



Children's Defense Fund builds community so young people grow up with dignity, hope, and joy. CDF Freedom Schools® provide summer and after-school enrichment through a research-based and multicultural curriculum that supports children and families through five essential components: high quality academic and character-building enrichment; parent and family involvement; civic engagement and social action; intergenerational servant leadership development; and nutrition, health and mental health. *CDF Freedom Schools* fosters environments that support children and young adults to excel and believe in their abilities to make a difference in themselves and in their families, schools, communities, country, and world with hope, education and action.

Since 1995, more than 205,000 children (Pre-K–12) have had the *CDF Freedom Schools* experience, and more than 23,700 young adults and child advocates have been trained on the delivery of the *CDF Freedom Schools* model.

In 2025, *CDF Freedom Schools* partnered with 131 organizations to serve over 11,500 children at 186 program sites in 97 cities and 26 states (including Washington, D.C.). Across the nation, *CDF Freedom Schools* programs served nearly 7,900 African-American and Latinx children, and 30 youth in secure detention facilities.

The *CDF Freedom Schools* has origins in the Mississippi Freedom Summer project of 1964, which brought college students from around the country to Mississippi to secure justice and voting rights for Black citizens. These early Freedom Schools aimed at keeping Black children and youth safe and giving them rich educational experiences that were not offered to them in Mississippi's public schools. In a variety of makeshift settings, college student volunteers provided instruction in reading, writing, humanities, mathematics, and science along with subjects not taught in Mississippi public schools, such as Black history and constitutional rights. All their instruction was tailored to encourage children and youth to become independent thinkers, problem solvers, and agents of change in their own communities.

CDF opened the first two *CDF Freedom Schools* sites in 1995 to address the needs of children who lacked access to high-quality literacy programs during the summer. *CDF Freedom Schools* today are designed to improve reading, language skills, and interpersonal relationships; strengthen families, connect children to medical and other needed social services, and develop in all participants the skills needed to improve conditions for children and families in their communities.

At the center of the *CDF Freedom School* program is a research-based Integrated Reading Curriculum (IRC) that fosters literacy. CDF has been in the forefront of raising consciousness about the fact that fewer than 30% of children's books published in the United States are about nonwhite children. Each year, a group of outstanding authors and illustrators select from a diverse body of children's literature books that will celebrate and nurture multiple racial identities and cultures. A distinguished group of historians and scholars reviews and recommends books used in *CDF Freedom Schools* to ensure that children read only those containing accurate narratives of history.

IRC instruction is delivered by college-aged Servant Leader Interns who serve as multigenerational mentors for small classes of no more than ten children. By providing rich, culturally-relevant and high-quality books that deepen children's understanding of themselves and all they have in common with others in a multiracial, multicultural democratic society, *CDF Freedom Schools* students gain understanding and a sense of connection to the books they read, which fosters a love of reading.

Extracurricular activities and social action projects provide opportunities for children in *CDF Freedom Schools* to build confidence about the ways in which they, their peers, and role models can become empowered and capable. During the afternoon, children and youth participate in structured extracurricular enrichment activities, such as organized sports and recreation; artistic pursuits of all forms, hands-on activities that promote learning in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics; and field trips. *CDF Freedom Schools* afternoon activities also include service and social action projects that foster awareness of community problems and ways of solving them. Students visit and write letters to elected officials, join town hall meetings, rallies, and marches, and take part in public education activities and voter registration drives.

The *CDF Freedom Schools* program is making an impact in the lives of children and families nationwide. National evaluations completed in 2025 show that over 84 percent of students participating in *CDF Freedom Schools* maintain or gain an average of nine months in their reading levels. Research has established other positive effects that the *CDF Freedom Schools* program has on students' attitudes about school and parents' engagement in the education of their children.

