

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release:

August 3, 2005

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A Freedom School Flourishes In The Lower East Side / Loisaida

Forty years after Freedom Schools were organized in the South during 1964 at the height of the civil rights movement, a modern-day Freedom School, operating under the auspices of a local school program: Bard High School's Da Vinci Program, is finishing its summer program of civic and cultural enrichment. The new Freedom Schools are the idea of the Children's Defense Fund (CDF). This summer, CDF Freedom Schools are servicing approximately 5500 young people between the ages of 5 and 18 at 80 sites located in 40 cities covering 20 states. There are 50 children enrolled at the Bard Freedom School.

Original freedom schools were part of the "Mississippi Freedom Summer Project", a major civil rights political action program designed to engage Black students and local community members. Today's CDF Freedom Schools serve a similar purpose although their target population and cultural relevancy is much broader. The CDF Freedom School is a partnership between CDF and a local community organization, church, university or other educational institution. It is structured to motivate young people to become critically engaged in their communities and the larger national and world context. The Freedom School provides culturally-based literary enrichment, youth leadership development, community involvement, conflict resolution and social action. Like their predecessors, today's Freedom Schools use college-aged interns from the community, called Servant-Leaders, to serve as mentors and role models for the younger program participants.

"The CDF Freedom School's approach to literacy and youth development is a model strategy for engaging children and young adults in reading and culture while simultaneously developing self-worth, commitment to service and leadership, and it's also a lot of fun", stated Donna Lawrence, Executive Director of CDF-NY.

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The mission of the Children's Defense Fund is to *Leave No Child Behind* and to ensure every child a *Healthy Start*, a *Head Start*, a *Fair Start*, a *Safe Start* and a *Moral Start* in life and successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities.



Children's Defense Fund