in the *CDF Freedom Schools* activities and enjoyed Harambee the most because it got them excited and energized for the day.

## NEXT STEPS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE EVALUATORS

The piloting and subsequent evaluation of *CDF Freedom Schools* in the probation camps provided an opportunity to learn whether the program seems promising and, if so, how the program can be further improved. Overall, the program was successful and it achieved its intended goals as summarized above. However, there are next steps in not only how the evaluation design itself can be improved to look at long term and systemic outcomes, but also how the program can grow and become a fundamental part of the culture in the probation camp educational system. Next steps for improving the evaluation and expanding the program include:

### EVALUATION

- Add data sources
  - Telephone or face-to-face interviews with the leadership of both Probation and LACOE (who worked with the Second District and CDF-CA to introduce *CDF Freedom Schools* into the probation camp system) should be included.

- Comparable SRI scores and behavioral change data from other probation camps should be obtained and compared with results in *CDF Freedom Schools* probation camps. SRI scores and behavioral change results should be compared for several months beyond the end of the summer program to look for any possible carryover of *CDF Freedom Schools* culture into the regular school year.
- Add data collection methods
  - Data should be gathered more systematically from Probation Officers and their supervisors, certified teachers, and their on-site administrators.
  - Formal observations should be added to the evaluation process. CDF-CA would continue the structured observations required for ensuring program fidelity, but semi-structured observations would be developed and observers would be trained in order to gain understanding of the culture of various classrooms and of each probation camp, actual and potential culture change, and the mutual influence of culture of *CDF Freedom Schools* and typical probation camp schools. Additional observational data would also provide insight when analyzing survey and/or focus group data.
  - Seek permission and budget to videotape and analyze Harambee and classroom observations.
- Identify indicators of culture change and assess culture change as it may be related to ongoing modifications in probation procedures, LACOE educational program modifications, and the summer *CDF Freedom Schools* program.

## PROGRAM

- Expand *CDF Freedom Schools* in the probation camp system.
  - Results of this evaluation support expansion of the program into additional probation camps.
- Modify *CDF Freedom Schools* to better fit the environment.
  - Results of this evaluation suggest that the program may benefit from modifications to make it even more compelling to scholars and better integrated with probation goals of self-management and academic goals of remaining enrolled in and graduating from high school with at least functional literacy.
  - A broader selection of relevant books for this particular population.
  - Increased opportunities for sports and physical fitness activities.

- Smoother integration of the Latino and African American curricula that CDF-CA offers.
- Incorporate positive aspects of *CDF Freedom Schools* (i.e. Harambee, additional culturally relevant literature) into the regular school year curriculum at the probation camps.
  - Provide respect to scholars all year round.
  - Extend the unity built up from summer *CDF Freedom Schools* into the rest of the school year activities, to further avoid referrals and suspensions.
- Train and Retrain
  - Ensure that a sufficient proportion of Probation Officers, probation camp school administrators, and certified teachers receive national training at each probation camp in which *CDF Freedom Schools* are conducted. It is important that at each location, the tipping point is reached to fully implement *CDF Freedom Schools* methods and culture, regardless of staff turnover, reassignment, and shift assignment.
  - Short interdisciplinary meetings that include Probation Officers, teachers, and SLIs to debrief at the end of each program week will help to further weaken the walls of departmental silos and reinforce the *CDF Freedom Schools* way.
- Increase Staff Involvement
  - It is likely that further attention to implementing the collaborative role of the SLI and the certified teacher within each classroom is needed. SLIs were not observed delivering any lessons during survey administration visits, and it is possible that this major program variation requires further refinement.
  - Develop processes to fully integrate all site staff at all levels with the program. The *CDF Freedom Schools* way is antithetical to the traditional role of Probation Officers as it has been carried out historically. The L.A. County Probation Department will first need to debrief the Officers at Miller and Afflerbaugh camps to help develop these processes and determine how to reconcile the two approaches while continuing to assure safety at the probation camps.