Since 1995, more than 23,700 college students and recent graduates who have worked as CDF servant leader interns have received training in research-based pedagogical strategies that have proven their effectiveness in increasing the academic achievement and school engagement of children growing up in poverty. The recruitment and training of servant leader interns is another way in which CDF is addressing the nation's critical need for nonwhite teachers who reflect the diverse ethnic and cultural composition of the majority of children in America's public schools. Each year on average, over 1,350 *CDF Freedom Schools* staff members learn how to make the CDF Integrated Reading Curriculum accessible and enjoyable for children with vastly different learning styles. The young adults who complete the *CDF Freedom Schools* training and parents of children in the program learn how to ask questions and engage children in discussions that foster the development of their critical and creative thinking skills. Most of all, training provided by *CDF Freedom Schools* teaches adults who work with children both in and outside of classrooms to love, support and set high expectations that instill self-confidence that can transform a child's life.

*CDF Freedom Schools* also have produced over 450 Ella Baker trainers since 1995. Ella Baker trainers are the best of the best *CDF Freedom Schools* teacher-mentors and are selected to join a national training team to implement the *CDF Freedom Schools* model. Many Ella Baker trainers move on to become teachers, educational administrators and CDF staff members. All staff working in *CDF Freedom Schools* complete training virtually or in-person at the Alex Haley Farm in Clinton, Tennessee. If you would like more information or would like to become a partner, please contact *CDF Freedom Schools* at [freedomschools@childrensdefense.org](mailto:freedomschools@childrensdefense.org) or (202) 662-3524.

## HIGHER EDUCATION PARTNERSHIPS

Clafin University (SC), Davidson College Center for Civic Engagement (NC), Florida State University – CARE (FL), IU Indianapolis (IN), North Carolina A&T State University (NC), Purdue CDF Freedom Schools (IN), Rutgers University – Camden (NJ), Rutgers University, Newark Campus (NJ), Southern Illinois University Edwardsville (IL), Tennessee Tech University College of Education (TN), University of Florida, Collaborative for Equity in Education (FL), University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (IL), and Wake Forest University (NC).

## PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT AND INDIVIDUAL SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

Academia Cesar Chavez Charter School (MN), Ashley Academy Freedom School (NC), Carter G. Woodson School (NC), Christina School District (DE), Cook Literacy Model School (NC), Crossroads School for Arts and Sciences (CA), DECA PREP (OH), Edmund F. Lindop School District 92 (IL), Friendship Academy of the Arts (MN), Guilford County Schools (NC), Hopkins Public Schools (MN), Independent School District 622 (MN), Jackson Public Schools (MS), Kimberley Park Elementary School (NC), Madison Metro School District (WI), Minneapolis Public Schools (MN), Reynolds School District (OR), Robbinsdale Area Schools (MN), Saint Paul Public Schools (MN), W.A. Perry Middle School (SC), and White Bear Lake 624 (MN).

## JUVENILE DETENTION CENTER PARTNERSHIPS

One *CDF Freedom Schools* site served adolescents in juvenile detention centers. The facility is located in Cleveland (OH).

## ELLA BAKER CHILD POLICY TRAINING INSTITUTE NATIONAL TRAINING

The Ella Baker Child Policy Training Institute National Training for Site Coordinators and Servant Leader Interns will be held from June 3 – June 6, 2026 at the Knoxville Convention Center in Knoxville, TN and at the Alex Haley Farm in Clinton, TN.



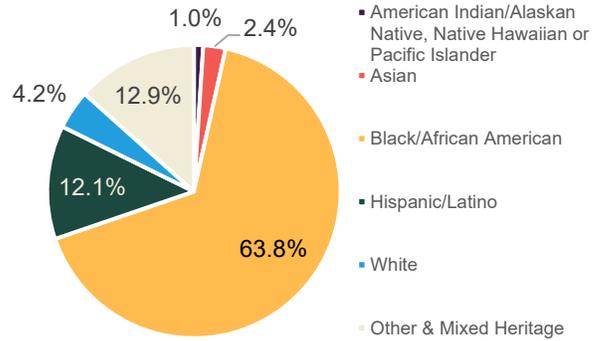
## 2025 PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM SITE LOCATIONS

1.	Birmingham	AL	34.	Maplewood	MN	67.	Queens	NY
2.	Long Beach	CA	35.	Minneapolis	MN	68.	Rochester	NY
3.	Los Angeles	CA	36.	Minnetonka	MN	69.	White Plains	NY
4.	Oakland	CA	37.	New Hope	MN	70.	Cleveland	OH
5.	Pasadena	CA	38.	St. Paul	MN	71.	Columbus	OH
6.	Richmond	CA	39.	White Bear Lake	MN	72.	Dayton	OH
7.	Sacramento	CA	40.	Florissant	MO	73.	East Cleveland	OH
8.	San Francisco	CA	41.	Kansas City	MO	74.	Lima	OH
9.	Santa Monica	CA	42.	St. Louis	MO	75.	Newark	OH
10.	Washington	DC	43.	Webster Groves	MO	76.	Pataskala	OH
11.	Dover	DE	44.	Jackson	MS	77.	Springfield	OH
12.	Georgetown	DE	45.	Asheboro	NC	78.	Toledo	OH
13.	Wilmington	DE	46.	Charlotte	NC	79.	Fairview	OR
14.	Gainesville	FL	47.	Davidson	NC	80.	PORTLAND	OR
15.	Miami Gardens	FL	48.	Durham	NC	81.	Allentown	PA
16.	Tallahassee	FL	49.	Greensboro	NC	82.	Columbia	SC
17.	Atlanta	GA	50.	High Point	NC	83.	Conway	SC
18.	Cedar Rapids	IA	51.	Wilmington	NC	84.	North Charleston	SC
19.	Broadview	IL	52.	Winston-Salem	NC	85.	Orangeburg	SC
20.	Champaign	IL	53.	Asbury Park	NJ	86.	Chattanooga	TN
21.	Chicago	IL	54.	Bloomfield	NJ	87.	Cookeville	TN
22.	Edwardsville	IL	55.	Camden	NJ	88.	Jackson	TN
23.	Springfield	IL	56.	Ewing	NJ	89.	Knoxville	TN
24.	Indianapolis	IN	57.	Jersey City	NJ	90.	Maryville	TN
25.	West Lafayette	IN	58.	Montclair	NJ	91.	Nashville	TN
26.	Wichita	KS	59.	Newark	NJ	92.	Austin	TX
27.	Baltimore	MD	60.	Paterson	NJ	93.	Fort Worth	TX
28.	Bladensburg	MD	61.	Scotch Plains	NJ	94.	Galveston	TX
29.	Suitland	MD	62.	Trenton	NJ	95.	Houston	TX
30.	Detroit	MI	63.	Brooklyn	NY	96.	Hampton	VA
31.	Flint	MI	64.	Jamaica	NY	97.	Madison	WI
32.	Kalamazoo	MI	65.	Mount Vernon	NY			
33.	Saginaw	MI	66.	Peekskill	NY			

## 2025 SCHOLAR DETAILS

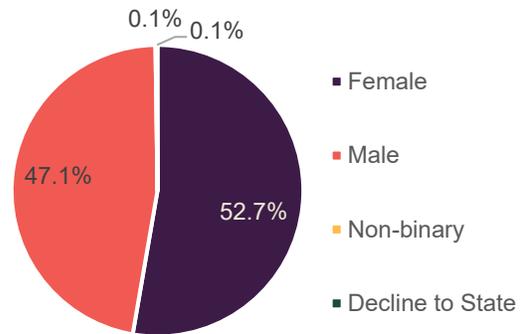
### Race/Ethnicity

American Indian/Alaskan Native, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	1.0%
Asian	2.4%
Black/African American	63.8%
Hispanic/Latino	12.1%
White	4.2%
Other & Mixed Heritage	12.9%



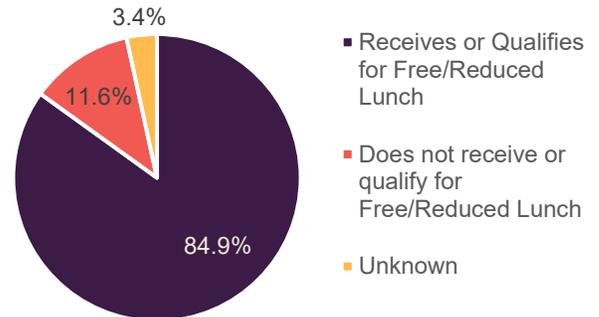
### Gender

Female	52.7%
Male	47.1%
Non-binary	0.1%
Decline to State	0.1%



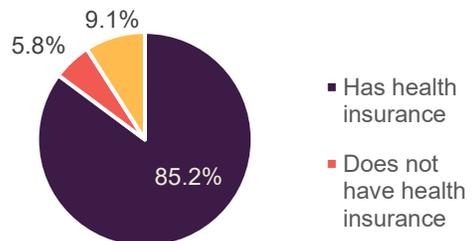
### Free/Reduced Lunch (FRL)

Receives or Qualifies for Free/Reduced Lunch	84.9%
Does not receive or qualify for Free/Reduced Lunch	11.6%
Unknown	3.4%



### Health Insurance

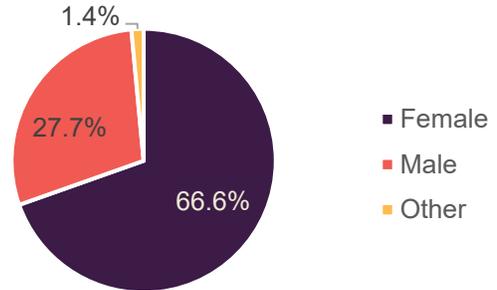
Has health insurance	85.2%
Does not have health insurance	5.8%
Unknown	9.1%



## 2025 SERVANT LEADER INTERN DETAILS

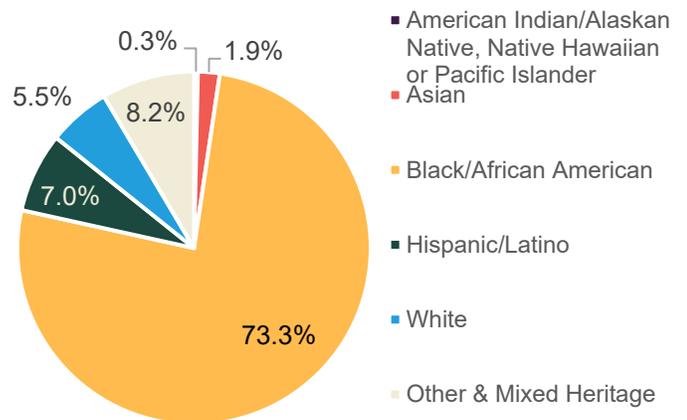
### Gender

Female	66.6%
Male	27.7%
Other	1.4%



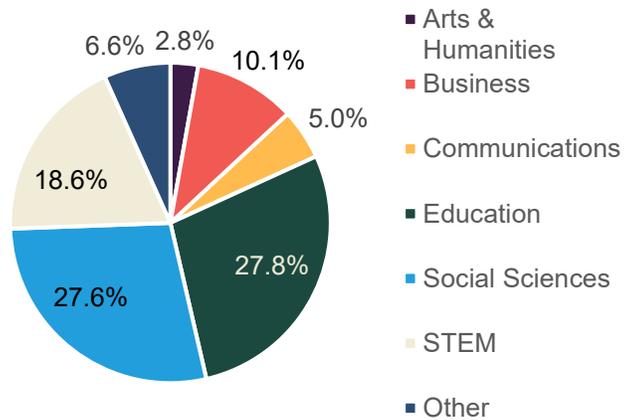
### Race/Ethnicity

American Indian/Alaskan Native, Native Hawaiian or Pacific	0.3%
Asian	1.9%
Black/African American	73.3%
Hispanic/Latino	7.0%
White	5.5%
Other & Mixed Heritage	8.2%



### Major

Arts & Humanities	2.8%
Business	10.1%
Communications	5.0%
Education	27.8%
Social Sciences	27.6%
STEM	18.6%
Other	6.6%



*CDF Freedom Schools National Assessment Results from 2021 to 2025*

	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2024</b>	<b>2025</b>	<b>Average/Total</b>
% Scholars improved	52.9%	51.7%	55.1%	50.5%	52.7%	52.6%
% Scholars maintained	31.1%	32.7%	30.0%	31.3%	31.3%	31.2%
% Scholars declined	16.0%	15.6%	14.9%	18.2%	16.0%	16.2%
Number of sites that participated in the assessment	65	96	121	132	133	547
Number of scholars who participated in the assessment	1,201	1,753	2,375	2,556	3,028	10,913